**Midnight Memories**

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**Midnight Memories**

by [Daydreamer](http://archiveofourown.org/users/Daydreamer)

**Summary**

Itachi is left to care for a child whose existence has taunted his brother through the ages, driving him to the brink of insanity. Love becomes obsession and Sasuke's final hope is Naruto.

**Notes**

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter One

October 10, 1987

“I knew I would find you here.” A quietly powerful voice broke the through the thoughts of Sasuke Uchiha as he stared intently into the nursery window at the local hospital. The single occupant of the nursery screamed almost uncontrollably as the nurse cooed in an attempt to calm him. She couldn’t see Sasuke because he didn’t allow it. He was there to watch without being seen.

“Hn. What gave it away?”
“You should just let him go. Our kind isn’t supposed to cling to the mortals. You, Sasuke, are the perfect example of why we should stick to our own. You allow yourself to suffer. Will you watch over this soul for eternity? How many times can you stand to watch him die before you are driven insane?” Itachi sighed as annoyance spread across his brother’s face. There was no reasoning with him when it came to the tiny mortal that was so desperately interwoven with the soul of his brother.

“I will take what time I can with him. It’s my life.” Sasuke grated out the words as he watched the nurse leave the room to call the doctor. In the blink of an eye, Sasuke was standing beside the tiny hospital cradle. Lifting the tiny life into his arms, he watched as the baby scrunched up his face as if about to release a particularly loud cry when blue eyes opened and locked with black. The cry never came as the hazy blue attempted to focus on the man holding him. A faint coo escaped small rosebud lips as Sasuke holding the infant smiled at the life he held in his hands.

“Still as stubborn as ever.” smirked Sasuke as cuddled the baby close, his fingers gently caressed the small tufts of blonde hair. He saw the unmarked cheeks and wondered how it would happen this time. Would it be a car accident or a wild animal? It never failed that scars would one day adorn these cheeks.

“I will watch over you forever, Naruto. You saved me and in turn cursed yourself. I wasn’t worth it.” Sasuke nuzzled his nose into soft cheek and breathed in the baby powder scent.

He heard the steps of the nurse and reluctantly laid the infant in the crib and exited the hospital. Calling on the preternatural strength that his kind was gifted with, Sasuke crouched and lunged to the top of the building where his brother stood waiting, cigarette dangling from elegant fingers.

“You look pale, Sasuke. You haven’t been feeding like you should.” Itachi calmly blew a tendril of smoke from his lips and his bright crimson eyes watched the movements of his brother.

“Blood tastes like ash in my mouth compared to his.” Sasuke crouched and popped his neck to relieve some of the built up stress. He only fed when it became necessary to do so. The taste of blood no longer held appeal if it wasn’t his blood and Sasuke did not like feeding from an inferior source.

“Foolish, foolish little brother. I can smell your hunger.” Itachi stepped closer and closed his eyes to force away the almost unbearable need to feed that radiated from Sasuke. The sound of his footsteps was muffled as he glided towards his brother. When one was as old as the two of them, fighting the hunger became easier. No less painful but manageable. Control was the key and he was certain that Sasuke was at the end of his.

Crouching beside his brother, Itachi arched a brow at his brother. If it was any other creature, he would have called him weak but this was Sasuke. He was the only of their kind who could rival Itachi in strength and cunning, yet he was humbled by one human soul that he chased through the ages.

Contrary to popular belief, night walkers are not created. They are, in fact, born. Drinking from a human will not turn them into a night walker nor will the sharing of blood. If anything, the blood would make the human sick. Garlic and crosses are a myth as well. Hell, Itachi was currently sporting a lovely gothic cross earring.

Looking upon his brother, he felt pity. To love a human is to be destined for heart break as you watch them wither away in a measly eighty years or so. Sasuke had watched his lover die at least ten times. It really was a shame; Itachi actually liked the little soul. He always exuded such life and charisma that Itachi continued to wish that he would one day be born night walker. Those chances
were slim. There had not been a birth among their people in close to a hundred years. Births were rare in order to keep the population down.

“Feed from me, little brother. You know my blood is strong and will last you for a while.” Itachi shrugged from his black jacket and rolled up the sleeve of his silk shirt. Presenting his forearm to his brother, he watched in amusement as Sasuke’s obsidian eyes bled to red. He could see the lengthening of incisors that poked against his brother’s lips and he could literally smell the blood lust that Sasuke exuded. A tiny bead of blood welled up on Sasuke’s lips as one of his incisors pierced the skin. Sasuke’s pink tongue darted out to lap at the droplet and his eyes deepened in color as the bloodlust intensified.

Sasuke shuddered. He could feel the pull of warm blood pounding through Itachi’s body. He fought the urge to pounce on his brother and attempt to drain him dry. It had been nearly two weeks since he’d fed but each time blood touched his lips he found his soul screaming in agony that it wasn’t ‘his’ blood.

“I freely offer you nourishment, Sasuke. Hurry and take what is offered so I can go home.” Itachi rolled his eyes as Sasuke fought himself. “Just take it.”

Sasuke didn’t need another offer, his lips were latched onto the pale skin and his teeth were buried in the flesh. Withdrawing his teeth, he sucked hungrily at the offered liquid. At the first touch on his tongue, his body went into spasms of pleasure. His consciousness faded and there was only the lust for blood. All control was gone and the monster inside took hold. Fingers curled into talons and small animalistic growls escaped as he fed deeply on the delicious liquid.

Clinging desperately to Itachi, Sasuke felt his nails digging grooves into the flesh of his brother’s forearm but he couldn’t stop. His body was on the brink of starvation and had resorted to its more primal form. Itachi’s blood was fire in his veins and he sucked harder to bring more of that delicious strength into him. His brother’s powerful blood was an ultimate high, second only to Naruto.

“That’s enough.” Itachi frowned at the viciousness in which Sasuke fed.

Itachi tried to pull back his arm but the claws dug in deeper and the mouth sucked harder. Eyes narrowing, he grasped the back of his brother’s head with his hand and dragged the face up. In that moment, Sasuke looked the monster that fiction proclaimed them to be. Blood and saliva dribbled down his pale skin, large white fangs were stained pink with blood, and crimson eyes flared dangerously, making him a truly monstrous sight to behold.

“That’s enough, Sasuke.” growled Itachi, wincing as the nails dug deeper into his arm. His own teeth flashed dangerously and he flung Sasuke across the roof of the hospital, causing him to slam hard enough into a metal structure to leave a large dent.

Sasuke was on his feet in a moments notice but his eyes no longer held the feral look of blood lust. Wiping frantically at his face, he sent Itachi an apologetic glance. It shamed him that he had brutalized his brother while taking sustenance. “I’m sorry, Itachi.”

“Gods, Sasuke. Are you trying to become a monster? I don’t even want to think about what would have happened if you had decided to feed on a human. I will lock you away myself if you ever let yourself go that bad again. I’m surprised you didn’t devour that infant.” Itachi clutched his injured arm to his chest as he ripped the sleeve off and wrapped it tightly around the bleeding wounds. They would be gone by morning but he didn’t want to loose any blood waiting for them to heal.

“He has a name and I would die before hurting him.” grated out Sasuke.
“Sasuke, stay with me for a while. You are too on edge. I should have seen it coming. The child will be fine. Let me put you to sleep for a few years. I can see madness creeping in your eyes.” Itachi face showed no emotion but his words were sad. His brother would be joining the soul in the afterlife this time. He wouldn’t survive another death. Each one seemed to rip him to shreds and left Itachi to pick up the pieces of his broken brother. He reached up to stroke the pale skin of his brother’s cheek and sighed as Sasuke flinched away from the touch. Yes, his brother was too far gone to be allowed to remain unmonitored.

“He’s here again. I’ll be alright.” Sasuke murmured, his eyes going distant as he stepped away and stared into the dark horizon.

“No, you won’t. I can see it in your eyes.” Itachi approached Sasuke slowly and gripped a shuddering shoulder.

“I have to watch him, Itachi. I have to make sure he’ll be alright. You know the fates never treat him kindly.” Sasuke looked wildly at his brother as he clung to black silk.

“I will watch him for you. Your mind needs rest. You are in no shape to watch anyone. I should have sent you to sleep years ago. Sleep now, Sasuke.” Itachi’s mesmerizing voice was so powerful that Sasuke stumbled against his brother as strength left his legs.

“You’ll watch him for me?” asked Sasuke, his voice a mere whisper in the silence.

“You have my word. Sleep.” Sasuke could fight his brother’s voice no longer and sunk into oblivion.

Itachi clutched at his brother as Sasuke went limp. Tossing the slender frame over his shoulder, he jumped from the building and ran along the roads to his home. The large stone house was situated deep in the wooded area of Washington State not far from the outskirts of Olympia.

Itachi moved on silent feet as he carried his limp brother to the basement and into the secret room he had built there. Stepping inside, Itachi laid his brother on the plush, satin covered mattress. “To think that I am giving up my lair to you, little brother. Use it well. Rest and be prepared for the trials ahead.”

Itachi covered Sasuke and sealed the room, using his blood and a few incantations. Only the most powerful of their kind would be able to remove it as Itachi was the most powerful.

Making his way up the stairs from the basement, he paused at the wine rack to grab a bottle of red wine. The dust covered bottle clenched in his hand, he took a glass from the kitchen and settled before the fireplace.

A quick glare from him and the fire was crackling. Pouring the wine, Itachi sipped the bitter drink and stared into the dancing flames. “Foolish brother. One day you will be destroyed by your love for that human and then I will be left alone.”

Itachi’s mind began to wonder and soon he was lost in his own memories of the events that led to Sasuke chasing Naruto through the ages. The memories were as fresh now as then and an ache began in his chest because he knew he was to blame for steering that thread of fate. It was his actions that intertwined the fates of a vampire and a human.

December 3, 1065

“Why are we here, Itachi? These lands are filled with the superstitious. It will be hard to find refuge from the religious fanatics, should they come after us.” Sasuke wrinkled his nose at the
smell of animal droppings and unclean bodies. Humans were such disgusting creatures. They feared bathing too often would make them sick when it was just the opposite.

Normandy was cold this time of year. Snow made the ground wet and muddy. Sasuke’s boots sank slightly into the black mud as he kept pace with his brother. They approached the weapons smith and entered the building. The interior was warm from the fires used to heat the forge but the shop was empty and Sasuke wondered what was here that his brother was so interested in.

Itachi seemed to ignore the lack of shopkeeper and walked towards the back where the sound of metal being pounded echoed. Sasuke followed, intrigued at his brother’s interest in this smith.

“Can I help you?”

Sasuke turned and saw perhaps the most beautiful creature he’d ever seen. Tall with broad shoulders that tapered to a slender waist and long strong legs, the young man before them was a stunning image of virility. Sasuke was at a loss for words and Itachi turned laughing eyes on his brother before addressing the young man.

“I ordered a sword created from your father. I would like to have it.” Itachi’s bored voice didn’t seem to faze the young man as he grinned.

“I know which you speak of.” he said cheerfully before exiting towards the back.

“You ordered a sword? You came all the way to Normandy for a sword? You dragged me all the way to Normandy for a sword? Are you insane?” Sasuke hissed to his brother who only smiled.

“You’re point?” The gleam in Itachi’s eyes told Sasuke he should just drop the discussion because he would never win.

“Fine, tell me why you expressly wanted a Normandy blade? You don’t even like broadswords.” Sasuke crossed his arms and scowled.

“I’m surprised that you can’t smell it in the air. This country is going to war soon and I would wager this exceptional blacksmith is more than likely going to be forced to join the Duke of Normandy in his lust for England’s crown. I wanted a sword from him before he is lost to the war.” Itachi ran his finger across the edge of a displayed blade and stared at the single drop of blood that trickled down the cold steel before it was absorbed into the metal.

“Whoever buys that blade will be a lucky bastard.” smirked Sasuke.

“So they will.” Itachi returned the smile and moved his gaze to the doorway as two blondes stepped into the room, the younger holding a rather stunning blade. He hid a smirk behind a cough when he saw Sasuke’s entire focus was on the young blonde holding the sharpened metal.

Stepping forward, Itachi took the offered blade and examined the craftsmanship. It was exceptional but he had expected no less from this man.

“It is perfect. I was wise to request your services.” smiled Itachi before removing a bag of gold from a hidden pocket of his fur lined cloak. Tossing the bag to the youth, Itachi took the scabbard and slid the blade inside before moving towards the exit.

“’’My lord!’’ Itachi turned at the exclamation and arched a brow.

“This is far too much gold for the blade. Please take some of it back.” The blonde took several pieces from the bag and offered it to Itachi.
“An honest craftsman? Keep the gold. This blade is worth far more than that small bag of gold.” Itachi turned and moved to leave, Sasuke reluctantly following when the young man grabbed the black cloak.

“Naruto!” exclaimed the blacksmith.

“Father, it is not right. The price of the blade was already astronomical. To accept over-payment would be shameful. Our lord, Jesus Christ, would be ashamed of us.” Naruto firmly pressed the gold bag against Itachi’s chest and for a moment the man stared at the hand before sending a glance towards Sasuke.

“I have an idea. You are the son of a weapon smith; do you have knowledge of swordsmanship?” Itachi smirked as confusion spread across the blond features.

“I do. I was practically raised with a sword in my hand.” answered Naruto truthfully though he was confused at the question. What did him having knowledge about swordsmanship have to do with the question of the bag of gold?

“This is my younger brother, Sasuke. I would like him to be educated in the skill of the blade. If you do that for him, the gold is yours. He is a bit of the lazy sort so you shall have your work cut out for you.” Itachi smirked at the sight of Sasuke’s scowl reaching mammoth proportions.

Naruto tilted his head and considered the request for a moment. He would not lie to himself and say that the temptation to keep the gold was hard to fight. It would help greatly if the talk of war was true. War was never a good thing for the lower classes such as his family. “I accept. Meet me here tomorrow at dawn, Lord Sasuke, and I will start your training.”

“He will be there. Now, come along, Sasuke. We have things to discuss.” With that, Itachi was strolling out of the blacksmith and towards the local inn. Appearances must be kept after all. The sun was high and it was taking its toll on both the nightwalkers.

“What are you thinking?” hissed Sasuke, knowing full well that he was deadly with the sword and could probably teach that youth a thing or two.

“Giving you a reason to enjoy yourself, little brother. We will stay for a fortnight. I suggest you tup the boy as much as possible between now and then.” Itachi smiled at the understanding dawning in Sasuke’s eyes. His brother had been denying his more basic desires for far too long. He also knew that Sasuke preferred men to women. Itachi had tasted both but found that he liked nothing better than a warm bosom and soft hips. To each his own.

Sasuke was grateful when they reached the inn. The two would need to sleep the remainder of the day. It was pointless to sleep once the sun set. The pull of the night was like a siren to them and sleep would be impossible.

“You don’t have to buy me sexual partners, Itachi. I’m perfectly capable of finding my own.” Sasuke slumped against the door. His own room was down the hall and he could already feel the call of the bed. Neither he nor Itachi had fed. It was a dangerous game to feed off this superstitious lot of people, especially being foreigners. As such, it made remaining awake during the day a difficult task since the sun sapped energy at a rapid rate.

“Go rest, Sasuke. You will thank me for it later. The blonde looks like he will be a lively romp for you.” Itachi stretched on the bed and stared at the thatched roof. He’d felt something when he saw the blonde. It was almost as if something had happened in the thread of fate. Unlike their mother, neither Sasuke nor Itachi could see the web of fate but they could feel it if a particularly strong
thread was thrummed. There was a subtle sense of foreboding and that worried Itachi.

“What changes in fate have you brought into our lives, little human?” wondered Itachi as he finally dropped off to sleep.

The moment the sun dipped below the horizon Itachi’s eyes shot open and he sighed. His body felt weaker than it should have and the smell of the humans moving about in the inn brought a low growl to his lips. He and Sasuke had been living on livestock and wild beasts for the duration of their time out of their homeland. It was beginning to take its toll.

Sasuke was beside his bed and Itachi frowned up at his younger brother. “Knocking would have been polite.”

“Fuck off. I need human blood tonight, Itachi. I’m almost to the point of wanting to drain this entire inn and bathe in what I don’t drink.”

Sasuke’s entire body was quivering and his skin held much more pallor than it should. His teeth were permanently extended and it was obvious that he was not pleased with his body’s natural response to the smell of fresh prey. Sasuke would need human tonight. He wasn’t as old as Itachi and the bloodlust was a bit harder to bear.

“Come.” Itachi was on his feet and the two were bounded out of the single window of the room. Using their powers to cloak their presence, the two nightwalkers scanned the area. A small cry reached their powerful ears and the smell of lust and fear reached their noses.

Stepping so lightly that neither created footprints, they watched as a scruffy man rutted on the body of an unwilling woman. So focused on his own pleasure, he didn’t realize the two creatures behind him. Tears tracked down the woman’s face and the abject pain in her eyes set Itachi off.

In a moments notice, he was prying the dirty man from the woman’s body and slinging him against the stone wall that had been his cover. “And they call us monsters.” snarled Itachi as he stroked the woman’s hair. Her clothes denoted her as a peasant, possibly a shop girl or maid on her way home from her employment. Shock was beginning to set in and her body shuddered in the aftershocks of the traumatic experience.

Sasuke grabbed the man and his thoughts suddenly invaded the rapist, drawing every memory from him. He felt the pleasure of the man. He felt how it was more the subjugating a woman than the actual act that he drew the most pleasure from. Sasuke was disgusted and withdrew immediately before the thoughts could taint him with their madness. “He’s a stranger to these parts. He never stays in one place long to keep from being killed by the families of the women he rapes. He’s trash. Shall I dispose of him, brother?”

Itachi allowed his eyes to bleed red at the words and snarled, revealing pristine white fangs. “Do what you will to him, Sasuke. I’ll care for the woman.”

Sasuke’s grin could be considered nothing other than malice filled as he turned his now red eyes to the man that quivered in his grasp. “I’m going to drain you. When you meet your god, make sure you remember who sent you there. Your soul is monstrous and does not deserve to live in this world.”

Sasuke buried his teeth in the dirty neck and began to pull with hard sucks at the warm liquid that rushed across his tongue. It was warm and metallic. The smooth texture coasted down his throat and slowly the color began to return to his cheeks while the color faded from his victim.
Itachi watched for a moment before turning his eyes to the pitiful excuse for a girl. Her eyes were blank and as he touched her mind, he was scalded by the abject fear and pain that radiated from her very core. Stroking her cheek, Itachi brought his lips to her limp wrist. While Sasuke’s feeding was vicious and brutal, Itachi slipped his teeth in her wrist with the utmost care.

Drawing gently on her life force, he pressed his mind into hers forcing the memories of the entire night into a quiet corner of her mind and there he locked them. Her shivering stopped and another moan escaped, this time of pleasure. Smirking, he drew even harder of her blood and allowed her to relish in the feel of the experience. It wasn’t really sexual desire but something more that could never be fully described. It was the feeling, almost similar to the sharing of a soul.

Sasuke’s victim was locked in terror. He was experiencing everything he had ever done, only he was the victim. Gone was the feeling of power and he was left feeling brutalized and terrified. Sasuke snarled a little and sucked harder. He felt the man’s heart rate begin to stutter and understood the meaning. It would be over soon. He had now reached the point of no return when a hand was placed on his shoulder.

Sasuke lifted his blood coated face and snarled at his brother. “Mine.”

“Don’t take that tone with me. Clean yourself up and take the girl home. I’ve erased her memories. She will sleep until dawn.” Itachi held the eyes of the man in his piercing gaze. “I’ll finish this.”

Sasuke seemed to snap out of the bloodlust and dropped the man like a rag doll. He’d never killed while feeding and he was surprised at how easy it was. Itachi had always protected him from that. His brother had always been at his side while he fed, teaching him how to control the bloodlust and when to stop. He taught him how to make it pleasurable and how to make it painful. He stepped away from the whimpering mass of human being and scooped up the girl before disappearing in a flicker of black.

Itachi was left staring at the pitiful excuse for a man. Blood trickled down a grimy and sweat stained neck. Fear was rampant in the man’s eyes as Itachi crouched down so that his whispered words could be heard. “Unlike my brother, the suffering I will inflict on you will drive you mad before you breathe your last. You should be honored, human. You are looking at a king.”

A tortured scream was caught in the man’s throat as his eyes went wide at the images that he saw and experienced. Horror did not begin to describe the pain he felt. When death came on black wings, he sent up a prayer of thanks that the seemingly lifetime of suffering was at its end and went limp in Itachi’s hands.

Dropping the husk of the man, Itachi tilted his head back at the feeling of absolute power that engulfed him. It was the most potent thing for one such as him to experience and it was something that he’d tried to keep Sasuke from feeling. To control this overwhelming seduction was more difficult than even the most rampant blood craving.

Itachi trembled as he stood. Face impassive, he lifted the body and took it several miles from town. Calling forth the animal scavengers of the forest, he left the body in a secluded area to be devoured and returned to his room at the inn where Sasuke was waiting.

“Thank you, Itachi.” said Sasuke as Itachi flickered into the room.

“You aren’t ready. Tasting such power is not a curse I would inflict on anyone. I will allow you to keep that part of yourself untouched as long as possible.” Itachi shed his bloodied clothing and tossed it in the fireplace. Disposing of bodies was such messy work.
Glancing at his brother, he smiled at the color that was once again gracing his cheeks. The fire crackled as the clothes were destroyed and Itachi settled himself before it. Sasuke joined him in the adjoining chair. Itachi spoke of returning home. The small town at the base of their mountain was very understanding of them. The villagers practically worshipped the two nightwalkers. To be bitten by them was to be blessed. In their home, they were safe from the rabid mobs that Christianity had created.

Dawn came and Itachi settled in the warm bed while Sasuke scowled. “I hope this boy will be worth my time to fuck.”

“You have two weeks to find out. I suggest you hop to it. I’m leaving in a fortnight.” murmured Itachi before closing his eyes.

Sasuke exited the inn and winced at the trickle of light that burst over the horizon. Already he was beginning to feel the sluggishness that the sun brought. Walking down the street that was just beginning to awaken for the day, Sasuke turned down the lane that led to his destination.

“Fucking Itachi. I don’t need him to buy me a lover. I’m just selective.” Sasuke muttered to himself as the approached the weapon smith shop.

“Good morrow.” exclaimed a bright eyed and bushy tailed Naruto. The smile spread across his face and Sasuke was entranced once again. He looked to be about eighteen or so but held the innate youthfulness of a child. His face was clean shaven, which Sasuke preferred, and his eyes were bright.

“Good morning.” Sasuke tried to hide his accent as Itachi did but he knew it came out.

“I figured I would show you how to hold a sword today. Though, maybe I should ask you how much you know about swordsmanship. You must have had some teaching being noble and all.” Naruto scratched his cheek and looked questioningly at Sasuke.

“Let’s get the meat of this meeting. I probably know more about sword fighting than this entire town. My brother set me up with this so to make this worth my time let’s spar and have a wager. If you win, I will do anything you like for the remainder of the day. If I win, the same.” Sasuke picked up the practice blade and swung it a few times to adjust his body to the feel of its weight in his hand.

“Hey! I’m the teacher here.” growled Naruto.

“Hn, more like you are the dunce.” smirked Sasuke, loving how red flushed across the blonde’s cheeks. Naruto’s body was strong and healthy. Despite the deep feeding the night before, Sasuke felt a tingle of desire to taste Naruto’s blood.

“You’re scared to fight me? Don’t tell me a few words can cower you?” Sasuke tossed his cloak over the fence and popped the bones in his neck before facing Naruto.

Sasuke had to give him credit, he looked unsure. Whether it was because he was afraid of hurting him or because of the taunting words spoken, Sasuke was unsure. He watched with amusement as Naruto picked up the other practice blade and faced Sasuke.

“I don’t back down from challenges. I will defeat you. That’s a promise.” growled Naruto and Sasuke smiled. Oh, it was going to be so nice to pound that arse. He could already feel the tendrils of desire begin to drift southward, curling in his stomach before settling in his loins.

Naruto lunged and the game began. For the next two hours the two clashed swords in the back of
the weapon smith. Passersby stopped to watch the show. Both men were covered in sweat and dirt. Naruto had long since discarded his homespun shirt while Sasuke’s own finely sewn tunic was plastered to his body. Despite the coldness of the December day, sweat and heat dripped from both and soon there was a crowd watching and cheering them on.

Sasuke knew that had the sun not been out, it would have been harder to hide his natural advantage but the heat of the sun weakened him enough to allow him to give more to the fight instead of holding back. Naruto was a natural and he moved with such grace that there were a few times that Sasuke was nearly beaten by him. As it was, Sasuke kept them at a stalemate and allow Naruto to wear himself out in the mock battle.

A few soldiers also stopped to watch the battle and they whispered amongst themselves. The foreigner was out of their grasp but the blonde boy would be perfect for the army when the Duke decided to invade England. The three left to tell their superior officer of their findings.

“Give up, dead last.” smirked Sasuke as he retaliated with a blow that Naruto barely dodged.

“Never. I’ll never give up.” Naruto redoubled his efforts and drove Sasuke backwards, causing him to trip over a woodpile and crash to the ground. When he regained his equilibrium, he found the tip of Naruto’s blade pointed at his throat. “I win.”

That Sasuke was shocked was an understatement. He glanced towards the cheering crowd and pulled himself to his feet, dusting the mud and grime from his pants with a scowl. “Fine. What do you want me to do?” God, it grated his nerves to say it.

“I want you to cut all those logs into quarters for the forge. I’ll be back later to check on you.” grinned Naruto who entered the forge and promptly poured a bucket of lukewarm water over his body. Sasuke couldn’t stop his eyes from following the trails of liquid as they moved down that trim body, tiny beads catching in the tufts of hair visible on his lower stomach. Oh, he hated him for making him feel this way. He would make him pay while he was buried in that arse.

Grabbing the axe, Sasuke began his chore. Never let anyone tell him he reneged on a wager. The ax was sharp and cut through the wood like butter. It barely took any effort and soon all the logs were quartered and ready for the forge fires.

“What do you get all your energy? I just went inside and rested.” asked Naruto exclaimed as he walked outside and saw the neatly stacked wood.

“How do you want anything else done or am I free of my obligation?” Sasuke stretched his muscles, feeling them tighten and release after the strain. It wasn’t hard as much as repetitious and he was more than a little annoyed at losing. He’d completely underestimated Naruto and that was his downfall.

“Would you like something to drink? I have some cool water in the shop. You don’t look so well.” Naruto offered, feeling obligated to hydrate the man since he really was starting to look a bit pale.

“I think it’s the sun.” I know it’s the sun. Sasuke staggered a bit and was grateful when he felt Naruto brace him.

“Should I send for your brother?” asked Naruto as he led Sasuke into the warm interior of the shop.

Sasuke shook his head, now that he was out of the sun, he felt a bit of his strength returning. Settling in the offered chair, Sasuke took the offered water but couldn’t stop staring at the thumping pulse in Naruto’s neck. Each thrumming beat of his heart was like a drum in Sasuke’s
ear and he wanted to taste that blood more than anything.

“Where are you from? You and your brother look different.” Naruto asked as he sat with his own water.

“Far to the east. My brother desired a sword from your father. He is rarely wrong about crafters. Your father’s blade is a work of art. Where is your father by the way?” asked Sasuke as he noticed that the shop was empty.

“Mother was sick this morning. She hasn’t been well for a while. Father usually sends me to watch the shop while he stays with her.” Naruto smiled sadly and Sasuke felt a twinge in his heart. “Are you and your brother going to build a castle near here? You are obviously nobles. It would be so nice if you stayed. Then we could spar all the time.”

“We are leaving in a fortnight. This climate doesn’t treat us well.” Sasuke watched Naruto slump. He frowned. He didn’t like the sad look on Naruto’s face. An idea occurred to him and he found himself voicing it before even considering discussing it with Itachi.

“Come with me. Come to my home. You can be my vassal. I’ll make you a noble. You will answer only to me and Itachi.” Sasuke smiled at the idea. He would take Naruto with him. He would take him away from these filthy humans.

Naruto blushed a little but shook his head. “My father and mother need me. My father is starting to get up in age. I’ll need to take over the forge for him one day. I wish I could come with you, Lord Sasuke.”

“Bring them too. I’ll set them up in a house with servants. They will want for nothing. Come with me.” Sasuke knew he sounded almost desperate but a fortnight wasn’t long enough. He wanted so much more than a quick tup. He wanted...he didn’t know what he wanted but he wanted Naruto. He’d explain things to Itachi. He would understand.

“I’m not sure.” Naruto frowned a bit but there was a twinkle of excitement in his eyes. Sasuke wanted to whoop with joy. He had won. Naruto was his!

“If it’s a forge, I’ll build one for your father. He can do as much crafting as he likes. The locals can even show him how to make swords as they do.” Sasuke was already planning the move. He and Itachi would need to go ahead. It was too long a journey for them not to feed. Itachi and Sasuke would travel ahead and once home, send servants and carts to move any belongings.

“If my parents agree to come, I’ll go with you.” smiled Naruto, now happy.

“You’ve made me so happy.” Sasuke felt his stress ease. This was a much better option. He would make Naruto happy. He would shower him with clothes fit for a king and make love to him before the large fireplace that engulfed a wall of his room in his home. Just thinking of Naruto naked before him sent heat spiraling southward.

“Why are you doing this for me?” Naruto frowned again and scratched his cheek, obviously a nervous gesture.

“I like you. You interest me.” Sasuke began to stand, wanting to go back to the inn so he could sleep before sunset when a shot of hunger pulsed through him and he slumped against Naruto, surprising him.

“Lord Sasuke? Are you alright? Did you get too hot?” Naruto knelt with Sasuke in his arms when suddenly hands tightened around him and warm lips brushed his throat. The breath left Naruto’s
lungs and every nerve in his body centered where those lips pressed against him.

“I’m sorry. I need it. I’ll make you forget. Don’t worry.” Sasuke whispered before his teeth pieced the tan flesh and Naruto’s body went rigid. Warm liquid rushed over his tongue and he groaned at the taste. It was like tasting ambrosia after only having eaten mortal foods. He felt Naruto struggle but was unable to release him as he drew on the warm liquid. Heat was radiating through his body and pooling in his loins.

Pressing the blonde into the ground, he groaned and settled his hips between leather clad thighs. Arching his body, he froze as he felt the hardness of Naruto’s crotch. He liked it? Drawing back a little, Sasuke lapped at the blood that trickled from Naruto’s neck. Each lick earned a groan from the man beneath him.

“Your blood is like fire inside me.” growled Sasuke before latching on again and drawing the liquid heat into his veins. He was actively thrusting against Naruto at this point and both were straining against each other, seeking release.

Naruto’s neck arched back and a low moan radiated from his throat as his legs lifted to wrap tightly around Sasuke’s hips. His hands were clenched in the soft material of Sasuke’s shirt and he released small grunts as the sucking at his neck seemed to be directly connected to his cock.

“Ahhh…” Naruto cried out and his body began to shudder.

Sasuke threw back his head, mouth open in a soundless scream as his hips began to jerk spasmodically against Naruto. He could feel the seed pool against the tight leather but was unable to do anything but feel. Blood dripped down from his lips, creating a trail that wound down his neck before dripping against Naruto’s bare chest.

Slumping against Naruto, Sasuke began to purr as he lapped at the blood. Each flick of his tongue caused a little cry to escape from Naruto’s lips and his hips to jerk in response. After several slow licks, the blood was gone and the healing agent in his saliva sealed the wound, leaving nothing but a slight discoloration in the skin which would disappear in an hour or so. “Mine.”

“Sasu…What?” Naruto’s hazy eyes blinked rapidly and Sasuke brushed his fingers down the confused face. He would erase his memories but he wanted to lie here a little while longer. He wanted to feel Naruto lazy and contented.

“Let me stay like this a little longer.” whispered Sasuke as he buried his nose into Naruto’s sweat dampened neck.

After several moments, Sasuke sighed and ran his fingers over Naruto’s eyes forcing him to sleep. Cleaning up both their bodies the best he could, Sasuke placed Naruto in a chair and meticulously replaced the actual memory with a memory of Sasuke leaving after they had agreed to relocate Naruto and his family.

Sasuke left quickly and collapsed on his bed. He was unable to stay awake a moment’s longer, not even realizing that his lips and shirt were stained with blood.

“Christ, Sasuke. Who did you feed on?” Sasuke’s eyes popped open and he saw Itachi looking at him worriedly. Sasuke could tell that the sun had long set but his mind was still groggy. That was odd.

“You fed deep, didn’t you? Did you kill him?” Itachi alternated between pacing and sending angry looks toward Sasuke. “Gods, you must have drained him dry to have that much color in your
“I didn’t kill anyone.” grumbled Sasuke as his mind finally cleared. “Why do I feel so drowsy?”

“Haven’t you been listening to me? You fed deep. Your body is still absorbing the nutrition. You couldn’t have gotten enough to put you in that state from one person.” Itachi grabbed a pitcher of water and began to clean his brother of the blood before pulling the shirt from him and tossing it in the fireplace.

“I’m telling you I didn’t feed that deeply. He was fine when I left him. He just tasted so fucking good, Itachi.” Sasuke closed his eyes at the memory. Nothing in his lifetime had ever tasted as good as Naruto’s blood. Suddenly recalling his exciting news he smiled happily at Itachi.

“I’m taking Naruto with me. He wants to bring his parents, which might prove a bit tricky since his mother is ill but if we have them travel in the spring and summer, they should reach the fortress before the autumn chill.” Sasuke tapped his fingers on the window pane thoughtfully.

“You are bringing them to our home? Are you insane? You were just supposed to fuck him a couple of times and get him out of your blood. I refuse to allow you to bring him with you.” Itachi crossed his arms and allowed his eyes to bleed red to further ferment his decision.

“Then I won’t be going home. I need him, Itachi. He makes me feel not so empty.” Sasuke looked at his brother with pleading eyes and Itachi’s conviction wavered.

“It’s dangerous, Sasuke. Outsiders are dangerous. Are you prepared to face the consequences?” Itachi’s voice changed from concerned brother to king in a moments notice.

“He’s worth any price.” Sasuke murmured and Itachi sighed. “We should arrange the trip with his family tomorrow. If we leave, we should make it home in a week’s time. That would give the carts time to get here by mid spring. Sasuke, I hope you know what you are doing.”

Sasuke smirked and exited from the window, leaving Itachi alone to ponder the recent events. There was a bit of worry in his eyes as he stared at the fire. Something felt wrong to him. Something bad was going to happen very soon and Itachi couldn’t shake the feeling that it revolved around his brother.
October 11, 1987

“You’ve reached Olympia Department of Children Services. How may I help you?”

“This is Peter McKenna of McKenna and Associates. I would like to speak with the case worker handling the Uzumaki baby.” Peter McKenna, a middle aged, rather plump individual glanced nervously at the gentleman sitting calmly in front of his desk. He wasn’t sure why Itachi Uchiha made him so nervous. There was no plausible reason why the uncommonly handsome man caused chills to run down his spine; yet every time the man walked into his office, he had to fight the urge to jump up and run away.

“I’m on hold, Mr. Uchiha. Please be patient.” Peter couldn’t help but question why he felt the need to keep the intimidating man placated. Perhaps it was the predatorily gleam in his eye. His family’s firm had been handling the business affairs of the Uchiha family since the mid 1800’s. The Uchiha family is the sole reason why McKenna and Associates was the attorney powerhouse that they are today. They came from old money and it never seemed to run out; not even during the Great Depression.

Itachi inclined his head but kept his neutral gaze on the portly man who was beginning to sweat rather profusely under his gaze. He could tell that he made the man nervous. It was a common occurrence. He had the tendency to make most people nervous without trying. It seemed that on a subconscious level, most humans could sense what he was. It was just that they didn’t recognize what they were feeling.

They felt the urge to run and hide but instead of obeying this feeling, they would rationalize that it was just irrational fear and ignored the warnings that their brain tended to pump out. It was this fact that made humans such easy prey to feed on. They didn’t know how to trust their own instincts.

In more recent years, feeding could be conveniently done by means of a blood bank. However, the blood tasted old and lost some of its potency. Also, blood born diseases tended to run more rampant at these establishments and while human ailments did not infect the night walkers, they soured the blood, making it unpleasantly bitter. Most of their kind could easily smell disease and avoided the carriers of such illness unless in dire straights.

“Is this the caseworker of the Uzumaki infant who was born yesterday?” Itachi redirected his focus back onto the lawyer. His exceptional hearing made it possible for him to follow the conversation of both participants.

“Yes, this is Angela Mason. May I ask why you’re interested in the child of a cocaine addicted prostitute?” asked the overworked and underpaid caseworker impatiently.

“My client, Mr. Itachi Uchiha would like to sponsor the child.” Peter stated swiftly going into full lawyer mode. That was one thing Itachi liked about the man. When given the chance he was a bulldog for his client.

“Why would a wealthy man like Mr. Uchiha want this child? This is highly unusual.” Itachi could
hear her shifting nervously in her chair. Crossing his legs, Itachi couldn’t stop the frown that crossed his elegant features.

McKenna began his job, “Ms. Mason, could you tell me what the odds are that a child born from such a woman would ever be placed in a loving home? What are the chances that he will ever be adopted? Am I, or am I not, correct in the assumption that he would end up spending the first years of his life bouncing from one foster home to another?” McKenna kept his eyes on Itachi as he argued his case to the woman.

Itachi could practically hear the woman bristle in offense, “I take offense to that. DCS may receive a lot of bad publicity but every home that a child is placed into is an adequate environment for growth.” Fighting back a smirk Itachi continued to eavesdrop on the social workers conversation with McKenna.

“I’m sure that every home is adequate,” McKenna mollified, “but what Mr. Uchiha is offering is an exceptional environment that the boy would not find elsewhere. He would attend the best schools and have the best teachers as well as round the clock supervision from caring staff. This is the chance of a life time. I will ask you once again. What are the honest to god chances of the child of a cocaine addicted prostitute getting adopted?”

There was a heavy silence on the other end of the line and McKenna knew his point had been made. After all, he wasn’t the head lawyer of this firm for nothing. Across from him, Itachi smirked as well. This firm never ceased to please him with their services.

“Slim.” she relented reluctantly. A child born from such a woman usually ended up with learning disabilities as well as attention problems. Most families wanted to know a child’s history before they adopted. It didn’t help that the Uzumaki baby was already showing signs of being a difficult child. He cried continuously no matter what the nurses did to try and soothe the upset baby.

“Ms. Mason, this child will not get the love and attention that he needs being jostled from home to home. Mr. Uchiha is willing to help this child become something great. Are you able to, in all good conscious, deny this child such an opportunity? Is the Department of Children Services that cruel? Better yet, are you that cruel?” McKenna went in for the kill. It was over. There was no way the woman could possibly resist now.

Ms. Mason sighed in defeat, “Very well. Fax Mr. Uchiha’s application and criminal history to me and I will arrange for Naruto to be placed in Mr. Uchiha’s care. My only condition is that I will visit once a week for the first six months and then every three months after that. If I see even the tiniest evidence that the boy is being used for less than honorable purposes, I’ll have Itachi Uchiha in jail so fast that he won’t know what hit him.” McKenna smiled at the woman’s tenacity. She was over worked and yet she became a mother hen to protect a child that she didn’t even know.

“Naruto?” asked McKenna. “I wasn’t aware the child had been named.”

“The mother named him before she died. She said she had a vision where she saw her son all grown up and that he leaned down and whispered his name to her. Or, that’s what the nurses told me anyway. It was probably the drugs talking. The thing that I find strange is, despite the fact that the mother was high as a kite and had obviously been using throughout most of the pregnancy, Naruto Uzumaki was born with no addiction to cocaine. I’ve never heard of that happening.”

McKenna arched a brow in shock. He had never heard of such an incidence occurring either. Nodding to Itachi, who also seemed to be contemplating something, McKenna said his goodbyes to the woman and promised to fax the proper documents immediately.
“It’s done, Mr. Uchiha. May I ask why a young, single man like you wants a crack baby?” McKenna blinked when it seemed that Itachi’s eyes glowed. It was probably just a trick of the lighting he convinced himself.

“Naruto Uzumaki is a very special boy and he holds a very precious treasure. I made a promise to protect him, and I will do everything in my power to do just that. I’ve made many mistakes in my life but I will rectify it here.” Itachi turned to leave.

“Mr. Uchiha, why not legally adopt the boy. You will be, for all intensive purposes, his father.”

“No,” Itachi replied sharply, “The boy will be my ward. I will provide for him but he is not my son. I have a family that works for me. They recently found out that they could not have children of their own. I’m sure they would love to be able to raise Naruto. Let me worry about the boy. You just make sure that everything goes smoothly.” With those parting words, he left the building.

Placing dark sunglasses over his eyes, Itachi walked languidly towards the waiting car. The driver opened the door at his approach and he nodded to his driver in appreciation. Itachi slipped into the vehicle and leaned against the plush, leather interior, thankful that the tinted glass eased the glare of the afternoon sun. He felt rather exhausted from making the arrangements to care for Naruto and he simply wanted to go home and sleep.

Itachi knew his housekeeper and her husband would be joyous upon his request for them to care for the child like their own. The plump woman would spoil Naruto rotten and the gruff gardener would teach him values. They would raise the blonde so that when Sasuke awoke, he would be the person that his brother needed. Maybe this time, they would be allowed some happiness.

“Mr. Uchiha, where would you like to go?”

“Home.”

Late March 1066

Sasuke paced impatiently before the massive stone fireplace in Itachi’s sitting room. The entourage that had been sent to collect Naruto and his family should be departing at any moment from the village. The trip would take a month, at least, and Sasuke was nearly going stir crazy from all the waiting. He hadn’t seen his Naruto in several months and it was making him extremely edgy. Even Itachi was worried about his brother’s state of mind.

“Calm yourself, Sasuke,” Itachi demanded. “We should be receiving a missive from Simon soon. You know his hawks are the fastest fliers in this part of the world. I’m sure he will report that all is well and that they are on their way.” Itachi sipped his wine.

Sasuke sneered at his brother’s calm veneer. Itachi was calm because it wasn’t his lover that was traveling through dangerous passes and wolf infested forests. Sasuke, on the other hand, was very worried. He was having trouble sleeping even when the sun was at its zenith. His lack of proper rest showed in his face, which had taken on a slightly gaunt and shadowed appearance.

Itachi’s long slender fingers tapped on the gold goblet before he released an exasperated sigh, “The boy is fine. You would know if he was dead since you’ve tasted his blood. You would know instantly, so cease your worrying. You look like a haunt. Go feed.”

Itachi stood and left Sasuke alone. Frowning, the younger nightwalker shuddered at the thought of drinking from someone other than Naruto. If he drank from another, it would feel as if he was tainting the purity of Naruto’s blood, which continued to pulse through his veins. However, Itachi
was right. If Naruto was dead, he would no longer be able to feel him in his veins.

Reluctantly, Sasuke left the room and prowled the castle silently. The servants and villagers did not know what Itachi and Sasuke were but they knew they were not the same as the village people. They knew that the brother lords protected them and the punishment was harsh for those that sought to harm them. That was all they cared about. Even if the brothers were otherworldly creatures, they had done nothing but care for the village and its inhabitants.

Sasuke prowled the battlements; his preternatural eyes scanned the village below. The smell of human wafted towards his highly sensitive nose. Obsidian eyes bled red as the scent of blood danced on the wind. He really shouldn’t have waited so long.

Jumping from the structure, the dark lord kept to the wooded area surrounding the village. His eyes darted from human to human in his search for the best prey. A flash of blond hair, however, forced his body to freeze. It wasn’t Naruto, the scent was different, but the sunshine colored locks were close enough to his lover’s shade that suddenly all thoughts of other prey left his vision. This one would do.

Keeping to the shadows, Sasuke followed the youth. Upon closer inspection, Sasuke wondered how he could have possibly thought that this boy was like his Naruto. The body build was completely different. Already, his desire to feed was gone. Closing his eyes, Sasuke fought back the frustrated snarl.

He had to feed. He had waited for too long. His body screamed for the succulent blood that pulsed through veins. Advancing silently, he stepped before the youth, startling the boy so much that he dropped his packages.

“Forgive me. I promise to take only a little.” The man frowned but his confusion was short lived as he fell into the hypnotic pull of Sasuke’s eyes.

Pulling the man to the shadows, Sasuke bared the stranger’s throat. Using his fangs to pierce the thrumming vein, he began to suck hungrily at the nourishment. Shivering violently as his body assimilated the blood, Sasuke fought back the unnatural urge to gag at the taste. After having tasted Naruto, the blood from others no longer held its appeal. While his body devoured the nourishment desperately, his mind rebelled at the fluid, wanting only Naruto.

Taking just enough to stave off the blood lust, Sasuke leaned the boy against a wall. Stacking his packages beside him, he lapped at the wound until it healed, leaving nothing but a dark bruise, “Thank you for your sacrifice.”

For several moments the boy stood there as if in a trance before startling suddenly into awareness. All he could remember was sad red eyes and a deep sultry voice. Touching his neck but feeling nothing but skin, the boy pick up his packages and walked the rest of the way home, thoroughly confused at the experience.

Sasuke was confused as well. Why was it so hard? Why did the blood sit heavy on his stomach? Falling to his knees just inside the palace gates, his body heaved as if trying to expel what he had just ingested. Dry heaves was all it was but it was uncomfortable. That was how Itachi found him, crumpled against the wall.

“Sasuke?” Itachi frowned at his brother’s crumpled form. He’d heard the gagging and the sound had worried him. Seeing his brother in such a state was unheard of.

“I can’t do it anymore. It’s like his blood is clashing with any I ingest. I know it’s in my head but
that doesn’t make it any easier.” Sasuke panted as he spat out a mouthful of regurgitated blood.

“Sasuke, he will be here within the month. But what will you do when he dies? You may not want to consider the inevitable but it will come. One day you will hold him in your arms as he breathes his last breath. Human life is but a drop in the bucket to us. It is a sad fact that you must come to terms with.” Itachi assisted Sasuke to his feet. The two raven haired men stared at each other for a long moment before Sasuke bowed to his brother and retired to his room.

Now that his body had fully assimilated the meal, he felt revived and energetic. However, he was also feeling unsociable and depressed. He had been avoiding the very topic that Itachi had so bluntly thrown in his face. In the fullness of time, Naruto would grow old and die while Sasuke remained the same.

It was a sad truth that kept many night walkers from becoming involved with humans other than for sustenance. Keeping their distance also spurred myths about his kind. Humans envied such powerful creatures but they had no clue how difficult it was to continue living after seeing those around you die. Sasuke was young for their kind, yet he still felt the overwhelming life set out before him.

Staring into the dancing flames until there was nothing left but crumbling cinders, Sasuke felt the approach of his brother. Dawn crept silently across the horizon and Itachi opened his brother’s door to find him staring mindlessly into the remnants of a fire.

“You should sleep. If you like, I can put you to rest until he arrives. You would not feel the passing of time.” Itachi offered as he sat in an identical chair beside Sasuke.

“I would rather wait. I don’t like the thought of sleeping. Mother and Father’s sleep has lasted five hundred years. I was barely able to feed alone before they decided to sleep away the ages.” Sasuke sighed as he felt the pull of sleep.

Itachi nodded his understanding. He’d felt another shift but he prayed that it did not revolve around his brother or Naruto. He refused to give up his brother and be left to drift through the ages alone.

“Sleep now Sasuke. I have a feeling a message will arrive today.”

Sasuke nodded and walked slowly to his bed. The large curtains hung elegantly on the cherry wood frame. Intricate designs of flowers and greenery were carved into the wood by master woodworkers. Wearily, he curled onto the feather mattress, sinking deep as he pulled thick furs over his body. He didn’t need the furs for warmth but more for comfort.

Itachi closed the curtains around his brother’s bed. Exiting the room, he stopped one of the night guards, giving him orders for any missives to be brought to him immediately before disappearing into his own room. The sun rose slowly and Itachi could feel the pull of sleep but fought against it. Forcing his body to dip only into the most light of sleeps, Itachi awaited word from his master of the hawks.

A quiet knock on the door roused him from his light slumber. Pulling tired limbs from the beckoning bed, Itachi called for the servant to enter as he pulled a black satin robe over his naked body. The girl who entered immediately blushed and announced that a missive had arrived via a hawk.

The girl presented him with the crumpled letter and exited the room. Itachi settled in a chair beside the fireplace and broke the seal.
My Lords,

We have arrived at the village of Lorient and will journey back after a few days rest. The family was happy to see us and I’m sure they will be happy in our village. The blacksmith seems knowledgeable and it would be a blessing to have someone of his caliber.

Itachi breathed a sigh of relief. Now Sasuke could relax. His brother was driving him mad with his incessant worry over the human. Glancing at the message to continue reading, Itachi’s heart froze in his chest.

The son, however, was taken to fight in the Duke of Normandy’s war with England. I’ll await instruction from you concerning what actions we should do before leaving the village. From what the family tells me, he did not go willingly. Please use Sui-Oh for your response. Ahna will need rest.

Humbly yours,

Simon.

Crumpling the letter in his hand, Itachi flung it into the embers and watched as the letter alighted brightly before dissolving into ash. The fates were against his brother. Laughing to keep from crying at the injustice, Itachi slumped heavily in the chair and there he remained. He knew what the response from his brother would be; he only hoped that he could dissuade him from the course.

For the remainder of the day, Itachi sat watching the dying fire until the logs were cold. The wooden arm of his chair possessed large claw marks where his long elegant nails had scratched deep furrows in his worry. He knew the moment his brother awoke, for he was before him in a moments notice.

“Did a message come?” Sasuke looked desperately into Itachi’s eyes, not liking the worry he saw.

“It did.”

“Where is it? Will they arrive soon?” Sasuke was anxious for some news of Naruto. He’d been malcontent ever since Itachi had forced him to leave the blond in order to preserve the secret of their nature. Itachi rarely put his foot down with anything involving Sasuke but with this he was adamant. There had been no arguing with him on his decision that they would await the arrival of Naruto and his family at their home.

“Sasuke…I need you to remain calm.” Itachi began, tired eyes looking up at his brother.

Sasuke’s excitement dulled. Something wasn’t right. He could tell in the way that Itachi’s eyes flashed. His brother was upset. This did not bode well. “Itachi…”

“The boy was taken by the Duke of Normandy to fight in his war. It seems he was taken shortly after we left.” Itachi dreaded this part. He knew what Sasuke would do.

“I’m going after him.” snarled Sasuke as he turned on his heel and stormed towards the door. Itachi, already having anticipated this reaction, was before his brother in a flash with a hand gripping Sasuke’s arm in an unrelenting grasp.

“You will not. Sasuke, I’ve protected you from having to experience the utter despair and bloodlust of war. To humans, it is merely a battlefield of horror, fear, and death. To us, it is so much more.” Itachi’s eyes bled as red as Sasuke’s. He was desperate to get his point across to his brother.
“I can handle it.” Sasuke firmly placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder, “Even feeding has become distasteful to me. I don’t think the presence of more blood would affect me so horribly.”

Itachi shook his head. “Sasuke, up until now, the only bloodlust you have experienced is your own. How will you deal with the smell of the bloodlust of thousands of men? It is a potent and desirable odor. It will bring out the monster in you. I guarantee it.”

“Then I will become a monster to protect him. You can’t stop me. I will never forgive you if you stop me. You will lose me either way.” Sasuke snarled as he tore his brother’s hand from his arm and exited the door.

Itachi slumped against the hard wood as red tears tracked down his face. He felt the moment his brother left the castle. He felt when he exited the forest protecting their lands, yet Itachi simply remained against the door, feeling every year of his millennium and a half age.

“Sasuke,” he whispered miserably to the empty walls, “be safe.”

The nights bled together. Sasuke was forced to rest during the days to conserve his energy. He fed deeply on deer and elk as he kept to the forests, occasionally replenishing his energy in the small villages that dotted the countryside. The blood tasted stale in his mouth but he forced his body to keep it inside. He needed the strength it gave.

A week after leaving his home and reaching the ocean border of Normandy, Sasuke scowled. England was an island. He was powerful but even he could not traverse water like the son of God. Exhaling softly, he approached a moderate sized village on the coast to inquire about transport across to the island kingdom.

Entering a small inn just after dusk, Sasuke approached the innkeeper. “I would like to cross to England. Are there any ships heading that way?”

“You don’t look to be from Britain,” mused the innkeeper, a slender man with bad teeth and a shifty eye.

“I am from the east. My sister’s husband is fighting with the Duke and I have been sent to tell him of his son’s birth.” Sasuke lied effortlessly. He could easily have charmed the man but he knew better than to waste unnecessary energy.

“Hmm, there is a ship leaving at dawn with supplies for the army of the Duke. If you talk to the captain, he might allow you to ride with him. You are foolish to want to go find a man just to tell him about his whelp’s birth.” snorted the innkeeper as Sasuke passed a gold piece to him.

Tracking down the captain took some doing. A bag of gold and much persuasion later found Sasuke seated in the smelly hold of the cargo ship. The sight of rats running along the barrels of food, weapons, and armor barely fazed him. By the time the ship reached the shores, there were no rats remaining, their corpses hidden in the boxes of armor.

“We won’t be staying more than two days. If you wish to book passage again, you need to be on the dock before the tide leaves, day after tomorrow.” the captain informed Sasuke as he departed.

Sasuke ignored the man and searched for a cave to rest in. The rats had barely eased the hunger that beat inside him. Traveling nearly nonstop had burned up most of his reserve energy. There would be no more feeding on animals. He would require human when dusk approached.

Staggering into a small seaside cave, Sasuke collapsed onto the sand. His body slumped into sleep as the sun rose high in the east. The day passed as if in moments and Sasuke’s eyes shot open, a
permanent red in his hunger starved state. Stalking to a nearby village, he silently entered the first home he reached.

The couple asleep on the bed did not notice him, nor would he have allowed them to. Thralling them, he drew first the woman, and then the man into his arms, drinking deeply from each before exiting the house.

So starved were his cells that even though his mind rebelled at the taste, his body devoured the blood whole heartedly. He was careful, leaving no trace of his presence. The only memory would be a delicious dream shared by the couple and forgotten with morning’s light.

Now that his body was no longer on the point of starving, Sasuke traveled deeper inland. He could smell the scent of bloodlust and unwashed bodies. Oh, the bloodlust scented sweet in the air, causing his own natural predatory instinct to flair wildly. Itachi’s warnings, which had previously fallen on deaf ears, was now ringing crystal clear.

It was long minutes before he adjusted to the smell of bloodlust. He was still miles away but the scent drifted on the cool breeze, tantalizing his senses. There was no blood in the air causing Sasuke to conclude that the actual fighting must not have taken place. Sasuke sent up a prayer of thanks to whatever god was above.

Dawn was fast approaching and he would need to find Naruto before the battles began. In the mass hysteria of war, it would be as if searching for a needle in a haystack.

As dawn broke across the horizon, Sasuke’s eyes widened at the sight. There had to be thousands of men preparing for the day’s battles. The fort built at Hastings encompassed a large bit of ground and was sturdy despite the surrounding marshland.

King Harold’s own army was camped on the outskirts, several miles from the fort. Battle would begin very soon. Watching in alarm, the gates to the fort opened and the army of close to seven thousand cavalry, infantry, and archers marched towards their foes.

The rise of the sun dulled Sasuke’s own strength, forcing him to travel only slightly faster than the average human. His breath panted as he attempted to locate Naruto in mass or armor clad warriors.

Without warning, a hand suddenly snatched his own and drew his attention. An old woman sat on the sidelines of the march. He didn’t have time for this but she was surprisingly strong for one of such advanced age. “What do you want, old grandmother?”

She simply cackled, showing a toothless mouth full of black gums. “Ten lifetimes. You will suffer for ten lifetimes.”

“Release me, old woman.” he demanded.

“Listen. It’s a test. You will have to pass or forever exist in loneliness and despair. I know what you are. You must be found worthy. He must find you worthy. The reward will extend past your wildest dreams.” She cackled one last time before releasing the arm she gripped.

“Who are you?” growled Sasuke.

The woman ignored him, gathering up her belongings. She left him alone with her words ringing in his ears. Shaking aside the sense of foreboding, he followed the marching army until they faced off against Harold. To the untrained eye, the two armies seemed almost equal in manpower.

Sasuke continued to search the ranks as the battles began. After two hours of despair, Sasuke
panted slightly. It was nearing noon. The battle should have decided a winner by now but Harold was refusing to give quarter. He was a tenacious bastard even when facing a superior army.

Blood was now rampant in the air. Sasuke had long given up hiding his eyes. The dying were the only ones that noticed. All others were only trying to survive. His sword was drawn and his voice felt hoarse from calling out for his beloved.

“Naruto! By all that is holy, answer me you idiot!” Sasuke shouted at the heavens.

“Sasuke?”

The shout was barely audible above the clash of sword and shield, but it was there. Sasuke reeled around, his eyes quickly scanning the direction from which the voice had come. Finally, there was an opening before him and he spotted that beautiful sun colored hair.

If there was such a thing as angels singing, he would have heard them. Naruto seemed to be fighting his way towards him. Sasuke ducked and dodged the blades sent in his direction.

“Naruto!” called Sasuke.

He would get him out of here now. He refused to allow his beloved to remain in this hell hole another moment. They were still about a hundred yards from each other when everything froze in Sasuke’s vision; everything but Naruto as an arrow suddenly pierced his chest.

Screaming his anger, Sasuke was at Naruto’s side as he crumpled to the ground. Blood leaked from pale lips as Sasuke assessed the wound. It was bad… it was mortal. There was nothing that could be done. He was going to die in his arms. Already, Sasuke could feel the irregular flutters of Naruto’s heart.

“Sasuke…what are…you doing…here?” gasped out Naruto, through the pain.

“I came for you, you idiot.” whispered Sasuke.

“Why would…you come for…me?”

“You made me love you. I wasn’t going to leave you here.”

“You…you love…me?”

“Only you.”

“That’s…nice…because…I don’t…want to die…alone.” Naruto began coughing up blood. The red liquid dribbled in dark streams down his chin.

“Naruto, don’t leave me. I don’t think I can keep going forever without you.”

“There’s…always the next…lifetime.”

Sasuke froze at the words. They rang in clearly with what the old hag had said. Swallowing hard, he pulled Naruto closer. His mind prayed for a miracle, something…anything. He needed a fucking miracle. Where was the Christian god that these petty human’s prayed so diligently to?

“I’m cold…Sasuke.”

“Don’t you dare close your eyes! I won’t let you go.” Sasuke snarled angrily at the blonde who only grinned, despite the fact that he knew he was dying.
“You…don’t have…a choice.”

“Naruto…”

“I’ll make sure…to look for…you…in the next…lifetime…” Sasuke felt the heart stutter to a stop as the body in his arms went limp. What was the absolute worse was that he felt Naruto’s blood inside him disappear. He could no longer feel that light inside him and he went mad with grief. Streaks of red trickled down Sasuke’s face as he screamed out his anguish.

Tales would be told for years after the battle of Hastings; stories of the demon with flaming red eyes, who struck down every man dressed in Harold’s colors. Whether or not his presence altered the course of the battle, no one can say.

Blood streaked, lying next to the cold body of his beloved, Sasuke was broken when his brother finally located him. Sasuke’s eyes were dead as Itachi approached him. Lips pulled back to reveal pearly white fangs; a warning to not get too close.

“Oh, Sasuke.” whispered Itachi at the sight of how his brother desperately clung to the corpse.

“Let’s go home.” Itachi whispered but Sasuke shook his head adamantly.

“Not without Naruto. I won’t leave him in this heathen land.”

“We’ll take him with us.”

Sasuke growled as Itachi attempted to take him from his arms, “I’ll take him.”

“As you wish, little brother,” Itachi followed Sasuke, as they approached the waiting ship.

Sasuke never knew if Itachi was able to slow the decay of death but Naruto’s body never rotted or smelled. The entire trip to their home, his body remained the same as if he had just expired.

As his body was lowered into the cold ground, Sasuke released a keening wail and collapsed before the grave. It was months before he spoke a word.

Itachi force fed him blood in an attempt to keep him amongst the living. Nothing mattered any longer. Each night found Sasuke lying on the ground beside the grave that marked the location of Naruto’s shell.

As the years passed, the pain remained but it became…bearable. Itachi kept Sasuke close but mourned the loss of his brother. Sasuke had changed, becoming bitter and resentful. It would not be until the early 1300s in Florence, Italy that Sasuke find a new lease on life.

To be continued

Chapter End Notes

The actual date of William of Normandy’s invasion of England occurred in September of 1066, but for the flow of my story and the fact that I changed what I initially had planned, I have William invading in march of 1066 so you history buffs, don’t get all uppity
September 24, 1988

The sound of a child crying grated on Itachi’s nerves. The baby sitter for Naruto had called in sick with a cold, forcing his housekeeper to bring the child to work with her. She had promised that he was a little angel, but he seriously doubted that issue. The boy appeared to have the lung capacity of an elephant.

Though he was exhausted, Itachi never took to his bed before noon. Living amongst humans in such close quarters required a bit more effort on his part. For the last few years, he’d debated returning to his castle. The small village that once resided below the castle had been replaced by a thriving town. More than enough people to provide him with sustenance should the need arise.

Sasuke held him back, and now Naruto’s presence was holding both of them back. Replacing the book on the shelf in his library, Itachi stretched his tired muscles. It hardly seemed a year had nearly passed since he’d charmed his brother into sleeping.

Naruto seemed to be thriving. The reports from his housekeeper detailed every little accomplishment the boy made.

Itachi, however, avoided the child. Sasuke’s deteriorated mentality was a direct result of that soul. Itachi was quite bitter toward the child. He admitted to it. He would have been happy leaving the little infant to fend for himself in the hospital, had Sasuke not pleaded for his help.

Wincing as yet another screech reached his sensitive ears, Itachi’s control broke. He moved from the library and towards the kitchen where his housekeeper was rocking the crying baby in an effort to calm his wails.

“I’m sorry, sir. He’s hardly ever like this. He kept trying to open the door to the basement. I didn’t want to chance that the door would swing open. Those stairs are far too steep for him to be around,” apologized Maggie his very plump housekeeper.

Itachi glanced sharply towards the door leading to the basement. Narrowing his eyes, he turned them towards the screaming baby. Chubby arms reached for the door as if it were someone he wanted to hold him. Naruto couldn’t possibly sense Sasuke. Humans lacked that ability.

“Allow me to take him off your hands. Go ahead with your duties. I’ll handle him for a while.” offered Itachi, sharp black eyes locked on the blond.

“You don’t have to. I’m sure he’ll quiet down in a few minutes.” Maggie said the words but it was obvious in her eyes, she wanted to accept the assistance.

Itachi scooped the baby from her arms and carried him out of the kitchen into the library. Naruto screamed even louder, tear tracks marring his chubby red cheeks. He was so different from Sasuke as an infant. Sasuke had been so quiet, it bordered on abnormal.

Lifting the blond child so their eyes met, Itachi stared deep into the infant’s soul reflected there. He tried to find something, anything that marked Naruto as different. Other than his excessive crying, nothing jumped out as anything but ordinary.
Sighing, he set the child on the floor before settling himself into a comfortable chair. The crying dulled in ferocity, but continued. Itachi rubbed his eyes in frustration. His curiosity over the boy had gotten him into a mess where he sat in his library staring at an obnoxious baby.

The cries slowed to small hiccupping whimpers as the child began to explore the area. Itachi could track him by his cries along with the shuffling of his knees against the carpeting. When the cries stopped all together, the vampire king glanced up from his book. Frowning, he walked around a table in search of the child.

Freezing mid step, Itachi stared in something akin to shock. The baby was sitting quietly, staring up at a painting of Sasuke. Naruto turned to glance at Itachi, causing a shudder to run down his spine. Those were not the eyes of a child, but the intelligent eyes of someone far older than twelve months.

“What are you?” whispered Itachi, his voice hoarse.

Naruto blinked a few times before his eyes dimmed as the flash of intelligence left. All that remained was the child as the boy turned his eyes back to the painting.

Sasuke stared at them from the painting. The artist had captured his brother so beautifully. The arrogance that Sasuke exuded was perfectly portrayed. It seemed as if Sasuke was staring from the painting. The slight curve of his smile seemed to be directed towards the artist.

Sasuke’s smiles were so rare and Itachi wished he had been in the studio when this was painted. His heart ached every time he saw it, but he could not bear the thought of destroying it. It was during one of the few times Sasuke had a full grasp on his sanity.

Dressed in the garb of the mid 1300’s, Sasuke’s eyes held a light that shone bright. The only time Sasuke’s eyes shone with such a glow was in the presence of Naruto. Looking down at the child Itachi narrowed his eyes. The boy raised his hand, pointing a chubby finger at the painting.

“Saaaaaa. Saaaaaa.”

Stumbling back, Itachi stared at the child. Slumping against the table, his mind froze in shock. The child continued to stare at the painting, occasionally calling to it. It wasn’t until a knock at the door, brought him from his thoughts. “Enter.”

“Mr. Uchiha, Paul is finished with his duties. He’s going to take Naruto home.” Maggie smiled brightly, seeing how nice and quiet her son was playing.

“Thank you so much for your help, sir.” Maggie picked up Naruto, causing the child to fuss as he reached towards the painting. Maggie turned to see what he was reaching for.

“Oh! What a handsome man. Naruto must have good taste.” she smiled before carrying the now wailing child from the room.

Slumping in a chair, Itachi brought a shaking hand to his face. Before he was simply going to ignore the child’s existence but now, he would watch the boy closely as he grew into adulthood.

Perhaps it was just coincidence that Naruto was drawn to the painting of Sasuke. Chuckling, Itachi shook his head. He was just fooling himself of course, that wasn’t coincidence. What it was, he did not know but a coincidence it was not.

~oOo~

March 13, 1348
Itachi paced the ramparts of his castle which was located on the border of Hungary and Romania. The heavy mountains protected it from outsiders. Traveling the mountain pass to reach the small valley where his home rested was treacherous. Only someone knowledgeable of the area would have any success reaching the lush valley.

It was a little touch of paradise, but to Itachi it was a place of mourning. He did not mourn the dead, but the living; namely, his brother Sasuke. Since the death of his lover 282 years ago Sasuke had lost his smile. His brother breathed, fed, and fucked but never lived. For the last twenty or so years Sasuke had become particularly irritable, spending less time with Itachi and more time at the gravesite. It bothered Itachi greatly. He did not want to lose his brother to despair.

Each evening Sasuke would sit for hours beside the weathered grave where Naruto lay. His fingers would trace the stone monument as if caressing a lover. It broke Itachi’s heart to see his brother continue to mourn the boy. He should have gotten over him long ago. Yet, he was standing in the warm evening air, staring as his brother sat beside the lonely grave.

Something needed to change. Itachi was tired of it. Strolling to the edge of the battlement, Itachi looked dispassionately at the small figure of his brother, exactly where he’d expected him to be. Enough was enough.

Jumping from the battlement, the king of nightwalkers landed in a crouch before stalking towards his brother. The wind lifted his silken hair in something akin to a caress. The trained eye could see the annoyance that bled off the older nightwalker despite the practiced neutrality of his face.

Sasuke glanced up at Itachi’s approach, fingers pausing from their stroking of the headstone “Yes, brother?”

“We’re leaving at sunset tomorrow,” Itachi stated.

“What?” exclaimed Sasuke as he jumped to his feet.

“I’m tired of your moping. You’ve had almost three hundred years to mourn that boy. It’s time you got over him.” Itachi turned but wasn’t surprised when a hand grasped his cloak, forcing him to whirl to face his furious brother.

“Get over him? How dare you? I’m not going anywhere,” Sasuke’s cheeks were red with fury. His pristine fangs flashed dangerously causing Itachi to smile; his own fangs gleaming in the moonlight. This was the most animated he’d seen his brother in a very long time.

“Yes, you are. Be ready at dusk,” Itachi smirked before throwing off Sasuke’s arm, sending the younger stumbling backward.

“You bastard.” shouted the younger.

“Hn,” Itachi made his way back to the castle. Things felt right, now. Sasuke’s anger would diminish as he was engulfed in the new wonders of the world. He just needed to be forced to see it. Itachi would make sure life was breathed into his brother once again.

~oOo~

May 1, 1348

Sasuke blinked awake as the sun dipped below the horizon. His bastard of a brother had drawn him from their castle to roam the countryside of Italy. In a few of the cities they traveled through, change was washing clean the archaic beliefs of the past. Sasuke couldn’t say it was all bad though.
Superstitions were being put aside in favor of more concrete beliefs and analytical thought. Much to the dismay of the church, Sasuke believed. Even on the eve of a renaissance, old beliefs and traditions die hard.

Stretching his arms, Sasuke rolled from the bed in the inn. He’d never liked country inns, their beds were usually made of straw stuffed mattresses and stray pieces were always poking his skin. Popping his neck, Sasuke gathered his belongings before making his way to his brother’s room, arriving just in time to see Itachi step quietly into the hall.

The boisterous laughter from the tavern part of the inn could be heard through the walls. Now that the day was at an end, villagers would gather together to drink and make merry. After working from dawn until dusk, Sasuke could empathize. Allow them whatever small joy they could find in life.

“We should reach Florence by dawn.” offered Itachi, earning a scowl from Sasuke.

“I don’t understand why you are dragging me all over Italy. I’ll admit things have changed but nothing you show me will change who I am or how I feel.” Sasuke said, reaching up to rub the skin over his heart. The farther from their home they got, the stronger the ache in his blood grew. It wasn’t bloodlust but something else, something that shouldn’t be there but was.

“Sasuke?”

“It’s nothing.” Sasuke frowned, lost in his own thoughts. Rolling his shoulders in an attempt to dispel the feeling, Sasuke pulled himself onto his mount. The large black stallion snorted, stomping his feet in a desire to get moving.

“My lords are you sure you don’t wish to stay until morning.” The inn keeper took in their fine clothes and well kept animals; his mind already spending the money he could earn from them for another night.

“We wish to reach Florence by dawn. I’m afraid we must be off.” Itachi swung onto his own mount, steering the horse away from the inn. Sasuke followed in suit.

For several minutes, the two brothers rode in silence before Sasuke released a wry chuckle. “We’re being followed.”

“Indeed,” Itachi breathed deeply. It really was foolish of their would-be assassins to stand downwind but the men could not have known Itachi and Sasuke’s true nature. They probably only saw the obvious wealth; thinking to make an easy bit of gold.

“I was a bit hungry, anyway.” Sasuke’s leather clad hands clenched on the reins, the excitement of the hunt beginning to build inside him. How long had it been since he and Itachi enjoyed the pleasure of a hunt together?

“Hold!” shouted a gruff voice from shadows.

“Who goes there?” called Sasuke, playing along with the robbers.

“Hand over your gold and horses. If you do so, we won’t kill you.” Sasuke could taste the lie on the man’s lips. They had no plan to let the two of them live. Sasuke almost chuckled aloud. It really was amusing to see the foolish humans attempt to rob two of the most powerful beings in the world.

“Come now, Sasuke. We really don’t have time to play.” said Itachi, rolling his eyes as he stepped
down from his horse, appearing behind one of the assassins. “You really should have stayed at the inn.”

Itachi buried his teeth in the dirty neck bared before him. Eyes bled to red at the first taste of blood. Swallowing deeply, his senses spun as the essence ran down his throat, providing life and energy. He vaguely noted the scream from across the road. Obviously, Sasuke had dropped his own game to take of what was so delightfully offered.

Itachi had been planning to grab a meal from one of the wild deer that roamed the countryside but seeing as these gentlemen offered so nicely to provide for them, he would take what they had to give. It was very delicious, seeing as he and Sasuke had refrained from partaking of the locals, choosing instead to remain incognito.

Shuddering as he felt the man lap into unconsciousness, Itachi dropped the poor fool. The robber crumpled at his feet. Wrinkling his nose, Itachi dabbed at his lips with a silk cloth before approaching Sasuke.

The possessive growl from Sasuke’s lips earned an equally annoyed one from Itachi. “Stop or he’ll die.”

“Why do you care about some worthless human?” snarled Sasuke, his eyes flashing a dangerous warning.

“You know why.”

“Fine,” Dropping the man in a heap, Sasuke pushed angrily past his brother. The horses stirred restlessly at the bloodlust that poured off of Sasuke. Itachi shook his head sadly before glancing at the lump of a man at his feet.

“Consider yourself lucky, human.” Itachi ran a hand over the man’s closed eyes, sealing the memories of the night. Grabbing a bottle of cheap wine strapped to the robber’s belt, Itachi poured the liquid over the man. He would wake up with the worst hangover he’d ever experienced, but at least he would wake up.

Finishing clean up, Itachi mounted once more. “You really should learn control over your instincts, Sasuke.”

“Why? When I have you to do it for me,” Sasuke said as he smirked. Sasuke urged his horse into a gallop towards their destination.

Sighing dramatically, Itachi followed leaving the two men to sleep off their ‘hangover’. Sasuke was destined to be the death of him, he just knew it.

Dawn shot rays of pink, blue, and orange across the horizon as the two travelers entered the gated streets of Florence. The clopping sound of the horse’s hooves on the cobblestone road sounded their arrival. Servants were moving about, bowing appropriately to the two obvious noblemen riding down the street.

“How are we here?” asked Sasuke. “Out of the entire world, what is here that is so interesting?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps we can take in the social scene. I understand that the balls and soirées are quite the entertainment.” Sasuke shot Itachi a disgusted look, causing Itachi to smirk. “I don’t know, Sasuke. It’s a change of atmosphere. Perhaps there is something here to interest us.”

“I think you are completely…” Sasuke’s words trailed off at the sight of sunshine hair
disappearing in the growing crowd of people.

“What were you saying, Sasuke?” Itachi glanced at his brother, taking in the drawn up brow and frowning lips. “Is something wrong?”

Sasuke shook his head, sending black bangs dancing on his face. “I’m going to explore. I’ll meet you later.”

Sasuke waved haphazardly to Itachi as he chased after the blond hair; jogging away before Itachi could stop him. Glancing down alleyways and side streets, Sasuke searched for the sunshine hair that haunted his dreams every night. The draining effect of the sun lowered his strength.

Growling in his throat as a trickle of sweat worked its way down his temple; Sasuke leaned against the stone wall of a shop. He was tempted to just go find Itachi. It wasn’t Naruto. Why did he allow his sentimentality get the better of him? Naruto was never coming back. It had been nearly three hundred years.

Dusting his hands over his embroidered doublet, Sasuke turned to head towards where he’d left Itachi. His exhaustion must have gotten the better of him as he plowed directly into another gentleman. Parcels scattered across the cobblestone road.

“Are you alright, milord?”

Sasuke froze. A heart that he’d thought frozen began to beat with a thumping so loud he was sure the passersby could hear it. That voice. That beautiful, melodious voice. The language was different but he would never forget that voice.

Shivers ran up and down his body. Sasuke was afraid to look. He was afraid that the man standing near him wouldn’t be ‘him’. Taking a much needed breath, he turned wild eyes towards the owner of the voice. Breath left him immediately in a whoosh. It was Naruto.

“Sir? Milord? Should I go for assistance?” Concerned blue eyes watched as Sasuke struggled to breath.

“Naruto,” Sasuke gasped out, tears beginning to form at the corners of his eyes.

Blond brows drew together as a look of confusion spread across tan features. “Do I know you?”

The sound of his voice washed over Sasuke again, bringing calm once more to his broken soul. Closing his eyes, Sasuke breathed in the scent of Naruto. He smelled the same as before but… something was different. Paint maybe?

“Hey, I live up those steps. You can rest there. Maybe you’re over heated.” offered Naruto, attempting to converse with the man. He really was acting strangely. Perhaps it wasn’t so good an idea to bring him home.

Snapping out of his haze, Sasuke blinked a few times before responding in perfect Italian. “Thank you. I think you are right.”

Naruto looked relieved at the response. Gathering up his supplies, he trotted across the street towards the somewhat rickety door. “It’s this way.”

Naruto led Sasuke through the door and up a short flight of stairs. Dust covered everything on the lower level causing Sasuke to fight the urge to sneeze. As soon as they cleared the steps, Sasuke was assaulted by the smell of oil paint. The room was well lit. The dust of the lower floor seemed
to have no place here. It was a bit cluttered but not horribly so.

“Sorry about the mess. I really don’t have much time to organize things.” Naruto laughed lightly causing Sasuke to close his eyes again as the sound enveloped him in warmth.

“Whoa, don’t collapse.” Firm hands gripped at Sasuke, drawing him once more back into reality.

“Come why don’t you rest over here. You look a bit pale.” Sasuke fought back a laugh at the comment. If only he knew.

Naruto cleared a place on a rather old bench. Hand sewn cushions took away from the hard wood. Not that it would have mattered to Sasuke.

“I don’t know your name.” Naruto grinned sheepishly, bringing up a hand to scratch nervously at his scalp.

“Sasuke,” Naruto frowned a bit at the name. It rung so familiar in his mind. He didn’t know any Sasuke nor could he ever remember hearing the odd name but the name sent tremors. It was as if the memory was caught on the edge of his mind, unable to be reached even though one knows it’s there.

Giving up for now, Naruto grabbed some loose pieces of parchment and a sharpened piece of charcoal. Glancing at the pale vision before him, he set to work. Never had he seen someone so beautiful. His skin was so pale; it added an ethereal glow to him. His travel clothes were finely made and they were a testament to his obvious wealth. Naruto supposed he should consider himself lucky. Perhaps he would get a commission out of this. Rent would be due in a few days.

The dark haired nightwalker stared as Naruto began sketching with a bit of charcoal. “What are you doing?”

“I’m sketching you. You have such nice bone structure. I’d love to paint you.” Naruto lifted his eyes from the rough bit of parchment.

“Are you good enough to paint me?” Sasuke snorted.

“I’ll have you know that one day I’ll be known all over Italy as a great artist. I’ll be invited into the homes of nobility.” Naruto crossed his arms over his chest, his lip poking out slightly, drawing Sasuke’s attention.

“Hn, so you say. But I’ve yet to see any of your work.” Sasuke gestured to the cloth covered easels. Standing, he reached to pull a sheet away. A tan hand stopped him from the task.

“If you commission me to paint you, I promise that you won’t be disappointed.” Naruto smiled, the plea in his eyes was unmistakable. He was desperate.

“Tck, fine. I’ll be here every morning until midday.” Sasuke reached into his money pouch, offering several gold coins.

“Just take it, idiot.” Sasuke’s hand shot out, grabbing Naruto’s before placing the coins in his palm.

“I’m not an idiot, you bastard. I’ve just never seen that much gold.” Naruto grimaced at how whiny he sounded. What was it about this man that set him off in more ways than just curiosity?
“Go sit over there. I want to get a few preliminary sketches while the light is how it will be when we work.

Once again, the sound of charcoal rubbing across parchment could be heard. Sasuke was silent; enjoying the simple act of watching Naruto, taking in the way his nose would scrunch up when he was thinking or how his lips would twitch occasionally. Sasuke wondered what the other found humorous.

The bells in the square began to chime causing Naruto to heave a sigh. “I suppose that’s it for today.”

“Don’t sound so disappointed.” smirked Sasuke, a hand reaching out to tilt up the frowning face. “I’ll be back tomorrow. And the day after that, and the day after that.”

Sasuke left the blond sitting confused in his chair. Exiting the way he entered, Sasuke made his way towards the townhouse his brother had purchased. It was easier to hide their nocturnal tendencies in a privately owned home.

Sasuke burst through the door, startling a maid so bad she nearly fainted. Rushing up the elegant staircase, Sasuke thrust open the door from which he sensed Itachi’s presence. “He’s back, Itachi!”

Itachi jerked awake, his movements sluggish from the depth of his rest. The sun in the sky made it all the more difficult to focus on his brother. The elder began growling low in his throat as faced him. “Who is back?”

“Naruto is! He’s come back to me.” Sasuke panted the words, waiting for them to sink in his brother’s mind.

Itachi blinked a few times, attempting to push away sleep so that he could focus on the words spoken. Naruto? Naruto is back? Full blown confusion played across aristocratic features as the king glared at his younger sibling. “Repeat that.”

Itachi struggled to a sitting position, the shadows beneath his eyes only adding to his sex appeal. If he wasn’t Sasuke’s brother, the younger Uchiha was certain they would have been lovers. The way Itachi’s long hair sifted over his shoulders to tease the tips of his nipples was something of an erotic scene.

“Come now, Sasuke. I know I look good but wasn’t there something you wished to discuss?” Itachi smirked, causing his brother to blink before a joyous smile burst across his face. The upturning of his lips completely changed Sasuke’s image. Gone was the vision of a suffering lover, to be replaced by the face of someone in love. Itachi frowned; a trickle of foreboding worked its way down his spine.

Now fully awake, the elder focused his attention on his brother. “Well?”

“Naruto is alive. He was reborn. I just spent the morning with him.” exclaimed Sasuke, his happiness brightened the room.

“Are you sure it’s him and not you putting what you want on some unsuspecting boy?” asked Itachi, though he knew the answer. He felt the truth of his brother’s words in his very core.

Sasuke planted his feet firmly before Itachi. “It’s him.”

Itachi sighed as he reached up to rub his suddenly tired eyes. Although the happy Sasuke was an improvement to the grief ridden Sasuke, it would not last. With humans, nothing lasted; whether it
is love or life. It was the way of the universe.

“Sasuke…” Itachi began but found he could not say the things he wanted. “Enjoy your time with him, for it will seem like the blink of an eye.”

Sasuke frowned, obviously not connecting with the fact that he was destined to lose Naruto again until Itachi’s words. “Itachi…”

“Go and rest, take what joy you can from life.” Itachi watched as his brother exited the room. His hand lifted to rub the aching in his chest. Unable to shake the sense of foreboding, he settled himself in a large chair staring into the emptiness of the room.

~oOo~

Sasuke’s joy knew no bounds. He quickly forgot the worry his brother’s words brought, replacing it with the happiness of existing in the same world as Naruto.

Each morning, he sat with the blond, talking or simply enjoying the other’s presence while Naruto worked on his portrait. The first few days consisted of massive sketching. Naruto seemed frustrated by Sasuke. He couldn’t seem to capture the true essence of the other.

“I’m attempting to capture your true self.” Naruto said one day after he began placing the base paint on the canvas and easel.

Sasuke wrinkled his nose as the heavy scent of oil paint curled around him. To his sensitive senses, it was a bit annoying but Naruto’s presence made it bearable. Shifting a bit in the chair, Sasuke sniffed. “You would need to be a master to capture the essence of your subject.”

Naruto seemed to think about the statement. “Is it conforming to what is known, or creating your own that makes you a master in your field?”

“You are very philosophical today, Naruto.” commented Sasuke, frowning a bit. The frown drew a scowl from Naruto, who placed his palette before striding over to place stained hands on Sasuke’s cheeks.

“Stop frowning. It ruins the line of your face.” Naruto grumbled, staring into Sasuke’s eyes.

Pale hands lifted, closing over tan wrists. Naruto jerked at the touch but didn’t pull away. He was captivated by the dark swirling depths of Sasuke’s eyes. Unable to pull away, he continued to stare, mesmerized.

One of Sasuke’s hands lifted to brush tan cheeks, tracing over the thin lines that marred otherwise perfect skin. Unable to resist, Sasuke pulled Naruto until their lips were barely a breath away from touching.

“Sasuke…” The warm breath from the whispering of his name brushed his lips.

No words were spoken as Sasuke closed the distance between lips. Sasuke’s were cool while Naruto’s were warm. The contrasting sensation took his breath away.

He wanted to absorb the heat Naruto exuded. He wanted to absorb everything that was Naruto. He refused to lose him this time.

The musky smell of sweat mixed with oil paint produced an enticing odor, causing Sasuke to breathe deeply; memorizing every layer of it. His tongue traced the closed seam of his beloved’s
mouth, begging entrance.

“Oh gods, Naruto.” whispered Sasuke, causing Naruto gasp. In doing so, he provided Sasuke with access to tease the interior of the warm cavern now open to him.

His agile tongue teased along smooth teeth before flicking along the sensitive roof and finally, enticing the warm, wet muscle of Naruto’s tongue into play. For several moments, Naruto’s tongue remained inactive, but Sasuke would have none of that; his own tongue forcing the other to join in the play.

Naruto moaned low in his throat as Sasuke’s hands dipped to slip under his plain tunic, teasing the skin along his hips. He’d never have imagined this happening, that what he assumed was friendship would take this route, drawing him into the dark recesses of desire.

Sasuke smirked before nipping at the skin above the pulsing vessels in his neck. He could already taste the unique flavor that was mere centimeters away, only separated by a thin layer of skin.

His fangs, already at full extension, throbbed with the subtle scent of the pulsing fluid. He was so close. Raking his fangs along the skin, the tiniest drop of blood pooled from the tiny scratch. The red bead slid down the flushed neck, only to be caught by Sasuke’s tongue. Lights burst behind his eyelids at the taste of that tiny drop.

Sasuke released his own moan, shivers running up and down his body at just the small taste. It had been what seemed like an eternity since he’d savored the rich flavor of Naruto.

His hands pulled the hips of Naruto closer, longing a more intimate contact. Sucking at the skin, Sasuke growled at the residual flavor. His Naruto.

Finding some form of control from deep within, Sasuke pulled his lips from the enticing neck of his beloved. He could feel the shivers racing through the other man. They had time. They had a lifetime.

“I…um…I’m not sure…” stuttered Naruto, shifting nervously on Sasuke’s lap.

“Shh…I won’t go fast. We have all the time in the world.” Sasuke whispered, his fingers gently stroking Naruto’s back. The other relaxed under the strokes of Sasuke’s hand.

“It’s almost midday.” said Naruto.

“Do you want me to leave?”

Naruto thought about it for a moment before shaking his head. “No.”

“Then I won’t leave.” Sasuke’s hands sifted through blond locks as he brought lips to his own. This kiss was just as sweet as the first, maybe more as Naruto was less surprised by it and a much more willing participant.

Shifting a bit so that his legs straddled Sasuke’s hips, Naruto leaned more easily into the kiss. Their lips brushed back and forth, not going deeper but more like teasing to see which would break first.

Naruto buried his face in the sweet smelling hair of his…what was Sasuke to him? What was he to Sasuke? It was Naruto’s turn to frown as he pulled back. He’d been alone most of his life. An aging painter had taken him from the streets, paying him a small stipend to act as an assistant. Naruto learned from watching his master, soon surpassing the older painter in skill and talent.
After his master’s death, Naruto survived by performing odd jobs along with selling the occasional painting. Now, an obvious nobleman was showering him with affection.

“You are thinking too hard.” Naruto blinked down at the statement.

“If you were me, you would be thinking hard too.”

“How. If I was you, you wouldn’t be you. You would be me.” Sasuke almost laughed at the wheels that seemed to be turning in Naruto’s head. “Don’t hurt yourself.”

“Bastard.” muttered Naruto.

Sasuke did chuckle at that. He would have attempted to pull Naruto down for another kiss had there not been a knock from the door below. Growling irritably, Sasuke watched as Naruto stood, adjusted his clothes, and began to head downstairs.

Sasuke followed Naruto, deciding that if he wanted to have enough energy to spend tomorrow with him, he would need to rest. As much as he wanted, he knew he couldn’t do so here. “Naruto, I’m going. I will return tomorrow.”

Placing a gentle kiss on his newfound love’s lips, Sasuke opened the door to find a middle aged woman standing at the door. Bowing politely, Sasuke exited, making his way home.

Naruto watched until the rich raven’s wing hair disappeared before turning his attention Sarafina Marchello. “Signora Marchello, how may I be of assistance?”

“Naruto, my husband has heard rumors that the plague is heading this way. It seems to be worse in the cities. Our city is so beautiful, I cannot imagine it touching here but I thought it best to offer. We look on you as a friend. We are leaving tomorrow for the countryside. My aunt and uncle have a small cottage we can stay at until this passes over. I would like you to join us.” Her pale eyes lacked the normal gleam usually found in them.

“Signora, I’m touched.” smiled Naruto. He’d heard rumors of an illness creeping from the east, spreading death like wildfire. Though all feared it, many believed their faith in God would save them. The people to the Far East were not believers and as such were stricken down. Naruto did not believe this for a moment and it appeared that Signora Marchello did not either.

It was on the tip of Naruto’s tongue to agree to leave but Sasuke kept him from agreeing. He didn’t want to leave Florence and possible Sasuke. “I’ll be fine, Signora.”

“Please come with us.” Her voice quivered in fear for someone who had become dear to her heart.

“I’ve met someone. I can’t leave.”

“As you wish, Naruto. I’ll pray for you.” She smiled sadly as she walked back to the home she shared with her husband and children.

A bit of coughing came from below his step. Frowning, Naruto peeked below to see an old woman huddled in the shade. Her filthy clothes were ragged. A stroke of pity coursed through him. Coming around the step, Naruto knelt before her. “Here old mother, you need this more than I.”

Offering her one of the gold coins, he was surprised when she waved away his hand. “Child, when your time comes hold tight to your love. It will guide you to your destiny.”

Struggling to her feet, she began to meander down the cobblestone street. Confused, Naruto made
his way back inside. All thoughts of the words of the hag lost.

July 25, 1348

Naruto buried his head beneath the pillow in an attempt to hide the sound of pounding that matched the pounding in his skull. He must have developed a bit of a fever during the night. The light filtering onto his face stung like needles in his eyes. Finally, there was blessed silence as the pounding ceased.

Drifting into a fitful sleep, Naruto jerked at the feel of a cool cloth on his head. Cracking open one eye, he saw the concerned face of Sasuke. “Sasuke? Why are you in my bedroom?”

Sasuke winced at the croaking voice. He’d smelled something off in the air the last few days but pushed it aside. Itachi had been ill at ease as well. That never boded well for things.

Finding the love of his existence burning up with fever, Sasuke was nearly sent into madness. Determined not to lose him again, he bundled the youth in blankets before scooping him in his arms. The weight of the sun felt heavy, causing the journey to the house he shared with Itachi to seem all the longer.

“No, let me go. I need…to stay.” Naruto’s feverish ramblings worried Sasuke. Illness was something he could not relate to. Nightwalkers did not get ill. Sickness and disease was a human condition. He did know that if Naruto was rambling, his fever must be dire indeed.

Stumbling across the threshold, Sasuke collapsed in the foyer; causing servants to rush about in distress. “Take him to my room.” grated out Sasuke, his limbs heavy.

The servants did as he wished, while Sasuke slammed into Itachi’s room. His eyes widened, surprised to see his brother awake and still dressed. “Itachi?”

“Sasuke, death is coming on swift wings. We should leave.”

“A screenshot of the image: pages from a book, with text about a plague and fever in the 14th century.
“The choice won’t be yours, I’m afraid.” Itachi whispered.

Word got out that one of the stricken was in the house. The windows and doors were boarded up by order of the city council. It would not be enough. Naruto was not the only one to fall ill. Nearly half the population of Florence was stricken with the pestilence.

Sasuke refused to leave Naruto’s side; he held hope that he would overcome the illness. Itachi was forced to creep from the townhouse to feed enough for both himself and Sasuke; having to practically force feed his brother.

“Sasuke.” Sasuke glanced up from the book he was reading. Happiness spread through him. Naruto’s eyes seemed lucid for the first time in nearly a week.

The purple pustules had ruptured oozing black blood and pus. The smell of Naruto’s infected blood was nearly unbearable to Sasuke. Unlike the pureness of before, the scent of illness hung heavy in the air.

“How are you feeling?” asked Sasuke pushing back a strand of limp blond hair.

“I feel…sad.” Naruto smiled, his dull blue eyes seemed focused only on Sasuke.

“Why are you so sad? You’re on the mend now.” Sasuke offered Naruto a sip of water, which was taken gratefully.

“I had a dream. I dreamt that I was a soldier and I died in your arms.” Naruto smiled sadly at Sasuke. “I finished your portrait. I was going to surprise you.”

“As soon as you are well, I’ll get it. Then, I’m taking you home to our castle. It’s where you belong.” Sasuke frowned when Naruto shook his head.

“I won’t be able to see it this time.” Dark lashes fluttered closed, only desperate shaking from Sasuke brought him back into focus.

“Don’t think like that. You are getting better.” Sasuke’s voice held determination, but his eyes held fear. Abject fear.

“I think we had more time, this time. Maybe it was a gift.” Naruto’s hand shook as he brushed the dark bangs that hung over Sasuke’s eyes.

“Don’t die.”

“I think I love you. No…I know I love you.”

“You idiot, I’ve always loved you.”

“Sasuke.”

“What is it?”

“I’m scared.”

Sasuke curled into the bed with Naruto, the smell of illness a mere afterthought. He just wanted to hug his beloved. He wanted him to keep him forever in his arms. Naruto’s arms came up around him, returning the embrace with every fiber of his being.

“Don’t leave me.” Naruto’s voice, barely a whisper brushed Sasuke’s cheeks.
“Never.”

Naruto seemed to relax, curling his body into Sasuke’s. They lay for a long time, Sasuke counting each beat of Naruto’s heart. When the beat stuttered, his arms tightened even more as if trying to absorb him before his soul escaped. He felt the last intake of breath, the last thump of a heart beat and still he held him. Naruto’s body grew cold and still he held him.

“Sasuke.”

“Leave.”

“Sasuke.”

“Leave us alone!” screamed Sasuke, his voice grief stricken.

Lunging at his brother, Sasuke swiped with claws. “Leave us!”

Itachi hissed as claws dug into his shoulder. Eyes bled to red. Snarling he grabbed his brother; slamming him painfully against the wall. The sight that he witnessed was far worse than before. Where anger had driven Sasuke at Naruto’s first death, despair ruled him now. “Oh, Sasuke.”

“I…I can’t feel him. Itachi…I can’t feel him.” Sasuke dropped to his knees before his brother, tears the color of blood creating tracks down his face.

“I know.” Itachi crouched by his brother, pulling him into his arms.

“I can’t feel him.” Sasuke continued to whisper the words until the sun rose, falling into a deep sleep.

Itachi carried him to the master bedroom. Stripping him of clothing, he laid him upon the cool sheets.

“Sleep, little brother.”

Returning to the sick room, Itachi scooped up the empty husk of Naruto. “It appears that you have destroyed him once again.”

Carrying the body along the roof tops, Itachi lowered the shell to the ground in a small deserted clearing. Gathering up materials, he built a funeral pyre fit for a king. “I cannot allow you to be carried home, this time. I would not subject my people to this illness.”

Placing Naruto on the pyre, Itachi started the blaze with a flick of his wrist. With sad eyes, he watched the body enveloped in flame. Closing his eyes, he stood vigil until there was nothing left but ash.

Gathering the ashes in a pouch, he returned to his brother’s side. What more torture did the wheel of fate have in store for his brother? Itachi placed a hand over his heart, praying that he would not have to witness it again.

Chapter End Notes

Ch.3 is during the early renaissance. Not in its prime. The Black Death was one of the
reasons the Renaissance happened. The Black Death peaked in Europe during 1348-
1350 possibly killed close to 60% of Europe's population. Though exact #s are
unknown and can only be speculated on.
December 12, 1992

Itachi rubbed at the headache forming behind his eyes as he replaced the telephone on its cradle. Maggie and Paul Peterson were dead. Their car had hit a bit of ice on the road, sending them careening into a tree. Paul died instantly, but Maggie held on until the paramedics arrived. Miraculously, the five year old Naruto Uzumaki was unharmed save for a few facial lacerations.

Sighing, Itachi made his way down to the basement. The need to see his brother was potent tonight. Of course, Sasuke was still sleeping and he would continue to sleep. He would be unable to comfort his brother in this time of mourning.

Entering the well protected hidden room, Itachi watched the slow rise and fall of his brother’s chest. The pain in his own was almost unbearable. There were few humans whom Itachi considered friends. Maggie and Paul were two of those humans.

They had no knowledge of his nature but it did not stop him from considering them precious. He’d trusted them with the welfare of Naruto, who was most precious to his brother. It showed the level of trust he’d held in the two humans.

Sighing, he slumped on the bed; the motion barely moving the soft mattress. A faint layer of dust enveloped the room, coating everything but Sasuke. Itachi always found it an intriguing sight. Perhaps it was something in his blood or skin repelling the dust from his body. Whatever the case, Sasuke’s still skin shown like the finest porcelain; tiny blue veins visible in his jaw.

“Little brother, I find myself longing for your company again. We grew apart. It was my fault. I… Whatever curse has been placed on you, please let it end. Should Naruto die again, I will destroy you myself. You won’t survive it again. I won’t watch you be driven insane again.” Itachi stroked bangs back from his brother’s face, recalling the innocent brother long since tainted with despair.

Not expecting an answer, Itachi sat for what seemed like hours. He felt the rise of the sun in the east. It no longer held the pull it once had, although it didn’t prevent him from sensing its assent. Being long lived had its drawbacks. Sasuke was haunted by it, tortured nearly to the point of insanity. A lesser man would have long since taken his own life to escape the nightmare. Today, he truly felt the weight of his years. What would he do with the child, Sasuke’s beloved reborn?

He was in no way equipped to care for a young child but it was his responsibility to look after the boy until Sasuke could take him. He didn’t even want to think about if he’d died today. Itachi would have destroyed his brother while he slept. There would be no saving Sasuke this time. The madness, always but a breath away, would devour him.

As king of their kind, he held a responsibility to his subjects as well as to the humans amongst whom they lived. To release a grief maddened night walker amongst humans was asking for their secret to be exposed. Itachi was pretty sure the humans would not take kindly to the knowledge of their existence.

Lifting his hand to his own midnight tresses, he closed his suddenly very tired eyes before rising. Resetting the safeguards, he slowly made his way to the upper parts of the house. Other than the disturbing episode four years earlier, he’d avoided contact with the boy; content to watch from afar. Now, he would be forced to once again confront the cause of his brother’s madness.
The door chime rang loudly. It was a mere formality. He’d known of their arrival the moment the vehicle stopped in his drive. His brother’s doom stood behind the door. He could smell his scent. The added odor of salt from tears brought back into the forefront of his mind the reason for the boy’s presence in his home.

Opening the door slowly, Itachi stepped back as Naruto’s case worker ushered the boy inside. The tear tracks were still visible beneath dark smudged eyes; large white bandages covered each cheek making them look puffy. Fighting the urge to offer comfort to the boy, he silently escorted the two into the sitting room off from the foyer.

“Mr. Uchiha, as Naruto’s benefactor, I’m giving you the option to decide what we should do. His case is very unusual but I’d like your input.” Angela Mason, watched as the child sat quietly, his fingers running across the wooden arms of his chair. She’d become very close to him over the last five years and seeing the normally upbeat and hyper child acting so sluggish tore at her heart.

“He’ll stay with me.”

“Pardon?” Her eyes jumped back to his, surprise evident in them.

“He’ll stay with me. I’ve already taken steps to hire a live in nanny for the hours when he’s not in school. There won’t be any problem, will there?” Itachi watched the boy slide from his chair, obviously not interested in the conversation despite its direct impact on his life.

“You’ve had almost no contact with him since his birth. Why would you want to take him in now?” Angela was baffled.

“Consider it a change of heart.”

“Bullshit.”

“Watch your language around the boy. I don’t want him picking up such words if he’s to live with me.” Itachi smirked at the blush spreading across her face, still fully aware of every step Naruto made.

Sad blue eyes were scanning the room. It was filled with fancy paintings and obviously expensive vases. All utterly boring. He wanted…no needed something to do to take his mind off of Mama and Daddy. They told him they were not coming back. They acted like he was a baby.

Naruto knew full well why they were not coming back. He wasn’t stupid. They were dead. Death was the end, but some reason, it didn’t scare him.

He’d smelled the faint scent as Mama had buckled him into his booster. He’d known something would happen. His childish mind was unable to describe how he knew but he’d known that something would happen to them.

Continuing to explore the room while the adults talked, Naruto spotted something of interest. It was the beautifully designed sheath of a katana. The display called to him. He reached out a hand to take the weapon when long slender fingers grabbed his wrist, preventing him from taking the blade.

Turning, he saw the pale man looking at him thoughtfully, not angry but contemplatively. “What kind of sword is it?”

“Hn, it is a katana from the early Muromachi period in Japan.” Itachi murmured, his eyes not on the weapon but on the boy. Out of all the treasures in the room, he’d chosen that one. The sword
called to its master, he supposed.

“Mr. Uchiha, if you are allowed to take the boy, you really must do something about the weapons.” Angela fretted over the boy. It was really more of a showing than actual affection. She didn’t even want to think about placing the boy. It was easy to simply leave him in the care of Itachi Uchiha than to place him in a home that would require her to make weekly or bi-weekly visits. With Uchiha, she might get by with once a month if not longer.

“Ms. Mason, why not simply say what you intend and leave. I know you want the boy to stay here. Stop pretending to care.” Itachi lifted the sword from its stand. Unsheathing the blade, he looked at the boy. Naruto’s eyes were glued to his reflection in the metal as if he was seeing something only his eyes could view.

“What do you see boy?” Naruto jerked as if slapped.

“I don’t see anything.” A pink lower lip quivered, but his jaw remained firm.

“Hn.” Itachi tested the weight of the weapon. It really was an extraordinary sword. The katana originated in the Muromachi era. It was created to be quick to draw, cutting response times during battle drastically. “Ms. Mason, is there anything else I can do for you?”

“Now wait a minute, Mr. Uchiha…”

“It’s ok, Ms. Mason. I don’t mind staying with him.” Naruto’s face held a serious gleam.

“Naruto…”

“I promise there will be nothing that can harm him. Tomorrow there will be a nanny to care for him when I am not around.” Itachi turned dismissively, to place the now sheathed katana on the stand with its accompanying wakizashi.

Turning to the woman, his voice purred smoothly, the compulsion he sent towards her was unmistakable to any of their kind. She would be hard pressed to fight such a powerful charm. “Angela, you will trust me with the boy. He is safe here. I will care for him. You can leave him with me.”

Blinking a few times in confusion, she stood and left silently, her back stiff. All she felt was trust in the aristocratic man. The small niggling stream of doubt blocked from her mind.

Itachi turned to the blond haired boy staring at him through eyes that looked far too old to be on a face so young. He didn’t seem the least bit shocked or surprised at the way his social worker left.

“Who are you?” Itachi’s eyes sharpened as he settled in a chair, gesturing for the boy to approach. It was strange. The boy seemed almost otherworldly one moment and the next he was the average five year old boy.

“My name is Naruto Uzumaki.” The small chest poked out in self importance.

“I didn’t ask your name.” Itachi inched his face closer, staring deep into the boy’s eyes. His own eyes having bled to red. He grabbed thin arms, his mind delving into the cloudy depths that fogged a mind so young.

Fighting the clogging tendrils of the mind, he sought out what he’d not a chance to see until now. Walking through the darkness even his eyes could not see, he became nearly lost.
“You don’t belong here.” Whirling around, he was face to face with Naruto. Not Naruto the child but Naruto the adult.

“Who are you? Why did you nearly destroy my brother?” Anger began to drip from him as his clawed hands swiped at the mental image of Naruto. His fingers passed through the flesh as if nothing was there.

“It’s not time.” Blue eyes drifted upward, almost as if he was scanning the unseen sky. The image flickered between that of the adult and of the child. Almost as if his mind couldn’t decide which he was.

“Naruto…”

“I’m sorry…”

Itachi gasped as he was flung forcibly from the mind. He reentered his body with such force; it felt as if the air was knocked from his lungs.

The boy was sitting quietly; his eyes began to fade, losing that otherworldly gleam. Itachi swallowed. The experience spun in his mind. It should not have happened. Rubbing his eyes, he stood slowly. “Come, I’ll show you to your room.”

~oOo~

February 19, 1404

“Sasuke.”

Sasuke blinked as his eyes stared out into the snow covered village. The powder dusted houses provided a picturesque image. He wasn’t really seeing it though. His mind was replaying thoughts of Naruto. The way he laughed. The way he tasted. When they were together, the rest of the world faded away.

“Sasuke.”

Why did he die? Why couldn’t he save him? He was a fucking immortal. Why couldn’t he save one human life? Fingers tightened into a fist, blood dripped in a small pool at his feet.

“Sasuke!”

The younger brother jerked, turning startled eyes to his brother. Had Itachi been calling him? It was so hard to stay grounded lately. His mind felt so lost. “Itachi?”

“Didn’t you hear me calling you?” Itachi snatched the bleeding hand, drawing his tongue across the torn skin. Each swipe of his tongue healed the wound a little more until only unmarked skin remained. “You are foolish.”

“I’m sorry.” Sasuke slumped against the wall. “My mind seems to drift lately.”

“I feel like you are slipping away from me.” Itachi’s fingers ran through his brother’s hair, the short spikes bobbing at the stroking. Sasuke closed his eyes, his body relishing in the touch of his brother.

“I have an offer for you. Perhaps it is what you need. My duties keep me from joining you. How long has it been since you visited the land of our birth?” Itachi watched interest enter his brother’s
eyes for the first time since Naruto’s demise.

“A very long time.”

“I thought it might perk your interest. I’ve been in contact with Uncle Madara. He has agreed to allow you to stay with him on his estate outside of Kyoto. Are you interested?” Itachi saw the sparkle of life begin to twinkle in his brother’s eyes.

“I am.” Sasuke’s mind drifted back the land of his birth. The rice fields spread across the countryside. The cherry blossom trees dotting the landscape, petals floating through the air. He missed it. For the first time in a very long time, Sasuke’s mind was filled with something other than Naruto.

“I’ll arrange for your departure.” Itachi left his brother to his travel plans. This was what they both needed. Itachi had been worried for so long but now, he could relax. This trip to the land of their birth would renew Sasuke. Closing his eyes, he smiled a little. Yes, this was what he needed.

~oOo~

April 6, 1404

Sasuke breathed in the slightly salty air as his feet stepped from the ship into the harbor. He was home, the land of his birth. Some things had changed but some remained the same. The smell of the land was unchanged. He closed his eyes at the subtle scent of sakura mixed with the salt of the ocean to tease his senses.

Spring was such a beautiful time. His childhood had been spent playing beneath the midnight blossoms of the sakura trees. It was a time filled with laughter. His brother, already long grown, would carry him on his back as they jumped from tree to tree. His childhood was filled with much love and laughter.

“Uchiha-san?” Sasuke was brought from his revere of the past as a meek servant approached.

“Yes.” Sasuke stepped forward. It felt strange to be dressed in the fine men’s silk kimono. After so many years in western clothing, the light spring robe felt strange. The tatami sandals felt equally strange, though he would never reveal such things to the servant before him.

“Uchiha-sama has instructed me to transport you to his palace. If it pleases you, the carriage is here.” The servant bowed, awaiting Sasuke’s direction. He was well trained and as such, would never direct his master.

Sasuke nodded as he made his way to the ornate carriage. Madara was going a bit overboard. His memories of the man were vague but this seemed totally in character with him. Settling inside the horse drawn box, he closed his eyes.

The midday sun was sapping what little energy he had. He would be glad when they reached Madara’s palace. Sasuke had grown unused to the sun after Naruto’s death. There was really no need to remain in it. He had no interest in humans anyway, other than food and even that had become a chore foisted on him by Itachi in his worry.

The jarring of the carriage jerked Sasuke from his drowsy state. “What is going on?”

“Please forgive me, Uchiha-san. The wheel has broken. Please wait here, I shall go to the palace and another carriage shall be sent post haste.” The servant vanished before Sasuke could debate the issue.
Frowning, he stepped from the vehicle. There was no point in him sitting there. His legs worked fine. He would begin making his way towards Madara’s home. The sky did not promise to remain docile. Perhaps luck would be with him.

About an hour into his journey, the skies opened up, the over cast horizon now releasing its fury on the land below. No, it appeared luck was deserting him as well. Arching his brow, a little annoyed, his energy was so low, partially from the sun and partially from his own lack of proper feeding. He could just hear Itachi’s voice in his head, berating him for his failure to feed properly.

“I’ll hunt tonight.” he promised himself as he looked for somewhere to take shelter.

A small, attractive house near a babbling creek drew his attention. Perhaps it was impolite to intrude but he really didn’t want to stay in the rain. Approaching the wooden door, Sasuke knocked politely.

It was several moments before a young Japanese woman, dressed in a light pink kimono answered his knock. Her long black hair hung attractively around her dainty face. Lavender colored eyes stared into obsidian. Strange. He’d never realized such eyes existed in the world.

“Forgive me; I was traveling to my uncle’s home when the rains began. Might I trouble you to sit under the awning until my carriage arrives?” Bowing politely to the woman as she took in his drenched visage.

“P-Please come inside,” She answered, her eyes compassionate for his plight. Sasuke hoped it would not be a trait she would regret to possess. “I’ll get m-my husband.”

Sasuke shed his shoes, careful to keep his dripping clothes from the finely shined floor, choosing to remain in the entryway. The cold didn’t really bother him, but that didn’t mean he liked standing about wet. He could already feel his body adjusting to the loss of heat.

The cold might not bother him, but the hunger did. It gnawed at his soul, the smell of the human blood coursing through the woman’s veins was especially appetizing. He would have to take care tonight as he fed; he had not felt a hunger this strong since Naruto died.

The ache in his chest intensified. He’d tried to keep him from his thoughts. He’d thought he’d come to terms with the death of his beloved. It appeared such was not the case. It had been growing progressively worse over the years.

Taking a slow breath, he rubbed the area over his heart. Water dripped from his bangs to splatter on the floor. His eyes focused on that, he needed something, anything, to keep him in the now. He doubted the occupants of the house would appreciate him being lost in the past.

“Good afternoon.” Sasuke’s eyes flew open, face whipping around to see…him.

“I’m Uzumaki Naruto and this is my wife, Hinata.” The smiling blue eyes shone as both bowed politely.

No. Nononononono. His face remained impassive while his mind screamed at the injustice. He was his. He’d always been his. Stumbling a little, partially from shock as well as hunger. Naruto belonged to someone else. He loved someone else.

“Sir?” Naruto caught the dark haired stranger as he collapsed, sooty lashes lay stark against pale cheeks. Naruto was stunned by the abject beauty of the man. Hiding his response, he lifted the stranger, surprised at his slender frame hidden beneath the finely spun kimono.
“Hinata, roll out a futon.” Naruto followed his wife into the room, laying the slender man on the soft futon.

“Is he s-sick?” Hinata hovered nervously nearby.

“It’s probably the cold. The rain still has a lot of chill.” Naruto felt the cool skin, worried about the lack of warmth coming from him. "His skin is freezing."

Removing the wet material from his frame, he fought the gasp at the sight before him. Taunt muscle covered in porcelain skin appeared as the material was tugged away. Not a single blemish marred the beauty. He could think of no person, male or female possessing of such beauty.

“Husband…here is t-the blanket.” Hinata carried in several blankets, her soft steps barely noticeable on the wooden flooring.

“Hinata, go make some tea. He’s too cold. I need to warm him quickly.” Naruto stripped his light yukata from his frame before pulling the limp body into his arms. He was freezing. Worry began to worm its way into Naruto’s mind. His hands began vigorously rubbing any bit of skin accessible, attempting to increase the circulation.

The milky white skin was soft and smooth, his sword calloused hands seemed rough as they ran over the pale chest. A twist of heat built in his stomach. It didn’t take a genius to know what that feeling signaled. He shouldn’t have been attracted to the man. He had a wife. It was a dishonorable response, but his body had a mind of its own.

“Naruto-kun” He glanced up to see Hinata carrying a tray with tea.

Sitting up, he gestured for her bring it. A knocking towards the front of the house drew her from the room once more. Stealing a few more moments with the man in his arms, he pulled away. The feeling of loss was almost a tangible thing. He felt as if he was losing a lover or dear friend. This man was a stranger.

“Wake up. I have some tea.” Sooty lashes lifted to reveal tired eyes, the hidden pain ripped through Naruto. This man knew loss; very deep loss.

Sasuke masked his face as the memories poured back. The fates were indeed cruel. Sitting up slowly, he took the cup from his host. Lifting the fine porcelain to his face, he breathed in the warmth. In his state, there was no way he could ingest it, however, the warmth and smell were enough.

“Aren’t you going to drink it?” Naruto’s lips turned up as the stranger seemed to be making love to the tea, the sight making heat flow in the wrong direction.

“I’m savoring it. Some people do that instead of gobbling things down like heathens.” Sasuke smirked before breathing in the scent again.

Hinata shuffled to the door. “Naruto-kun, you s-should come. There are s-strangers here.”

Naruto frowned but stood, leaving Sasuke to continue making love to his tea. Entering the entryway, his eyes widened. Uchiha Madara, lord of much of this area of Japan stood in his home. Bowing low, he and Hinata showed their respects. “Uchiha-sama, it is an honor for you to enter my home.”

“Forgive the intrusion. It has come to my attention that my nephew may have taken refuge in your home. Uchiha Sasuke.” The elegant voice rumbled through the room, power evident in its tone.
“A man did take refuge here, but I have no knowledge if he is who you speak of. He collapsed not long after coming from the rain. Please, follow me.” Shock coursed through him. His beautiful guest was the nephew of Uchiha-sama. Leading the lord into the small guestroom, he saw the dark haired stranger just as he’d left him.

Sasuke glanced up at Naruto’s return, surprise on his features at the presence of his uncle. “Uncle Madara?”

“You don’t look well.” Madara’s sharp eyes took in the pale, almost gaunt face of his nephew. When Itachi had written him, he had not believed it was this bad. It was obvious he had not been resting nor feeding appropriately.

“I’m fine.” Sasuke’s spine stiffened at the concerned tone.

“No, you aren’t. My thanks Uzumaki-san. I’m in your debt.” Madara bowed slightly before approaching his nephew. Strong arms lifted the man as if he were nothing. Naruto stood wide eyed. He would never have thought Madara would lower himself to caring for someone else when there were plenty servants around.

“Goodbye, Uchiha-san.” Naruto bowed as Sasuke was carried from the house towards the waiting carriage. Their eyes locked. For a split moment, the world faded away leaving just the two of them.

The spell was broken as the carriage pulled away, leaving Naruto confused. Turning to his wife, he plastered on a false smile before making his way back inside.

~oOo~

“Sasuke…I can smell your hunger.” Madara fingers drummed lightly on his thigh.

“I can bear it.”

“You are as foolish as your brother claims. Why do you fight what you are?”

“I don’t fight what I am.”

Madara sighed, Itachi warned him that Sasuke was stubborn. He’d very briefly touched on the subject of Sasuke’s lost love. Madara was grateful he’d been spared such loss. To love a human was to play with fire. It was inevitable, one would be burned. From the look of Sasuke, it was a very severe one.

“When we reach the palace, I will send food to your rooms.”

“I can feed myself.” Sasuke’s hackles rose, already his heart felt heavy. He’d found Naruto again, only to lose him to another. At least he lived, Sasuke would take what comfort he would in that truth.

“I’ll give you until dawn to feed. After that, you will take what I offer you.”

The conversation ended with that. He felt like a child again, being led around, drinking from his parents. It was annoying to be treated as such again. He could care for himself just fine.

As the carriage slowed to a stop before the ornate palace, Sasuke shrugged off the assisting hands. Some of his energy had returned.

“Sasuke.”
Sasuke turned at his name, his uncle looking concerned. Dark eyes met, a silent exchange, before Madara nodded. “I will trust you to care for yourself. But if you weaken anymore, I will take matters into my own hands. I promised your brother I would care for you.”

Sasuke nodded, following the servant towards his quarters. It was long past midday and what little energy remained was quickly waning. He would have to rest until night fall. Slumping on the soft futon, he allowed the oblivion to take him.

His sleep was haunted, not with dreams but with memories. Unlike human sleep, the sleep of the nightwalker is so deep, all that remains is fragmented memories; recollections of a long past. For the last four hundred years, Sasuke has been haunted by those memories. Things he could not change. Pain so deep, his sanity was being chipped away. Each death he witnessed forced him into the darkness of despair.

As the sun sank beneath the horizon, crimson eyes shot open. The hunger had him nearly mad with thirst. He could hear the thump of each human moving about the complex. He could almost taste their blood on his lips. As tempting as the thought of feasting on the servants of his uncle’s home, his entire being was drawn to another. Another, whose blood called to him over the miles. Another who was determined to follow him through time.

His fangs lengthened at the thought of Naruto’s blood flowing smoothly down his throat. His breath panted out. It was more than blood lust. It was the connection he wanted to protect. The bond formed so many years ago in the cold regions of Normandy. Naruto was his, no matter what the fates deemed appropriate.

“Naruto…” The name rolled across his tongue like fine wine. The need for blood shot through him again. Not just the need for blood, but the need for Naruto’s blood. Only his blood would satisfy. Only his blood would ease the ache in his soul.

In a flash, running on mostly instinct; Sasuke disappeared through the window. The song of the wind chimes the only evidence of his passing.

~oOo~

Naruto smiled brightly to his wife as she made her way to the bedroom. For a long time he sat staring at the slowly dying flames in the sunken fireplace. His thoughts kept returning to the pale man. He judged him to be around nineteen or twenty. His body at least seemed to be around twenty. His eyes told a different story.

Until today, he’d never seen someone with eyes so tired. Sasuke…that was his name. Sasuke looked as if he’d lived for many lifetimes. With eyes blacker than night and skin reminiscent of a geisha, he seemed to be more than he was.

“Who are you, Sasuke? Why do I find myself longing for your company?” He sighed deeply, before standing. There was no use lingering on such thoughts. He might not love his wife, but he promised to be loyal to her. To save her from an arranged marriage, he’d petitioned her father for marriage.

Rubbing his eyes, he made his way to the bedroom. Hinata lay peaceful on her own futon, the small lamp leaving just enough light for him to make it to his. Perhaps rest was what he needed. His mind would be clearer in the morning.

A flash of…something from the small koi garden drew his attention. Frowning, he took his katana from its stand before sliding the door open as quietly as possible. Even the moon was hidden
beneath the clouds. The darkness seemed a living thing, breathing on his neck. The tiny hairs on his arms stood up but surprisingly, he wasn’t afraid. Nervous, yes. Uncertain, absolutely. Frightened, no.

“Naruto.” The blond swung around at the whisper in his ear.

A pale skinned demon stood before him. Red eyes blazed brightly in the near pitch blackness of the garden. The tiny sliver of moonlight caught across the pristine skin, making him seem paler than a spirit. Sasuke.

Naruto found himself pressed against the lone sakura tree, the rough bark scraping his skin through the thin yukata. His katana dropped from limp fingers. Why couldn’t he fight? Why wasn’t he afraid?

He felt the cold fingers that pulled heat from his body, devouring it. Those pale appendages caressed his skin as they tilted his head. He was blindsided by the burning of lips on his neck, sending shivers down his body to pool in his loins. Any words he wished to speak were lost in his throat, only garbled sound.

Never in his life had he experienced such desire, such need. Hinata, his wife, failed to illicit such a response. Their few and far between sexual encounters leaving them both disappointed. This was different. This was something else.

“Mine.” That was the only word spoken before teeth sunk into the skin of his neck.

If he’d thought he was aroused then, nothing prepared him for the rush of lush that spiraled through him as those lips sucked at his neck. Each drawing on the liquid leaking from him sent such desire, such arousal through him; he nearly passed out from the sensation.

“Ah…Sasuke.” Naruto arched his hips, he wanted to cum. He was so close.

He moaned as the sucking ceased. He was so close. Why did he stop? “Please…”

Sasuke’s teeth flashed white in the dark as his tapered fingers loosened the obi, slipping inside to brush his abdomen. The feeling of lightheadedness crashed over him, all his blood continuing to pool low in his body. He opened his mouth to scream out his frustration but the only sound to escape was a low moan as a pale finger trailed up his arousal.

“Ahh…”

“Mine.”

Sasuke’s hands seemed warmer, though still chilled. The cool digits clenched on his hips as the lips that lapped at the bite on his neck, healing the skin until only a dark bruise remained.

Those lips, leaving fire in their wake, trailed down his chest pausing to suck gently on each nipple. Naruto knew he was going to expire. No amount of experience in his twenty years of life could compare to this. His blood flared with heat, a dark and untapped desire burning his soul. This was wrong. He should stop but the words were lost as teeth and tongue teased his navel, a particularly sensitive spot.

Beads of pre-cum pearled on the tip of his arousal before tracking down to be lost in the thick curls encircling the base. Just the thought of Sasuке’s lips on him nearly sent him over the edge.

His mind felt hazy, almost as if this was a dream. Why did he feel like that? His body reacted
almost with a will of its own. Fighting a little, Naruto choked out a whispered ‘no’. This demon wasn’t Sasuke. This demon was something else, feeding on him.

“I…can’t.”

Crimson eyes lifted to gaze into the rare blue of Naruto’s. His breath panted on the tip of Naruto, threatening even the strength of his control. He wanted this so bad. He wanted this connection. He did not know him, yet he did. The need that radiated from the other was so alluring. To be needed.

Naruto slid down the tree at that look. It was a look of utter need and devotion. No one, not even Hinata, had ever shown such devotion when looking at him. It tore barriers from his soul he didn’t even know he had. “Sasuke…”

The red blood lust faded from his eyes, leaving the natural obsidian. The utter pain in those eyes was something no one should ever have to experience. As he relinquished his post above Naruto’s erection, that beautiful pale face was before his own in an instant.

Their breath mingled. Sasuke leaned in to barely rub his lips along Naruto’s. Shock went through both bodies as Sasuke sucked first the top lip and then, the bottom. So engrossed in each other, neither saw the pale eyes staring at them. Neither felt the dark jealousy pouring from a short distance away.

Sasuke’s hands caressed the smooth skin of Naruto’s cheeks before forcing sleep on him. He felt the human go limp, the compulsion strong. Holding him, he sat beneath the tree. For a moment, he thought he might take Naruto, force him. Lust and hunger mingled so deeply, at times it was hard to distinguish between the two. He truly was a monster if he was willing to compel the keeper of his heart into sex.

In those long moments, he came to a decision. He would stay in Japan for the duration of Naruto’s life. He would not interfere any longer. He only wanted Naruto’s happiness even if it was without him. Maybe the fates would be kind to his beloved blond. Maybe they would allow him a chance, even if only for a while, to be happy.

Carrying Naruto to his futon, he glanced darkly at the woman curled in her own. That she had taken him from him sent jealousy curling through him before it was overwhelmed by the pain in his heart. A single blood red tear trickled down his cheek to splash unseen on the bedding.

On silent feet, he fled the house. His pain was so great, the agony so intense, he soon found himself in a clearing surrounded by trees. Falling to his knees, he screamed out the injustice of it. Why bring him back just to have he be with someone else? What was the point?

As dawn crept across the horizon, Sasuke collapsed on his bed. Madara looked him over. He hadn’t fed well but it was adequate for now. The streaks of pink lining his cheeks worried him greatly. Itachi had spoken of Sasuke’s loss and these were evidence of it. Humans, worthless. Only good for food. Why Sasuke allowed himself to lose his heart to one was beyond him.

~oOo~

Hinata sat silently watching her husband finish the meal. He had spoken little to her since that night. She had dubbed it ‘that night’ because it was the night her husband was stolen from her. Her anger was towards the man who made Naruto moan and cry out in ways she never had. Her anger had built over the last week. She knew that man was on his thoughts and it sickened her.

Why had he betrayed their marriage? It was true the marriage had been of convenience but she was...
sure Naruto loved her. He was so kind to her. She loved him. She had loved him before he offered to wed her and now that love was threatened by a stranger with piercing dark eyes.

“I saw you.”

“Hinata-chan?”

“I saw you with him. In the garden. I saw him touch you. Why Naruto? I thought, perhaps you were growing to love me.” Hinata watched as tear drops splattered on her hands clenched in her lap.

“Hinata-chan. I do care for you…”

“But not love me. Do you love him?”

“I’m…drawn to him. I think of him constantly.”

Hinata closed her eyes. It was the final weight tipping the scale. Her world felt to be crashing down. She became lost in her anger. Slapping her hand across his cheek.

“Hinata…please.” Naruto reached for her, his eyes relayed a sadness that she refused to acknowledge.

“No! Don’t touch me.” she screamed, throwing his hands from her.

Her shove caused Naruto to stumble backwards, falling to the ground. His head cracked on the edge of the low table, knocking over a lantern. Blood leaked from the wound on his head as the flame touched the straw mats, catching almost immediately. Hinata screamed, rushing from the house for help, guilt eating away at her soul.

~oOo~

Dusk swept across the land as Sasuke roused from sleep. His body felt brittle. His uncle would be force feeding him soon. He laughed hoarsely, he would be surprised if his body even kept it down. Naruto’s seemed to be the only blood capable of sustaining him.

Creeping from the palace, he felt a chill rush down his spine as a spindled hand gripped his. The sensation of such a grip teased the edge of his mind. He saw the toothless grin of an old woman, her skin hanging off her bones. “Are you sure you wish to witness that which you have already seen?”

“What do you mean, old woman?”


“Yes.” he hissed, his fangs bared for her to see. “He’s mine.”

“We shall see.” She released Sasuke, her wrinkled hand drawn once more into the long sleeves of her kimono as she wandered away.

Collapsing against the wall, he shuddered violently. What was that? His mind felt as if it was under water. He was drowning in darkness. Sliding slowly to the dirt, he could barely move. Naruto. A cold hand clenched over his heart. Something was keeping him away.

Fighting with a viciousness bordering on madness, he forced his body to his will. It was slow, each
step taking all of his strength. He frowned as he neared Naruto’s home. Something wasn’t right.

The smell of smoke was heavy in the air. The weeping of a woman echoed loudly. Naruto.

The small house was aflame. Pain ripped through and he screamed. The sound like that of a dying animal echoed through the night. Not again. Not so soon. They had barely touched; small taste, a few words spoken. What was this? Shards of his sanity drifted through him, crumbling in the recesses of his mind.

Her! Red, demon like eyes zeroed in on the young wife of his beloved. All he could sense was guilt. Her odor was steeped in it. She murdered him! In the confusion of the townspeople attempting to control the flames, Sasuke grabbed the woman. “You took what was mine.”

Hinata gagged as fingers tightened like a vise around her throat. Red eyes filled with anguish and heartbreak looked deeply into pale lavender. Her memories.

The truth. The guilt and regret poured from her. “I should kill you. You murdered him. You took him from this world. You took him from me.”

Later it would shock Sasuke how little he felt in those moments. If not for the gentle hands prying his fingers from her neck, he would have snapped it with little remorse. He felt cold. His insides were like a frozen wasteland. He wanted nothing more than to drain the life from her body. A gentle touch infiltrated his mind…then, nothing.

He was vaguely aware of gentle hands caressing his hair and as his eyes drifted open, the emptiness seemed to overwhelm his very soul. No one was there. Sitting up slowly, he listened to muffled voices.

“I fear for his sanity.” Madara murmured, his eyes closing wearily.

“I’m glad I came when I did. How does that fucking soul do it? It follows him, determined to drive him mad.” Itachi snarled.

“ Asíti?” Sasuke mumbled, stumbling from the bed.

“No.” whispered Sasuke his pale hand reaching for the blade.

“Sasuke…”

Malnutrition and grief took their toll on Sasuke. He slumped unconscious in his brother’s arms. Cradling him close, Itachi scooped his brother into his arms.

“Itachi, this was left for him with one of the servants.” Madara stepped forward to show the beautifully carved sheath of Naruto’s katana.

“Destroy it.”

“No.” whispered Sasuke his pale hand reaching for the blade.

“Sasuke…”

“No.”
“As you wish.” Itachi carried his brother to the bed. As soon as he restored his brother’s strength, they would leave. He was once again forced into the role of piecing together his brother’s sanity.
May 12, 1998

“Your teacher called me.”

“So?” Naruto Uzumaki mumbled as he stood before the large cherry wood desk of his guardian. He avoided those bottomless eyes like the plague. They always seemed to stare far deeper into him than he wished.

“She said you were caught smoking behind the gym.”

Naruto was silent under the piercing gaze of his guardian. What could he say? It wasn’t a lie. Some of his friends had a cigarette and offered him a puff. He’d only taken one drag before deciding the tobacco sticks were not for him.

“Aren’t you going to defend yourself?”

“Why do you care?”

“Go to your room.”

“You aren’t my father.”

“I might as well be since your own father didn’t care enough to use protection when he impregnated your mother.”

Naruto’s eyes narrowed as he stared at the man whom he’d come to love as an older brother. He saw the frustration. The anger. The hurt. The absolute desperation. He felt Itachi Uchiha’s pain as if it was his own. In a small way, he felt to blame, but he wasn’t sure why.

He had dreams. Strange dreams of strange places. He dreamt of the man in the portrait. He dreamt of things no child should dream. Death, pain, and suffering seemed to tear his soul from his body, only to rocket it back in.

Most nights he would awaken with a scream on his lips, the pull of whatever he dreamt clinging desperately to him. When he was young, Itachi would come running, almost as if he was afraid something was hurting him. The fear in his eyes as he would rush to the room was akin to a wild animal desperate to save itself.

It felt nice, the comfort of those arms around him. He’d thought for a while he might have a crush on the exotic man but the thought of doing…it with Itachi turned his stomach. He was almost twelve. He knew what grown-ups did. He wasn’t as stupid as he pretended to be on occasion. He was practically a man…or at least he liked to think so.

Lately, Itachi had begun avoiding him. He would spend hour upon hour in his study, leaving Naruto to his own devices. It hurt, being ignored. It hurt feeling something missing and unable to figure out what it was. It hurt that it seemed Itachi did not want him around anymore. From that hurt stemmed anger. He wanted to hurt Itachi as much as he hurt.
“I hate you.”

“Naruto…” Itachi reached out a slender hand to his young ward.

“Don’t touch me!” He screamed the words before turning, making his way rapidly to his room.

Itachi slumped in his chair. The sound of the cries from the boy’s bedroom were loud in his ears. Naruto’s smile and cheerful nature wormed its way into his heart. Affection he thought was sleeping with his brother awoke in him as the years passed. Where once there was wariness and anger, warmth and love now resided.

The ache in his chest intensified as he stared out into the night. Sasuke’s absence was felt more acutely these last few months. He missed the brother he’d been before Naruto stepped into their lives. Naruto’s presence was both a balm and an irritant. He was afraid to care for the boy, afraid of becoming attached to a human. Sasuke’s own deteriorated mental state was evidence of what could happen.

For most of his brother’s life, he’d watched him. He’d known where he was as well as what he was doing. There was only one period of time in which Sasuke had fallen off his radar. He had come to late. Sasuke never spoke of it and he never asked. Itachi wondered if he had approached his brother, had asked what happened; would Sasuke still be awake today. Would his mind have retained just a little more of his sanity for a while longer?

Within the blinking of an eye, he stood before the door to Naruto’s room. Raising a hand, he jumped in surprise as the door swung open. Old eyes stared back. These were not the eyes of his ward. A rim of red encircled the iris as they stared a hole straight to his soul. A chill went through him. It took much to frighten one as old as him. He was frightened now, not for his life but for what the future held for his brother.

“Soon.”

He took a step back as the door closed quietly. For a long time he was frozen against the wall. What was he keeping for his brother?

~oOo~

May 12, 1473

Konstantiniye

Wild, almost feral eyes scanned the darkened alleys of the normally bustling city of Konstantiniye. All the good little people were safe in their homes, praying to God, Jesus, or Allah. He could smell them all, the spices in their food, and the tobacco in their lungs. The exotic flavors of the night called to him.

The thirst cried out for him to sate himself, to take one of the pitiful orphans hiding in the shadows. It cried out for him to devour them all, to save them from the pain of living. His suffering to be theirs.

Chuckling darkly, he moved on, hearing the sigh of relief from the hidden street scum. What would Itachi think of him now? He hadn’t seen his brother in…fifty years? Perfect Itachi. He would look down his nose at his suffering brother. At least, in Sasuke’s mind, he would. Living away from those who loved him left him in a warped state of mind. His sanity floated in and out on the tide. Some days were better than others.
He’d grown tired of his brother’s sad eyes. What did he fucking know? He wasn’t the one who lost someone. He wasn’t the one who suffered every minute of every day. Why did he pretend to understand when he couldn’t even begin to relate to his suffering?

The moon rose higher as he continued to prowl the streets. Something called to him this night. Shadowed eyes lifted to the starless sky. His mind burned with thoughts of Naruto. Each incarnation ripped at the pieces of his already ragged soul. He could feel his sanity slipping. Each day became harder. He wondered if he should simply give up. He could join his parents in their eternal slumber.

Breathing deep, he smiled. He heard the rustling of vagabonds in the shadows, eyeing him as a possible mark. His pristine teeth gleamed as he drifted along the streets. No one would dare to attack him. Even the most seasoned predator could sense the death and danger clinging to his skin as sex clung to a whore. He almost wished they would attack. At least then, he would have something to take the edge off.

Growling, a low rumble from deep within, he lifted his head to scent the air. The smell of tobacco, amongst other things, burned heavily in his nostrils. There was a club nearby. He could smell the opium mixed in the scent. It was a dangerous game the humans played with the drug from the east. It’s popularity was growing, slowly but steadily. Each day a new victim was caught in its deadly arms.

Frowning, he caught a subtle whiff of something…clean. He smelled sweat, lust, and sex; but hidden inside of all those odors was something fresh. He breathed deeply again, nearly wallowing in the soothing aroma. His eyes fluttered in ecstasy.

New determination flared through him. Eyes watched the shadows, searching for the origin of his salvation. He would find it. It was his!

It didn’t take long. Or rather, he found the general location of his prize. A whorehouse. The irony was not lost on him. He was where people came to forget their troubles, forget their lives. They paid courtesans to take them away from their troubles, if only for a while. Perhaps his troubles could be lost here, where sin ran rampant.

Most of the patrons seemed to be of the more wealthy variety. Their general states of dress were gold embroidered caftans, some even lined in fur. His own fine loose black trousers, shirt, and entari fit in well despite his lack of fine ornamentation. Perhaps it was the aura of power surrounding him. He didn’t care one way or the other. He was here for one reason, to find something of interest.

“Master, welcome. You are just in time for the nightly show. Please follow me.” The servant led him through the crowds towards a more private room. Plump pillows were strewn near a hookah. Gauze gave the illusion of privacy as he settled, blank eyes watching as a servant brought a selection of tobacco.

Sasuke chuckled at the girl’s surprised look as he selected the most potent and most expensive. Tossing a bag of gold at her feet, he settled back to watch her set up the hookah. Gauze gave the illusion of privacy as he settled, blank eyes watching as a servant brought a selection of tobacco.

He wrinkled his nose, turning his eyes away from her. She wasn’t worth his time. He could see it in her eyes though, the longing for death. Perhaps later he would give it to her. Itachi always tried to shield him from taking a life, from being drawn into that darkness.
‘Too late brother. I was drawn in the moment Naruto died in my arms.’ Sasuke took the offered pipe, breathing deep of the tobacco/opium mixture.

Almost immediately, he felt the effects. His mind opened ever so slightly. Of course, the effects were muted on him due to his less than human nature. Muted or not, it felt better than without the drug. He’d grown addicted to the imported mixture. It took the edge off the hunger, off his pain. Unlike human addiction, his body didn’t require it but his soul craved it. He craved anything to take away his suffering for just a little while.

Puffing again, he relaxed to the sound of the bubbling water. The chatter of the room eased as lamps were extinguished, leaving only the stage illuminated. A show? Ah yes, the attendant mentioned a show. Continuing to puff, he watched the stage through the haze of smoke.

Music began, first soft before fading into a pulsing beat. Drums thrummed almost in time with his heart as the curtains faded away. A few scantily clad females paraded their bodies before the smirking spectators. Their beauty was unquestioned but lacked the spark he longed for.

The stilling of the music drew all eyes to the stage as a lithe dancer took center stage. His slim muscles contracted as he leapt across. In such places, women were usually the center of attention, however this boy kept every eye riveted on him. His grace and beauty more stunning than all of the women joining him on the stage.

Sasuke wanted him. He wanted that slim body wrapped around him. He wanted to hear cries of pleasure as he took him again and again. He wanted his hidden face revealed for him alone. He would be his. Only his.

Motioning for his servant girl, he never took his eyes from the stage. “I want him.”

“He comes with a heavy price, effendi. Perhaps one of the girls…” she whispered, nervously glancing towards one of the gauzy rooms.

“Hn, I’ll pay whatever the cost. As soon as he leaves the stage, I want him here.” Sasuke continued to puff on the hookah, allowing the opium rich smoke to flow through him.

The floating feeling increased as he saturated his blood with the narcotic. Each thump of the drums drew him deeper and deeper. His body burned as he watched the swaying of the dancer. His desire increased with every second until he was nearly on fire with lust. Never had he felt this powerful of desire. Not for anyone other than Naruto.

The music ended but the pulsing in his blood remained. He saw the servant approach the young man. If he tried, he could probably understand what was being said but the concentration such an endeavor would entail wasn’t worth it. Instead, he sat calmly puffing his hookah. His eyes never left the stunning creature.

His wait was short. Within minutes after the performance ended, his prize approached him. The haze of the drug dulled his senses only slightly. He could hear the rustle of fabric as the other approached.

The other knelt before him, bells attached to his jelick chimed softly. His caramel colored skin shifted beautifully over lean muscles. The smell…his smell, it pushed aside all others. This was the scent he’d been chasing. This was what he’d been looking for.

“What is your pleasure, effendi?” Sasuke frowned. That voice… His fingers lifted, tugging away the veil to reveal his most desperate desire as well as his most terrifying nightmare. Naruto.
“If my scars displease you, I can leave you to choose another.” Naruto stood to leave when a pale hand latched onto his wrist.

“Where do you think you are going?”

Blue eyes blinked with confused innocence. Sasuke only smirked, drawing him closer until his nose was buried in golden curls. Perhaps it was the opium making this meeting of souls seem dream like.

“You belong to me…and I don’t share.” he growled into a pierced ear, his teeth nipping at the shell.

Lust burned brightly. Lust for Naruto’s blood. Lust for his body, Lust for his very soul. He would have him now. He was too far gone. His hands stripped the jelick from his body, bearing his chest completely. The small vest fell unnoticed to the ground.

Perhaps it was the opium or perhaps it was the heat radiating from the thrumming blood just beneath the surface, calling him. If this was a dream induced from breathing too much opium, he hoped he would never awake. To find it all a dream would be the nightmare.

“Are you real?” he whispered into blond hair, inhaling the surprisingly clean scent coupled with the faint spice of cinnamon.

“I’m whatever you wish, effendi.”

Growling in frustration, he ripped the head back. An erratic pulse thrummed in the bared neck as his lips tasted the sweaty skin. It made it all the harder, him not truly remembering the past. Any memories for Naruto were only the faded dreams long since forgotten as the mind awoke fully. Never would he know the suffering Sasuke had been through. He had it easy. All he had to do was die.

Closing his eyes, he could feel them burning with something almost akin to hate. He wasn’t sure who he hated or if it was simply an emotion he was most comfortable with. Hate made it easier to give into the dark desire whispering through his mind, telling him to kill; to drain the world.

His nails lengthened, digging bloody furrows into Naruto’s hips. His partner cried out in pain. The smell of blood awakened his lust. It was as if smelling fine wine before tasting. Fangs erupted from his mouth as he lowered his lips to the bleeding scratches.

“Stop, you’re hurting me.” whimpered his prize, fear tinting his voice.

Sasuke jerked, his eyes darkened immediately to their natural obsidian as they met fearful blue. He was afraid. Never before had he feared him. The crystalline tears glistened on kohl-lined lashes. He didn’t like the fear leaking from him. It soured his stomach, draining any pleasure from the act.

Releasing his claws from the ripped flesh, he leaned in to kiss the quivering lips. The drug took his self-control. The amount he’d smoked would have probably have put a human into a coma. He wasn’t human, after all.

At the first touch, he knew he never wanted to kiss any other lips. In the last five hundred years, he’d taken others to ease the lust of his inner demon but never had he kissed another. Such a sacred touch was meant only for one. The body housing Naruto’s soul was the only lips he could bear to touch, to taste, to devour.

Lifting his hand, he stroked sweat-matted locks as his lips continued to devour. His conquering
mouth gave no quarter, taking first the lips before venturing after the slick muscle inside.

“I’ll make it feel better.”

Kissing down the bronzed neck, he purred against the pulse. Soon. Soon, he would taste the essence of Naruto. It would sustain him like no other. It took all his strength not to bury his fangs deep, drinking until he was saturated in Naruto right then. Only his willpower, such that it was, prevented it.

The lower he drifted, the thicker the fragrance of blood. Even in the smoky room, he could see the crimson liquid dripping clearly from deep gashes. For a moment, he felt remorse over harming his precious.

Lapping gently at the torn skin, he reveled in the taste washing across his tongue. The dark lust flared wildly. The painful hiss from his partner was ignored as he tended to the wounds, his saliva healing them. Each lap coated his tongue with the essence while healing Naruto.

He was uncertain when the pain filled grunts turned to pleasured groans. The others body fell limp as his tongue healed one side before nipping his way across the flat plane of muscled abdomen towards the other bleeding scratches. The body beneath him arched in abandon as his tongue continued to lap. Sasuke couldn’t help but smirk at the heavy erection he felt through the other’s low riding trousers.

“I told you I would make it better.” he purred, his hand pressing heavily on the arousal.

Naruto screeched in pleasure. His body bucked wildly as cum dampened the thin material of his trousers.

“So soon?” chuckled Sasuke, giving one last lick on the newly healed skin before lifting his body to half pin the panting man.

He watched with pleasure as a blush stole across the scarred cheeks. Yes, that was what he liked. He remembered that blush, that beautiful darkening of skin. It told of lust and excitement. His body remembered, even if his mind did not. Sasuke would accept that…for now.

“I-I’m sorry, effendi. I don’t usually…I mean…” Naruto seemed to stutter, his blush darkening in embarrassment.

“I like it when you can’t hold out. It makes me want you even more.” Sasuke’s hands stroked downward, taking the soiled trousers with them.

Naruto hissed as the material scraped his still sensitive cock head. The sound heated Sasuke’s blood. He wanted more. His thin thread on control was tentative at best. He could feel the drug hazy eyes on them. The thin gauze provided only minimum privacy.

He would need to refrain from biting. His inner demons screamed in malcontent at such a thought. He might have sunk low, but he still respected the laws of his people. They kept their kind safe for thousands of years. He would respect them, if only in the most basic of contents.

“Turn over.”

Naruto obeyed instantly, pleasing and frustrating Sasuke at the same time. His anger boiled at the thought of others taking him. He wasn’t deluded into believing Naruto to be innocent. His movements, his scent, his way of speaking; it all told him of the jaded life he’d led. Others had touched what was his, taken what was his. No more. No other individual would come near his
precious one. From now on, Naruto was his. He would defy fate. Naruto would not be lost this time.

“Mine.” he growled, as he dipped his fingers in scented oil left by the servant.

“Yes, effendi.” panted Naruto, his eyes rolling back as slender fingers stretched him.

His body was tight. Despite having been used before, it was tight. He mustn’t have been in this business long if he retained such tightness. That discovery pleased him immensely.

Grabbing the still tender skin of newly restored hips, Sasuke slid his erection along the crevice. His body demanded he take him hard and fast. It wanted to mark him, claim him. His more primal nature battling for dominance. Only the harsh biting of his inner jaw allowed some semblance of control.

Slowly, his body was engulfed in heat. It was as he imagined. He could feel the clenching of muscles as they adjusted to his girth. It was pain and pleasure rolled up in one moment of heat and desire. He would forever remember this one moment of completion.

Alas, his more primal consciousness was pushed to the forefront. No longer could he revel in the simple pleasure of finally being inside of his beloved. Lust exploded inside him as he withdrew, only to careen forward once more.

Hips slapped against hips as his harsh rhythm had his partner crying out in both pain and pleasure. He wanted to slow down, to savor but it was a lost cause. It had been too long. He’d been deprived of this intense feeling of completion. His body would not be denied.

“Ahh…please…effendi…oh!” panted out Naruto, his voice rising as the rhythm increased.

“Sasuke…my name is Sasuke…say it!” His voice sounded harsh in his own ears as his hips continued to pound into the moist cave.

“Ah…Sa…suke…harder…oh god!” Naruto screamed loudly, his body quivering on the edge of completion.

Pulling back, he sat back on his haunches. The quivering of every muscle before him brought him to the edge. The wild clenching and releasing was driving him insane with pleasure.

Lifting Naruto’s torso to press against his chest, his teeth grazed the throbbing pulse. He was so close. The taste of him was mere millimeters from him. He could almost see the vein swelling in anticipation.

With a cry, he retracted his teeth. Biting down hard with his dulled incisors, he screamed into the sweat coated skin. He could feel, smell, and taste the pleasure shooting through Naruto as the body convulsed almost painfully. Cum shot from his dusky colored erection to pool on the pillows. Only when he felt his lover go limp did he allow his own orgasm to wash over him, a low almost pained moan escaped from him as lights danced before his eyes.

For several moments, his mind wavered between oblivion and consciousness. It took the smell of lust and anger to bring him from his stupor. His face lifted from its resting place on a tan shoulder blade. Even through the haze of the smoke and gauze, he could see angry eyes staring at him.

A possessive smirk passed over his face as his hand stroked down a smooth flank, taunting the onlooker. Let him look at what he lost. Let him see what he will never have for he had claimed Naruto as his own. No other could have him.
Dark eyes narrowed as they gazed upon the two satiated lovers. With an angry glare, the other man whirled away. The air grew considerably lighter with his exit. Sasuke was sure he had not seen the last of him. It was more than lust from the other. It was possessiveness. He assumed Naruto was his.

Sasuke would never allow that. Now that he had his claws in him, he would never release him. Already, his presence lightened the dark void developing in his soul. He would destroy any who threatened his bond with Naruto, be they human or nightwalker.

Stroking his hand across the tan temple, he sent his most precious person to sleep. Tossing another bag of gold to the servant, he lifted the slender body into his arms. To Sasuke, he was light as a feather.

Once out of the den of pleasure, he appeared to flicker before disappearing. The movement was unseen by the naked eye. His speed was beyond what humans could comprehend. Dawn was approaching. He wanted Naruto in his lair before it broke the horizon.

His sleep was strong. He’d tasted his blood. That alone gave him added persuasion over the blond. He would sleep until dusk, awaking only when Sasuke allowed it.

Entering his small home, he sealed the door with powerful spells. No one would enter, their death would be swift at hand should they attempt it. No one would for the same reason they never attacked or attempted to rob him.

As the sun peaked over the mountainous horizon, he smiled at his sleeping prize. All his. Every inch of Naruto belonged to him. He’d been in that dark place for far too long, his eyes almost hurt to look upon his wayward love.

“I will protect you this time. Nothing will happen. I will find a way to keep us together always.” he murmured against baby soft hair.

There was no response. He did not expect one. The sleep was deep. It would rejuvenate them both. Never again would he lose sight of what he wanted. Though the hunger seemed to beat at him, sleep was the higher priority. He could feed when he rose at dusk.

His eyes grew heavy as they stared at the sleeping beauty in his bed. His. The sleep of his people pulled him deeper as his thoughts roamed through memories long passed. With Naruto near, they seemed like just that…memories. The nightmares no longer plagued his dreams. Curled in the body of Naruto, he slept.

The scent of cinnamon was heavy in his nose as he rose with the moon. The hunger burned deep within. His eyes flared crimson as he watched the thrumming pulse tick against the skin of Naruto’s neck. His fangs lengthened, pearly white against blush colored lips.

“My Naruto.” he purred as he ran his tongue up the neck of his sleeping companion.

He tasted of salt and sated lust. Running his fangs along the vein, Sasuke closed his eyes as his teeth sank deep. Immediately following the bite, blood rushed across his tongue. It was the nectar of the gods. He moaned, pulling Naruto’s legs around his waist. The answering moan sent shivers of delight through him.

With each drag on the punctured skin, his strength returned along with his sanity. Or perhaps he lost more of his sanity. That line was quite hazy.

Claws burst from his fingers as he cradled the lolling head. Biting his lip, he watched as a few
drops of his own blood dripped onto the punctures. Naruto was now marked. No other would touch him without his knowledge. No other would hurt him without facing retribution from him.

Lapping gently at the marks, he watched as each swipe of his tongue healed them until nothing was left but a dark bruise. He smiled as he rocked against the hardness pressing against him. Only with Naruto did he feel lust from feeding.

Sliding down the body sprawled out before him, he pulled the hard erection from its confines. Naruto was perfectly formed. Not too big and not too small. His taste was the perfect combination of salty and bitter. Releasing his sleep compulsion at the same moment he swallowed the entire length, the other awoke with a start, shooting his load hard into his mouth with a scream of pleasure.

“Delicious.” he murmured, smacking his lips in pleasure.

“Effendi! It’s my job to pleasure you.” Naruto gasped out, his heart speeding wildly in his chest.

“It gives me pleasure to taste you.”

His own cravings sated, he grinned with feral glee as Naruto’s own stomach rumbled in hunger. The attractive blush spreading across tan cheeks pleased him greatly. Standing, he walked to his closet, throwing gold embroidered dark blue trousers with a matching shirt to Naruto.

“Get dressed. I don’t have food here.” Sasuke settled in a chair, watching the play of muscles along Naruto’s back as he dressed.

The clothes were a bit loose on him but they would do until he could have him fitted with more appropriate garments. He would be the one to provide for Naruto now. No longer would he frequent that den of smoke and lust.

“Where are we going?” Naruto asked, frowning at the slight dizziness. He felt as if he hadn’t eaten in days.

“First for food. Then, for your clothes.” Sasuke tucked several bags of gold on his waist before exiting, followed shortly by Naruto.

“Why don’t you have food?”

“Because I don’t eat.”

Naruto frowned at the comment. “Huh?”

“All I need is you to survive.”

Naruto let it go for now. Concluding that he was joking, Naruto smiled happily. He’d been hoping someone would take him exclusively. It was beginning to seem as if Lord Hakan was going to be that person. For the last week, he’d paid for his services until last night. Last night, Sasuke had taken him.

His brows furrowed as he thought about the previous night. It was the best sex he’d ever had. His body felt used and cherished at the same time. With all other clients, he felt completely used.

“Effendi, what shall I call you?”

“I thought we discussed this last night. My name is Sasuke. You may call me it. I wonder if rebirth
interferes with your ability to think?” he commented.

“Did you just insult me?” growled Naruto. “I don’t have to stay with you. Lord Hakan would probably…”

Sasuke was on him in a moment’s notice. “Never even think about leaving me. You belong to me.”

Naruto’s eyes widened. Red piercing orbs gazed into his very soul. He was startled but not frightened. Some part of him knew these blazing eyes. He knew he would never hurt him. He didn’t know how, he just did.

Just as quickly as they flared, the eyes darkened to a color blacker than midnight. “Come, I know a place you can eat.”

Sasuke led the way through the streets and back alleys. Naruto looked on frightened as they passed some very questionable men. None made the slightest movement towards them. The fear in their eyes burned brightly. Why were they afraid? Every one of them was larger than Sasuke by at least fifty pounds.

“Sasuke…”

“Yes?”

“Is it safe to walk these roads?”

“For me, yes.”

“Why don’t they attack you?”

“If they did, it would be the last thing they did in this life. I’m dangerous and they can smell it.” Sasuke smirked darkly, hinting at something Naruto was afraid even to allow to linger in his mind.

“Would you hurt me?”

He paused before turning his eyes back towards his destination. “Never.”

Naruto smiled happily. Fate must have been shining on him when she sent Sasuke into the pleasure house. A hand grabbed his free one bringing a cry to his lips. “Let go!”

“You can’t run from your fate, just as he cannot hide from his.” The words poured from wrinkled lips as an ancient woman stepped from the shadows.

A roar erupted from Sasuke as he pinned the wrinkled woman to the wall. “You can’t have him. He’s mine.”

She merely cackled in what seemed like delight before fading into the shadows. Naruto gaped at the spot where the woman had stood. She vanished into nothing. “Sasuke…”

Sasuke’s mind burned. They would be hard pressed to take Naruto from him again. He would be diligent in his protection. No murderer would dare come near his Naruto. “Forget what you saw. Come.”

Nodding before trailing along behind his master, Naruto made sure not to tarry. He didn’t want to be left behind in the darkened alley. They walked for several more minutes until finally they stood before a large ornate building. Neither noticed the hate filled eyes following them.
“Lord Sasuke!” gasped an attendant, bowing low. “Please follow me.”

The establishment was similar to the den visited the previous night only of a higher class. They were led through ornate hallways until arriving in a private room filled with pillows, a table, and several low burning lamps.

“How may we serve you tonight?”

“Some food for Naruto and wine for me.” Sasuke reclined on his pillow, watching Naruto with the eyes of a hawk.

“Yes, effendi.”

Turning to Naruto, he smirked. “Dance for me.”

“But there is no music.”

“You don’t need music. Dance.”

The servant left the room, trotting quickly to fill the order. It was only minutes until he returned, carrying a tray filled with food and wine. A bejeweled hand stopped him before he could approach the door. “How much to buy your service?”

~oOo~

Sasuke barely acknowledged the entrance of the servant as he placed heapings of food on the small table. His eyes were locking the swaying of Naruto’s hips. His loins ached as he watched the blond dance in slow swirls. The flash of skin as his shirt rose up sent ribbons of desire drifting through him.

“That is enough. Eat.” Sasuke gestured to the food, he could feel Naruto’s hunger beating at him.

Sasuke accepted the cup of wine, setting it aside as he watched the other eat. His cheeks puffed endearingly as he stuffed as much in his mouth as he could. “Slow down, you will choke.”

“Sorry.” gulped Naruto, swallowing the food. “I’ve never had food this good. I usually use some of my take to help feed the older ones who don’t get many clients.”

“Honorable as ever.” smirked Sasuke.

“Can I have a some of your wine. He didn’t bring me anything to drink.” Naruto pouted prettily, probably a trained response.

“Hn.” Sasuke offered the untouched cup to him.

Naruto’s smile lit up the room as he nearly drained the cup. “That tastes off.”

“It’s probably a higher quality than you are used to.” chuckled Sasuke, taking the empty cup from the other.

“I suppose.”

“You are finished?”

“Yes.”
“Come here.” Naruto willingly curled his body against Sasuke.

His stomach felt odd, probably due to all the food. Smiling happily, he laid his head on Sasuke’s chest. He listened happily to the constant thrumming of his heart. It lulled him into a state of comfort and peace.

“I’m sleepy.” The words were slurred as his head lolled on the warm chest.

Sasuke closed his eyes. He didn’t need to press his ear to Naruto’s chest to hear his heart. The steady beat comforted him. He wasn’t tired in the least but he supposed allowing Naruto a few minutes to nap wouldn’t hurt. The place he would go to dress him was always open for him.

For several minutes he was content. It was the slight fluttering in the previously constant beat causing a break in his pleasure. Frowning, he sat up to look at Naruto. He appeared to be sleeping.

“Naruto, it’s time to leave.”

No response. Frowning again, he repeated the words; even going so far as to add a shake to the curved shoulder. Still no response. Not pleased, Sasuke patted the scarred cheeks. “Naruto, you need to wake up.”

The heart. The core of a person’s being. His people held the heart dear. It was the part of a body pumping the blood. Blood was precious, as was the heart pumping it. Naruto’s heart was slowing. Every second his heart seemed to slow its beats.

Panic now set in. How? Why? He was healthy. Looking around the room, his eyes zeroed in on the empty wine cup. Snatching it from its resting place, he brought his nose to the tiny bit of liquid. Poison!

“Naruto, fight it! You can’t let them win. I can’t lose you again.” Sasuke watched in horror as Naruto’s breath became ragged. His eyes never opened as he breathed his last breath, death coming gently.

As he lay still, body growing cold, Sasuke threw back his head. The scream echoed through the establishment, sending servants and patrons alike scrambling for the exit. Eyes bled red as the small barely healed pieces of his sanity crumbled to dust. He wanted blood. The blood of those who killed his Naruto.

Snarling like the animal he now was, he ripped through the building. The only thought on his mind was finding the servant. His death would not be swift. Oh no, he would skin him alive before gorging on his blood.

It took a ridiculously short time to find the man, huddled in the kitchen. Most of the other servants having left in fear, but this man remained. Did he feel remorse for taking such a beautiful soul from this world? If he did not, he would before this night was through.

“Your death will be slow and painful.” purred Sasuke, the long nails of his claws tapping teasingly on the marble.

“Please…effendi…I only served it…the other…he…you were supposed to drink it.” The servant continued to stutter and plead for his life. Sasuke had no mercy.

“Who is this person.”

“I know…him…only by reputation. Lord Hakan. Please…have mercy.”
Sasuke ran the claws of one hand swiftly over the throat, stopping all words as blood spilled darkly. The sickening gurgles coming from the flopping body brought only a wrinkle of disgust from him. The dark liquid of life pulsed out, spreading across the floor. What a waste of a meal, he thought as he left the body for whomever would find it.

He knew where to go. Lord Hakan. He didn’t know the man but he suspected he knew where to find him. Using his powerful legs, he lunged to the roofs. Leaping from flat stone roof to flat stone roof, he raced towards his destination. The den of prostitutes and opium stood quietly. He could hear the faint sound of conversation and music. He could smell the scent of tobacco and opium.

Dropping silently to the ground, he approached the attendant. “Effendi, we are pleased to have you with us…ahh!”

Sasuke snarled his eyes nearly mad. Pressing the attendant against the entrance door, he hissed his orders lowly in his ear. “Take me to Hakan or die here as I find him myself.”

“Y-Yes, effendi.” stuttered the attendant as he stumbled towards the central room.

“T-There.” He pointed a shaking finger towards a laughing man, the gold on his caftan gleaming in the lamp light.

“I would suggest you leave,” murmured Sasuke before strolling calmly into the pillow strewn room.

“Hakan.” He rolled the name across his tongue, savoring the sound like fine wine.

“Wha…?” he gaped at the sight of the slender man stalking towards him with deliberate slowness.

“All my planning…all my hopes…crushed by an act of jealousy. You have wealth. You could have any concubine you desire…yet you wanted him. You sought to kill me, yet now you will die. I will take you blood. I will relish in your screams as you feel my nightmare. Die.” Sasuke moved forward with the speed of his kind.

In the blink of an eye, his fangs were buried deeply in the soft skin of his prey’s neck. The poor fool screamed out as his jugular was pierced, rich hot blood pouring rapidly down Sasuke’s throat. His claws carved deep scratches into the man’s sides as he felt the struggles waning. The darkness consumed him as he dropped the body to the blood spattered pillows.

It wasn’t enough, he smirked darkly. Grabbing a screaming prostitute, he buried his fangs deep. She was dropped unceremoniously to the floor as well. The darkness consumed him as he feasted, his body ready to pop with the feeling of power. It was no longer about revenge for Naruto’s death. It was simply about the rush of adrenaline, the explosion of power he got.

The night was his to rule. This apex of a city was his alone. Perhaps had he kept his kills less public, the king would have paid them no mind. The viciousness of the murders only drew attention to their kind.

Itachi found him dirty, mostly mad. “Sasuke…what have you done?”

“What have I done? I’ve become what the fates wanted me to be. I’m a monster of their creation. Aren’t you happy brother…I’m feeding well.” Sasuke cackled wildly.

Itachi pulled him to his feet before slamming him into the wall. “I want my brother back.”

“And I want Naruto back…but we can’t have what we want.” That earned him a fist in his jaw, the
sound of bone breaking sounded in the silence.

Sasuke screamed as pain shot through his face. His brother stood over him, a dark king suffering at how far his beloved brother had fallen.

“Sasuke, I’m taking you away from this place. Sleep now.” Sasuke slumped immediately to the ground.

“Sasuke, don’t make me destroy you.” he whispered, already knowing the elders would call for his death. He would not give them his brother. He was the most powerful of his kind. Sasuke would live. He would heal him, body and soul. If it took every breath in his body, he would save his brother from this curse of torture. “I promise you, Sasuke. You will live. I will do everything in my power to make sure you are happy.”

Within hours, Itachi and Sasuke were on a boat; sailing away from Konstantiniye. The killings stopped but not the memory. The memory of his deeds would haunt Sasuke far longer than one lifetime. It was added to his suffering. His only sane thought for many years was finding Naruto. Naruto was his salvation. Naruto was his hope.

Chapter End Notes

Konstantiniye is Constantinople. History lesson here. The Ottomans conquered the city in 1453. Although they did not purposely change the city's name, they opted to make "Constantinople" into a more Turkish style name "Konstantiniye" (which loosely translates as "of Constantine"), however variations on Konstantiniye soon cropped up. And for those that don't know, Constantinople or Konstantiniye as I refer to it in the story, is the modern city of Istanbul in Turkey.

Effendi is Turkish for formally addressing of someone. The best I could come up with was that it is similar to Lord or Sir. I don’t speak Turkish so if it is not right, feel free to point it out.

Hookah is one of those water pipes used to smoke, an example is the pipe the caterpillar used in Alice in Wonderland.

jelick is a short vest.

Also, Opium has been around since ancient times and was originally used for medicinal purposes. I don't know how popular it was in this time period but i know it was extremely popular in Europe during the 1900s
October 10, 2000

The blaring alarm barely stirred the curled ball hidden in warm blankets. Washington nights were starting to get cooler; as such, thicker blankets were a necessity. Snow was sure to fall thick and heavy, leading to a nice white winter. This was the dream of every child…until frozen slush and frost bit fingers led to grumpy adults.

Naruto rolled from bed, grumbling as his feet hit the carpeting of his bedroom. Last year he’d begged Itachi for carpeting, complaining about the cold winter floors. Itachi suggested slippers. He’d pouted, returning to his room to blare the grunge music he loved so much. The next week, returning home on the day of his birthday, he found the floor of his room carpeted in plush blue, matching the hints of blue in his walls perfectly. As usual on October 10th, Itachi was nowhere to be found.

His birthday never seemed as joyous as that of others. Well, it wasn’t that it was a bad day; it was just that Itachi seemed to detest it. He often wondered if his guardian despised the day because it was his birthday and therefore despised him. Those thoughts would often lead to depression, causing him to mope for days on end.

Pulling on his clothes for the day, an orange flannel shirt accompanied by brown cargos, he made his way to the kitchen. On any other day, Itachi would be sitting at the counter. He never ate but at least he was there for company. Today, however, he wasn’t there. Not that Naruto expected him to be. Today was October 10th after all.

“Figures.” he grunted, opting for just an apple before braving the slight morning chill. The day would warm up considerably. He’d best enjoy the warm afternoons while he could, for soon, the bone chilling cold would come. Slamming the door in his frustration, he left for school.

Dispassionate eyes watched from the kitchen window as the slouched boy made his way down the long drive. Today was not a day he found joy in. It was the day to mourn the loss of his brother. Over the years, it wasn’t uncommon for him to lose track of him from time to time, but this was different. To the best of his knowledge, Sasuke never ‘slept’.

He felt so weary. Every day ticked with the sound of a clock, bringing him closer to some end he had no power to control. His brother’s consciousness struggled the hardest on this day of the year. It wanted to be free. It wanted Naruto. He could feel the possessiveness radiating from it. It was almost completely animal. He sensed Itachi’s presence, as well as Naruto’s. Unable to rationalize, he did not like his mate being alone with his brother. It forced Itachi to sit with him. As long as he sat there, Sasuke was calmed. Sadly, he knew it wasn’t his presence Sasuke found comfort in, but instead it was the fact Itachi was not with Naruto.

Rubbing his fingers to his throbbing head, he sent a particularly powerful push to Sasuke’s restless mind. He needed sleep. It would be long in coming if he worried about his brother waking to begin a maddened rampage. That shit he pulled in Constantinople had been his one strike.

“How did you love him?” It was a question he asked himself repeatedly throughout the centuries. Why did he do it? Why did he tie his soul to that boy? After so long, he still lacked an
answer. What was the point of it all? Even as a nearly eternal being, he’d always been one to believe there was a purpose to everything.

It might sound a bit corny for one such as him to quote scripture, but to everything, there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die; a time to reap and a time to sow. With Naruto, there seemed no purpose. Nothing added up. He was born, then he died. He brought nothing to Sasuke but a small touch of joy followed by only nightmares.

For long moments, he stared to the ceiling. His eternal debate waged war in his mind. What would he do if Sasuke’s mind was completely lost, even in Naruto’s presence? He’d shown signs of breaking on the night of the boy’s birth. When he’d seen him take Naruto in his arms, in a moment of doubt, he’d feared he would slaughter the child. It was wrong to think but in that moment, he’d doubted his brother.

His eyes drifted shut, rest coming on swift wings. He longed for the blankness of sleep, that mental darkness where his thoughts were washed away. To Itachi, the sleep of the nightwalker was blessed relief from the many thoughts of living for so long. Perhaps that was the reason they slept nearly dreamless sleeps. To forget everything for a few brief hours.

The sound of doors slamming caused obsidian eyes to fly open, scanning the room before making his way downstairs. He felt Sasuke stirring. His command to sleep should have pushed him past making any conscious attempts to awake for months if not until next year.

Naruto! Panic seeped in his blood as he flashed to the kitchen. Seeing the one door forbidden to Naruto open, his heart dropped from his chest. Racing down the stairs, he found his ward staring intently at the wall. Beyond that wall lay Sasuke, fighting his sleep with all the power in his body, power that was still considerable despite his weakened state.

“Naruto.” Itachi whispered.

“Can’t you hear him?” The monotonous sound of his voice was surprising.

“Who?”

“I don’t know. I dream about him. It hurts. I don’t know if it’s my pain, or his.”

“I think we need to go upstairs. You shouldn’t be here.” Itachi attempted to keep the panic from his voice but what happened next would haunt him for a long while.

Naruto tilted his head to the side, almost as if listening to a voice. Without any warning, he dropped to the floor screaming. His fingers scratched wildly at the brick wall. It was mere moments before they were bloody. He could feel Sasuke’s wildness. He was breaking free. Grabbing the boy, he flung him away from the wall.

His screams continued to echo through the basement as the boy struggled with more strength than was possible. Pulling him up the stairs, he forced him into the kitchen. Just as quickly as the screams began, they stopped, his body going limp in Itachi’s arms.

Gaping at the limp body, he frowned. It had been nearly a year since anything odd had happened with the boy. The ‘episodes’ were becoming fewer and fewer. This one seemed different somehow. Never had Naruto harmed himself.

Lowering the body to the bed, he lifted each finger to his lips. His tongue swiped along the lacerated skin, healing. He frowned at the taste. Up until this moment, he’d never tasted Naruto’s blood. Not even a drop.
His blood tasted…pure was the only word to come to mind. He remembered Sasuke’s claim of all other blood tasting of ash compared to Naruto. He’d swept the thought aside, blaming it on love talk. A lover’s blood always tasted sweeter. Sex added an extra level to the flavor of blood.

He found his own teeth unconsciously extended. His own demon begged for a deeper taste. Paling considerably, he swiped each digit quickly before exiting the room. His heart pounded as he brought a hand to his lips. Just that small taste revived him as none other had.

His hands shook as he opened the hidden lair. His brother had become surprisingly quiet. He shouldn’t be afraid. It wasn’t fear for himself; he could destroy a thousand of Sasuke’s strength. No, it was fear for what he might have to do. Slumping in the only chair in the room, his eyes drifted towards the upper levels of the house. His thoughts were on Naruto, and his strange reactions tonight.

~oOo~

Naruto shifted restlessly on the bed. Two pair of silent eyes watched him with concern. “He’s fighting it.”

“Hmm.”

“You aren’t worried?”

The taller frame of the man shrugged as his eyes gazed down at his partner. She was always the more talkative one. He preferred his own thoughts. The first person he met after he ‘awoke’ was her. From that day on, they had been like family though no blood connected them.

“Things would go much more smoothly if he were allowed to be with him.” she commented.

He grunted. She spoke the truth. The growth of one such as Naruto was being impeded by the seclusion from his other. In the history of their kind, only one other survived separation from the other during the early years.

“Do you think he will survive?” she asked.

“He’s strong. It’s the other I worry about.” he answered.

“I have never seen such a bond formed between two.”

He said nothing. Some things were best left unsaid. It was rare, but not unheard of. He remembered his other. He remembered the bond being rejected in his first incarnation, and in every one afterwards. Perhaps he chose to live in spite of his other rather than die. He was the only one of their kind to have been rejected in every life, including his immortal one.

“He’s kept the same form. It’s an interesting development.” she continued.

“Enough.” He approached the restless boy, his hand extended.

The struggling ceased as his hand stroked the sweating brow. “Calm, don’t fight yourself.”

With a last glance at the sleeping boy, the two figures faded into the darkness. No trace of their existence was left. The room was silent as dreams swirled around Naruto’s mind. His fingers reached out to touch them, no longer afraid of what they would show. They weren’t all bad.

~oOo~
April 18, 1570

“Naruto, hurry your arse up and get that scenery finished.”

Blond hair stuck to a sweaty brow as the young man swung around to stick out his tongue at the retreating back. “Do this, Naruto. Do that, Naruto. Kiss my considerable arse, Naruto.”

“Keep that up and you won’t even have this job, let alone one on stage.”

Naruto smiled at the older man. His name was Jiraiya. He was a playwright for the current band of merry actors otherwise known as the King’s Cross Merrymakers for which Naruto was currently employed as a stagehand. The old actor turned playwright chuckled at the scowling face of his much younger friend.

“You’ll get your chance.”

“That is highly doubtful. I’m already twenty, practically a fossil for the stage.”

“I resent that.”

“Sorry,” he chuckled, his fingers dragging the paint brush across the scenery one last time before moving it onto the stage to dry.

“Hey, boy. Why not leave this life? There’s really no success in it. Actors are a dime a dozen. One day you are on top of the world, the next day it comes crashing down.” Jiraiya pulled his considerable frame from its sitting position on the box, offering a wave before ambling from the theater in search of a quick lay in the nearest whorehouse.

“I’ll think about it, you old pervert.” he yelled, earning an almost bored wave.

Sighing, he slumped against the wall. Whom was he kidding? He would die in this life, most likely alone. From the day he was born, something felt wrong. It was all an act. He wondered if the people who saw him working on sets day after day knew what a great actor he really was. Probably not. If they did, they would see the aching emptiness inside.

Each day was a little harder to climb from bed. The happy go lucky smile plastered on his face was as false as the moans of a cheap whore. His life held little meaning, each day he awoke only to be alone. His work held little to no joy. Even the excitement of the theater was dulled in his eyes.

The mid afternoon sun showed dully through the thick layer of clouds as he stepped from the small theater. The smell of street sewage and smoke was heavy in his nose. He pulled on a woolen coat, worn thin in some places. Dull eyes gazed at the passing horse drawn carts. He wondered how much it would hurt to step in front of one of the fast moving vehicles? To end everything.

His fingers shook as he walked forward. It would be so easy. No one would miss him. Jiraiya might think of him from time to time, maybe even immortalize him as a minor character in one of his many unpublished plays.

Maybe. Maybe he’d lived enough. There really was no reason for his existence. He thought for a moment who he’d want to say goodbye to. There were a few acquaintances in his life but no real friends. Jiraiya was the only one to come close. Thank you for caring, Jiraiya.

Watching the rapid approach of an incoming carriage, he asked for forgiveness. He prayed no one else would be injured as he stepped into the street. Goodbye.
A bone crushing hand wrapped around his arm in an almost painful grasp. He was pulled from
certain death by the owner of the most beautiful pair of eyes he’d ever seen. Lost in those eyes, all
thoughts of death trickled from him as if they’d never been there.

“You should watch where you are strolling.”

The eyes continued to bore holes into him, analyzing what they saw. While the eyes analyzed him,
he took the time to analyze his ‘savior’. Long midnight colored bangs framed a face so pale, the
queen herself would be envious. From what he could tale, there was no make-up. The flawless
perfection before him was the ideal of every man and woman.

His clothing lacked the thick neck ruff, which was so popular amongst the nobility. He looked
elegant all the same. His face carried an almost blank look. He wasn’t sure why it bothered him so
much. He wondered how the face would appear in joy or in sadness.

“Who are you?”

“That is of none of your concern. Please do not try that again.” Black eyes blinked slowly before
the man turned, leaving Naruto standing there, stunned.

“Wait!” He reached out to grab him only to find air in his hands.

His savoir was gone, lost in the crowd. There wasn’t even a view of his back; it was as if he had
vanished into thin air. People passing by seemed unfazed by the look on his face. He was nobody
and therefore not worthy of their attention.

Feeling a little depressed at the loss of the other, but no longer suicidal, he turned for home.
Perhaps once he reached the small two-room housing, he could sort through his thoughts. He
couldn’t get the dark haired man from his mind. The dark pools that were his eyes seemed to stare
into his soul, seeing his every thought.

He was so familiar, like an image from a dream. Every time he tried to grasp the thought, it
fluttered away only to continue to tease him with the knowledge it possessed. Only when he was
lying on his bed did he allow the face to overwhelm him. The smooth curve of the jaw, the
aristocratic nose, the slight tilt of eyes denoting some foreign ancestry; all these merged together to
create a creature of absolute beauty and mystery.

Naruto had never been one to be interested in men or women. He’d lost his virginity to a prostitute
hired by Jiraiya on his eighteenth birthday but it had been a forgettable experience. Only the
experienced hands of the woman had been able to bring any sort of response from him. Of course,
he’d told Jiraiya the experience was amazing and eye opening.

Now, he lay in his bed wondering what it would be like to be with the man he’d seen. The churches
always preached on the sin of men laying with other men. He wasn’t foolish not to have seen it.
The theater was the ideal place for witnessing such relations. He’d even caught some of his co-
workers in the act. They seemed to enjoy it but he’d never had interest enough to try it out himself.
Now he had an interest.

Frowning, he drummed his fingers on his abdomen. It wasn’t really the intercourse he wanted. He
wanted it but...there was something deeper pulling at him. He wanted to touch the face, to bring
joy to it. Groaning, he rolled onto his stomach. He was foolish letting his mind roam with such
thoughts of romance. The other man had shown almost no interest in him. He’d probably never see
him again. He wasn’t sure why that made his heart throb. He didn’t know him. For all he knew, he
could be some noble who murdered children on the weekend.
“He’s not,” he whispered to no one.

He wasn’t sure but he felt deep down that the stranger was a good person. Something was holding him back. He wanted to see the real man behind that mask. He would even be willing to remove his own for the right. Before sleep took him, he wondered what he would do if he saw the stranger again.

~oOo~

“Naruto! Get those sets lined up properly. I don’t pay you to stand around looking like an idiot,” screamed the director.

Naruto chose to ignore the screaming man. He was used to it. It was nothing new for him to be the whipping boy of anyone who was stressed. It was always Naruto’s fault if an actor forgot their lines or if a prop broke. It was his fault if the torch light didn’t properly show off the features of the leading actors or if the audience was not packed.

In the dirty little theater, he wondered why it mattered. It was a common theater. Nobles never dared enter unless they were ‘slumming it’. From time to time, nobles would rent one of the few box seating. More commonly, they would rent it to fuck their significant other. No nobility ever came in to actually watch the plays. That tonight the box seats were rented had everyone in a tizzy. He didn’t know why it mattered, the poor folk paying a penny to see the raunchy play created by Jiraiya wouldn’t care if an actor flubbed a line of if the scene wasn’t perfect and the nobles came to fuck in secret.

“Naruto, my boy…tonight could be the night. If a noble decides to support my work, I’ll be set for life. My plays will go down in history, perhaps even one day be played for royalty.” Jiraiya dusted off his rather worn brocade vest. His fingers were stained black from hours spent penning his works to paper. The ruff around his neck was yellowed with age, long having lost the color pristine white.

“I wish you the best, Jiraiya.” Naruto sighed, watching him walk onto stage to greet the viewers. Slumping against the curtains, he scanned the audience. The same raunchy crowd appeared, their dirt covered faces and blackened teeth told their lot in life. The only joy for them came from their standing room only as they watched the writing of Jiraiya come to life on the stage. He supposed that should give meaning to their life, making the lives of the working class a bit more bearable. It didn’t. All he could think about was dark eyes and pale skin.

“Naruto! Get the curtain!” someone hissed, breaking his thoughts.

Blinking away the mental vision, he began pulling at the rope. The threadbare, patched curtains parted to reveal the first scene. The actors began their parts. It was bad. Well, not the lines, just the actors were bad. He almost felt bad for Jiraiya. His plays were actually well written. They had the quality of the Queen’s stage.

Peaking out again at the audience, his eyes flickered up to the balcony boxes. The area was darkened, almost a guarantee that there was tupping going on. Leaning out a bit, he caught a flash of pale, almost ethereal skin. It was so like his.

“Pete, I’m going…somewhere. Take over the curtain for me.” he murmured to one of the stagehands before handing over the rope.

Working his way up the back stairs, he crept along the stained hallway towards the private boxes.
Normally, he would hear the moans of a couple taking pleasure from each other. Some of the whores brought by nobility would make better actors than those on stage. That is, if women were allowed to act.

Pushing aside the thick curtain blocking the box, his eyes scanned the interior. There was no heavy smell of perfume mixed with sex. There was nothing. A pale face turned to him, dark eyes flashed sharply before going dead once more.

“It’s you…” Naruto whispered.

“What do you want?” The words rolled across Naruto like a touch. They soothed all his worry. They aroused his mind.

“To thank you.”

“For stopping you from ending your life? I can’t watch such a thing. Disease, murder, accidents, are all things I cannot prevent. You throwing away your existence, I can.” Dark eyes turned dispassionately to the stage once more.

For several minutes, Naruto watched him. His face never smiled at the humorous lines of the play. The audience was going wild while his pale face remained unmoved. He seemed almost emotionless. Why would an emotionless man care if he lived or died?

Eyes the color of the darkest coal turned to face him once more. “Why are you still here?”

“Why do you care?”

“Protecting you is my only reason for existence. I…have done things…never mind…please leave me.” The voice, for an instant, lost its monotonous sound. It quivered before he turned away, his eyes gazing at the play.

“Why are you here?”

“Because you are.”

Naruto gaped at the back of a dark head. He stumbled back against the wall. The thick curtain fell, leaving the other blocked from his view. He was here because of him? What could possibly be so great about him?

“Naruto!” He glanced up to see the director of the theater practically foaming like a mad dog. “How dare you disturb our guest!”

The loud crack of a palm striking skin echoed in the small hall. He crumpled under the blow. Blood dripped from his mouth to fall in crimson speckles on the floor. A foot in his abdomen caused a fresh spatter of blood to spew from his lips. He could have sworn he heard the crack from his ribs.

His vision grew hazy as he watched angry red eyes appear from behind the curtain. He tried to hold onto consciousness as the blows ceased. The black form stepped silently towards the large man over Naruto. His eyes drooped before he fell into unconsciousness.

He floated for a while in darkness. Every time he came close to the surface, the pain sent him back. His entire body cried out in agony. When finally the pain seemed manageable, he opened his eyes. Only candle light permeated the darkness, giving a view of a shadowed room. Voices seemed to come through the walls.
“So this is why you left home? You went looking for him.”

There was a deep silence. Only his own breathing could be heard. He wondered if maybe they left until the strange voice spoke again.

“You will lose him again. Just let him go. I thought you were going to let him go.”

“I can’t.”

“I won’t let you fall again. I will kill you first.”

“Itachi, I…am in control. I won’t let myself feel anything.”

“That’s not what I wanted and you know it. You are a living being. You need to feel.”

“I…can’t. Not with him…every time I love him…he takes a part of me.”

“What is the point of watching him then?”

“Knowing that he is safe gives me comfort.”

“Don’t let him destroy you again. I won’t hesitate.”

“I understand. I won’t get close to him.”

“Sasuke, you are already close. You were close the moment you laid eyes on him again. He’s awake. I’m leaving for Romania. There has been an outbreak of a sweating sickness in the village. My return is necessary.” There was a deep sigh. A rustle of clothing alerted Naruto of the entrance of someone at his bedside.

“You’re awake.”

He nodded, his jaw ached too much to do more than nod. The nobleman nodded, his fingers checking his ribs. Each time he breathed, pain shot through his chest. The fingers released their pressure before moving to his jaw. “Your ribs are broken but your jaw is merely bruised. It will hurt for a few days but should heal fine.”

“Why?” he grated out, risking the pain.

“Why did I stop him? I told you, I would keep you safe from what I could. Rest now. I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

Naruto watched the other stand, before moving away from the bed. His back seemed stiff, as if he was forcing himself to leave against his wishes. “Stay.”

Obsidian eyes turned back to him, the surprise on his face evident before he locked down the emotion again. Naruto could see the clenched fist at his side. The man looked…torn. He could see the battle fought within him.

“I can’t…”

“Why?”

The blockade was up once more. All life faded from the eyes. Where moments earlier there was confusion, now there was…nothing. No anger. No laughter. Nothing. His savior’s eyes looked dead. “That is of none of your concern. Rest. I’ll arrange for you to be moved to your home. I’ve
arranged with the writer Jiraiya. He is going to run a theater for me. You will work with him. You need not return to that…place.”

“Wait…”

“Good night, Naruto.”

Slumping on the bed, Naruto wondered why he felt like crying. Exhaustion beat at his mind, forcing it into sleep. It was nearly afternoon when he woke. A servant assisted him in dressing before a carriage took him to his small set of rooms on Leek Street. He was surprised to see Jiraiya waiting for him.

“Kid…I have some news for you.”

“I know.”

“You know?”

“Where will we be centralized?”

“What aren’t you telling me, Naruto.”

“Nothing, old man.”

“Fine. Our benefactor has arranged for us to have a theater. The building is newly constructed. It can house more than five hundred people. This is a dream, Naruto. I’ll make you an actor. No more backstage for you.” Jiraiya continued to go on and on.

Naruto stopped listening. His thoughts remained on the man. He’d never even gotten his full name. All he knew was his name was Sasuke. He only knew that because of eavesdropping on the conversation. He was determined to find the man again. He would follow him all over the world if he had to.

The days turned into weeks and the weeks into months. Naruto was kept busy. He was a surprising success on the stage. Women loved him. He was always portrayed in the heroic role, making him the envy of all. That was, until tragedy became the new draw. Comedy did fine, but if one really wanted to succeed, they showcased tragedy. The public wanted something to move their souls, as did the Queen. Her Majesty was an avid supporter of the theater.

Naruto understood Jiraiya’s malcontent. Tragedy wasn’t his best area. Naruto had read a few scenes from the story he was working on. It had a lot of potential. It would be Naruto’s first time dying. He wasn’t sure why he found it so humorous.

“Jiraiya, tell me who he is.” Naruto was tired of chasing around dead leads. He wanted the man. He wanted to touch him. To make that deep darkness in him go away.

“You know I can’t, brat. He asked that he not be named. He wants to be left anonymous. If you find out you might tell someone or someone might see you with him. It’s better this way.” Jiraiya took a swallow of ale as he focused on the mess of scribbled lines before him.

Naruto grumbled but left the man in peace. He would have to go looking elsewhere. He’d returned to the house he’d stayed at after his beating. It was vacated, empty as a tomb. It was made obvious to him that ‘Sasuke’ did not want to be found by him. That only incensed him more in his quest to find Sasuke.
He remembered the first day he met him. His death seemed minutes away. He’d wanted it with every fiber in his being, until he’d seen those eyes. Now death was out of the question.

Each day away from him strained his soul. He didn’t want to die but he didn’t want to live without him either. Maybe he was still watching him from the shadows. Maybe he should ‘attempt’ to die again. It was a risky venture but he supposed death was better than living without him.

Taking a deep breath, he exited the building. His thoughts drifted over many things. Some similar to what he thought on that day so many months ago. Who would miss him? He was a recognized name now. Many people would acknowledge his death but who would miss him? Would Sasuke miss him? Why did he bother rescuing him if he didn’t want to be around him?

Each thought made him angrier and angrier. His steps became loud drums, his leather shoes clopping against the dirt in muffled tandem. If Sasuke didn’t want him, then to hell with him. He would decide his fate. Reaching the river, he stared into the swirling darkness. The sun had set, taking all but the faintest light. His hands trembled as he lifted himself onto the bridge. He would end this confusion. Either Sasuke would save him and explain himself, or he would die. A small part of his mind screamed at the irrationality of his thoughts. Sasuke wouldn’t save him, he wasn’t God.

He wasn’t sure why he was so certain Sasuke would show himself. Was he a demon or an angel? Either way, there was something different about him. He was certain that his conviction would produce the other. Taking a deep breath, he released the bridge only to feel arms around him.

“Stop.”

“You’re here.” His words were lost on the wind as strong arms brought him to safety.

“Please, stop.”

“I wanted to see you. I looked and looked. Why did you hide from me?” Naruto buried his face in the warm chest, the scent of sandalwood rose from him. It was so rare for an individual to smell so clean. Most men covered the lack of their washing with the most expensive perfumes. This fresh, clean scent was addicting. He wanted more.

“Stop.” The word seemed less certain, almost afraid.

“No.” Naruto clenched his arms tighter around him, determined not to allow him to disappear again.

“You…I can’t…do you want to destroy every wall I have put up? Do you want to return me to the monster?” Sasuke’s voice cracked, the walls he built already crumbling.

“I don’t know what you mean but I want you with me. I don’t understand this connection to you but I don’t want to let it go. Stay with me, please.” Naruto’s eyes gazed determinedly at the other.

Shaking hands lifted to cup his cheeks. He could feel the small jerks as they tilted his head so dark pools of blackness could stare into his own wide eyes. He felt a thumb stroke along his jaw, a caress so gentle he thought he might cry at the touch. Sasuke seemed almost reverent in his touches, as if he was afraid he would shatter at the slightest touch.

“How am I going to prepare myself?” Sasuke’s voice broke the silence.

“For what?”
“For losing you.”

“I won’t go anywhere.”

The only answer was the burying of a pale face in the skin of his neck. The heated breath seemed to seep into him. The chill of the evening disappeared as lips brushed along his neck. His body jerked at the touch of lips.

Nothing else happened. His lips simply continued to brush his neck, teasing the tiny hairs. Naruto couldn’t stop the moan that escaped at the slight brush of tongue. It was erotic but at the same time, comforting. The answering moan from Sasuke sent pleasure shooting through him.

“I have to go.”

“No! I won’t let you leave me again.”

“I promise to come to you again.”

“When?”

“Your next performance. Jiraiya tells me he will have finished the script by morning.”

“We won’t be ready for weeks.” Naruto frowned, he didn’t like this. He wanted him with him now. Always.

“I will escort you home every night then but please…I must go.” Naruto’s hands clenched in the fine woven shirt before lowering his arms.

“Fine, every night.” Sasuke nodded before turning, his swirling cape disappearing in the darkness.

Reaching up, Naruto touched the skin of his neck. It burned. He wanted something he couldn’t name. He wanted Sasuke’s lips and teeth on him. His body shivered in memory of those soft lips brushing against him.

Wrapping his arms around himself, he made his way home. He’d since upgraded his living quarters to a small townhouse in a bit more respectable neighborhood. The area was a bit worn, although nowhere near the shape of his previous dwelling. That night Naruto’s dreams continued to be haunted by Sasuke, only this time, they took a decidedly more erotic turn.

~oOo~

The next morning dawned dreary as most mornings this time of year. Naruto went to the theater where the final draft of the play was presented to him. The next few weeks would prove trying indeed. It was good, though. Jiraiya expertly mixed his natural comedy with the drama of tragedy. This play would be sure to be a hit. Perhaps it would even catch the eye of the Queen.

True to his word, that and every night afterwards, Sasuke was waiting as Naruto stepped from the wooden framed building. His dark cloak swirled around him, adding mystery to his aura. Each night, Naruto invited Sasuke inside. Each night he declined. At first, their walks were completed in companionable silence.

Gradually, Naruto began to speak. He was tired of the silence. He wanted to know more about Sasuke. He wanted Sasuke to know more about him.

“You’re not from Britain are you?”
“No.”

“Where are you from?”

“My brother and I reside mostly in Romania.”

“What’s his name?”

“Itachi?”

“Your names are strange.”

“Why are you asking so many questions?” The exasperation in his voice made Naruto smile. He liked the thought of Sasuke not being his normal annoyingly calm self.

“I want to know you.” he grinned before his voice turned serious. He stopped walking, causing Sasuke to turn to him. “What makes you so afraid to feel?”

Sasuke stepped close, his pale hand lifting to stroke the striped cheek. “Myself.”

Naruto frowned as he hand was dropped. “Come, it is getting late.”

“That’s not really an answer. Why do you fear yourself?”

“If you wish to know my past, you need only look into the mirror. Good evening, Naruto.” With a swirl of his cape, he was gone once more.

Naruto fought the urge to stamp his foot in frustration. He felt as if he was getting nowhere. Every step forward resulted in another step back. It was annoying to no end. Sighing, he nodded before bolting his door.

He was too old to pout. That didn’t stop him from wanting to. Sasuke was proving harder to snare than he’d anticipated. He didn’t doubt for a moment his own feelings. They seemed far deeper than anything he’d ever felt. It was strange, he knew so little of him, yet his heart ignored his mind.

“Sasuke.” The name tumbled from his lips. The exotic feel of the word sent shivers coursing through him.

Sleep came easy, his dreams filled with thoughts of Sasuke. Some were of gentle kisses while others left his body aching with all too familiar feelings of unsatisfied need. Knowing he didn’t need to be at the theater until after midday, he curled into the blankets. His attempts to reclaim the dreams were futile. At least Sasuke would be in the theater tonight. Tonight. It was the opening performance of Jiraiya’s new play. The entire troop had been working so hard. It was rumored of the possibility of attendance by some of the Queen’s favorites. Should this show go off without a hitch, they might find themselves performing for Queen Elizabeth soon.

Tonight was also special for another reason. Tonight marked the anniversary of the day he met Sasuke. A year ago today, his life seemed pointless. Such was not the case now. Now he felt booming with life.

Tonight he would tell Sasuke how he felt. Tonight, Sasuke would not escape him again. Tonight’s performance would be for him. It would be as if the only person watching was Sasuke. He knew he would be there. Sasuke was always there, even if he couldn’t see him. He would feel the burn of dark eyes and knew.
His steps were light as he entered the building. It was as if he’d stepped into a mad house. Stage crew ran back and forth at Jiraiya’s command, each attempting to adjust the stage to the playwright’s specifications all the while seeming to fail miserably. Naruto chuckled, drawing the older man’s attention.

“There you are, you ungrateful spawn of a whore.” He growled, turning to face him.

“Why are you so upset, old man?”

“Why? Why? Nobility is coming tonight. The Queen’s favorite, Lord Robert Dudley will be in attendance tonight. Do you realize what this means? Of course you don’t. All you can think about is your lord. Don’t think for an instance that he feels anything for you. You are an easy tup. When it comes time for him to do his duty to his family, you will be forgotten. I told you, an actor’s life is no place for love.” Jiraiya moved away, grumbling under his breath.

‘Sasuke wasn’t like that,’ he wanted to scream. It would fall on deaf ears though. Jiraiya had lived too long in the theater scene to change his opinions. Thought he felt different about it, he wasn’t one to push his own ideas onto others. Let Jiraiya say what he wanted, Sasuke wouldn’t abandon him.

“Hey, Naruto let me show you this.” called one of the stage hands, gesturing for him to join him on the stage.

“You know your big death scene? We had planned to just use a painted dagger but I was working with some props and made this.” He plunged the dagger at Naruto’s chest. The wooden blade disappeared into its hilt. From a distance it would seem to be entering his chest.

“That is amazing. It will look so real.” Naruto sat down, playing with the prop.

For the next few hours, madness ensued. Then, the calm before the storm. Actors were being dressed in their stage finery. Naruto, as the lead actor, received the most attention.

“Naruto?” An elderly woman carried a large arrangement of flowers towards where he was sitting, talking with a few of his fellow actors.

“For me?” She nodded, smiling a toothless grin. “The black roses symbolize death of something, while the Narcissus symbolize rebirth. It is an interesting combination.”

“You don’t know who sent them?” he asked, confused. Upon closer inspection, he noticed the roses weren’t black but a very deep red. They looked less grim now he knew the true color. Sasuke probably sent them to annoy him.

“What a bastard.” he grumbled, tossing the bouquet to one of the stagehands before walking towards the stage.

“Why does he get the lead? Jiraiya, you promised me this lead. I can do it. I arranged an interlude with my sister for you. You promised this part would be mine tonight. Why are you changing our deal?” yelled a voice.

Naruto rounded the corner to see Jiraiya in an argument with Gerald Smith. He was a decent actor. He usually worked as a fill in for actors. He knew every part by heart. It was a rather amazing ability.

“You can have the roll when we don’t have nobility in the audience. This could be our big chance. I don’t want to ruin it.” Jiraiya turned his back on the young man, making last minute adjustments
to scenery while the man whirled to see Naruto standing there.

“You think you are on top of the world now. Just wait. It will all come crashing down.” he growled.

A shiver went through him. It was probably nothing. He was simply being paranoid. After the flowers and then Gerald, things were just strange. This feeling did not deter him from his determination. He would tell Sasuke how he felt tonight.

“Listen up!” yelled Jiraiya. “Tonight is very important. I want perfection from all. There are no excuses.”

The troop practically twittered with excitement. The rumor of Lord Dudley’s attendance had reached their ears. Most had dreams of wealth and fame. Naruto only had dreams of Sasuke.

The sound of audience members entering the theater caused all to fall to silence. It was the same before all performances. The actors waited for their cue. All were silent. The silence this night was particularly deafening.

Actors took their places, entering and exiting the stage. The audience laughed at the humor while watching in silence the build of the drama. They knew this play was different. This play would not have the joyous ending of Jiraiya’s comedies. The tension in the air was palatable. The only question in their minds was who would die. What sadness would be portrayed for their enjoyment.

“Are you ready to die, Naruto?” chuckled Benjamin, the antagonist of the play.

“As ready as I’ll ever be. The audience seems rapt. Jiraiya has a masterpiece on his hands.” chuckled Naruto as he drew his sword, charging on stage to rescue the maiden, a teenage boy dressed to appear feminine.

The battle was epic. Ben and he added a bit of flourish to their routine. It wowed the audience, causing gasps of delight. Now it was time for the grand finish, his death in the arms of his beloved. He couldn’t help wishing it was Sasuke’s arms but he found it hard to imagine him in a dress.

Ben grinned devilish, flashing the dagger. Naruto parried the attack of the rapier, stepping into the knife. A gasp ran through the audience. Naruto didn’t hear it. A terrified look passed across Ben’s face as blood bubbled to Naruto’s lips.

The modified dagger had been replaced with a real one. In all the excitement, neither realized it until it was too late. For a moment he stood in shock. His eyes dropped to the weapon protruding from his chest. His prop sword drop from limp fingers as he crumpled to the ground.

“I…I…I didn’t know…” whispered Ben, falling backwards to stare at the other.

Blood began to pool beneath him. It was getting so cold. Suddenly warmth was encircling him as a horrified Sasuke cradled him. For a brief moment he wondered at the stark horror on the other’s face. It was the first honest show of emotion he’d ever seen on the other’s face.

“Sasuke…” he gasped out, finding it harder and harder to draw breath.


A blood stained hand lifted to brush the rapidly paling cheek. The entire cast poured onto the stage, crowding around the fallen actor.
“Sasuke…I…love…you. I wanted…you to…know.” He blinked his eyes rapidly, Sasuke’s vision becoming haze.

“Stay with me.”

“I…please…” His body began to tremble. He wanted to go to sleep. It didn’t even hurt any longer. Red tears? Why were there red tears on Sasuke’s face?

“Don’t cry.”

“I love you, Naruto. I will always love you. Please, stay with me this time.”

“Hmmm…that sounds…familiar…” Naruto smiled, closing his eyes.

Everything went dark. Sasuke. The only thing he could focus on was Sasuke. It was his guiding light. Even in the darkness, Sasuke was his goal. He remembered things. The past. The present. The future. They all melded together. He needed Sasuke to make him whole…but not yet. He needed…the time wasn’t right.

~oOo~

October 11, 2000

Naruto opened his eyes to find tears on his cheeks. The light from his window spoke of a new day. A dream? It felt so real, more real than ever before. Sasuke. His heart thudded at the name. Something was building in him. It was as a puzzle was being connected in his mind. Only time would tell when that puzzle was finished. Things seemed clearer today. He felt he should find Sasuke.

He grabbed his notebook. The dream was already fading. He scribbled as fast as he could what he could remember. The only thing that did not fade was Sasuke’s face. The same face hanging in the library. The face in all of his dreams. Sasuke. He would find him. He had to.

Chapter End Notes

Anything that leaves you confused will be explained as the story progresses, particularly involving how Sasuke always finds Naruto.
Chapter 7

July 30, 2004

Itachi fought the urge to murder the angry looking youth sitting before him. He’d hoped he and the boy had come to some sort of accord. The small instances of rebellion were annoying but manageable. This, however, was above and beyond even his seemingly limitless patience.

In all the years of his existence, never had he come across a more stubborn individual. There was no way his brother would have handled raising this boy. He would have probably slaughtered him as well. Either that or joined him.

As it was, he stood staring through the bars of the cell belonging to the newest member to the world of juvenile delinquents. He was careful to keep his gaze neutral, though in truth, he wanted to scream out his frustration. He’d practically raised his brother and never did he give him even half the hassle as Naruto.

“So?” Naruto grumbled.

“So what, Naruto?”

“So when are you forking over the money so I can get out of here. I’m starving.”

“Oh, I don’t think so. I think you need a lesson. I’ve arranged with the police for you to stay the night.”

“What!” Naruto jumped to his feet, his eyes suddenly taking on a frightened glint as he glanced around the small cell, from the stained mattress to the dirty toilet. “You can’t leave me here!”

“I didn’t put you there. You put yourself there when you and your friends decided to go off joy riding in a car not belonging to you. Was the car I bought you for your birthday not good enough?”

“That’s not the point.” Naruto pouted, slumping on the bed.

“Well, I certainly hope the ride was enjoyable since you shall be staying here in this…cell. Maybe it will give you time to sort through why you are trying to rebel.”

Naruto shot from the bed towards the cell door. “Please…don’t leave me here.”

Itachi turned to face his ward. Naruto’s fingers clenched on the bars so hard the knuckles whitened. Black eyes narrowed. He noticed the way Naruto’s hair clung to his sweat dampened face and the extreme pallor of his skin. Something wasn’t right.

Normally when a nightwalker is among the humans, they tune down their senses to prevent being overwhelmed by the sensory overload. Itachi was well versed in the skill, especially living with a teenage boy. Hormones made for frustrating emotions. Now, his curiosity was peaked.

Opening his senses, he was first overpowered by the smell of sweat, blood, and urine encompassing the area. Filtering out the scents and sounds he didn’t want, he stared at the boy before him. His heart was pounding so hard in his chest; Itachi feared Naruto was close to passing out. The scent of fear poured from the other. He was alone in the holding cell; he didn’t have anything to fear. Itachi had wanted this to be a lesson. He’d made sure no harm would come to him, yet the boy was quaking with more than simple fear of the unknown. This fear bordered on
“Naruto?”

“Please…get me out of here. I feel like I’m suffocating in here.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Just get me the fuck out of here.”

“Hn.” Itachi turned, leaving the boy. The sobs echoing off the stone walls tore at his heart. He signaled the guard. “Get him out. I’m taking him home.”

~oOo~

The car ride began in silence. The tears had long since dried up but the tortured look on Naruto’s face had not. His fear of being left alone in that cell had terrified him. Itachi was more than just intrigued now. He knew nearly every breath the boy had taken since the day of his birth. He knew the backgrounds on all his friends and their families. There was no reasonable explanation for why he was so terrified.

“Why were you so frightened in the cell?”

Naruto crossed his arms, turning his eyes from Itachi to the passed road. It was almost three in the morning. The streets of this part of Olympia were nearly deserted, only a few homeless ambling down the lonesome road.

Itachi crossed his own arms, waiting for some response. Naruto shot him a look from the corner of his eye but said nothing.

“Suit yourself.” Itachi commented, his fingers pulling out an antique pocket watch.

The silence resumed until Naruto spoke. “I don’t know why I was scared. It just felt…like I was going to die in there. I felt cold.”

“Hn.”

“Fine, don’t believe me. I just don’t want to go back there.”

“You won’t…if you show up at court. I’ll make sure you don’t go to jail but you will never again do what you did tonight. You will not screw up your life because your friends want to have a little fun.”

“Don’t act like you care. You throw money and cars my way. You placate me but why can’t you be my father?”

“Because I’m not your father.”

“My brother then, something. I feel like we are two strangers living together. I’ve lived with you since I was five. Don’t you feel anything for me?”

“No.”

Naruto jerked as if slapped. He blinked a few times, digesting the information before turning his eyes to the road. “What am I to you then?”
“You are Naruto and if you do not stop participating in felonious activities, I will be forced to take more drastic measures than slapping you on the wrist.” Itachi opened the door as the car stopped before the house.

“Who are the people that come to see you at night?” Naruto yelled as Itachi trotted up the steps causing him to pause.

“What do you know of it?”

“You’re a drug dealer, aren’t you?”

“What I am is none of your business. You are restricted to your room for two weeks and since you obviously don’t want the car I gave you, you are restricted from driving until January.” Itachi turned once more, disappearing into the house.

Naruto slammed his hand against the roof, wanting to yell out obscenities to the retreating back. Over the last few months, things had become more and more strained with Itachi. Naruto’s dreams started coming more and more often. Some nights he was afraid to sleep. The most recent ones terrified him more than anything ever had. They weren’t dreams in that they told a story but instead spoke of a dark, dank place. It stirred an irresolvable fear in him. The only light in the dream comes from eyes of the darkest pitch, shining out from the blackness. Eyes and a name came to him again and again. Sasuke.

~oOo~

February 12, 1693 Salem Village, Massachusetts

Men and women alike walked through the dusty streets in fear. Since February of the previous year, the small communities around Essex, Suffux, and Middlesex counties had been gripped in a nightmare with seemingly no end in sight. All feared the finger pointed in their direction with the dreaded word…witch.

So many had been executed and still others waited in prison. The hanging tree in the clearing was cursed with the deaths of many. Salem Village wasn’t the only village infected with this nightmare, but it was the village in which Naruto Uzumaki was imprisoned.

Naruto slumped against the dank wall of the cell. He coughed lightly into his hand giving a small smile to young girl sitting next to him. There were two fates for those imprisoned in the small space with him. Death from sickness in the cell, or death from a noose on the tree. Guilt or innocence did not matter. The finger was pointed. Their fates were sealed.

The people screamed witch, proclaiming the work of their God. Naruto wanted to argue the fact that God had deserted them. No merciful god would leave them to rot in these prison cells. His God had deserted him.

“Thy cough is getting worse.” Mary whispered to Naruto, pulling a thin blanket tightly around thin shoulders before leaning against him to share what little warmth there was.

“It’s fine. I’m more worried for you. You are becoming nothing but bones.” He wrapped a comforting arm around her.

“I believe they are testing our resolve. If thy situation is horrible enough, a witch would reveal the truth. No matter what is done, thy must not lose thy resolve.”

“You are brave for someone only sixteen.”
“And thy flatter with a skill best left to poets.”

Naruto chuckled before going into a body quaking cough. Mary was right. His cough was worse. Several of the others had developed a cough as well. Elizabeth, an older woman curled in the corner was barely moving anymore. The cough had taken her strength. She would be dead within days if not sooner. They all knew, but never spoke of it. Nothing could be done. Death would be their only escape.

“Thy need to have faith. God will protect you if thy have faith.” Mary whispered, partially to Naruto and partially to herself. Faith was in short supply these days.

Naruto shivered, his hand lay on the dirty head of brown hair. She would live. When the food came, he’d give her part of his share. It wasn’t fair what was done to them. Naruto closed his eyes. He didn’t pray, for he had lost his faith in a God who left good people to die in order to please religious fanatics who saw witches where there were none.

~oOo~

“So this is the new world.” Sasuke murmured to himself.

For the last 20 years he’d tore apart Europe and Asia in search of his beloved. Itachi tried to keep him away, going so far as to threaten to send him to sleep. He’d refused. He’d learned to listen for Naruto. The moment of his conception, he could feel a tiny tingle in his soul. It was so small; he would miss it if he were not looking for it.

That small tingle would grow in potency as Naruto grew. It was a beacon for him. He learned to follow its lead. His fingers clenched tightly as he recalled the last life. He could have saved him if he’d been willing to risk his heart. He was foolish because he lost it the moment he’d seen him.

Since the moment he felt that first tingle, his mind focused purely on it. Itachi’s ranting fell on deaf ears as he left no stone unturned. Standing on the shores of England, he stared across the sea. He was there, in the new world. Naruto had become his obsession. He had to find him.

Sanity and insanity warred with each other. There were moments when his mind could barely function. He was so close. Where once he thought watching each death would drive him insane, now he knew each life was all that kept him sane. He was only sane when Naruto existed.

His need for blood increased. He spent so much time in the daylight hours; his energy was constantly being sapped. The increased need to feed drove him nearly mad. The taste was like ash. His body constantly rebelled against the nourishment.

After nearly twenty years of searching Europe and Asia, he was forced into the realization that Naruto was further away than ever before. The New World. The colonies. He was across a vast ocean in a land rich and untouched.

And so, here he stood. Boston Harbor. He could practically taste Naruto in the air. It was a refreshing break from the foul smell of rats and unwashed bodies. Perhaps soon he could actually taste Naruto. Rats made for poor dining but he couldn’t risk the chance of killing one of the sailors on the long trip. His body was practically shaking as he stepped cautiously from the gangplank, an obvious side effect of malnutrition.

“Sir, are you well?”

Sasuke ignored the questions. Using his cane to steady himself, he placed his feet on the new world. The air smelled different. It was wilder, barely touched by humans and their ideals.
“I am fine. I don’t travel well.” he said, pushing aside any who wished to help him.

He breathed deep, pushing aside the scents of the ocean, humans, and wildlife. He focused only on Naruto. It was faint, almost none existent but there. He smiled darkly. He’d found him.

~oOo~

March 13, 1693

Naruto stroked the face of Mary. She’d died a few minutes prior. Her suffering was minor. She was one of the lucky ones. Despite the cold air wafting through the damp cell, her skin still felt warm. She’d professed her belief that God would save her until her last breath. It made him sick to remember her constant belief. After living here for the past few months, he held no belief in a merciful God.

He’d wanted her to live. He’d prayed for her health. Despite all his attempts, fever had set in several days ago. There was nothing he could do for her. In the end, the experience only destroyed the little bit of faith remaining in him. “I’m sorry, Mary.”

“Mary Sullivan?”

Naruto glanced up at the unwashed guard. “Who wants to know?”

“The judge is here for her trial. Wake her up.”

“The only person who can wake her up is God.”

The guard frowned. A clanking of keys and the squeal of rusted hinges signaled the opening of the cell. Any time before his incarceration, Naruto’s nose would have wrinkled under the wafting odor of sweat and unwashed bodies. He knew now his own odor was far worse than that of the guard. He’d adjusted weeks ago to the smell.

“Yur right, she’s maggot food.” The guard spit on the ground near Mary’s body. Naruto’s mind went red.

“You bastard. She just died and you could care less.” he yelled.

“She weren’t nothing but a slut.”

“She was a girl. She had her whole life ahead of her.”

“The only thing she had to look forward to was the noose on a tree. Them judges don’t find people innocent. You’d best pray for yourself. You’re next before them, and the noose.”

Naruto scream startled awake a few of the sleeping prisoners. He lunged to his feet, charging the jailer. The man was taken by surprise, giving him an opening to plow his fist into the meaty jaw. The jailer yelled out for his fellow jailers as Naruto’s fist landed again and again.

Blood spurted from the other’s nose as he began to fight back. He spit the draining blood into Naruto’s eyes, temporarily blinding him. Naruto let out a shout, wiping frantically at his eyes. His chance was lost; the momentary blindness gave the guard the opening he needed. Now it was his turn to go on the offensive.

Leather booted feet kicked harshly at the imprisoned man. Naruto cried out at the sharp pain in his ribs. He felt the crack. Agony shot up his body, sending him crashing to the slime covered ground.
The kicks kept coming, causing blood to rise into his mouth from his lungs. Wracking coughs shook his body as blood dribbled from his lips.

As unconsciousness hit him, he wondered if he would die here as well. Perhaps death would be better than this hellhole he was being subjected to. Where was God? Where was the benevolent being that saved the suffering?

He floated for what seemed like hours. The nothingness tugged him this way and that until finally breaking. His first thought was that he was no longer in the cold jail. The next forced him to realize he was outside. As cold and horrid as the cell was, at least it protected him from the chill of the spring wind.

Droplets of rain fell from the sky to patter against him. The cool drops pulled him from his slight stupor. It was then he realized his predicament. His neck and hands were restrained in a wooden stock. He pulled at them harshly, but to no avail.

He’d seen what happened to those sentenced to stocks. Exposure to the elements usually resulted in death. Tears dripped down his face, mixing with the rain to splash on the ground. His body began shaking violently from the cold. March nights still held the chill of winter. He would be lucky to live through the night.

“Where are you!” he screamed.

A flash of red startled him. It was likely to be a wild animal. Fear coursed through him. He’d hoped the animals would leave him alone until he died. Apparently that was not the case. His body, shivered violently. The cough he’d been fighting for several weeks wracked him once more. The eyes moved closer and closer until the owner was revealed.

Instead of an animal, a man stepped forward. His clothes looked more appropriate for tea in a parlor than for a dusty village in the New World colonies. Another cough quaked through him. He tasted blood on his lips. His shivering wouldn’t stop but he had to know before he was unable to speak.

“Who are you?” he whispered, looking upon the most beautiful creature he’d ever seen.

~oOo~

Sasuke dropped the deer carcass to the ground. The heavy thud of the body barely garnered a response. He could feel the animals waiting in the darkness, waiting to devour the dead beast. The meat would not go to waste. There was always some animal able to devour the dead.

He took a deep breath, inhaling in the scent of the forest. He could feel the beast’s blood coursing through him. It was weak, barely able to do more than sustain him. Finding appropriate blood was proving more difficult than he’d hoped. The Puritan communities making up this part of the world were going through some sort of religious fright. Every town and village he approached once he left the larger town of Boston locked their doors tight as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon. Their fear lay thick in the air. They screamed witches.

He smirked into the pitch-black forest. He would love to tell them there were much more dangerous things to be afraid of than witches. Much more dangerous. He refrained, despite wanting to feast in the blood. He would need to feed on a human soon, despite the risk of drawing attention to himself. He could only survive so long on the blood of wildlife.

Once he’d tasted the power of death, he never truly forgot it. His brother knew this would happen.
He knew the taste of it would always beat at him. Sasuke wondered if even the knowledge of this constant hunger would have stopped him in Constantinople. He debated the issue but knew the real answer. It would not have stopped him. He would have feasted on all of them again and again. He would have bathed in the blood in retribution for the sanity they took from him. His mind had never been the same after that. He played at sanity for the sake of his brother.

He’d felt little pity from those he’d murdered in his grief stricken rage. He felt nothing for anyone but Naruto. Itachi knew this. He knew the danger of keeping him. He knew the danger and yet his life was spared but an integral part of him was lost. He’d tried to push aside the emotions and was successful…until Naruto.

Only Naruto was able to break through the wall he’d built around himself. Naruto was his damnation and his salvation. Naruto gave him the will to live, only to take it away. He wondered why he bothered. Now being able to track him, why not simply avoid him?

He laughed with little humor. He was kidding himself. He would never be able to stay away. His soul was irreversibly bound to him. He would be forced to bear this weight. He knew without a doubt he would die without Naruto. Just the knowledge he would be born again kept him hanging by the smallest thread of sanity.

Pain shot through his chest, sending Sasuke to ground with a snarl. His eyes bled red as clawed fingers dug through the wet dirt. It was several minutes before he realized the pain was not his own. Anger tore through him. Naruto was in pain so powerful, he was barely conscious.

“Naruto.”

Tamping down his emotions, he sped through the forest towards the nearby town. Salem Village appeared before his sight as he stopped just short of the town square. The hacking cough coming from the pitiful excuse for a human sent a wave of protective impulses through him.

His eyes flared red as he stalked closer. The coughs became louder, more panicked. He tried but couldn’t calm himself. He wanted to know who put him there. Naruto. Despite the tattered clothing and pale features, he couldn’t take his eyes from him.

“Who are you?”

Sasuke ignored the question, stalking closer. His eyes never left him. Kneeling before the other, he rubbed his fingers down one grime-covered cheek.

“Naruto.”

“You…know…my name? Are you an angel? Has God…not forsaken me?” Coughs fractured the sentences.

“You don’t need God. I will take care of you,” hissed Sasuke, his fingers easily breaking the iron lock.

Naruto lacked the ability to even hold himself aloft. His body crumpled from the stock to the ground. Mud splashed around him as he stared up to his savior. The pale, perfect skin gleamed in the light of the newly risen moon. This man could be nothing but an angel. Every physical aspect of him was perfection.

“Who…”

“Sasuke. Rest.” Sasuke’s hand brushed at dirty blond hair. He watched as dull blue eyes closed.
Lifting Naruto in his arms as if he was a babe, Sasuke faded to the shadows. A deserted barn was the best shelter he could provide. The witch scare had even inn doors locked after dark. At least this way there would be no questions.

A thunderous expression remained on his face as he broke several pieces of rotten wood from an old gate. The material shattered like twigs beneath his palms. Even with his lack of proper feeding, his strength during the night hours far surpassed that of humans.

Dumping the broken wood and a bit of straw, he dug a fire pit before striking a flint. A bit of wind pushed through the cracks in the shabby walls. Naruto shivered beside him, his eyes shut in a restless sleep causing Sasuke to work harder to warm him.

It took little time to build a comfortable fire, but there was plenty of hay to use as starter fuel. Once the flames crackled comfortably, he turned worried eyes to the shivering bundle of bones. Heat poured off Naruto in waves. A fever was waging war inside him. Sasuke could smell the illness in him. There was little he could do but attempt to bring the fever down.

“Stop trying to die.” growled Sasuke, pressing a wet bit of cloth to Naruto’s brow.

A moan was the only response, bringing another wave of malice through him. He was fucking tired of the suffering Naruto experienced lifetime after lifetime. He was tired of being left behind to watch him die without being able to do a thing.

“I will destroy anyone who comes near you.” Sasuke murmured, his fingers stroking through the dirty locks.

Standing, he glided out of the barn. Naruto would be safe for now. He would know if any came near him.

Closing his eyes, he listened for life in the nearby forest. The heartbeat of the forest fauna pounded through him until he found what he sought. Moving faster than humanly possible, he snatched a medium sized hare from the forest floor. The animal was dead before it could register being in his hands.

His next stop was a small farmhouse a mile from Salem Village. Even from here, he could smell the taint spreading across the village. These people reeked of their sins. It took all his strength not to release them of their suffering. Thoughts of Naruto were all that kept his darker side at bay.

Creeping into the house, he chuckled at the ease in which he entered. It was amusing these humans believed a simple locked door and prayer could keep the darker things of the world from them.

Taking a pot, loaf of bread, stirring spoon, and a bowl from the dwelling, Sasuke left as silently as he came. He was at Naruto’s side moments later. Laying aside his pilfered goods, he lifted the limp body into his arms. For a moment, everything faded away. His anger. His hurt. His ever-present madness. Everything was as it should be. Naruto was in his arms, breathing and alive.

“Stop making me suffer.” he whispered before forcing water down the other’s throat.

Naruto choked on the water before drinking greedily. Satisfied, he laid aside his companion in favor of preparing some nourishment for him. He quickly skinned the rabbit. Throwing the dressed meat into the pot, he sat silently as the stew boiled. It was little more than boiled rabbit but would have to do for now. Sasuke wasn’t well versed in cooking.

Just before dawn, he poured rich broth into the bowl. Lifting Naruto once more, he dribbled the soup over his tongue. The other turned his head at first until the warmth hit his empty stomach.
Instincts are stronger than illness, causing him to greedily down the broth despite his illness.

Despite Naruto’s protests, Sasuke forced him to eat slowly. From the shape he was in, he hadn’t had a decent meal in a long time. It was yet another reason to wipe out these worthless humans. All they did was destroy anything different or anyone who spoke out.

“Sleep.” Sasuke whispered, seeing the complete exhaustion on Naruto’s face.

Covering Naruto with a blanket, he curled against a wooden wall with Naruto in his arms. The sun rising in the east was draining what little energy he possessed. There would be no getting around it come nightfall. He would have to feed but for now, he was happy simply holding Naruto in his arms.

~oOo~

As the sun dipped low on the horizon, Sasuke blinked awake. On a subconscious level, his body watched over Naruto. He would awaken at the slightest distress from the human. It made for very poor rest.

With the sun gone, his energy increased tenfold. It wasn’t enough. There was no getting around hunting for more dangerous prey. He shrugged into his cloak, turning to see fevered eyes staring deeply.

“Why did you…save me?”

“You called to me.”

“I called…to God.”

“And I answered. I’m your God now. Think only of me. I’ll take care of you.”

“Where are…you going?”

“To feed.”

“There is…plenty of broth.”

Sasuke chuckled, turning to face Naruto with gleaming red eyes. “That food will do nothing for me. I will take blood and then I will be able to care for you properly.”

“Blood…?”

Sasuke’s fangs lengthened at the subtle scent of fear. Naruto’s blood pounding through his body flavored the air with everything that was him. A part of him hated the fear, yet another more primal part relished in it. Fear gave control.

“You’re scared.”

“I’m not…”

“Don’t lie…I can smell it. Of all the creatures in this world, you are the only one I can say has nothing to fear from me. I live for you and I would die for you. You own my soul.” Sasuke leaned closer until their breath mingled.

“You aren’t God.”
“I’m your God, just as you are my God.”

“That’s blasphemy.”

“My entire existence is blasphemous to those bible thumping people who imprisoned you. Your God has abandoned you…if he was even there in the first place.”

“Stop saying that!”

Sasuke grabbed Naruto’s hair, his fingers digging roughly into the scalp. He heard the hiss of pain but ignored it. “I have to feed. Don’t worry, I’m sane enough not to kill them…unless, you’d like to nourish me.”

His tongue stroked up the skin, tasting sweat and the slightest hint of lust. He allowed his teeth to trail over where his tongue just tasted. He felt his fangs lengthen even more as heat poured into his loins. Even Naruto’s sick and starved body aroused him beyond his control. His tongue longed taste the crimson liquid just below the surface.

“Would it stop you from hurting someone?”

“Hurt? The pleasure that one feels from my bite is greater than anything they have ever experienced.”

“Just because it feels good, doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt.”

Sasuke snorted. “You’re too weak. I can’t use your blood. I promise to leave no noticeable mark. Don’t worry, Naruto. I’ll be feeding from you soon enough.”

Sasuke gave one last lick to the arched neck before standing. To Naruto’s eyes, he seemed to vanish from where he stood. In actuality, he was simply moving too fast for Naruto’s eyes to process the movement.

His body started cramping up as he reached the edge of Salem Village. In order to keep his presence masked, he would have to take a little from several people. It was an annoying process. Normally, he would feed from one or two people. They would be tired for a couple of days before recovering with no permanent damage.

That wasn’t an option here. The absolute fear these people had made him extra cautious. He didn’t want to stir the locals any more than need be. Naruto wasn’t in any shape for hard travel.

Taking a calming breath, he entered the first house he came to. A husband and wife resided here. At least there was a bit more convenience than if there were only one individual. He crept to the bedroom, teeth gleaming white. He lifted a lily-white wrist to his lips, sinking his teeth in immediately. Blood rushed down his throat. He nearly moaned.

It was not an intelligent thing to let himself go so bad. The taste was not pleasurable but the power it gave was. Already he could feel his strength returning. His tongue swiped the marks as he forced himself to withdraw after only a few swallows, switching immediately to the husband.

It was the same after every house. He visited four houses before he was satisfied. He needed to make sure his energy was at its full potential.

As he stepped back into the ramshackle barn, he saw Naruto sipping the broth from the previous night and nibbling on bread. His hunger beat at Sasuke’s consciousness, yet he ate slowly when he obviously wanted to devour the bread and broth.
“You’re hungry.”

Naruto coughed, “I haven’t had more than moldy gruel and tepid water in months.”

“Then eat. I can provide you with as much as you wish.”

“I can’t. I’ll get sick. It’s better to start slow.”

“Hn.” Sasuke grunted, poking the fire embers into full life before adding extra wood.

“What are you?”

Sasuke continued to stir the fire. The warmth of blood coursing through him energized him and yet his mouth still watered for the blood flowing beneath the skin of his companion.

“Aren’t you going to answer me? Are you a demon? An Angel?” Naruto slammed his bowl to the ground.

“I told you, I’m your God and you are mine. I exist for you. You bound me to you so long ago and yet I can still remember that day as if it was yesterday. I can still taste your pleasure on my lips.” Sasuke lunged across the fire, forcing Naruto to his back as his fingers pressed over the rapidly beating heart.

“You never remember, not until the end and then it’s too late. Not this time. I’m keeping you even if I have murder every living creature within miles of you. No one will touch you. No one will kill you. I’m keeping you.” Sasuke flinched as a warm hand covered his own cool one.

“If God decides to take me…”

“I told you, I’m your God!”

Sasuke pushed away, striding away. He paced nervously, his ears perking at the smallest sound. Closing his eyes, he calmed his breathing. “Finish the broth. I’m taking you from here. It’s not safe.”

“What are you so afraid of?” Naruto asked quietly.

“I’m…this is not going to help you. I’m taking you to Boston. I’ll get you the care you need. You won’t get any care here.” Sasuke shrugged from his coat, draping it around Naruto’s shoulders.

“Everyone dies.”

“Not me.” Sasuke scooped the thin body in his arms before taking to the woods.

Naruto buried his face in Sasuke’s chest. The thick coat protected his body from being scratched by the tree limbs. His body would jerk as the coughs wracked his body from time to time.

Sasuke’s arms tightened around the quaking body as he moved faster than any human possibly could. The world moved by at a blur. He refused to stop, even for a moment until he reached the sea-scented town of Boston.

“I’m taking you to a doctor.”

“If you are so powerful, why not heal me yourself.”

Sasuke closed his eyes. His kind could take lives but not save them. “It’s not within my power.”
“So my life remains in God’s hands.”

“Stop saying that. Whatever creature you pray to, he deserted you the moment you were thrown in that prison. All you have left is me.”

“I tried to push him away but in the end I returned to him.”

Sasuke remained quiet; slamming his fist against door who he knew was a reputable doctor. He’d heard the words of several people during his first trip through this town. When no one answered, he beat against the door again.

Several minutes passed before a maid sleepily opened the door. “What is it, sir?”

“I need to see the doctor.”

“I’m sorry…the doctor is sleeping…”

“I don’t care if he is fucking the chambermaid…get him down here right now or I will tear this place apart.” hissed Sasuke, his eyes flashing dangerously while Naruto’s cough continued to rattle.

The maid nibbled on her lip before nodding before stepping aside so that Sasuke could carry Naruto into the examination area. His color seemed to be improving slightly, giving Sasuke a little relief. The introduction of unspoiled food was obviously helping.

“What’s the meaning of this?” A large busted woman stood in the doorway, her arms crossed. Her brow rose slowly as she waited for an explanation. “Well?”

“He’s sick. Tell your husband to get out of bed and fix him.”

“What makes you think I’ll do anything more than call a constable to come remove both of you from my home?”

“You’re…?” Naruto gaped at the woman, used to the helpmate wives in Salem Village.

“That’s right, boy. My late husband was a doctor. He was significantly older than I was and trained me. I may not have a medical degree to hang on my wall but my practice is more respected than some who do. Now, back to my question. What makes you think I’d waste my time with street rat boy who probably pick pockets for a living?”

Sasuke was on her in a moment, his breath hissing in her ear. “Because if you don’t heal him, I will kill you before finding someone who will.”

“Sasuke!” Naruto gasped out before falling in a fit of coughs.

Sasuke and the woman eyed each other before she nodded. “Do you plan on paying or should I just give up.”

He fished a bag of gold from his pocket before tossing it at the woman. “Heal him.”

She nodded, walking to Naruto. Her hands deftly felt along his ribs, lifting his shirt and coat before noting the deep bruising that signaled a possible broken rib. “What’s your name?”

“Naruto. What’s yours?”

“Tsunade.”
“That’s pretty.” Naruto doubled over with his cough. A white kerchief was placed over his lips until the spasms eased.

Tsunade pulled back the kerchief only to sigh. The blood coating the white linen was a telltale sign. “How long have you been sick?”

Naruto shot Sasuke a glance before answering. “A couple of months.”

“Have you been around anyone who’s been sick or died?” she asked.

Again, he glanced towards Sasuke. He wasn’t sure why, but he trusted him. He’d saved him from certain death, brought him to a doctor. Despite all that, he saw the pain in his eyes, hidden deeply. He wanted to take away that pain. A creature as beautiful as Sasuke shouldn’t be in such pain. He wanted to take it away. He might be a demon or an angel, but he was his savior.

“I’ve been in Salem Village prison for about four months,” he whispered, pulling up the sleeves of the coat to reveal restraint scarred wrists.

“Did you say Salem?” she asked.

He nodded, sending another wave of curses flying from her lips. “Those damned puritan bastards. You were accused of being a witch?”

He nodded again. “I’d lived there all my life. When my father died of a strange illness, I was blamed. My father was the local preacher. His death was not taken well.”

“I’m surprised the sanctimonious bastards let you live this long.”

“There were more powerful people pushing for the trial of others and the courts wouldn’t dare hang a person without a ’trial’.”

She snorted before laying her head on Naruto’s chest. “Breath in and out.”

He did as she asked. It was only for show, to make Naruto and Sasuke more at ease. She knew the truth.

“I know what’s wrong with you.” she said, pouring herself a snifter of spirits.

“What is it? Is there medicine?” Naruto shook his head at the offer of a drink.

“No…you have consumption. When a number of people are crowded together, the disease spreads from one person to the next. I’ve heard of research being done in England but there is no treatment. The most you can do is manage the symptoms. It will get worse. Your body will waste away. Eventually you will lose the ability to walk and will have to be confined to a bed. You’re dying. I’m sorry.” She took another swallow of the liquid.

“How…how long?” Naruto asked.

“It’s hard to say. Some people live years with it, others months. The weaker your body, the more easily the disease can take hold. I would suggest getting as healthy as you can. It might extend your time…”

The sound of breaking plaster startled both from their discussion. Sasuke’s fist was through the plaster wall of her examination room. His body began to shake horribly.

“Sasuke…”
“We’re leaving.”

“Any physician will tell you the same thing unless they are trying to bleed you dry of money.” Tsunade stood, helping Naruto into the coat he’d discarded.

“Thank you.” Naruto smiled as Sasuke scooped him into his arms.

Within the hour, Naruto was curled in a warm bed at a local inn. There were still several hours until sunrise, forcing Sasuke to remain awake. He stroked the now clean blond hair. The sight brought a burning to his eyes as bright red drops trickled down his cheeks. “What are you trying to do to me?”

Naruto slept the remainder of the night and the entire next day wrapped in Sasuke’s arms. He didn’t awaken until he felt the gentle stroke of fingers along his cheeks. “You shouldn’t stay close to me. You might get sick.”

“Hn. If it meant dying in your arms, I would do it again and again.” Sasuke murmured, kissing Naruto’s brow before answering the knocking at the door.

“Thick beef broth and bread, just as ye requested sir.” A crotchety old woman struggled to place the tray on the bed.

“Ah, young master, I was told ye needed food that would help ye build up ye strength. Yer friend is kind to make sure ye get better.” she placed the tray on his lap, along with a glass of mead.

“When, I have a cough, I always drink a bit of mead. It helps.”

“Thank you.” Naruto smiled.

The woman patted his hand, her eyes twinkling with some unknown knowledge. “Cherish every moment.”

Naruto nodded, dipping his spoon in the broth. He felt the dark eyes of Sasuke on him. “What is it?”

“Why aren’t you afraid?”

“Of death?”

Sasuke nodded. “And me.”

Naruto sighed, putting down the spoon. “When I was locked in the prison, I prayed for a savior, for someone to take me from that place. I lost all faith as I watched people die from either the noose or whatever sickness they developed. I wanted to be freed from that place and then I saw you. I thought you must be an angel to be so beautiful. I thought you must be the angel of death come to take me home. But you didn’t take my soul, you saved me.”

“Naruto…I don’t think I can watch you die again.”

“You keep saying that you knew me before. That means you will know me again.”

Sasuke’s lips pulled back to reveal pristine fangs as he lunged at Naruto, sending the soup and tray to the ground. “I could kill you now and save me the trouble of watching you waste away.”

“Do it.”

His lips hovered over the fluttering pulse. Saliva pooled in his mouth at the thought of tasting the
blood flowing so close to the surface. “I hate you.”

“You hate what you think I represent.”

“And what’s that?”

“Mortality.”

“I don’t have to fear death.”

“I didn’t mean yours.”

“My existence revolves around you. I tell you what I am and you smile. I threaten to kill and you began speaking in riddles. What do you want from me?” Sasuke lifted his face to reveal crimson orbs.

“I don’t know why, but I need you with me. When I die, I want you by my side. The thought doesn’t scare me then. I want to know why I feel like you will always save me.”

Naruto paused, looking pleadingly at the other. “Sasuke…can I stay with you?”

“I told you. You belong to me. I will not let you leave me.”

“You act like you love me.”

“I do.”

“No, you don’t. You love your memories of who I was. I don’t think I’ll die until I’m sure you love ME. Yes. I’ll stay with you until I’m sure you love me.”

“Then I hope you never find out.” Sasuke growled, earning a congested laugh.

Sasuke laid his head above the beating heart. He didn’t have to be so close to hear it but it comforted him. He was happy like this. Fingers stroked his hair. They laid there for the entirety of the night. And the next night, and the next.

Naruto’s strength returned. With the exception of the cough, his body grew stronger. Each day was a blessing. There were no accidents or assassinations. The witch scare blew over as it was destined to do. The courts were made to see how foolish they were to allow irrational fear of the unknown to coerce them into wrongfully accusing innocent men and women with no proof other than a pointed finger.

Life was seemingly perfect. Sasuke purchased a town house near the park. Every day, he and Naruto would stroll through, talking about everything and nothing. It was beneath one of those trees that he received his first kiss from him. He thought his happiness would never end.

~oOo~

May 20, 1698 Boston, Massachusetts

Sasuke closed his eyes, unable to watch the gravediggers lowering the coffin into the ground. If he watched, he was afraid his sanity would be ripped from him. If he kept his mind focused on something other than the cold body of his lover being lowered into the ground, maybe he would survive.

For nearly five years, Naruto’s health seemed stable. He had good days and bad days, yet still kept
his smile. The past winter was different. His coughing grew worse. He tried to hide the increased blood expelled from his lungs. He should have known he could hide nothing from Sasuke.

As spring came, Sasuke was sure Naruto would rally with the introduction of warm weather. Such wasn’t the case. His strength failed him as he continued to deteriorate. Sasuke swallowed his pride before begging Dr. Tsunade for something, no matter how radical. Anything was better than watching him waste away.

Naruto just smiled. He knew this wasn’t the end. Sasuke’s presence in his life assured him of that. Naruto’s contentment did not help Sasuke deal with his loss. The only comfort was that Naruto died quietly in his sleep with Sasuke at his side.

So focused inward, he didn’t sense the presence behind him until a gentle hand pressed to his shoulder. His mind was jarred back into his body. Opening his eyes, he saw the emotionless face of his brother.

“I’m sorry.”

“Why are you here, Itachi? Shouldn’t you be lording on high from your castle?”

“A lot of the family is migrating to the colonies, seeking freedom.”

“And being the good little king, you had to see the layout for yourself.” Sasuke jerked his shoulder from Itachi’s hand.

“You don’t have to mourn alone.”

“You didn’t even know him and you want to mourn him. You’ve never liked him and you want to help me. You’re a bastard.”

“Sasuke…I know you. I’ve seen you lose him more times than I wish to remember. Let me help you.”

“I…I’m considering the sleep.”

Itachi paled considerably, his hand jerked Sasuke to face him. “You are stupid. Just because our parents grew bored with life doesn’t give you the right…”

“I hurt!” Sasuke screamed, drawing the eyes of the graveside mourners. “It hurts, Itachi. It hurts so much more. I didn’t get just a taste. I had the entire meal. For five years, he was mine. I can’t return to our bed. It hurts so much I can barely breathe.”

“I can’t lose you. Stay with me. A little longer.” Itachi’s voice drifted off as Sasuke’s dead eyes drifted to the freshly turned soil of a new grave.

“A little longer…”
May 28, 2005

“Please stand. I present to you, the class of 2005.”

Naruto stood proudly. He was now a high school graduate. He was pretty sure his accomplishment surprised Itachi. He never said anything, though. He was always there, his dark eyes peering almost into his soul. Sometimes, he could almost swear there was a spark of affection; just the tiniest of glimmer.

Today was one of those day he was sure Itachi felt more for him than he showed. He’d trotted into the house after graduation practice to find the place not surprisingly empty. Itachi was rarely around during the day. However, sitting on the table was a card, printed on extra fine paper.

Itachi’s elegant writing scrolled across the cream colored parchment.

‘You do yourself proud by your accomplishments.’ That was all that was written. A small blue box lay beside the note. Inside was a stone attached to a silver cord. The stone matched his eye color perfectly. He was stunned. If it had been another car or some emotionless gift, he was likely to have kept his opinion of his guardian. However, this necklace spoke of a more personal touch. Itachi had to have hand chosen this for it to match his eyes so perfectly. It was perhaps the most wonderful gift he could have imagined. It wasn’t the physicality of the gift but the meaning behind it. Itachi cared, if only a little. He cared.

“Hey, Naruto. What are your plans?” The question broke through his thoughts as he glanced towards the bleachers of the gym. He could have sworn he’d seen Itachi there. He was gone now but he was sure he’d seen him.

“College I guess.”

“You guess? Well you better get your ass in gear and apply.” Sakura walked up, poking him in his shoulder.

“Way ahead of you…I’ve already been accepted to the local University.” Naruto stuck his tongue out, only to earn a slap to the back of his head.

“Owww. What did you do that for?”

“You deserved it.”

“You better listen to her, Naruto. Or you will end up with a concussion.” Kiba grinned, throwing his arm around his best friend and partner in crime.

“Yeah, yeah.” Naruto grinned widely, linking his arms behind the necks of his two best friends. “I’m in a good mood. What should we do to celebrate?”

“Hey, we could hang out at your place. You know, I could bring the beer. My sister gave me a twelve pack for graduation.” Kiba answered.

“I don’t know…”

“Come on…you seriously have like the most awesome gaming set up. Must be nice growing up rich.”
“Well, it’s just Itachi…I’m not sure. I mean, I always okay guests before anyone comes over…”

“Please, Naruto.” Sakura poked out her lip. How in the world she could go from deadly to pitiful in a moments notice was beyond him.

“Well, I suppose it can’t hurt…”

“Fucking A. I’ve got the brews in an ice chest in my truck.”

Kiba was grinning wildly as the three guided their cars into the large driveway. Naruto parked his in the garage while the other two pulled off to the side, careful not to block the road.

The house was lit up brightly, making Naruto very nervous as he led his friends in through the kitchen. Kiba raided the pantry for snacks, while Sakura grabbed glasses and plates from the cupboard. Naruto’s eyes darted back and forth nervously.

“Dude, chill. He’s probably holed up in the study reading some book written two hundred years before any of us were born. He’s a freak. It’s a fucking waste for someone like him to be so loaded.” Kiba joked, juggling a few packages. He slammed the door shut, revealing Itachi leaning against the door frame. The open pantry had hidden his presence from the three teenagers.

“Oh, fuck! You scared the shit out of me!” Kiba shouted, dropping all the food to the floor.

Itachi simply arched a brow before turning to Naruto. “Planning a celebration?”

“Well…I mean…what’s it to you?”

“I was merely asking. I have guests coming shortly. Please keep your friends in your rooms. Miss Haruno may sleep in the guest room next to yours.” Itachi said, turning to exit.

“What about me?” asked Kiba.

“There’s always the floor.” A small smirk and he was gone.

“I swear to God, Naruto. That man creeps me out. He looks so young and pale…you don’t think he’s you know…”

“I know what?”

Kiba licked his lips before whispering, “A vampire.”

Sakura snorted, sending Kiba a very amused look. “What makes you think he’s a vampire?”

“Well, you know, he’s always skulking around. He looks like he’s barely twenty. He’s pale. He lives in a huge mansion and is filthy rich. It’s all the classic signs.” Kiba cringed at his own deduction.

“Itachi is not a vampire. I’ve seen him eat. I’ve even seen him in the sun. He has a disorder. It makes him ultra sensitive to the light but he can still go out in it.” Naruto rolled his eyes.

“I’m just saying, I wouldn’t want to be alone with him on a cold dark night.”

“I would.”

Both boys turned to stare at their friend. She only arched a brow. “What? He’s hot.”
“Let’s just go upstairs before his guests arrive. I’d rather not get in trouble tonight.”

The three made their way up the stairs, their pilfered goodies in hand. All talk of Itachi was dropped in favor of beer, snacks, and video games. Even Sakura joined in the Metal Gear Solid fun. Much laughter and merriment was to be found in the messy blue bedroom.

It was nearing four a.m. when Sakura excused herself to the next bedroom. Kiba was already passed out on the bed, having consumed the most of the alcohol. Naruto couldn’t help but laugh at the sight of his snoring friend. The other was likely to sleep until noon.

Closing the door to his room, he made his way down the stairs. The lights still blazed as he entered the kitchen, tossing the soiled cups and plates in the sink. Muffled speaking drew his attention towards the study. He knew Itachi didn’t want him anywhere near it while his ‘guests’ where around but he could not resist the pull towards the gathering.

Curiosity was probably one of his biggest faults. He couldn’t resist not knowing what was being discussed so late at night. It was definitely not a normal time to be having a meeting unless one wanted to hide something.

Creeping towards the door, he found it partially ajar. From the crack, he could see several men and women. All were dressed expensively, a few sipped on glasses of red wine while others stood silently.

“My Lord, you need to destroy him. You are only delaying the inevitable by keeping him asleep.”

Sleep? Naruto furrowed his brows. What could that mean? Was it a literal sleep or maybe it implied something like being kept in the dark? The man’s heavy accent could mean English was his second or third language. Destroy wasn’t that hard to understand. Was Itachi a mob boss? Determined to continue his snooping, he crept closer.

“Do not even suggest it. He has suffered. I will give him a chance.” Itachi was on his feet, a very dangerous gleam in his eye.

Naruto shivered unconsciously. He hoped to never be the recipient of that look. It made him think he was capable of killing someone. He eluded danger and death. This Itachi was someone he didn’t know; someone he was afraid to know.

“My liege, please reconsider. He’s been in a steady decline for a thousand years or more. If your father was here…”

“I would not finish that statement if I were you. My father is not here. I am. My word is law.”

“You are still accountable to the elders!”

“Do you wish to challenge me for my place as your king? Is that why you are pushing this so hard? If you so wish it then I can do no other than accept the challenge.”

Naruto frowned, flabbergasted at the direction the argument was taking. Shifting to try and get a better look at the occupants of the room, the floor creaked beneath him. A woman, previously silent glanced towards the door. A delicate brow rose, her crimson colored eyes widening slightly. She smiled, sending him a wink before standing.

“Gentlemen. There is no need to fight. As long as he sleeps, Sasuke is no threat. Leave it be for now.” She closed the door to Naruto, leaving him staring at the polished wood.
As he made his way back towards his rooms, he pondered her words over all the others. Sasuke. She mentioned him. He’d always attributed his dreams to the painting hanging in the library, always believed it was the cause of the face haunting his dreams but tonight, she spoke the name. She gave life to what he thought of as only his over active imagination. Sasuke. Could he have heard Itachi or perhaps someone else mention it…no. That felt wrong. Sasuke was a living breathing part of him. He wasn’t just some imaginary part of his psyche. The red eyed woman’s words were proof, weren’t they?

Sasuke… Did he suffer from dreams as Naruto did? Did he feel the pull of the past as acutely? Sleep did not come to him this night as he lay staring at the ceiling of a random guest room. Sasuke, what did Itachi mean? How had he suffered?

~oOo~

January 12, 1778 Valley Forge

Sasuke crept silently through the encampment. It was a bleak sight. Men trudged through the snow, slush, and mud towards threadbare tents set up haphazardly around pitiful campfires. The small campfires offered little light and even less warmth. They dotted the area, men huddled close in search of the fleeting warmth. Coughs could be heard off and on through the night as more than a few suffered from cold related ailments. Frostbite, coughs, and fevers were the worst. The medical tents were packed beyond capacity with the ill as Washington’s army wintered in this frigid climate, volunteer surgeons having their hands full with the multitude of the sick.

General Washington was taking a great risk leaving his men to weather the winter on desolate field twenty miles outside of Philadelphia. It was a guarantee that lives would be lost due to exposure. With an army of over ten thousand men, such a thing was inevitable but the men were in no shape to continue marching. The winter months were bringing the war to a near standstill. In this detestable weather, one would wonder why one such as him wandered among these war weary soldiers.

He was here because he was lost. Geographically, he knew exactly where he was. So sure was he of his placement on the globe, he most likely could have drawn a map pinpointing his exact location to any who wished to use it. No, Sasuke was lost in the literal sense but more of a lost soul. He’d felt him, the moment he’d been struck down. He’d held him in his arms as the wound from the musket ball bled into the early snow. All he could think of was why?

He was an officer, a doctor. He should not have been at the front. He’d promised him he would be alright. Sasuke had trusted him not to do something foolish. Before the hatred between the colonies and England, his life with Naruto had been a soothing balm to his tattered soul. He was sane when the other was near. The madness was pushed back, though he feared Naruto’s presence was loosing its potency. His need for blood was almost constant. When he’d revealed himself to Naruto in New York, the other simply smiled. It was as if he was waiting for him.

It continued to amaze him at how understanding Naruto was. He accepted things that were far beyond what he should have been able to comprehend. He accepted Sasuke. His flaws. His nature. It was all taken in with a smile and not a few questions.

They were lovers almost from the first night. Sasuke’s never ending need for every part of his lover was met with an equally desperate need. It was as if they were feeding off of each other. The past melted away. It was Naruto. His last life had taught him not to love the past, but to take comfort in the present. He’d fallen in love with him almost instantly. No, it wasn’t love. What he felt transcended such a paltry human emotion. Each life brought something more. More incite. More depth. Each was different, yet the same.
This incarnation forced him to recall his past. Many conversations were had before a warm fire. He forced him to relive each life, and learn from it. It was here he realized how cursed he truly was. Each Naruto took a different part of his soul with him to their grave. Would there come a time when he had no soul left to give them? Would he then become a monster to be put down like a mad dog? He’d asked Naruto these very questions only to be given the answer. “God never gives us more than we can handle.” It offered little comfort to one such as Sasuke. Life went on, though.

When Naruto enlisted with Washington as a surgeon, they had argued. The first of many. Naruto felt the cold disdain of England more keenly than Sasuke. When it came to war, he had willingly given himself to them for the freedom of his home.

Sasuke had stormed away, seeking solace in his brother’s company. He’d ignored his own aching soul. Surprisingly, it was Itachi who encouraged him to return to his lover’s side. The sentiment came much too late. Sasuke arrived in time to once again drag his lover from the battlefield. He once again bathed in the warm blood as it spilled forth to nourish the soil.

War was a horrible thing. It robbed even the innocent of their lives while the generals and kings sat in safety. This war was to some, a necessary evil. It was a bid for freedom from the oppression of England. Sasuke didn’t care about the petty squabbles of humans. He almost wished they would destroy themselves with their canons and muskets; with their disease and strife.

War had transformed him into little more than a monster, feeding on the blood of the dying. He knew the stories that arose. He was an angel of death. He came for the souls of the dying, taking them to Heaven or Hell.

He could not say where the souls went as he drew their life force from them. What they saw as he drained them was anyone’s guess. All he knew was blood. All he cared for was blood. He was too tired to make any effort to do more than use the dying to feed his ever growing addiction.

“Naruto…” he whispered, stepping over logs and sleeping forms.

His feet moved silently, almost gliding as he approached the medical tent. He’d lost the will to even pretend to be human. His eyes remained perpetually red, a sign of his ever growing madness. Still, he held back. He would not allow himself to take that final step into madness. He would not give them an excuse to destroy him. He would simply exist until he felt that small trickle of life appear in his heart. That would be the sign he could start living again.

The tent was quiet as he silently passed the beds of those on the mend. He felt the eyes of a few soldiers on him, watching as he passed. His dark clothing and red eyes terrified the sick men. Breath was exhaled as he passed them by. He was tempted to take them, tempted to devour them with no thought of the consequences. He wondered what the man would think of tomorrow. Would it be just a dream to him? Or, would he perpetuate the legend growing among the weary troops. When the dark man was seen, a death was sure to follow.

Sasuke listened to the death rattle sounding through the back of the tent. This was the place of dying. These men offered up their bodies for the freedom of others, their reward…death. Their sacrifice evident. Not even the gangrenous smell circling through the air could deter him from his destination. The last cot revealed a boy, barely sixteen. Coughs wracked his body, flashing a memory through him of a similar sight.

Bloodshot eyes opened as he took a seat beside the ill young man. Fear shown bright in the fear plagued eyes as the boy shifted weakly away. Tears began to streak down a face too young to be facing imminent death.
“Shhh.” he whispered, calming the boy. His hand stroked the fever damp brow. “Do you want me to free you?”

“I… I don’t… want… to… d-die.”

“I’m afraid it is your fate. You body has taken all it can. I can ease you, make your last moments pleasurable. Know this though, if I leave you, you will not live to see the dawn. Your fate is already written.”

Tears poured in increasing streams. “Are… you… an angel?”

“No. I am no such creature. The only angel I have ever known was taken from me. I will only take what is freely given. This is a promise I made to my angel. I ask again. Do you wish me to stop your suffering?” Sasuke stroked the still baby soft cheeks, crimson eyes boring deeply.

A tired sigh was released as dark eyes closed. “Will it hurt?”

“No.” Sasuke waited no longer. He lifted the boy from the bed, his fangs instantly puncturing deep into the pulsing artery.

The body beneath him went stiff before a shuddering moan was released. Arms lifted to clench in the silky material of his dark shirt. Warmth flooded his mouth as a wave of blood pulsed down his throat. The blood was weak, tasting of sickness boarding on death. It would do little more than keep him going for a day or two at the most. Fleeting guilt followed the flush warmth. It was shameful to take sustenance from one such as this but it was an act of mercy. He kept telling himself that as he felt the heart beneath him stuttering, its beat losing the stead rhythm.

The power behind each pulse of blood slowed, forcing Sasuke to suck with increasing force to draw the last dregs of life from the boy. The hands gripping his shirt loosened before falling limply to the straw mattress of the cot. A gasping breath later, he was gone. Sasuke’s own shuddering breath sounded loud in his ears as the warmth faded. He could feel the boy’s relief on his tongue.

He stumbled to his feet before lifting a shaking had to his tousled hair. His stomach tried to rebel against the nourishment. Even his body longed for only Naruto. Drawing in a shaky breath, he began to alter the scene of death before him. Things needed to be done before a surgeon found him.

Sasuke was meticulous in his clean up. The cold body was positioned, eyes closed so that he appeared almost to be sleeping. A small smile graced his lips. What he dreamed in his sleep of death, Sasuke could only imagine. A small push was all it had taken to send him to nirvana.

His tongue lapped at the telltale sign of his presence, hiding the mark. He couldn’t risk humans finding out what haunted the darkness. Some things were best left to the imagination. A person here or there was nothing, but as a group, humans were too easily panicked. The witch hunts plaguing the colonies upon his arrival a hundred years past were proof enough of how easily panicked they could become. Far too many innocents were destroyed in their search to purge the threat of witches from their midst.

Sending the body of the boy a final glance, he left with speed, his movements unseen by humans. He wished he could say he was sorry for taking the boy’s life, stealing the few precious hours of existence that remained. He wished he could feel just a little more regretful of what he’d done. If Naruto was alive, he might have felt more than the fleeting guilt. Now, all he felt was pity for the poor creatures fighting a battle they might lose.

“Foolish humans.” he muttered as he stepped into the nearby forest. Only one human mattered to
him. The rest were food.

“You took another.”

He chuckled darkly as the voice rolled over him. The familiar voice of his brother intoned from the shadows. Weariness plagued them both. The centuries were long. Sasuke suffered, dragging Itachi with him.

“He was dying.”

“It is not your place to decide that.”

“And whose place is it? Yours? I have lost count of the numbers of humans you feasted on. I can remember the criminals and vagabonds who fed your bloodlust just as the dying feed mine.”

“I wanted to keep you from this. I thought, when you came to me…”

“You thought what, brother? That I was as I was before? I’m not. I will never be the same. Each day is a torture. The only thing keeping me going is that I will see him again. You could never understand what it feels like to have your soul to die. You’ve never felt that all encompassing lust to possess and be possessed. You heart remains still in your possession.” Sasuke spat the words, his eyes glaring as his brother stepped from the darkness.

The wind swirled his black cloak as Itachi stepped from the shadows, his pale skin stark in the moonlight. His own crimson eyes closed at the sight of his brother. Things were beginning to worry him, a small niggling feeling of doubt.

“Sasuke…”

“I don’t want to hear it, Itachi. I feel empty and the only way to fill it is with blood, no matter how vile I find the taste.”

“You thought that it is not Naruto’s blood that is special but your own perception of yourself when you are with him?”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“Then educate me, brother. Tell me why you feel this way? I can let it slide, the killing of the dying, but have you any knowledge of how close you are to the point in which I can not save you?”

“I’m in control.”

“For how long? A year? A century? A millennia? We are long lived. You are barely a baby compared to me. I saw the crucifixion of Christ. I witnessed the Roman Empire at its peak. You should be relishing in each era that passes you by. Yet here you are, pining away for some human soul, praying he will return to you. It is a waste. I miss my brother.”

“Itachi…I can do no other than wait for him. I feel that if I’m not here, if he doesn’t know me, something will happen.”

“Then sleep until he lives again.”

“You know I can’t.”

“What do you want from me, Sasuke? I can only offer my council. I willingly do so and yet, you toss it back at me. You are standing at the edge of oblivion.”
“I will be more cautious, if that is what you wish.”

“Never have I seen trials such as these. Souls should not come back like this.”

“But he does. He comes back to me.”

“Then take comfort in the fact that he will return.”

“But there is always that doubt…”

“What doubt?”

Sasuke stared off into the distance, his eyes halfway dead as they gazed at nothing. “That this time is the last.”

Itachi placed a hand on Sasuke’s shoulder. “Then allow me to help you bear this burden. I offer you a place at my side until he returns.”

“You know the court would disapprove. The elders wish me destroyed.”

“I’m the king.”

Sasuke smiled. It was sad, full of pain still fresh in his heart but a smile, none the less. Itachi’s heart broke at the sight of his pain ridden brother.

“Why did he die?” Itachi asked.

“I heard he was the only surgeon who volunteered to patch up the soldiers on the front. The others wanted to wait for the injured to be brought to them.”

“He was brave.”

“He was an idiot…is always an idiot. He wanted to fight for these colonies. He desperately wanted freedom.”

Itachi stared at his brother before asking. “Is that such a bad thing?”

“It is when it leaves me alone.”

“Do you share his sentiment?”

“Of what?”

“This country. Do you wish it to have its freedom?”

“I don’t care what the humans do.”

“True, but don’t you think it would be something for him to appreciate when he returns?”

Sasuke frowned, his brow crinkling as the wheels turned rapidly. It was true he was born randomly but there was always the chance he would be born on this continent. If he was, he would want this freedom being dangled before them. He would want it because that was the type of person he was. He cared about others. He wanted help others. Always, his light shown brightest when faced with adversity.

“What are you thinking?” asked Itachi, curious to the growing determination in Sasuke’s eyes.
“Of Naruto.”

“No…you aren’t.”

“Brother, I must ask you turn your eyes away from this country and its war.”

Itachi stiffened, his gaze going cold. “Why?”

“Because I will be fighting in it.”

“Sasuke…”

“Please Itachi…I don’t want the elders to use what I might do against you.”

“You are as foolish as you claim your lover to be…but I will call the family back to our homeland. Many have already begun returning to Europe, fleeing this unpleasantness. Fates preserve me, this will be a nightmare. I advise you not to draw too much attention to yourself. Why are you fighting for those you hold in such disdain?”

“For him, to make a world he would want to live in.”

“As you wish. I’ll give you five years. Farewell, little brother.” Itachi turned and was gone in a whoosh of wind.

~oOo~

October 6, 1780
Kings Mountain, North Carolina

The bursting of cannons shook the earth as the Patriots and the Loyalists waged a war. The weary soldiers clashed desperately, each believing in their own cause. There was no right and wrong, only ideals.

Sasuke panted heavily against a tree. The scent of gunpowder hung heavily in the air. It tainted each breath with its harsh undertone. The screams of the dying brought forth the monster as he growled low in his throat, searching for his humanity.

He never ceased to find it humorous, referring to the good in him as humanity. He, who had never been human, possessing of humanity. Perhaps another day, he would create a new word, one that would better describe it.

Today, he held on by what seemed like the tiniest of threads. It was the blood. The smell was nearly as heavy as that of the gun powder. He could taste the metallic flavor in the air. It would be so easy to simply let go of his ‘humanity’. He wanted to relinquish his control and devour them all. He wanted it but was held back by thoughts of Naruto. In his darkest moments, he found the strength to go on. It felt almost as if Naruto was there with him, comforting him.

A canon ball shattered the tree nearest him, sending him lunging away. Pain rushed through him as tiny shards of wood pierced the skin of his back through his shirt. It was more of an annoyance than a true injury. It would heal by nightfall, anyway.

The battle would be ending soon. Sasuke smirked as he watched the Loyalists surprise at the tenacity of the Patriots. He watched the commanding officer of the Loyalists give the signal to charge. This was what he’d waited for.
The Patriots released a volley of shots, sending several charging horsemen to the ground. The major was amongst them. Sasuke grinned darkly, rushing into the fray. It appeared to be only a flesh wound as the captain of the Loyalists attempted to rise to his feet.

“Not so fast, Major Fergusson.” Sasuke purred, his hands grabbing the injured major, dragging him behind an overturned cart.

“Thank you.” hissed Fergusson, his hand going up to grasp at the bleeding shoulder wound. The wound was obviously non-lethal. Painful, yes, but he would survive.

“Don’t thank me, Major.” Sasuke smirked, his hand reaching up to clench in the wound. Fergusson screamed out in pain, his body going rigid as the clenching fingers dug deep. The ball had gone straight through. A pity, it would have hurt more had it lodged in a bone.

“You’re one of the upstart colonists.”

“In your eyes, perhaps. In truth, you all could destroy yourselves and I could care not one bit. No, I do this for another who wished for freedom from England.”

“A coward who has others fight his battles…ahhh” Fergusson punctuated the sentence with a scream, unheard in the commotion of battle as Sasuke squeezed again.

“Never call him a coward. He died from a Loyalist musket ball. I fight because he can not. I do pity you though, your death will be the beginning of the end. The Patriots will claim this battle. The turning point of this filthy war is finally in sight. It really is a shame you must die. I know you do not fight out of hate, but of duty. Perhaps you will be reborn into a world where war is a thing of the past.” Sasuke bit deeply, ignoring the screaming and flailing of the man beneath him.

Hot, thick, healthy blood ran into him. It strengthened his body. He felt a twinge in doing such to a man who’s only crime was that he supported England. It was so small, he barely noticed it. The warmth heating him was much needed. It had been several weeks since he’d feasted on such strong blood. The foul taste was ignored in favor of the strength it provided.

The man’s struggles lessened until they stopped completely. He dropped the pale body to the already blood soaked ground. Pulling a pistol from his waist, he pointed the gun at the bite marks now adorning the major’s neck. The flintlock sparked as he pulled the trigger. Gunpowder clouded his vision, causing him to blink wildly to clear his eyes.

Before him lay the body of Patrick Fergusson. The bullet had torn apart his neck, hiding any sign of him having been bitten.

The battle didn’t last much longer. Sasuke was far away by the time the white flag was raised as the remaining seven hundred Loyalists surrendered their arms to the cheering Patriots. He wasn’t much for celebrations, choosing instead to disappear into the growing darkness.

The major’s blood continued to spread through him, providing him with much needed energy. His soul however, ached for the warmth that came from just a sip of Naruto’s essence.

He collapsed, miles from Kings Mountain. The animals of the forest stayed clear, sensing his darkness. He didn’t care. Silence was welcome after the loud booming of cannons and muskets.

Bringing his hands to his eyes, he cursed the burning that came from the now peacefulness. It was when he was alone, when his mind was allowed to wonder. These were the times when Naruto haunted him.
“I can’t keep this up…I’m sorry I’m weak.” he whispered into the night. “Naruto, forgive my weakness.”

‘Stop that!’ Sasuke’s head jerked up, his senses on high alert.

“Who’s there?” he growled, seeing nothing.

He extended out his senses, feeling nothing but wild animals. There was no human for miles. He was alone.

Slumping once more against the tree, he stared at the crimson staining his hands from the tears he’d thought to stop. “I’m alone.”

‘You are never alone.’ He knew there was no one there yet he heard Naruto’s voice clearly. The cool bark of the tree became his lover’s chest. The swirling wind became his breath.

“I hurt…Naruto.”

‘Just a little longer, then we can both rest.’

“You aren’t real.”

‘Why do you say that?’ It was just as if Naruto’s husky voice was being purred in his ears. This wasn’t real. It wasn’t…but he wanted it so bad and that scared him. If he allowed himself to create a Naruto where there was none, he would lose what little bit of sanity remained.

“Because I can’t feel you inside.” Sasuke stood, closing his eyes at the loss of the phantom touches.

He turned, knowing what he would see. Only the tree he’d just vacated. There was no Naruto in this world…not any longer. For now, he only remained in his thoughts and memories. No matter what he might wish, his future with the keeper of his heart was lost to the wheel of fate.

~oOo~

January 14, 1784 Annapolis, Maryland

Sasuke watched with dull eyes from the shadows as a cheer went through the crowd gathered outside the building where the Congress of the Confederation was meeting to ratify the Treaty of Paris. The war was officially over.

Technically, it had ended months prior in Paris but the delay in the treaty reaching the governing body of the now United States of America delayed the reality of it for the people. Now it was official. This land was now free from England’s rule. Come hell or high water, they were free.

Sasuke snorted. He would miss the battles. It took his mind from his own growing darkness. Most likely, the blood and death perpetuated his descent. He wondered how long before Itachi showed up again?

At least he helped give this country a start, even if it was with death. He closed his eyes at the feel of a hand on his shoulder. He could never run from his ghost. Turning to snarl, he was shocked to see an actual person standing behind him. How had he gotten so close?

“Forgive me. I only wanted to see if you were alright. You looked a little distraught.” Thick red hair ruffled in the breeze. There was nothing special of the man. He was of average build, his gray
eyes held nothing more than concern.

“Leave me be. Go celebrate with your people.” he growled, turning his back to the man.

“You are almost there. Just wait a little longer.”

Sasuke swirled around with eyes wide only to see no one there. He shouldn’t have been able to move that fast. Was this another hallucination brought on by the thinning in his sanity?

Sasuke turned from the celebrations, fading into the shadows. He was no longer needed by these humans. He was a ghost. The history books would ignore his existence, as they should. Drawing too much attention was a dangerous game. Towards the end, he’d skirted the edge of that blade. He was sure to hear an earful from Itachi when next they met.

Perhaps he would explore the wilderness of this new country. It was best he not dwell with the humans too much. It would be at least fifty years before Naruto returned to this world. Perhaps he could hold on a little longer.

~oOo~

May 29, 2005

“Oh, my head. Is beer supposed to give you a hang over?” Kiba pillowed his head in his arm, causing Naruto to grin at his friend’s suffering.

“Well, when you drink ten of them over the course of four hours, I’d say the answer is yes.” Sakura elbowed the other, earning another groan.

“Hey, Sakura. Is it possible for a person to have red eyes?” Naruto asked.

“Red? Like bloodshot?”

“No, like the iris is red.”

Kiba’s head shot up from where it rested, his finger pointing accusingly at Naruto while Sakura laughed hysterically. “I fucking told you he was a vampire. Now you believe me.”

“Not that again. I swear, if you keep spouting that shit you are going to be committed.” Sakura laughed, accepting a plate from Naruto.

“It wasn’t Itachi.”

“Huh?”

“It was this woman. I just wanted to know if it was possible to have red eyes.”

Sakura stuffed a piece of pancake in her mouth as she internally debated the question. “Well, some types of albinos have pink eyes. I suppose you probably met one. They look red. Have you ever seen those white rabbits with the pink eyes?”

Naruto bit his lip, placing the remainder of the food on the breakfast bar. Kiba waved away the food, shooting to his feet as the smell of bacon reached his nose. The sound of gagging could be heard moments later from the nearby bathroom.

“That’s disgusting.” commented Sakura as she continued to eat. She would need that strong stomach if she was planning on going into the medical field.
“You don’t think we should check on him?” asked Naruto.

Sakura shot him a dead panned look. “He’s fine. Just get him home so he can sleep it off. By the way, what’s that door for? It was locked when I was looking for a broom. I thought it might be the supply closet.”

Naruto followed her gesturing fork towards the basement door. He shrugged. “It’s the basement but the steps are rotting. Itachi said he’ll get them fixed one of these days. He doesn’t like me going down there because it’s dangerous.”

Sakura shrugged before grinning. “I’m so happy we are going to the same college. It’s going to be so awesome. I’m getting an apartment with Ino. I swear, me and the pig are going to have so much fun.”

“Me too. Itachi wants me to live here but I’m sure I’ll still have fun. Just think of the hot sorority chicks and all the parties. It’s going to be paradise.” Naruto grinned, shaking away his confusing thoughts in favor of something a little more upbeat.

“You should really ask him if you can get an apartment. We have an extra room. I can talk to Ino if you want…”

“Naw. I’ll just stay here. It’s only like a ten minute drive to the university. I don’t mind it here. Unlike Kiba, I don’t believe in monsters that go bump in the night.” The two started laughing at the expense of their friend, not seeing the dark eyes watching them from the hallway.

Itachi turned, silently making his way away from the kitchen. The laughter of the two friends followed him. He wondered just how long Naruto would continue to feign his disbelief in what he knew was truth. He’d sensed the boy last night. He’d whispered thanks to Kurenai after the meeting adjourned. She successfully steered the conversation away from Sasuke and the eventually, Naruto.

He knew he should allow them to meet. Naruto was of age. True, he wasn’t old enough to drink in this era but that was a minor technicality Itachi ignored. He supposed deep in his heart, as much as he wanted to see his brother again, he didn’t want to hand Naruto over to him just yet. He wanted to keep Naruto to himself for just a little longer.

When he started this journey, time couldn’t pass fast enough. Now, it seemed to be flying by at the speed of light. He wanted it to stop, for a moment. He wanted it to allow him to enjoy the warming presence of Naruto. It was a bit selfish. He knew this, yet he could not bear the thought of losing either of them. Naruto thought of him as merely a guardian and he’d facilitated that belief. He didn’t want to become attached to him but in the end he had.

He’d hated Naruto. Despised what he made Sasuke into. He’d nearly destroyed the last of his family which his mere presence. There were so many times he considered destroying Naruto just for the sake of everything they had been through. The thoughts were dispelled as quickly as they came and not for Sasuke’s sake alone. Naruto’s carefree attitude, his warm nature called to Itachi. He ignored the call but not without considerable effort.

He would wait a little longer. Once Sasuke was awakened it was unlikely Naruto would even glance in his direction. He would give Naruto a little more time. He would allow him to enjoy the end of his childhood before waking Sasuke. This would be the last life for Sasuke. It hurt Itachi to think of his brother’s remaining years in the double digits. Sasuke would not last Naruto’s death even if it lasted for seventy years. This was the beginning of the end.
May 3, 2008

Naruto grinned happily as his two best friends in the world fought over who had to buy the next round. He was just happy it wasn’t him. Both Sakura and Kiba were a year older than him since he’d skipped a grade in elementary school. He didn’t turn twenty-one for another five months, not that he mooched alcohol off of his friends. He paid for his fair share but tonight was very special. Tonight he was on a date.

He’d asked Sakura and Kiba to come with him to make it sort of a double date. He thought for sure when he’d asked the most popular girl at their university on a date, he would get shot down right then. Ten-Ten had surprised them all when she accepted. Naruto hadn’t known how to react.

For the last four years, he’d tried to push away thoughts of his dream man. He was young, in the prime of his life. He couldn’t date guys. He constantly compared them to the sultry voice and dark piercing eyes of his dream man. Finally, giving up on ever having a relationship with a man, he turned to women. Not to say, he wasn’t attracted to women, because he was. Women were soft where men were hard. Maybe a woman could give him the emotional connection he desperately wanted without the constant comparison to his dream lover.

In the last few years, since his eighteenth birthday, he’d felt so empty, there were days when it took every ounce of his being just to get out of bed for class. His grades began dropping. His friendships began to suffer. He was slowly withering away from the inside. He turned to Itachi, hoping for some sort of soothing affection only to be disappointed when even his growing connection with his former guardian did not ease the emptiness looming.

In an effort to quiet the growing restlessness, here he was, seated at a small table with Ten-Ten and his two best friends. It was a comfortable atmosphere, and his date seemed at complete ease with his friends. He enjoyed her company. She didn’t come off as stuck up as most of the popular crowd did. In fact, she seemed completely down to home. This should be a sign of a match made in heaven, yet the disquieted ache continued to eat away at him. He was even more aware of it tonight because of Ten-Ten’s presence.

“Your friends are interesting, Naruto.” smiled Ten-Ten, stirring her drink while smiling sweetly at him.

“They are the best. I’ve known them both since the third grade. I was a crying shoulder when Sakura came out as a lesbian and Kiba announced he was actually a woman in a man’s body.”

The fighting ceased as twin pairs of incredulous eyes turned to stare at him. Sakura was the first to break the silence with her indignant screech. “What did you say, you lying sack of shit?”

“Did you say something, Sakura? I think my eardrum just ruptured.” Naruto grinned sneakily at her, watching with delight as her face soon matched the color of her hair.

“That’s not the only thing I’m going to rupture.” She pulled back a fist only elbow some idiot stupid enough to stand behind her. Said person then turned and slapped her; not a wise thing to do.

Naruto’s eyes widened almost comically as an honest to God bar fight erupted before his very eyes. He’d seen a few drunken patrons swing at each other a time or two before, usually taken care of by the bouncers. Not this time. Sakura retaliated with fists blazing, sending her knuckles straight into
the other woman’s nose. Blood gushed out before the girls’ boyfriend, thinking Kiba was Sakura’s significant other, plowed his fist into the other’s jaw in retaliation for Kiba’s ‘girl’ having hurt his.

Ten-Ten clutched at Naruto’s shirt as the body of some random bar goer was sent flying across their table. That was when pure mayhem erupted throughout the entire place. Bottles and glasses shattered as men and women fought, some not even knowing what they were doing, simply joining in the ‘fun’. If he’d been in a corner with his friends watching the events, he was sure he would have been laughing his ass off. Now he simply stared in shock at the mayhem playing out before him.

The sound of sirens drained the blood from his face and sent him into overdrive, grabbing all three of his friends to escort them quickly out of the door. He wasn’t sure he could survive a night behind bars in the emotional state he was in. Itachi was out of town on business and not due back for another week. He had several large companies in Europe that required his presence periodically. If he was arrested, there was a damn good chance he would spend the night or longer in either a holding cell full of criminals or alone in a tiny cell awaiting the appearance of his court appointed lawyer.

“Go! Go! Go!” he yelled, grabbing Kiba by the collar and Ten-Ten by the arm.

They four raced from the bar, rushing down the street to the parking garage where Naruto and Kiba’s cars were parked. Naruto didn’t allow them to rest until they were in sight of their vehicles.

“Jesus Fucking Christ, Sakura. What the hell were you doing starting a bar brawl?” yelled Kiba, doubled over as he attempted to catch his breath while gingerly probing the swelling on his own face.

“I started it? I didn’t start shit. Naruto started it by telling Ten-Ten I was a lesbian. If it wasn’t for the fact that I am currently too tired, I’d have his balls attached to my cell phone as a charm. I’m surprised you aren’t more upset, he called you a transvestite.” Sakura growled, her eyes flashing dangerously towards her friend.

“Well, if being gay will get me more girls, I figure what the hell.” Kiba grinned at Sakura, taking it all in stride. “Not to mention, I’m too drunk to care or I would be in much more pain.”

“Idiot.” Sakura spat, turning to Naruto. “And you…I’ll deal with you later when my knuckles aren’t throbbing. I’ll take Kiba home, I don’t think he should drive and I’m sober now.”

“Alright…Sakura…I was only joking. I didn’t think it would blow up like that.” Naruto tried to sound properly contrite but he couldn’t help but feel a little in awe of the entire seen. One tiny sentence, nearly lost in the noise of the bar had stemmed a huge bar brawl that would most likely make front page news. They had even resulted to contacting the police. One little joke and all Hell broke loose. It was requiring of the proper amount of humility.

“I know, Naruto. That’s why you are still alive. Why don’t you take Ten-Ten back to her apartment and go home. I think we have all had enough excitement for the night.” Sakura smiled, her eyes losing their murderous glare.

Sakura exited the garage quietly, Kiba now sound asleep in the passenger side of the vehicle. Ten-Ten snickered, drawing Naruto’s attention. He tried to smile but all he wanted to do was go home.

“I hope you will invite me again. That was the most fun I’d had in forever. Too bad I didn’t get a chance to join in the fighting but I was so surprised, I was frozen stiff.” She giggled, cracking her knuckles.
Naruto plastered a happy smile on his face before sliding into the driver’s seat. The entire drive to Ten-Ten’s apartment, she chattered on and on about the excitement. When Naruto pulled at the entrance to her apartment, she sent him a sultry look. “You want to come up?”

Now, Naruto couldn’t say he wasn’t tempted. He sure as hell was, but he found the thought of sex with her less than appetizing. She was beautiful with bright eyes and soft clear skin. Her bosom was adequate but she wasn’t him and that alone made any thought of sticking his dick anywhere inside of her, very distasteful.

His one attempt at sex had been horrible. He hadn’t even been able to orgasm and it because almost painful as his partner attempted to get him off. All he got out of that night was a sore ass and a case of blue balls that only eased when he was alone fantasizing of Sasuke. He broke up with Gaara the next day. There was no point; his heart wasn’t in the relationship. The last he heard, Gaara was happily involved in some foreign student. They talked from time to time and neither felt animosity towards the other. They were just simply not meant to be.

“I’d better be getting home. I have to be up early tomorrow.” he lied masterfully.

“We are going to go out again?” she asked hopefully.

“Heh…sure.” he said, allowing her to lean in and kiss him on the cheek.

Naruto made his way home, his feet dragging as he trudged up the steps. He felt more tired than he had in ages, just wanting to sleep. That tomorrow was Saturday was a relief as he had every plan of staying in bed all day.

August 12, 1867

“You cheated, asshole.” Naruto jumped to his feet, pointing a finger at the casually smiling Asian man sitting across from him in the local saloon. Naruto couldn’t help but see how the other was mocking him with that fake smile as he raked in the small pile of money. It wasn’t so much that he lost pissing him off but that he lost the entirety of his wages save for a bit of small change in his pocket.

Sai, as the man was called, kept egging Naruto on each time he tried to leave the table. Each derogatory phrase thrown his way was enough to bring Naruto back with the urge to make the man eat his words.

Ever since the railroad came through, men and women of Asian decent had taken up residence in the country. They’d originally come to build the rail along with the Irish and German immigrants but after its completion, chose to settle in the various towns that cropped up along its route. It wasn’t an impossible event to see a china man; it was just rare as most continued with the train construction all the way to California, choosing to settle there. In Paradise, Texas it was as rare a sight as seeing a purple buffalo.

Paradise was a moderately sized town, home to mostly ranchers and homesteaders. It wasn’t big enough for the rail to come through but at the same time, it was ideally located as a central meeting area and supply stop for both ranchers and the stage route. There were two hotels, three saloons, a general store, a feed and tack store, a public bath house, jail, a church, and a post office. There was even a small school set up beside the church though it was never very full of children. Most of the ranch children were schooled by their parents due to the distance between the town and the various ranches. Most of the students were the children of the various people living in the town.

All in all, it was a pleasant place to live even if it didn’t have the excitement of the larger cities.
The general peacefulness of the town didn’t stop cons and thieves from coming in and making trouble. Sai happened to be one of those bits of trouble that trickled in from the bigger cities. It wasn’t that he was particularly skilled at cards, or no more than the average person. No, Sai’s skill came with his ability to hide his emotions while enraging his fellow players. An angry person was easy to manipulate and Naruto was easily angered.

“I didn’t cheat...you were just too stupid to remain calm during the card rounds.” Sai smiled that annoyingly pleasant smile. Even his slight accent annoyed him. God, he was a dead man.

Naruto reared back a fist before plowing into Sai’s smiling face. Who was smiling now? The spurt of blood from Sai’s nose was somewhat satisfying but no where near as much as the crunch of bone as the other’s nose broke. He kept plowing his fist into his face, pleased by the grunts of pain from the china man. Fucking asshole, stealing his hard earned money. So high was he on his pounding on Sai, he didn’t notice when Sai reared back his fist and plowed it into his temple.

The tables were quickly turned and soon it was Naruto who was bleeding. The bartender tried to pull them apart only receive a random fist to the eye. Even he couldn’t say whose fist it was. It wasn’t until the sheriff fired his gun into the ceiling did the two break apart. It was hard to say who looked the worse. Naruto had a cut on his cheek, a swelling eye, and a split lip. Sai wasn’t much better with his still gushing nose and black eye. There was so much blood; it looked as if one of them should be dead.

“Alright, what the fuck is going on here?” growled the sheriff.

Naruto growled as Sai stepped forward. “Naruto-san became angry when I won his money while he proceeded to continually lose. He became angry and accused me of cheating.”

“That’s because you did cheat, you fucking china man!” Naruto yelled and would have punched him again had not the deputy grabbed him under the arms.

“Naruto-san, I am from Japan, not China.” Sai said calmly, his blood clogged nose adding a slightly stuffy sound to his voice.

“Same fucking difference!” Naruto began to struggle in earnest.

“Shut up, Naruto. Was anyone watching the game?” Sheriff Backer rubbed his temple, knowing the headache that was to come form this.

“I was.” whispered one of the whores. “Business is slow this time of day. I thought I would try and saddle up with the winner.”

“Did either of these gentlemen cheat?” Baker eyed the whore, weighing how much he could trust her. She’d been around for a few years, her eyes still caked with last night’s make up she’d probably been too worn out to wash off. She might be a whore, but he had no reason to doubt what she said was the truth.

“No, Sheriff. But I can’t really say it was a fair game. Mr. Sai was driving Naruto into a rage something awful. I don’t know how Naruto was even doing as well as he was. He was pretty damn mad. So, if making someone so mad, they can’t think is cheating then, yes Mr. Sai cheated but as far as the cards go, Naruto lost the games fairly.” she said, biting her lip. She didn’t want Naruto to lose his money but she couldn’t very well lie since several of the other saloon goers witnessed Naruto’s growing agitation with his card opponent.

“Hmm.” Baker grunted, crossing his arms over his chest. “Naruto, I’m going to split the difference
with you. You can have half your money back. The rest, the China man can have. Now, get on home before you end up with a bullet in your back from some person who pissed you off enough to make you lose your temper. And, you…”

Baker turned to Sai who was dabbing his nose with a rag acquired from the barkeep. “I better not hear of you playing cards like that again. You are welcome to play if you are going to do it with a bit of honor. Otherwise, I think you had best hop the next stage elsewhere.”

Sai snorted, but nodded his understanding. Taking his winnings, he chose to exit the saloon as well in favor of his room at the hotel across the dust covered street.

Naruto watched him go from the bench outside the saloon. He was pissed at only getting half his wage back but he wasn’t going to risk getting thrown in jail going after the other half. He wasn’t as dumb as some of the folks thought.

Pulling himself onto his horse, Kit, he winced at the throbbing in his ribs. He didn’t think they were broken but they sure hurt like hell. That fucking China man didn’t pull his punches. Slumped in the saddle, he kneed Kit into motion hoping his horse wouldn’t need too much guidance to find his way back to the ranch.

The heat from the sun didn’t help the aching in his head but he wished it had stayed sunny. Clouds formed quickly over the once clear sky, a sure sign that something was brewing in the heavens. At the first drop of rain, Naruto scowled into the darkening horizon. “Fuck You!”

Knowing full well God must have let the Devil have his way with him today; he took a moment to consider his options before the storm hit. They’d been having a lot of flash showers of heavy rain. They usually didn’t last longer than an hour or two but would be enough to make travel difficult. Grumbling, but knowing he was too far to make it back to town before the rains started, he took note of his location. There were several small caves and over hanging cliffs in the area. He and Kit could wait out the rain in one of those natural shelters until it eased enough for them to make it home.

“Come on, boy.” he grumbled, guiding the horse up a shallow incline and towards one of the larger shelters.

Pulling his rifle from his saddle, he cautiously hobbled Kit to the ground just under the shelter. The horse seemed particularly nervous, tossing its head and pulling at the secured reigns. Naruto clenched tightly at his rifle. If a wild bear or cougar had taken up residence in the cave, it could prove dangerous to be unprepared.

“Shhh, Kit. I’m right here.” Naruto whispered, rubbing the horse’s damp neck in a soothing stroke.

The wind picked up, whistling through the crags in the bit of mountainous area. Rain quickly followed, pounding hard on the over hang. Naruto glanced into the darkened part of the cave. He could hear movements that while could be explained by the wind rustling old leaves and dirt, did nothing to put him at ease.

He felt almost as if the devil was breathing down his collar. His eyes jumped back and forth as the shadows became larger and more ominous. His glove clad fingers clenched on the butt of the gun as he prepared to swing around, only to have a cold body slam him into the wall of the opening.

The gun dropped from his fingers as the breath left his lungs. Kit screamed, rearing back to tug even more futilely at the hobbled reigns. He felt the panting breath in his ear, in and out. There seemed almost desperation in it. For the first time in his life, he was truly terrified.
“You smell like him. I can taste the way your blood courses through your veins.” The voice purred, long slender fingers wrapped around his throat to squeeze ever so gently.

Naruto said nothing, his body beginning to quiver in fear. It was shameful to think of him shaking like a girl but he couldn’t move, fear held him petrified. “Please…”

“Please… I wonder if you are another ghost sent to taunt me. I stopped caring… not even Itachi knows where I am. Hmm… I wonder if you taste like him… are you real? If I squeeze hard enough… will you die?” The purred words washed over Naruto, teasing some hidden memory forever lost.

“I don’t have much money… but you can have it… please just let me and my horse go.” Naruto tried to keep his voice steady but was unable to stop the faint quivering in his tone.

“Did you know that I am cursed amongst my people? I long for what I can only be denied. What is a year or two in a life that extends for millennia? It is a moment’s breath. You haunt me. He haunts me.” He continued to whisper in Naruto’s ear.

Naruto’s heart pounded with each word. The utter despair tore at his soul in ways that none ever had. What this man must have gone through to be able to express such loneliness and despair made him ache.

When the lips trailed down his jaw, he could do no other than shiver beneath the touch. When they paused to suck at the skin above his pulse, he moaned. When the teeth, sharper than any beast he knew scraped along his skin, he gasped in anticipation. He could taste death on the wind and he embraced it.

“Naruto… mine…” Teeth buried in his neck, forcing a cry of pain from him.

The world seemed to blur. Pleasure and pain mixed in an intoxicating swirl of color and sound. The harsh sheeting of rain against the shelter. His emotions, painted before his eyes in swirls of red and black. Each inward draw upon his neck from his assaulter sent another wave of emotion through him.

“Sasuke.” He wasn’t sure where the name came from. It held hints of the exotic. His own name was exotic, named for some character in a book his mother had read while pregnant. This name, though, held a darkness tinged in blood.

The frame behind him stiffed before wrenching itself away. Naruto, lacking the brace of the other to hold him aloft, crumpled to the ground in weakness. His hand lifted to his neck, feeling the slight ooze of blood from the puncture wounds. Unable to run, he merely turned to look at the pitiful creature pressed against the wall.

“I know you…” he whispered, pulling his hand away to stare at the red staining his hands.

There was a whimper as an otherworldly pale hand was lifted to press to a shaking head. “Stop.”

Naruto could not stop. His mind buzzed with feelings and emotions he should not be experiencing.

“How do I know you?”

“A dream… A memory… They are the same to me.” The reply whispered across to weave around Naruto in a near caress.

“Are you sick?”
“I am…starving.”

Naruto frowned, blinking as the thin creature crept into the light. Blood dripped down pale lips, the skin seemed cracked and brittle. Shaggy black hair framed the pale face and sunken cheeks, seeming soft despite the unkempt manner of it.

“I have a bit of hard tack and jerky in my saddlebags.” Naruto rose to his feet, his energy restored. He’d thought he’d lost more blood than he had.

A dry chuckle erupted from the other. “Your food cannot nourish me. Only your blood sustains me. I choose to hide from the nightmares and still you find me. I ignore your call, and still you find me. I relinquish my hold on you…and…and…you…find…me.”

“How long have you been here?” Naruto gaped at the other as he crept closer.

“Long enough.” Sasuke hissed, his long fingers gripping Naruto’s shirt.

“I…I…” Naruto gaped as pushed his head aside followed by the swiping of a tongue over the deep puncture wounds. “Stop.”

Sasuke did not stop. His tongue continued to lap at the blood soaked neck, sending tiny flicks of arousal through Naruto. He’d never been molested by a man but damn if he wasn’t responding to it.

“Are you here to torment me…or sustain me?” he asked, drawing his tongue over the skin one final time before withdrawing.

Naruto’s hand lifted to his neck. The slow throbbing pain in his neck gone. Where before there had been small wounds, now was clean unblemished skin. What had happened? “How?”

“Hmm, there is a healing agent in our saliva. If we chose, we can leave no trace of our existence. But you know that, don’t you? You have it all locked away inside. You always know. Hn, still as obtuse as ever.” Sasuke closed his eyes, leaning against the cold stone.

Naruto watched in awe as his skin, brittle and pale grew supple before his eyes. The sickly pale vanished to be replaced by a cream colored tone. The thin, gaunt frame began to slowly flesh out with muscle. “Who are you?”

Eyes no longer crimson in hunger opened to reveal pure obsidian; the iris so dark, not even the pupil could be disguised. Surprising intelligence peered out at him from those depths; a strange change for the wild madness possessing them before. A delicate pink tongue darted from between soft appearing lips to flick at the remainder of blood drying there.

“You said my name, idiot.” growled the other, rising from the ground in a motion that could only be described as poetry in motion.

“You just looked familiar is all.” growled Naruto, stumbling to his feet as well.

“Hn.” Sasuke smirked, his eyes closing as he breathed in the fresh air, mingled with blood and Naruto.

“What are you?”

Sasuke’s eyes drifted open once more. “Yours.”
Naruto’s eyes widened as he stumbled against the wall, spotting his rifle. He grabbed the weapon, pointing the barrel at the other. Dark eyes rolled as he began shedding the dirty, torn clothing. A pale lean back was revealed, followed by a smooth perfect ass. Naruto immediately averted his eyes only to have them drawn to the pale perfection once more.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he yelled, trying hard not to watch the play of muscles across the revealed back.

Sasuke ignored him, pulling musty clothes from a leather bag hidden in a dark corner. He wrinkled his nose at the smell before sliding the material over his arms. Black trousers were then pulled over his hips, hiding the pale skin. Naruto didn’t know if he was happy or depressed at the stunning ass being hidden from view.

“I’m still hungry.”

Naruto nearly groaned. The statement wasn’t overly seductive nor was it violent. It was simply a statement made almost as if two friends were speaking. When had the atmosphere become so familiar? When had this…thing become a man? When had he stopped being afraid?

“May I?” Sasuke asked, the question in his eyes as well as his lips.

“What?” Naruto was confused.

Sasuke moved as stealthily as a cat. His face radiated calm while his eyes flashed with promises of pleasure far outweighing any release found between a whore’s thighs. Naruto’s breath caught as Sasuke took his hand, pulling the thick gloves from his fingers to reveal calloused work hands. His fingers soothed over the rough skin before rubbing the smooth skin of his wrist.

Naruto couldn’t fight the pull as his wrist was brought to the pink lips. He didn’t even bother to stop the moan from escaping. Those bottomless dark eyes continued to watch him as fleeting pain shot through his wrist. This time, there was no fear. There was only the mind numbing pleasure racing up and down his spine. He would have closed his eyes had it not been for the obsidian gaze keeping him locked.

“Sasuke…” At the murmur of the name, dark eyes closed. Naruto was left feeling only the pleasure of each pull of lips. He felt both euphoric and conflicted. It was as if he was waking from a dream he had no memory of. There was only Sasuke; only the blood flowing from him and into the other.

His eyes closed as the world imploded in heat. It wasn’t like an orgasm of the body. It was so much more. It wasn’t his cock that pulsed, but his entire soul. The last thing he remembered before oblivion took him was passion laced eyes staring directly into his soul.

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Sasuke’s hands cradled the sleeping head, fingers running through his hair. The darkness clouding him had lifted, upon the taste of his blood. He chuckled mirthlessly, wondering if it was fate’s intention that he be fully competent to watch Naruto’s life drift from him. He ran his fingers over the tan skin of his neck. He was darker than he remembered, probably a result of his life in the sun.

The pulse beneath his fingers throbbed in a steady beat. It would be so easy to kill him. The thought wafted through his mind. Death. Naruto was born to die. Sasuke was created to watch it. He chuckled at his logic.

“Naruto…how easy it would be for me to drain you dry…to snap your neck. I could save myself the pain by ending it now.” His finger ran along the scarred cheeks before once more burying in
the thick hair. Maybe later.

Naruto stirred beneath the touch, blue eyes blinking open to stare at the stone ceiling of the small cave. The smell of rain reached his nose. The storm had passed quickly, just as they always did. “Why is my head in your lap?”

“Would you rather I have left you on the ground?” Sasuke growled, dropping Naruto’s head from his lap and relishing in the grunt of pain as it hit the hard floor.

“Ouch!” moaned Naruto, rubbing his head. “Who are you?”

“You don’t remember?” Sasuke ran a finger over a crack in the wall of the cave.

“I remember coming here to get out of the rain. You were doing the same?” Naruto jumped to his feet. Kit was still shifting around in nervousness.

“I live here.” Sasuke murmured.

“Oh…well, I have a small cabin on my boss’s land. I can put you up for a few days. It’s the only Christian thing to do since you did put me up for a bit. You don’t seem like a bad person.” Naruto scratched his head, struggling to remember what had happened to make him pass out.

“Christian…it amuses me for you to use that term.” Sasuke smiled, turning to face the other. “I’ll take that offer.”

Naruto scratched his head again before nodding. He set about checking Kit before leading the horse from the shelter. Sasuke followed in suit. He could return here quickly if need be.

“We’ll have to ride double.” Naruto said, placing a foot into the stirrup and pulling himself onto Kit.

“Fine.” Sasuke said, wincing a bit as the sun glared off a buckle into his eyes.

Kit fought the bit for moment before Naruto’s hands forced him into the pace he wanted. The slow trot seemed to satisfy the horse, though he seemed more skittish than normal. Sasuke knew why. He was still very weak from his confinement in the cave. Even Naruto’s amazing blood seemed only able to restore him at a slow pace. His hunger continued to beat at him. He knew it wasn’t so much hunger as the need to devour.

“We’re almost there.” Naruto kneed Kit into a light gallop, ready to be home. The sun was setting and he didn’t want to risk Kit’s health by riding him at night.

Sasuke appraised the small cabin as he dismounted, followed by Naruto. Naruto began brushing down Kit as Sasuke took in his new surroundings. It was almost ironic that he could have been so close to Naruto and still allowed himself to be dragged into the darkness. It was only a blessing he hadn’t killed anyone in his maddened state.

Naruto’s blood…it forced him into sanity…it forced him to understand his surroundings. He wanted to drain it all…no! He needed Naruto…he wanted him alive. He wanted his smile. His blood was just an added bonus.

The dark creeping sensation wormed its way through his heart. It wanted Naruto’s blood. It would have Naruto’s blood. It was as if he was torn in two. Two parts of his soul vying for control. The darker part wanted to kill, while the lighter part wanted to caress.
He moved towards the cabin, pausing in the doorway, fully aware when Naruto came to stand
behind him. “I can fix up some dinner. I usually eat with the other hands but since you are here…”

“You’ve already fed me.” Sasuke stated calmly.

“I did?”

“Yes. But I’m sure you are hungry. Go eat at the main house if you like. I can find something to do
keep myself busy.” Sasuke offered Naruto a lantern, watching as he pulled out some matches.

“Well…if you get hungry…there’s some jerky in my saddle bags. I won’t be long.” Naruto blinked
a few times as if trying to grab the memory just on the edge of his consciousness.

Sasuke watched as he disappeared towards the lights of the main house. He could smell the change
in the air. Something was coming on the wind, and fast. His body thrummed with both excitement
and dread. He would lose Naruto soon. It was always the same. He was brought into the light only
to be eclipsed in the shadows it created inside him.

“Hey, Sasuke. I’m back. I brought you a couple of biscuits and some meat.” Sasuke blinked,
turning to Naruto. Hadn’t he just left?

“Hey, why didn’t you like a lamp? Or the stove? You didn’t have to remain in the dark.” Naruto
set about lighting the stove and a few oil lamps.

“Welcome back.” Sasuke brought a shaking hand to his head. He’d lost time. Had he gotten so lost
in his mind, time had passed unnoticed?

“You hungry?” asked Naruto, smiling.

Yes. Sasuke closed his eyes at the whispered voice in his head. He was always hungry. Nothing but
Naruto satisfied him any longer. The taste turned to ash in his mouth, nourishing his body but not
his hunger. Only Naruto. He both satisfied and intensified the hunger.

“No.”

“Well, I’ll put it here on the table in case you want it later.” Naruto set it on the table, stoking up
the wood burning stove.

“Will you remember me next time? Or will you forget again?” Sasuke asked, his hand lifted to
settle around Naruto’s neck.

Naruto blinked a few times in confusion. “What?”

“Nothing.”

Naruto frowned, settling before the warmth of the fire. “I don’t know anything about you other
than your name is Sasuke.”

“Maybe you do, you just don’t want to remember it.” Sasuke smiled, stroking the wooden arms of
the chair.

“I think I would have remembered you. You kinda look like a China man, like that asshole Sai. If I
see him again…” Naruto fumed at the memory.

“I’m from Japan originally, though, my family now resides in this country…amongst others. May I
ask you something, Naruto?” Sasuke edged closer, his fingers clenching on the armrests.
“Sure…” Naruto answered cautiously.

“Are you happy for your freedom? Was the sacrifices of those before you enough to make you happy in the country you live?” Sasuke’s eyes darkened as the memory of blood soaked earth followed by dark madness rushed through his mind. Were his own sacrifices worth it in the end?

“Huh? Yeah, I suppose. I never really thought about it.” Naruto ran a hand through his hair, having trouble following the conversation.

“Hn.”

“What’s that mean?” Naruto reached out a hand, only to have it slapped away.

“Don’t touch me. I can’t control it when you touch me.” Sasuke hissed low, his fangs throbbing in his mouth.

“Hey, are you alright?” Naruto reached for him again only to find himself flat on the floor, Sasuke’s body pinning him to the ground.

“I want to taste you again, before you are taken from me. I want to be filled with you essence. I want you to sustain me because soon I will join you in the darkness. Soon I won’t allow you to return to this world because I will keep your soul with me.” Sasuke whispered in his ear.

“Let me up!” Naruto struggled futilely against Sasuke.

“Will you sustain me?” Sasuke purred into his ear.

“Yes, just let me up.” Naruto was struggling in earnest now.

“Shhh. I’ll only take a little.” Sasuke slid his cool hand beneath the loosened shirt, splaying it across Naruto’s abdomen. He felt the tiny muscle jerks wherever he touched. His mind was a swirling vortex, madness and sanity warred with each other in a never ending battle for supremacy.

Naruto’s breath caught in his lungs. “What are you doing?”

Sasuke didn’t answer, his eyes locked with Naruto’s as he pushed the flannel up to reveal a tone abdomen and firm chest. His nails scraped downward, stopping at the edge of his pants before working their way back up. “Naruto…you destroy my control.”

His hand released Naruto’s wrist, joining its partner beneath the shirt. His eyes lowered to watch as Naruto’s lips parted. He wasn’t fighting now, merely lying calmly under the touches. “Stop…”

“No. “ Sasuke stroked Naruto’s face before unbuttoning the shirt. The edges fell away to reveal deeply tanned skin. He smirked. Naruto was never quite the same. In the beginning his muscles were large from working his father’s forge. His skin was pale as he suffered through consumption. His body slender as he tended the wounds of the dying during the war. His eyes, however, stayed the same. The same rich blue reminding him of the ocean surrounding the land of his birth.

He kissed the corner of Naruto’s mouth before lowering his lips to the hard chest. The flavor of sweat coated his tongue as he swiped it across the unblemished skin. A wave of chill bumps rose on the chest before him, making him chuckle before nipping at the skin. “Mine.”

He plunged his teeth into the flesh violently, letting Naruto feel the pain and the pleasure. This Naruto, he would want the pain. He would relish in the contradiction between the two. He was hard, tanned from the sun. He was not someone who would want to be treated gently as a woman.
As the blood coated his tongue, pouring down his throat, he felt relief from the creeping madness. His thirst was satiated by the thick liquid. He was free from the madness that haunted every moment of his life, staved only by the presence of Naruto.

Naruto screamed out, his hips nearly tossing Sasuke as his fingers reached up to plow through the other’s hair. Sasuke understood the need in it. He knew it well for he felt the same pulse. Blood sharing could be an extremely erotic experience. The drinker was overwhelmed by the emotions of their prey. The prey, their desires and lusts were played through their mind, sending them into a euphoric state.

Tossing back his head, Sasuke moaned along with Naruto. Blood trickled down his arched neck as his body shuddered with the feeling of completion. He liked the added earthy taste of this incarnation. It reminded him so much of his original. The taste of nature, not overpowered by sickness and war, it was ambrosia.

Lowering his lips once more, he lapped at the skin with his healing tongue. He felt the hardness in Naruto’s pants. It matched his own. As much as he wanted it, he would not take him. He would not break the vow he made to himself. He would not allow the body to rule him. He would only be satisfied with his soul, locked away carefully.

He drifted for several minutes, contentment flowing through him. Things felt different. The sense of the end was more potent but it still felt far away. He could feel the pull of fate on his soul, driving him towards a path he wasn’t sure he wanted to see.

Closing his eyes, he listened to the thrumming beat of Naruto’s heart. He listened, and prayed for some relief from the torment that seemed to be coming to a head. “Naruto.”

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Naruto jerked awake at the crow of the cock. He sat up, finding himself in bed. He ripped off his night shirt to reveal nothing but flawless skin. A dream? A nightmare? An erotic fantasy? The cool body pressed against his was fully clothed as well.

“Sasuke…I need to go pick up some things in town for the boss. I’ll bring you some clothes, your’s look like shit.” Naruto said, feeling like a husband running errands for his wife. A mumbled reply was given though Naruto had the feeling the other never awoke.

He saddled up Kit and began the hour long ride into town. The sun was beginning to heat the dusty streets as he tied off the reigns in front of the general store. “Hello, Jeremiah.”

“Oh, good morning Naruto. Here to pick up Mr. Sean’s order?” Jeremiah’s eyes smiled over his glasses as he began to sort through several packages behind the counter.

“Yeah, if I had known he had a package waiting, I’d have taken it with me when I was in town yesterday.” grinned Naruto sheepishly.

“Well here it is.” The shopkeeper opened the box to reveal a beautiful doll. Her dress was blue, made of the finest satin; her hair styled in perfect ringlets. “He came in a few weeks ago. Wanted to order it for his daughter’s birthday. I was beginning to think it wouldn’t come in time.”

“Just in time. Her part is on Saturday.” Naruto chuckled as he accepted the box. “Take care.”

Naruto secured the box in his saddlebags and pulled onto the horse. Maybe if he was lucky, there would be some left over breakfast. Kit trotted along, seeming a bit nervous but no more than usual. The bay was a bit skittish but was probably the best ride he’d ever had. He just needed a firm hand
to tame his wilder instincts.

A gunshot sounded. Kit reared, tossing the now limp body of his master to the ground and racing towards the ranch.

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Sasuke’s eyes shot open. Black faded to red. Destiny had found him once more but this time, he would return the favor. There might not be war to hide the feeding but in this untamed land, there were ways.

“I’ll avenge you once more, Naruto. This time, I’ll be in perfect control.”

Sasuke slid from the bed. His white shirt billowed around him as he tucked in the waist, calmly adjusting his appearance as if he was going to town. He knew where to go. There was no rush.

He paused by the bed, rubbing a hand over the now cold sheets. He would miss what never was with this Naruto. It was a shame. This one was his equal much as he had originally been.

His reflection shone in the mirror, giving him pause. There would be no hiding his eyes. The madness would come soon but his control was absolute. Now wasn’t the time to slaughter the world. He would save that for later.

The sun began setting in west. His ears could still hear the panic ensuing at the main house as the boss and a few of the hands went in search of Naruto when his horse wandered up riderless. He knew what they would find. There was no point in hope. He’d felt him die.

As soon as the sun set, his power reached his zenith. The moonless night gave him pause to smirk. It seemed even God was turning a blind eye tonight. Fitting. Breathing in, he located his prey before fading into the night.

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Sai’s eyes darted around the campsite. He’d known he couldn’t stay in town after he’d shot the blond. His honor demanded he avenge the shame brought to him by the blond hothead. He’d seen the look of disgust in the eyes of the town’s folk. He hated these small towns but they made it easier for him to rile.

Naruto had been especially easy to drag into a rage. He grabbed a stick, stoking the fire before pulling his blanket around him. He’d reach Bovard in two days. From there he could decide his next destination.

“Konbanwa, Sai-san.”

Sai jerked his eyes to the shadows. “Who’s there?”

“It has been a while since I used the language of my birth. My brother would be ashamed of me.” Red eyes came into view as a slender man of obvious Asian decent stepped from the shadows. Sai knew immediately, this man was no human. He’d never believed the tales of spirits and demons his grandmother spoke of. Now, he wished he’d listened more.

“I’m going to kill you now, Sai-san. You took something very precious to me. You took away a piece of my soul. I’m going to take the payment for it in you blood.” Sasuke grinned, showing lengthened incisors.
Sai was on his feet a moment later, his revolver drawn. “Stay away.”

“No, what do you think you can do with a western weapon?” Sasuke smirked before vanishing from Sai’s sight only to appear behind him. “You forgot where you came from. You forgot the things that linger in the shadows. Let me remind you.”

Sai’s screams echoed through the plains. Coyotes howled in accompaniment to the screams and pleas for mercy. They merely waited their turn with the human. They knew a meal would be left for their delight; it was only a matter of time.

Sasuke dropped the drained body. He doused the campfire and freed the terrified horse. Sai’s blood wormed through him, leaving an almost disgusting feeling. He was tempted to vomit it from his body. Compared to Naruto, Sai was nothing but ash.

He didn’t need a mirror to know his eyes retained their red glow. He would no longer be able to blend in with society as easily. He would be forced to remain in the shadows. It suited him fine. His kind was born from the shadows.

“I’ll be waiting for you, Naruto. Your blood is mine. I won’t resist the call any longer.”

~*~

October 2, 2009

Naruto jerked awake. He swallowed the lump in his throat. Itachi was on one of his long trips and would return home within a day or so. It left him alone in the large house. He wasn’t sure what awakened him but he couldn’t stop the chill of foreboding creeping up his spine.

He rubbed his face before grabbing his baseball bat from the corner. Slowly opening his door, he crept down the hall, searching the house. Even a state of the art burglary system could be broken if the criminals were really intent.

As he reached the kitchen, he felt that strange pull. He’d felt it off and on his entire life. It was as if something was waiting for him, calling him. His eyes jumped to the forbidden door. Itachi was anal about the basement. Naruto once asked him about bodies hidden in the basement. He’d expected a laugh. What he got was an angry glare along with a warning to never go down there.

Unlike before, this pull was strong. It was almost as if he wasn’t in control of his own body. Something in the basement was calling him. And he wanted to go to it with ever ounce of his being. Opening the door, he disappeared down the darkened stairs.
October 2, 2009

“Breathe.” Naruto closed his eyes; a mixed feeling of dread and excitement coursed through him. Feelings of lightheadedness spiraled through him as if his blood was being denied the needed oxygen to survive. The heaviness in the air pressed down upon him with a nearly physical weight. Though something pushed to keep him away, he was unable to deny the pull towards something he had no words to describe.

The wood below his feet creaked loudly as he worked his way down the ramshackle stairway leading into the basement. The pull was strong. It reminded him of the sensation one felt when riding a roller coaster. Something was pulling his insides towards an unknown destination, leaving him breathless—tumbling through the dark into the unknown.

His hands fumbled for the light; yanking the cord. The single bulb flickered to life, the dust on the filament crackled loudly as illumination was spread across the basement. Dust coated boxed lined the enclosed room, their contents carefully packed away—unused and forgotten.

Naruto swallowed at the lump developing in his throat. There was a thickness in the air, similarly found in long abandoned tombs. It was more than just dust and age. A heavy feeling encompassed the very molecules of air—almost in warning. A sneeze built in his nose as the long untouched dust particles rose to tickle along his nasal passageways and throat. Rubbing at his nose, he fought desperately to prevent the expulsion. His attempts were unsuccessful as his body doubled over—expelling the foreign material from his nose and throat in a series of violent sneezes.

Wiping the escaped saliva from his mouth, his eyes locked on the one uncovered wall. Small scratches marred the hard stone, as if someone attempted to claw their way through the brick. “What the fuck?”

His hands ran along the blood tinged scratches, looking for what the person was trying to do. There were better ways to escape a dark cellar than through a solid brick wall. To be desperate enough to tear apart their fingers in an attempt to scratch through a solid wall, he didn’t want to even consider the reasons for such madness. Itachi wouldn’t hurt anyone—he would never lock someone away in this basement.

A flash of pain rocketed through his brain, sending him crashing to the grown, rolling on the dirt covered floor. Small clouds of dust engulfed him, in no way comparable to the wave of pain rolling through his mind as long suppressed memories surfaced. He could taste the desperation on his tongue as his fingers clawed. He didn’t know why. All he knew was intense need. He was pure instinct. His body moved as if controlled by something far more instinctual. There was no rhyme or reason behind his motions—only need.

He moved, lost in the memory. His fingers began to scratch desperately at the stone. Something was here. He needed it. He lived for the connection it could provide. It was an intricate part of him, lost through space and time. No one would keep him from it. Were these his memories? Was the complete obsession his or another’s?

Sweat beaded on his brow, running in rivulets down his cheeks to splash in the stirred dust. His fingers bled, blood dripping from the digits to smear along the already stained stone. “Please.”

He needed to get through. It had to let him through. He would scrape his hands to the very bone in
desperation. It was uncontrollable. They kept them apart. Who and why, he did not know. He only
knew the desperation driving him. It came from his very core--pulled him deeper and deeper in the
darkened madness. He was lost in its drive; a slave to the madness.

A wave of power pushed through his core, slinging him away from the wall and into a stack of
dust covered boxes. The dull ache from his fingers in no way drew attention away from the
desperation to tear down the wall keeping him out. Out of what? The rational part of his mind
continued to question the actions his body took. The two parts continued to war with each other--
each fighting for dominance over the other.

Struggling to his feet, he pushed aside the dizziness. The air was practically ripe with electricity.
The single light bulb flickered wildly before shattering, sending tiny shards of glass to the dirt floor
below. Darkness engulfed everything before the room seemed to give an almost shudder. A door
now stood where once only brick was.

Silence reigned as he stepped towards the simple wooden door, glass crunching beneath his feet.
The repelling force was gone, leaving only the desperate compulsion to pass through. His hand
shook as he gripped the iron knob. It wasn’t fear. Excitement? What was behind the door to be
excited about?

The hinges creaked loudly as he pushed through. The near pitch of the room prevented his eyes
from focusing on anything. His hand patted along the wall in search of a switch. His very breath
stilling in his throat as a low rumbled escaped from within.

“Hello?” His voice, barely a whisper, cracked as his eyes desperately attempted to adjust to the
darkness. The room possessed no windows, not that it would have mattered. The lateness of the
hour didn’t help his search, the only light being that shining down the stairs from the kitchen.

The small touch of light caught on something. Gleaming red eyes stared into his very soul, forcing
memories that were not memories to the surface. Pain engulfed his head once more as nightmares
best forgotten bubbled to the surface. They were nightmares haunting his dreams. No…not
true nightmares haunted by monsters. These were shards of lives, connected in an unbreakable
chain of fate. No matter how much he fought, the dark eyed man of his dreams was left desolate
and alone with his growing insanity.

Stumbling backward, he gasped as a weight pressed heavily on his body. His body collapsed to the
floor under the weight, glass shards of the broken bulb cutting through the thin tee-shirt into the
skin of his back. An animal? No. Fingers pressed to his throat, stroking the skin above his pulse. It
had to feel the hammering of his heart through the skin. Was this his end, as violent and short lived
as his dreams foretold?

“Do you seek to torment me?” The dry crackled words sounded thickly in his ear, causing his
breath to rush forcibly from his lungs.

“I…” Why couldn’t he speak? Yell? Scream? He could feel the heated breath along his jaw, the
lapping of a tongue along the faintly stubbly skin as teeth nibbled down the neck.

“You smell different.” The words did little to ease the mixture of fear and excitement rushing
through him. His neck arched of its own accord, bearing itself for the sinful lips. He wanted to be
devoured by the lips and tongue running along his throat. If he died tonight, it would be with a
pleasure more powerful than any he’d experienced. The compulsion he felt to give every part of his
being to this creature outweighed any thought of escaping. He wanted to live and to die. He wanted
something his mind struggled to wrap its arms around. The weight of the darkness thickened as his
hands lifted to embrace the creature at his neck.
The first scrape of teeth along his neck brought shivers of pleasure through him. A tongue replaced the teeth, lapping at the beads of blood brought to the surface. Each brush of the tongue sent pleasure through him, mingling reality with the high flowing through him. The creature above shuddered, fingers dug into the flesh of his arms as lips suckled hungrily at his throat.

The cry of pain released from previously frozen vocal cords couldn’t be stopped as teeth buried themselves in his throat. His body jerked wildly for a moment before stilling as pleasure rippled through him, ten times the previous sensation. This was perfection. This was what he’d been waiting for. This was the completion his mind had longed for his entire life. His hands lifted to clench at the creature’s--no, man’s waist; his mind going white as everything faded away leaving just the two of them. This was a meeting of significance to his very existence.

**January 17, 1933**

San Francisco, California

The darkened bar--hidden deep within the slums--provided the perfect atmosphere for dealings of the less than legal. Since the crash of the stock market in 1929, many people sought to ease their troubled minds with illegal imbibing of alcohol. If one knew where to look, a person could purchase a bottle of secretly brewed liquor for mere change. Of course, in the depth of the depression engulfing the world, money was a desperately desired commodity. One could eat for days on a dollar. While children starved on the streets, men such as the owner of this secret establishment made their profit off of the money of the desolate parents. What better way to survive this horror than to lose oneself in the siren’s call of alcoholic oblivion.

The black eyed man hidden in the darkest corner was not one you approached casually. Every night he sat, dark eyes gleaming with predatory menace. The owner of the bar--too afraid of retribution from him--pushed aside the desire to expel him from the shady establishment. It was saying something when the owner of such a dark and dangerous place took caution concerning an individual.

Even should he move on, people always found him. Those desperate enough always found him. Some nights he would spend the evenings staring at the customers with barely concealed distaste while other nights would be spent in the company of various individuals with whom he had business.

“They say you’ll kill people.” The tremor filled voice broke through the clank of glasses.

“So they say.” Sasuke smirked, his keen eyes taking in every small nuisance of the woman before him as she slid into the chair opposite his own. It wasn’t rare at all for a woman to seek his assistance. Some wanted freedom from abusive husbands. Some wanted revenge for past grievances. Some coveted their neighbor’s possessions.

“I want you to kill someone.” Her entire body was shaking as she reached for the glass of amber liquid his pale hands pushed her way.

“Why?” Despite her tremors, he could taste the determination in her. It was rare for someone so frightened to show such determination when faced with him. If he didn’t take the job, he was sure she would look elsewhere. Her lined face told him of her plight. What she wanted, he would gladly give.

“He…he killed my baby. T-They didn’t do anything. I don’t have a lot of money…” He had to snort at her statement. No one had money these days but criminals and bootleggers. Even the politicians in Washington were suffering the strain of the depression. Money was irrelevant. He
considered what he did a service.

“It’s irrelevant. Tell me what he did. I’ll know if you lie.” Sasuke grabbed her calloused hand, feeling the life pulsing through her. Her suffering was great. Perhaps he should simply end it for her now. Her anger at her daughter’s murder was the only thing keeping her on this earth.

“That…monster. He killed her. I saw him watching her. Calculating eyes. Then she was gone. The police…they ignored me. They told me a missing girl wasn’t high on their list of priorities. She was only fifteen. I know it was him. I can see it in the way he looks at me. He knows I know and he knows there is nothing I can do about it. But you can. I’ve heard rumors of the dark man who sits in the shadows.” Sasuke chuckled darkly as she finished her tale. She didn’t know a monster. She was currently speaking with one.

“His name?” Sasuke sat back, releasing her hand which she drew to her chest. She understood now. To kill a monster, she must employ someone just as monstrous.

“Kabuto Yakushi. He lives at 59 Devon Street. Please…please…” The desperation in her voice struck a cord within the lost parts of his soul. He knew such desperation. It haunted him every day. Every blond walking down the street brought him back to what he’d lost. Each lifetime, he wondered if it would be the last. Would Naruto stop coming to him. His own obsession made tracking him difficult.

He knew he was alive…and young—probably no older than eight or nine. He was having trouble targeting him…though it was a mute point. Fate was a strange creature. It forced them together in ways that were baffling and mysterious. It was only a matter of time before he bore witness to another death. For the last two hundred years, his sanity hung by a thread so thin.

“You wish for his death? Are you prepared to pay the cost to your own soul?” His words seemed to shock her out of her fear.

“What do you mean?” Her dry pasty skin seemed to lose the faint bit of blush remaining.

“I am a tool. It is you who bears the brunt of his death. If you wish his death, it is you who pulls the strings.” Sasuke smirked to himself as she wavered in her conviction. They always wavered. For a moment, his words appealed to their inner morality. They may wish the death of a vile individual. The world might be better off with out him. The question swirling around in their heads was a simple one. Was it their place to remove him from existence? If God and country deemed him suitable to remain on this earth, was it truly her place to take him from it?

“You seek to absolve yourself?” she asked, her pale blue eyes wide.

“No. My punishment is never ending. Do you wish his death on your conscious? That is the question at hand.” He watched with pleasure as her resolve increased.

“I want Kabuto Yakushi dead.” Her eyes burned with resolve.

“Fine. My payment is a favor.” He removed a medallion from his pocket. The metal was infused with his blood, allowing him to track it. “If anyone comes to your door bearing this symbol, you or your family is to welcome them. This payment doesn’t end with your life. Your debt is taken on by your children upon you death and your children’s children. The debt is paid when the medallion is taken from you. Do you understand?”

She nodded, accepting the small medal. “Make sure you family knows your debts upon your death should the debt not be collected.”
“I will.” Her whisper was barely audible.

“He’ll be dead before morning.” Sasuke stood, exiting the small bar with nary a sound. The massive exhale of both patrons and owners would have been amusing had he not business with a certain Kabuto Yakushi. Tonight he felt the burn of the bloodlust. This man’s death would likely have a brutal air to it. It was unavoidable. Blood was only bearable when it was taken from victims who fought him.

Since the day he’d killed Sai, news of his killer for hire business had spread. It was lucrative in more ways than one. Money was never an issue but a favor owed was a very lucrative commodity. He’d only collected a few. He wondered, what would Itachi say? He hadn’t seen his brother in twenty years. Of course, he would disapprove. Sasuke was a powder keg of dangerous proportions. Should his sanity be lost, he had no doubt he would be felled beneath his brother’s claws. I was all the more reason to keep his unsavory business unnoticed by the council. Already he felt their breath across the nape of his neck.

Ducking into an alley, he crouched before launching himself to the rooftops. His muscles bunched and lengthened, taking him over the rain damp buildings towards the more residential areas. He knew the area the woman spoke of. It was practically a slum. The houses were ramshackle, falling apart around the owners’ heads.

As he neared his destination, he noticed the pitiful shape of the buildings. They were bunched together almost as if seeking warmth from each other. It was obvious why the police avoided offering much assistance at the girl’s disappearance. In this part of town, the world ignored your existence.

The damp air flushed through his lungs as he paused to breathe in the crisp scent. Unlike most cities, this one retained a bit of the natural tone slowly fading from the land as the population steadily increased. As he breathed in the night, he caught a hint of blood in the air. The fresh coppery scent drew him, his eyes flaring red. It took all his strength to keep some aspects of normality in the presence of humans. It would not do to be hunted down as the monster he was.

Crouching, he honed his sharp senses on the trail. It was human. Perhaps the woman’s contract was just. The blood hung heavy in the air as he dropped behind his destination. A dull light rose from the built-in cellar. The metallic scent of blood settled on his tongue as he crept towards the wooden doors blocking the entrance.

He could smell the excitement rolling from his prey. It was sexual in nature, sending waves of disgust through him. He pushed back the repulsion, opening the doors silently. The other appeared too involved in his endeavors to notice the presence of another.

The room was practically a slaughter house. Hooks, saws, and knives hung from the blood splattered walls. The orange glow of the traditional oil lamps provided a macabre view of the actions of his prey and they disgusted him. It was hard to believe there was anything in this world to revolt a monster such as him.

Before him was his prey. He was not alone though Sasuke wished it was so. He wasn’t afraid of being caught as Mr. Yakushi was completely enamored with his rutting upon the corpse on which he lay. His naked body thrust back and forth, blood and fluids coating his body as the cold corpse beneath him flailed limply with each inward thrust. Only once in his existence had he ever seen anything such as what he witnessed now.

His eyes darkened to the color of blood as he watched the show presented before him. Sweat mixed with the odor of blood. The grunts coming from the man before him showed him lost in his own
world.

The death of this man more than deserved. The corpse beneath him--its gender lost in the defilement--deserved better in its death than to be the rutting puppet for its murder’s lust. The squelching of skin against blood and fluid provided an audio accompaniment to the visual stimuli he was provided as he watched the actions of the man. Leaning against the frame of the door, he continued to watch as the man dug his fingers into the blood knotted hair of the corpse, his hips jerking wildly before the salty odor of semen joined that of sweat and blood. Breath panted in and out in rapid succession as a blood smeared brow dropped to bury itself in the neck of the defiled corpse. Disgusting.

Dispassionately, he watched and waited for his presence to be noticed. In fact, it added anticipation. He wondered just how long the other would be lost in his pleasure. He could hear the heartbeat slowing as he came down from an orgasmic high.

Sasuke smirked darkly as dark eyes met his own crimson orbs. Pale skin lost even more color as he stepped from the shadows. “Your proclivities veer very far from the norm, Mr. Yakushi.”

Of course, the man didn’t stop to converse. His very life was at stake with his darkest secret revealed to an outsider. His mind did not process the red eyes or pale skin. Sasuke could only shake his head in annoyance. As if this insect of a person could even stand a chance of killing him. Even in his slightly blood hungry state, the other stood no chance against him.

Perhaps the man realized this, choosing to fight all the harder for survival. It was beneficial to both. Sasuke received the benefit of heady blood while his prey would be able to die knowing he fought back with every bit of strength. Was it fair? No. No human could overwhelm him in a face to face fight.

A knife flashed in the dim light provided by the oil lanterns. The man was fast. The blade nicked his skin as he moved away from the slice. It appeared desperation gave Yakushi speed.

His hands shot out, throwing the man against the wall. His skull cracked as he landed, a sickening thud sounded through the room. In his dazed state, Sasuke drew him to his feet. The stench of sex on his skin was nearly revolting enough to forgo the meal in favor of the snapping of his neck. If he had not abstained from feeding for several days, he would have taken that option. As things stood, he needed the blood before he went feral. He’d learned the hard way when it came to feeding.

He didn’t bother offering final words to the monster he held in his grip. Such creatures were below even his accord. These drains on society deserved their fate. That thought was his final before burying his teeth deep in the blood smeared neck.

Warmth filled his mouth. The blood, tinged with the adrenaline of the fight, poured into him. It was a less than satisfying meal. It was becoming more and more difficult to find any sort of satisfaction with the meals he took from his victims.

Each pulse of the other’s heart pumped fresh blood down his throat in rapid succession. His lips increased the suction, pulling it deeper. The faster he finished his work, the faster he could leave this little slice of hell. So lost in his feeding, he did not realize the danger of one such as Kabuto Yakushi.

The danger with feeding to kill came from the victim. While feeding, a night walker was vulnerable. Their mind focused completely on the kill and nothing else. It pulled them into a haze of inescapable pleasure. Even Sasuke, who took no pleasure from feeding, was drawn into this
haze. He did not realize the maniacal workings of this prey until the blade was plowed deeply into his side, nearly gutting him.

The influx of pain broke him from the feeding haze. Crying out, he jerked back to see the smirking face of his prey. Kabuto Yakushi’s last sight was Sasuke anger filled gaze before his neck was snapped with the ease of a twig. The other fell limply to the ground, his body jerking with the death spasms.

Sasuke spat to the ground, his hand palming the large slice in his abdomen. It hurt. The wound went deep. The prey had been quite cunning. One had to assume he’d thought to escape after wounding his attacker. Smart and foolish at the same time.

Leaving the cellar open, he stumbled onto the muddy ground. He needed to take care of his wound. He was bleeding a little more than he was comfortable with. His lack of feeding lately was working against him as he stumbled into the city. Few people walked the streets this late and those who did mistook his stumbling gate for that of a drunken man. He was ignored, which both helped and hindered him.

He could feel his body knitting itself together. The pain of rapidly healing flesh forced him to stop every few steps in order to keep from collapsing. He would not make it to his home before dawn.

Since the beginning of the economic depression, warehouses once filled to the brim with surplus goods stood empty along the shore. He chose one of the more rundown as a place to hide. With the amount of blood he’d lost, the sun would surely burn deeply. Only those who fed healthily could venture into the light.

Fighting to remain standing, he shouldered open the door. The rusty smell of disuse flooded his nose as he stumbled against some metal scrap. He collapsed to the cold concrete beneath him. He had no energy to go further. His body continued its duty, knitting his wounds. The thirst was nearly unbearable by the time the sun broke the horizon.

His body was forced into the deep realm of unconsciousness. It was neither restful nor healing. It was merely a state of being. His mind wasn’t aware of his surroundings; a dangerous state for his kind. Should an individual wish it, he could be destroyed in such a state. Death perhaps would be welcomed with open arms.

Despite his unconscious state, his mind wandered. Time meant nothing as he floated on an ocean of both pain and ease. In this state, he felt the pulsing beat of Naruto but was unable to do anything save listen as it faded in and out—so close he could touch it. The torture was keen as a heartbeat pulsed in his ears, blood dosing his senses.

“Is he dead?”

“No…I saw a dead man once. He didn’t look like he was sleeping. His eyes were open and his tongue swollen in his mouth. It was disgusting.”

“Should we call the police?”

“Let’s search his pockets first. He’s got good clothes. He might have some coins.”

“Is that…blood?”

Sasuke’s eyes snapped open, his hand latching onto the hand of one of the boys. Both screamed. The first—a rather chubby brunet—ran top sped towards the open doorway from the warehouse.
Lifting his eyes, he stared deeply into the sky blue he dreamed of so often. Naruto was here. Fate had sent him to him. Why so young? What was his fate that they met with him merely a child?

“Let me go!” He began to struggle in earnest, his initial surprise giving way to fear and desperation.

“I won’t hurt you.” His voice was raspy from dehydration. The blood loss must have been significant to pull him into this state.

The boy’s struggles eased as he looked over Sasuke. “What’s your name?” He knew of course. It was always Naruto. Strange though it might be, the name Naruto was the one significant constant in their meetings.

“Naruto.”

“Why are you here, Naruto?” Sasuke released the wrist; the pulsing beat beneath his fingers was too tempting a feel.

“We were looking for a place to sleep. All the other good places were taken.” Naruto plopped on a few feet away, his shaggy blond hair hiding his eyes.

“Homeless?”

“Yeah. Me and Chouji have been living on the streets since we left the orphanage. They were going to send us to the place where all the kids go once they turn eight.” He stretched his arms over his head. Sasuke took this time to observe him. His clothes were several sizes too big except his shoes which were too small. Food was probably in short supply. Dirt and mud caked his body, leaving small smudges on his cheeks and nose.

The sun had long since dipped below the horizon, giving him a sliver of energy. Sasuke rose slightly before collapsing. His body was still healing. It would be another day at least before he would be healed enough to feed.

“Hey mister…what’s your name? Are you rich? Me and Chouji could work for you, running errands…sweeping your floor. You got nice clothes…well when they’re not bloody. What do you say?” Naruto mouth was running a mile a minute as he began rattling off things he could do for Sasuke. The other could do no other than chuckle at it. This was the first time he’d met Naruto so young. It was strange. He knew who he was. He knew who he would become and yet to not be attracted to him was an interesting experience.

“My name is Sasuke.” Sasuke closed his eyes, tired of looking into the earnest eyes. He was tired of Naruto’s innocence. It nearly burned him to be in his presence after the becoming monster he was today. He wasn’t even sure what he felt anymore. It had been so long since he’d felt little more than the despair. What did he feel? It felt foreign. Love…such a pitiful word to describe his relationship with Naruto. No. He did not love him. Naruto was his obsession. He both ran from and to him—he knew he always would. He could not exist in this world without him and it was torturous to be with him.

“Sasuke…you have a strange name like mine.” Naruto sat watching him, his clever little eyes looking for weakness.

“It’s Japanese. Your name means something like maelstrom.” Sasuke rested his head against the metal wall of the building, attempting desperately to ignore the flush of blood moving through the veins of the boy.
“What’s a mail whatever?” Naruto frowned, testing out the word.

A small chuckle escaped. “It’s a type of violent whirlpool.”

“Oh…what about your name?” Naruto inched closer, watching him with more and more interest.

“My name has no special meaning. It can mean help but I doubt my parents were looking for help when they named me.” Sasuke winced, moving in an attempt to ease the ache in his abdomen. His healing had slowed down considerably as his blood ran low. He could only hope he was not feral by the next sunset.

“Are you hurt? I mean, we saw the blood but that’s a lot of blood for one person so I figured it wasn’t yours.” Naruto wrinkled his little nose at the crusted blood decorating the other’s dark clothes. Even with dark clothing, the blood could clearly be differentiated on the cotton.

“I’ll be fine by tomorrow night.” Sasuke pressed his hand to the wound. The skin had barely knitted together, at risk for ripping open at the slightest stressing.

“I can bring you food tomorrow…and maybe some stuff to bandage it.” Naruto offered. It was probably saying a lot, offering food. For a child living on the streets, food was one of the greatest needs. Many starved to death in their first few months.

“I just need to rest. Don’t come here any more. Stay away.” Sasuke closed his eyes as consciousness faded in and out. He heard the soft breathing of Naruto. He heard the whispered questions directed at him of which he was unable to answer. He heard him leave as dawn broke the horizon. It was all relative. His body refused to allow him to move in his stasis state. It required rest and energy to heal. His body was literally eating itself to heal enough for him to feed.

His mind began to fade farther and farther from the forefront, leaving only the most animalistic part of his brain in control of his actions. The darkness encroached, blocking the light of awareness from his view. What remained was the most basic sum of his being. He could not speak the words of man. His feral mind did not care. The things making Sasuke who he was were repressed by the inert need for survival.

Red eyes snapped open as the sun dipped beneath the horizon. The creaking of the door drew his enhanced sense as the young boy stepped inside. Sustenance. He cared not for whom. The only factor was the hot blood pulsing through the young body. Saliva pooled in his mouth as his fangs lengthened to their full potential, stabbing past his lips.

“I brought some food. I couldn’t find any bandages so I stole a shirt from someone’s laundry. At least it’s clean.” Naruto paused sensing a change in the air. “Are you alright?”

Sasuke body quivered at the words. He wasn’t interested in the bread and jerky the boy had wrapped carefully for him. His entire focus was on the pulsating blood beneath the surface. His only reason for existence was blood. This boy held the key to his survival. He needed it. Need. Desire. Sustenance. They all blended together, giving him strength to move.

“At least you can stand today.” He grinned walking forward.

Had any portion of Sasuke remained, he would have screamed for the boy to leave--to run. He did not. He merely waited for the opportune moment. He was an animal. His only instinct was to survive--to devour any who offered themselves to the beast within him.

Naruto placed a hand on his arm and he struck. The scream was cut short as his teeth buried themselves in the small neck. The cry turned faint, his body rigid. Fear flavored already
exceptional blood. The power flooding him was unlike any he’d ever experience. His teeth gnawed deeper, determined to fill his body with the strength it offered. Growls and snarls escaped as the struggles of the body beneath him began to dwindle.

“Stop…please…I don’t want to die.” Naruto whispered, the strength obviously draining from his body.

The words fell on the deaf ears of the monster. He wanted only to feed--to replace what was lost. He could not even speak words of what he needed. He was lost to the feral creature lurking inside every injured animal.

The heart pounded beneath his palm. He could feel the slender ribs and concaved stomach--a result of malnutrition. It did not affect the potency of the blood flowing warmly in his mouth. The strength returned to his body as it faded from his victim. The heart stuttered beneath his palm, slowing. The beats became irregular as his lips drew the red liquid into his mouth.

The body gave a final shudder before going limp. His clawed hands discarded the boy to roar out as heat burned through his very core. Where once was madness, sanity erupted into a powerful surge. Lightning coursed through his body as stars flared before his eyes. Energy spiraled through him, pushing aside the monster. Only the man was left quivering in the aftermath.

Perhaps an hour passed--perhaps a day. Time meant nothing. Only the ache remained--some keen knowledge of having done something even beyond his small code of morality.

Stricken eyes landed upon the dirty head of blond hair. His body scrambled to the small frame. “N-Naruto…”

The cold skin burned him. His fingers trembled at the blood smearing the small neck and his own lips, now crusted and dry. His mind shattered. The scream that tore through the crumbling warehouse was more that of an animal dying. He’d destroyed the object of his obsession. He had killed him. His blood ran heavy in his veins, powering him in ways he had never dreamed. Hours. Days. They meant nothing as he cradled the rotting husk in his arms.

How Itachi found him was anyone’s guess. His brother’s pallor bespoke of the truth he would hide from the council as he pried his hands from Naruto’s cold body. Sasuke’s snapping and madness meant nothing to his brother. He was wrapped in a blanket of sleep, spirited away to one of Itachi’s many homes.

For a decade he stared into the darkness of his mind. It fell upon Itachi to force feed him the blood his body craved. Gone was his brother. There was nothing left but a husk as empty as that of Naruto’s body.

February 27, 1943

Olympia, Washington

“ITACHI…”

Itachi pulled his wrist from his brother’s lips. A small trickle of blood tracked down the chiseled chin. He quickly caught the droplet with a napkin before turning to see Kurenai.

“What can I do for you, Kurenai?” Itachi tossed the soiled linen into a wastebasket.

“What do you not put him out of his misery?” Her eyes softened with compassion as she stared at the shell of what was once a man.
Itachi crossed his arms, crimson spreading through his dark eyes. “He’s not gone.”

“There is nothing left! He’s a ghost. A shell. The boy…Naruto, took the last of his sanity with him.” she hissed, he eyes hardening in determination.

“I’m sorry.”

Dual pairs of crimson eyes turned to the man seated at the window. Itachi moved quickly to his brother’s side. “Sasuke!”

“Naruto…I’ll make this right.” Sasuke’s eyes continued to stare at nothing before turning to meet Itachi’s. “Itachi…I have to make it right.”

“Sasuke, make what right?” Itachi took his brother’s hand, clenching tight the pale skin.

“He’s dead because of me. If I’m given another chance. I need to make it right. I need you to help me make it right.” Sasuke grappled at Itachi’s clothes, seeking perchance against him.

“Sasuke, leave the human. He has broken you to nothing. I’ve nearly lost you. I don’t know what I would do without you. Leave him. Let the fates do what they will with that soul.” Itachi shook his brother lightly, hoping the words would break through to him.

Sasuke’s gaze went dull. His eyes closed in seeming exhaustion. “I’m tired, Itachi.”

“Don’t say that.” Itachi shook him again.

“I won’t sleep. Not yet.” Sasuke returned to his chair by the window, dead eyes staring at nothing.

“Itachi, we need to talk.” Kurenai nodded to the door.

Closing it behind them, she turned to face the king. “I have encouraged the council to ignore this last break out of courtesy to you. They will not overlook another. Be wary, least you find yourself without a throne.”

“Is that a threat?” he asked, hands clenched in fists.

“It is a warning. You are my dearest friend but I am but one vote. Take care.” She smiled, touching his cheek before leaving.

Itachi rubbed his hands over his eyes before returning to Sasuke’s room. The light from the electrical lamp illuminated the empty chair where his brother once sat. Racing through the room, he cried out for his brother. There was nothing. He had vanished.

“Sasuke…he will only bring about your downfall.” Itachi closed his eyes, feeling so very old.

October 2, 2009

The blood. It carried memories to his mind. Naruto. The many versions of him merged together. His touch. His voice. The taste of his blood.


Pushing away from the form, his fingers dug into his skull. The darkness was there, hazing over his very being. He recalled the hospital. The infant so small and weak cradled in his arms. He
could have ended his suffering. Had Itachi not spoken…would he have?

Rocking back and forth, his mind rebuilt itself from the deep sleep. He could feel his memories clicking together. His mind fragmented again, only to rebuild itself. He could not see. He could not hear. He lived in his memories. They flashed before his eyes, swirling images.

“Sasuke!”

His eyes jumped to meet his brother’s horrified gaze. “What have you done?”

Sasuke continued rocking. He could not process the words. His mind--part feral, part man--balked at the comprehension. The name Itachi was the only understanding. He watched with wild eyes as his brother crouched beside Naruto. He was going to take him from him. No one would take him from him again.

“No!” he screamed, his claw-like fingers reaching for him. He belonged to him. “Mine!”

“Sasuke…he’s weak. I need to get him help. You have to let me help him.” Itachi whispered frantically.

Wild eyes darted back and forth before his fingers released the pants. Lips moved but no sound escaped. He closed his eyes as another memory took him in its grasp. He screamed out, his claws madly lashing out at anything.

Itachi gripped his brother shoving him to the bed. His mind was too fragmented. Sleep would only be a temporary fix.

Sasuke screamed out, his feral side returning to dominance. “Mine! Mine!”

“Sleep, Sasuke.” Sasuke fought the thrall. His body twisted under the compulsion before going limp. Darkness engulfed him. For the moment there were no nightmares.

To be continued.
The darkness shrouding him faded as Naruto blinked slowly awake. Even the dim light from the bedside table seemed to glare brightly, causing a grimace to pull across his face. The sensations rolling through his body reminded him of the time he’d ridden the rollercoaster at the amusement park for the first time. His stomach seemed to be making loops despite his mental attempts to calm it. His vision blurred as he eased into a sitting position on his bed, wondering how he’d gotten there to begin with.

His last memories were both bizarre and entralling. They were a blur of fantasy and reality. He tried but couldn’t seem to grasp what was real and what was a dream. His thoughts were filled with the image of flashing red eyes like something from a horror movie. They seemed to pierce into his very soul, picking apart all that made him Naruto. The floodgates were opened, images forgotten from his dreams forced their way to the forefront of his mind. Memories he shouldn’t have were creating a maelstrom of confusion throughout him.

“Welcome back.”

Naruto glanced to the chair at his bedside. He hadn’t even felt his presence in the room. Not that he could do more than wade through the confusion brewing in his core. “Itachi…What are you doing home?”

A smile tilted one side of the thin lips, softening his normally hard features. “I suppose it’s good that I finished my business early. You would have died if I hadn’t been here.”

A memory flashed through the haze of his mind--pain mixed with pleasure. He’d felt his life draining away and he hadn't cared. He’d wanted it. His body had flared to life in a way he’d never experienced before. His life had flashed before his eyes--only it wasn’t his life but another’s. The experience was akin to watching a movie made of moments sewn together in a long flowing reel. He nearly lost himself in them once more until Itachi’s hand settled on his shoulder. “What do you remember?”

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“It’s hard to explain and I’m not sure how to go about it.” Itachi pulled his chair closer to the bedside.

Naruto fixed his eyes on the man he’d known all his life. “Try.”

“What I am about to tell you goes beyond what normal humans can even comprehend. There is no way I can hide it from you any longer. I don’t want to hide it. For millennia, my people have existed in the shadows. We are neither good, nor are we the monsters legend makes us out to be. I was born so long ago, I’ve lost count of the centuries. My parents were ancients, born before the time of the written word when the world was barbaric. By the time I was born, they were already growing weary of this world but obligations to our people kept them amongst the living for several centuries,” Itachi began. He looked deeply into Naruto’s confused eyes.
“Huh?” Naruto blinked a few times. It was one thing to dream about lives. The dawn always brought about the end. Itachi wasn’t talking about dreams, he was talking about life…and quite a long one. “What nonsense is this?”

Itachi snatched Naruto to his feet, his eyes bleeding to red. “Nonsense? Are your dreams of red eyes and experiences that border on nightmares nonsense? This world is full of beings which your mind can’t even begin to grasp. I warned Sasuke about you…or rather, your first incarnation. I warned him that trouble would come. He was always willful. He wanted everything and in the end was given nothing but a shattered mind and fragmented dreams. I warned him and yet I too am ensnared by your vibrancy. I want to say Sasuke’s descent is your doing but I know it was his weakness that allowed him to be lulled into insanity. He could never come to terms with his lack of control. The harder he tried to keep you, the more quickly you slid through his fingers. Fate was working against him.”

“S-Sasuke?”

“You know him. He’s followed your soul through the ages. You are his addiction. You met him downstairs today…what was left of him.” Itachi released Naruto, walking towards the window to stare into the night. Dawn was fast approaching, not that it mattered. His kind might have evolved to walk in the sunlight but they never lost the ability to sense its approach. To a weakened night walker, walking in the sun could be a deadly experience.

“I don’t…you’re a vampire!” Naruto’s eyes grew wide. Who would have thought Kiba would be right about something? Blood pounded in his ears as his mind attempted to wrap around what Itachi had said. Vampires weren’t real. It wasn’t possible. His dreams were just a figment of his overactive imagination but to be told flat out of the existence of creatures of the night went beyond his scope of understanding. Surprise gave way to fear and then to wonder. He wanted to yell at Itachi to stop joking but knew deep in his soul that he was not lying. The truth stared at him through eyes of pitch.

“We prefer the term nightwalker. Does it bother you?”

The question came as a bit of a shock to him. Naruto considered his answer for a moment. He wasn’t really sure what to say. He wasn’t sure what to believe. He’d seen Itachi’s eyes. It wasn’t a trick of the light or some fancy contacts. It was real. A person’s eyes didn’t turn red like that. The sclera could become bloodshot but not the iris. “I…should it?”

Itachi chuckled, shaking his head--whether in disbelief or not, Naruto wasn’t sure. Laughter softened the strained appearance reflected in the window, making him realize just how young Itachi really looked. He’d never thought about it, only assumed Itachi just aged well but seeing him now, he didn’t look a day over thirty. If he wanted to be honest, he didn’t look a day over twenty-five. His skin was a smooth cream, holding only the fewest of lines around his eyes. His eyes. They gave away his true age. They were weary, yet still carried the glimmer of hope.

“You are taking this quite well. From what I gather, you always did.” Itachi turned to face his ward, a small smile gracing his face.

Naruto nodded his head sagely, a smile creasing his face endearingly. “I think I’m in shock…or this is another dream.”

“It’s no dream.”

“Can I ask you something?” Naruto edged closer to where Itachi stood. “The dreams I have…they aren’t just dreams, are they?”
Itachi closed his eyes before whispering, “No.”

“Why?”

“Who knows. Even I’m not so arrogant to believe I know everything in this world. I’ve asked myself many times why you were reborn time after time. Was it something Sasuke or I did to upset the cosmic universe? Were we too arrogant? Were we cruel to some sorceress? Is this punishment to me or Sasuke? I don’t know and I doubt I ever will.” Itachi flung his arm out dramatically, his eyes shadowed by his suffering, which some might say was just as torturous as Sasuke’s. He was forced to watch, practically unable to do anything as his beloved brother was destroyed.

“What am I?” Naruto whispered, a bit of fear trickling into his eyes.

Itachi calmed his face. Placing a hand on Naruto’s shoulder, he released a breath. “You are the only soul I’ve had the pleasure to know in 10 different incarnations. What draws you back to this existence, I’ve no clue. Sasuke seemed to have figured it out until the last century or two. He lost himself in his search for you. I promised him I would see you were safe. I just didn’t want to believe he’d gotten this bad. He hid it well.”

“Couldn’t you have turned me into a vampire so I didn’t…you know…die?”

“If only it was that easy,” Itachi chuckled. “If such a thing was possible, I’m quite sure Sasuke would have long since turned you. Our kind aren’t made, we are born. Children are rare in our kind as I’m sure you can understand. It wouldn’t do to have a world full of nightwalkers and no way to feed. We can only feed upon each other in cases of emergency. Our blood doesn’t nourish each other as well as a human’s would.”

Itachi took a moment before continuing. “There is nearly a thousand years between Sasuke’s birth and my own. I’ve lived for a long time and I’ve yet to see a creature such as yourself. Rebirth was only something talked about in religious centers…places I’m sorry to say, we are not welcome. The feeding on blood is not looked on kindly.”

“I can’t believe any of this.” Naruto tried to wrap his mind around the concept. Vampires were real. Kiba had been right all along. If he ever found out, the mutt would never let him live it down.

“Let me show you.” Itachi extended his hand to Naruto, leading him through the halls and down towards the once forgotten basement. The light from the kitchen shown down the stairs into the dust caked interior. Unlike before, the room was unhidden. The glass littered floor crunched beneath his feet—nervousness springing up from his very core. He felt both anxious and elated. Something was calling to his very being with such force, he knew he would fight tooth and nail to remain within. He also felt a great sadness. The source was unknown but it beat at his very being, misting his eyes with unshed tears.

Itachi paused, waving his hand to light the rows of candles. Light illuminated the room to reveal the sole occupant.

The man laying peacefully upon the bed looked to be sleeping. Dark lashes fanned out across pale cheeks. The tone body hinted of powerful muscles hidden beneath the jeans and shirt. Naruto’s fingers itched to run through the seemingly soft hair framing his near perfect features. His beauty rivaled Itachi’s but in Naruto’s eyes, there was none more perfect as the sleeping face. Some part of his very soul pulled him towards the man laying quietly. “Sasuke…”

“Yes. I had to put him to sleep again. It won’t last. A day at most. I needed time to make sure you weren’t injured.” Itachi sat on the bed, resting his hand on Sasuke’s limp one. “You feel it, don’t
you. The pull to him. You can’t explain it or understand it but he pulls to you. It has been the same for nearly a millennia. You are drawn together by some unfathomable force.”

“He’s sleeping?”

“For now. I don’t know what to do. He’s been skating a very thin line with the council for a long time.” Itachi stroked back dark bangs from the pale face. “They’ve been watching him for several years.”

A vague memory worked its way to the surface. The council? He remembered seeing elegant men and women gathered around Itachi. He’d always thought of Itachi looked like a king holding court. He never realized how close to the truth that image really was. “What can they do?”

“Destroy him. For now, he’s safe but it’s only a matter of time. He’s emotionally unstable. I have little doubt he will devour the first human he comes across. He hasn’t fed in over twenty years. Other than what he took from you.” Itachi glanced towards Naruto when he heard the snarl.

“You would let them do it?” Naruto’s lips pulled back in a grimace to reveal white teeth.

“It’s not that I want it. I have nearly given up everything to protect him. He has destroyed himself and I am left to pick up the pieces. When you die again, there will be nothing left of him if there is anything left now. You will die. It is only a matter of time. I can feel your body dying. You are a human after all.” Itachi scoffed, trying to hide his own fear in harsh words.

Naruto remained silent for a moment before speaking. “I know that. Everything dies.”

“We don’t.”

“You don’t have to sound arrogant about it.” Naruto grumbled.

“I’m not. I simply state the truth. Death for us is more complicated. Time is relative. For humans, you are granted a hundred years if you are lucky. I have never known one of my species to die of old age. Most choose either suicide or eternal sleep,” Itachi explained.

“But you can die?”

A smirk crept along Itachi’s lips. “Plotting to kill me?”

“What? No!” Naruto shook his head violently. “Itachi…can I ask you a favor?”

“A favor? I would give you anything I could. You are precious to me even if I cannot have your love.” Itachi ran his hand over the scarred cheeks, remembering the day the boy had been ushered through his door.

“Can I stay with him?” he asked, expectantly.

Itachi blinked a few times in surprise. A look akin to hurt flashed across his face before it was hidden once more in his passive expression. “I have no control over him. If he wakes up, he could very well kill you.”

“I feel like I have to. Have you ever wanted something so deeply, you weren’t sure if you could survive not having it?” Naruto asked quietly, his eyes never leaving Sasuke’s face.

“Yes,” Itachi chuckled mirthlessly. “I was never jealous of Sasuke…until now.”

“Itachi…”
“Even now you are drawn to him. I can sense it in you. I could take you…spirit you away to some far away country but you would always want him.” Itachi sighed, lifting the stone dangling from Naruto’s neck to gaze in the facets of the gem. “He’s at the point of no return. Another step and he will plummet. He will no longer be reachable. I can’t do that to him. Not even for you.”

“I don’t understand…” Naruto frowned. He’d never known Itachi liked him in that way. He felt a keen disappointment that he could not return the feelings. While he found Itachi physically attractive, part of his very being was drawn elsewhere. Even as a youth, his attraction to Itachi was nothing more than a physical lust. He cared for the man, but not in the way both needed.

“Do as you feel you must. I will keep you from him no longer. Call out to me and I will come should you need me.” Itachi stood with a last glance at both, he exited the basement.

Naruto watched the man he’d looked up to for nearly his entire life exit, leaving him alone in the candle lit room. He wanted to go after him, to apologize. He’d hurt him but was unable to offer comfort. Why had Itachi brought him here if he knew Naruto would be drawn to stay? Did Itachi understand the emptiness he’d always felt? Is that why he’d brought him to Sasuke? He didn’t know the man laying before him and yet he did. Memories not his own continued to swirl through him. As if watching a home movie, he saw Sasuke’s descent. He saw the acute pain and eventually the lack of love. It hurt. Knowing Sasuke had stopped loving him in favor of the need to possess him and being driven insane when Naruto was taken from him. Naruto’s eyes traced the lines of the body sleeping before him.

Who was the true Sasuke--the arrogant noble he’d been in the beginning, or the insane monster he’d become? He seemed so angelic laying quietly under the soft glow of the candlelight. He felt the draw of the other but not the feelings swirling through his memories. They seemed distant like the dreams they were. Shouldn’t he feel something more than an undeniable pull? Shouldn’t there be a great over bearing feeling of completion? Of love?

For long minutes Naruto stood quietly, unable to do more than stare at the man from his dreams. He had questions though he knew there were no answers to be found. Itachi, himself, had said he didn’t know everything in the world. He wanted to help Sasuke, to make him what he was. “What am I supposed to do?”

“A good question.”

Naruto jerked to stare into the shadow filled basement. The voice coming from the room swirled over him. It held a slightly monotone texture, pulling him in. “Who’s there?”

A ginger haired man stepped from the shadows. Silver piercings gleamed from his dispassionate face. His deep gray eyes seemed to measure Naruto, looking with a gaze as sharp as any Itachi had given him. “Who are you?”

“I’ve had many names during my existence.” A flash of silver appeared as he spoke, revealing yet another piercing through his tongue. Naruto wondered where else the man was pierced.

“How about you give me one of them before I call for Itachi.” Naruto hissed, standing defensively between the stranger and Sasuke’s sleeping form.

“Would my name truly matter? I could tell you that once upon a time I was called Archeleus. Would that matter to you? Would you understand the person I was then? The person I am now?” A small smile curved the stranger’s lips.

Naruto flushed a bit. “I just want a name I can tell the police when they arrest you for breaking and
“You may call me Pein. It’s as good a name as any but do you really think I can be arrested by your police? I am standing undetected inside the home of the lord of all nightwalkers. Do you really believe that threat means anything to me?” Pein’s lips twitched a little in amusement.

“What do you want?” Naruto’s eye twitched. And he thought Itachi was an arrogant bastard. Itachi had nothing on this guy.

“Ah, we come to the heart of the matter. What do I want? If I said I wanted you, what would your answer be?”

His lips pulled down in a frown. The other was toying with him and it was pissing Naruto off. “I’d say hell no and for you to get the fuck out.”

“Of course you would. You don’t even know what you are. You haven’t finished coming into being yet. I only wanted to meet you officially. We’ve been watching you for a long time. You’re special, even more so than your lover could have possibly known. It’s rare for one of us to be so connected to a night walker. It’s a bit straining for our ‘other’ to handle as you can see.” Pein extracted a cigarette from his pocket. Long slender fingers brought it to his lips, lighting it on one of the candles dotting the room. He exhaled the thick smoke while keeping his eyes on Naruto. “You’re almost ready. Things happen for a reason. You just don’t know what those reasons are yet.”

“Then why don’t you tell me?”

“You’ll see. When it’s time, you’ll see. I’ll see you around, Naruto Uzumaki. Give my regards to Sasuke.” Pein bowed his head in parting before fading into the shadows once more.

Naruto searched the room but could find neither hide nor hair of the ginger haired man. Only the remaining odor of cigarette smoke floating through the air gave testament to his presence having had been there. The day had started off normal. He’d gone to bed with all intentions of sleeping but from the moment he’d laid down, the events seemed to have been removed from his control. Life wasn’t supposed to be this strange.

“Sasuke…Itachi…Pein.” What forces were connecting him to those three men? He stood over Sasuke’s sleeping form, watching the slow rise and fall of his chest.

Naruto’s heart jumped in his throat as dark lashes fluttered open. Dark orbs stared at him, giving him a glimpse of who Sasuke really was. It was only a glimpse before dark bled to red and the real Sasuke was eclipsed once more with the mad creature.

“Stay away from me!” Sasuke screamed, crashing from the bed and into the corner. Red eyes darted back and forth as if searching for demons in every shadow. “You aren’t real. I killed you. You aren’t real.”

“Sasuke…”

“Don’t talk to me!” Sasuke’s hands lifted to press over his ears. “Naruto’s dead. You aren’t real. Stop haunting me.”

“I’m real.” Naruto reached for him only to have claws swipe across his arm.

Blood dripped from the torn skin to splatter on the floor. Naruto cried out and stumbled back clutching at his injured arm. Sasuke’s eyes changed from terrified madness to something much
darker. His hands dropped from his ears, curling in claw like motions.

“Sasuke…I know you’re hurting. I can feel it. Please, let me help you.” Naruto backed away slowly so not to entice the other to attack.

Naruto jerked as the pale hand latched on his wrist. Long fingers dug into the torn skin, bringing fresh blood to the surface. Naruto jerked his arm, attempting to free himself from the painful grip. The action earned him a slow growl from the barely human creature before him.

Fangs peaked out as pink lips lowered to the sliced skin. A delicate tongue darted out to lap at the dripping blood. “Naruto.” Almost instantly tingles shot through Naruto’s skin. He watched amazed as the skin began knitting itself back together with each swipe of Sasuke’s tongue. Sasuke continued the treatment until only freshly healed skin remained.

“What’s wrong?” Naruto pulled back his arm to run fingers over the sensitive healed skin. Only the faintest of scars remained on the previously unblemished skin.

“Please leave me alone. It hurts to much. I can taste you on my tongue. I can feel you in my veins.” Sasuke pressed against the wall, reverting back to the damaged creature of before.

“I won’t leave you.” Naruto whispered, feeling even more enthralled by the broken creature before him.

Naruto dropped to his knees, staring at the man. He felt rather than saw Itachi as he approached cautiously from behind. “He’s awake.”

“Yeah.”

“I smelled blood.” Itachi paused behind Naruto.

Naruto nodded. “Yeah, mine.”

“I know. Sasuke?” Itachi’s eyes jumped between Naruto and his brother.

“Yeah…he healed me. He was just scared.” Naruto felt a twinge. The memories continued to bombard him. In them Sasuke was so vibrant. Here he was a shattered creature, lost in his own hell. Naruto wanted to find the real Sasuke again. He wanted to discover what their bond really meant.

Itachi remained silent for a moment before speaking. “You don’t have to remain here. Sasuke can’t leave this room for the moment. I’ve bound him to it until he’s stable.”

Naruto understood Itachi’s meaning. The word ‘until’ was hiding the word ‘if’. “He will get better. He’s lived this long.”

“I don’t think he wants to leave that place he’s in. He’s watched you die so many times. I’m surprised he didn’t join you in the afterlife. I wanted to blame you but in the end, I can’t.” Itachi crouched beside Naruto to watch Sasuke.

“He knew I would come back.”

Itachi shook his head. “He couldn’t. That was always a fear he held. He asked me once what he would do if you weren’t reborn.”

“You said you were surprised. Maybe things happened for a reason. I don’t know what they are, but maybe some hidden part of him knew I would come back.” Naruto thought back to what Pein
had said. Things happen for a reason. It was less an answer, leaving Naruto with only questions.

“I cannot speak for things I do not know. You should rest. Sasuke will sleep soon. The sun is rising and he’s very weak. Sleeping for so long has made him susceptible to the pull of sleep. Even now he’s fighting it.” Itachi reached to assist Naruto to his feet. The other shook his head in refusal.

“I’m going to stay with him.” Naruto leaned his head against the door frame where he knelt.

Itachi sighed, nodding his understanding. “As you wish. I would advise you to tread carefully. Sasuke is dangerous in this state. Even weakened in such a way, he’s still a very powerful nightwalker. Noble blood runs through his veins. I must rest as well. The trip exhausted me.”

“I’ll be alright, Itachi. I just want to sit with him.” Naruto turned his eyes back to the dark haired man crouched in the corner. Watching him, he tried to understand him. It was hard since they had never really had a conversation. Past lives didn’t count in Naruto’s mind. He wanted to find the Sasuke hidden beneath the cracked exterior. He was hiding in there somewhere. It might take a lifetime. It might take twenty life times but he would find him. He would find what he’d loved in the past. Then, perhaps he would be able to love him. He would be able to touch him without fear of breaking him.

Hours or minutes could have passed as they sat in nearly deafening silence. He continued to watch as Sasuke curled in his corner, glancing up every few minutes to stare intently at Naruto as if trying to ascertain if his presence was real or just a figment of his shattered psyche.

It was a gradual thing, Sasuke’s decent from consciousness. It began as a hooding of eyes. For a split moment, they would drop only to jerk open once more. His head began nodding as he drifted in a state of partial awareness. Naruto watched the events unfold slowly, intrigued by Sasuke’s seemingly passive attitude.

He found it humorous to watch the other nod off. Sasuke had slept for years yet he continued to doze. It was as if the years in sleep were not sleep at all but more of a suspended animation where no true rest was achieved.

Sasuke’s head dropped to his drawn up knees as he finally gave up the fight. Naruto’s lips turned up in a smile, his own eyes drifting shut as well. They weren’t touching. Their bodies were several feet apart and yet, they seemed to take comfort from the other’s presence. Sasuke’s body relaxed completely, resting a true sleep as the sun rose overhead. The semi-forced sleep allowed his body to gather its energy.

Naruto drifted, sleeping deeply despite his semi upright position, only awaking at the touch of a hand on his shoulder. “Naruto, your friends are here.”

“Itachi…what time is it?” Sleep called to him. He couldn’t have slept for more than an hour or two.

“Almost three in the afternoon.” Itachi smirked at Naruto’s disheveled appearance. “Your friends just arrived. They said you were going to study for finals together.”

“Fuck! I’m awake.” Naruto jumped to his feet, groaning as his bones cracked from being in a cramped position for so long. It didn’t feel like he’d slept so long. It only seemed like moments. He glanced at Sasuke’s still sleeping form. “I’ll be back, Sasuke. I won’t leave you.”

“I’ll stay with him. I’ve neglected my duties to him.” Itachi took a position on the bed, watching his brother sleep in his place in the corner.

Naruto nodded, trotting up the stairs. It wasn’t hard to find Kiba and Sakura. Their voices carried
with loud precision through the large house.

“There you are! Your vampire father said you were sleeping. Don’t tell me you’re trying to turn into a vampire too.” Kiba snatched a handful of Naruto’s hair, pulling his neck in a painful arch in search of the telltale sign of vampire infestation.

“Stop that you moron!” Naruto punched Kiba’s ribs, hearing the other yelp with great satisfaction. “Itachi isn’t a vampire.” He was really getting good at lying.

“He may not be a vampire, but you look like shit Naruto.” Sakura stepped forward to place a cool hand on his brow. “You’re pale and those bags under your eyes are huge.”

Naruto swallowed the thick lump forming in his throat. What if they guessed something was wrong? They would think he was crazy if he told them the truth. Not to mention, Itachi would probably kill him. It was always best to use the simplest answer. “I’m a college student. I’m supposed to be pale with bags under my eyes.”

“Nice try. Have you been sick?” Sakura forced him to sit while she checked his pulse.

“Just a…stomach virus.” He was fucked if she kept asking questions.

“Why didn’t you say you were sick? I would have brought you some soup or came and sat with you.” Sakura clucked, releasing his hand. “Your heart rate is a little high. You should lay down.”

Kiba rolled his eyes. “Naruto, dude, don’t let her push you around. You’ve got to help me study for Ethics. I’m so going to fail the final if you don’t help me out. Naruto…be a pal.”

“You moron!” Sakura shoved Kiba’s shoulder. “If you hadn’t been an idiot and slept through the semester, you wouldn’t need Naruto to help you cram Ethics into your pea sized brain.”

“Hey! Stop with the name calling. I can’t help that Ethics is at eight a.m. I can’t get moving until like ten,” Kiba whined, rubbing his shoulder.

“If you would stop partying all night and actually get some sleep you might be able to stay awake. What’s going to happen when you get out in the real world? Your boss won’t like it if you’re three hours late for work every day.” Sakura crossed her arms and tapped her foot. “What are you going to do then, hmm?”

Kiba tilted his head in consideration. “Get a job that lets me come in at ten.”

Sakura threw up her hands in annoyance. “Moron! You are incorrigible.”

Kiba leapt towards her, pulling her in his arms and pressing a sloppy kiss on her cheek. “But you love me anyway.”

“Heaven only knows why.” Sakura shoved him away, turning her attention back to Naruto. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“I’m fine.” He plastered a fake smile across his face, patting her on the back. “Let’s go study.”

“You know Naruto, you should really keep a couple of crosses and garlic around just to be on the safe side. If he isn’t a vampire…well, better safe than sorry but if he is, you are totally protecting your life.” Kiba was totally in Kiba Land by the time they reached Naruto’s room, blabbering on and on about the signs of Itachi’s vampire nature. Naruto would have laughed at the irony if he wasn’t so tired. He’d lost a lot of blood the previous night and was feeling it today.
“You idiot. He answered the door…in broad daylight. How do you explain that, Mr. Van Helsing?” Sakura asked as she dug her books from her bag.

“Sunscreen…you know, that SPF800 shit. That crap is like wearing a lead suit. My sister layers that shit on her kids. I’m telling you…that’s how he does it. Pretty smart of them vamps, huh?” Kiba snatched a bag of chips from Sakura’s hand.

“I take back what I said.” Sakura snatched back her bag of chips. “You aren’t an idiot. You are retarded. It’s amazing I didn’t see it before.”

Naruto’s soul lightened at the banter. These two were his best friends in the world. Even when they weren’t trying, they could cheer him up. “You two, stop fighting.”

Sakura gave a particularly hard punch to Kiba’s shoulder before turning to Naruto. “You’ve been a little down lately. I know you and Itachi have an…unusual relationship but if he’s treating you bad…”

“No! Nothing like that. I just have a lot on my mind. Next year is my last year of college and I still don’t know what I’m going to do with my life.” Naruto shifted to sit by Sakura, laying his head on her shoulder.

Kiba popped open an eye from where he was laying sprawled on the floor. “Pfft, what do you need to work for? Your vampire father is loaded. Just ask him to make you like honorary vice president or some shit. Collect a paycheck while you seduce the ladies in the Bahamas.”

“Do you think he’d go for it?” Naruto chuckled, playing along with Kiba.

“You’re both idiots.” Sakura slapped Naruto on the crown of his head. “But I love you both.”

“I was only joking,” pouted Naruto, rubbing the tender skin.

“I know. I only hurt you because I care.” Sakura smiled, rubbing the spot she’d slapped. “How about you start helping Kiba learn enough about Ethics to at least pass the class with a D and I’ll review my classes before helping you with your Chemistry.”

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Sasuke blinked awake. Naruto’s scent was in his nose. His taste coated his tongue. “Naruto.”

His body ached from his cramped position in the corner. Scanning the room, he noticed a distinctive absence of blond hair. Anger rushed through him. He wasn’t there.

“Sasuke?”

Red eyes narrowed in on his brother. He’d taken Naruto from him. He remembered now. Itachi had wanted Naruto. He wanted to keep him from being with him. He wanted Naruto for himself.

“You took him.”

“What are you talking about?” Itachi frowned, approaching his brother.

“I saw how you wanted him. You want to keep him from me.” Sasuke’s voice continued to rise, his body slinking along the wall.

“Sasuke…” Itachi took a step forward, only to earn a snarl from Sasuke.
“Give him back!” Sasuke’s fangs were fully extended over his pink lips. “He’s mine!”

His mind lacked simple reasoning. Naruto was his. Itachi was a male. His mind connected the dots, assuming Itachi’s presence in place of Naruto meant he’d spirited him away.

“Naruto is fine. He’s upstairs with his friends.” Itachi reached out a hand to calm his brother, earning a slash of claws.

“No! You took him. You want him. I can smell him on you,” Sasuke snarled, his claws digging into the bricks lining the walls.

“Sasuke, you need to calm down.” The worry in Itachi’s voice could be plainly heard. The words were meant to calm but instead sent Sasuke over the edge, his already tenuous sanity discarded in favor of the violence rolling through him.

“He’s mine!” Sasuke lunged from his position against the wall. Bloodlust rushed through his veins. Itachi was trying to take something from him. He couldn’t allow that. Naruto was his!

Itachi’s quick movements were all that kept him from being impaled on Sasuke’s claws. Sasuke refused to listen to reason. Thoughts of Naruto in Itachi’s arms rolled through his shattered mind. Had he been in all his faculties, he would have known that Itachi would never have done such a thing even if he’d wanted it. Itachi knew this and attempted to remain in a defensive position.

“Sasuke, Naruto is safe. I don’t have him hidden away from you.” Itachi dodged another swipe of Sasuke’s claws.

“Lies!”

“You never wanted me to be with him. You wanted him only for yourself, that’s why you tried to keep me from going to him.” Sasuke screamed, saliva dripping from his fangs as he grew even more irrational.

Itachi bided his time, waiting for Sasuke to attack again. In such a state, Sasuke was sloppy with his attacks. He allowed his unsubstantiated anger to control him. It gave Itachi the perfect opening to force Sasuke’s claw tipped hands behind his back, making him defenseless. Sasuke screamed out, fighting to gain control once more. “Bastard!”

“He drove you to this,” Itachi answered in return. “No…you allowed yourself to become this. You are weak Sasuke.”

“ITACHI.”

Itachi turned to see Kurenai standing regally several feet behind him. “What’s happened?”

“The council is convening. Sasuke’s fate will be decided tonight.” She said sadly.

“Why wasn’t I told? The council planned to keep this from me?” Itachi released Sasuke, rushing Kurenai. The woman gasped in surprise as she was pinned to the wall, boxes tumbled to the ground around them. “I am the king. You knew?”

“Itachi…” She gasped as she struggled to breathe around the hand crushing her windpipe. “I didn’t know…they knew…I am close…to you…that I…support you. I was…just told moments ago.”

Itachi snarled, his crimson eyes flashed furiously. His fingers tightened in their grip around Kurenai’s throat before releasing her to fall gasping to the floor. “I’m going to destroy them.”
Chapter End Notes

There won't be any flash backs from now on. The past is over. XD
Chapter 12

Naruto slumped against the door, Sakura and Kiba finally having left him. While he loved both like the brother and sister he’d never had, they could annoy him just as easily as a real brother and sister. It was annoying and endearing at the same time. With his mind focused on Sasuke locked down in the basement, he couldn’t keep his full attention on school work or friendships. All he could focus on was Sasuke and being near him. The entire time he’d sat with his friends, he could literally sense Sasuke pacing below.

The previous night, a dam had been opened, one that now rushed from the build up of years or maybe even centuries. His mind and soul were both complete and empty at the same time, an amazing feat to be sure. He wasn’t sure if he liked this feelings Sasuke brought to him. Couple finding out there were actual vampires in the world and add in the mysterious man who’d visited him; it all sent his mind into a tailspin. He wondered if it should be him that was driven insane and locked up in the basement with Sasuke. Most horror stories kept the crazy relative locked in the attic, Itachi had to be different and keep him locked in the basement. This wasn’t a horror story. Horror stories didn’t make you cry and in utter despair and longing.

Only two stories from him and already he felt the pull. Sasuke’s subconscious drew him towards the basement, much as it did the previous night. He could no more deny the pull than he could when he’d stepped down the proverbial rabbit hole and into this mysterious new world laid out before him. Tonight was different than the previous. The madness and desperation he’d felt before seemed tempered. It was still there, but to a much more muted degree.

He wasn’t foolish enough to believe Sasuke was sane. He’d seen for his own eyes just how mad he truly was but this left him hopeful. He could hope that his sanity would return. He needed it to return. He needed Sasuke to see him and know him—to know this Naruto, to forget all others before him. Perhaps it was a little too much of him to desire, but he’d felt like his entire life was a dream filled with the memories of the dead.

He couldn’t think of those past visions of himself as even facets of himself. It was like an experiment performed slightly differently each time to see the possible results—a practical joke by the powers that be.

“You’re thinking hard.” Sasuke’s red eyes lifted from where his head lay against his knees. He was still safely curled up in ‘his’ corner, but his eyes had lost some of the wild animal look they had retained the previous day.

“Youre confused.”

“Shouldn’t that be my line? I am locked away by my brother, a threat to the world.” Blood dripped to the floor where Sasuke’s lengthened nails sliced into his palms. The smell was loud, it wafted towards Naruto to tease his senses with a metallic flavor.

“You’re hurt!” He stepped forward, approaching Sasuke with no thought of possible injury that could be inflicted upon him. All mattering to him was dressing any possible wounds on the other’s body.

“Stay back!” Sasuke jerked away as Naruto approached, his legs pushing his body from the corner and sliding along the wall to the opposite wall. His eyes frantically scanned the room, seeing things Naruto couldn’t.
“I want to help you, Sasuke.” Naruto stepped forward again, his palms extended.

“I can’t…think when you’re around. What I’ve done…it can’t be undone.” Sasuke’s hands lifted to sift through his mussed hair, fingers digging into his skull with almost desperation. “I can’t think--”

“Then don’t think…just let me take care of you. Me and Itachi--”

“Itachi!” Sasuke spat the name from his lips as one would the vilest thing. “He wants to take you.”

Sasuke paused, shaking his head in almost an argumentative way. He was arguing with himself, that much was evident. It was a war between sanity and insanity. “No, that’s not right--” Sasuke’s hands lifted to rub his temples. “I don’t know--”

Naruto was forced to the sidelines, only able to watch as his… He blinked, what was Sasuke to him? What was he to Sasuke? The emotions previously felt by his soul resounded in him. Love. Lust. Anger. Sorrow. Each warred with him, blending in a mesh of raw emotions he could neither sort, nor define in singularity. But they weren’t his emotions. They were merely echoes of his long dead incarnations. What he felt for Sasuke was still a mystery.

He was just as lost as Sasuke seemed. He felt as if it was his fault. There was nothing he could have done. Their fates seemed to be on a track neither could deviate from. Knowing this didn’t make things right. “I’m sorry, Sasuke.”

Sasuke’s eyes cleared slightly from the words. Sanity temporarily winning the battle. “Not your fault.” Pressing his face into his knees, Sasuke’s shaking and rocking stopped to let them sit in mutual silence until Naruto took it upon himself to approach the still form once more.

The connection the two shared was more than a little strange. Had he not felt the hidden knowledge all his life, he might have reacted worse than he did. Even knowing Itachi wouldn’t allow anything to harm him; he felt their trials weren’t over. Things were still in motion, the track not yet at its final stop.

“What are we going to do?” Naruto asked the question in the broadest of way, not knowing what he wanted Sasuke to answer.

“I don’t know.” Sasuke flinched at the first touch of fingers on his arm but didn’t snap or bite. He sat like a wild dog receiving the first touch of love, unsure how to react but not desiring to bite the petting hand.

All they could do was wait. Their fate would come soon enough, forcing them into their final tests. Each understood the quiet before the storm, threatening their barely found understanding of each other. The newness of the bond felt flimsy and novel between them. It was different than before. Sasuke was a broken creature and Naruto was swimming in a haze, clouded by Sasuke’s past and his own fear of what do and how to respond. In the darkened interior of the Uchiha household basement, Naruto and Sasuke came to a silent understanding. Whether their calm would last was anyone’s guess.

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“Itachi, I’m sorry.” Kurenai walked quickly behind the king, the darkness surrounding them belied the presence of other night walkers in the depths of the building. Kurenai reached forward with one of her hands, clenching into Itachi’s forearm. “Please Itachi--”

“Don’t speak to me. I’m only moments away from destroying you.” Itachi shrugged away her hand. His anger still burned brightly. If he needed to destroy the entirety of the council to prevent a
ruling against his brother, he would do so without the slightest tinge of regret.

“Itachi, you know I’m only one voice in the council. Danzou—” Kurenai wasn’t foolish enough to grab at him again; instead she followed close behind him as he prowled through the long halls toward the council chambers. Had this not been a coup, he would have been present during the deliberation and sentencing. Anger aside, he was surprised Danzou had the balls to step forward with his petition for Sasuke’s death.

“Danzou will get his own comeuppance.” Itachi’s eyes narrowed, landing on the large ornate doors. The delicate carvings decorating the door illustrated the evolution of the nightwalker, from the humble beginnings before the time of written history to the prosperity they now experienced in modern society. In the center was a sacred circle, a sign the Wiccan followers had taken from the night walkers. What was done came back full circle.

“If you interrupt an adjourned meeting of elders—” Kurenai stood before him, her red eyes pleading. “You could risk losing your crown. Danzou would like nothing better than to take your place as king.”

“If I allow them to kill Sasuke so I can keep my crown, then I do not deserve it.” Itachi lifted a hand to cover his heart. “I am responsible for all my subjects, including Sasuke. He has not harmed a human since the last ruling concerning him. They have no right to attack him.” He conveniently left out the attack against Naruto hours earlier. It was neither here nor there.

Itachi pushed her aside, eyes lowered to the ground. “Sasuke is all I have left. I can’t give him up, even for my crown.”

Kurenai bowed her head, placing her own hand across her heart. “As you wish, my king.”

Itachi placed both hands on the door, growling low in his throat. An enchantment sealed the door, preventing any from interrupting the proceedings inside. The reinforcements behind it told their own tale of Danzou’s determination to keep Itachi from the council. It was a quite powerful guard. “If you think this can keep the son of Fugaku and Mikoto from you, you have become senile in your age.”

Itachi’s eyes flared crimson; his fangs were bared for the council, shining in the candlelight lining the passageway. It was a rare show of anger and power from their king. Hissing beneath his breath the words of a language long dead, lost even from history. It was the language his parents spoke upon their creation. There was no older language—not Latin, not Mesopotamian or Sumerian. It was the oldest know language. It was unknown to humans, long forgotten by all as more and more languages emerged as the people grew and were shaped by their beliefs.

Kurenai backed away slowly. Her fear bled into Itachi, feeding his bloodlust and making the chanting of words all the more emphatic. The barrier began to heat, becoming visible to the naked eye. Wind rushed through the hall, extinguishing each and every candle lining the walls--creating an enveloping darkness.

The hallway went silent, the chanting stopped and the magic surfacing around Itachi stopped its violent swirling of power. The calm lasted only seconds. He lifted a hand, placing it upon the door. “Open.”

The doors swung open, pushed by a seemingly heavy wind. All those seated inside lunged to their feet, shouts taking the place of once quiet conversation. Only Danzou and the Nara representative remained seated. Danzou’s arrogance having placed him at the head of the long council table--a position normally occupied by Itachi. “It appears I am late. Please forgive my tardiness.”
“My lord…and Lady Kurenai. I wasn’t aware either of you would be attending the council meeting tonight.” Danzou stood slowly, his traditional robes flowing around him in shades of red, black, and gold. His scarred face and black eye patch gave him an air of danger that was not a complete boast. He was, in fact, very dangerous. Once a former enforcer for Itachi’s parents, it was well known in the night walker kingdom of Danzou’s malcontent concerning the passing of the mantle of kingship to Itachi. That Itachi’s rule was considered one of the most prosperous only made Danzou’s hate for the Uchiha family all the more deadly.

“I am surprised at you, going behind my back—even sealing the council chambers. Your hate has become quite the problem.” Itachi glided towards the head chair, taking his seat—fully aware of the fear radiating from every member save two. Kurenai followed him in the council chamber, taking her designated seat which she had been forced to vacate in order to inform Itachi of the council’s unscheduled meeting.

“I only wished for the decision to be based fairly and not because your lordship wished it otherwise.” Danzou slid gracefully from Itachi, moving to his usual seat on the side of the long table. “Your person is…biased.”

“Is it? I seem to recall this issue having been decided several centuries ago. Why the sudden interest in my brother yet again?” purred Itachi, his eyes glowing with a permanent crimson gleam.

“Your brother is a danger to our secrecy—a danger to all humans if he is allowed to run about unchecked. He’s feral and must be dealt with! His history should be proof enough. Need I remind you of the events in Constantinople?” Danzou snarled, hate dripping from him like the poison from a deadly viper.

“He has not injured anyone since the last ruling.” Itachi wasn’t the fool many might think of him where his brother was concerned. Since the first ruling, he kept one eye on his kingdom and another on his brother. He might not know Sasuke’s location, every second of every day, but he would know if even the first drop of blood was spilled by his brother’s hand. That much he could do.

“It doesn’t stop the fact he’s a danger. His sanity makes him a risk. Better to put him out of his misery now than later after he slaughters some innocent,” Danzou argued.

“Do we have that right?” A quiet man spoke up from the table, drawing the attention of each elder. To the human eye, he looked no more than twenty. Every member of the council knew him to be nearly three thousand. Each night walker knew him and why he was a member of the council. His family, the Nara, was one of the most respected and deadly families under the Uchiha. Their keen intellect was a deadly weapon they wielded with exact precision.

Shikamaru Nara rarely spoke in the meetings, usually appearing nearly asleep. No one was fooled by the demeanor. He was listening and making his own judgments concerning the topic at hand. When he did speak, it was taken with great weight. It wouldn’t have surprised Itachi if Danzou had sought to prevent the Nara representative from showing at this particular council.

“For the sake of our kind, of human kind—I say yes.”

“If it makes it easier for you to take the throne from the ruling family, all the better?” A thin brow rose and dark eyes stared intently at Danzou—measuring him.

Danzou’s cheek ticked in anger. “It was never a consideration.”

“Indeed.” Shikamaru sat back in his chair, his eyes never leaving Danzou’s face. “It isn’t our place
to dictate what might happen. It would open the door to more such ‘preventative’ executions. The Nara family stands behind the king in this case.”

“Coward!” Danzou shouted, rising to his feet to direct a hate-filled glare towards Shikamaru Nara. With the Naras erring on the side of the king, most of the spineless families would fall quickly in suit.

“You dare suggest the Nara clan of cowardice? Shikamaru, it is within your right to demand recompense for verbal slander,” Kurenai growled in Danzou’s direction.

Shikamaru merely shrugged, turning his gaze from Danzou and towards Itachi. “Heated words often tell of weaknesses otherwise hidden from view. I wouldn’t have allowed him to call a vote. I think the remainder of you should be ashamed and fearful of your lives. Such a coup against one such as Uchiha is a dangerous gamble to play, even with Danzou at your back.”

“Who said this was a coup?”

Itachi’s eyes shot towards Danzou. Fury rolled through him. Every eye at the table was fixed fearfully toward where the murderous malice rolled forth from Itachi’s every pore. “Repeat yourself.”

“This was not a coup,” sneered Danzou.

“Your arrogance knows no bounds. Why were the doors sealed? Why was I not alerted to a council conjuring?” Itachi’s nails lengthened to scrape along the polished wood tabletop--his teeth extending to such a degree, his voice slurred.

A shifting of bodies in chairs told of guilt. While a coup wasn’t what the council desired, Danzou had ways of ensuring support for his cause. Right or wrong never came into play when politics began to emerge.

Shikamaru pushed back slightly, his body tensed to restrain Itachi should he be provoked into violence. Danzou was a manipulator and where Sasuke was concerned, manipulation of Itachi was a simple task. It was Itachi’s weakness, one very evident to each member seated around the table.

“Come at me then, King. Smite me down with all your power.” Danzou stood, obviously goading Itachi into attacking. Violence in the council chambers was strictly forbidden. Any physical damage done to one part was met in equal amounts--a punishment to the attacker. Even the king was not exempt from such punishment. He would also be expelled from the council chambers for the duration of the meeting, giving Danzou what he sought from the beginning and another excuse to have Sasuke executed. Itachi knew this but his desire to attack Danzou was throwing his mind into a confused state.

Shikamaru was on his feet, hand clasped to Itachi’s arm at the first twitch of muscle--a preventative measure and a deadly one. Itachi could very well turn his attack on the other. “I think a vote should be called about whether to reopen the case concerning the king’s brother. If you wish to discuss his progress or decline, perhaps we should table it for another day when tempers aren’t quite so high.”

“The Naras, ever the voice of reason,” spat Danzou.

“I would suggest you close your mouth Lord Danzou, least I show you just how deadly my clan can be when called for.” Shikamaru’s eyes bled to red, showing how serious he was--unassuming nature falling away to reveal his true self.
“I second the motion to table the discussion on Sasuke Uchiha until a later date when all members of the council can be present.” Kurenai stood, her voice having more bite than it usually held.

The council members nodded. The Yamanaka representative stood. “So noted, the subject is tabled until the next council meeting.”

“I would suggest you not try to get around a perfect attendance at the next adjournment,” Itachi snarled.

Danzou’s visible eye narrowed. “This isn’t the end of this. Your brother’s life is only temporarily on hold.”

Itachi jerked in Shikamaru’s firm hold, pausing only when words hissed in his ear. “Calm yourself. Your brother is safe. Don’t risk your life or position on him.”

Though Itachi’s eyes remained crimson, he relaxed in Shikamaru’s grasp. “Fine.”

With all the flourish his position demanded, Itachi pulled from Shikamaru and exited the council chambers, followed by his supporters. When all was said and done, most of the council members followed Itachi from the room, their loyalty going to the stronger appearing member, and Itachi put up a very strong appearance—a very obvious reason why Danzou wanted to keep Itachi from the chambers.

“You should go home to your brother. You won’t have much time to prepare him. The council is going to want proof of his sanity or at the very least, a visible improvement, possibly even having him brought before the council.” Shikamaru lifted a slender cigarette to his lips, taking a seat on one of the many plush chairs lining the halls of the underground passageway.

Kurenai settled on the arm of Shikamaru’s chair. It was well known amongst the higher clans of Kurenai having become involved with Shikamaru Nara. It would make them a dominating force on the council should the need ever arise. After years of having her affections spurned by Itachi, Kurenai had finally turned her eyes elsewhere.

“Can I count on your support, Nara?”

“I’m no fool. If your brother is beyond repair, it would be best to put him down. The danger of keeping him alive would far out weigh the benefits.” The words from Shikamaru angered him more for their truth than any other reason. His body became taught, though his face remained neutral.

Shikamaru smiled. His lips twirched in amusement. “But, from what I’ve heard, he’s not beyond redemption.”

Kurenai lowered her eyes. “I saw how he reacted to the human. He’s not completely lost but he’s still a very real danger to humans…and to us.”

Itachi met Shikamaru’s eyes. “I can’t lose my brother.”

“Then, let’s see that you don’t.” Shikamaru stood, offering his arm to Kurenai. “I suggest you get to work on your brother. I doubt Danzou will allow the council to wait long before adjourning again.”

Itachi nodded. The sun would rise soon and he was weak. Sasuke would need feeding soon as well or he would seek out nourishment from nearby sources, namely Naruto. Exiting the building, he disappeared into the fading night.
Sasuke jerked awake, the burn in his stomach excruciating. He recognized the feeling. Hunger. The sensations rolling through him were only slightly milder than those he’d experienced upon waking from his forced sleep.

The steady thrum of a heart had his fangs lengthening, saliva dripping from the tips. His perpetually red eyes gleamed with an even deeper bloodlust. Hunger roared through him, urging him to attack—to drain.

He glided along the dirt floor, eyes locked on Naruto’s sleeping form. He’d told Naruto to stay away. Why didn’t he stay away? Hunger beat at him with every thrum of his heart, his mouth salivating with the memory of the rich flavor running warmly down his throat. “Naruto—”

Sleep heavy eyes blinked open, lips drawn down in a grimace. Sasuke could hear the popping of bones as Naruto’s arms reached behind his head. He couldn’t take his eyes from the tone body stretching before him—a perfect example of a healthy human.

“Sasuke? What’s wrong?” A pink tongue darted out to wet dry lips, sleep fading from his eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

Naruto frowned, confused. “For what?”

“He’s starving. Long sleeps require massive feeding for several days until the body recovers from the long hibernation.”

Two pair of eyes jerked towards where the familiar redhead stood just beyond the barrier Itachi had erected. He neither smiled nor frowned. His eyes, a dark gray, possessed deep intelligence and hidden sadness.

“What are you doing here?” Naruto asked, feeling Sasuke’s unease as well.

Bloodlust altered from hunger to possessiveness. He didn’t like the feel of this man. He wasn’t human nor was he a night walker. His emotions and thoughts were impossible to read. Sasuke shook his head, his mind having trouble focusing on something other than Naruto. His body continued to scream for blood. Better to take this man’s blood than Naruto’s.

Pein noticed Sasuke’s difficulty, smiling. “I’m waiting.”

Naruto frowned. “For what?”

“For you.”

Sasuke pushed Naruto behind him. “You can’t have him!”

Lunging towards the doorway, his claws extended, he froze inches from Pein’s face. The barrier Itachi had set up kept Pein safe for the moment. Had Sasuke’s mind not been starved for blood, he might have been able to whisper the counter spell and escape to feast on the other’s blood. “He’s mine!”

“That’s not your decision to make. His fate still has to find its completion.” Pein smiled safe behind the barrier. “Come with me. It will be easier on Sasuke if he doesn’t bear witness. I promise.”

Sasuke moved away from Pein, his fingers locking around Naruto’s wrists. He wouldn’t allow it to
happen again. He wouldn’t let anyone or thing take Naruto from him. He would destroy the world to keep Naruto safe. “He stays with me.”

“You will only seal Sasuke’s fate if you stay with him, Naruto. You weren’t meant to bind yourself quite so close to him. His purpose was to ground your soul to this plane, yet instead your connection practically destroyed your other, a nearly unprecedented event.” Pein extended his hand, the tips of his fingers brushing the barrier but not passing. “Come with me.”

“I did this to him?” Naruto jerked, Sasuke’s fingers digging into his arms.

Sasuke growled low. “I don’t care, you can’t have him. He’s mine!”

Pein shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t say I didn’t offer to make it easier on you. Your fate is coming fast. It’s the final journey.”

Sasuke snarled, a sense of foreboding rushing through him. His hands pulled Naruto close. “He’s mine.”

“Wait a damn minute.” Naruto shoved Sasuke away, confusion evident on his face. “What are you talking about?”

“The sacred number has not been reached.” Pein twirled his cigarette between nimble fingers. “Aren’t you curious as to why your lover there is so fearful? He is an instinctual being and after so long with the experience, he knows the feel of it in the air.”

“No.” Sasuke’s fingers left bruises along Naruto’s arms.

“The feel of what?” Naruto’s voice remained calm while in his embrace. Sasuke pressed his nose to Naruto’s neck, his eyes never leaving the invading man with the hypnotizing eyes.

“Do you really want to know? Will it make it easier? You’re strong, stronger in this life than any of the others. Konan always said Sasuke fought his fate when she foretold yours. I always thought her appearance to him was a bit overkill. As if a warning would keep him from you. You wouldn’t let him…neither would he for that matter, fight though he may.” Pein tossed the cigarette to the ground with a flick of his fingers. “Death comes. No one can stop it.”

“Who are you?” Itachi snarled, stepping from the shadows. “And what the fuck are you doing in my home? Did Danzou send you?”

Pein’s smile dropped, his face taking on an almost angry visage. “No one you would care about.”

“Who are you?” Itachi lunged forward, his claws extended to swipe at Pein only to move through empty air.

“You missed.” Pein sat on the basement stairs staring, his attention focused on Itachi giving Sasuke a chance to pull Naruto even closer, his breath ghosting along the smooth column of neck.

“Tell me who sent you, now!”

Pein stood slowly to his feet, dusting imagined dust from his pants. “No one you need to worry about, Itachi.”

Itachi snarled, “Danzou did send you.”

“I think you should worry less about Danzou and more about your brother and Naruto.” Pein’s
features became like smoke before fading from the room in a gush of warm wind.

Sasuke was aware of the other’s departure, he just couldn’t bring himself to care. Naruto’s warm blood pulsed beneath the smooth tan throat. Small drops of saliva dripped from his teeth to splatter on Naruto’s neck.

The threat now gone, Sasuke’s hunger took over his mind. He desperately needed to feed on the warm nourishment Naruto’s neck promised. “Naruto--”

Naruto’s breath hitched. His heart began rocketing through his chest, making the rush of blood all the louder. He could feel it, the lust and desire for his blood. Naruto knew. He might not have a name for the need but he felt it all the same, of this Sasuke was sure. The way his neck tilted expectantly to the side and how his heart began a rapid staccato in his chest.

Sasuke’s teeth grazed the skin, moments from sinking deep when hands pulled Naruto from him and forced him through the barrier. Naruto stumbled, the haze in his mind interfering with his coordination. “What?”

“You need to stay away from Sasuke. He’s half starved.” Itachi rolled his sleeve towards his elbow.

Sasuke’s eyes locked on the blue veins running beneath pale skin, hunger pushing aside Naruto in favor of promised sustenance. Itachi’s blood was powerful. Not nearly as satisfying as Naruto’s but with Naruto out of his reach and the hunger beating at him, Sasuke had no choice but to dive towards the offered blood.

Heat rushed into his mouth, thick and healing. His veins heated with the power rushing into him. The taste, thick and unappealing, offered nothing but strength but his body in the shape it was, refused to relinquish the nourishment. His hands clasped desperately at the wrist to secure his access to the warmth pouring rapidly into him.

Unable to stop himself, Sasuke moaned low. Strength flooded through him at an alarming rate. Itachi, planner that he was, had double fed to supply enough blood for both their bodies. His starved body soaked up every drop of blood, adding color to his cheeks and muscle to what was lost during his long sleep.

He could feel Naruto’s eyes on him, a hint of envy in his gaze. He tore his lips from the offered wrist, suddenly sick for enjoying the power flooding through him at Itachi’s blood. Along with the blood came some semblance of mental capacity. “Naruto--”

“You haven’t taken enough. You need as much strength as you can get during these next few days.” Itachi reached to pull him back, his body fighting.

The dangerous thirst had dimmed enough for him to realize he wanted Naruto’s blood. “I need Naruto.”

Itachi shook his head negative. “No. It’s too dangerous.”

“Why?” Naruto spoke up, his heart pounding loudly in his chest for both night walkers to hear. Sasuke’s face grew dark. “Because I killed you.”

“It’s too dangerous for both of you in this state,” Itachi corrected.

“You can stop him before he hurts me,” argued Naruto.
Sasuke’s body shook, falling to his knees at Naruto’s approach. His hands lifted to cover his ears, blocking out the loud pounding of Naruto’s heart. He could practically taste the rich flavor he knew gushed in Naruto’s veins. Naruto was his addiction. He would give his very soul for another taste.

“Naruto, stay back.” Itachi moved to put himself between the two men when Naruto dropped to kneel before Sasuke.

“We’ve done this before, haven’t we?” Naruto lifted hands to remove the ones clasped over Sasuke’s ears.

Sasuke lifted his red gaze to meet familiar blue. He was haunted by those eyes, even during a supposedly dreamless sleep, he’d dreamed of those eyes. “Yes--”

“Then I don’t mind. I know you won’t hurt me.” Naruto lifted his arm as Itachi had.

“I have before.”

“I’m not sure what we are. Are we soul mates? Are you just an excuse to keep my soul here as Pein said? Are we just destined to hurt each other?” Naruto offered his wrist. “I don’t care. If I have to die…I want to die by your hand.”

Sasuke’s eyes widened. “I won’t survive you leaving me again.”

“I’ve never left you. Those Narutos before me, they weren’t me.” Naruto lifted his hand to furrow through his hair. “I’m me.”

Sasuke’s eyes closed at the touch. Naruto’s touch was gentle but insistent. He felt tugging and opened his eyes to see Naruto’s wrist before his eyes. He’d never received such a selfless offering, or perhaps it wasn’t selfless. He felt the excitement in each breath Naruto took. Naruto wanted this.

A quick glance to Itachi showed his brother frowning but not interjecting between the two. It wasn’t a blessing, but it was enough for Sasuke to release a sigh of relief. He lowered his lips to the warm flesh. His tongue darted out to taste the skin, salty with a hint of sweat.

He smirked at the way Naruto’s heart stuttered in his chest. Running his fangs along the skin, they both shuddered for different reasons. “Sasuke--”

Not wanting either to wait any longer, Sasuke pressed his fangs into the thrumming vein. A shock rushed through him. If Itachi’s blood was nourishment, Naruto’s was a gourmet meal.

Links clicked together in his mind, the years melted away and he felt revived in ways he never had. His internal organs began to heal from the years of malnutrition. His hands lifted to grasp at the wrist, sucking even more powerfully at the open vein.

Naruto moaned, falling to the floor to writhe as Sasuke sucked deeply of the flowing blood. Sasuke followed him down, lapping at the multitude of power and flavors rushing from the punctures. He snarled upon feeling Itachi’s hand reaching to pull him away.

“Sasuke if you don’t stop, you’ll kill him. Is that what you want? To destroy him again?”

Sasuke’s body clenched, aroused and full of Naruto’s blood. For the first time in years, his body longed to flip Naruto over--to pound in him hard and fast. Naruto would welcome him. He wanted it.

“Sasuke…stop…” Naruto panted from beside him.
The word was like cold water, dousing his passion and bringing him from the madness. He dropped the wrist, backpedaling towards the wall and away from Naruto before he drained him. Blood smeared his lips, his tongue darting out to savor the remaining flavor.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Sasuke shuddered at the memory of holding Naruto’s limp body in his arms for hour upon hour.

Itachi crouched, checking Naruto’s pulse only to have the other push him aside. “Sasuke…that was so…I can’t think of how wonderful that was.”

Itachi nodded. “Arousal is common on both parts from such a feeding.”

“You mean you…?”

“No!” Sasuke and Itachi shouted together.

“It’s more than just feeding. For arousal, there needs to be a connection and desire. Sasuke and I don’t have that,” explained Itachi.

“Thank the gods.” Sasuke muttered, having calmed a considerable amount since the blood began circulating through his system.

“Naruto, it’s nearly dawn. Why don’t you go out for breakfast. You’ll need the nourishment and Sasuke will sleep once the sun crests the horizon. He’s still weak, even with your blood.”

“But…” Naruto pouted.

“Go.” Sasuke glanced from his crouched position on the wall. “I’m fine.”

“Fine but I won’t be gone long.” Naruto sent a glance back towards both brothers. “Bye Sasuke.”

Sasuke glanced up in time to see Naruto disappear up the stairs. He didn’t move until he was no longer in sight before turning his gaze towards Itachi.

“Sasuke, we have to talk.”
Chapter 13

Naruto shifted on his feet, staring into Itachi’s eyes. His gaze darted quickly to where Sasuke remained, huddled against the wall. His quickly shifting eyes contained intelligence and sanity despite his posture, which suggested he was less than of sound mind. Blood still framed his mouth in a macabre fashion, appearing almost like lipstick smeared across his lips. Almost on cue, a pink tongue darted out to flick at the red stain, eyes closing as if he’d tasted the most wonderful dessert.

He didn’t want to leave them alone. Something told him to dig his feet in and argue reasons he should stay with Sasuke. He wanted to stay with Sasuke. Even leaving him for a short time wasn’t appealing in the least. That Itachi would shoo him away like child too young to understand the adult discussion attacked his pride. He wasn’t a child, nor was he so naïve he couldn’t offer something to their discussion. He believed Itachi’s explanations of what they were and how he and Sasuke came to be caught in their circle of life and death. He believed what they were. He was capable of taking anything they threw at him…so why was Itachi suddenly being secretive? What did he have to hide?

Sasuke’s eyes shifted back and forth, scanning the room in quick sweeps as if searching for monsters in the shadows of which only he could see. Those crimson eyes paused on Naruto and his head gave a slight nod. He was agreeing. Couldn’t he feel the change in the air? Naruto clenched his teeth against the urge to scream at them for bringing him in only to exclude him.

“Go, I’m fine.”

A muscle ticked in Naruto’s clenched jaw, but he did as commanded--leaving the two brothers to their discussion. He wanted so badly to refuse them but he found himself unable to deny the request. He wasn’t compelled or under any spell that he could tell. Then again, if he was, it was likely he wouldn’t be able to tell.

His grabbed his wallet from his room. Instead of driving, he opted to walk the half a mile to a local diner. The sun had barely risen, shining brightly through the heavy trees surrounding the area. Itachi liked the secluded nature surrounding his home. Naruto had asked once why he chose to live so far from the main parts of the city. It was then Itachi explained his reasons, citing the quiet call of nature and other such nonsense. Looking back, he was probably naïve--a bit less jaded. He was sure Itachi did enjoy the nature setting and the quiet that came along with it, but knowing now what he did, he suspected Itachi’s true purpose was to keep Sasuke as far away from civilization as he could. Even Naruto couldn’t deny Sasuke’s status as a time bomb if steps weren’t taken to control the situation.

That understanding brought the subject of Sasuke to his thoughts. Sasuke was a strange creature. Naruto’s memories…no, not memories. He couldn’t truly call them memories as he had not lived them but only watched them as a theater goer watches a movie and even then, they were fragmented into a collection of scenes surrounded by strong emotions. While it was true his soul had loved Sasuke in various ways, he found his interests in the crimson eyed creature ran much deeper. There was a thread pulled taut between them. It drew him to Sasuke and had absolutely nothing to do with his past memories. He would come to Sasuke even if he had never known him before. He wasn’t sure why he knew this, but he could say without a shadow of a doubt that his and Sasuke’s fate was intertwined in ways superseding everything he thought he knew of love. Love paled when he thought of what he felt. Perhaps it was a similar feeling to what had driven Sasuke mad.

Love He snorted loudly. That emotion alone was a mystery to him. It was hard not to feel the
residual emotions lingering in him. Love. Lust. Fear. Hope. They all swirled in the shadows of his mind, choosing the most inopportune times to flow forward and corrupt his thoughts. If Sasuke was his soul mate, as his memories suggested, he wanted to love him as he was now and not because the Naruto five hundred years ago did. It made things difficult. Love. Once again in the spotlight. It was better not to look too deeply into the abyss. There was that saying, when you look into the abyss, the abyss looks into you. He’d heard it in his philosophy class but it felt quite appropriate now. He could almost see the eyes of his dead selves looking out from the abyss of Sasuke’s eyes.

Kicking a pebble across the deserted street, he scowled a bit. He’d never been one to over analyze his life or that of his guardian. Lately, his mind seemed to spin, looking for something to grasp a hold of as the waves of madness threatened him. The world seemed to have gone mad, taking him with it into a purgatory of unknown outcome.

Through all this, a strange spark of excitement curled through him. He’d dated men and women. That was nothing new. He’d even kissed and fondled his fair share of both sexes. His own sex appeal seemed to draw in the sexes, much to Kiba and Sakura’s chagrin. He had to grin at that. Both sexes loved him and not just for his body, regardless of the fact that it was in top condition thanks to soccer and swimming.

“I’m a beast. Men want me. Women want me. Hell, even supernatural creatures of unknown origins want me.” Naruto spoke to the empty street, more to himself than in hopes of being overheard by some passerby.

Walking down the street at a slow amble, he felt his load lighten. Sasuke was healing. In just a mere day, his eyes had lost the wild animalistic look and transformed into something hinting at sanity. He wasn’t afraid. He should be. He should fear for his very life in Sasuke’s presence. He’d been killed once before by the familiar madness eating away at the mind behind soulful eyes. Something told him not to be afraid. Something was coming but he shouldn’t be afraid. Death held no true power over him, the wind purred in his ear. The mysterious intruder seemed to know more than he wished to reveal on that subject. Was there truly any need to hide behind riddles? Was it a game and Naruto the unwilling participant? Asking him straight forward did nothing but earn more questions.

Pein. He’d said his name was Pein. From the multiple piercings lining his face and ears, he’d probably gone through quite a bit of pain. It was strange name for an equally strange individual. He’d felt a pull to this man as well. It wasn’t the same as Sasuke. With Pein, he felt a kindred spirit. It felt different, though. Pein seemed almost disillusioned, a shell of what he should be. The first spark of something other than boredom or mild curiosity had been when he’d faced Itachi. There had been something there. Something curious.

“Something is going on with them,” he murmured. “And you are an idiot who has started talking to yourself. It’s probably the first sign of your growing insanity. At least it means you can join Sasuke in the padded room.”

He chuckled, happy to finally see the small family owned diner come into his view. He was tired of his thoughts. He was tired of trying to analyze his feelings while still being in shock from the strange turn his life had taken. Good food was always a way to take one’s mind off troubles, at least temporarily. Well, bad food could do it too but who would want to use bad food as a medium for distraction?

Pressing the button at the intersection, he waiting impatiently for the signal he could cross. His stomach rumbled loudly, reminding him of his lack of proper sustenance in the last day. Add in
that he’d volunteered his blood as food for Sasuke and he was practically running on empty. If he was going to make a regular offering, he should probably keep his strength up. Hell, he would be upset if Sasuke didn’t feed from him. He’d felt things.

The physical was the most obvious but there was something else. He’d felt Sasuke’s blood rushing with each pulse of his heart. He’d felt his lungs fill with oxygen, each breath resonating in his body. The taste of himself on Sasuke’s tongue had been more of a turn on than the actual act. He’d been Sasuke, merged in every part of his mind. Had it not been so fragmented, Naruto was sure their minds would have synchronized instantly. Itachi had mistaken his question to be for the arousal. Which, it was arousing, but the feeding had been so much more. It was almost a reinforcement of his connection with Sasuke. What had been lost over time was being rebuilt.

The sign signaled pedestrians to walk. The little man flashed its urgency not to dawdle to any pedestrian waiting for the signal. Not bothering to glance down the street, he trotted across the crosswalk--fully confident of his safety with the little white man.

He was trotting and then he was flying through the air. His mind was too shocked to register the pain rocking through him. His body skidded along the gravely road, bouncing and flailing before coming to a stop. The skidding of tires and screams of bystanders echoed in his ears. Had he been hit? Had he foolishly fallen into a sense of false comfort with his life? Had he descended into that all too familiar trap of society’s youth, believing nothing could harm him?

Naruto felt tears rolling down his cheeks, unable to do much more than lay as bystanders crowded around him. He heard screams to call 911 and felt the comforting touch of a stranger wrapping a coat around his body. His body was shivering. Why couldn’t he stop shivering?

His head felt sticky. He couldn’t feel his arms and legs, much less move them. It was a given he probably had internal damage. Through it all, his mind remained calm--almost analytical. He was dying. It was a familiar sensation, like being born but instead of drawing in life, his frail body was releasing it.

“Sa…Sasu…” He tried to call out to him yet his throat closed in on itself. Blood bubbled from his mouth, dripping down his lips much as it had Sasuke’s. Funny how it seemed much less pleasant when it dripped from his own mouth.

“Stay calm. The ambulance is on the way.” Some stranger’s words pushed through the madness. It would be too late. Fate had her hand in this deal. One couldn’t run from their fate. It sounded cliché in his mind. Such a cliché phrase and yet, so true in this moment.

“Giving up so soon?”

The world froze around him. The people stopped moving. The wind stopped blowing. Everything stopped, the pause button pushed. It was impossible. The world shouldn’t freeze like this.

“Pitiful, the human shell encapsulating the soul. You know, there is no heaven or hell. There is no afterlife, per say. All souls are reborn, it’s a balance system. But every so often, a special soul is born. This soul can’t be wiped clean upon death. Sure, the fine details are erased and usually only accessible through dreams but that feeling, that uniqueness to each human is still there.”

Naruto’s eyes hazed, trying to focus on the figure standing before him. Pein. He was here. “Ah… Pa…”

“Don’t try to talk. This is the moment of truth. This is where you become what you were always meant to be. This is the moment when all the world stops and you are given the chance to evolve.”
Pein crouched down beside him, his gray eyes hard. “We’re Watchers. We watch. We are the self proclaimed keepers of the balance of all things. If something occurs to endanger the balance, we take action. Take your lover for example. His kind don’t die…at least not easily. They feed off of creatures that do. If there is a boom in their population, it’s our job to take care of it or the balance will bring in very bad things. There was a famous flood brought about by an imbalance in the balance.”

Naruto’s eyes widened, he would rather die than play executioner to a race of people just because they birthed a few too many children. Pein chuckled, pulling out a cigarette from his jacket pocket.

“Your face, so much pain. Do you think this world could survive if there isn’t a balance? Humans and the others have to live in synchronicity. If they don’t, we intervene. It’s funny really, how we come into being. But I think, that’s a discussion for another day. I’m here to take you, or rather, your soul. It’s ripe. After ten lifetimes, you’ve amassed enough power to survive without your body.”

Naruto shook his head. “No!”

“No?” Pein snorted. “You never got to live. Your first life sent a tingle to whatever force takes care of wiping souls. It killed you. Sure, throw in a war and swords…that’s not coincidence that you were taken there and its not a coincidence your little nightwalker was there. The powers that be felt your connection. They felt the link you had to this world before you ever died. And it happened over and over and over. Your soul wouldn’t forget until finally you are here. It’s the end of the line. There will be no more rebirths.”

The world around them wavered slightly, making Pein frown. “Listen to me. There isn’t much time remaining. A choice must be made. Your soul will be destroyed. Souls that aren’t able to be wiped clean are devoured. How do you think your nightwalker will take it?”

Pein pressed his hand to Naruto’s chest, causing feelings of warmth to rush through him until a faint thread revealed itself. It sparkled brightly with some mysterious light, making Naruto want to sit and gaze at it forever. It grew from his chest and flowed away from him.

Then he knew. This was his connection to Sasuke. This was what he’d felt. It had drawn him to Sasuke throughout his entire life.

“I see you know what that is. This little thing is about to snap. He won’t survive it. It’s always been there, even while your soul waited in stasis for rebirth. Do you understand now? His soul is marked just as yours is. There will be no rebirth for him, either. This is it. This is the end. Take my hand.” Pein lowered his hand.

Sasuke. Pein’s words were spoken in truth though Naruto’s heart broke at what he already knew. If there was no hope…if the thread connecting them was severed…

He didn’t think twice. There was no hesitation. If he didn’t take the hand offered him, Sasuke would destroy himself and likely a good portion of the world with him. He didn’t care about the balance of things. He didn’t care if the powers that be held a scale measuring every ounce of creation. All he cared about was Sasuke. Only Sasuke. In those moments, a choice was made though there was really no second option. He reached up and grasped the slender hand.

“I do apologize. This is going to hurt.”

Naruto screamed. Or he thought he did. He couldn’t hear his screams over the roaring in his ears--the screams of lifetimes. It felt like his very being was being ripped from his body. Electricity
rippled up and down his nerves, causing his body to convulse wildly. The hand gripping his never
slackened its hold, even through the haze he could see Pein’s face was wracked in equal agony. He
was sharing his pain. Perhaps his name was appropriate after all.

“Sa…Sasuke…” Naruto arched his back, tendons and veins standing out against his skin. The
blood boiled in his veins, becoming molten lava with every rapid pulse of his heart. He was dying
but unlike before, there was no comforting warmth or darkness--only agony which surpassed
anything he’d felt before. He felt it leaking from him and rushing down the bond connecting him
and Sasuke.

“Konan!” Pein’s shout was barely heard through the loud roaring in his ears.

“You idiot!”

A woman stepped from the nothing. Her blue hair shimmered beneath the sun that seemed
amazingly even brighter--a white light behind her. The heat ripped through him, burning the skin
and muscle from his bones only to replace it anew…and then, silence.

Perhaps it wasn’t a true silence. He heard his heart pulsing blood through his veins. He heard the
rush of air with each exhalation. Then, it came. The rocketing agony coming through to him made
the previous bout seem like a minor prick. The difference was, Naruto knew this wasn’t his agony.
Sasuke. It wasn’t physical. Fight though he might, his body refused to hold out any longer. If he
was dying, at least his last thoughts would be of Sasuke.

“You should have called me.” Konan snarled to Pein, who sat slumped beside Naruto.

“There wasn’t time. His decision needed to be now. I told him it would hurt more if he waited.”
Pein flinched from her touch, his body heaving.

“Don’t give me that shit. You are a master of time.” She crossed her arms, glaring down at him.
Pein shook his head, scooping his arms under Naruto’s shoulders.

“Help me, Konan. We need to get him out of here. He’ll need to stay in stasis for several hours to
recover.” Pein’s voice echoed in his ears as the world faded to black.

oOo

“Sasuke, the council is very on edge concerning you.” Itachi began, being diplomatic in order to
prevent an explosion in Sasuke.

“Hn.” Sasuke snorted, wrapping his arms tighter around his knees. “They always are.”

“I’m serious, Sasuke.”

Red eyes shot to meet Itachi’s. “So am I. Whether or not they put a warrant on me is irrelevant,
isn’t it?”

“I won’t let them hurt you but you are going to be brought before them…soon.” Itachi clenched his
jaw at the angry gleam in Sasuke’s eye.

“Do they know?” His claws began to extend, digging into his legs. Sasuke didn’t seem to notice,
and wouldn’t have if Itachi hadn’t wrapped his hand around Sasuke’s wrist.

“About Naruto?”
Sasuke nodded, attempting to keep himself calm under the swirling emotions being with Naruto brought to him. “Yes.”

“All suspect something. Some know. I think Danzou will use Naruto against you.” Itachi lifted a hand to the bridge of his nose. He suspected Danzou might attempt to assassinate Naruto for the soul purpose of driving Sasuke over the edge.

“He wants the throne.” Sasuke stared at the blood coating his fingers. He brought his thumb and forefinger together, smearing the red liquid.

“Driving you insane won’t get it for him.” Itachi began to pace. “What’s his angle?”

Sasuke laughed, first a small chuckle which grew into a loud cackle. “Don’t be stupid, Itachi. Can’t you see it? How sane do you think you will be when I’m executed?”

Itachi paled, staring at Sasuke as if he’d grown a second head. “You…Sasuke…you know I wouldn’t let them execute you.”

“Then you would forfeit your throne. Don’t you see? It’s brilliant. I’ve single handedly trapped my brother into a coup. I’ve very nearly handed Danzou the crown.” Sasuke began laughing again. “Don’t you see. If I die, you’ll likely be deemed unfit. A vote of no confidence goes a long way. If you save me after the execution order is given, you forfeit your crown. Brilliant! To think I underestimated that bastard all those years I spent active in the court.”

“Sasuke, you are forgetting that Danzou can not force me to go mad and he has to have a unanimous vote of all members present to execute anyone. Shikamaru…”

“Shikamaru Nara will look after his own skin. He’s smart. He won’t risk his family name on my account.” Sasuke shook his head, frowning at something.

“You have too little faith in others.” Itachi tilted his head, feeling a chill work through him. “The air has changed.”

“Itachi…” Sasuke began rocking, rubbing his arms back and forth. “Something is wrong.”

“Itachi, stay calm.” Itachi extended his senses to the general area. Everything seemed as it should.

“I can’t…I can’t think…I can’t…feel him…” Sasuke claws began ripping into his forearm, blood dripping thickly down to splash on the ground.

Itachi moved to stop him, only to have the claws slash across his chest. The white shirt split in four rips, blood trickling from where the claws had sliced his skin. Quiet pain rippled through Sasuke’s eyes, his body drawing into a tighter ball.

“Can’t you feel it, Tachi?” he whimpered into his knees. “I can.”

“Naruto is fine. It’s just because he’s out of your scanning distance.” Itachi grasped Sasuke’s shoulders, shaking him harshly. “Get a hold on yourself. Do you want to play into Danzou’s hands?”

“The quiet.” Sasuke’s eyes went distant, his hand reaching to rub across his chest.

“Sasuke? What are you speaking of?”

Sasuke ripped away from Itachi’s grip, prowling away--disappearing into a darkened corner of the
room. “The quiet before the storm.”

Chills shot up Itachi’s spine. A sense of foreboding unlike any he’d ever felt resonated in him. His eyes, rarely losing their natural black, began to shift—altering to a deep crimson. The air practically crackled with electricity moments before Sasuke began screaming. His hands ripped at his shirt and then his skin as if to tear it from his bones. Itachi, unable to do much else, tackled him to the ground. Sasuke continued to scream, his eyes red and fangs completely extended.

“Sasuke!” Itachi hissed at the bite of claws into his wrists as Sasuke flailed about wildly.

“I can’t feel him! It hurts!” Sasuke’s body convulsed, his eyes rolling back.

“Sasuke!”

Wrapping a hand around both of Sasuke’s wrists, he used his free hand to gather the drying blood on his chest. Drawing ancient symbols onto Sasuke’s brow, he hissed out a language long dead. The whites in Sasuke’s eyes showed as crimson orbs rolled back into his head and his body went limp. The spell was strong but the stronger a spell, the shorter the duration. It would only give him hours—a day at the most.

Itachi’s hands shook. Blood, both his and Sasuke’s, covered his body. He wiped his hand across his face, smearing blood over the pale skin. He needed to get to Naruto. The dread he’d felt…he didn’t want to consider what would happen if Naruto wasn’t happily eating breakfast. He cursed himself for taking only a taste of Naruto, all those years ago. It would help him track him more easily if he’d taken more.

He rushed to his room, only taking the time to rinse the blood from his face and to pull on a clean shirt. He found his energy waning significantly after putting Sasuke under. The difficulty he had focusing his eyes was evidence of that.

“Fuck, Sasuke.” Itachi braced himself on the doorjamb. “You aren’t making this easy on me.”

He raised his hand to his chest, wincing under the glare of the sun. He could feel it burning through his skin. He would have to wear a hat and coat if he was going to go out in it. His strength was too drained to walk about without covering.

His nose picked up Naruto’s scent easily, and he knew his ward enjoyed a small family owned diner a short ways down the road. Drawing in as much energy as he could, he flashed quickly to the diner. The sight before him chilled him to the bones. He was sure his heart stopped yet he remained standing. Police and ambulances littered the areas along with pedestrian bystanders stopping to gawk at the circus.

“Naruto…”

The familiar blond head he’d found his hands tussling as a child was matted with blood. His eyes glazed over as a white sheet was lowered over the body before it was lifted onto the stretcher. Several locals recognized him, knowing Naruto was his ward.

“Mr. Uchiha!”

Itachi stumbled against a nearby building. Only Sasuke had ever made him feel this despondent. He was lost, unable to respond. A police officer touched his arm. It took every ounce of self control not to kill him instantly. “Mr. Uchiha?”

Itachi nodded, not trusting himself to speak. “You’re the guardian of Naruto Uzumaki?”
Itachi closed his eyes. “Yes.”

“We need you to come down to the morgue to identify him. I’m sorry to have to put you through this but it’s procedure.” The police officer guided Itachi towards a waiting car.

The entire drive to the hospital, Itachi sat in a state of shock. All he could think was that he’d failed Naruto. There was no reason why he couldn’t have stayed with him and Sasuke. Sasuke was calmer when he was around.

Every mile, he fought to keep his eyes from bleeding red in his grief. Only iron clad control kept him from going as feral as Sasuke. Naruto had resided in his heart as no other but his brother had. He’d swore he would not grow attached the boy. He would only keep him safe for Sasuke. He was a fool, blinded just as Sasuke was by Naruto’s light.

Something about Naruto drew him in. He connected with him--saw something familiar that he was unable to name. Naruto was a like song he’d heard once, reviving a long dead feeling he’d never known he’d felt or missed. It was such a strange sensation, being in Naruto’s presence. He was envious of Sasuke--of how Naruto seemed to only need him.

“Sir?” Itachi glanced at the police officer. “We’re here.”

Itachi gave no response, sliding gracefully from the car. He was careful to keep his hat low on his head until he stepped within the building. The scent of blood and death nearly sent him to his knees. Normally he had guards over his senses to keep from being over powered. With his energy so low, he was bombarded by the odors and the humans’ worthless attempts to cover them. These scents never died to those with preternatural senses.

He followed the officer, standing silently as the man conversed quietly with the medical examiner. Itachi heard every word. It wasn’t hard to over hear them. He really didn’t care until he heard the words ‘hit and run’. His jaw cracked under the effort to keep his dark nature in check. Danzou did this. He didn’t know how, but something told him who was responsible.

“Mr. Uchiha? I’m Kakashi Hatake, the medical examiner. If you’ll follow me.” Dr. Hatake ushered Itachi through a set of double doors where Itachi froze. Naruto’s blood was heavy in the room. It was fresh, undiluted by the cleaners humans use.

“I’m sorry. Usually we clean the deceased before the family come to identify them.” The medical examiner pulled the sheet from a body causing tears to prick his eyes--tears he was unable to shed for several reasons, the first being they would be the color of blood.

Itachi turned, unable to look anymore. He’d fought so hard to keep his eyes from changing and now he was losing the battle.

“You don’t have to hide, King Itachi.”

Itachi swirled around, his eyes a brilliant red and locked on the doctor. A snarl revealed sharpened fangs ready to pierce his throat. “What did you say?”

“Forgive me, I’m one of the shape changers. Wolf. I’m surprised you didn’t scent it on me. We can’t hide from your kind, even in human form. The wolf stays on us. Perhaps your grief, no?” Kakashi’s eyes softened as he glanced at Naruto’s body. “I’ve never known your kind to take in orphans.”

“He was a promise I failed to keep.” Itachi brushed his hand along Naruto’s cheek. It was cold, the skin already decaying. One touch and he knew Naruto’s soul was no longer within. “Forgive me,
“Naruto. I failed in so many ways.”

“My clan has always respected you. You’ve kept the peace amongst your kind and are a fair judge. We will keep the peace for you while you mourn.” This was no small offer. Hatake was practically offering up his pack as a supernatural militia. Most non humans kept their distance from others of a different breed out of some inbred instinct. Tensions ran high in the presence of others.

“Is there some debt I owe you?” Itachi lowered his hand from Naruto and turned to gaze at the shape shifter.

“Consider this a peace offering amongst our species. There have been rumblings. The wind speaks of plots against you. I think this child’s death wasn’t an accident.” Kakashi pulled the white sheet over Naruto’s head.

“Oh, of that I am certain and there will be a reckoning. I would advise your pack to stay clear. I’m afraid war might be coming.” Itachi strode to the wall. A quick slice to his wrist released blood in a crimson flow. He dipped his fingers in the fluid, writing on the wall in symbols only a select few could read. “It’s funny and sad…I’ve had to call on the ancient magics a lot recently.”

The letters glowed brightly before the blood faded. Kakashi sniffed the air causing Itachi to laugh mirthlessly. “That magic is invisible to your kind. Consider it our bargain. When his body is laid to rest, I’ll consider your oath fulfilled. My part shall be a binding promise. Should you need my aid, speak my name in calling. I will hear you, no matter you location.”

Itachi stumbled against the wall, his body unable to stand any longer. Kakashi Hatake rushed to his side, helping him stand. “You’re not well.”

“Exhaustion. I have much to do, none of it pleasant. Don’t let anyone take his body without my say. What I wrote wasn’t only my oath. It will prevent your from falling under compulsion while you reside in this building.” Itachi shrugged away the wolf’s touch.

“You think someone would try to take him?”

Itachi snarled, his fangs glistening in the florescent lighting. “I’m very sure of it.”

Using the last of his energy, he whispered ancient words. The world faded away and he was once more in his study. There was nothing to hold his body up and he crumpled to the floor. It was then the tears came. Great rivers of red fell from his eyes to stain the carpet. He was helpless to stop them, his body all but drained of energy and the sun was high in the sky.

“Forgive me.” Itachi closed his eyes and was pulled once more into the darkness.

oOo

Pein collapsed against Konan, allowing her to support him. She snarled at him. “You are a fool.”

Pein smiled faintly, “So you continue to say.”

“You could have destroyed yourself.”

“You worry too much. There was no time for a ritual. I had to remove his soul manually.” Pein slumped into a plush chair while Konan started a fire in the fireplace.

“Still…was this boy worth it? There will be others.” Konan took a seat in the adjourning chair, staring into the flames.
Pein nodded, his hands tracing designs on the chair arms. “His bond with that nightwalker…”

Konan’s eyes widened. “That’s what this is about. You see what you were denied.”

“I was denied nothing!” Pein snarled, his fingers tearing into the fabric beneath them.

“Don’t kid yourself.” Konan turned her gaze back to the flames licking at the wood. “I was around long before you.”

Pein shook his head, his eyes staring into the flames and he was carried back. It was hard to fight the pull of the past. It haunted him with a viciousness. He often wondered if it was fate or something else.

“Nagato!”

Nagato gasped for breath, staring at the ornate ceiling. The painted symbols surrounded him, glowing under the words of the surrounding priests. Were they priests? They were cloaked so he couldn’t see their faces. They sounded like priests, their words were foreign and spoken in sync.

“Nagato, you must stay with me.”

She wasn’t who he wanted. He needed someone else. Where was he? Didn’t he feel their bond? Couldn’t he hear him crying out for him? This was their final chance. He needed him.

“My Lady, he’s not going to answer the call. We will have to forcibly remove the soul or he will die. He’s bleeding out too heavily to wait,” one of the hooded priests whispered to the woman standing at his side.

“It could kill him. We’ve never extracted a soul successfully without their bonded soul present.” The blue haired woman brought her hand to her lips.

“Konan, if you don’t hurry, he’s dead anyway. Look at the thread. It’s all but invisible. His bond mate either doesn’t care, or he has not acknowledged the bond. Sadly, it happens far more than not,” the priest sighed.

“He’s had ten lifetimes! I’ve seen him at each death! He’s been there! I’ve watched Nagato since his first lifetime,” argued Konan.

“My dear, powerful though you may be, you are still young by our standards. He is at the death because he is drawn to those places. That his soul does not answer means his soul was not ready for the burden. He unintentionally rejected the bond. Now, you must bring forth this boy’s soul or he will be destroyed.”

Konan looked sadly at Nagato. “Take my hand. I will be your mother into this world.”

Chanting escalated as he took the offered hand, pain ripping through him and along the thin thread binding him to the man. He heard her words. He’d been rejected. He knew the man. His dark hair and eyes were plastered into his memory. He’d dreamed of him his entire life. He knew his name, music on his tongue. Many nights he laid in bed, whispering the name over and over. It was a prayer to him.

Nagato arched his back, pain was tearing him apart. He cried out the only thing he could. It was his prayer—his mantra. “Itachi!”

Then there was nothing but blackness.
“Nagato.” Konan was shaking his shoulder. “You were dreaming.”

“Pein…” Pein rasped out, sipping the whiskey Konan handed him. It burned down his throat, heating his stomach but unable to force back the chill residing in his soul.

“I’m not calling you that. It’s not who you are.”

Pein closed his eyes. Nagato had died on the alter to be reborn as Pein. The sooner she realized it, the sooner everyone would be happier. “How long was I asleep?”

“About six hours.”

Pein cracked his neck, not liking the stiffness in his body from sleeping in the chair. “The boy?”

“He’ll be awakening soon. You’ll want to be there. Your face will be the only he recognizes.” Konan folded the blanket she’d tossed over him hours earlier.

Pein nodded, standing and stretching. It was time. The boy’s extraction had taken him back to his own. It was a miracle he’d survived with such a small bonding thread. He watched Konan leave to give him a few moments to compose himself.

His hand shook as he lifted a hand to touch his chest. Just as it had a thousand years prior, a thin, translucent thread showed itself. Try though he might, he could not bring himself to clip it. He no longer needed his bond mate yet…he couldn’t bear the thought of destroying it.

Opening the door, he found Konan standing quietly. He smiled at his long time friend. “Let’s go welcome our newest member.”
Chapter 14

“How is he?”

Pein took his place at Konan’s side, frown creasing his face at the pale colored stone before him. A few of his fellow Watchers kept their distance, watching two of their strongest take more than a slight interest in the young Watcher lying unmoving upon the stasis slab.

It was hard not to be in awe of the image Pein presented. His slender frame belied the pure power flowing through him. He was easily the strongest amongst the Watchers. The piercings littering his body only made him all the more eye catching. They all knew his story and could not imagine he survived being long estranged from his bond mate.

Until the previous day, he was the only known Watcher to survive the soul extraction without the immediate presence of his soul bond mate. Now there were two. It would have been a concern had he not shown an interest in Naruto Uzumaki.

“Stupid. Idiot. Why don’t you fight?”

Pein paced around the slab of stone serving as a stasis bed. Watchers drew their strength from the world around them. And the world responded to them in turn.

Naruto showed no signs of connecting with the spiritual force of the earth. Pein could see the strands of life seeking to connect, only to be repelled. He slammed his palms upon the alter, willing Naruto accept the earth’s bond.

The stone remained clear and undiffused with the natural power Naruto should be exuding. The worried whispers of the others reached his ears, forcing him to tune them out as he focused on the young man before him.

It could be the connection with his other but…

“Wake up.” Pein shoved a hand through his hair, glancing at Konan before continuing his pacing around the slab.

The strongest of their kind were those bonded to long lived beings. Shape shifters. Nightwalkers. Magic wielders. Bonds to the supernatural were rare. Human bonds were more common but tended to be weaker and therefore, the Watchers created from them were weak. Such was the way of things. Balance was key.

Naruto was bonded strongly to a nightwalker. He should be excelling at his new life, not slowly drifting away. It went against everything any of them knew.

“He’s still not waking. His soul has almost shut down. I should have known you were an exception to the rule. There’s a reason why souls aren’t extracted without their bond mates present.” Konan shook her head in regret. “It’s a pity. I think he would have been strong.”

“He’s not gone yet.” Pein frowned as he approached the large alter made of clear quartz.

“He’s all but…” Konan sighed. “Look at the crystal. It should glow with his color. It barely has any light. He’s dying.”

“I’m not going to let him.”
A curious expression crossed Konan’s face. “Why?”

“I have my reasons,” answered Pein curtly.

“Do those reasons have to do with Itachi Uchiha?”

Pein snarled, releasing a string of curses in languages long dead. “My reasons are my own.”

Determination hardened his face as he placed a hand on Naruto’s chest, sending the faintest pulse of power into him. Before his eyes, the bond thread gleamed. Nothing appeared abnormal.

Appearances could be deceiving. His eyes narrowed, observing the thread—a spiritual connection to Sasuke.

Sending a second, much stronger, pulse; his eyes widened. From behind, he heard Konan’s gasp followed by those of the Watchers present. They couldn’t be seeing what they were. It was impossible.

“Nagato…”

“Unbelievable…”

What normally stemmed from the heart outward was wrapped around Naruto’s entire body. It flowed from Naruto, branching off in several areas to swirl in translucent strands over legs and arms. The strands seemed to stroke and caress every place they touched while forcing away the strands of earth energy. It was obvious to each person witnessing the Naruto was more than bound to his other. He was irrevocably connected to Sasuke in ways defying their ancient knowledge. There was no room in him for a significant bond to the earth. Sasuke Uchiha had claim to every part of Naruto’s soul.

He couldn’t be sure, but there was a very strong possibility Sasuke was wrapped just as tightly in similar strands. Pein’s hand dropped away and the visible connection faded away.

Bonds could be broken. If Itachi died, Pein would feel the emptiness of the bond loss but would be able to continue on. He could purposefully sever the bond, resulting in a similar effect. It would hurt but not kill him. The same went for all Watchers. In most cases, their mate was reborn and they were given the option of renewing their relationship, whatever it might be or merely watching from afar. It was one of the reasons for the name of their species.

Not all bond mates were romantically involved. Soul mate, as the term implied, was a joining of souls. Such things did not disallow from falling in and out of love with others. The bond only meant the two souls were compatible. If the souls joined on a physical level, it was their choice.

Naruto’s bond was different. If Sasuke died…so would Naruto. He was literally dependant on the energy flowing around him. The bonds had centuries to develop. It was no wonder Sasuke had been driven to the brink of insanity. With each life, the bonds naturally grew stronger.

“Shit…” Konan stumbled to Pein. “This has never happened…”

Pein was at a loss for words. “We need to take him to his bond mate.”

“We need to not do that…”

“It’s the only way,” argued Pein. “His mate isn’t of the most stable mind right now. If he goes under, he’ll pull the boy with him.”
“Then end it now.” She turned sad eyes to Naruto’s form. “For both of them. I can’t see what will happen if they live.”

“No.” Pein eased his arms beneath Naruto. His frame continued to shift between solid and ethereal. He wasn’t grounded enough to retain his physical form. It was dangerous to move him in such a state, but he was rejecting the earth’s spiritual energy--his entire being, most likely focused only on the energy binding him to Sasuke. He had to hurry or Naruto would fade away.

“Nagato!” Konan shouted, racing after him. “He’s faulty. Even if you give him to the night walker, his sanity will pull Naruto into the darkness. Our kind possess too much power allow a loose cannon admittance.”

“You didn’t allow the others to destroy me.”

“That’s different. Your bond was barely there. You were in no danger of losing your grip on this world and you allowed the earth to power you.” Konan reached to touch Naruto’s cheek. “This one’s fate is interwoven too powerfully with the nightwalker…they share the same fate.”

“Your gift for reading the strands of fate is amazing but, I can’t let him die. He’s like me in ways you couldn’t understand.”

“You’re doing this for him!”

Pein sighed, looking down at Naruto. “I’ve done things in my many lives I regret. I refuse to allow Naruto to be one of them. You forget you aren’t the only one who watched him.”

Pein faded from view, leaving Konan alone. Her hand lifted to her heart, clenching in the robe. “You’ll only be hurt again. I can’t bear to watch you self-destruct again.”

“My Lady?”

Konan turned from where Pein faded from sight. “Yes?”

“Lord Danzou has arrived. He wishes a reading.” The acolyte bowed to her, his long hair falling around his face.

“He’s a bit pushy, isn’t he, Neji?” Konan patted the youth’s shoulder.

“Yes, Lady Konan. Does he think the strands will show a different fate for him?” Neji moved silently beside her.

“You know better than that, Neji. Fate isn’t written in stone. Our actions change our futures and our fates. Think of fate as a flowing stream. Anything can accidentally alter the flow but sometimes trying to purposefully alter it results in fate path becoming all the more determined. Danzou seeks to change things for his benefit. He is foolish.” Konan clenched her jaw in annoyance. “King Fugaku was in error to entrust Danzou with the secrets of our order instead of his son. But we can’t interfere with the choices made by others. Mores the pity. There is a great reckoning coming of which the outcome, even I can’t see.”

Neji paused, glancing at her through pale lavender eyes. “What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. I was foolish to suggest destroying the boy. He is the fulcrum of this coming storm yet I hoped to keep our Order out of storm.”

Neji frowned, “You sought to change the flow of fate?”
“Even one such as I can lose sight of what it means to be a Watcher. Perhaps I allowed Danzou’s aura to influence me,” mused Konan. “I suppose there is no getting around it. I don’t think he will leave happy today.”

Neji chuckled. “I don’t think he would be happy even if you told him he would rule the world atop the back of a dragon.”

Konan smiled, her heart lifted at the comment. “No, I don’t suppose he would. Fate rules our species. We are tied to the earth and charged with keeping the balance. It is why we can read the fates. Earth’s fate is our only concern. One such as him sees us as nothing more than seers. But it is not he who moves the pieces on the board…but us.”

“He wouldn’t like you speaking as such,” Neji laughed.

“Oh he would most definitely not like that and it makes the knowledge all the sweeter. Come, let us deal with him, then worry about Nagato’s little charge.”

She tucked a loose strand of blue hair behind her ear. The threads of fate had a way of surprising even the most devout readers. She would need an open mind for the coming events and hope for the future.

OoO

Sasuke was little more than a beast. What little furniture remained in the sealed room was in near shambles. Shards of wood littered the floor. Deep bloody furrows dotted the walls where Sasuke’s fingers dug in attempt to escape his prison. His eyes no longer held the slightest trace of sanity. He was nothing but a mad animal.

Itachi paced before the door. Sasuke followed the movement with rapid shifting of eyes. He would attack if given the slightest provocation. He had no mind for light as he was drowning in the darkness. His light felt all but extinguished. Only one name whispered in his mind.

Naruto.

The thread binding him to the world was stretched impossibly thin as if at any moment it would snap, leaving him to wallow in the darkness. There was nothing but the darkness. He withdrew deeper and deeper. There was no reason for him to push it away. There was no Naruto.

Blood dripped from his hands to splatter in small droplets along the floor. His fingers painted ancient runes into the wall, his mind unable to distinguish between the shattered thoughts spinning through his head.

Claws ripped at his chest, attempting to find the invisible place where Naruto marked him. He needed to feel Naruto. He wasn’t there. He’d never been there. No…that wasn’t true. Naruto was there but he could feel the bond fading. Some instinctual part of his mind knew what this meant. If the bond broke, Naruto would be lost to him and he would be lost to the darkness.

“Sasuke…”

Red eyes darted towards the direction of the sound. He couldn’t answer. The dark place he resided in no longer allowed him that liberty.

“Sasuke…you have want to live…I can’t do this alone. I’ve felt empty for too long,” pleaded Itachi.
“He’s all but gone.”

Pein stepped from the shadows, in his arms cradled a limp form. Itachi’s shock was mirrored by Sasuke.

Sasuke snarled lunging from where he prowled. The barrier repelled him, yet he continued to attack it. This man—he’d done something to Naruto. The sight of the limp frame cradled in arms sent him into a frenzy. His blood, born of ancients, began to wear down the barrier Itachi had carefully erected. He would rend the other apart and bathe in his blood.

Itachi’s eyes flashed red upon seeing Naruto. “What have you done?”

“I’ve no time to explain. He’s fading. He needs to be with his other.”

Itachi snarled, reaching for Naruto—surprised the other didn’t refuse him. The slender frame felt light in his arms, almost as if he was made of air. This was not a normal body. “Naruto is dead! You’ve desecrated his body.”

Pein relinquished his hold on Naruto and repeated his previous statement. “He isn’t dead in the sense you think and…he needs to be with his other.”

Itachi pulled Naruto tighter, feeling the heartbeat. Dark eyes went wide with shock. “He…He’s alive?”

“He has evolved.”

“What?” Itachi blinked at the other before gazing down at Naruto’s sleeping face. “Into what?”

Pein shook his head, running a hand through his hair. “There’s not time for explanations. Just do it. Give him to his other.”

Pein lifted a hand and pointed towards where Sasuke crouched snarling. Malice flowed from Sasuke in waves, turning the air cold with his madness. He knew they were trying to keep Naruto from him. He shook his head at the dark swirling voices echoing in his ears. It urged him to reclaim Naruto from them.

Itachi shook his head, cradling Naruto close. “He’s too far gone. He’d destroy him.”

“He’ll save him.”

Itachi stared at Pein, turning his eyes to where Sasuke watched from the doorway. He was no longer attempting to rip his way through, yet he wasn’t exactly offering much comfort. His eyes gleamed with predatory intent and his teeth extended past his lower lip.

“Naruto…” Sasuke snarled, his palm flattening against the barrier. “Mine…”

“There isn’t much time. Naruto will be destroyed without him. Give him to him.” Pein’s hand touched Itachi’s shoulder, making both men wince at the sensation.

“If he hurts him…I’ll destroy you.”

Pein stepped back, chuckling mirthlessly. “You can try.”

Itachi stepped forward, moving through the barrier. Sasuke continued to watch him, moving back as Itachi approached but made no move to attack. His entire focus was on Naruto’s frame cradled in Itachi’s arms.
He needed him. Naruto was too precious. His name spiraled through his mind, tattooing itself into his very core.

Itachi carefully laid his burden upon the floor. His eyes dropped to where Naruto looked to be sleeping before returning to where Sasuke crouched, entranced by the motionless form.

The smooth line of his neck and the hard hollows of his cheeks drew his madness tinged gaze. Naruto.

His name was a mantra playing over and over. Light, faint and painful, shot through his mind--sewing together pieces of his sanity and pulling him from the darkness he’d resided in for too long. It hurt.

It wasn’t a physical pain but one made of emotions and memories. His hand slowly extended forward, blood stained fingers stroking down the scarred cheeks. There was a pulse of life. It called to him.

He could do no other than move forward. His fingers traced down the tan neck and over the shirtless chest. Trails of blood were left in the wake of his fingers. He was marking Naruto in his blood.

His nails scratched lightly at the toned abdomen, tracing the way muscle roped over bone and sinew. Each hollow and slope was explored with the gentlest of touches. There was only one thought in his mind. He wanted Naruto. It was more than a physical ache. The nothingness pouring from the other made him want to refill him. He wanted to pour his very essence in Naruto--to fall into Naruto. He wanted to drown in his warm--to devour his blood.

His hands deviated to the sides, linking with limp fingers. “Wake up…”

The fluttering of lashes was the only visible response.

“Wake up.” Sasuke lowered his lips to kiss along the sternum, pressing his face to the warm chest.

He could hear each pulse of the heart, his own stuttering and matching it. Their blood rushed in time with the other. They were two halves of the same whole, bound irrevocably to each other.

He could feel it. The invisible threads tightened around him, pulling at his mind, body, and soul. Heat. Life. Desire. Hunger. They all merged together.

He was blinded by the essence of Naruto. His mouth watered for a taste. His body longed to be buried within the warmth. His soul was no longer his own but a part of Naruto just as a part of Naruto resided in him. Ten lifetimes. Death after countless death drove them to this point of no return. They could die in this moment. Darkness awaited them just beyond their realm of existence.

Or…they could live.

Sasuke?

“I’m here,” he whispered into Naruto’s chest.

I understand.

Sasuke pressed closer. Naruto’s words were not a physical sound but something spoken through his entire being. In that moment, they were one.
“What do you understand?”

I was created for you.

“I could have told you that, idiot,” purred Sasuke, lifting his face to stare at Naruto.

I’m tired

“Rest. I won’t go anywhere.”

Blue eyes fluttered open to stare at the ceiling. They shifted to stare at where Sasuke curled his body into him. “Can you see it?”

Sasuke’s eyes lifted to stare at the threads of silver woven around them. With each passing moment, they seemed to thicken and tighten though he felt no pain as they wrapped around him. He could see it. He could see his connection to Naruto.

“Good.” Dark lashes fluttered closed, his body relaxing into Sasuke. “I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t let you die alone.”

For the first time in over a century, Sasuke’s eyes faded completely from their perpetual crimson into his more natural ebony. His lips lowered, pressing kisses along hard curve of jaw. He didn’t pause in his journey until reaching the pulsing ebb and flow beneath Naruto’s neck.

“I need you,” whispered Sasuke.

His lips mouthed the flesh of Naruto’s neck, tugging at it with sharp teeth but never breaking the barrier of skin. He could taste Naruto. He carried the natural salty flavor of all humans, yet something was different. He seemed so much purer. His fangs throbbed with need to pierce him. His tongue tingled with the excitement of soon to be drowning in the flavor.

Naruto’s thighs parted, creating a cradle for Sasuke. His neck arched--pressed closer to the teasing mouth. “Yes.”

Both needed to affirm the presence of the other. They needed this ritual known only to each other. The temperature around them rose in tandem with their body heat. Their chests pressed to each other--Sasuke’s lips at Naruto’s throat and Naruto’s lips quietly urging Sasuke on.

It was a true exchange. Hunger or madness was no longer an issue. Sasuke’s teeth slid through tan skin--smoothly piercing the vein and withdrawing to be replaced by gently sucking lips.

Naruto’s body arched high, his eyes closed. Sasuke held Naruto still, his lips ravishing his neck. Warm, rich blood poured into him in a seemingly never ending flow. It was Naruto yet without the slight imperfections that tended to mar blood. This was what a perfect creature tasted like.

Sasuke moaned into Naruto, his hands clawing at Naruto’s hips to bring him closer to him. He was going to merge with him. They were going to be one creature--a beast with two backs.

“Sasuke…” Itachi stepped forward, earning himself a snarl and flashing of red eyes before Sasuke returned to his feast.

“Mine,” Sasuke mumbled into the flesh of Naruto’s neck.

“Sasuke, you need to stop. You’ll kill him.”

Even through the haze in his mind, Sasuke understood Itachi’s attachment to Naruto. He didn’t like
it. Itachi would never steal him, yet he couldn’t help but feel wary of the other. He couldn’t risk Itachi wanting Naruto. He couldn’t have him. His hands pulled their bodies even closer—thrusting his hips hard against the cradle created between Naruto’s thighs.

Pein clasped his hand on Itachi’s arm. “He’ll stop. He would never kill Naruto. Besides, you’ll find it much more difficult to kill him now.”

Almost on cue, Sasuke pulled away from Naruto’s throat, his tongue stroking over the seeping wound. The skin healed over with each gentle stroke until only a dark bruise remained. Sasuke purred at the sight, having marked Naruto for the world to see.

Itachi turned his eyes to Pein as if suddenly recalling his presence. “Who are you?”

A look of hurt flashed across Pein’s face before he clamped down on his emotions and sealed away his expression. “That’s a difficult question to answer.”

Itachi’s eyes narrowed. “Try me.”

“I’m a Watcher and my purpose is to observe the world and keep the flow of fate constant. Naruto is also a Watcher but…I’m not sure how he will…he’s not like other Watchers.” Pein’s eyes trailed away to stare at Sasuke nuzzling his face over Naruto’s neck, chest, and abdomen with an almost longing gaze.

“What about Naruto…where were you while he died time after time?” Itachi snarled, forcing Pein against the wall. His fingers tightened around the slender neck menacingly.

Pein’s face never dropped its calm expression. “We were watching. We can’t interfere directly.”

“He’s a watcher…why didn’t you save him before? Was it to toy with my brother? Was it to see how far you could take him before he broke?” Itachi’s eyes showed his loss of control, bleeding a dark crimson. “Was it a game?”

Pein’s hand lifted to encircle Itachi’s wrist. “We couldn’t interfere. Each time a soul dies, things are imprinted on it. A dislike of a certain food despite never having tried it is common. A preference for blondes instead of brunettes is not unheard of. Those things are etched on souls and ignored by whatever force wipes the memories. Each time the soul is reborn, those small things are carried over. Naruto is special. He’s different. Detailed things are constantly etched on him and are unable to be removed, but there reaches a point when the soul can not be erased to the satisfaction of the powers that be. We pluck the soul from the still living body and ground it to earth. We…I draw my strength from the world around me. Naruto draws his strength from him.”

“What about Sasuke?”

“It’s complicated. No one knows why two souls are joined. The old soul mate idea is a crock of shit. It’s not predestined. Two living souls meet and resonate with each other. It doesn’t have to be sexual. Powerful friendship can be just as binding. The point of the other is something to ground them to the earth until they grow into their soul. With human souls, they stay close to each other and are reborn around the same time. With immortal beings…it becomes a bit tricky.” Pein fidgeted, obviously uncomfortable about the subject.

Itachi tilted his head, frowning. “Tricky how?”

“Immortals don’t forget. Would Sasuke be in the shape he’s in if he forgot Naruto as soon as he died?” Itachi frowned but said nothing, signaling for Pein to continue. “Naruto’s soul never forgot your brother. Each rebirth, his instinct was to find Sasuke. It’s the same with all soul mates. Find
your other. Watchers always have bond mates but it’s rare for one of our kind to be connected to an immortal.”

Itachi snorted. “We’re far from immortal.”

“But you are long lived. How old are you? Were you alive when Christ walked the earth?”

“That’s beside the point,” evaded Itachi.

“It’s precisely the point. Night walkers don’t die because their body wears out. That’s as close to immortal as most creatures can come. It’s a pity Sasuke was immortal. He was forced to suffer.” Pein reached up to touch the piercings lining his nose. “Naruto’s different in other ways. Did you realize Naruto kept the same form?”

Itachi inclined his head. “I hadn’t thought much about it but yes. Is that unusual?”

“Very. Almost unheard of.” Pein frowned, dropping his gaze from Itachi’s intense one. “I was a woman at one point. Gender…physical appearance…none of it is stationary for a soul.”

“Why have I, ruler of all nightwalkers, never heard of Watchers?”

It was a good question and demanded an answer. Itachi knew of the witches, the shape shifters, the demons, and the nearly extinct nagas. He had never heard of watchers.

“We keep a low profile. Revealing us to you was a necessary evil. I couldn’t watch Naruto’s soul die because he was kept from his other. It is a tortuous thing to exist without one’s bond mate. The bond is painful if ignored. Naruto and Sasuke don’t have the option of ignoring each other. They won’t survive without the other.” Pein rubbed his chest, draw Itachi’s eyes.

“Sasuke never ignored Naruto. I think he became a little too obsessive of him.”

Pein smirked, glancing to where Sasuke practically curled around Naruto. “Perhaps.”

“Was your bond mate human?” asked Itachi curiously.

“No,” he responded curtly, his jaw visibly tensing.

Itachi didn’t respond for several moments. “Who is it?”

Pein’s face grew hard. He didn’t bother to hide his anger. He had to ask that. It was fine until he asked.

Now that Naruto was out of danger, the situation he was in burned him. He was jealous of what Naruto had. Naruto didn’t have to fight for even a glance from his other. The most he’d ever received from Itachi was a single night in his arms. He was gone come dawn the next day, leaving his then form bereft but not fully understanding why. All he was left with was a feeling of abandonment before being murdered the following night.

“You want to know who destroyed me? You aren’t worthy to know the soul who left me to die.”

It was Pein’s turn to flip the tables. His eyes became hard, his hands pinning Itachi to the wall. “We are silent in this world because we have the power to change it. That is a very dangerous thing to possess. One person from each race is given the knowledge of our existence. I wonder who in your race knows…”

“Who is it?” snarled Itachi, angry both at being pinned so easily and at some unknown individual
under his rule possessed knowledge of such powerful beings.

“Think hard, maybe it will come to you,” retorted Pein.

“You think this is a game? Do you enjoy torturing others as you obvious enjoy torturing yourself?”

Itachi’s eyes were a deep crimson. Though any powers of hypnosis he might possess were lost on Pein, the other couldn’t help but stare entranced at how intently they sought to delve into his soul. He wanted to forget everything. His chest hurt him, but it was a welcome feeling. It let him know the bond was still there.

“You should ask yourself, who is truly doing the torturing? I’ve been tortured for nearly two thousand years. Can you say you are the same?” Pein released his grip on Itachi’s arms, moving several feet away.

“Who are you? What right do you have to act so superior?” Itachi stepped away from the wall, rubbing his arms where the impossibly tight grip had bruised his skin.

“Who am I? I’m the whore you fucked, offering the first pleasure from a customer I’d ever felt. I’m the warrior you watched die while you trailed around after your soulless father. I am the crippled child you held in your arms as my life faded. I wasn’t as lucky as Naruto. I never looked the same in each life. You should have felt something despite my appearance. You should have stayed.” If Pein had possessed fangs, it was highly probably they would be bared to Itachi.

“What are you speaking of?”

“Do you know what happens when a soul is on their tenth life? It is then they form the strongest of bonds with their bond mate. Five minutes. Five years. However long they have, the bond is strong. The bond is what holds the soul to this earth as it is extracted from the body. Rituals are performed. It is fairly painless.” Pein ran his fingers over the piercings dotting his face and ears, continuing his rant as if not hearing Itachi’s words. “Then, there are those whose cries are ignored. It doesn’t matter if the other didn’t know. It doesn’t matter if through the nine previous lifetimes that he died alone without his death being given a second thought by his other. Without the other to ground us, the process is excruciating…you weren’t there.”

Itachi’s jaw clenched, his eyes following Pein’s every move. “I don’t know you.”

“Don’t you? Don’t you feel it? It’s a small tingling in the back of your mind--some familiarity. When the tenth life comes, the other must answer the call. Sasuke…” Pein glanced where Sasuke was watching them intently. “He was a special case. His mind was so shattered; he couldn’t understand what he felt. But you…you felt it, and ignored it.”

“I don’t…”

“Stop!” Pein lifted a hand, preventing any further denial. “It’s a dagger being twisted inside you. The thread binding you to another is pulled tight. It demands acceptance or rejection. You rejected it. You blocked it from your being…and created me.”

Pein stepped backward, his body fading into almost smoke. “You asked who I was. I was Nagato but now all that’s left is Pein.”

Itachi opened his mouth but Pein was gone. He searched the room to no avail. Even the spicy scent following Pein was fading. He was gone.

“We’re both fucked up, brother.” Sasuke whispered hoarsely.
“Indeed. Was what he said… Sasuke, do you remember him from before Naruto? I can’t…I don’t… wouldn’t I have felt something as you did with Naruto?” Itachi’s face was unusually pale as he slumped against the wall.

“I don’t… remember. I wasn’t very old when I met Naruto. Not like you.” The room was silent before Sasuke spoke again.

Will he take Naruto from me? I won’t let him.” Sasuke’s arms tightened around the sleeping frame.

“I think Naruto is special. He can’t take him from you but…” Itachi pressed a hand to the ache in his chest.

“I feel different, Itachi. I feel whole.” Sasuke laid his head on Naruto’s chest. “I haven’t felt that in a long time.”

“What happened, Sasuke?”

Sasuke shook his head, attempting to verbalize what he’d felt. It wasn’t an easy task.

“I don’t know… I was in a dark place awaiting death when something pulled me back. I don’t remember much. It was instinct,” said Sasuke.

They could have sat there for minutes or hours. Neither could judge the time as both were lost in their own thoughts. Naruto slept peacefully, curled against Sasuke.

“My lord, we are here to judge your brother.”

Both brothers jerked their eyes from each other to the men standing just beyond the barrier. They were dressed as businessmen but only a fool would consider them safe. Even Shikamaru, who stood towards the back, exuded an air of danger. The only female present pushed forward to glance worriedly at the three figures.

“Itachi… you knew this was coming. I tried to stall as long as I could with Naruto’s… death… my God… I was told… Danzou said…” Kurenai’s red eyes grew wide as Naruto’s eyes fluttered open.

“Why are there so many people here?”

Sasuke’s lips quirked before drawing Naruto’s weak frame into his arms. “They are here to find me insane and put me down like a mad dog.”

Danzou’s face paled at Naruto. “Necromancy!”

“You’re an idiot.” Shikamaru stepped forward to examine Naruto. “Other than a rather large hickey, I don’t see any marks to claim necromancy. Of course, you can request a formal examination but honestly, the only place covered is his dick and his ass. If those are the places marked…”

Danzou’s face grew hard. “Fine. The boy’s alive. He isn’t the reason we are here.”

Itachi leveled a hard glare on Danzou. “I was expecting more time.”

“Why wait? Insanity doesn’t just go away. Look at the room. A madman destroyed this place. He’s not sane and must be put down as a danger to both our society, and the humans.”

The room was indeed in ruins. Blood flaked dryly from the walls where Sasuke’s fingers had drawn ancient symbols. The furniture lay in shattered heaps.
“Well, you would be mad too if Itachi locked you in a room.”

Every eye in the room focused on Naruto. He simply blinked innocently at them. “Well…it’s true. There are no windows…and no bathroom. I’ll be the first to tell you Sasuke is smelling pretty ripe about now.”

“Can’t argue with that.” Shikamaru popped a cigarette in his mouth, inhaling the pungent smoke.

“You…Talk to him…he has been insane for years. You all know it.” Danzou one visible eye was flashing angrily at where Naruto cuddled close to Sasuke.

Shikamaru shrugged, glancing lazily at Sasuke. “What’s your name?”

“Sasuke Uchiha.”

“Who are your parents?”

“Fugaku and Mikoto Uchiha.”

“How old are you?”

Danzou growled, “Any idiot can answer questions like that. Why are you locked away like a criminal?”

Sasuke’s eyes grew hard. “Because it’s not safe until I recover from my sleep. Any sleep over ten years requires mandatory incarceration for a time until the hunger becomes manageable. Itachi is just being an asshole and not letting me out.”

“He seems pretty sane to me.” Shikamaru turned to leave. “Keep him here for another week to make sure he’s got his hunger under control. I’m going home.”

Itachi’s lips twitched as the elders left one by one. Danzou remained, seething at the happy picture the three painted. His eye glared holes in both Uchiha.

“This isn’t the last of this.” With that he was gone.

Sasuke slumped against Naruto, his hands shaking. “I’m not in full control.”

“It’s the hunger. You were asleep for a long time.” Itachi placed a hand on Sasuke’s shoulder. “In more ways than one.”

Sasuke nodded, burying his face in Naruto’s neck as a child might his mother. Itachi smiled and turned to leave.

“Itachi…”

Itachi turned to see crystalline eyes gazing up at him. “I’m sorry.”

“For what, Naruto?”

“For not being able to love you like you wanted.” Naruto’s teeth worried his lip.

“Don’t worry, Naruto. Our time, short though it was, is precious to me. What I feel for you could never compare to what you and Sasuke have. Even I see it as superficial. I knew it wouldn’t last, which is why I cherished it.” Itachi bowed his head to the two and left the room.
Chapter 15

Konan stood patiently in her room, running her fingers over a journal sitting benignly closed on her desk. It was worn, the leather cracking in areas. Inside were her most private thoughts and memories of times long since passed. She'd transferred from ancient scrolls to parchment in the early fifteen hundreds—the content remaining the same. The language scrawled on the parchment pages was a composition of early Latin mixed with Greek.

There were occasions she considered burning the tome. Only pain lay inside. It was appropriate since it was her observations of Pein. No. He would never be Pein to her. Only Nagato.

As a Watcher, one spent most of their time doing just that. The past was recorded on countless scrolls and tomes since the creation of the written word and before that by truth tellers. The history of the world was carried within the stone walls of their sanctuary—both the successes and failures.

Civilizations rose and fell under their observing eyes. They watched, learned, and when necessary, intervened.

Throughout her existence, she'd seen the course of history changed by the actions of one man. It happened all the time, but not as bitter as what she'd seen happen to Nagato. That one man could be so cruel as to deny a connection.

Her hand clenched tight. The monsters of the past weren't the only ones to blame for Pein's suffering. She had a part in his pain—she and the rules created long before. Rules which demanded both her compliance and silence were meant to prevent too much interference. Not a day passed that she didn't wish she'd had the strength to go against the grain and stop what was happening.

She'd been young, too young and idealistic to even think of interfering. It was a rule. Until the soul was ripe, no one could interfere. Life needed to take its course. The soul needed to grow and experience all it could. The law was the law.

It was customary for a Watcher to keep a journal chronicling their charge's various lives and those bound to him or her. When in incorporeal form, they were undetectable by others. It made watching easier and allowed for witnessing private conversations.

"Konan?"

She shook the morose thoughts from her mind. Placing the journal on the desk and turning to see Neji standing quietly in her doorway. He was an intelligent sort. He didn't speak out but watched and learned. Some of the others taught him without ever observing a conversation with him.

"Yes, Neji?"

"Lord Danzou has returned."

Konan's jaw clenched tightly. "What does he want?"

"He wishes to speak with you. Should I send him away?"

Releasing a pent up breath, she shook her head. "No. I'll see him. He's probably upset the threads of fate changed. He doesn't understand. There is little certainty in the future. My crushing a single ant can possibly alter life thousands of years ahead."
"You're worried." Neji's eyes narrowed. "You're worried about what he'll do."

"I'm always worried about what he'll do. The question is will he do it." Konan slid her feet into comfortable loafers.

"I'll come with you."

"Not this time. He's probably volatile." Konan prowled down the candlelit hallway, Neji trailing quickly behind her.

"Lady Konan! Don't go in there alone." Neji's unsmiling face looked intently at her.

She placed a hand on his shoulder. "What will be will be."

Leaving him, she stepped into the receiving room. Danzou wasn't the most patient of individuals. After only a small wait, he was pacing before her like a caged tiger. She closed the door with a faint snap.

"Konan! You betrayed me, Konan. You said I would be the fulcrum for a new age. You said I would be the reason for change to happen. You said I would be the spark bringing new power to the nightwalker throne. Instead, I have Itachi's followers trailing doggedly after him. His brother miraculously recovers from centuries of insanity." Danzou approached, his breath brushing over her face. "Tell me, woman, what other lies have you spoken to me?"

Konan sniffed, brushing past him. She was desperate to put distance between them. He was too dangerous.

"I speak no lies. You simply interpreted the truth to benefit yourself. The threads of fate aren't so cut and dry as you seem to believe. I've told you, one moment can alter the world. What would have happened if Alexander the Great hadn't died? What would happen if Jesus wasn't crucified? What would happen if John F. Kennedy had decided not to campaign in Texas? The world would be different, I think." Konan leveled her gaze on the fuming man. "Now, do not return to this place until you learn to appreciate the gift your former king blessed you with."

Danzou stood quietly, his body quaking with anger. His movements were fast, faster than anything she'd experienced.

"What-" she gasped, finding herself against the wall.

Before she could fade from his grasp, a dagger found its way into her abdomen. The most shocking revelation was she was bleeding. She should have healed immediately following the extraction of the blade. Why wasn't she healing?

A trickle of blood dribbled from her lips, splashing down onto her shirt and making Danzou smirk with dark glee. "Surprised? It seems you're not immortal after all."

"How?" she gasped, falling from Danzou's grip to the floor.

"Ancient magic infused this blade. Fugaku was a smart man. He left nothing to chance. Every living creature has a weakness…even acclaimed immortals such as the Watchers." Danzou crouched beside her, tracing a finger up the trail of blood dripping from her chin. "I wonder what the blood of an immortal tastes like."

He closed his eyes upon tasting the blood. His fangs distended and he moaned low, obviously enjoying the flavor.
"One drop and I feel as if I've tasted ambrosia."

"Don't…think…this is the…end…for you…" Konan pressed her hand to the wound, futilely attempting to stem the bleeding.

"No…but it is the end of you. I've grown tired of looking to your kind for the glimpses of the future. I'll make the future mine. You don't control my fate, little girl." Danzou stood, walking from the chamber as if nothing was amiss.

"No…" Konan whispered, "but you've sealed yours."

There was a dark feeling of foreboding running through his veins. Pein couldn't seem to shake it as he prowled through the rooms encompassing his bedroom. He could feel the reverberation of energy beneath his feet. He always felt it. It was a slow, steady pulse of power. It was the only comfort he had in his extremely long life.

Today, it failed to offer the normal consolation. His heart felt raw. Ripping out the organ seemed an all too desirable action. Feeling hurt. Reminders of the past pains. Itachi. The what could have beenes haunted him.

He closed his eyes, refusing to dwell on the direction his thoughts were taking him. As Konan always told him, the past was nothing but the textbook to learn for the future.

Itachi was a mistake he needed to learn from. The intense desire to be with him shouldn't rule his life. He was not prey to the desires of the bond.

He could always sever it. Konan had long since broken hers for reasons she refused to reveal. He could do the same. It wouldn't kill him and he would no longer be bound to the bastard king.

Slamming his fist against the wall, he snarled into the empty room. Already he could feel the strengthening of the bond. Touching Itachi, expressing strong emotions to him—all these things brought about a renewing the formerly brittle bond.

"Fuck!"

Panicked cries from outside his room brought forth his more violent nature. His eyes became focused and he stepped from his room into the hall. Several acolytes rushed past him towards the inner sanctum.

"What is it?"

"We have to find a healer."

Pein frowned. A healer? Why would they need a healer?

Instead of stopping to question more of the panicked Watchers, he moved through the maze of passageways towards the source of the madness. A crowd gathered around the exit to one of the receiving rooms.

Pein elbowed his way through to see a familiar blue head cradled in her apprentice's lap. Crimson stained her shirt and the floor beneath. It was impossible.

"Konan?"
Her dull eyes turned to look on him. "Nagato…"

He was on his knees beside her within moments. "How did this happen?"

"Ancient…magic…" She swallowed heavily, the muscles in her throat jumping with every attempt. "Nagato…I made…a mistake."

"Shit…don't talk, I'm taking you to the sanctuary." Pein scooped her from the floor and strode from the room.

Her pallor created a dire panic in him. She was his closest friend. She knew all his secrets and he liked to think he knew all of hers. He couldn't imagine losing her.

"Nagato…don't…"

"Stop talking. You need to conserve your energy." Pein laid her as gently as possible on the quartz slab.

She should have exuded a brilliant blue from the crystal. Instead, the stone barely glowed. It was proof how badly injured she was.

"Nagato…"

"Tell me who did this, Konan. I'll make him pay."

She shook her head, a fist gripping in the soft material of his shirt. "You need…to listen. Go to my room. On my desk…is a leather bound journal. You need…to read."

"I can do that later." Pein clung to her hand. "I need to make sure you're alright."

"I'm dying."

"No! You'll be destroyed."

She smiled, her fingers lifting to rub over the silvery piercings. "I'll be reborn."

Pein shook his head, only making her smile brighten. "We are immortal for a reason."

"Nothing…is…immortal." Desperation lit her gaze, her fingers tightening on his shirt. "Listen…read my…journal. My sins…you have to…understand."

"You haven't done anything wrong." Pein tried to calm her, the light in the quartz flickering.

"I wronged…you." She pulled Pein so their faces nearly touched. "In silence…I wronged…you. Please…my journal…read it."

A tear tracked from her eye, working down to splash on the stone. For long moments there were no words as her life left her. Her body went limp and all color faded from the stone. There was no great bursting of power as one would expect from one such as Konan. She faded gently from his life just as she had entered it.

He collapsed to his knees watching as before his eyes, her body grew transparent and faded. His hands reached to grab at her, to keep her with him only to pass through it as if it was nothing but smoke.

Pain ripped through him. It made him want to scream out at the injustice of it all. Konan had never
harmed another. She was gentle, if not occasionally hard individual. She was his closest friend. Not having her to talk with would be a hell in itself.

His hands lifted to his face. Even the blood staining his body was fading from him. Nothing of her would remain save for the physical objects she cherished.

His mind held nothing but pain, his feet taking him to her private sanctuary. Things were just as she had left them. A half finished bit of knitting sat in a basket near the fireplace. Her neat and tidy desk contained a few unopened correspondences and the afore mentioned journal.

He frowned at the name emblazoned across the leather cover. Nagato.

It wasn't lost on him that every Watcher kept a detailed journal on their subjects. He'd never bothered to read his because he hadn't wanted to see what was written. Reading one's past was discouraged and he never pushed the issue. He'd lived, there was no need to rub in the pain any more.

Flipping to the initial pages, he scanned the handwritten text. At the time he'd first existed, loose paper was definitely not the rage. She must have recopied every word from the scroll, most likely written in a dead language. His brow arched. Latin. His memories of the earlier lives were hazy at best. He'd almost forgotten he'd lived in Rome.

His first instinct was to toss it back to the desk or bury it in the mounds of ancient tomes located in the archives. He wanted to forget his past, not relive it.

Closing his eyes, he drew on the inner strength to do what Konan wished of him. Her last request of him was to read her journal. He could never defile her memory by denying such a thing. It was the very least he could do for her.

Settling in her chair, he carefully turned the brittle pages to the beginning-where it all started.

"This is my first assignment prior to completion of my training. I will do my best to uphold the law while observing the life and times of the soul assigned to me. I hope to provide only truth. My excitement is churning inside me at being given this chance to follow the life and times of a soul."

Pein chuckled. It was so like Konan to begin her journal as almost a personal diary rather than an objective journal of her charge.

Taking a breath, he read on. After initial introduction of her locating his soul, he frowned at the turn of events described. Instead of mundane comments concerning him, she instead began dialoguing events not directly involving him, but having everything to do with him.

652 BC Rome.

"I won't have it."

Fugaku Uchilious, as he was called during those days, glared at his chief advisor. His handsome, eternally youthful appearance didn't hide the destructive force lying in wait. As far as any living night walker knew, he and his wife were the oldest. They were born of a mutation in blood, possibly an evolution. Their first children gave birth to their race. As the years passed, though distantly related, none of the night walkers could be considered of their direct bloodline.

Only their youngest son, Itachi, could be considered pure blooded as their previous children were
all dead, or resting in eternal sleep. Itachi was an infant by their standards, despite being nearly three hundred in years.

"My lord…the Watchers are nearly as old as you, if not older. You can not stop the bonds from forming. I'm afraid your son has already joined his soul with one." Danzou sipped at the wine placed between them.

"I want you to take care of it. Destroy the soul." Fugaku's nails bit deep furrows into the wooden arms of the ornate chair inside his large marble home.

"I know of no way to destroy a soul." Danzou leveled a gaze on his king. "I can take care of the human body. If Itachi isn't present during the ceremony to extract the soul from the human body in ten lifetimes, the soul will perish. Then you wouldn't have to fret over Itachi being bound to one of them."

"And Itachi?"

"The only one at risk is the Watcher. Itachi is bound to feel some pain as the soul dies, but it will fade with time." Danzou sat back, obviously pleased with his plan.

"We're going to need to watch Itachi and that soul closely. My son can never know what we've done."

"We won't know which soul it is until Itachi meets it again. Physical appearance doesn't usually transfer but I will do my utmost best to make sure Itachi never realizes his soul has been joined to another." Danzou smirked, his rough stocky face creasing in excitement.

"I knew it was wise to allow you the knowledge of the Watchers," Fugaku stated. Danzou bowed his head in acknowledgement before asking, "Even if it breaks the promise you gave them?"

"They will never see it coming. They can not interfere with what we do. And I'm allowed an heir to the knowledge. I had hoped to make it Itachi, but frugality demands you supersede me in this." Fugaku lifted a hand to his chin, his face taking on a thoughtful look. "Do it."

Danzou bowed. "My lord!"

Fugaku wrapped the excess of his toga around his arm, strolling into the night lit garden. Unlike his son, the sun was almost painful to his skin. Merely walking through it wouldn't kill him unless it was for an extended period of time, but would leave painful burns. Itachi as well as most of his children and their descendents seemed to have no trouble moving about during the day.

"Itachi." Fugaku stepped down the steps of the pavilion and into the fragrant garden. It was a different from his beloved island home far to the east. He missed the scent of the mountains and spiced food. It was necessary to travel often or the people would become frightened. Fear could motivate loyalty, but it also brought about risks far outweighing the benefits.

"Father." Itachi trotted up the steps to meet his father.

His body, dressed only in a kilt, shone beautiful in the moonlight. Itachi was his pride and joy. He would never allow anyone to take him from him. Itachi was what his previous children were not. He was both strong and frighteningly intelligent. He was a perfect heir for the crown. Already Mikoto was losing interest in life. She'd agreed to only spend twenty or thirty years asleep, yet he could tell she longed to make it permanent but would not submit to it until he joined her.
"You've been practicing? You're growing powerful."

Itachi smirked, the twinkle in his eye answering though his lips moved out of respect. "I am, but that's not why I requested an audience."

"For shame. My own son, feeling the need to formally request time with me. Never feel you need to use formality with us."

Itachi blushed a little, dropping his gaze beneath the piercing one of his father. "Father, I've met someone. I think...that is, I would like your blessing to bring them to the family."

"A human?" Of course, Fugaku knew this already. He knew and as they spoke, the human was being taken care of.

"I know what you're going to say, Father."

Fugaku held up a hand. "Hear me out, son."

Fugaku led them through the garden, stopping beside a stone statue. "This statue represents you. Long years will pass before it is withered away."

A pale slender hand plucked a lily from the floral beds near the fountain. "This is the life of your human. A mere blink of our eyes and they will disappear. This flower, even cared for religiously will only last a matter of days before it dies compared to the statue which will stand unchanged for centuries."

Itachi sighed, lifting his hand to clasp his father's shoulder. "I would like to spend those years with him even if it will only hurt me in the end."

Fugaku hung his head, lifting the plucked flower to his nose. "So be it. Bring him to me tomorrow."

A broad smile broke Itachi's neutral façade. "Thank you, Father!"

Fugaku watched his son leave the residences. A quick flick of his hand had Danzou crouching at his feet. "Is it done?"

Danzou smirked, gazing up haughtily at his king. "It is done."

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The sun hung low in the sky. Another two hours and the shops in the village would close. He'd trained himself to rise before the setting of the sun. While weakened, at least he was able to walk about in sunlight unlike his father.

"Itachi...why do you look so sad?"

A ten year old Sasuke looked up at him with soulful eyes. How could he explain the pain he felt without knowing the cause? Every few years bouts of melancholy would pierce his internal barriers, leaving him distraught for days, months, and on occasion, years.

"I'm fine, Sasuke. How would you like to go to the town? Maybe I'll buy you a toy."

Sasuke crossed his arms over his bony chest. "I'm not a baby. I don't want a toy. I want a sword."
"A sword? What would a little runt like you do with a sword?" Itachi chose that moment to flick Sasuke's brow with his fingers.

"I'm old enough. Father said he would teach me how to use it," pouted Sasuke.

"Hn, let's go then. Maybe I'll buy you a wooden one. Wouldn't want you cutting off a limb." Itachi turned to move towards the gate when a hand tugged on his summer yukata.

"Carry me?"

He turned with an arched brow, seeing his brother making plaintive eyes at him. "You say you're old enough for a sword yet you want me to carry you into town?"

"Please, Itachi."

Itachi ruffled the soft hair before crouching before his brother. Sasuke grinned widely before lunging onto the presented back. Itachi's hands looped beneath Sasuke's legs and they were off.

The walk would have been at least an hour for any normal human. For Itachi and Sasuke, it was only a matter of minutes. Itachi was careful to take detours through the sakura trees so not to be seen by villagers traveling the roads. Sasuke's hands reached out to grasp the falling blossoms as they moved quickly towards the nearby town.

His pace only slowed to a natural walk as they reached the outskirts of the town. "Remember what I've taught you, Sasuke?"

"I remember, nii-san. I shouldn't say much and only speak when spoken to."

He could practically hear Sasuke rolling his eyes. "It's for both our safety, Sasuke."

Sasuke merely snorted, jumping from Itachi's back to stroll along side him. The village was quite large as most port towns were. Sasuke spotted a few children and before Itachi could stop him, he was off. Hopefully he wouldn't get into too much trouble and it would keep him from being spotted shopping for Sasuke a small blade as his eleventh birthday was approaching.

When one grew as old as Itachi, birthdays stopped mattering. For Sasuke, an infant really, birthdays were important. They had to be celebrated.

A weapon smith hammered his wares while Itachi browsed before approaching. "I wish to commission a weapon."

The man took in Itachi's finely woven yukata, smiling with the knowledge he could make a fine coin. "What do you wish of me, sir?"

"A sword, small. It needs to be fit for a child."

"A child?"

"My brother's birthday. He's turning eleven and it's time I started training him in the art of the sword." Itachi picked up a small blade, testing its feel. "It's length should be as this one. I would like the hilt engraved with red and black along with the Uchiha seal." Itachi replaced the blade, turning to the man. "Can you make it to my specifications?"

"Yes." He turned from Itachi to shout into the back. "Nagato! Get your lazy ass out here. We have work to begin."
From the back came a stunning young man with odd ginger colored hair. He bowed low to Itachi before going to his employer, only to receive a slap to the face.

The sight brought a frown to Itachi's lips. He said nothing but watched as the young man was treated as nothing but a work animal. "Who is he?"

The weapon smith returned to Itachi, accepting the coins he offered. "Nagato. His father sold the worthless piece of shit to me last month. He was quite the religious zealot, citing that the boy was the result of his wife's infidelity. I find it hard to believe since the boy has his father's eyes. What do I care? It was cheap labor that I own for life."

Itachi fought the urge to strangle the man. He was sure he'd never seen a creature more full of life. Some part of him found the boy strangely familiar. It was on the tip of his memory, locked away through the passage of time-perhaps the result of meeting an ancestor.

While the weapon smith counted his money, Itachi approached the young man. "Your name is Nagato?"

Gray eyes widened, looking desperately at Itachi. There was recognition there though Itachi knew he'd never met the other.

Nagato seemed to regain use of his tongue and nodded. "Yes."

Itachi stared at him for several more moments before turning and returning to the weapon smith. "I wish to purchase the slave."

Eyes bugged out. "You want Nagato?"

"Yes. Tell me what you paid for him and I will double it."

Greed worked its way across the man's face. "Triple."

Itachi's lips thinned but he nodded. "Fine. I'll be back tomorrow with your coins. Have him ready to come with me. I expect him to be in the same shape he is now."

"Don't worry about Nagato. I'll have him ready for you."

Itachi nodded. "See that you do."

Leaving the forge, he could almost feel Nagato's eyes on him. He would have turned to verify when Sasuke raced up to him. "Did you have fun playing, little brother?"

Sasuke nodded happily, showing off several small pieces of hard candy. "The others were eating them but…I wasn't sure…"

"It's fine, little brother. It will offer you no nutrition but you may eat it if you like." Itachi ruffled Sasuke's mussed hair.

Sasuke popped the bit of hard candy in his mouth, wincing at the sweet taste. Itachi chuckled, taking the remainder from Sasuke's hand. "Don't like it?"

"Too sweet," said Sasuke with a frown.

Itachi chuckled, popping the pieces in his mouth. He loved the flavor of human sweets. He wished he could eat them and feel fulfillment in his stomach. At least he was allowed to savor the taste.
As the sun set on the horizon, Itachi approached his father's rooms. "Father?"

"Enter, my son."

Itachi slide the door open, walking on silent feet to kneel before his father. "You don't look well, Father."

"I'm very tired, Itachi. Soon I will relinquish my throne to you." Fugaku placed his hands on his thighs.

"Perhaps if you and Mother took a more active role in Sasuke…"

Fugaku shook his head. "Bringing Sasuke into the world was a futile attempt to bring some joy back to Mikoto. I'm afraid it failed. I could tell the moment she held him in her arms, she would only stay as long as necessary."

"But…"

"No, son. I have promised your mother I will arrange everything."

Itachi closed his eyes, bowing until his head touched the polished wood. "As you wish, Father."

"Send Sasuke to me. I wish to spend time with my youngest and final son."

Itachi left the room with a heavy heart. He did not make it to Sasuke before collapsing onto the floor. His hands went to his abdomen to feel for what he was sure was a knife wound but finding nothing.

"Itachi?" Sasuke rushed to him. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know…Sasuke, I need to leave." Itachi needed to go…he wasn't sure. Perhaps it was a premonition. He felt a sudden and desperate urge to find the slave he'd arranged to purchase.

"I'm getting Father." Sasuke disappeared before Itachi could stop him, returning moments later with Fugaku.

"I need to go, Father. Something…I don't understand it." Itachi ran a hand through his long hair in frustration.

"Itachi, you're not thinking reasonably. You're not well." Fugaku placed a gentle hand on Itachi's shoulder. "Come rest with me."

"No, Father…I need to…" Itachi doubled over again, his hand rubbing desperately at his heart.

Fugaku frowned, knowing exactly what this was. He withdrew a knife from his sleeve and sliced through his palm. A few quickly utterances of ancient words along with a blood sacrifice had Itachi collapsing into Fugaku's arms.

"Sasuke…Let's go put your brother to bed. He's likely to sleep for several hours, if not until dusk tomorrow."

A servant approached as he laid Itachi upon the futon. "My lord…Lord Danzou is here to see you."

"I shall receive him in the garden." Fugaku covered his son before moving quickly, pausing under the awning of the house. "Is it finished?"
"It is finished, my king."

"Good. Itachi will be your lord soon. Serve him as you serve me."

oOo

Itachi blinked awake. He no longer felt the pain or compulsion of the previous night though a strange ache throbbed in his chest. He couldn't believe he'd slept so long. To sleep through a night was nearly impossible for their kind.

"Itachi! You're awake." Sasuke practically slid across the slick flooring. "Father said you would sleep long."

"He performed magic on me."

Sasuke nodded, "It was amazing. You dropped like a rock in a pond."

Itachi nodded, stripping his sleeping kimono for a clean yukata. "I'm going into town. I'll be back in an hour or two."

"Can I come?"

"Not this time. I'm bringing a human back with me and I don't want to have to worry about you." Itachi slid his feet into sandals and stepped into the garden. "Stay out of trouble."

Sasuke snorted, but waved goodbye to his brother.

Triple what the weapon maker paid was steep, but Nagato would be worth it. He wasn't sure why he was so drawn to the other. He felt a deep connection, something he hadn't felt in a long time.

"Where's Nagato? I have your money." Itachi approached the weapon smith whose scowl increased tenfold upon seeing him.

"Dead. I don't know who did it, but if I get my hands on the idiot who killed him…"

Itachi froze, pain shooting through him. Dead? It wasn't possible.

He stumbled back, leaving the tradesman to his craft. The world felt as if it was crashing down. He felt as if he mourned for someone he didn't know, yet it still hurt. If he was just another human, why did it hurt so much?

oOo

Nagato, please forgive me for withholding the truth. I severed my own bonds in hope of joining with you, but soon found it not in my fate. If you are reading this, you now know the truth. Itachi didn't betray you. Fugaku Uchiha betrayed Itachi and I betrayed you. I hope you can forgive me. With my bond severed, there is a chance I will be reborn. I will be a normal soul, but I hope if we somehow meet again, you will look kindly on me.

Always, Konan

Pein felt the journal fall from his fingers. He felt empty. His life was a lie. Everything he'd held dear was a falsehood built on betrayal.

He wanted to rage at Konan. Why? Why had she allowed him to grow bitter? Rage though he might, he knew the answer. She'd hoped he would sever his own bond and create a new one with
Closing his eyes, he felt tears pool in the corners. "Idiot."

"Pein?"

Pein swiped at the tears, looking back to stare at Neji. His hands were clasped before him and his eyes held just as much anguish as Pein.

"Yes?"

"I thought you would like to know. The man who did this, who took her from us. He is a lord amongst the nightwalkers. He goes by the name of Danzou," spoke Neji calmly.

Pein felt shock work through him. His hands slowly lifted the journal, running his fingers over the leather binding. Danzou. He was the one who killed him. Though he never saw the man, he now understood. Konan must have known this would happen. None could see the threads as clearly as her.

"Thank you, Neji."

Pein gently returned the journal to Konan's desk. Danzou's time on the earth was limited. He refused to rest until the past had been reconciled and Danzou's blood coated his hands.

To be continued…
Sasuke's arms tightened around the frame half in his lap. He was afraid to let go—afraid if he released his hold the man in his arms would be spirited away as he had for so many years. It was a strange sensation. The first feeling of completion in centuries settled into his bones. His mind held the clarity it once possessed—no longer invaded with thoughts of madness and despair. Everything was returned to him but could easily be taken again.

He smiled faintly at the snuffling coming from the other. Deep azure blinked up at him, first in confusion and then happiness. His arms stretched out with a popping of joints and muscle before speaking. "You know sleeping on the floor is bad for your back."

Sasuke chuckled lightly. "That's a shame because I destroyed all the furniture yesterday."

"We could go upstairs. I have a very nice bedroom. Itachi even painted it for me," offered Naruto as he pushed back from Sasuke.

"Naruto…" Sasuke grabbed Naruto's forearm, preventing him from moving away. "Do you remember the past?"

Naruto cocked his head to the side and considered the question for a moment before answering. "A little. It's strange, I have memories I can pull from almost like scenes from a movie. I know it's the same soul, but when I search, it feels like I'm watching someone else. The emotions I feel are complicated. It's a strange sensation. And…I can see what I did to you."

"You didn't do anything. I…allowed that to happen." Sasuke lifted a hand to stroke across the thin scars decorating Naruto's face.

Naruto's eyes grew sad. "You shouldn't blame yourself. No one knew what was happening."

There was silence and Sasuke stood and regretfully released his hold on Naruto's arm. He found himself not wanting to let him go. It was a familiar sensation of possession. Naruto deserved better from him than to be considered as such. It shamed him to think of Naruto in such a way…a way he'd been doing since almost the beginning.

Naruto stepped forward and broke his thoughts by wrapping his arms around Sasuke's waist and leaning against his back. "What happens now?"

"What do you want to happen?" Sasuke gripped the wrist resting on his abdomen with a smirk. Naruto flushed red as a beet and pulled away. "Not that, you pervert!"

Sasuke began laughing so hard he couldn't help but double over in mirth. Naruto's face when he'd insinuated sexual intercourse was priceless.

Naruto growled low in his throat. "Just what do you think you're laughing at?"

Sasuke opened his mouth to attempt to calm down Naruto when the room seemed to chill. Both looked up to see Pein step from the shadows. Large bruises smudged beneath his eyes made him look like a zombie. "Pein?"

"While I'm sure you would enjoy private time for…other things, I'm here to take Naruto with me."
Sasuke turned to face him with all the fury he possessed, his teeth bared at the other. Pein's eyes glinted darkly while his hands clenched into fists as if he restrained himself. Naruto's eyes widened and darted back and forth between them.

"You aren't taking Naruto anywhere," snarled Sasuke. The blood lust poured from him and before Naruto could stop him, he pushed Naruto to the ground behind him and swiped his clawed hand towards Pein. The razor sharp nails passed through the man as if he was made of smoke.

"Nice try, but I'm afraid you aren't quite equipped to offer any sort of challenge for me." Pein crouched before Naruto. "You know you have to come with me, don't you? You've felt the simmering beneath your skin. You need to know how to control what you've become."

"He stays." Sasuke stepped between Pein and Naruto. "You can't have him."

"He needs to know how to defend himself. He's not quite immortal. Not any longer." Pein lifted his eyes to stare at the ceiling.

It was Naruto's turn to speak. "What do you mean? I thought I became immortal."

Pein shook his head. "One would think. I thought so too. Blades don't hurt us. If we grow too tired or spend too much time away from our source, we become nothing but air and are pulled back to the source to replenish. It's been the reason we've kept ourselves from interfering in world events unless necessary. We watch, document, and maintain the balance. Someone has discovered how to kill us and we go to war very soon. Naruto needs to be ready. He's very close to the front, even though he doesn't know it."

Pein leveled a stare on Sasuke whose eyes maintained their red color. "Night walkers," he spat out.

"Do you have something against my kind, or is it just those close to me?"

The occupants of the room turned to where Itachi stood in the doorway. His eyes flashed red for an instant before darkening to their normal pitch. Sasuke smirked, thinking he now had the upper hand with the man upon Itachi's arrival.

Pein prowled to where Itachi stood. "It's a shame I don't have the time to deal with your presence."

A growl rumbled in Itachi's throat. "I'd like to see you try."

Sasuke added his growl to Itachi's low rumble. The room sounded more like two dogs preparing to attack than intelligent beings. The only thought on both minds was protecting Naruto from the unknown this man represented.

Pein chuckled and faded from their sight. "Have it your way, then."

Naruto watched the motion. He watched as Itachi and Sasuke relaxed. Watchers left no scent unless they wished to. Naruto's eyes followed the movement of the master watcher. The man knew Naruto could see him and smirked as he approached the other.

Pein gleamed and his head lowered so that his lips barely brushed Naruto's ear. "You know you have to go. I promise to have you back to your other within a fortnight. That's the longest you could be away from your source without replenishing. Do you want to become strong enough to defend yourself or do you wish for the king and his brother to always come to your aid."

Naruto frowned at the taunt. His eyes narrowed and he turned his head sharply to stare into the triumphant eyes. "I'll become strong. For Sasuke and Itachi."
Pein solidified behind Naruto. "Don't worry, Other to Naruto. I'll return him to you soon and completely unharmed."

Pein's arms wrapped around Naruto's waist and their bodies became nothing but air, floating and light. Sasuke screamed out in anger, his voice shouting for Naruto but his other half was gone. Instead he moved to leave the room. He would follow his instinct straight to Naruto. He would bring him back.

He would have left had Itachi's hand not stopped him. "I can't allow you to leave."

"Try and stop me." Sasuke shook off the hand only to have it return with enough force to shove him against the wall.

"You stay."

Sasuke bared his teeth in anger. "Fuck you, Itachi!"

"You stay, to keep the council from finding an excuse to execute you. Danzou will do anything to usurp my position. I won't give him an excuse to bring the guillotine down on both our heads. You will stay here for your mandatory incarceration to insure you won't go feral. I'll look for Naruto."

Itachi dug his claws into Sasuke's shoulder just enough to bring his point into crystal clarity. "Do you understand?"

Sasuke growled. "Fine. But if he isn't back here by the time my lock in is finished, I'll leave and find him myself."

"Deal. I think I might know who can help find him." Itachi stepped away and in a flash of speed he was gone.

What would have taken nearly twenty minutes in a car, took only seconds under his preternatural speed and led him to a familiar doctor's residence. Had it been a human he would have ignored niceties in favor of expedience. With were-creatures, one was forced to observe their ways. He pressed the door bell and waited patiently. He knew he was in there, he could smell the scent of the wolf. He pressed the bell again. Nothing. That was the problem when dealing with other species. The weres were particularly annoying when it came to dealing with non-weres. "Kakashi! Open the door now or I ignore protocol and enter.

The door swung open to reveal the man he sought. Kakashi Hatake. A king amongst his kind and recent friend of sorts to the nightwalkers under Itachi's command. "You rang?"

"Watchers. Where can I find them?"

Kakashi arched a brow. He seemed genuinely surprised by the question. "Don't you know? All kings know. They are similar to prophets and can predict prosperity or ruin. Why don't you?"

"Tell me what you know." Itachi narrowed his eyes, making Kakashi sigh heavily and step aside to allow him inside.

"Please keep it quiet. My mate rests upstairs. Did something happen to your father suddenly. I would have assumed when you were named his heir, you would be told the secrets. I'm not sure I should be discussing it. There are rules to having access to powers such as those possessed by the watchers." Kakashi poured a snifter of whiskey and gestured for Itachi to join him in matching wingback chairs. "If the rules are broken, the watchers will remove their gifts from the clan who breaks them. I've never used their assistance but I don't want to risk a future where I might."
"My brother's...mate is a watcher. I'll set you up with them if you need it. Now talk." Itachi watched Kakashi debate before nodding.

"I thought he was dead. In fact, I'm pretty sure he was settled in my morgue." Kakashi arched a questioning brow. "Perhaps it's I who should be asking the questions."

"I can't explain it. It seems even far out for my own broad experience. I don't know why or how, but he was made into one of them. I've answered your question. Now, you answer mine." Itachi bore his eyes heavily into Kakashi's, letting him feel the urgency in his gaze.

The werewolf took a sip of his whiskey and glanced towards Itachi. "Only two people per species are allowed to know of them. The king or queen and his or her heir. We are allowed to visit them and have them...spin a thread or something. Like I said, I've never visited. My kind tends to err more on the side of keeping the future a mystery. It's more fun that way."

"So they are fortunetellers?"

Kakashi shrugged. "Even being privy to some of their talents doesn't mean I know everything. Why not ask your brother's mate?"

"Because he was taken by pierced redhead with a bad temper and I don't want my brother going feral waiting for the man to return him." Itachi's hand clenched in the material of his trousers.

"A male? He intrigues you. Don't deny it, I can smell it on you even if your physical demeanor didn't give it away. What is it you are looking for?" Kakashi cocked his head to the side much as a dog did when curious of something.

"I'm looking for Naruto. Now, tell me where I can find them. You said the kings were allowed inside their home. Where is it?"

Kakashi ignored the question. "Why was your brother's mate taken?"

"He said training. Naruto hasn't been a watcher for long. He said a war was coming and Naruto needed to be prepared." Itachi watched as Kakashi stiffened visibly. "What is it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe nothing but we've heard rumblings of that nature as well. It's why I offered to guard you. I don't know if it will be species against species or a civil war. And I believe you've already tasted some of that."

Kakashi seemed to know more than he initially revealed. Being out of the loop annoyed Itachi more than he would ever let on. The fiascoes with Sasuke and Naruto had left him focusing more on his brother and allowed others to sneak past his defenses. "I've had some internal difficulties of late. But nothing that would hint cries of war."

"If the watchers are preparing to battle, then I suggest you allow them to do so. They are usually neutral. This worries me. I'd advise you to prepare yourself for the worst and not fret over one of them." Kakashi downed the remainder of his liquor. "And that's all I can help you with."

"You won't tell me where they are?"

Kakashi shook his head negatively. "That's one rule I won't break. If you aren't your father's heir to their knowledge, then I can't help you. I'm sorry."

Itachi snarled to himself but left in a flurry of wind back to his home. "Sasuke?"
"I'm assuming your werewolf friend wasn't forthcoming." Sasuke sat in the shadows, his eyes burning red.

"How do you know I was with a were?" Itachi leaned against the doorframe, his eyes never leaving Sasuke's.

"I can smell him on you. My senses are heightened." Sasuke popped his neck in a slow rotation, his eyes never leaving Itachi. "He didn't tell you where Naruto is, did he?"

"No. But he did enlighten me to a few things." Itachi's jaw clenched upon thinking of their father. He had prepared Itachi from the time he was a child to take over. There had been no unseen rush to his taking to sleep. Why hadn't he told Itachi?

"What was it?" asked Sasuke.

"Our father seems to have left many secrets." There was an extended silence as both nightwalkers turned their thoughts inward.

Sasuke was the first to speak. "I've made a decision. I'm going after him. Just this small time away from him has me on edge. I can't remain when I don't know where he is."

Itachi stepped forward with a hiss. "Sasuke…the council won't allow you to leave this home for at least two weeks. To break your confinement will result in possibly getting yourself executed. I can't help you."

Sasuke wheeled around to face Itachi. "Why do you always have to help me? You took care of Naruto and I'm grateful but this is something I have to do. I can't leave him alone."

"Just wait a little while. Please. Pein promised…"

Sasuke snarled at the man's name. "When did you become such a supporter of him?"

"I didn't say I liked him. I just don't believe he would go back on his word. He said Naruto needed you to survive. Then trust him to bring him back to you."

The doorbell went off. It was a bit late for visitors and the council wouldn't bother with the bell. "Wait here," Itachi ordered and prowled up the steps to deal with the interruption.

He opened the door and standing there was a worried Sakura. "Hi."

"What is it?" He barked, not in the mood to deal with Naruto's friends.

She flinched but held her ground. "I'm sorry for coming so late. Is Naruto home? He hasn't been to class in several days and we were worried so I told Kiba I would stop by after work and check on him. He's not answering his cell."

"He's fine. He was down with a cold for a few days." Itachi moved to close the door but Sakura placed a hand to stop him.

"Can I see him?" she asked.

Itachi's jaw clenched. Women were always so demanding, no matter the era. "He's out with my brother."

"What about his cell?" Apparently she wasn't about to give up.
It was becoming redundant. He was already worried about Sasuke. Their conversation wasn't nearly over and he was trapped, answering questions from one of Naruto's strange friends. "He lost it and hasn't replaced it yet. I'm sure he'll call you soon with the new number."

She seemed to accept the explanation and pulled a small business card from her pink pocketbook. "Give this to him. My mother had them made for me since I'll be graduating this summer. It has my cell number on it in case he forgot it."

"He's fine, Sakura. I'm sure it won't be long until he's back to his old self." Itachi accepted the card and closed the door behind him.

He placed the card on the table and made his way down to where he'd left his brother minutes before. The empty room greeting him sent a wave of panic to his very core. He began cursing in every language he could think of before racing upstairs to change into travel clothes. It was time to track Sasuke before the trail grew cold. His brother truly was an impatient idiot.

oOo

Pein touched down in the central area. He used his own body to force the change into Naruto, solidifying both their bodies. The effect left Naruto slightly dizzy, causing him to double over.

He gagged a little from his doubled over position. "I feel sick."

"It will pass." Pein glanced around, their arrival garnering a small but curious crowd. Konan's murder hadn't sat well in their west coast colony. He'd heard whispers of moving to some of the larger east coast colonies or even to Europe.

The sound of gathering people grew, causing Pein to take Naruto by the arm and begin to lead him from the room. "Come."

"Where are we?" Naruto's eyes grew wide at the vaulted ceilings carved into the very walls of one of the large mountains along the Cascade Mountain Range.

"One of many homes. We like staying close to the earth, hence why our homes are carved into mountains. It also makes it easier to hide and to defend if need be." Pein gestured for Naruto to follow him down a series of corridors towards a large empty space. The interior possessed a high ceiling and a collection of various weapons on a rack against one wall. "Here is where I will help you hone your skills."

"You said war was coming. War between who?" Naruto picked a sword from a rack of weapons. "Heeya!"

"Not between the humans and their petty religious squabbles. Though there have been times when I wished they would blow themselves up." Pein snatched the weapon from Naruto's hand, knowing full well it would be impossible for him to be killed by such a weapon. "Put that down before you chop off a leg."

Naruto crossed his arms across his chest. "That's mean. I was a human until recently."

"But you aren't any longer." Pein considered for a moment before speaking again. "These weapons aren't really for you to learn to wield so much as learn to avoid. Weapons, while they have a hard time killing us, hurt like a bitch if they pierce us. Some can even prevent us from escaping with certain spells placed on them."

"Why can't Sasuke be here?"
"Because if he's here, then Itachi will be here," snarled Pein.

Naruto returned the snarl. "Itachi is a good person. He took care of me."

"I'm not discussing this with a neophyte. You're here to learn, not try to stir up old trouble." His voice carried a hint of old hurt.

Naruto peered cautiously at Pein. There was pain and regret, which he was unable to mask before Naruto witnessed. "Whatever he did to you…was it that bad?"

"It was enough. Imagine if Sasuke's presence during your lives had been played with by Itachi. What if he'd never known how strong your bond would be? What if you were denied Sasuke by his family?" Pein lowered his eyes to the dusty floor and heaved a sigh.

"I would be mad at Itachi, not Sasuke. Why are you mad at Itachi?" Naruto cautiously approached the slumped man.

"He should have known. Something should have sparked. No matter his sanity, Sasuke would have waded through the River Styx for you. Itachi doesn't even remember my face. That's why I'm angry. I was never allowed the chance to be with him, however fleeting those times might be. I was denied everything." Pein heaved away from the wall with a huff. "Consider yourself lucky, Naruto."

"I'm sure Itachi didn't forget you. You have a connection. You can work it out," encouraged Naruto.

"Enough. My past is irrelevant. I'm sure you would like to know how I brought us here? When we become like air, we can move though it. It makes traveling fast and easy. Your first lesson is making your body nothing but air. First, imagine yourself light. Let go of your solid form. The sensation you felt when I carried us here, use that as your guide. Don't do anything else."

Naruto frowned and closed his eyes. He attempted to imagine being light as air. He used the previous sensation as a template but the transformation seemed elusive. His fists clenched and his face scrunched up in desperate concentration. Nothing. "It's not working."

Pein shook his head. "You're still trapped by the physical. You aren't human any longer and therefore, are not bound by their laws. Take a deep breath. Feel the air. Embrace it."

Naruto frowned and closed his eyes. He attempted to imagine being light as air. He used the previous sensation as a template but the transformation seemed elusive. His fists clenched and his face scrunched up in desperate concentration. Nothing. "It's not working."

"Naruto…you need to get a grip. Hold onto yourself. You need to be aware of everything. If you become completely air, you won't be able to return to your human form," shouted Pein. The command jolted Naruto back into his mind.

How do I get back? Naruto was beginning to panic. The thrill was gone and he was left fearful of never returning to his physical form. Sasuke would kill him.

"Just imagine yourself slowly becoming solid. Your body should gradually flow towards the ground the more solid you become," he instructed.

Just imagine being solid. In his panicked state, he had no concept of gradual. He wanted to be solid
immediately. As a result his body reformed into its solid counterpart while floating twelve feet in the air.

A scream ripped through the chamber as he plunged to the ground. His body landed with a loud thump, making Pein chuckle darkly. "I did say gradual."

Naruto groaned, his body reshaping automatically to correct the broken bones and muscle caused by the fall. "So you did."

"It will get easier."

Naruto groaned from his place on the ground. "That doesn't make me feel any better. I thought we were supposed to be invincible. It still feels like I fell from fifteen feet."

"Just because it's hard to kill us, doesn't mean the pain receptors aren't there. If you fell from a hundred feet, just imagine what it would feel like to have every bone in your body repairing itself. When we become air, we can avoid injury. For instance, swing this sword at me." Pein plucked the very weapon Naruto had played with earlier from the weapon stand. "You won't hurt me. Even if the blade lands, I'll heal in a matter of minutes."

Naruto took the blade and jabbed nervously at Pein. The metal passed directly through his body as if made of air. Eyes grew wide and shock caused Naruto to drop the blade. It clattered to the ground, the sound echoing off the high walls of the room.

Pein's body solidified and he plucked the sword from the ground. "Even if I had allowed you to stab me, this blade wouldn't have killed me."

"Let me try," pleaded Naruto.

This time the weapon chosen was a slender wooden club. "Let's try with this first. I don't want to exhaust your body too much today."

Without a warning, Pein jabbed forward with the club. The wood slammed into Naruto's abdomen and sent him to the ground, gasping in pain. "Christ! Did you have to hit me so hard."

Shaking his head, he continued to stare at the writhing blond. "You were supposed to fade to air."

"Well I wasn't ready. You didn't tell me you were attacking." Naruto gasped out a mixture of a groan and a whine.

"I had a weapon in my hand. Shouldn't that have been warning enough? Do you think you enemies will give you a warning before they attack. You need to be ready for every attack, including surprise ones." Pein offered his hand and pulled the shaky Naruto to his feet.

"That's easy for you to say." He rubbed his stomach where the ache still remained even after his body healed it.

"Next time you'll dodge the attack." Those words were the only thing said before he swung the club again. Naruto didn't exactly become like air, though he did dodge the attack by lunging to the side and tumbling across the dirt floor.

"You asshole! Why are you still swinging?" Naruto screamed as he came to his feet.

Pein ignored him, coming quick and fast without using preternatural speed-yet. His swung the club, clipping Naruto's shoulder. A screeching scream of anger came from the blond. "Stop it
"When you dodge my attack properly." Pein swung again and again. Naruto moved agilely through the room, bodily dodging every swing. "Naruto, while your tumbling skills are superb, you are not learning anything."

"Yeah I am! I'm learning that you're a crazy man who is torturing me for fun." Naruto raced towards the door only to have Pein move faster, appearing almost magically in front of the door to stop the escape. "Holy shit! We have super speed too?"

The clenching of Pein's jaw along with the twitching in his eye showed he didn't find the joke amusing. "Stand still and learn how to do this. Stop trying to dodge the attack and accept it."

Naruto didn't have time to dodge. Pein moved faster than was humanly possible. It was easy to forget they were beings beyond humanity. That was Naruto's weakness at this moment. He was too focused on his physical body-on the pain caused by the attacks. He wasn't thinking as a watcher yet. But he would. When instinct took over, there was nothing one could do but follow through with it.

Naruto's breath caught and suddenly his body became nothing. Just as when he'd floated before, yet this was different. His body held its form and solidarity, causing the attack to pass through him as if he wasn't even there.

"I did it." Naruto's eyes grew wide and he stared at his stomach. As soon as the weapon cleared his body, he grew completely solid once more.

"Good. Now, again."

The drills went on for possibly hours until Naruto's body was swaying in exhaustion. During the final attack, he couldn't even dodge it. He fell to the floor, unconscious. Pein stared at his fallen student before slumping against a nearby wall in equal exhaustion. He would need to visit the earth today after using so much energy and it still felt as if they had only learned a fraction of what Naruto needed to know. If they continued on this track, he would have to take Naruto to his lover earlier than expected. They'd used up a tremendous amount of energy. Food would replenish some, but not enough to continue on the crash course.

Closing his eyes for a moment, he wasn't expecting the attack. In the state he was, he probably couldn't have defended properly even if he'd seen it. Instead, he found himself pinned to the wall with red eyes burning holes into him.

"What did you do to him?" Sasuke hissed maliciously, his eyes continuing to dart back to where Naruto lay on the ground.

"I'm teaching him to hone his abilities," Pein growled in return.

Sasuke's hand tightened on the throat beneath his palm. His eyes seemed to darken in color as he bared his teeth for the watcher in his grasp. "You took him from me and now you've nearly killed him."

"He needs to be trained. It's the only way to protect him," insisted Pein.

He lifted a hand in an attempt to loosen Sasuke's grip while the room began to fill with watchers, many ready to fight the invading nightwalker. In the aftershock of Konan's death from a nightwalker's hand, the entire colony was on edge involving the beings. It was obvious Sasuke had made quite the fuss while moving to the training room. He'd probably followed Naruto's essence
all the way there.

"Sasuke, release him." Itachi stepped into the room.

The sight of his brother had Sasuke hissing. Itachi had followed his still warm trail but remained far enough behind so not to trigger his notice. It seemed Itachi had wanted to find this sanctuary as much as his brother but for different reasons.

"Look what he did to Naruto!"

Itachi knelt beside the collapsed blond. A loud snore erupted and the young watcher flopped over onto his back with a grunt. "S'uke…don't…do…mmm."

Itachi arched a brow in Sasuke's direction. "Apparently he's not that bad off."

Pein used the moment to slide easily from Sasuke's hand. The focus in his eyes faded in and out, causing him to stumble away before falling to his knees. He must have used more energy than he'd previously thought and not having replenished himself, he was tremendously weak.

"Apparently, Naruto gave him a run for his money," chuckled Itachi as he moved to stand over the fallen man.

"Please, your kind has already taken one from us. We don't want more bloodshed in our home." The long haired Neji stepped forward from the growing crowd.

"Who?" Itachi's eyes turned hard as Neji stepped forward.

"It is not my place to say. You may ask Pein if you wish after he awakens." Neji knelt to lift his fallen comrade. The sight of the beautiful man touching Pein triggered a long forgotten feeling in his chest. Never with Naruto had he felt such a possessiveness. On some level, he'd always known Naruto belonged to Sasuke. It kept at bay any impulses he might have towards the other. With Pein, he held no such reservations.

"I'll take him." Itachi moved and scooped Pein from Neji's arms. He felt lighter than he would have imagined. "Why is he so light?"

"He's weakened from the extensive training and has avoided replenishing his energy. It is a formal way to mourn those whose time as ended. It is rarely practiced except when someone very dear has passed. He and Konan were very close. He took her death harder than most." Neji turned and strode through the parted watchers. "Please bring him this way."

Naruto's eyes blinked open and he stared up into Sasuke's gleaming red. "S'uke? What are you doing here?"

"Tracking you down. You didn't think I would let you be away from me for so long, did you?" Sasuke traced a finger down Naruto's cheek.

A lower lip poked out in an annoyed pout. "It hasn't even been a day yet."

"That's too long. I spent so long in the darkness, I was afraid of falling back into it. I can't be away from you." Sasuke pulled Naruto into an embrace.

Tanned arms wrapped around his waist and Naruto leaned his head against Sasuke's chest with a deep felt purr. "I feel better with you here. In fact, I could probably go another couple of rounds with Pein."
"He's the one who refused the earth in favor of his other." Whispers such as this circulated through the room as Naruto unconsciously fed from Sasuke's energy. Sasuke couldn't see it but the watchers could. They witnessed the thread binding them wind around their bodies as Naruto siphoned off energy to replace what he'd expended.

Sasuke glanced to where the others continued to watch them. He felt good with Naruto in his arms but it felt different. The air around them felt almost electric. It was doing strange things to his body. The sensations made him want to feed on Naruto while fucking him at the same time. He was nearly to the point of not caring if the audience wanted to watch the act or not.

A woman stepped forward. All the watchers appeared young but like nightwalkers, looks could be deceiving. "Perhaps you should retire to a room. I will take you to the room assigned to this one."

Sasuke was loath to pull away. Both his body and mind screamed out at him not to release his hold on Naruto. He was forced to grit his teeth in order to push away and stand.

Naruto, completely revived, bounded up as if nothing had happened. The room parted for them once more, curious eyes following them as they moved from the room. "Hey, why is everyone so wide eyed?"

"It was because you fed from him instead of the earth. Pein took you from the sanctuary when you failed to thrive. I can only assume he took you to your other. It is rare that you should have an immortal other. I know of only a handful paired with immortals," she explained.

As they moved through the darkened hallways, Sasuke thought on her words. Naruto fed from him just as he fed from Naruto. It made him happy to provide for Naruto.

"Nightwalker, I ask that you not wander these halls without an escort. Have a good evening." She bowed slightly and left the two alone.

"Naruto, don't leave me again." Sasuke whispered, burying his face in the golden hair.

"Well…I was only going to train but I'm glad you came. Just try not to be a bastard to these guys. They are a bit weird but once you get to know them, you learn they can kick your ass in twenty different ways before you know it." Naruto wrapped his arms around Sasuke once more to revel in the feel of warm energy running between them. "Sasuke…Pein and Itachi…do you think they will ever work out their problems?"

Sasuke shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say? Do you know why Pein and Itachi have it out for each other?"

"Just bits. I don't know the entire story but I bet it's a long one." Naruto laid his head down to Sasuke's chest. "Pein says war is coming. Do you believe him?"

There was a pause before Sasuke answered. "If there is, we'll be ready for it."
Chapter 17

Sasuke continued to hold Naruto as minutes ticked by in rapid succession. They were finally alone. It was the first real time they'd had more than a handful of minutes to hold each other. It was probably more precious to Sasuke who didn't feel whole unless Naruto was by his side. The darkness in him could never be fully cleansed from Naruto's presence alone but at least in Naruto's company, he never feared what would happen. He could protect Naruto. This time there would be no cosmic forces tearing them apart. He could finally do what he'd failed to do for nearly a millennia. He could keep him.

His arms tightened around Naruto, allowing him to savor the leanly muscled body in his arms. There were differences. A freckle here, a broader stretch of muscle here—they were minor changes to Naruto's physique. It made no difference to Sasuke, though there were changes which had nothing to do with the makings of the physical form.

Since Naruto's rebirth into the Watcher guild, he'd noticed a few things. Naruto seemed less a different person and more a mixture of all his previous life. The way Naruto held his head or the rolling of his eyes upward when thinking were all traits he possessed through the different lives. Now he was all of them, and yet none of them. He was reborn and all the previous lives seemed like shadows of who he was now.

The more precise changes were lost on Sasuke as he was unfamiliar with Naruto's current incarnation. The differences from the last incarnation would likely be more noticeable by Itachi or one of Naruto's human friends. He would still be their Naruto, only with much more depth the humans would never understand. Only he and Itachi would be privy to understanding the changes.

"Sasuke, what was it like?"

"Hmm?" he mumbled at the sudden question. "What was what like?"

Naruto sat up and stared at him with luminous eyes. "Watching me die. I can remember some. Not everything, just important things unless I dig deep but it feels like I'm invading someone else's privacy even though I know it was always me so please tell me. What was it like?"

"Hell." Sasuke sighed heavily at Naruto's sad face. "It was like being in pitch black and the sole light in the darkness flickers only for a matter of seconds but in those seconds, you become dependent on the light."

Naruto looked down, sadness flooding his features. He always was one to wear his heart on his sleeve, no matter the incarnation. It was in his nature. It brought back memories, good and bad. Those memories shaped both of them in ways neither could possibly understand.

Sasuke lifted a hand and traced his fingers over the thin scars slicing across Naruto's cheeks. "I survived."

"Why did you do it? Why didn't you just forget me? It would have save you from being hurt again and again. Why didn't you?" asked Naruto.

Sasuke couldn't stop the smirk curving his lips upward. "You wouldn't let me. Such a tenacious moron you are."

"Hey!" Naruto shoved Sasuke's shoulder and crossed his arms across his chest. "Maybe you deserved it."
Sasuke pulled Naruto back, loathe to not feel his body against his. The feeling of pure sanity and security was new. Without Naruto nearby, he felt adrift and unable to anchor himself. One could say Naruto was his safety net. Naruto kept him grounded. It was likely to be a while before he could bear to be apart from him for long. "My apologies. I didn't mean to offend your sensibilities."

Naruto mumbled under his breath and shoved Sasuke's arm once more before allowing himself to be pulled into the embrace and pillowing his face in the curve of Sasuke's neck. "Just watch yourself next time. I have superpowers now."

Sasuke snorted at the comment. Naruto might have new abilities, but he was still Naruto and it was Sasuke's instinct to protect him as best he could. "I'll take that into advisement."

The room fell quiet and Naruto scooted closer to Sasuke so that his legs straddled the slender hips. "Do you feel different about me?"

"I feel," Sasuke said with hope that would explain to Naruto. He felt something. After so long lost in the tempest between emotion, madness, and nightmares, he could feel with a clear mind unclouded by the madness which had taken hold of his sanity. It was a sensation he could not describe and wasn't sure he would ever be able to.

Naruto blinked a few times before grinning widely. "Good."

Sasuke nodded and continued stroking his hands up and down Naruto's back in a soothing motion. He felt the other begin to relax completely. If a war involving the Watchers was coming, either of them could perish. He knew if Naruto died, there would no longer be madness for he would follow him into oblivion. No one would keep them apart again—not Itachi, not some divine machine… nothing.

Wanting to touch skin to skin, he slid his hands beneath the shirt and began to tug the material upward. He needed this affirmation of their existence. It wasn't a drive for sexual satisfaction but more a need to simply be with his most precious. He needed to claim him as he'd longed to do so for so long. Unlike before, nothing was forcing them together and then apart. They simply were.

Sasuke's cool hands brushed the taunt abdomen, making Naruto sit back slowly and aid him by lifting his arms in a slow and lazy motion. The long tone abdomen was revealed, followed by a firm chest and strong arms. His Naruto was beautiful, though it wasn't the physical attributes making him so but his simple existence and the knowledge that he belonged to Sasuke alone.

"Naruto..." he whispered the name like a prayer. To him, it was a prayer. It was a quiet invocation for everything Naruto had been, and was now.

Naruto wrapped his arms around Sasuke's broad shoulders and placed a gentle kiss upon the soft lips. He might have only meant for the touch to be an innocent admittance of affection, but Sasuke would have none of it.

The touch upon his lips was his undoing. So much longing and suffering created a need in him which tore at his insides like a vicious monster. He forced Naruto from his seat upon his lap and down to his back where his lips ravaged the surprise slack ones belonging to the other.

His teeth nipped, drawing just the faintest droplets of blood to the surface. He didn't question it. He didn't ask how he could draw blood when all else passed through as if there was nothing. He didn't wonder, only tasted. It was a flavor he knew all too well and it incited in him a need he would never satisfy. He would always want Naruto. He would always desire him above all others. Naruto was now ingrained into his very soul. There was no Sasuke without Naruto.
Naruto's tongue darted out to stroke over the small hurt, making Sasuke's desire flare painful throughout his body. His tongue stroked over the pink muscle, forcing its way past and into the warmth. Heat radiated from him and into his very soul.

His fingers were nearly claw-like, tearing at the remaining clothing so to feel more of the deliciously warm flesh. It heated the cold in him, forced it away from his light. He needed to own every inch—every thought. They were of the same soul, split into two bodies such as the old fable of man's creation.

Such was the strength of their souls' intertwining. They were a single creature, joined only through the thread binding them.

"Sasuke!" Naruto gasped, as the clothing was torn from his body. He wouldn't deny him. Sasuke wouldn't allow it.

His teeth bit down on the bared shoulder, sinking into the flesh and causing a rush of blood to fill his mouth. Naruto keened out a cry, his hips jerking upward. The pain only fed the pleasure.

Sasuke didn't have the patience any longer for slow touching and stroking. The time for such was over. Naruto needed to understand the monster he'd been on the threshold of becoming.

He scooped his arms beneath Naruto's knees and forced his legs upward, nearly bending him in two. His fingers stroked along the crease, pausing only for a moment at the pucker before working upward to cup and squeeze the tight sac at the base of the rapidly hardening erection. The body beneath him seemed to shudder and quake at the touch, fueling his lust all the more. Naruto was finally his. Nothing could separate them. All that remained was consummating their bodies.

"Naruto, I can't…it hurts too much to be gentle." It was the most he could offer him. He would give him gentle later, when the need wasn't tearing him apart. The monster inside begged for release—to claim Naruto as his own.

Naruto moaned at his touch, arching even higher at the words. "It's…alright…oh shit."

Sasuke smirked at the shudder working its way through Naruto at the external pressure against his prostate. His erection seemed to harden even more, droplets pearling on the tip and slipping down the side to splash into blond curls at the base.

He could see the clenching and releasing of Naruto's anus. It was practically asking to be filled. It belonged to Sasuke. Everything belonged to Sasuke. Naruto's hair. Naruto's skin. Everything.

Naruto's back arched high off the bed upon where he was placed. His skin glistened in the low light of the lamps; his fingers clawed at Sasuke's arms while a plea formed on his lips.

Sasuke fingers drifted upward to swipe across the tip of the erection with a finger, bringing the glistening liquid to his lips and tasting the essence of Naruto. The taste across his tongue was much like that of Naruto's blood. It was salty and strong, coating his tongue with amazing flavor. It was Naruto.

"Please, Sasuke…"

If Sasuke was a better man, he would wait. If he was a man, he would woo Naruto instead of forcing their bodies together in a union both desired. But, he was not a man. He was a nightwalker who had been denied unfettered access to his one true desire for too long. Even the longer lifetimes were a mere drop in the bucket. They seemed to last only the span of a blinking of eyes. No more. He would be denied eternity no longer. Naruto was his. He would protect him from the coming
war, and from any who sought to separate them.

Forcing his fingers into the panting mouth, he leaned down to swipe his tongue of the amazingly healed bite. His teeth gleamed and he shoved his fingers deep into Naruto's mouth just as his teeth sank once more into the tender flesh.

Naruto screeched around the fingers, his hips jutting upward and wetness spilling between them. His mouth went slack and a low moan rumbled from his chest as Sasuke withdrew his fingers and stared at the wetness splattered across Naruto's abdomen.

A flush of embarrassment spread across Naruto's cheeks, coloring them a dusky red against his already tan skin. "Sasuke…"

Sasuke dipped his fingers in the cum, spreading it slightly before lifting the damp fingers and tracing Naruto's lips. "Taste yourself. You taste delicious."

Naruto's eyes widened and pulled away, only to have the fingers pressed passed his lips once more. He moaned around the fingers sucking faintly at the bitter-salty taste coating them before nipping at the tips.

Sasuke's eyes flashed red and his fingers were withdrawn and forced inside Naruto's body with a harsh push. Naruto's body slammed down tightly around the intruding digits, making Sasuke release a snarl so to sound less civilized and more the animal he was.

This was not gentle. He couldn't be gentle. All he could hope for was enough self control to insure he didn't injure Naruto though the way the other's body clamped and tightened around his fingers, such hope was becoming more and more fleeting by the moment.

"I'm sorry…" he hissed into the air around them, feeling the cool touch of breeze almost like a physical caress.

Naruto shook his head and wrapped his arms around Sasuke's shoulders. "It feels good."

Sasuke's eyes narrowed at the lie, his mind forcing his fingers to gentle as much as was possible considering the state he was in. Naruto's body was oversensitive after the orgasm. The touch was probably as much painful as it was pleasurable, most likely the former.

He needed to merge with Naruto. He needed to be a full part of him—two souls once again joined in heat and passion. His body. Naruto's body. It was all relative when they were together for they possessed not two bodies, but one—a beast with two backs.

His hands forced Naruto to arch upward so that only his shoulders and head rested on the pillow beneath him, his body splayed out before Sasuke like a feast. Every inch was his. His balls ached along with the teeth in his mouth, a synchronized throbbing. Neither would be eased until they were both buried in Naruto. Only Naruto would satisfy him.

It was with those thoughts swirling through is mind that he pushed forward and was engulfed in the heat of Naruto's body. Naruto's cry wasn't one of pleasure, but of pain. He felt the deep furrows Naruto's nails created in his arms, yet Sasuke was unable to keep his body from continuing onward. If anything, the scent of blood now permeating the air fueled his lust all the more vehemently. It had been too long and his soul was still raw. It tore at his mind to hurt him but he was unable to allow for adjustment. He needed Naruto too badly.

His jaw clenched until he was certain his teeth cracked. Naruto was surrounding him in heat. Paradise couldn't even begin to describe the sensation of completion he felt. His body slowed its
movements now that he was enveloped in the heat. His lips opened, a low moan was the only sound he could produce. All capacity for speech left him as he shuddered in Naruto's grip.

Naruto's hands lifted to Sasuke's face, forcing their gazes to meet. "I know. I understand what you need. I don't mind."

The words created a tremor in Sasuke's very core, shaking what little remained of his control. His hand lifted to fist in blond locks, forcing the head back to reveal the pristine and amazingly unmarked throat. It called to him. He could already taste the blood upon his lips. He wanted it—needed it. It was desperation unlike any he'd ever encountered in his very long life.

The need drew him to swipe his tongue along the length of the throat. The shudder rocking Naruto's frame created a resounding tremor in Sasuke's body. His teeth scraped along the flesh, now fully extended. The razor sharp tips traced the veins pulsing beneath the smooth skin of the tan neck.

It was foreplay between them. He could feel Naruto's renewed arousal at the touch of his teeth. The sensation was overwhelming. He could fight the need no longer. With a strike as quick as a snake, Sasuke buried his teeth in the vein calling to him and was immediately rewarded with warm rich blood.

Naruto cried out, but this time in pleasure. The sound forced an echoed growl of satisfaction from Sasuke. He withdrew his teeth and stared as the marks healed before his eyes.

That wasn't what he wanted. His eyes flashed red and he growled in anger—in need. He wanted to mark Naruto. He wanted the world to see he was his. He desired to insure no other would seek to take him from him.

He lowered his lips again, this time kissing the skin before sliding his fangs through the flesh in a slow, drawn out motion, forcing Naruto to feel every instance of the pain. His hips followed the pace of his teeth and pumped inside the warm heat now liquid around him. Naruto's body went taunt, his muscles clenched around Sasuke's cock. Warmth once more flooded his mouth just as Naruto released low keening of pleasure. The sound caused an eruption between them of heat and madness. Their bodies moved like a machine—sweat, blood, and cum coated every visible inch.

The scent, sounds, and touches were too much for either. There was no love in this act. Possession and need ruled them. Neither minded for there would be later times for gentle words. What they felt surpassed anything as simple as love. It was complex and completely ruled them.

Sasuke screamed into the warm neck and reared back to once again pierce deeply into the waiting veins. Time didn't exist. His body screamed out its pleasure as blood poured down his throat. He couldn't stop it. His entire being was wrenched from himself and devoured by Naruto just as he devoured Naruto.

The heat exploded between them like a super nova. Nothing existed except each other and in each other's arms they collapsed. They existed only in the world created by their heat. The lust spent and need sated; they cradled in each other's arms and waited for the shudders to pass. Time was at its standstill. Their souls were complete once more, the missing pieces now returned.

"Sasuke…" Naruto's breath finally calmed and he lifted a hand to stroke through the sweat soaked hair.

Sasuke lifted his head from the once again smooth neck with a growl. "Why won't you mark?"
"What?" Naruto frowned at the question, obviously uncertain how to answer it when he didn't fully understand. "What do you mean?"

Sasuke's finger traced down the smooth unmarked skin. "I want to mark you as mine."

"I'm not sure..." Naruto gasped as Sasuke pulled out his arm and sank his teeth into the vein pulsing beneath the surface. "Oww! Stop that you bastard. You're going to drain me dry."

"Hn," grunted Sasuke. "Look."

Before both their eyes the blood oozing from the punctures ebbed and eventually stopped. The wounds healed, scarred, and then faded to perfectly untouched skin. Naruto's eyes grew wide and Sasuke's grew annoyed. "See."

"Whoa, that is so cool. Pein didn't tell me I could do that." Naruto ran a finger over the skin where Sasuke had bitten. "It still tingles."

"Stop doing it and allow me to mark you," growled Sasuke as he lowered his face to Naruto's shoulder, preparing to deliver another bite when he was shoved off the other.

"No fucking way. You've bitten me enough." Naruto moved to roll off the bed only to be pulled back with a jerk of Sasuke's hand.

"You're not going anywhere." Sasuke buried his face in Naruto's neck once more and lapped at the skin while dragging his fangs along the flesh.

"Stop that!" Naruto struggled to free himself. "I just wanted to go clean myself."

Sasuke moved away, sitting back to stare at the mess that was Naruto. His skin was covered in dry sweat, blood, and cum. He couldn't help but close his eyes and breathe in the aroma of their mixed essences. It was delicious, far more than ever before. His eyes opened to reveal brilliant crimson orbs staring at Naruto with a mixture of lust and possession.

"And stop looking at me like. Geez, you're going to be one of those who keep me barefoot and well...barefoot. God forbid watchers are able to become pregnant." Naruto shuddered at the thought.

Sasuke wrinkled his nose. He didn't even want to think about impregnating Naruto or how the infant would be brought into the world. It was a revolting thought and successfully enabled him to push away the burgeoning lust. "I won't keep you barefoot...I'll keep you nude."

"Chauvinist," barked Naruto as he shoved Sasuke again, this time making it from the bed and towards the room off to the right.

Sasuke chuckled darkly. If only Naruto knew just how possessive he could be. He swiped at Naruto only to have his hand pass through the area of his hip. The both froze and stared at the now solid patch of skin.

"Whoa," murmured Naruto. "I wasn't even thinking about it."

Sasuke continued to stare. "Indeed."

"Pein was teaching me about it but I was having some trouble." Naruto flushed and scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.
Sasuke's lips twitched at Naruto's embarrassment. "You just need the right motivation."

"Pervert!" Naruto stomped into the bathroom and slammed the door shut with a resounding thud.

oOo

Itachi carried the surprisingly light form through the long maze like corridors. The long haired man leading him kept turning back as if to insure he was being followed. Looking down at the man, he looked so different when unconscious. The hard lines around his eyes and lips transformed.

Seeing him, a memory lost in the ocean of time surfaced. It was a strange thought of a gray eyed slave who looked at him with near adoration. He shook his head and forced the memory back into its place. This was no time to recall the regrets of the past when the future of the world hung in the balance.

They entered a large room. The light flowing through the crystals nearly blinded Itachi and he stumbled before gaining his footing. His kind was meant to remain in the darkness of night. Such bright light was uncomfortable even after he adjusted; forcing him to push aside his discomfort and focus on transferring Pein to where Neji led.

"Lay him there," instructed Neji, gesturing towards the large clear slab of quartz crystal forming a type of alter.

Itachi did as instructed, his eyes scanning the area. It was created nearly completely of crystal. It seemed almost like a church cathedral than an underground hideaway and the light was nearly blinding. "What is this place?"

Neji was silent for a moment. "I'm not sure I should speak of it. You intruded into our home without an invitation…"

"Your master taking of Naruto was our invitation," growled Itachi, the light making him irritable.

Neji returned the glare with one of equal force. "He isn't my master. He is merely one who we look up to as a leader. Especially now with Konan gone."

"If you don't wish to tell me, it is only a matter of time before I question him. So tell me now, or he tells me later. It matters little to me." Itachi could wait. He possessed a wealth of patience having been ruler of his people for more than a millennia.

Neji frowned and seemed to consider his options. He was loyal, Itachi would give him that. He seemed to truly care for the man laying unconscious on the clear crystal slab. The question of what sort of caring wormed its way into Itachi's thoughts. It was rather shocking to be suddenly overrun with thoughts of jealous as a result of the annoying Pein. The need to inquire about their relationship ate away at his craw, making him all the more irritable.

Itachi could respect him for seeking the welfare of his people over that of a virtual stranger but the sensation of jealousy made his temper all the more shorter. "Tell me."

"This is our sanctuary. We return here to rejuvenate ourselves. The earth provides us with energy. She is our life. Truly we don't need to eat or drink, though the pleasure of such things make doing so an unnecessary pleasure. Pein showed his mourning for Konan's loss by refusing to replenish himself. It took its toll on him, especially with his intense training of the young one." Neji frowned in Pein's direction. "Something's not right."

Itachi glanced towards where the red haired man lay. He appeared younger than he'd first guessed,
though his actual age was far older. If one went by appearances, he didn't look much older than twenty. "What's wrong?"

Neji began to remove Pein's clothes, revealing more piercings through his nipples and navel. Itachi fought the urge to flush at the sight of the slender toned body before him. It was beautifully carved, each muscle standing in stark relief beneath cream peach colored skin. As Neji slid the tight leather pants from slim hips, he saw even more piercings forming a ladder down the underside of a nicely shaped penis. He mentally winced at the sight, wondering how much pain such things had caused. An equally unwanted thought of how much pleasure they could give him during sex. Did such things mean he enjoyed pain? Itachi could show him how delicious pain and pleasure could mingle.

He immediately clamped down on the thought, pushing it aside and away from his thoughts. There was no reason for such thoughts. There wasn't time for such things. Only Pein seemed to understand the reasons for this confrontation with the nightwalkers and if at all possible, Itachi wanted to prevent a division amongst his people. Needless death was a result of his father's rule, not his.

Fugaku Uchiha had been a great leader. He'd inspired devotion in his people but Itachi wasn't foolish enough to believe in the purity of his rule—not any longer. He knew the true face of his father was one of force and strong handed leadership—a trend Danzou sought to bring back to the night walker rule and a reason Itachi would never allow it as long as he breathed. His kind had come too far to allow such a backslide.

"He's not drawing forth energy," stated Neji with frustration. "I didn't think he was so depleted."

Itachi arched a brow. "Wake him up. Tell him to take in the necessary energy."

Neji shook his head and glared at Itachi. "It's an automatic response. We don't need to be conscious to draw from the earth in these sacred places. In fact, it is easier if we are unconscious. All barriers are down and our bodies accept the gift offered. The quartz facilitates our union with earth and glows with our bond."

"But?"

"But, he's not doing so. He's not drawing forth as he should...at all." Neji flattened Pein's body onto the slab, letting as much of his skin touch the quartz as possible but to no avail. Pein's body seemed to be rejecting the very essence he was created from. "Shit. Ever since your brother and his mate came into our lives, there has been nothing but trouble. Your kind is destroying us."

Itachi approached the alter and stroked his fingers along the cool stone. The motion caused the slender digits to brush against the pale skin, creating a shock and forcing him to flinch away. It wasn't unlike a charge of static electricity.

Neji frowned and stepped away from the alter. "It can't be...he already accepted the earth."

Itachi frowned and stared at Pein's limp body. "He looks better."

It was true. There was more color in his cheeks than previously. He still looked overly pale but at least now he didn't look near death.

Neji shook his head remorsefully. "He was one of two watchers whose other was not human. We assumed it wouldn't make a difference and when he accepted the offered gift of earth's energy we were convinced of it. We assumed Naruto was a fluke. Apparently we erred."
"Stop speaking in riddles," growled Itachi.

Neji focused his pale eyes on where Itachi stood. "It appears you are one who demands a visible example. Take his hand."

The frown remained on Itachi's face but he did as asked. The instant he cupped his hand around the limp one, color immediately infused through Pein's entire body. His pallor began to fade away, leaving an attractive healthy flesh color. His nipples darkened to a dusky color, drawing Itachi's eyes and creating a stir of arousal in him. The sensation left him floundering for control. He didn't like having his control ripped from him in such a manner.

He released the hand, only to have it latch onto his wrist. Pein's body convulsed up off the quartz table and colors of brilliant red shot through the crystal. It was near blinding. Even Neji was forced to turn his eyes away from the light.

Pein released a gasping cry, his eyes wide and his hand tightening to the point Itachi felt the bones in his wrist crack. Though pain shot up his arm, he was unable to look away as life returned to the red head's body. He vaguely noted the sudden diminishing of his energy and the added hunger he thought he'd controlled.

In such a state, he couldn't control as his eyes lost their darkness and flared crimson. He could literally feel the blood coursing through the body lain out before him. His fangs lengthened in tandem with the erection suddenly tenting his pants. And still he remained, allowing Pein to suck him dry while his body screamed for him to replenish what was taken.

The pulse in Pein's throat thrummed rapidly, telling of the crimson liquid flowing in the blue veins visible beneath the warm skin. The stunning gray eyes fluttered open and stared up at him, hazy in confusion.

"You," Pein whispered, loosening his grip on Itachi's hand.

Neji moved in immediately and broke the connection between their bodies. The action had Itachi's eyes flaring dangerously red. He shook his head and fought back the urge to kill the man where he stood.

With the connection broken, Pein's eyes darkened slightly. "Neji, what happened?"

Gone was the seeming adoration, making Itachi feel a wave strange remorse for the loss. "You collapsed," answered Itachi.

Pein turned his eyes angrily towards Itachi. "And what is he doing in our sanctuary?"

"I'm sorry," Neji bowed. "He sort of…invited himself."

There was a look of hope quickly tamped down by incredulity. "And you allowed him?"

"Perhaps the better question is why haven't you been taking care of yourself? You speak of war but if you are barely able to support yourself, you certainly can't take on invaders." Itachi crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against a crystal pillar.

"You should leave." Pein quickly accepted the formerly removed clothing from Neji and began dressing without the slightest shame.

"Not until you answer questions," Itachi rebutted.
Neji looked decidedly uncomfortable as he leaned to whisper in Pein's ear. "You fed from him, refusing the earth energy."

Itachi didn't show any change in facial emotion despite having heard every word spoken. Pein glanced towards him with a startled look, knowing very well Itachi heard Neji's words. "W-What?"

Itachi's lips turned upward in a smirk, the looking only serving to incite Pein into a furious anger. A red flush spread across high cheekbones, matching the red hair almost to the shade. Itachi found himself enjoying the shocked and embarrassed look.

Pein shook his head to dispel the emotions and stormed towards the exit. Itachi arched a brow at Neji before following at a more leisurely pace, though he was glad to leave the room. The light was killing his eyes.

Pein prowled through the halls, not stopping until he reached his rooms. Itachi followed easily, using his sense of smell whenever he lost visual. The door was open. Itachi was cautious as he entered, closing it slowly with a click.

"Would you care to explain?"

Pein walked to his desk and snatched Konan's book from the engraved wood. With a glare, he threw it at Itachi's head. "Read for yourself if you like. It doesn't matter anymore."

"What am I going to find in this book?" asked Itachi as he turned the journal over in his hand to admire the leather bindings.

"The truth, or rather, one watcher's version of the truth. I would believe her over any other." Pein lowered himself to a chair before the fire, his hand waving to create a blaze from embers.

Itachi frowned and opened the book to the first pages, reading the inscription dedicated to Pein. A sense of foreboding washed over him. He wasn't sure he wanted to know what lay within the pages of the ancient book but he would read and he would understand. And so he read.
Chapter 18

Numbness was something he was used to. After countless lifetimes of existing in an almost monotonous world, he was used to feeling little. Occasionally flashes of anger burst through his barrier such as with the council and Sasuke.

In part, he had Naruto to thank for returning him part of his 'humanity' if such a word could be used by one such as him. He forced him to start living and feeling again after so long locking away every emotion threatening to escape him.

As he stared at the final words scrawled neatly upon the page, he was at a loss for what he felt. His memories weren't as sharp as he remembered and the times described were over a millennia past–some of them closer to two. There were reasons he'd chosen to forget them and now they were pushed with glaring clarity back into his mindset.

He had wanted to forget them and once again they haunted him. Some instinctual part of him had recognized Pein for who he was. Another part shoved the memory even further back to the safety of his subconscious.

Closing the journal, Itachi stared at the leather bound tome. It wasn't the original–of that he was certain. The binding was only a century old, if that. That Pein's friend…Konan, had painstakingly re-scribed her story into a new volume bespoke of her wish to eventually transfer the knowledge onto Pein.

Perhaps she didn't know she would die, perhaps she did. It really wasn't his place to speculate about what she'd known when she wrote out the events of his past. All he could say with any certainty was the utter feeling of numbness at fully knowing the events transpiring around the centuries prior to his acceding to the nightwalker throne and the part his father played in it.

"Well?" Pein stood near the fireplace, his narrow gray eyes trained directly on Itachi.

"What would you like me to say?"

Disgust spread across the strangely beautiful face. "Don't say it doesn't affect you because if damn well affects me."

"I barely recall those days," he replied calmly.

It wasn't actually a lie. He had forgotten many things, but reading Konan's account of them caused his mind to nearly black out with the influx of long forgotten days and feelings he held during those times.

And then came the numbness.

He'd locked away his feelings and emotions, choosing the path his father had created for him. To rule without the burden of emotions was to view all sides with a clear mind. But in truth, he hadn't wanted to lose again. Where Sasuke chose to cling to Naruto, Itachi had given up on the incarnations of Pein. He didn't know the complete truth, but the sense of loss wasn't something he'd wanted to deal with even if he didn't fully understand the depths of his connection. It wasn't even a conscious act, but one created out instinct to protect himself.

He might be numb now, but the dreaded onslaught of anger was beginning to tingle along his senses. Already he could feel it building in intensity. Something had been taken from him and he'd
never realized the true implications of it until this very moment.

He refused to lose control. His control was a hard sought strength he couldn't relinquish because if he did, the world would tremble. He would not tear his people apart for it. Desire for Danzou's death was eating away at him, forcing him to push all the harder for control.

He was his father's son. He was nothing like Sasuke who was treated as an innocent by Fugaku. Itachi was groomed from the moment he first drew breath. He was taught to bottle away his emotions. His first kill had occurred at age ten. Unlike Sasuke, Itachi was forced to battle his darkness from a far younger age.

"You're lying. I see it in your eyes. Are you going to tell me that you don't care? That it doesn't bother you that your father dictated every aspect of your life including that concerning me?" Pein sounded almost offended on his behalf.

The words awakened another part of his soul. "How do you know I lie?"

Pein gave a small snort. "I'm not some child. In experience, I'm nearly as old as you. I can tell."

Itachi stared at Pein. It was true. His eyes were those of an ancient. They held secrets of the long dead past–probably more secrets than anyone would desire to have.

His eyes shifted away so not to stare into the smoky gray depths. Staring too long would cause him to lose himself. Was this what Sasuke felt with Naruto? Was his connection to Pein some warped version of the connection Naruto and Sasuke shared?

He couldn't be sure. Time had distorted their connection to such a degree, he couldn't fully understand it. Probably never could. Perhaps it was similar to a blind man seeing for the first time after a lifetime in the darkness. His eyes didn't know what they saw and his brain didn't know how to process the information.

Sasuke was obsessed with Naruto. Such emotions didn't translate for Itachi. He found Pein physically attractive but if he fell dead in this very moment, he wasn't sure he would be driven insane or even feel more than a tingling of remorse for the other's death. It was remnants of centuries devoted to control.

"Aren't you angry?"

Itachi's eyes darted back to meet gray when it occurred to him. He was in shock. The numbness was fading and the anger he expected was building to even greater heights in his stomach. He wanted to kill them all for taking what belonged to him. The anger pushed at him, forcing him to struggle to keep from allowing it to take over completely. He was very dangerous to everyone when he was angry. If Pein didn't start the war, Itachi's actions could very well send his people into a civil war.

He closed his eyes to hide the change from black to red. He was furious at what he'd lost and at the same time his hands were tied by his position. All he was left with was unrelenting frustration and anger.

And Pein seemed determined to bring them to the very surface like a boil ready to burst. He couldn't realize what he was threatening to unleash. He had to know there was a limit to what Itachi could take before erupting.

"Stop what you're doing," hissed Itachi.
Pein stormed forward, wrapping a hand in Itachi's inky locks and forcing his head back so their gazes met. "Your other was taken from you and you don't feel the need to destroy those who allowed the atrocity."

Itachi glared with as much force as he could. "I don't know what that means. I barely remember that time."

He knew exactly what it meant and lying to Pein only made his frustrations grow in strength. What was natural was perverted by his father so that both he and Pein suffered to different degrees from the actions.

Pein's eyes increased in intensity. "It means you need to take your revenge. Your father is beyond us but Danzou can pay for both their crimes."

"War will accomplish nothing save tearing my people apart." Itachi lifted a hand to clench in Pein's soft sweater. "Am I angry? More than you could fathom."

"Then why are you acting as if you don't care?"

Itachi stood and forced Pein against the wall with such a force, the wall cracked behind him. The force of the action didn't even seem to knock the breath from him.

"I care but I am a king. To know I have someone who is so joined to me that we are nearly the same being. To know that I lost a chance to have what Sasuke and Naruto have hurts. It hurts more than you could ever know. I hate what was done to me but I have to put my emotions aside for the greater good of my people. I have to be willing to sacrifice," snarled Itachi.

Pein's eyes darkened to a swirling gray. "So I am your sacrifice? When you thought Naruto dead, were you hurt? I know what you felt for him. I'm a watcher and I watched the two of you. Did you ever think of taking him from your brother? Killing your brother so you could have him?"

Itachi hissed, his fangs gleaming white in the muted light. "What I feel for Naruto is irrelevant."

Pein dropped his hands away. "Fine. Take the noble role. Naruto still fights with us."

"No."

"That's not your decision to make," replied Pein.

"Why are you pushing for a war? Is it your immortality? You're sure you will win?" asked Itachi with a frown.

"You don't understand. You're nothing but a slave to your father and Danzou." Pein pushed at Itachi's chest with more strength than Itachi would have thought could come from him. "Danzou didn't just take Konan from me. He and your father took you. Do you realize that I should have died. But I wanted to live so badly. I wanted to be with you. My other lives didn't matter because in my last, you saw me. For the first time I think you actually felt our connection."

Itachi felt his anger burn away to leave regret. The regret hurt more than the sense of betrayal he felt. He hurt because he knew what he'd lost and who had taken it from him. While he would put nothing past Danzou, that his father had instigated the actions forced him to tamp down even more. If he had his way he would slay Danzou where he stood for what he'd done.

But there was more than just himself to think of. Already the council was torn in their allegiance. Things would get nasty if a war was to erupt.
"Don't drag my people into a war."

"What would have me do? Forget everything? Continue to allow Danzou to come and have the threads of fate interpreted for him? Act as if nothing happened and Konan was still alive?" Pein shook his head. "I can't do that."

"Then what about that man?"

Both sets of eyes turned to where Naruto stood with Sasuke slightly behind him. Itachi stiffened and eyed the two while Pein moved calmly towards one of the two chairs set before the fireplace.

"What man?" asked Itachi.

"He means Danzou," answered Sasuke. "And I can honestly say the world and our people would be better off without that man alive. Kill him Itachi. You're the king of our people. Take him out for crimes against your person."

Itachi shook his head wearily. "Even if I wished for Danzou's death, the council would never allow it. It would take a unanimous vote to execute a council member. He has at least one family in his grasp."

"Who said we go through the council." Sasuke's eyes faded to crimson.

"Explain."

Sasuke's teeth flashed as a crooked grin slid across his face. "Why not bring him to the watchers? We don't have to go through the council and justice is done."

"Don't be childish. It would only start a war. Someone would call for Danzou's murderers and I wouldn't be able to stop it," sighed Itachi.

Naruto placed a hand on Sasuke's chest before approaching Naruto. He leaned his head on Itachi's chest and sighed heavily.

"Naruto?"

Itachi could feel both Pein and Sasuke's eyes on him and Naruto. The intensity of both gazes seemed to rip through him. There was a distinct air of jealousy coming from both males, though for different reasons.

"Itachi…we can't do nothing. Pein needs you."

"Wait a minute," growled Pein as he half stood from his chair.

Sasuke moved to Pein's side, placing a hand on his shoulder to keep him seated. "Let him talk. He's smarter than anyone gives him credit for."

"If there is a threat of war—a real threat—I think the council will err on the side of saving themselves rather than protecting Danzou," argued Naruto.

"They won't just hand him over. If I wasn't involved, I might be less likely to simply hand him or anyone over merely because someone threatened war." There was a way, but he wasn't sure if the council would go for it. "But—"

"Itachi?" Sasuke frowned at the look of concentration working its way across Itachi's face.
"If an injured party comes forth demanding compensation for a grievance, they might agree."

Sasuke's eyes widened. "Gods. I should have thought of that."

"What?" Naruto and Pein seemed completely out of the loop of understanding.

Sasuke shook his head. "Nightwalkers hold very true to tradition. We dig our feet in on most issues but honor isn't one of them."

"So…?" Naruto seemed to have trouble following his explanation.

"All grievances must be answered and the value of the life paid. It is a matter of honor as our people originate in the Far East." At Naruto's confusion, Sasuke continued his explanation. "Each species holds a value—some more than others. Because of the prevalence of their species, humans possess the lowest worth. If by some random chance a human sought a grievance, it would most likely be paid in something of monetary value."

"Hey! I used to be human."

Sasuke smirked faintly, his hand lifting to stroke Naruto's cheek. "I know. Because the human worth is so low is the reason execution for my crimes were always stayed…well and having the king for a brother helped as well. They feared discovery more than anything which is why my crimes had them on edge. It wasn't the people I killed but the very public nature of it."

Itachi snorted but said nothing, merely allowing Sasuke to speak. He would have his say soon enough if need be. If Sasuke was thinking along the same lines as him, the council would have no choice but to issue execution orders.

"What race is worth the most?" asked Pein, though from the smirk curving his lips, he knew exactly which race.

"I had always assumed it was the incubi," answered Sasuke. "In the last five hundred years, their numbers have been in a decline."

"But it's not, is it?" asked Naruto.

Itachi shook his head. "No it is not. How many watchers are there in the world?"

Pein cocked his head for a moment, calculating silently. "Less than five hundred."

"I thought as much." Itachi glanced at Naruto. "The incubi continue to have at least three or four thousand."

"Whoa. I'm a member of an endangered species," gaped Naruto.

"The question is, will your council recognize watchers as worth anything? We are largely unknown and this action will do something we've never done. We will be shoved into the supernatural spotlight." Pein frowned as he spoke. "We've remained outside of history but this action will force us into the forefront. Every race except the humans will know of our existence."

"Is that something you really want to happen?" asked Itachi. "There are other ways to punish Danzou besides killing him. I'm sure I can have him removed from the council. His intrigues are becoming a nuisance to many of the more prevalent houses."

"It is a necessary evil. Perhaps it is time we step from the shadows. We still possess the skills to
watch without being seen." Pein rested his chin on his fist. "What do you have in mind?"

Itachi heaved a sigh before speaking. "I will call a council meeting to address a grievance brought to my attention. You will have to speak on Konan's death and the reasons behind it. I have no doubt death will be his punishment."

"Danzou will not fall easily," interjected Sasuke.

"I'm aware," answered Itachi calmly. "I'm sure he will gather what supporters he can but those are the choices of his followers. I can only protect those who wish it."

"Are you alright with this, Pein?" asked Naruto.

"I am. My people will support my decision." He glanced at Itachi. "How long before you can call a council meeting?"

"I will send out missives immediately. The meeting will be held next nightfall. I very much doubt Danzou will answer. As he is the accused, his vote does not count but he has several supporters. If they do not show, it could be difficult if a majority is not present," answered Itachi.

Pein nodded and stood stiffly. "Then do so."

Itachi nodded and gestured for Sasuke to follow him from the room. Naruto stayed, staring at Pein who gazed blindly into the crackling fireplace.

"Are you alright?"

A slight nod of the head was the only response he received. The lack of appropriate response incited him to press for more.

"You and Itachi are like me and Sasuke, right?"

Pein broke his gaze with the flames and glanced at Naruto. "No."

"Why not?"

Pein shrugged. "It's complicated."

Naruto wasn't one to let something go when he set his mind to it. He was determined to find out exactly what Itachi and Pein were to each other. He wanted his big brother to be happy because he'd never seen the light in Itachi's eyes.

"But you want to be."

Pein heaved a sigh before looking at Naruto. "I've never seen a pairing such as you and Sasuke Uchiha. I can't say with any certainty that Itachi Uchiha and I wouldn't have been as you if we'd had a chance. But as we did not, our relationship is different."

"Itachi's hard to read. He's always been like that. It's like he's afraid to let anyone in except Sasuke. Sasuke was always an exception even though I didn't realize it at the time. He kept everyone else at arm's length." Naruto's grin became devious. "But I wormed my way in. You should too. He needs someone. He's always alone. Sometimes I see him in my memories. He's always alone."

"If things were different," murmured Pein.

"Make them different. We deal in threads of fate, right? Well, you know there is always more than
one fate. Hell, I haven't been a watcher very long and I know that much. Fate is what you make of it." Naruto propped his hands behind his head and grinned widely. "You should change your fate."

Naruto continued grinning as he stood and left Pein alone with his thoughts. The contemplative look on Pein's face was enough to insure he was considering Naruto's words thoroughly.

"Perhaps." Pein glanced at Naruto from the corner of his eye. "After this issue is settled."

Knowing he wasn't going to get more out of him than he already had, Naruto nodded and left him to the silence of his thoughts.

oOo

Itachi slashed a lengthened claw across his wrist and allowed the blood to run thickly down into the cupped palm. Dipping a finger into the crimson fluid, he began writing in blood upon the wall while Sasuke watched in awe.

"I never realized you were so adept at it."

Itachi snorted as he completed the final symbol. "I didn't have a choice in the matter."

"Will enough come to kill the bastard?"

Itachi paused before running a tongue over his wrist and glancing at Sasuke. "They will come. I added a bit of compulsion to the summons. Of course, it wouldn't work on the stronger families like the Nara, but the weaker minded council members—the ones Danzou owns—won't have a choice but to obey."

"Good. I doubt the Naras would let anyone own them," commented Sasuke as Itachi hissed a few words and the blood shimmered bright red before fading completely.

"Don't assume anything about the Nara clan. They aren't as noble as you believe. They will do what they think is right for their clan. Some times I wonder if the Nara would be better kings than the Uchiha," mused Itachi.

It was Sasuke's turn to snort. "The Naras like staying behind the scenes. They are like puppet masters. They would never willingly rule anything."

"Perhaps you know more than you let on, Sasuke. Much like Naruto." Itachi sat wearily into a chair in Sasuke and Naruto's quarters.

"Are you well?"

Itachi nodded. "I'll need to feed before the meeting tomorrow. Weaving such a powerful compulsion into the summons is draining."

"Not Naruto."

Itachi paused, sending Sasuke an annoyed look. "Naruto isn't the first person I think of when needed to feed."

"But he has the best blood," argued Sasuke. "I feel unusually energized when I drink from him. And the taste is far better."

"I'll make do." Itachi leaned his head against the back of the chair, appearing even less the powerful nightwalker and more of just a man.
Naruto moved into the room, pausing at seeing Itachi sleeping. "Is it day? I can't tell when there aren't any windows."

"Not yet. He wiped his energy sending the summons. He needs to feed," answered Sasuke, pulling Naruto into his arms. "And before you offer, I already told him no."

Naruto's mouth closed with a snap. "But I know my blood is good."

"He'll be fine. The sleep will give him enough energy to hunt before the council convenes tomorrow."

"What about Pein?" asked Naruto.

Sasuke nuzzled his face into Naruto's shoulder. "What about him?"

Naruto snickered and pushed Sasuke away. "Itachi could feed from him."

Sasuke sat back with a glare. "I think that man would rather see Itachi starve."

A mischievous look worked its way across Naruto's face. "Not if he wants to live."

"What are you talking about?"

"I heard on my walk here that Pein's make-up has changed. You know what happens when I get low on energy?" Naruto pressed a hand to Sasuke's chest, drawing energy from him.

The sensation was probably similar to that of being shocked by static electricity, though much more erotic in nature. Sasuke moaned, his hips jerking beneath Naruto's and his fangs lengthening enough to poke from his lips.

Sasuke shuddered and clung to Naruto who shifted teasingly in his lap. "Don't do that."

Something gleamed in Naruto's eyes. "Does it feel good?"

"You have no idea. So stop before I fuck you with Itachi in the room," growled Sasuke.

"Ooo, kinky."

A growl rumbled from Sasuke's throat and his hands clenched on Naruto's hips. "Naruto—"

"If you two are going to go at it, please allow me a moment to leave. I have no desire to watch or listen to the two of you." Itachi stood slowly and glided from the room almost like a ghost.

"Why do you have to be such a bastard?" Naruto slammed a surprisingly strong fist into Sasuke's shoulder.

oOo

Itachi smirked slightly at the yelp of pain coming through the door. Apparently Naruto was growing stronger every day.

As he turned towards in a random direction in hopes of finding an empty room to rest in, his vision blurred and he staggered against the stone cut walls. The combination of Pein feeding from his energy and the use of blood magic had him to the point of nearly collapsing.

"Excuse me?"
Itachi felt his fangs poking at his lips. Watchers were strange. They could hide every aspect of their being from the world—sight, scent, touch, and sound. But inside these walls they were offered some sort of comfort and tended to allow their natural forms to expand.

He could smell the blood flowing beneath the girl's skin. He could taste her nervousness and a small hint of excitement. It was exhilarating.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

Itachi opened his lips to reply when he felt a presence at his side. It was hard not to notice Pein's signature spicy scent and the sheer power he exuded when he was near. Where the blood of the girl was tempting, Pein's was nearly unbearable.

"I'll take care of him, Cora," interjected Pein.

"Yes, sir." She gave a small nod of her head before moving down the hallway.

Itachi shuddered, leaning heavily against Pein while inhaling deeply. He hadn't been this starved in ages. Having Pein's arm around him and the scent of his blood was almost overwhelming.

"Are you alright?" Pein frowned at how Itachi leaned against him. "You're sick?"

"No," he whispered, pressing his face into where his shoulder and neck joined.

Pein jumped and pulled away at the first touch of a tongue on his throat. "What the hell?"

Itachi stumbled slightly but was able to brace himself against the wall. His eyes lifted and he was certain Pein saw the red by the slight stuttering of his breath.

"What's wrong with you?"

Itachi moved so fast, he probably appeared like a blur to any onlooker. He had Pein pressed firmly against the wall with their noses practically touching.

"What the fuck," gasped Pein as his back slammed into the wall.

While the redhead looked surprised, he wasn't exactly pulling away, making Itachi determined to keep him off balance. He was in his grasp and Itachi was starving.

"I'm hungry…starving," purred Itachi as he lowered his head to nose at the skin just above the neckline of Pein's thin sweater.

"Stop," he whispered though he wasn't trying hard to stop the other.

Itachi lifted his head to stare into Pein's shocked eyes. "Do you really want me to stop?"

His hand lifted and stroked across the throbbing vein beneath the surface. It was practically begging to punctured.

His touch seemed to increase the pounding of the fluid exponentially. Temptation didn't even begin to describe what he felt.

When Pein didn't answer, Itachi lowered his head to scrap his fangs across the skin. He could taste the blood rising just beneath the skin, begging for him to take it.

It was a strange experience for him. While he'd felt the hunger throughout his lifetime, he'd never
been so enthralled with the process. He'd never wanted to draw out the feeding to the point of exquisite pleasure. Pein made all the difference.

Pein released a shuddering moan, his neck arching back at the slight scraping of teeth. "Itachi–"

"Let me take from you." Itachi nipped at the skin before soothing the small hurt with his tongue. "Let me taste you."

If he had any qualms about Itachi feeding from him, he didn't speak them. Instead his head dropped back even further to bare the veins in his neck. One could almost imagine him being under a thrall though watchers seemed mostly immune to such talents.

Continuing to nibble at the skin, Itachi relished in the slight tremors working through Pein. This was perhaps the most docile he'd ever seen the male. It was arousing—the hunger running through him making his sexual nature rise quickly to the forefront.

There was little need for more preamble. The foreplay was forced aside under the hunger. He refused to wait any longer for what he needed.

Teeth sunk deeply through the tissue and into a throbbing vein. His teeth were removed and rich blood poured into his mouth, sending a shock wave of unexpected pleasure. It was completely different from any blood he'd ever tasted, including the small droplet of Naruto's.

He couldn't withold the small moan escaping his lips, mirrored by a similar one coming from his companion. Unimaginable power was flooding into him with a force he never expected. Instead of pulling back, he pressed harder—sucking as much of the delicious nourishment into his body as he could.

He couldn't help but press closer so that his now rock hard erection pressed into the other's hip. He could feel Pein's equally hard response, making him growl low in his throat and withdraw, only to strike again.

Pein grunted under the second assault but instead of pulling away, his legs lifted and wrapped around Itachi's hips to anchor himself to him. "Oh Goddess–"

Itachi pulled back, blood dripping from his lip to splatter on his shirt. He stared into Pein's eyes before driving their lips together in a forceful kiss. His body had never been this driven in his entire life. All he could think of was burying his tongue in Pein's mouth and his cock in his ass.

He drove his hips forward with the same force as his tongue plowed into his mouth. He couldn't get enough. Tasting Pein. Drinking him. Completely devouring him.

This must be what Sasuke felt—this overwhelming need to possess and devour. It was driving him insane. He wanted more.

His hand lifted, fisting in Pein's hair and forcing his head back at a sharp angle. He watched the wounds healing before his eyes until nothing but smooth skin remained.

He was at full strength but wanted more. He wanted to devour him.

His tongue stroked from collarbone to chin in one swoop—tasting the blood and sweat. "Delicious."

His hips ground even harder against Pein, causing him to scratch and claw at Itachi's shoulders. The legs tightened around his hips as his teeth nipped at the bobbing adam's apple.
"Geez, at least Sasuke and I go at it in our room." Naruto stood in the hall, staring at the two with a look of amusement and exasperation.

A growl rumbled in Itachi's throat, his eyes flashing dangerously in Naruto's direction. He couldn't stop the possessive way his hands clenched on Pein's hips or the flashing in his crimson colored eyes. This was the most alive he'd felt in centuries and he wasn't about to let anyone take it from him.

Sasuke was immediately between Naruto and Itachi. "Calm down, Itachi."

Reality flooded back to him, his arms nearly dropping Pein like a stone. His eyes quickly darted to meet his companion's no longer lust heavy gray gaze. There was anger there, and confusion.

"Put me down."

Itachi complied, stepping back despite every instinct telling him to lunge forward and claim him once more. "Forgive me. I'm afraid I was a bit more drained than I'd thought."

Pein lifted a hand to his neck, rubbing the smooth unmarred skin. "Will the council meet?"

"The summons has been sent. Unless they are loyal to Danzou, they will meet." Itachi glanced at Sasuke. "The sun will rise soon. We should rest before tomorrow night."

Pein blinked several times before gesturing towards the room across the hall. "That room is unoccupied. You can sleep there until dusk."

The three watched as Pein turned and walked stiffly down the hall before disappearing around the corner. Itachi was in just as much shock as Pein, only dealing with it in his usual manner of numbness.

"Goodnight," he said quickly before Naruto could open his mouth to comment and escaped into the sanctity of his room.

His back leaned against the door for several seconds before he moved into the small washroom. Staring at his face, his eyes glazed at the sight. Drying blood stained his lips and jaw with a brownish red. He looked as if he'd murdered someone rather than practically fucked them against the wall.

He refused to allow Pein into his head. There was no point in dwelling on the past and as much as he might wish to deny it, Pein was his past.

Washing away the blood, he lay on the unmade mattress and allowed the pull of the sun to tug him into the dreamless sleep he desperately needed to fight the swirling thoughts threatening his sanity. Tomorrow could possibly be the start of a war he held little power in stopping. He could only hope on the wisdom of the council to see them through it.
Sasuke's eyes shifted slowly to where his brother stood silently staring at the intricate carvings covering to the door leading to the council chambers. Beyond the massive doors waited the council in its near entirety. Even several families thought completely loyal to Danzou were in attendance.

It could be a delay tactic set up by Danzou to keep the council from declaring him a fugitive but Sasuke didn't think so. Even the smallest of clans would look out for the clan welfare before that of alliances. It wasn't in the nightwalker's nature to place strangers or acquaintances above the needs of the clan.

Sasuke might have been the spare heir, but he'd listened closely when his father spoke. His memories of the man were mostly during his childhood, Sasuke being barely a century in age when his parents chose eternal sleep over life.

Knowing what he did now about Itachi and Pein's relationship, he could understand the way Itachi locked himself up. Itachi had admired their father, following in his footsteps with how he dealt with the various clan and their politics. Now that image was shattered and it left his brother struggling to find his equilibrium. It also made him very dangerous.

There was also the mirror of their relationships. Both were connected to watchers but while Sasuke finally had a powerful connection with Naruto, Itachi was left with a tattered and time torn bond with Pein. Itachi's cold and calculating mind was steeled against breaking, having weathered much even before Sasuke's birth nearly a millennia after his own while Sasuke's sanity had shattered easily.

A frown wrinkled his brow as he turned to face Itachi. "Was I weak for allowing Naruto to break my mind?"

Itachi's expression didn't change, his eyes shifting from where they stared at the door. "Why do you ask?"

"You and Pein…"

Itachi shifted his frame to fully face Sasuke. "What are you asking, Sasuke?"

Seeing Itachi like this chilled him. He knew it was because he was shifting from brother Itachi into King Itachi. A king could not hold any emotions that would impair him towards making decisions for the betterment of the race as a whole…even if the decisions went against what he would do as a brother.

"Why are you so unmoved by Pein? It's like you only feel anything when you are weakened. I always feel Naruto. He's in my blood and wrapped so tightly around my very being that I can't separate us," explained Sasuke.

Itachi's gaze returned to the door. "We aren't you and Naruto."

"I know that but you still share the same connection as us."

"Our bond is thin from time."
Both turned at the words to see Pein and Naruto standing behind them. The two seemed to possess an almost ethereal continence. Naruto was still mostly transparent while Pein's physical appearance was solid.

"I swear...that feels so funky," groaned Naruto as he leaned against the wall for support until his equilibrium returned.

Pein chuckled dryly. "You'll become accustomed to it."

Itachi stared silently at Pein for several moments before turning to the doors. "It's time. Come Sasuke."

Itachi moved towards the door, pausing just as he laid a hand upon it. "The two of you should wait here until I send for you."

Pein merely leaned against the wall, his face strangely mirroring Itachi's in blankness. He barely moved, the air nearly stilling around him. He could have been a statue if not for the rhythmic rise and fall of his chest.

Sasuke frowned in his direction but didn't inquire. This was the first time he'd seen Pein so withdrawn. Usually his time was spent taunting Itachi into some sort of verbal or physical battle.

Naruto seemed to want argue if not for the glance from Sasuke. There were traditions to uphold and strangers in the council chambers without being summoned was in violation of the laws. Sasuke's position as Itachi's heir was the only reason he was allowed entrance into the most sacred meeting of their people.

Nodding his head in satisfaction, Itachi opened the solid doors with an effortless press of his hand. A cool wind blew inside, ruffling the clothes and hair of all those gathered inside.

Sasuke followed silently behind Itachi, earning shocked looks from most of the council. The first wave of the brewing storm was moments from hitting.

As expected, the Yamanaka clan representative was on his feet at their entrance. "My king! What is he doing outside of confinement?"

The clan wasn't exactly aligned with Danzou, but they were exact followers of the laws. They did tend to make things difficult from time to time. Through following the exact letter of the law, they tended more often than not to stand with Danzou.

"The laws must be upheld."

"You have more of a chance of going feral than my brother," whispered Itachi. "Sit down."

It was rare that Itachi's normally smooth and melodic voice took on that tone of absolute mastery. There was no doubting to any sitting before them that his brother was scarily serious.

Inoichi Yamanaka sunk to the plush chair immediately with no other word. His throat bobbed with nervousness despite the neutral look taking control over his face.

Sasuke's lips quirked. They knew who was the most powerful amongst them. Itachi's age was considerably younger than nearly all those seated before him save for Kurenai and Shikamaru.

Uchiha blood was powerful. Any of them would gladly wed their daughters to either Itachi or Sasuke for a chance to add Uchiha blood to their own. It would never happen, of course but they
Itachi would never allow himself to be used for breeding and now knowing Pein, he doubted Itachi would stray far from him once they reestablished their connection. Sasuke might not have the power of Itachi, but he could see how drawn his brother was to the watcher. The scene outside the room he and Naruto shared was evidence enough.

Even starved, Itachi would have enough willpower to merely take a few sips and move on. From what he'd seen, Itachi was practically ravishing the man. He'd never seen his brother react in such a way.

Frowning slightly, he took his place behind Itachi's chair as his brother took his seat. His place in the council was just as an observer but also as a warrior in the event the council members revolted or attempted to flee the judgment decided.

"I'm sure your curiosity over this summons has eaten away at each of you since last eve," mused Itachi quietly.

Several of the members nodded their heads, Shikamaru Nara merely smirked and lifted one shoulder in a half-hearted shrug. It wouldn't be surprising if he'd already created a hypothesis concerning the meeting. The Naras were quick-witted and never idle with their thoughts for very long.

"There is a traitor among us. You know of whom I speak as his seat lays vacant."

All eyes turned to Danzou's empty chair as if by some means he would appear seated in his designated place. He was never one to miss a council deliberation. His need to control exceeded most any other instinct.

"What right have you to present this accusation?" asked Kurenai, though it was obvious by her tone she completely agreed with it.

"The right is not mine. I speak for a species who has lost one of their own due to his actions." Itachi's eyes scanned the entirety of the council room before settling on Inoichi. "You understand what I am saying?"

Inoichi closed his eyes and heaved a sigh. "Repayment equal to the crime."

Itachi hummed in agreement. The pleasure rolling from him was almost palatable. The king would never bring a charge before them for a council member unless it carried a punishment of death. It was beneath him.

"Who? What species?" asked the Akamichi representative.

"One whom only the king and his heir are privy too but who will now be widely known throughout the entire world with the exceptions of the humans." Itachi tapped a finger on the wooden table. "I wonder if the Nara clan holds any knowledge of them."

Sasuke arched a brow at Itachi's statement, his eyes following those of every other council member. It was amusing to watch the partially amused and disgruntled look crossing Shikamaru Nara's face at being singled out.

"Are you accusing the Nara clan of something?" asked Shikamaru mildly.

"Not precisely but you know of what I speak, don't you?"
Shikamaru heaved a sigh and nodded carefully. "The Watchers."

Itachi's eyes narrowed on him. "The Nara clan lives up to their reputation."

"What are you talking about?" asked one of the council members, his body shifting nervously in his seat and effectively drawing Itachi's eyes.

"Why doesn't the Nara clan enlighten us on who the Watchers are?" Itachi spoke, though his eyes remained on the nervously shifting member of the Azure clan.

The man's shifting drew Sasuke's eyes as well. He was hiding something. Of what he wasn't sure but Itachi would pry it from him soon enough. There was no escape for him and possibly death if the clan chose to align with Danzou. He was foolish to answer the council call if he still held an alliance to a traitor.

Shikamaru shot Itachi an annoyed glance but nodded his head in acknowledgement. "Much can be gleaned from merely being observant. Our long lives allows much to be surmised over time. All that we learn is carefully recorded for the future generations. If we do not learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of it."

Itachi smirked at the almost disclaimer. "Continue, Nara."

Shikamaru nodded before continuing. "We don't know exactly when they came into being. It could very well be before any of our kind walked the earth. They are essentially displaced souls. They have ties to the earth and can in some cases see the various futures like threads stemming from a central source."

"Various futures?" asked Kurenai.

"Each action we take, each decision we make isn't written in stone. Things…outcomes may change what route we choose and therefore changing the future. The change could be minor or it could be major. The possibilities are endless. I would imagine deciphering such things would be difficult and quite troublesome," answered Shikamaru.

Sasuke and Itachi knew this, so their attention was mostly leveled upon the council members–especially the Azure clan. Shikamaru's explanation was completely enthralling most of the council save for that foolish clan as his eyes continued to glance furtively towards the door.

Escape was futile.

"Their connection to the earth may or may not be related by their ability to convert their bodies to air and be uninjured by the elements earth, fire, wind, and water. Weapons are ineffective against them. They are seemingly invulnerable to any attack." Shikamaru turned his gaze to Itachi who inclined his head.

"Is that all the Nara clan knows about the Watchers?" asked Itachi.

Shikamaru shrugged lazily. "It is all I know from memory. More could possibly be found in our archives."

"It's enough," said Itachi.

"The Nara clan knew this?" Inoichi looked scandalized. "Why was this not shared with the council?"
"Don't worry, Yamanaka." Itachi leveled a glare on Danzou's empty chair. "I was not informed about them until recently."

Shikamaru frowned faintly. "You are your father's heir. He didn't not inform you of the Watchers?"

"No. I wasn't his heir in everything, apparently."

"What has this to do with Lord Danzou?" asked Inoichi.

"Everything," hissed Sasuke from behind Itachi. "There are things I could tell you about that bastard…"

"Enough." Itachi lifted a hand to silence Sasuke. "We aren't hear to discuss crimes against me."

"But Itachi…"

"I said enough!" Itachi's palm slammed onto the table with a thud. "Please escort Naruto and Pein into the chamber, Sasuke."

A scowl washed across Sasuke's face, but he did as asked. It was Itachi's right to keep things against himself private if he wished. His reasons weren't obvious but there was nothing Sasuke could do on the matter.

Opening the door, he found Naruto and Pein standing quietly against the wall, discussing something quite animatedly. "Naruto. Pein. Follow me."

Both stepped away from the wall and into the room where gazes locked upon them. Pein gave no visible response, but Naruto's immaturity and youth had him shifting nervously.

"Why are they staring at me?" he hissed to Sasuke.

"I don't think it's you."

The truth was that Pein was drawing the gaze of every person in the room. Power recognized power and Pein exuded it in waves. His eyes flashed gray as they darted over ever member seated around the table before settling on Itachi.

"You wished to report a crime against your species?" asked Itachi.

Before Pein could speak, Inoichi was on his feet. "There is no proof to this claim of Watchers. This mysterious species Shikamaru speaks of could have died out long ago. It would explain why I've never heard of them and I don't think I'm the only one on this council who can say that."

"I exist."

Eyes reverted to Pein, including Itachi's. He looked fully prepared to kill the lot of them for the insult of insinuating the Watchers were extinct at most.

The air in the room seemed to drop several degrees…literally. Pein's eyes were a hair's breath from glowing from the intensity of his anger.

"And…I will continue to exist long after all of you are gone into the next life…if such a thing is allowed." Pein stepped forward and placed a palm on the table. "Our secrets remain ours, but I will tell you that we exist."

Shikamaru was the first of the council members to recover, a small smile curving his lips.
"Interesting. I think I will enjoy speaking with you at a later time."

A low growl erupted from Itachi. He was on his feet in moments, fist slamming with such force into the table, a hairline fracture cracked along the center and ended just before where Shikamaru sat.

Tanned hands lifted in submission. "I wasn't planning on treading on other's property, merely assuaging curiosity."

Itachi lowered himself to his chair, his eyes never leaving Shikamaru. "If you can not feel his power, then you don't deserve to be a member of this council. Who would dispute his claim of his people's origins?"

Not even the Yamanaka clan could deny it. Not a single hand lifted nor did they dispute the truth before them. A previously mostly unknown species stood before them. They were bound by the laws that governed them.

"What…is the number of your species?" asked Kurenai cautiously.

Sasuke's took Naruto by the arm and led him to the wall where he remained at his side. Pein had been briefed by Itachi but Sasuke knew the other was reluctant to reveal such things to strangers when previously they had been completely invisible to all except for a chosen few.

"Around the world…less than one five hundred fully developed members."

Gasp echoed through room. "You're sure? You aren't simply saying so to bring about a harsher punishment?"

Pein slammed a palm on the table. "I do not lie. For millennia, my people have served all the kings because we seek balance in the world. If we need to, we will destroy you all to maintain it."

His eyes were as cold as steel as he scanned the night walkers seated around the hardwood table. They didn't stop moving until they landed upon Itachi.

"My people are not bound by the same rules that govern you. We can't procreate. Our women are barren and our men are sterile. But…we are powerful. If it comes to a war because of this, we will destroy you and any who stop us from our revenge. And we will have revenge."

As he stopped speaking, the table split down the center along the crack Itachi had created earlier. Chairs slid backward to prevent feet being crushed beneath the split table while red eyes stared at him from all present faces save Itachi and Sasuke.

"Whoa…" whispered Naruto.

Itachi inclined his head towards Pein. "State your case."

"My friend and second in command of our clan was killed by Danzou after he received a reading which he was not pleased to have. He was the only one able and willing to do so. I want revenge for her death."

"Why would Lord Danzou kill one of your people?" asked the Akamichi representative. "It would be anti-productive if he had access to your talents. Even if he was unhappy with the results, knowledge of what he could gain from you far exceeds the cost."

"War," stated Sasuke. "Danzou wanted to start a war between the night walkers and the watchers."
"What purpose would that serve?" asked Inoichi.

"What purpose? How about the death of all those not fully loyal to him, including the king." Naruto stepped forth, now completely having the attention of the council for the first time.

Kurenai blinked several times upon noticing him. "Naruto?"

"Sasuke makes me stay with him. I think he's afraid someone will kill me again." Naruto snickered under the glare he received from Sasuke. "Not that it stopped it from happening before."

"Sasuke, take Naruto and go for a walk. There is much to discuss," instructed Itachi.

"I want to stay…" grumbled Naruto. "It was starting to get good."

"I think things are about to get dangerous in there very soon. Our people might have rules to appear civilized, but we are no more so than the weres or any other species. We might even be more deadly," said Sasuke as he escorted Naruto away from the council chambers.

"What do you mean?"

Sasuke stopped walking and stared at Naruto. "I mean…Itachi is likely to kill anyone who does not do as he says. It's a rare action for him. I've never seen him pull that card. It was one thing he always hated about our father. Our father replaced more council members than he kept. The council formed by Itachi has been the same for nearly the entirety of his reign. Only Shikamaru Nara is different."

"When you say replaced?"

"Killed. The king is the only one who can kill unceremoniously. If Danzou were king, he would be untouchable by anyone except assassins. No reparations could ever be taken from him for the deaths of others," answered Sasuke.

Naruto's eyes went wide. "He can kill anyone?"

Sasuke shrugged. "It might cause war but it is the right of the king to take us to war."

"If it's just Danzou, why doesn't he just kill him? You know he wants to even if he denies it."

Sasuke chuckled and settled onto a wooden bench. "Because he's Itachi. To him, possessing a death warrant for Danzou is more satisfying than simply killing him. It will prevent the excuse of unlawful killing being a excuse for someone to lead a rebellion."

"Seems a lot of trouble," sniffed Naruto. "If someone is going to rebel, they'll find any reason for it."

"Maybe, but if Itachi comes across as clean, less of our people will join in. It's politics," explained Sasuke.

Naruto snorted loudly. "Apparently even vampires have politics."

"We prefer the term nightwalker. Vampire is too Hollywood."

"You would," grumbled Naruto. "What happens if there is a war?"

Sasuke lowered his gaze. He knew Naruto would ask it. If there was even the smallest chance of war with the watchers…if Itachi was unable to snip the monster at the bud, he would take Naruto
and run. He would not allow Pein or Itachi to use Naruto in war…especially not in a war where Danzou knew how to kill them.

"Don't worry."

Naruto scooted closer so their shoulders touches. "You're planning something."

"Yeah…but only if the council refuses to come to an agreement."

The words were just leaving his mouth when the council doors were flung open and the representative from the Azure clan was barreling out. It was pure instinct that had Sasuke grabbing the man before he could escape.

A dagger was shoved into his side, making him hiss as his fangs dropped to their full length at the pain. He vaguely heard Naruto give a shout but his entire being was focused on the man in his grasp. It forced him to fight through the pain to keep from losing his grip.

Itachi was at his side in moments, his face distorted by his fangs. His hands ripped the fleeing council member from Sasuke's hands and slammed him into the stone wall with such force blood splattered from parted lips in red speckles across Itachi's face.

"Sasuke!" shouted Naruto, finally jarring himself from his shock and racing to his lover's side.

"I'm fine," groaned Sasuke, the flesh in his side already stopping its bleeding and slowly knitting itself together.

"What happened, Itachi?" asked Sasuke.

Itachi's eyes slid to where Pein walked from the council chamber, his arm dripping thick blood on the stone floor. "The Azure clan has made an attempt on a rare species in the presence of the council with a weapon capable of slicing into the flesh of an immortal."

"Why would he do that? Doesn't he realize that war will tear out people apart?" asked Sasuke.

"This bastard has decided what side he is on. And has forfeited his life."

Sasuke didn't blink. "Does he speak for his clan?"

Itachi's eyes seemed glow in their intensity. "For the sake of his clan, I would hope not."

"I would assume this is enough of a display to force the council's hand into declaring war against Danzou and all those loyal to him?" asked Sasuke.

Itachi's eyes slid to Inoichi Yamanaka who's pallor was even more striking and unnatural. "You are the most knowledgeable concerning the laws. What say you?"

"I think I speak for the entire council when I say that we will approve your request for a death warrant on Lord Danzou," interrupted Kurenai. "But we ask that you bring him before us before enacting it."

"I will not risk his escape by doing so. If you wish to question him, I suggest you get to him before me," snarled Itachi.

"Where is he?" asked Sasuke.

Itachi smirked while gazing at Stefan Azure. "Oh…I believe the Azure clan can help us in that
The man paled from the look of malice in Itachi’s eyes. There would be no escape for him.

Naruto sat on the bed watching Sasuke pull on tight black leather pants and equally black boots. He nibbled on his lip while watching him dress.

"I'm going!"

"Absolutely not," snarled Sasuke as he pulled a black turtleneck over his head.

Naruto strode across the room towards Sasuke, his eyes flashing blue flames. "Pein's going."

Sasuke visibly winced at the look on the blond's face. "You could be hurt. I'm going."

"No. Pein said you're catching on with the abilities but not so that you could properly defend yourself. You should stay here."

"No. I can take care of myself," argued Naruto. "Just as good as you."

"You're staying." Itachi's voice rolled through the room as he strode through, tossing a sword which Sasuke snatched easily from the air. "Are you ready? Pein said Neji's visions aren't as powerful as Konan so we don't have time to waste. He might already be on the move."

"Itachi, let me go," whined Naruto.

"You're not ready. If you were injured, Sasuke would go feral."

Naruto crossed his arms and flopped on the bed. "It's not fair."

"If Danzou didn't possess weapons to kill your kind, I would have no problems allowing you to come. But I can't risk you getting hurt." Itachi turned to Sasuke. "Finish things here and meet me downstairs."

Sasuke strapped on his weapons then lowered his head to steal a quick kiss only to have Naruto turn his head. "Naruto-"

"Hmph…"

Sasuke smirked, grabbing Naruto's chin and nibbling on his lower lip before pulling away. "We'll be back before dawn. It's still early. Why don't you call one of your friends. Itachi said they came by earlier."

"I guess…" Naruto said as Sasuke waved good-bye and trotted down the steps to meet his brother.

Naruto scowled at the door before digging his nearly forgotten cell from his bag. He was grateful his friends hadn't been notified at his 'death'. It would have been difficult to explain away that and he didn't want to give up Sakura and Kiba for a long time.

Hitting speed dial on his cell, he bounced excitedly on his bed until he heard a familiar female voice. "Hello?"

"Sakura!"
"Naruto! Oh my God! You're alive!" she practically screamed in his ear.

"Uh…yeah. Sorry if you worried. I've been sick and then Sasuke practically kidnapped me." Naruto flushed with the knowledge he'd completely ignored his friends for weeks.

"I kept calling and even came by the house. Itachi stone-walled me. I'm so happy to hear your voice. Kiba has been driving me crazy asking about you," said Sakura.

"Sorry about that. I was wondering if the two of you wanted to come over tonight. I'm alone. Itachi and Sasuke had business to take care of."

"You make it sound like they are in the mafia," she chuckled.

"Well…" Naruto grinned. "I don't think anything they are doing is illegal."

At least not by nightwalker standards anyway. He was certain everything they were doing tonight was against human laws, but as he wasn't a human, he wasn't sure the laws applied to him or them as long as they didn't get caught.

"So…you want to come?"

There was a chuckle in his ear. "Hell yes we're coming. I'm off tonight and you know Kiba. He's probably getting yelled at by his mother."

"He sure drew the short straw on parents," empathized Naruto.

"You aren't kidding. We'll be there in thirty. Have the snacks and drinks ready."

Naruto grinned. "Will do."

Naruto raced down the stairs and into the kitchen. Staring at the food in the cabinet, he frowned. The thought of eating didn't appeal to him at all. It wasn't a disgusting thought, but he didn't look forward to it.

"What a waste," he murmured as he collected all the snacks he thought his friends would like.

Opening up a bag of chips, he withdrew one and stared at it. Even lack of hunger had never before kept him from popping one in his mouth as he waited for friends to arrive. Now staring at it, he just wanted to drop it back in the bag.

Growling, he shoved the chip into his mouth and chewed. The more he chewed, the more frustrated he became because he didn't want to swallow.

"Fuck!" he shouted before spitting out the chewed paste and grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge.

Drinking wasn't so bad. He knew he could drink water, wine and some beers. Milk still felt thick in his stomach but he could down it if need be.

Hearing the doorbell ring, he dropped the chips and water bottle on the table. Sakura and Kiba were fast but seeing as they hadn't seen him in a while, he could understand it. He was excited to seeing them too.

Throwing open the large mahogany doors, he stared at the older, scarred man standing before him. Before he could process what was happening, a blade was stabbed into his shoulder with such force he was sentpropelling backwards as pain shot down his arm and up his neck.
"D-Danzou..." he whispered.

"You didn't think I would be foolish enough to allow Itachi and his insane sibling to catch me in my home? There are ways to defy any predictions and young Neji is simply not seasoned enough to pick out the most probable outcomes."

Danzou strolled calmly into the room and closed the door behind him. "Don't worry about your little friends, I took care of them. Lucky for them, I only incapacitated them. They weren't worth my time."

"Bastard!"

"People do strange things in the search of power. I wonder to what lengths Itachi would go to save you? If you die, his brother dies, and his own affection for you might be enough to push him over the edge," explained Danzou as he paced around the room.

Naruto groaned and rolled to his knees. The thought of extracting the blade seemed unappealing, making him call upon his lessons with Pein.

He sought the inner power, attempting to make himself lighter than air. For a moment, he thought the skill was working until double pain shot through him.

Unable to contain his scream, he doubled over as his vision went black around the eyes. His breath panted in and out, sweat popping out on his brow and upper lip. His eyes lifted to stare at the smirking Danzou with a feeling of anger and fear.

"I wouldn't do that. That weapon blocks your ability to use your talents. A more experienced Watcher might be able to remove it in such a way but not you. You are completely helpless," boasted Danzou.

Fighting back the threatening wave of unconsciousness, Naruto panted out a question. "Why?"

Danzou crouched before him, his eyes red in the dim light of the foyer. "Why does it matter to you? You'll be dead soon."

Danzou's hand gripped the knife lodged in Naruto's shoulder and twisted, causing a scream to erupt from his throat. "Stop!"

"I think not, young watcher."

oOo

Sasuke frowned, rubbing his chest. "He should be here."

"He was here until a short while ago," replied Itachi as he sniffed the air. "If he moved, he did so only moments before we arrived."

Pein stepped to their sides, his eyes scanning the area. "Neji is still young. In a century or two he might begin to tap into powers on the level of Konan but until then, I'm afraid it will be hit or miss."

"That doesn't help us find Danzou. He needs to die for what he did to you—almost to me," Sasuke slammed a fist into the wall, leaving a large hole in the plaster. "How do we track him? His scent is already becoming faint. Our kind aren't able to track by scent like dogs."
Itachi smirked. "Perhaps not. But the weres can."

"Yes I'm sure they can but why would they help nightwalkers?" growled Sasuke.

"Because we were asked."

Out the shadows stepped the gray haired medical examiner and head of the wolf pack along with several of his clan. "An offered peace treaty is something I can't refuse."

"Find the man whose scent covers this place, Kakashi. After that, consider the treaty signed," instructed Itachi.

Sasuke glared at the weres. "Are you sure we can trust them?"

Itachi merely turned and watched as the five shape shifters altered their bodies into that of animals. Fur popped out all over their bodies and the cracking and popping of bone and muscle could be heard as their forms took on the shape of the wolf.

"No. But Kakashi isn't the type to go against a deal and an official peace treaty would be too good to resist."

Sasuke nodded his understanding, giving the creatures wide berth as they circled the area to familiarize themselves with Danzou's scent. He thought back to Naruto and how excited his lover was about learning and meeting all the various species of creatures he'd once thought were only parts of legend and fantasy. It would be nice to finally settle down with him. Their lives had been too chaotic for too long.

A howl reverberated through the area before all the wolves took off. Itachi, Sasuke, and Pein followed quickly. The animals were leading them to Danzou.

At first the direction didn't matter as Danzou's locale was the ultimate prize. But the further out into the outskirts of Olympia they ran, the more worried they became.

Itachi's home was growing closer with each passing moment. There wasn't much past his home, mostly wooded area. Itachi liked his privacy.

Danzou knew they would leave Naruto at home.

"Itachi…"

"I know," he whispered.

The wolves stopped several meters from Itachi's large home. Kakashi was the only one to transform his body but instead of speaking, he raced towards the car parked in the drive. On the ground lay two young adults.

"They're alive," he whispered.

"It's Sakura and Kiba," informed Itachi. "They are Naruto's friends."

"Naruto!" Sasuke moved towards the house only to be held in place by his brother.

"Let me go," he hissed.

Itachi shook his head. "Kakashi, can you take care of them. Sasuke and I have things to take care of."
"Of course. Shall I stop by some time next week for formalities?" smirked Kakashi.

Itachi nodded in agreement. "Calm yourself, Sasuke. He won't kill Naruto until you're there to watch. The only reason he didn't kill these two was because he deemed them undeserving of his attention."

"But Itachi…"

"Trust me." Itachi turned to Pein. "He'll probably have weapons that injure Watchers. Make sure you watch yourself."

"What would you have me do?"

Itachi glanced first at Sasuke and then at Pein. "Pein…I want you to hide yourself. Even I have trouble following your movements when you don't want to be seen. Danzou won't see you."

"What have you planned?" asked Pein.

"The end of Danzou. If you have a chance to attack, do so. Sasuke and I will cover you."

"I can smell Naruto's blood," murmured Sasuke, his eyes flaring a dangerous red.

"As can I. Stay calm, Sasuke. Naruto will be fine. Let's go," answered Itachi.

With that said, Itachi walked straight for the front door. There was no point in hiding their arrival. Other than Pein, Danzou could surely feel their approach.

His hand gripped the door and flung it open with more force than was necessary to see Danzou crouched over Naruto twisting a knife in the blond's shoulder.

"Ah, King Itachi and Prince Sasuke, such a pleasure to see you both again." Danzou stood, taking Naruto with him and holding a knife close enough to his throat that blood dribbled down the slope of his neck.

Sasuke's eyes transformed from dark pools of burgundy to bright crimson. "Let go of him…now."

"Tsk…My revenge isn't complete. If Fugaku was here, you wouldn't have run wild with this thing. He would have been destroyed before you ever saw him. But it wasn't my business if you went mad, it only served my purpose. But Itachi…you always were a bit of a pacifist. Always afraid to dirty your hands even though you had the power to do so with few repercussions." Danzou jerked Naruto's head back to bare even more of his throat. "What a waste."

"We no longer live in the Dark Ages, Danzou. Rule by blood isn't necessary. We can make treaties and work with others. You are a relic from a regime long past. My father was one of the first, if not the first. Do you really think your watered down blood could even compare to a child of two ancients?"

Danzou began to chuckle almost madly. "No, I do not. I might be older than you in years, but you have me beaten by blood. My ace is that I hold a crucial bargaining chip. You would die before you allowed me to kill this little Watcher."

Though his face didn't show it, Itachi could see Pein moving through the room unhampered. It amazed him at being able to follow his movements knowing he was invisible to the other occupants of the room. All he needed to do was distract Danzou for a few more moments.
"I won't bargain with you, Danzou. The council now has a blood warrant on you. It is only a matter of time until you're brought to justice," said Itachi quietly.

"True…unless you declare me your heir. We all know that the king is immune to blood warrants. He is supreme."

Itachi cocked his head. "You think to kill me and replace me as king? You're overconfident."

"Am I? Would you sacrifice yourself for your brother? We both know his sanity is tied with this one. How long would he remain sane before going feral? There would be no protecting him then. You would have to put him down yourself," Danzou pressed the knife even deeper into Naruto's throat, making blood flow more freely. "What would you say to that, Itachi?"

"I would say you are a fool."

"Oh? Is my life so important to you that you would sacrifice that of your brother? Of this fledgling Watcher? You are a fool, Itachi," smirked Danzou as the blade pressed even further into Naruto's throat. "Itachi…" snarled Sasuke, his muscles tensing in preparation to lunge.

"You are the fool," whispered Pein into Danzou's ear as he drove his blade straight through his black heart.

His grip on Naruto loosened in shock, allowing the now limp body to fall to the hardwood floor. Sasuke was there to scoop him from the area and move him quickly to safety.

Itachi was on Danzou instantly. The wound, while painful and weakening, would not kill him. Given time, he could recover from the attack.

The king of night walkers would not allow that to happen. His hand latched onto Danzou's bloodied shirt with a powerful fist and sent him careening against the wall.

Blood oozed from Danzou's lips, painting his pale face much like a horrific clown. "You are but a child compared to me."

"Strange," murmured Itachi. "It feels like you are the child."

"Aren't…you curious…why…your father…?"

Itachi paused, pulling back with a look of concentration. "My father was of a different era. I can not forgive or forget but I will make sure not to repeat his…or your mistakes. I am the king. You will bow kneel before me."

Danzou's red eye flashed dangerously despite his weakened state. "Never."

Itachi's lips quirked. "I did not say you had to do so willingly."

His hands moved so quickly, even Sasuke had trouble seeing the motion until Danzou's head was twisted from his neck. Blood spurted, over Itachi's face and arms, starkly coloring the pale skin visible.

The body fell to the floor with a thud, the head soon following. In Sasuke's eyes, his brother had never seemed more dangerous. For the first time in his memory, he was afraid of Itachi. It was easy to forget just how powerful his brother was when the façade of sophistication and humanity was
ripped away to reveal his true self.

"Itachi…"

Itachi glanced at his brother. "How is he?"

"He's weak." Sasuke stroked a finger down Naruto's bloody neck. "I can feel him using me to replace his lost energy."

"Hn," grunted Pein as he crouched before where Sasuke cradled Naruto in his arms. "As long as you stay near, he'll be fine. He's going to sleep for a while."

Pein grabbed the knife still lodged in Naruto's shoulder, removing it quickly before pressing a cloth to the injury until the blood slowed and finally stopped. "Cursed weapons."

"I'll see to it they are destroyed," murmured Itachi.

Pein wiped Naruto's blood on his pants as he stood. "There are others, I'm sure. Many of my people are wanting to retreat from civilization. There are few who are warriors such as myself."

"Is that what you wish?" asked Itachi as they moved to give Sasuke room to carry Naruto to their room.

"I don't know. It would be better for my kind, now that we are no longer anonymous. Things could become difficult."

Itachi nodded slowly, his eyes sliding to Danzou's crumpled form. "We'll need to burn him to ash. I'm sorry for what he and my father put you through."

Pein's lips curved slightly. "But not for the actions of yourself?"

"I was still young and idealistic," answered Itachi. "Might I ask, why did Naruto remain nearly physically unchanged with each life?"

Pein shrugged his shoulders. "I am not privy to every secret in the universe. Perhaps he and Sasuke connected on such a level that first time. Naruto seems the type to do things his own way."

"He is." There was a pause before Itachi continued. "Neji said you needed me to survive. How will you do so if you go into hiding with your people?"

"I can still draw energy from the earth…but it's weak. Just enough to survive. I hadn't given it much thought. Perhaps the bond will weaken as time goes on," answered Pein.

Itachi leaned against the wall. "And if I wanted you to stay?"

"I can't answer that now. Too much has happened…"

Itachi nodded. "As you wish…"

Pein glanced towards the stairs leading where Sasuke and Naruto had disappeared. "They are lucky."

"I'm sure Sasuke wouldn't consider what he went through luck."

"The ends justify the means," stated Pein.
"Hn," grunted Itachi. "What of Naruto? He is a Watcher."

Pein shrugged his shoulders. "He may do as he pleases. Of course, there are some who will not be pleased with his choice to remain with your brother, but the choice is his. I would ask that you arrange for him to spend time with his people. There is much he could learn and he is still very young by our standards."

"I will see what I can do," agreed Itachi.

"I should be going. Shall I dispose of this?" he asked as he gestured to the crumpled body of Danzou.

"No. I will present it to the council." Itachi's eyes flashed. "What Danzou tried to wrought, I will make it clear that it will never happen again."

Pein nodded. "Thank you for averting a war. My people are not warriors. It would not have been pleasant if weapons such as these were used."

Itachi nodded, watching as Pein faded completely from view. Heaving a sigh, he walked up the stairs towards where Naruto and Sasuke waited.

"You should have asked him to stay."

Itachi smirked at Sasuke's statement. "Should I?"

"If it was me…"

"You would have done just as I did. Pein and I are not the same as you and Naruto. But there is still time. He and I will be seeing each other again soon." Itachi bowed his head to the two on the bed before exiting the room.

"Idiot," muttered Sasuke.

"You say that only because he is not locking Pein away like you."

Sasuke's eyes drifted to where Naruto stared up at him. "I was worried about you."

"Don't change the subject. Let Itachi be. He's smart and is just giving Pein room to adjust…unlike you," pouted Naruto.

"You're too difficult to manage. That's why I never gave you any room," argued Sasuke, earning him a slap on the top of his head.

"But all that's over now. You have a long time to make it up to me…first by taking a bath with me," ordered Naruto.

"Your wish is my command."

Sasuke smirked and scooped Naruto into his arms. It had been a long road but now they were together and nothing would tear them apart. He only hoped that Itachi would soon know this since of completion. There was hope and if Sasuke knew Naruto. Itachi and Pein wouldn't remain alone for much longer.

"Stop standing there and get in the tub!"

Sasuke smiled, "As you wish."
The long road alone was finally at it's end and now Sasuke could travel it together with Naruto at his side.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end of the story, but I have a short side story to post later involving Itachi and Pein. :) I hope y'all enjoyed this

End Notes

I can't believe it has taken me so long to archive this story on this site. It's kinda long, so it will probably take me a bit to post it all. If you haven't read it before, I hope you enjoy it. :) It was written several years ago. It's one of the stories I'm most proud of, even if it's not perfect. The picture was drawn for me by a friend, blueh.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!