Teach Your Parents Well

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Teach Your Parents Well

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Summary

There are some things in life that no one expects will happen to them, even in the Hidden Villages. Case in point? Waking up to find your apartment invaded by an older version of you. With kids attached. The situation's sucky enough that Naruto just wants to find a quiet corner to hide away in and scream, but that isn't what shinobi do. At least Sasuke and Sakura seem to have his back on this one, even if no one else seems to understand why he isn’t overjoyed to have his 'estranged father' and 'half brother' back home.

At least Bolt seems to be a good kid. Even if his dad is an absolute ass. To say nothing of all the other weirdness that these alternate dimension versions of his old classmates seem to be dragging into his life.

(Character tags added with successive updates)
**Timeline** – Post Wave Arc for the ‘past’ characters, post canon for the ‘future’ characters, though this ignores nearly all of Naruto: The Last and Boruto: Naruto the Movie. Some information from the post 700 chapters will, however, be taken into consideration.
Mornings were always a nuisance. Half asleep, Naruto rolled over in the grasp of a dream, and found himself sailing right over the side of his bed, the sheets still coiled around his legs and stopping him from making any effort to catch himself. Not that he was awake enough to actually do anything, mind.

Blinking sleepily up at the ceiling and wondering where his swimming pool of miso ramen had gone, it took his brain at least a few minutes to kick-start enough to notice that he was laid out on the floor. Another minute or so to actually untangle himself enough to actually free himself from the sheets that were doing their level best to either molest him within an inch of his life or eat him alive. And a grand total of five minutes to stumble his way towards his bathroom.

Ten minutes later, still shivering and cursing from the cold shower he’d been forced to take – fucking landlord taking too fucking long to fix the fucking pipes, fuck – and on his way to the kitchen to be reunited with his one true love, he tripped over something that most certainly hadn’t been there the previous night. And found the floor rising up to greet him with open arms again.

At least this time he could actually do something about it. Though it didn’t amount to more than twisting and rolling straight into the wall. Sitting up with a groan, rubbing the back of his head, and gearing up to yell at whatever the hell he’d tripped over, he found himself freezing in shock. Because whatever the fuck he’d been expecting to see, it hadn’t been a man laid out cold on top of the ratty old carpet he had spread in front of his couch.

Gingerly crawling forward to poke the guy in the shoulder – though how that was supposed to help, he didn’t know, the guy hadn’t woken up even when he’d tripped over him – he suddenly noticed that there was someone else in the room. Two someones, to be precise. A boy and a girl. One of whom looked his age. And both wrapped up in the man’s arms. It would almost have looked sweet, if it weren’t for the fact that they looked badly hurt.

All covered in dust and blood. And the girl was still bleeding, her dress was soaked the worst. Horrified, he wrapped his fingers tight around the man’s shoulder and shook as hard as he could.

“Oi. Oi! Wake up-tebayyo! OI!”

The man didn’t do more than grunt, but the shift allowed Naruto to actually catch sight of his face. And that one glimpse had his breath catching hard in his throat.

He’d noticed the blond hair when he’d crawled up to him, but now that he could see it a bit more clearly, the face looked frighteningly like his own. Come to think of it, the boy looked a bit like him too. …he couldn’t see the girl clearly. He could at least make out that she wasn’t blond, though.

“OI!”

This time, his shaking managed to wake the boy up. A little, at least. He peered muzzily up at Naruto, clearly confused, but the confusion was quickly shelved in favour of shock and horror when he noticed the amount of blood on himself. And on his sister, or at least, Naruto thought it was his
“Hina! Hina!” he didn’t actually try to shake her, thankfully. And Naruto stopped him the one time he did reach out. He looked back at Naruto, scared, and Naruto realised that even if they looked roughly the same age, the boy had to be younger than him.

“Why isn’t she waking up?” he asked hysterically.

Naruto shook his head, speechless. He hadn’t expected to wake up to something like this-tebayyo! It was only then that the boy seemed to notice that there was actually someone else in the room, and the relief that coloured his face had Naruto shifting awkwardly.

“Oyaji, wake up. Oi, baka-oyaji...” The boy bit his lip, staring down at his father when his shaking didn’t do much to actually wake the man. Naruto also started shaking him, trying to help. Finally, actually exasperated enough to actually give the man a hard whack on the arm, he jolted back with a yelp when the man sat up with a start, face going from unconsciousness to alert within the space of a split second.

“Tou-chan!” the boy cried out, and Naruto heaved a sigh of relief when the man slowly seemed to calm down, staring down at his son with tired eyes. The tiresomeness was switched out for fear when he noticed the state his daughter was in, though.

“Himawari... Himawari-chan – fuck, where’s Sakura when you actually need her-”

“Tou-chan, mom’s going to wash your mouth out with soap if she catches you swearing around us again.” The boy muttered at him, giggling slightly. Naruto had to cringe at how frightened he sounded, despite the momentary hilarity in his voice. He opened his mouth to call out, when things when from mildly unreal to downright surreal in the span of a second. The three were suddenly surrounded by sparkly fucking fairy lights. Actually shining and shit. And, just. What.

“My brain wants to check out right now. This has got to be a dream,” he muttered. But it wasn’t. It couldn’t be that easy, right. Not when the girl woke up in the middle of the lights and started to scream, all but wailing for her father. And going transparent.

“Himawari!”

Couldn’t be a fucking dream if her old man sounded that fucking scared, right?

“HIMAWARI!”

“Hina!”

“Tou-ch-” her voice cut off midway through, and suddenly, there were only three people in his apartment. The girl was gone. Along with the fairy lights.

“...shit.” The man hissed after a beat, curling an arm around his son when the boy burrowed into his chest. Not actually crying, but clearly in shock. Naruto slowly levered himself up, still speechless. What exactly was he supposed to say when crazy shit like this happened in his apartment this early in the morning? He hadn’t even gotten to have his daily dose of ramen yet!

Thankfully, he didn’t need to say anything. When the man caught sight of him, he suddenly went still. Staring at him incredulously.

“What the ever-loving fuck.”
Well, that was a bit unfair.

“Hey! This is my apartment you’re in – I should be the one saying that!”


“Tou-chan!” snapped the boy, ducking back to glare up at him. The man winced, and patted him apologetically on the head, smoothing his hair back.

“This isn’t where we’re supposed to be, though. It was a space-time jutsu, but spatial displacement enough to shift us halfway across the country… We’re supposed to be on the borders of Fire, not in Konoha, let alone in here…” he muttered to himself distractedly. Which, just. What.

And, of course, that was when the ANBU chose to break his fucking door down.

Sitting silently within the Hokage’s office while watching more and more people pile in wasn’t particularly fun. Especially not when the man from his room was in the process of walking back and forth impatiently, pausing every few minutes to turn and scowl at Jiji before he turned around to return to his pacing. Kakashi was leaning against the wall beside him, watching the man with a single, narrowed eye. Naruto still didn’t get what was going on, but at least the lack of a Sharingan being focused on the man and his kid told him that things weren’t falling to pieces. Yet.

There were still a few last stragglers stepping in when the boy finally seemed to have enough. He stood up, and with a very exasperated “Baka-oyaji, just sit down already!” proceeded to drag his dad back to one of the two chairs that had been set out in front of jiji’s desk. And then promptly dropped down beside him, shrugging uncomfortably at the looks his outburst brought him. More than one person actually looked startled – and no, Naruto really wasn’t imagining the way everyone was looking back and forth between him and the two mystery men that had turned up in his apartment.

The way Kakashi chortled under his breath did not help matters. Enough was fucking enough.

“Okay, mind telling me who the fu-heck, heck, you two clowns are? And what you were doing in my apartment today morning?” Naruto demanded, quickly editing his words when he noticed the disapproving look jiji was shooting at him. And the hand that Kakashi was surreptitiously reaching towards him with. To whack him around the head, no doubt.

The brat shot him a look, one that all but screamed ‘are you serious?’ while the man gave a bone-deep sigh and lifted his a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose with his index finger and thumb. Trying to stave off a headache.

Which was when the door swung open one last time, letting in a man with long blond hair. Closely followed by a kid about his age, also with bright blond hair, though he looked almost unhealthily pale.

“Apologies, Hokage-sama, I had a situation at home and I thought I should bring him in as soon as possible…” the man slowly trailed away, staring at the two intruders with what very much looked like disbelief. And, to Naruto’s surprise, his face whipped around to stare at him right after. And kept staring until Kakashi pointedly cleared his throat, straightening very slowly from his slouch. Naruto tried very hard not to reflexively lean towards him – the man’s eyes had been unnervingly cold and sharp.

“Naruto-sama, thank goodness. I didn’t think anyone else got through.”
Naruto blinked, and for a split second, he actually thought the kid was talking to him. Which, no, of course not, who would refer to him with that honorific of all things, but-

And the man was straightening up in his seat, looking strangely relieved.

“Inojin. It’s good to see you, did anyone else come through with you- No, wait. Weren’t you supposed to be with your team? What the fuck are you doing here on your own?!?” the man’s voice ratcheted right back to tense midway through, standing up, but that was about as far as he could get before he was suddenly surrounded by ANBU, their kunai pointed at several fatal points from his throat to his groin. The abrupt appearance of the Hokage’s guard had Naruto stiffening in shock – he was familiar with nearly all the masks he was seeing, but he’d never seen them in this avatar, prepared to cut down a possible threat to the Sandaime. The only thing more chilling than seeing a familiar childhood scene abruptly growing fangs was the fact that the man looked completely uncaring of the danger he was in. His son and the new boy, Inojin, weren’t nearly as unaffected. The boy (did the man call him Bolt in his apartment? Boruto?) stood up with a yelp while Inojin came to a jerky stop, still in the process of walking forward, the smile wiped off his face.

“Naruto, was it?” the Hokage asked mildly, not having moved an inch during his scrutiny of the strangers in their midst.

(And, just. What. Naruto? Naruto?)

The man, the stranger who’d stolen his looks and his fucking name, sighed loudly, and carefully looked over his shoulder, ignoring the way the kunai shifted menacingly closer to his skin.

“You don’t look all that surprised, Jiji.”

Naruto couldn’t quite make himself tear his eyes away from the scene playing out in front of him. It was like watching two merchant carts crashing into each other in the market space, when neither of the merchants were paying attention. He could nearly hear the cabbages and apples bouncing and rolling in the dust, with the merchants screaming loudly at each other. It helped him ignore the way Kakashi-sensei had gone still beside him.

And there was that sharingan eye being unveiled. Did that mean things were falling to pieces now, then?

The other man with the long blond hair suddenly cleared his throat, and stepped forward, reaching a hand out to close around Inojin’s shoulder.

“I’ve examined this one’s memories at least, Hokage-sama. He isn’t lying when he says he’s a Yamanaka by blood.” He said.

The name took a few moments to penetrate the fog that had filled Naruto’s head. Yamanaka? Wasn’t that one of the teme’s fangirls back in the Academy? Not that he’d run into her anywhere since, but yeah, the hair was at least recognisable. And the eyes too, with their creepy lack of pupils.

“Can we verify this one’s claim as well, then? Are there any memories to correlate to their appearance here?” jiji asked, at which point Bolt suddenly reached out to curl his fingers into the vest of one of the ANBU surrounding his father.

(He wasn’t going to think about that. Because, fuck, it was bad enough that there was one guy who looked so much like him being called Naruto. He didn’t want to think about a man who looked like him having a son named Boruto. Even if that play on sounds was damn cool.)

“Hey, what’re you doing? Let go of my tou-chan!”
Naruto jerked forward, wide-eyed, but the man had shifted fast enough to catch the ANBU by the wrist before he could get anywhere near retaliating against the little kid – intruder – clinging to his vest. The only mark he had to show for the sudden blurring of his form was the line of red that had appeared on his throat. The rest of the kunai had pressed closer, but they hadn’t yet cut through his clothes.

The Hokage’s office was completely silent. Naruto could clearly feel the lump in his throat as he watched Bolt freeze in place, eyes wide and angry. Not teary, though, and there was something amazing about that. The man, Naruto-the-second, looked surprisingly blank for someone who’d managed to stop a nin from ANBU from lashing out against his kid.

“I’d appreciate it if you could find it in yourself to not touch my son,” he said, voice utterly still. And, then, Naruto felt the slow curl of killing intent sliding through the room. It wasn’t sudden and terrifying, not like when Zabuza had hit all of them with killing intent strong enough to make Sasuke want to kill himself back in Wave, but there was something insidious about it. Naruto could feel it like heat building below his skin, a sick feeling rising up from his gut. When he looked around, nearly everyone else seemed to be similarly or worse affected. Except for the Sandaime, who looked completely unaffected. And the ANBU that the man was actually focusing on, who slowly started to tremble in place.

This time, it wasn’t Bolt who called out to his father. Instead, Inojin pulled away from the Yamanaka behind him to step right up to the mass of men standing before jiji’s desk, and reached out to curl his fingers into the ragged black tank that the man had on. The man’s gaze shot down to meet him immediately, and the nausea that had been building in Naruto’s stomach abruptly cut off.

When the man let go of the ANBU in his grasp, the ANBU actually stumbled back a step or two before sagging down to the ground and shivering in place.

“Naruto-sama,” Inojin said, voice quiet. Ignoring the way the rest of the ANBU were bristling both at him and the man in his grasp.

“That’s enough. You’re all dismissed. Bear, get yourself to the infirmary.”

And that seemed to be that. The ANBU disappeared without another word, though Naruto got the sinking feeling that none of them looked very happy.

Leaning back in his seat with a sigh of relief, Naruto glanced up at Kakashi, only to stiffen when he noticed the way his sensei was staring at him, goggle eyed.

“Rest of you as well.”

Naruto’s head whipped back to stare at the jiji, much like nearly everyone else in the room.

The Sandaime looked about as forbidding as before when he glanced around. But he unbent enough to wave a single hand towards the door.

“You’re all dismissed. Out.”

Naruto’s jaw dropped in outrage, but Kakashi was steering him out the door before he could even consider demanding to stay back, closely followed by the rest of the jounin who had been in the room. Naruto hadn’t recognised even half of them when he’d been inside.

“Kakashi-sensei!” he snapped petulantly, craning his head to look back through the door, but he didn’t see much more than the older Naruto crouching down in front of Inojin and his son to receive a hug from both boys before another one of the jounin coming through blocked the way. When he
looked up with a scowl, he was surprised to see a face that he actually recognised.

“Shikaku-ji!” he squawked, finally stopping in his struggling, much to the silent relief of his sensei.

Shikamaru’s dad’s lips curled up in a slow smile. Naruto hadn’t seen him in ages, not since the last time he’d actually been to Shikamaru’s place and that had been a really long time ago. Much before their final exams at the academy.

“Still getting into trouble then, Naruto-kun?” the man asked, eyes crinkling in amusement. Naruto laughed nervously, and tried very hard not to think about the pepper bombs he, Shikamaru, Choji and Kiba had been trying to engineer in the Nara head’s kitchen while Shikamaru’s parents were away. The ensuing explosion had had all of them banned from Shikamaru’s house till they hit sixteen at the least. His mom had been very insistent, though he couldn’t quite forget the way Shikaku-ji had been doubled up in laughter by the door that day, well out of the range of the clouds of pepper that had filled the kitchen and had had all of them coughing and hacking up their lungs.

“Not really, Shikaku-ji. This wasn’t my fault, anyway, I just woke up and tripped over that guy in my living room!” he declared loudly, catching the attention of nearly all the men who’d been inside the Hokage’s office with them. They did eventually clear away, though not before Kakashi had thrown an arm around his shoulders and dragged him into a particularly painful headlock. Naruto made sure to struggle and squawk noisily in dismay, though he was secretly relieved. He really didn’t like being stared at this much. And Kakashi-sensei could be an utter asshole about helping him out, but at least he helped somewhat.

“Sorry about this one, Shikaku. I’ll take care of him, we’re late enough for our team meeting as it is.”

Naruto stopped struggling immediately. Nothing could be more mortifying than being late enough that even Kakashi considered it late. Thankfully, Kakashi took him along for the ride when he used the Shunshin jutsu to blow out of the place.

Not so thankfully, piggybacking on Kakashi’s jutsu had him spending the whole of the first hour of training upchucking bile and saliva since he hadn’t actually gotten around to eating before the ANBU had dragged him, Naruto-the-second and Bolt off to the Hokage’s office. Much to the disgust of both the teme and Sakura-chan, who pointedly stayed well away from him.

Chapter End Notes

Amusing information about the title, for anyone interested – this was nearly named ‘Tales From Yesterday’ or ‘Somewhere a Clock is Ticking’. Yes, 30 Seconds to Mars and Snow Patrol. Mostly because I didn’t have a title, and I wanted to avoid inspiration from CSNY when there’s a perfectly good Peggy Sue out there named based on their song. But this title really does seem to work best for now, ugh. Title subject to change.

Comments and kudos are very welcome! I’d love to hear what you think. Let me know if you think any other tags or warnings are more appropriate than the ones I have up. I’m really at a loss for this one.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which Naruto bonds with Bolt over the most unexpected of things.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Looking between the two faces in front of him, one amused and the other blank, Naruto found himself twitching in place madly. The appearance of unknown nin muttering about space-time jutsu within his apartment had been bad enough, to say nothing of the fairy light disappearance of Bolt’s kid sister, but this? This was just cruel.

“Oi, Jiji! This is crazy! What do you mean they need to stay with me?!”

Sarutobi continued to watch him with that vaguely amused look on his face, and fuck, he wanted to be Hokage someday just for this. So that he could sit and laugh at people all day long when they got confused about the weird orders he gave them, God-fucking-dammit.

“It makes the most sense. No one really know who your parents are, and the few who do in this village already know about Bolt and me being here. We look alike enough that I could easily pass myself off as your absentee father, and Bolt can be your younger brother.”

He just had to say it with that blank fucking look on his face, didn’t he.

“Look, I’m not talking to you. Jiji-”

“I’m sorry, Naruto. But this really is for the best.”

And with that, he was sent packing from the office without so much as a by-your-leave. Assholes.

Running into Bolt outside the office hadn’t exactly been something he’d planned on doing, but since everything else seemed to be going his way that day… But, weirdly enough, the brat took one look at his face and dragged him out of the tower. And kept tugging him along until they reached Ichiraku, which, yeah, this kid was someone he could get to like.

And then he had to open his big mouth and say “All Hokages are assholes! Here, I’ll treat you, dad gave me cash for lunch. It’s supposed to be for him and me, but screw him if all he’s going to do is stay holed up in that office with that bag of bones.”

Naruto stared at him, horrified. Because, this, he was… Bolt was Naruto-the-Second’s son. Why did he hate the Hokage?! But, then again, right now…

“Not sure if I’d agree with you any other day, but now? Yeah, they’re assholes. Teuchi-jii-chan! One large miso ramen!” he called out, ducking through the curtains hanging in front of the stand. When he turned around to ask what Bolt wanted, he was faced with the younger boy staring at him with open-mouthed shock. Naruto frowned, confused.

“What?”
Bolt quickly shook his head, and stepped inside as well, greeting Teuchi and Ayame with a bright smile. Neither of them looked particularly surprised, so Naruto assumed that Naruto-the-Second had brought Bolt around in the time since he’d last seen them.

(It was only a day. He hadn’t seen them in a day, and it looked like the first thing that Naruto-the-Second had done was to cart his son off to Ichiraku. He really, really didn’t want to think about this anymore.)

“One shoyu ramen, and tonkatsu ramen after that jiji!” the kid said cheerfully, a big grin spreading across his lips. And Naruto could only watch as Teuchi answered him with loud laughter, getting started on both their bowls of ramen.

…the brat really did look frighteningly like him. He had the same shade of eye-searing blond hair that Ino had once cursed him out for, demanding to know how anyone, let alone him, could actually have the genes to give him sunshine blond hair, sky blue eyes and perfectly tanned skin without something to mess up the combination. Naruto had sat and wheezed with laughter in a corner along with Kiba through the entire tirade, because why the fuck would he care about anything as dumb as genes and looks when they were still eleven? The only thing he’d really gave a damn about was graduating and becoming a shinobi as soon as he possibly could, and even then, the bloody buushin jutsu had left him bungling up the exams every time they’d come up. He never wanted to see Iruka hurt again, never wanted to see any of his precious people hurt again, but that shit with Mizuki had been god-sent. For all he knew, he’d still be stuck trying to work around the buushin in the academy without any of the teachers being willing to accept that, no, that really was the least chakra he could put into the damn things. Or that he had more troubles than just shitty chakra control on his hands.

Just before they both dug into the bowls of salty goodness before them, Bolt gave him a quick glance through the corner of his eyes. Naruto nearly choked on the noodles he’d shoved into his mouth, because the hair wasn’t bad enough? Bolt had to have eyes that were the same shade as his too? Even the crazy scars he had on his cheeks – Bolt had them too. Though, if he had them, then they weren’t really scars, were they.

So the marks he had on his face had become fucking hereditary, somehow? He’d started to think of them as a mark of the fox, after he’d found out that he had the frickin’ Kyuubi inside him, but what did it mean if Bolt had them on his face? He hadn’t seen the girl’s face clearly, but did she have them too? And, shit, why was he thinking about things being hereditary, he wasn’t supposed to be thinking about this shit.

“What?” he grumbled, once he’d actually managed to swallow.

Bolt slurped up the last of his bowl (wait, what?), and turned to give him a big smile.

“You’re really not what I expected.”

Naruto scowled at him.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” he demanded.

“Nothing. Just that you’re really nice. I think I can actually think of you as my nii-chan without totally feeling weird about it now.” He declared, then turned to start on the next bowl that Teuchi was already setting out in front of him. Paying no attention to the way he’d left Naruto sitting and reeling in his seat. He’d only just managed to get himself under control when he noticed the way Teuchi was leaning over the counter and smirking at him. Naruto all but pouted back, because this was Teuchi-jiji, and the old man was supposed to be on his side, damn it.
All the pout won him was a snicker. And another bowl of miso ramen which, granted, was worth any laughter at his expense.

“He’s a good kid. You should look out for him,” he said, voice pitched at a level that only Naruto would have been able to hear, eyes very pointedly focused on the scallions he was in the process of slicing. Naruto frowned up at him, then focused the frown on the boy who was sitting beside him. He was squawking and trying to stay away from Ayame’s hands while she reached out to smooth back his hair, a strangely soft smile on her face. He was still frowning when he turned back, a strange feeling building in the pit of his stomach.

“You met the other guy too?” he asked, trying to keep his voice down. Because he really didn’t want Bolt to hear him talking about his dad. Not when he’d already said that Naruto… hadn’t been what he’d been expecting.

Which wasn’t really comforting. Wasn’t Naruto-the-Second supposed to be… him?

*Shit not thinking about this nonono*

Because somewhere, somewhen, he could look absolutely blank faced while barging into his own life, could make a whole room of jounin sick with fear and could leave an ANBU trembling on the ground, and - and he had two kids. One girl bleeding out and crying for him, one boy who apparently hated Hokages, and -

*NOT THINKING ABOUT THIS.*

“Arashi-san, you mean?” Teuchi-jiji said, looking up at him from beneath lowered brows. The words managed to break him out of his thoughts, and he focused again on the old man. There was something cautious in his expression, and Naruto wouldn’t have noticed how careful Teuchi was being if he hadn’t been reeling from the aftereffects of the intrusion in his life already. There was something about having time travellers barging into your life that left you paying careful attention to the world, just in case there was something equally as ridiculous waiting in the wings to blindside you.

Ugh. What happened to not consciously thinking about time travel, again?

“Arashi-san?” he asked, swallowing down the last of the broth in his first bowl. And trying not to notice the way Bolt was charming Ayame into giving them both a free round.

“Oh, that’s tou-chan.” Bolt piped up suddenly. Naruto jumped slightly in place, then turned to stare at him. Contrary to how he’d been looking for most of their time together, the boy was frowning down into the bowl that Ayame had just set down before him, a sullen look on his face.

“He’d been talking to that old bag of bones yesterday, the Sandaime.” Naruto somehow caught his automatic response to the tone that Bolt used when he spoke about Jiji, forcing himself to listen. Because there *had* to be something wrong with the world if the kid hated the Hokage to this extent when he was from Konoha. Especially when he was clearly an active shinobi of some sort – Naruto hadn’t missed the metal square with the sign of the Leaf on it that had been stitched onto the loosely tied scarf draped around his neck, a majority of the cloth hanging over his chest. Very likely once a part of a forehead protector, but Bolt had appropriated it for another use, like so many others in the shinobi corps.

The scarf which… was missing today?

Naruto blinked slowly at the boy’s bare neck, then jerk his eyes back up to pay attention to what Bolt
“They were talking about what dad and I should do as long as we’re here, because dad still isn’t sure about when we’ll be able to go back. Or even if we’ll be able to go back. Dad said he’s officially going to change his name to Uzumaki Arashi here. Because he said he couldn’t keep using his name…” Bolt trailed away, starting to look awkward. Brushing away the reason why Arashi-san couldn’t keep using his name, Naruto folded his arms, his eyes squinting in thought.

“Why Arashi?” he asked finally. Bolt looked up at him, visibly startled.

“What?”

“Why. Arashi?” Naruto repeated slowly. Because if that was going to be his – no, Naruto-the-Second’s name, he wanted to know why he would choose that one.

Bolt continued to look startled, and a little confused, but his eyes abruptly focused at a spot behind Naruto before he could actually get around to answering.

“Arashi because I’ve used that name before.” Said a voice from behind him. Naruto slowly turned to first look over his shoulder, then up, at the man who’d just poked his head in.

“Arashi-san! Welcome!” Teuchi called out cheerfully, and Naruto shot him a betrayed look. How could he actually be nice to this guy?! Then again, if Arashi was Naruto-the-Second, that meant that Teuchi-jiji was being nice to the guy just because he was him. Which, yeah, was very cool. He knew Teuchi liked him, especially since he’d been willing to keep serving Naruto even if that meant he lost some of his civilian customers when Naruto had been a kid, but the fact that he and Ayame were blindly accepting Arashi and Bolt because they were apparently related to Naruto was really cool.

“One miso ramen, Teuchi-ji,” Arashi said, smiling slightly. He sat down on Bolt’s other side without another word, though he did take a moment to ruffle Bolt’s hair slightly. Bolt immediately turned around to face him, face going red with anger.

“BAKA-OYAJI! What took you so long?! Well, Naruto-nii and I shared out the cash for lunch and it was really good. So there’s none left for you. You’ll have to beg Teuchi-jiji for food now, nyah!”

Naruto jerked his eyes away from the father and son to stare into his bowl, and turned his attention to not snapping the chopsticks in his hand. He didn’t know what was more terrifying, the fact that Bolt had dropped his use of ‘tou-chan’ the moment Arashi had reappeared or the fact that he hadn’t even hesitated to add the ‘nii’ suffix to his name. Konohamaru had been calling him older brother for months now, even though he’d declared himself Naruto’s greatest rival, but there was something about Bolt calling him brother that made his stomach twist itself into a knot. Maybe it was how much the brat looked like him? Konohamaru was awesome, but also didn’t look anything like him.

Catching sight of the way Arashi was casually propping his head up against his hand, elbow resting against the counter, smiling patiently and just listening while Bolt continued to yell, arms waving energetically in the air, Naruto felt his stomach twist again.

He stared down into his bowl. Then lifted it up, and shovelled the rest of his ramen down.

“Thanks jii-chan! It was as great as always! Brat, I’ll see you later, thanks for lunch.”

Laughing at the affronted yell the nickname got him, he quickly handed his bowl back to Teuchi. He’d just ducked out through the curtains when Arashi-san called out after him.

“We’ll meet you back home, Naruto.”
Naruto felt himself seize up, then forced himself to relax. There wasn’t enough space in his apartment for them, anyway. Naruto-the-Second had to just be putting on a front for anyone that might have been close enough to see or hear him when he’d come to Ichiraku.

“See ya, Arashi-san.” He called back. And proceeded to walk towards where Team Seven was supposed to be meeting for the day.

Chapter End Notes

Well, most relevant notes are available attached to the first chapter. It's so strange, this is the first multi-chapter I've put up on AO3 and I already love the updating format. Thank you all for the kudos, and a special thanks for the comments. They left me feeling rather gleeful. Please leave me more! What you think, if you find something weird, if you're just as flummoxed as I am at the sheer weirdness of the next generation (ah, Mitsuki. Such fun I foresee at writing you...), or if you have more suggestions for tags.

I'll try putting up a chapter every week or two weeks, at least as long as I have chapters edited and ready. I haven't much time to write at the moment, but let's see where this takes us... At least I'm enough in love with this story that I'm unlikely to give up on it at any point. Updates will be anywhere around the weekend, between Friday through Sunday.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which aspersions are cast on Arashi's character, crazy shit happens, and Naruto, for once in life, doesn't want anyone's attention on him.

(He suspects they'll see too much)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Using a hasty kawarimi to switch with a rock a little further away, then dropping to the ground to avoid the fireball that kept coming at him, Naruto got up with a scowl on his face, gratified when Kakashi called the spar to a stop.

“Teme! This was supposed to be a taijutsu-only spar!” he snapped.

“You used the body replacement jutsu,” Sasuke said snidely, folding his arms. Naruto scowled back.

“That’s because you shot a fucking fireball at me!”

“Boys!” Kakashi cut in, sounding exasperated. Sakura was standing with her hands on her hips, frowning at both of them. No, wait, was that a quick smile she shot at Sasuke? And a glare for him. Fucking Sasuke and his fucking pretty boy face.

“Hn,” grunted said pretty boy, looking away with a roll of his eyes. Naruto twitched, and dived for him with a loud yell. It took Kakashi to break up the resulting brawl, and the application of Sakura’s fist to his head to actually keep them separate from each other.

“This clearly isn’t working for today. Shall we go and request a mission? D-rank, of course,” Kakashi said absently, running a hand through his hair. Still rubbing the back of his head – Sakura-chan could hit so damned hard! – Naruto looked up with a sullen look on his face.

“Do we have to?” he asked, much to the surprise of his teammates. Since he’d usually be the first one to go for missions rather than complaining about them. Unless he wanted to complain in favour of a higher ranked mission.

Kakashi, however didn’t look all that surprised. His single eye actually looked somewhat compassionate. And understanding. Naruto looked back at him suspiciously.

“What?” he asked. Kakashi shrugged, and glanced away.

“Arashi-san mentioned that he’d be putting up a D-rank mission later today,” he said. Naruto felt his brows twitch up and down again. And he ducked his head down, glaring at the mud, pebbles and grass underneath them.

Arashi-san, Arashi-san. That’s all people seemed to be able to speak about with him these days. Arashi-san with his short blond hair and placid, patient smile. Arashi-san and how good a shinobi he really was, with him facing off against Kakashi so Jiji could tell what level he was at practically.
Arashi-san in his burnt orange haori and dark blue pants, with tape to hold them tight around his calves. They looked almost disturbingly similar these days, more so than should be normal for relatives, and it was enough to make him want to tear his hair out. That, or dye it and then start wearing black so they wouldn’t look anything alike. Couldn’t the man at least try not to make them look so similar?

There were moments when he wanted absolutely nothing to do with Arashi-san. And those moments outweighed the moments when the man was actually a little bearable, like when he was putting together some food in the kitchen for all of them. For all that he could be an utter asshole sometimes, the man could cook. Naruto hadn’t even been missing his daily dose of ramen all that much when he was readily supplied with food that he didn’t even need to pay for, since Arashi took care of all the groceries on his own. And he’d been wrong. Apparently they all could fit into his tiny apartment. They’d managed to fit in there for a whole week when Arashi suddenly announced that they would be moving to a new place.

Yeah, announced. See? This was why he couldn’t stand the sight of the fuckwit’s calm, smiling face.

“…Arashi-san?” Sakura asked curiously, and Naruto groaned loudly, forcing himself to stand up.

“Come on, teme. Let’s spar again, maybe this time you’ll actually manage to defeat me without cheating,” he muttered, kicking at the ground and then stretching out. He paused mid-stretch when he realised that he hadn’t gotten a response of any kind. Looking back at his teammates, he found himself pierced by three sets of eyes. Sakura looked confused, and Sasuke looked suspicious, but it was Kakashi’s sharp gaze that made him cringe and look away.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he bit out. Sakura frowned, and sat up, an oddly worried on her face.

“What don’t you want to talk about? You’re not acting like yourself, Naruto,” she started, but stopped when Kakashi raised a hand to forestall her.

“Arashi-san is a… relative of Naruto’s who’s recently resurfaced, shall we say.” He said, and Sasuke’s gaze, which had shifted to Kakashi when he’d started speaking, shot straight back to him, going from suspicious to shocked before he tucked his emotions away again. Naruto grimaced, knowing that he’d understand the sheer weirdness of a family member resurfacing after being alone for so long. Time travelling insanity aside, it really did feel like he’d been given a pair of relatives that he didn’t want or need in his life. Bolt was great, even if he could be bratty little pain in the ass at times, but he still hadn’t really gotten used to Arashi. Nor did he really want to.

From how narrow Sasuke’s eyes had gotten, Naruto could only guess that the teme was jealous of him. Or some other stupid shit. Of course he’d think that any family resurfacing would be a good thing. From the shock on Sakura’s face, quickly followed by delight, she clearly thought the same.

News flash. He was fine on his own. He wanted a family, and he wanted his family back, yeah, but this was just… crazy. It was too fucking crazy, and he still didn’t know how to deal with a thirty-five year old version of himself who was the father of two kids, was supposedly fleeing from a war and somehow despite how much they looked alike, still acted nothing like him.

The looks he’d seen on Bolt’s face sometimes, when it was just them at home and Arashi had been off on his own doing god knows what since morning, didn’t endear the man to him either. Bolt had grown up with a father, a younger sister and very likely with a mother as well - that lonely look had no right to show up on his face. And Arashi had no right to let it show up on Bolt’s face.

The sharp crack of Kakashi’s hands clapping against each other had him refocusing on his sensei along with his teammates. The happy upside down arc of his eye had all of them stiffening up in
“Well, let’s go and pick up a mission! There’s no guarantee that we’ll get the one that Arashi-san set out, Naruto. And even if we do, I’m sure there’ll be other missions available. You don’t have to look so sullen.”

Naruto grumbled again at that, but he didn’t really have an argument for that. Kakashi did make a good point. Offering a hand to Sakura-chan, he was surprised when she actually accepted it for once, lightly balancing on her feet after he tugged her up. Grinning, he reached out with his other hand to Sasuke, absolutely not surprised when he batted it aside with an unamused snort. Glancing at Sakura to see if she’d was as tickled as him at the teme’s reaction, he tried not to groan at the hearts in her eyes. Of course she’d find Sasuke’s reaction cool instead of utterly hilarious. Ah well.

“Come along, brats,” Kakashi called, already on his way out of the training ground. Glancing at each other, they all scrambled to catch up to him.

“So? What do you think?”

Naruto continued to stare at the large space that he could see through the door that Arashi had left open behind him. Bolt had already shot after his father, cheering at the size of the apartment, and the fact that they all had their own rooms. Naruto hadn’t yet stepped in, but the thought of living in a four bedroom apartment was still mindboggling, since Arashi had set aside two rooms for himself. A bedroom and a study. He’d been quick to tell them that they could choose their own rooms and furnishings, though. Naruto had just continued to stare at him, wide-eyed. It was one thing to be told that they would be shifting to a new place. Being carted around to see apartments and independent houses, this fucking close to where the smaller clans and the richer civilians lived, was more than a little frightening. Forget the fact that he hadn’t even dreamt of living in places like this, Arashi and Bolt had just appeared in the past. Where the hell was Arashi getting this kind of cash from?!

“Oi, you didn’t take over the underworld or something when I was busy with training, did you?” he asked faintly, still staring at the wide space he could see from where he was standing. Still not more than a step past the front door. There were floor-to-ceiling windows, for crying out loud! Sakura had squealed over the last set they’d seen in a fancy apartment that Team Seven had been charged to clean as a D-rank mission back before they’d been to Wave. About the only thing that had saved him from a tongue-lashing for not recognising or appreciating how chic the windows and fixtures of the house were, was the equally befuddled look on Sasuke’s face. They’d stumbled along behind Sakura while she continued to coo over the apartment, while Kakashi (the traitor) had just stayed by the door, giggling at the looks on their faces.

Arashi looked back at him with a start, the surprise clear on his face, and Naruto was almost humbled to see the man’s mostly serious face dissolve into a wide grin, soon followed by helpless laughter. Bolt rushed back to the central living space, staring wide-eyed at his father, who had actually reached out to steady himself against one of those floor-to-ceiling windows, trying to stem the sniggers that continued to escape him.

“What in the world made you think I took over the underworld in Konoha?” he asked, the grin still stretching his lips wide in an expression that Naruto was… actually not very familiar with. He’d never given this soft-around-the-edges smile to anyone before. Or maybe he had, it wasn’t like he would have recognised it on his face. Bolt had pressed himself to his father’s side, and kept shooting Naruto the sweetest of smiles. Which honestly disturbed him. Bolt had been many things in the time he’d known him, and sweet wasn’t one of them.
Shrugging, Naruto finally stepped inside.

“I dunno. Maybe the amount of cash you’ll have to shell out if you decide to go for these places, especially when you’re fucking buying them,” he said, sticking his tongue out when Bolt spun around in Arashi’s grip to frown at him. The brat really had a thing for scolding people when they swore.

Arashi gave another laugh, ruffling Bolt’s hair to distract him, and curling an arm around his shoulders to hold him in place with a loose hug. The easy affection in the move had Naruto stiffening where he stood, forcing himself not to look away. When Arashi looked back at him with a smile, there was something uncomfortably knowing about the look in his eyes.

“I’ve been working personally with Sarutobi-jiji, he’s giving me more than enough cash to cover a place like this,” he said, gesturing with his free hand for Naruto to come in further. “Also, if it goes over the limit of whatever I have now, he said he’d cover the cost and that I could pay him back with what I’ll make on future missions. It’s fine. I’d rather have a good place for the two of you to stay in.”

Naruto uncomfortably shuffled his way in, still looking about himself with a disbelieving look on his face.

“But… don’t you think this is too big?” he asked.

Arashi frowned, and looked around as well.

“What do you think, Bolt? Too much?”

Bolt wriggled in place with a wide grin.

“No! It’s too little! We had these many rooms back home, and Himawari had her own room, but we also had a big garden for Kaa-chan! And she had her own lab at home too.” he said brightly. Naruto felt something lurch inside him at the appearance of the heretofore unmentioned ‘kaa-chan’ in Bolt’s words. She just hadn’t been brought up in any of the conversations they’d had before. Even Inojin and Bolt never brought Bolt’s mother up when Inojin dropped by his apartment, though from what they’d said, Naruto was starting to think it was more and more likely that the Yamanaka in his Academy class was Inojin’s mother. The way Arashi’s smile tightened at the edges, and his eyes went cold, told Naruto that there was likely a very good reason that Bolt’s mother had gone unmentioned even in passing till date.

The pained look disappeared before Bolt could catch sight of it, though. By the time Bolt was twisting around to peer up at him, Arashi had managed to make his expression soften.

“Could we find our house here, tou-chan?” the kid asked eagerly. Arashi sighed, and shook his head with a small smile.

“M’ afraid not, Bolt. I don’t think they’ve started building houses in that part of Konoha yet.”

“But this place is still too huge, Arashi-san. Do we really need such a large kitchen, or this much living room space?” Naruto cut in, shrugging awkwardly when Arashi shot him a relieved look.

“We might not need it, but do you like it?” he asked, after thinking to himself for a moment. Bolt let go to press his face up against the windows, staring out through them at the spread of Konoha below them. Naruto didn’t even know why he’d been surprised when Arashi had asked the agent to lead them straight to the apartments on the top floor. It wasn’t a penthouse, thankfully, Naruto really didn’t know how he’d react to something like that, but the size of the place was still ridiculous. Why
would three people need an apartment with two separate floors to live in? They’d been managing perfectly fine in a single bedroom apartment!

Bolt abruptly spun around to stare at him.

“Ne, oyaji, this place is nice, but didn’t you say there was another place you were considering?”

Naruto stared at the brat in horror. Hadn’t they already seen enough places? But Arashi was nodding with a thoughtful look on his face.

“Yeah, I think there was another place. It was independent, and not as spread out as this, but it did have some garden space out back. Himawari would like it, when she gets here.” He added the last line with another one of those too-soft smiles that made Naruto want to turn away in discomfort. Did they really think that Bolt’s sister would make a sudden reappearance at some point? He still couldn’t understand what the hell was going on, or the intricacies of the multi-layered fuinjutsu technique which was apparently being triggered on the other side, or other when – wherever Arashi and Bolt had come from. But Arashi had said that more of his people were supposed to make it through. He just didn’t know how many of them would, or even when they would.

“Come on, let’s tell the agent to keep a hold on this place, and go take a look at the last one too.”

“Yeah, I liked this apartment too. More than the other ones at least. What about you, Naruto-nii?”

Naruto followed them out in a daze, being tugged along behind a gleeful Bolt who’d wrapped his fingers around Naruto’s wrist and didn’t seem to be ready to let go any time soon.

Staring between a horribly red and dazed Hyuuga heiress, a bemused Arashi, a very angry Kiba and a very amused everybody-else, Naruto found himself controlling the urge to groan yet. Again.

“What happened?” he demanded, staring straight at Arashi, who was quick to raise his hands in self-defence.

“Hey, I didn’t do anything. They stepped in, and the girl went red and tipped over. Is she okay?”

If Naruto hadn’t known just how well the older man could disguise what he was thinking, he might actually have believed that look of concern on his face. As it was, he crouched down beside Kiba and Shino, still shooting suspicious looks at Arashi over his shoulder. Sakura hurried to sit beside Kiba’s sensei, checking over the Hyuuga princess too, while Sasuke remained by the door along with Kakashi. When Naruto took the time to actually look back at them, he found Sasuke staring past them at Arashi with a very strange look on his face, while Kakashi… looked like he were trying very hard not to laugh?

Come to think of it, that’s how the Sandaime looked too. His face looked politely worried, but Naruto knew how the old man worked. And those carefully lowered brows, the narrow eyes and those pursed lips, meant that jiji was all but cackling inside.

Kiba’s sensei sighed in relief when the girl, Hinata, seemed to stir on the ground. She slowly opened her eyes, first blinking up at the ceiling and then turning her gaze on the rest of them. Naruto was confused when she suddenly went pink again.

“Oi, are you ok? My idiot dad didn’t do anything weird, did he?” he asked, steeling himself for the reactions that would follow what he’d said. Because the Hokage had ordered him, damn it. Just because he hadn’t been ordered to actually call Arashi ‘dad’, it didn’t mean that that cover story
wasn’t fixed in place. And it would be easier to test it out here when he already knew Kiba.

The choking sounds he got for his declaration made him want to laugh and flinch at the same time. He couldn’t help but notice that Sakura didn’t look nearly as delighted anymore. Arashi should’ve thought of that, right. What the fuck did it mean if your absentee *dad* reappeared after 12 years, Arashi-san? With another kid, at that? When he looked up from Hinata’s wide eyes and pink face, it was to see Kiba looking about as horrified and angry as he’d been when the Sandaime and Arashi had first tried to float the story past him.

“I’m… I’m fine…” Hinata said softly. Naruto couldn’t really tell what she was thinking, but he *did* know that the frown on her face wasn’t something he was used to seeing. Then she went a bright red again, and he looked up to see that Arashi had taken the time to come closer. He was watching the lot of them with a small smile on his face, and Naruto stiffened when he realised it was the same look Arashi had had on his face when he’d been watching Bolt earlier in the day, when they’d been eating breakfast. He didn’t even remember what they’d been talking about, exactly. Just that Bolt had been bouncing around, particularly excited, and hadn’t been sitting in one place long enough to actually eat anything. He’d been too busy laughing, while Arashi had been smiling that small smile, trying to convince his kid to sit down and talk, instead of jumping around.

It was… weird to see it now, when he was looking down at them. Arashi’d grown up with all of them, right? Why was he smiling at them like that? At least it looked more honest that the look of concern he’d had on his face earlier.

“Are you ok, Hyuuga-chan?” he asked seriously, bending down to look at her. Naruto whipped around when Hinata… squeaked, and toppled back into her Sensei. When he realised that she’d passed out – *again* – he turned back to stare at Arashi incredulously. If he knew Hinata at all, and he clearly did, then this *had* to be on purpose.

“Oi, back off! Don’t come near her!” Kiba snapped, throwing his arm out, almost as though he were trying to hide Hinata from Arashi and everyone else in the room. When their other teammate, Aburame Shino, also put his arm out, Naruto slowly backed away, tugging Sakura along when she didn’t move. Arashi slowly straightened, face going blank. Naruto swallowed dryly. He *really* didn’t like that look on the older man’s face.

The tension in the room abruptly dropped when Kiba’s sensei lightly rapped both him and Shino on the back of the head.

“Stop that, you two. You’re being rude. Apologise to… Uzumaki-san?” her voice rose at the end in a questioning tone, as she raised her eyes to look at Arashi. Arashi smiled back, rubbing the back of his head uncomfortably.

“Uzumaki Arashi,” he offered, nodding politely. When Naruto forced himself back to his feet, pulling Sakura along with him to stand beside Kakashi and Sasuke, it was to find both his teammates looking between him and Arashi with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

“Team Seven, reporting for a new mission,” said Kakashi, before anything else could happen. Sarutobi nodded back with a pleasant smile, though Naruto could have sworn the old man was still cackling at all of them inside his head. Arashi suddenly cleared his throat, making Sarutobi-jiji glance at him curiously.

“Will it be ok for Team Eight to take this mission? I’m perfectly fine with them, but if Hyuuga-chan is unwell…”

Well, this was awkward. Naruto could almost hear the unsaid ‘if Hyuuga-chan has trouble with me
being there’. And if he could hear it, he was certain that everyone else in the room could too. He tried not to laugh, feeling a little hysterical, and watched as Hinata went a bright red again. Kiba swelled up like a territorial bullfrog, and even the mostly unnoticeable hum around Shino had increased, while their sensei looked partially embarrassed, but mostly irate.

“You don’t have to trouble yourself on our behalf, Uzumaki-san. Hinata is fine, right Hinata-chan?” she asked, looking down at her student. Hinata trembled in place, and looked down, shyly tapping her index fingers together.

“We—we’ll be fine, U-U-Uzumaki-san…” she said softly. Arashi looked down at her bent head, then nodded, smiling softly again.

“That’s good to know. I’ll see you around, Sarutobi-ji.”

“Get back as soon as you’ve finished moving house, don’t think I haven’t noticed that you still haven’t finished your section of the paperwork,” Jiji said snidely, making Arashi laugh nervously and duck past Kakashi with a wave before the Sandaime could continue. He was quickly followed by Kiba’s team, though Kiba himself kept staring at Naruto with narrow eyes until he was out the door.

“Paperwork, jiji?” he asked curiously, once they’d been given a mission that all of them were willing to do – a regular gardening assignment that wasn’t interesting in any way, but at least it was something to do. He ignored the growl that escaped Sakura at his informal address. Though, if Arashi could get away with calling the Sandaime Sarutobi-ji…

“Yes, paperwork. Your father’s managed to escape his share for long enough, he may as well do double now. Though he still manages to disappear just when I need him around,” he added, voice utterly exasperated. Naruto couldn’t help but snicker, jiji’s tone was so much like Bolt’s when Arashi did something he didn’t approve of.

“We’ll be back soon, Sandaime-sama. Keep aside a few more for us, the gardening assignments always get over too soon with Naruto there,” Kakashi said blandly, making Naruto loudly protest. That was unfair! Just because he could use the Kage buushin…

He pointedly ignored the way Sasuke watched him closely, all the way from the Hokage’s Tower till the suburbs, and even when they had started their mission. He didn’t want to talk or think about Arashi, especially not when jiji was giving him paperwork. And hinting that Arashi would have been required to do it even before he had ‘left’ on whatever it was that had kept him away from Konoha for all of Naruto’s childhood.

…it was bad enough that Arashi and Bolt had tumbled into his life without any warning at all, filling his house and time with noise and laughter – on Bolt’s part, anyway. Couldn’t Arashi have just… stayed quiet, and out of the way? What part of him constantly hanging out beside the Hokage, doing paperwork of all things, was keeping a low profile? They may as well have declared that they were time travellers, instead of doing all this complicated shit!

“…Naruto,” Sakura said quietly, when they were walking back towards the village.

For the first time in his life, Naruto actually ignored her. Thankfully, she didn’t say anything else. Nor did Sasuke, as silent as always. And Kakashi just kept strolling behind them, giggling into his book.
It was the tiny things that made Naruto shift uncomfortably in place, caught between wanting to ask more and really not wanting to know. Who the hell was Arashi to call the people on the other side his people? He wanted to ask, was nearly desperate to find out if he’d made Hokage, but at the same time, Naruto really didn’t want to ask. Because even if Arashi was an older version of him, or a possible version of him, it didn’t mean that everything Arashi had gone through would also be something he went through. Arashi had been very clear about that. Some things could be similar, but they weren’t from the same timeline. So it would just hurt worse, to know if some version of him had managed to become Hokage, when there were times when he had absolutely no idea if he would be able to get there. He wanted to, and he would keep walking forward until he got there, but how would it help to have an alternate, older version of him telling him that he made it when Naruto was still struggling? There were times that Arashi-san seemed like everything he wasn’t, and everything he wanted to be, but also, everything he never wanted to be. He seemed like such a perfect adult, so calm and patient, except when he laughed at something Bolt or Naruto did. So serious, when he was talking with jiji, or the one time Naruto actually caught Kakashi talking to him.

How could he have ever grown up into someone like this?

Chapter End Notes

....so does Monday still count as the weekend? Well, have at it. Thanks for all your lovely kudos! And consider dropping a comment on your way out, so I know if you like how things are going so far.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which Sasuke's family issues rear their ugly head.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They’re in the middle of training later in the week when Bolt suddenly decides to invade the training ground. Right in the middle of the spar between him and Sasuke, which might not have been as bad any other day, but—no, wait. It was always bad to jump into a spar between the two of them because the bastard could not find it in himself to stop flinging fireballs about even when it was supposed to be a chakra-less fight.

Naruto somehow manages to create a kagebuushin, switches it with a rock near Bolt, and dives one way while his clone grabs Bolt and dives the other way. The fireball slams into one of the many abused trees ringing their training ground. Naruto was just relieved that there weren’t any more flying towards them. Apparently seeing a tiny kid invade a spar was enough to stump even Sasuke.

“Naruto-nii!” cheered said kid, not even having the grace to look apologetic, instead flailing about cheerfully in the clone’s arms. Naruto, for his part, groaned loudly and slapped a hand over his face.

“Bolt, what’d I say about you not following me to training. What if you’d gotten hurt?!” he snapped.

The surprised sound that got from Sakura only made him more irate. Yeah, he wasn’t acting much like himself, but what if he hadn’t made that clone in time? What if he hadn’t managed to get Bolt out of the way? What if-

A large hand dropped heavily onto the crown of his head, cutting into his panic-stricken thoughts. For a moment, he actually thought that it was Arashi, pulling off one of his here-there-everywhere moves, but no, that was only Kakashi-sensei.

“He could have worded it better, but Naruto’s right, Bolt-kun. It’s a very bad idea to interrupt a spar the way you just did,” Kakashi said, and even with his eyes covered, Naruto could tell he had one of those silly curved eye smiles on his face. But there was an undertone of seriousness in his voice, which Naruto probably wouldn’t have noticed before Arashi appeared in his living room. Because Naruto-the-second had that same creepy way of speaking when they were in public, smiling and laughing but somehow perfectly serious at the same time. It made Naruto want to shudder because, ugh, of all the weird things to take from your sensei. He’d bet anything that the asshole didn’t even notice the similarity, because he’d seen Bolt cringing every once in a while too. They’d had a good laugh about it when they’d both happened to cringe at the same time, once.

Bolt was an awesome kid. Honestly, there were times Naruto found himself actually thinking of the brat as a younger brother, because he would’ve loved to have a brother or sister to share crazy cool stuff with like this, when he was growing up. He just wished the brat didn’t come as a bonus with Naruto-the-Sec – Arashi.

“Oh, come on, Kakashi-jiji. I was getting bored, Inojin’s busy at home with his gra-Yamanaka-san
and tou-chan’s busy at home with the team that’s helping him set up our place. He told me to get out for a while. I didn’t know what to do, so I came here.”

…didn’t know what to do wasn’t even the start of it. Naruto had watched Bolt getting wound up all through the week, at first manic and excitable, but then, as the days wound on and Arashi had gotten involved with getting the new apartment furnished and set up for them, and with work for jiji, he started to get quieter and quieter. He’d seemed irritable and sad at once, the few times Naruto had actually stumbled across him when the mood infecting him had been clearly visible on his face, but he’d been quick to tuck it away whenever he’d noticed either Naruto or Arashi watching him. For once, Naruto couldn’t grumble that Arashi was as utterly oblivious to his son as he usually was. Even when busy with work and just settling into a new place, Naruto-the-second had clearly known why his son had been withdrawing into himself, at least while at home. For Naruto’s part, it had been all he could do to head Bolt off at the pass whenever the brat threatened to follow him to his team meetings.

Looks like he’d just lost patience and decided to just sneak out after Naruto once Arashi had set him loose on the town.

“Yeah? Well, what’re you going to do here-tebayyo, there’s nothing to do! We’re just sparring and doing other team stuff, and Kakashi-sensei’s gonna take us for a mission afterwards!”

“Well, maybe I’ll just come along with you-tebasu! It’s not like I have anything better to do! You can’t stop me!”

“Now, now. Don’t fight, children,” Kakashi said mildly, getting between them in one, easy step. Naruto scowled up at him angrily, trying to dislodge the hand that was still balanced on the top of his head. Bolt thankfully knew better than to get anywhere near Kakashi’s hands, instead retreating to hide behind Sakura.

“Sakura’s better than all of you! So there! You don’t have to keep me company, she will!”

And with that, the little brat dragged Sakura away. Sakura looked horribly confused and embarrassed, not really sure why she of all people was being dragged away for special training with a kid, but from the yells that drifted back towards them, Bolt wanted help with chakra control. Obviously Sakura was the best help for the job.

Naruto had to stop himself from slapping himself silly again. Because it’s either that, or he screams. At least Kakashi-sensei already knew about the time travellers, but Sasuke didn’t. He’s in the process of coming up with some kind of excuse (maybe he could say that he’d told Bolt how Sakura had been the first to scale up the side of a tree, back when they were in Wave?) when he noticed the strange look on Sasuke’s face. Almost like he’d bit into a lemon when he’d been expecting something sweeter.

“Well, that was fun! Get back to work, you two. And Sasuke, no fireballs this time. No clones for you either, Naruto. Taijutsu only, no chakra, and try to stick to that for once.”

Naruto felt his grin wither away into a scowl. Well, at least the bastard got scolded too.

It’s only after the spar, when he’s laying spread-eagled on the grass and Sasuke’s sitting panting for breath in the shade of a tree, that Naruto belatedly realises that he did recognise the emotion he’d glimpsed on Sasuke’s face. And that Sasuke had looked roughly the same the day he’d heard that Naruto’s supposedly absentee relatives were actually an absentee ‘father’ and ‘brother’.
He still couldn’t really tell what the emotion was supposed to be, but he’d bet anything that it was something more complicated than simple jealousy. It wasn’t like Naruto couldn’t understand the harder emotions, jealousy and hatred being only a few among them that he’d become very well acquainted with when he’d been smaller. But he’d let them go, over time. Especially when he’d started to get along better with his classmates. Jealousy and hatred could be so tiring. And rage and bitterness were just as bad. The last time he’d really felt a strong surge of jealousy and bitterness had been back when he’d thought he’d failed the third test, and when he’d been seeing the other kids going home with their parents, as happy as can be, while he’d been left behind. He’d felt rage and hatred more than once since, the last time being back in Wave and he didn’t want to think about that, so – yeah. It wasn’t like he didn’t understand them. But the complicated emotions linked to family? Sasuke had the market cornered on those.

Almost as though he was in tune with Naruto’s thoughts – and wouldn’t that be fucking weird – Sasuke suddenly muttered something in a low voice. Naruto snorted, and lifted his head, first to glance about and see if any of the others were around, then to stare straight at the Uchiha sitting with his head hanging between his knees in the shade. Bastard. It wasn’t like the spar had been that bad. Naruto wasn’t as short of breath as Sasuke was. Then again, the more they’d sparred since becoming teammates, the more Naruto had started to realise that he just didn’t tire as much as the others did. Kakashi still had him beat, sheer experience trumping genetics and bijuu, according to the jounin, but Sasuke and Sakura were still a whole lot worse than him.

“Can’t hear you, teme, you’re gonna have to speak up.” He called out. There was a slight wheeze in his voice, making him scowl to himself. Fuck his stamina anyway, he needed to increase it if he was still short of breath. He was already loads better than he used to be, back in the Academy, but he wanted to be better. Stronger.

He hadn’t seen Arashi panting for breath anytime. Not even after the supposed spar that took place between him and Kakashi, which he’d been ordered to sit out along with Bolt and Inojin. Since, apparently, they would distract the two nin. Inojin’s sulking face had been about the only thing good about that situation, since seeing his unnaturally pretty face twisted up in a strange mix of a pout and scowl had had both Bolt and him in splits.

Sasuke looked up with a grumpy look on his face, clearly unwilling to repeat himself. But, surprisingly enough, the bastard did speak up.

“How are things at… home? Have you finished moving in with Uzumaki-san and Bolt?”

Naruto stared at him for a few seconds, then let his head drop back to the ground with an audible thump. The stinging ache that shot straight up towards his eyes was enough to make him wince. There went the chances of this being some disturbingly real day dream or illusion.

“You don’t have to call him that, Arashi’s good enough. The asshole won’t give a shit about what you call him, anyway. Though,” Naruto heaved himself up onto his elbows, brows lowered in thought “Bolt just might get irritated if you called his dad names.”

No reply. When Naruto looked up again, it was to see Sasuke watching him carefully, that odd look back on his face.

“What?” Naruto asked, impatient. He didn’t want to be having this conversation where Kakashi could hear it. He had the sinking feeling that his sensei got along a lot better with Arashi than he was willing to admit in front of Naruto.

“…don’t you mean our dad?” Sasuke asked back, lips pursed.
Naruto went still, then let himself fall back to the ground. Well, fuck.

“Ahaha- yeah, that’s exactly what I meant-tebayyo! It’s still a bit new. Can’t blame me, can you?” he shot back, laughing awkwardly. Shit, shit, shit. This is why he hadn’t wanted such a messed up cover story. How the hell was he supposed to pull off claiming Arashi as his dad when he couldn’t even lie to his fucking teammates?

Sasuke was uncomfortably silent at that declaration. When Naruto glanced nervously at him from the corner of his eyes, it was to see Sasuke glaring off to the side. If his eyes could shoot chakra the way some of those nin in manga did, the poor tree would have been dying in a merry blaze already.

“No, I really can’t,” he agreed, voice dark. It made Naruto seize up a bit, but he couldn’t even do anything to correct the bastard – who, come to think of it, wasn’t all that much of a bastard, if he could react like this just because he thought Naruto wasn’t getting along with his absentee dad. Then again, this was a question of family, and Sasuke could get really weird about family sometimes. And that was all that could be said on the subject, because Kakashi, Sakura and Bolt all reappeared in an unexpectedly loud burst of sound. Sasuke continued to ignore his surroundings, still glaring angrily, but Naruto made himself sit up with a grin, especially once he heard the way Bolt was laughing, hand still clutching onto Sakura’s. It was strangely relieving in some way, that Bolt got along so well with her. He wasn’t exactly treating her like his mom, however nice that reaction might have been, but at least he could be sure that Naruto-the-seco- Arashi had managed to maintain a good relationship with his teammates even after he grew older.

Afterwards, when he offered to take Bolt back and meet up with them back at the Hokage’s office, he could feel that sullen look of Sasuke’s following him out of the training ground long after they’d gotten past the line of sight from the grounds.

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“Y’know,” said Bolt much later in the day, when they were sitting at Ichiraku for a pre-dinner snack (it was more than a little awesome to be living in a household where there was someone else bringing in extra cash and actually giving him money to spend), “You and Sasuke are just the same.”

Naruto, in the process of swallowing, hacked and sputtered uncontrollably. Someone really had to warn Bolt to carry a warning label: Don’t listen to or look at me while eating, will choke.

“What, exactly, do you mean by that?” he demanded, once he’d gotten his airways clean.

Bolt blinked up at him, almost innocently. Except, in this case, it was possible that he really was innocent.

“Well, Sakura-ba isn’t really the same here. I mean, I can see the similarities, but she’s so different at the same time. Sasuke-ji’s weird too. He doesn’t smile as much. But, when the two of you talk together, you’re exactly the same. Even when you spar – Sasuke-ji totally keeps cheating back home. He says it keeps dad on his toes.”

Naruto’s first reaction was to laugh rather hysterically at the ‘ba’ and ‘ji’ that Bolt had added to Sakura and Sasuke’s names. Thank fuck no one else was at the booth except for them, though Teuchi’s look of studied disinterest said that he was laughing damn hard inside. But he forced himself to look past that first reaction. It was… strange, to have it confirmed that they’d changed over time. They had to have changed, after all. Naruto would rather have died that have grown up to be Arashi, or well, maybe he’d be ok if he stayed the same but grew up to be as powerful as Arashi apparently was. But the fact was that there was very little that Naruto could really see as similar
between them. Arashi was so much quieter and serious, and the complicated look he got on his face sometimes while looking at Bolt or even Naruto was something that Naruto thought he’d understand any time soon. It was… relieving to hear that Sakura-chan and the bastard had changed just as much.

Even if Sasuke had remained a cheating bastard in the future. (Ha! He knew it! Some things never changed!)

“If you say so, Bolt. Finish eating, Arashi-san must be wondering where you got to.”

“’Kay!” Bolt hummed cheerfully, and got back to shoveling down ramen. Naruto shook his head sadly. Such a waste of potential, the kid wasn’t even tasting any of what he was gulping down. He waved down Teuchi for another bowl, then turned his attention back to finishing what was in front of him.

Mmm. Perfect.

Chapter End Notes

...Well, clearly me keeping any kind of schedule on this one isn't likely. Especially not during finals. Anyone else dying under the burden of ridiculous amounts of work to turn in? Either way, with hope this offers some respite.

I may even be able to put up another chapter in a week, let's see if I can drag myself away from the books I'm supposed to be studying right now. Leave a comment if you have any thoughts on where things are headed, even a word or so is awesome.

Also, if this chapter didn't make it even more obvious, this story's a wee bit AU as far as Boruto: Naruto the Movie is concerned. For more reasons than me outright ignoring it. Yes, you'll find out why things branched off. Eventually.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which Naruto realises that Sasuke's issues... might need to be handled a bit more delicately. Maybe slamming him into trees and walls and any other hard surfaces till he starts making sense again might work.

(Also the one in which Kakashi is called names and is teased mercilessly by Bolt, who can be a little shit when he wants to be.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Okay. Enough was enough. He was going to let the bastard in on the secret or he was going to die trying to defend his decision in front of Jiji and Arashi.

It had started out mild enough, honestly. Sasuke hadn’t even been getting on his nerves – the bastard had been almost disturbingly supportive in the last two weeks. For some reason, Kakashi had been leaving the team to train on their own more and more often lately. It would have pissed all of them off if Sakura hadn’t brought back tales of the other teams going through uncomfortably similar situations. There was something strange going on, Naruto was certain of it, and he was just as certain that Arashi knew what was going on – Naruto-the-Second had been looking increasingly pensive for over a week now, and Naruto was sure that it had started around the time Kakashi had first disappeared in the midst of training, claiming that he’d received an emergency summons.

But, anyway. All of that was simply excess info. The point was, Sasuke’s supportiveness had been getting more and more obvious, especially whenever Bolt decided to crash their training sessions. Today’s gate crashing had been particularly momentous, actually. Bolt had sprung into the training ground with gleeful hugs and onigiri of various flavours for all of them, a mindbending bundle of joy that had all of them breaking for lunch. Because, honestly, Naruto hadn’t been able to find it in himself to scold the kid when he'd actually kept away till noon. And had picked up lunch for all of them too.

And, anyway, the look on Sasuke’s face had been a sight to see when Bolt had declared that of course he’d picked up the ones with sun dried tomatoes, of all things, for him. Where the brat had managed to find such a weird flavour, Naruto had no idea. But even Kakashi hadn’t been able to avoid caving in once the teme had started eying the onigiri as though he was going to savage anyone who got between them and his mouth.

Thankfully he hadn’t gotten involved with their sparring, once lunch was done, but he had been the one to insist that they should all try walking on water. Because his tou-chan had told him that, after learning to climb trees the hard way, all good ninja tried to walk on water next. About the only thing that had gotten him and Sasuke to agree was that Sakura had already mastered it sometime during the many tutoring sessions that Bolt claimed from her.

Sasuke tended to sink till waist height and stop, and Naruto still fell straight through, but they were keeping at it. Bolt had somehow coaxed Sakura into leading him through the Academy katas while on the water. The little brat was devious - he kept shooting Naruto little smug looks that said
everything they were doing was because Arashi-san was telling Bolt to bait them until they did it. The brat’s feet were still below the water level, but that was a whole lot better than what Sasuke and Naruto were capable of.

The trouble started when Sasuke first noticed the little grins Bolt kept shooting at Naruto. He went uncomfortably quiet, and ignored every effort Naruto made to speak to him after that. Later, when Sakura and Bolt had retired to the shore to rest, Sasuke had suddenly spoken up, but only to ask if Arashi had been the one to train Bolt before.

Naruto didn’t know what to say to that. So he’d said yes, it was likely that was the case. Though he had the sinking feeling that the Academy had just taught the students more when Bolt had been studying. He couldn’t have been older than nine, but he’d still had that headband when he and Arashi had crashed into their time line.

Sasuke had, predictably, grunted at that and walked away, heading back to the lake so that he could keep practicing. Naruto was tempted to go after him, but fuck, he was tired enough that he actually did want a longer break. So he stayed where he was, collapsed in a puddle right by the water, watching blearily as the teme trudged back into the water. And cackled where he lay when Sasuke dropped through the water like a rock when he tried to stay on top.

“Ne, ne, Naruto-nii, could we go to Ichiraku’s after you’re done for the day?” Bolt burst out abruptly, when Kakashi clapped his hands and waved Bolt and Sakura away from the shore. And got a hand on his and Sasuke’s collars to drag them kicking and grumbling from the water. It wasn’t like they couldn’t keep at it. Well, Naruto still had chakra to spare, even if Sasuke-bastard didn’t!

It was only after he’d managed to twist away from Kakashi’s vice-like grip that he had enough presence of mind to reply.

“Well, I guess. We go there every day anyway. Did Arashi-san say he wouldn’t be around for dinner tonight?”

The kid didn’t reply immediately, and Naruto looked about suspiciously. That much silence didn’t bode well, he’d noticed that Bolt tended to go absolutely silent only when he was too uncomfortable about saying something. Which could be all the fucking time about some things, especially when they were talking about something that had happened in the future or if it was about something Arashi had expressly warned Bolt to not talk about. But. Aargh, ok, the kid was wiggling about in place where he was standing beside Sakura, and from the look on his face, it was less an issue about things that were apparently taboo to talk about and more plain discomfort.

“Oh. Uh, I. Think he said something about being outside Konoha for the next few days today morning.” Bolt said haltingly. Naruto blinked once, twice, wriggled a finger in his ear to make sure that it hadn’t gotten clogged when he’d gotten submerged earlier. Then looked back at Bolt, eyebrows raised, waiting for him to speak up again.

He couldn’t help but notice, if only distantly, that Sasuke had gone strangely still beside him, where he’d still been trying to struggle away from Kakashi’s clingy hands.

Bolt gave him an awkward smile, the look on his face all but screaming that, yes, he was being serious, and no, the look on Naruto’s face wasn’t something unfamiliar. Naruto groaned, scrubbing his hands through his hair and scowling at nothing in particular.

“Shit – did he say anything about when he’d be back? Do we have enough groceries at home?” he asked, irate. Arashi had been taking care of shopping for food since he’d gotten back, and Naruto hadn’t really needed to think about the basic things for a while now – which made him feel more
than a little uncomfortable, come to think of it. Of course the asshole was going to check out without notice once Naruto had gotten used to the change of pace. Sakura made a soft sound, then, and it distracted him enough to look up at her. She was wide eyed, staring at him as though she’d never seen him before.

“Yeah, dad said there should be enough food to last us a week. He did leave behind cash. But. Uh.”

“He also left strict warnings that neither of you are to spend all of it on ramen, Naruto. It’s supposed to be there for an emergency.” Kakashi drawled from behind them all, making Naruto yelp in surprise.

All of them, Sasuke fucking included, stared up at Kakashi in surprise.

“Wait, you knew Arashi’d be heading out today?” Naruto demanded incredulously. What the fuck. He’d been able to tell that his jounin sensei got along alarmingly well with Arashi at times, though he still couldn’t really tell what made that relationship tick, but he hadn’t realized that they got along well enough that Naruto-the-Second left fucking instructions about what he and Bolt were to do when their bloody guardian was away. Well, he was Bolt’s guardian, anyway. Naruto was a full-fledged, independent shinobi. And about the only reason Bolt wasn’t completely independent himself was because Sarutobi-jiji hadn’t been willing to reinstate Bolt as a genin. Not when he was still so young and so obviously not a recent graduate of the Academy.

Kakashi treated them all to one of his classic curved eye smiles, and received near simultaneous snarls as a response. From all of them.

“I knew he would be leaving some time soon, yes. There hadn’t been any confirmation about when exactly he’d be leaving, or even if he would be leaving at all. I assume Hokage-sama send out an urgent message in the morning after Naruto had already left?”

Bolt, in the process of ramming his face into his own palm, paused to look back up at Kakashi.

“Yeah, that’s right. Oyaji left in a rush, one moment we were eating breakfast together and the next, poof, gone, rushing to grab one of his packs and yelling that I should tell Naruto-nii that he’d be gone.” He explained. Naruto huffed. At least the asshole had been nice enough to fucking remember him, even if it’d been an afterthought.

“You should head home, Bolt. We have to go collect a mission together,” Kakashi said, much later, once they’d returned to their training ground. Which was another weird thing, how exactly did Bolt always manage to find them even when Kakashi kept bouncing them around to different training fields?

Bolt all but pouted up at Kakashi, making Sakura muffle a surprised giggle beside him. She’d quickly gotten over whatever it was that had surprised her, thankfully. It had been weird, walking back to the training field, Bolt bouncing along beside him and Sakura staring holes through the both of them. Especially when Sasuke was a ball of studied disinterest and nonchalance, strolling along behind all of them. Someone needed to hammer the actual meaning of those words into the teme.

“But I don’t want to. Can’t I just stay with Naruto-nii and Sasuke-j – ah, with Sasuke and Haruno-san?”

Sakura blinked at the relatively formal state of address, while Naruto had a private break down over the careless suffix Bolt had nearly thrown in attached to Sasuke’s name. Sasuke, for his part, merely looked confused and irritated while Kakashi, the bastard, had a glint of unholy amusement in his one visible eye.
“Sorry, Bolt-kun, but they’ll need to concentrate on their mission. We can’t have any clients thinking we let friends and family tag along on missions, no matter how pint sized they may be.” Kakashi added the last bit with a cheesy grin that was clear even through the mask, making Bolt squawk in dismay.

“I’m not pint sized-ttebasa! And if they need to go do a mission, that’s ok. I can just stay with you, Kakashi-jiji!”

Yet another moment of still silence, and then, Naruto was the first to crack, followed soon after by Sakura, both of them clutching at each other while sinking to the ground, wheezing with laughter. When Naruto heaved for breathe, looking up with his eyes watering, it was to the sight of Sasuke hunched over, facing away from all of them, one arm wrapped around his stomach and the hand of the other arm clamped over his mouth, trying to muffle the snickers that were escaping him. The sight set Naruto off again, especially when Sakura noticed Sasuke right after him and all but whimpered, too breathless to actually laugh.

Kakashi stared down at Bolt with a fixed expression on his face.

“Ah. It’s ok, you can call me Kakashi, Bolt. Or even Kakashi-sensei, like your brother does.” He said in what would have sounded like a cheerful tone if he hadn’t been simultaneously looming over Bolt like a possessed scarecrow.

Bolt, the little shit, stared back at him with his teeth bared in a wicked grin.

“But haven’t I always called you that, Kakashi-jiji? It’s ok, there must be other old people about who don’t remember things clearly. You aren’t the only one.”

Naruto found himself whimpering into Sakura’s shoulder, not wanting to watch any more. Sasuke collapsed beside them, sounding like he was dying. Naruto blindly reached out to pat him comfortingly on the head, listening as Sakura somehow found the energy to cackle. Fuck. At least this hadn’t happened when he was the only one to watch the wreck in the making.

“Now that’s just unfair. I’m not that old, Bolt-kun. Shouldn’t you know that?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s just that you’re so much older than me. You’re even older than tou-chan!”

Somewhere in the depths of helpless mirth, Naruto managed to recognize that, well, funny as the conversation was, Sasuke and Sakura really weren’t supposed to be hearing shit like that.

“Ah! Kakashi-sensei, maybe we should just take him along, right? We can say he’s an academy student who’s tagging along so he learns the real meaning of teamwork or something. All hail the Will of Fire-tebayyo!” Naruto gasped out, rather hysterically if he did say so himself. Kakashi glanced back at him, eye sharp, and gave a big cheesy smile again.

“That’s a great idea, Naruto-kun! Let’s all go! Maybe I can even prove to Bolt-kun that he isn’t that much younger than me.”

There was a threat, wrapped up somewhere in that line. Naruto was too fucking relieved to notice it. Bolt, for his part, looked relieved that he hadn’t managed to spill too much before Naruto butted in to do damage control.

“Can we go home now?” Sakura asked weakly. Sasuke surprisingly worked up the will to pat her on the back, still looking dazed with laughter. Maybe what was more surprising was that Sakura seemed too exhausted after laughing as much as they had to really notice that it was her precious Sasuke-kun patting her on the back.
“Call me Sakura, ok, Bolt-kun? It’s so weird to spoken to that formally when you’re already calling Naruto and Sasuke by their names.” Sakura was saying, trying futilely to wipe away the broth that Bolt had dripping everywhere. Bolt laughed nervously and submitted himself to the patting, which made Naruto wonder just what about Sakura was frightening enough that Bolt actually stuck to speaking to her politely and letting her do whatever she wanted.

Sasuke had his head buried in his arms on Naruto’s other side, ignoring the cup of tea that Ayame-chan had been kind enough to set out for him, free of charge. It might have had Naruto angry if he hadn’t already been exhausted enough to understand, viscerally, why the bastard had poured himself into the counter the moment he’d set his ass on the stool.

“…Hey.”

Naruto blinked blearily into his noodles, wondering why his tonkatsu cutlet was suddenly speaking to him.

“Dobe.”

Oh. Ok. Good to know he wasn’t eating sentient tonkatsu cutlets now. At least his ramen was staying uncomplicated.

“What?” he muttered back. If, for some reason, Sasuke wanted to keep things quiet, then what the fuck. Ok. Quiet was what he got. As long as he didn’t say something irritating enough that Naruto exploded at him.

“Are the two of you going to be ok on your own?”

Naruto blinked slowly at the top of Sasuke’s head. The teme hadn’t even had the good grace to look up and talk. Then again, if he was going to say embarrassing shit like this… Well. Naruto sure as fuck wouldn’t have been able to keep his face straight through that.

“Yeah, sure. I’ve lived alone my whole life Sasuke, we’ll be fine.”

“…the brat hasn’t.”

Aw. Wasn’t that cute. Sasuke actually had a nick name for the br-ack.

Shaking his head, and trying futilely to convince himself that he and Sasuke hadn’t somehow both given Bolt the same nick name in their heads, he scratched the back of his head uncomfortably and sighed.

“It should be fine, teme. I’ll keep an eye on him.”

“Is Arashi a good father?”

…what the fuck?

Naruto tried not to choke, was pretty sure he failed on that count, but Sasuke had already sat up, reaching for his tea, acting as though he hadn’t said anything weird. If it weren’t for the spots of red high on his cheeks, clear signs of how embarrassed he was, Naruto might have managed to convince himself that he had been hearing things.

God-fucking-damnit. He really would have to fight with Arashi-san and jiji about this. He couldn’t
let Sasuke keep thinking Arashi was actually his dad. He wasn’t happy about having the asshole around, but at least it wasn’t twisting him up inside. Having a father and brother coming home after twelve years of absence somehow seemed to be fucking with Sasuke’s head more than it was disturbing Naruto, but that could be because Naruto knew that they weren’t actually his dad and brother.

Though everything they represented did disturb him. Like the fact that Naruto-the-Second seemed so sure of himself that it hurt to watch. Naruto couldn’t see himself anywhere in the man. It was probably a good thing that Arashi had grown up to be so much better in every fucking way, but fuck, Naruto would have felt better if he were at least recognizable in some way. And he would’ve felt better if Arashi were a better dad.

Naruto had never thought of himself with kids, to be honest. He had enough to worry about just thinking of his day to day existence, and there was the eventual aim of becoming Hokage someday. He had never really thought in terms of anything more than that, but Bolt and the sister that Naruto had only gotten a bare glimpse of were proof that said he did think of more than that at some point in the future.

The very thought of changing to that extent was terrifying.

“Well, we should be getting home. Is everyone finished?”

“Yes! Kakashi-jiji’s treat, right?” Bolt was asking cheerfully, making Sakura giggle helplessly yet again. The brat hadn’t let off the entire time they’d been on their mission, repainting someone’s house. They’d had to rescue Sakura when she somehow tumbled off the roof, too busy laughing to stay on top. Well, Naruto had been holding onto one of her arms, busy trying not to follow her down and laughing rather helplessly himself. Sasuke had walked up the side of the house with a scowl to help Naruto get her back on the roof, then had settled down to twitch for a minute or so, his concession to remaining stoic even when he wanted to laugh about as helplessly as them.

Bolt had just kept cracking more jokes at their sensei’s expense. Kakashi had thankfully adjusted an hour or so into the mission, which allowed him to just keep smiling even while he was handing over the cash for their meal.

“We should go now,” he found himself saying, once they had stepped past the curtains of the stall. Bolt immediately latched onto his side with a grin, while Sakura rolled her eyes and waved him off with a smile. Not automatically latching onto Sasuke’s side like a leech. He stared after her, wide eyed, then turned his gaze on Sasuke. Sasuke didn’t look too disappointed, he didn’t look like anything, actually.

“Let me know if you need anything,” he said suddenly. Awkwardly. And then he was gone without a trace.

Naruto stared at the spot when he’d been standing through shuttered eyes, then, turned the narrow eyed look on Kakashi. Who just laughed at him. Lanky asshole.

“Sleep well, Bolt-kun. Naruto-kun. I’ll see you both tomorrow.”

And that was that.

“Let’s go, Naruto-nii. I wanted to show you a scroll Inojin got out to me yesterday.”

Naruto watched him, took in that happy, open expression on his face, so different from the look he’d had on his face when he’d first mentioned that Arashi had left to parts unknown, with no clear
mention of when he’d be able to return. Naruto somehow found it in himself to smile back.

“Ok, let’s go.”

“What’m I supposed to do without anyone here, anyway? Shika isn’t here, Mitsuki isn’t here. And Inojin’s been busy with his grandad. Sarada isn’t around either, she’d at least be more fun than Chou-chou is.”

“You could go spend some time with Konohamaru, y’know,” said Arashi, eyes still focused on the pot of boiling water in front of him, ready to take it off the stove the moment the eggs were cooked. Naruto snorted into his jacket sleeves, because all that focus hadn’t let Arashi see the way Bolt’s face had twisted up at his father’s suggestion.

“Ugh, dad, why would I want to spend time with Konohamaru-sensei when he was a kid?” he demanded, and Naruto found himself snorting into his jacket sleeves for a very different reason all of a sudden.

“Whoa, wait, Konohamaru became a teacher?!” he demanded incredulously, eyes jerking from Bolt to Arashi and back. Arashi laughed softly to himself, switching off the stove and transferring the pot to the island countertop at which Bolt and Naruto were seated.

“Yeah, he’s BORING. Can’t I come with you to see Kakashi-jiji, Naruto-nii?”

Still reeling under the aftereffects of a whine that sounded way too much like what he’d once said to himself or to jiji whenever Iruka had been brought up, at least before Naruto had realised just how awesome Iruka actually was, he stuttered, somehow looking at Arashi for help. Arashi was humming placidly, not looking at either of them, but Naruto really didn’t need any extra input from the older man to know just how bad an idea it would be for Bolt to follow him to team practice.

“Ahaha-ah- maybe some other time, Bolt. Ah! Actually, look at the time, ahahaha, I should go- tebayyo! I’m late!”

“I dunno. This is Kakashi-jiji we’re talking about, Naruto-nii. Wouldn’t your late be early by his standards?”

“Just eat your breakfast, you two, you can talk about other stuff later. Here’s an egg each to start-”

Naruto hurriedly offered up one of the weird little cups that Arashi had picked up to hold their soft boiled eggs. He couldn’t really get over how many new things the older man had picked up, had actually asked at one point, because there was no way he’d grown up to use so many of these tiny, otherwise useless things in his house. However many decades separated him and Naruto-the-second, he couldn’t have grown up to be someone who wasted his cash on useless things, right? But he’d held back his comments when he’d seen the fixed look on Arashi’s face, the way he seemed to be arranging the things in the kitchen on reflex rather than actual interest.

Man, he really didn’t want to ask anything about Bolt’s mom. He was curious, yeah, but it was the little things like this that made something inside him scream a big fat no.

Chapter End Notes
Here's an update as a gift for the holidays, guys. Have some team feels and angsty fluff. Merry Christmas in advance! And a Happy New Year, if I don't get a chance to post anything before the 31st.

Consider leaving a comment on your way out, so I know if you like things so far - even a word or so is awesome. Thank you for all the comments and kudos you've left so far - they make me all gleeful and happy inside.

(Warning - not very well edited. I'll come back and clear things up later, if necessary.)
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which someone... completely unexpected pops in. And Naruto goes through enough highs and lows that he wants to start breaking things, just to see if it'll make him, or the people he cares about, feel better.

(It won't.)

Chapter Notes

Two tracks for atmosphere, this time:
Yuki Kajiura – Morning Moon
Yuki Kajiura - Dewdrops

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being woken up by a pair of small bodies dive-bombing him in bed was not Naruto’s idea of a good time.

Screeching and protecting his head reflexively, he peered up at the two boys sitting on top of him. Bolt was already in the process of trying to tug him out of his comfortable cocoon, while Inojin was smiling at him, his usually expressionless face looking surprisingly excited.

“What?” he croaked. He was still sleepy, damn it. A man needed his beauty sleep!

“Come on, come on! We need to go to Shika’s place!” Bolt chirped, before scowling.

“How do you and dad do this to yourselves, Naruto-nii? Your sheets and blankets get so tangled up all the time.”

“Well…” Naruto mumbled, before turning around and burrowing back into his pillows. Gotta sleep. And his new pillows were so much comfier than the old ones.

“Why’re you questioning the rules of the universe, Bolt-kun,” Inojin said blandly, but Naruto could still hear the smile in his voice.

“So Uzumaki Naruto’s sheets getting horribly tangled up whenever he sleeps is supposed to be one of the rules of the universe now?” Bolt was asking, and Naruto growled, trying to pull away from the cold hands reaching into his sheets.

“I dunno. That’s what dad always said, anyway. Sakura-san and Hyuuga-sama always looked so amused whenever he said it, though.”

“Oh yeah, I think Sasuke-shishou said something about it once, when he’d been over at our place. Uh, I don’t know what they were talking about, Hina-chan and I had been listening in. But he’d been saying something about the rules of the universe and oyaji had been laughing his ass off.”
Wait, what? Shishou?!

“Shishou?” he asked sleepily, hoping that he’d been hearing things. Why the fuck was Bolt calling the teme his shishou, now?

“Aaah! Naruto-nii, get up already! Shikaku-jiji sent across a messenger to get us to come over!”

“Shikaku-jii did? Okay, okay, get off me already, Bolt-” Naruto finally, grumpily, struggled his way out of the sheets, no thanks to Bolt or Inojin, who sat snickering to themselves while Naruto dragged himself out of bed.

“Did the messenger say why he wanted us to come over? Do we have time to eat?” he asked, hazily trying to remember if there was anything to eat at home. Arashi had been away for at least a week, but he hadn’t really needed to pick anything up. Naruto-the-Second had been nice enough to stuff the fridge at home before he’d disappeared.

“Nara-sama said he would feed us,” Inojin offered. Naruto short him a suspicious look. Something about the innocent look on the pale faced boy’s face made him uneasy. He didn’t know Inojin too well, Bolt didn’t usually bring him home to their apartment, but the few times he’d met him Naruto got the feeling that he wasn’t nearly as sweet natured as his smiles implied.

“Nara-sama means Shikaku-ji, right?” he asked warily. Inojin’s shuttered eyes and wide smile were predictable, but what put Naruto off was the sunny grin Bolt shot at him.

“Get ready, get ready, let’s go already!”

“Okay, okay.”

Yeesh. He was twelve, even Konohamaru didn’t make him feel this old. Then again, Konohamaru didn’t live under the same roof as him and wake him up when he least expected it.

…He wasn’t sure what to expect when they stepped into Shikaku’s house, but it wasn’t Shikamaru waiting for them, looking more awake that Naruto had ever seen him before. Except when he was in the process of running away from his mother’s lectures, of course – he tended to be wide awake then. If only not to get caught in something ‘troublesome’.

“Oi, Naruto, am I awake?” he asked, making Naruto stop to goggle at him. Bolt and Inojin actually giggled, hastily kicking off the shoes and dashing in. Well, Bolt hastily kicked off his shoes – Inojin neatly arranged their shoes and followed his more excitable friend in. Shikamaru let them pass with a dazed expression on his face.

“Yes, of course you’re awake-ttebayo! I don’t turn up in your dreams. Do I?” Naruto started off strong, but fumbled towards the end, staring at him, narrow-eyed. Shikamaru stared back at him for a few seconds before he snorted to himself, suddenly in control again.

“Of course I don’t. Dumbass.” He drawled, one corner of his mouth kicking up in a wry smile. Naruto grinned back, and looked from side to side.

“Inojin said that your dad said there’d be food? I’m starving!” he declared brightly, his stomach chiming in to support his words. Shikamaru laughed, actually laughed, reached out to catch him by the edge of a sleeve and dragged him along. Naruto stumbled after him, only barely managing to get his shoes off and praying that Yoshino-san wouldn’t notice them and yell later.
Shikamaru was acting weird, though. He’d gone back to his regular slouch and lazily shuttered eyes, but the fingers wound in the edge of Naruto’s sleeve said that there was something really strange going on. Naruto had no idea what it could be, but then again… There weren’t too many things that would have both Bolt and Inojin that happy. And leave Shikamaru of all people unnerved.

Getting an odd sinking feeling, he pulled Shikamaru to a stop right outside the kitchen.

“Uh… it was your dad that sent the messenger. Right?” Naruto asked quickly. Shikamaru’s brows shot up, and the boy gave him an uncomfortably sharp glance before looking away again.

“No.” he said shortly. Naruto cringed.

“Damn. I was afraid of that.” He muttered, looking down. Shikamaru’s fingers still hadn’t let go of his sleeve.

The Nara gave a low, hard laugh. And lazily uncurled his fingers from the stranglehold they’d had on Naruto’s sleeve.

“So you did know about this. Why am I not surprised.”

Naruto winced, and his hand shot out reflexively to catch Shikamaru by the wrist before he could pull away completely. Shikamaru looked back at him, eyes shuttered, and Naruto was suddenly reminded of being nine and standing awkwardly at a distance, watching Kiba, Choji and Shikamaru eating packed bentos together at a lunch table. They’d been in the school yard, under a tree, already having been together for most of the year before Naruto had been entered into a class with the rest of his year mates. He could still remember standing there, on the outside, until Shikamaru had looked up at him with the same shuttered eyes before calling him over with a lazy wave of his hand.

He’d nearly forgotten about that. They’d gotten older, and Yoshino-san’s orders to stay the hell away from the Nara household until they became less uncontrollable had nearly made him forget that the only reason he got along to any extent with his year mates was because Shikamaru had raised a hand in his direction. A lazy hand, and the Nara had declared actually hanging out was too ‘troublesome’ to deal with, especially when Choji wasn’t around, so it wasn’t like they were the best of friends. They didn’t even know each other all that well.

But Shikamaru had let him in.

Shikamaru’s gaze felt like a blade held against his throat, before he blunted it by lowering his lashes.

“Arashi-san,” he said blandly. It wasn’t a question. Naruto found himself laughing, and rather hysterically at that.

“Fuck, you don’t know the half of it,” he said, making Shikamaru’s eyebrows rise, but they were interrupted before he could say anymore when Yoshino-san suddenly appeared at the open doorway to the kitchen.

“And what, exactly, are the two of you doing standing right outside the kitchen like this?” she asked, voice rising towards the end. Naruto found himself diving behind Shikamaru near instinctively.

“Traitor,” Shikamaru hissed at him, raising hands with the faint hope that he could physically fend off his mother’s words.

“She’s your mom. And she’s scary!” Naruto hissed back, pasting a big, guileless smile on his face when Yoshino-san’s eyes turned to him. They softened rather unexpectedly, leaving Naruto feeling wrong-footed.
“It’s been a while since I’ve last seen you, Naruto-kun. Why don’t you come in? Shika-san said that none of you would have had breakfast when he sent the messenger out, so I made extra for everyone to eat.”

“Troublesome…” Shikamaru grumbled, making Naruto snicker in spite of everything.

“Thanks, Yoshino-san!” he called out cheerfully, shoving the grumbling Nara past her.

Naruto had thought he’d be mentally prepared for nearly anything when he stepped through the doorway, but the sight of the heavily wounded man leaning against a counter, one arm in a sling and the fingers of the other loosely curled around a cup of what smelt like tea still made him stop short.

He was tall. He had a goatee. And he had the same weird, pointy hair that Shikamaru and his dad had, pulled up into a tight, spiky tail. He was shirtless, except for the haori loosely shrugged over his shoulders, but his torso was completely covered in neatly bound bandages. Hell, even one of his eyes seemed to be hurt, hidden away behind a square of gauze.

But the smile that tilted across his lips was familiar, and just as wry as Shikamaru’s had been at the entrance to the house.

“Don’t worry. It’s better than it looks,” he said hoarsely. The bass of his voice was a shock. Naruto had heard a lot of deep voices, but somehow he’d expected this man’s voice to be exactly the same as Shikamaru’s. And Shikamaru’s voice hadn’t broken yet. Hell, none of their voices had broken yet, except for Sasuke’s, which only edged towards hints of a baritone before it went back to sounding the same as usual, most of the time. Arashi’s voice hadn’t been as deep as this.

“Are you ready to have something to eat, Shika-san?” Yoshino asked, stepping back in and quietly guiding Naruto and Shikamaru towards the table. Shikamaru-the-older (Shikamaru-the-Second?) raised his good shoulder in a casual shrug.

“Not really. I can wait. Shikadai’s still sleeping.” He murmured, raising the cup to take a sip.

“That your kid then?” Naruto asked, abruptly understanding why Bolt and Inojin had been so excited. Shikamaru shifted beside him. It was slight enough that Naruto wouldn’t have felt it if they’d already been sitting down, but Shikamaru’s arm was still lined up against his.

Ah.

Shika smiled tiredly, and saluted him with his cup.

“I hear our precious Nanadaime graced you with his holy presence,” he said drolly. Yoshino and Shikamaru went rigid, but Naruto found himself laughing again. The older man just sounded so damn irreverent that Naruto suddenly found himself feeling a lot more secure about Arashi, even if the man could act like a cold hearted bastard when he wanted to.

Well, not exactly cold hearted. A weirdly non-committal and expressionless bastard? No, he wasn’t even expressionless. Fuck. Leave it to Arashi to confuse the fuck out of him even when he wasn’t around.

…Shika was watching him with a strange, bemused slant to his lips. As though he was seeing something that was both expected and unexpected at the same time.

“Naruto’s doing well then?” he asked, slowly pulling away from his back rest. Yoshino immediately moved towards him, looking worried, but he warded her off with a quiet murmur that Naruto couldn’t really make out.
“It’s Arashi here,” he corrected. Shika blinked slowly at him before choking on his tea.

“Arashi? Seriously? Troublesome Hokage, fuck, that name is as good as a blood red banner waving in the wind…” he muttered, setting his cup down on the table. Naruto watched him with wide, interested eyes. There was something fascinating about seeing another time traveler like this, when he wasn’t freaking out about the kind of man he’d grown up to be.

“Is there something wrong with that name?” Shikamaru asked, dragging out a chair to sit down. Shika looked up, his expression pinched for a split second before it wiped clean.

“Nothing that should concern anyone over here. But he really should have known better. Sakura’s going to be pissed.” He sighed, reaching for his cup again, then stiffening and leaning to the side. Just in time to avoid the hand that would have swatted him on the back of his head if he hadn’t moved.

“…Yoshino-san,” he sighed, and Naruto found himself going stiff. He warily glanced at Shikamaru, only through the corner of his eyes. Shikamaru’s lips were pursed, but he didn’t look any more irate than he usually was.

Then again, his usual state of being was an odd mix of laziness and irritation, so…

“Shika-san. I have no idea what your usual habits may be in your home, and I have no control over them, but I would prefer that you didn’t swear quite so freely around my son and his friend.” Yoshino said severely. Shika glanced back at her, clearly exasperated. Shikamaru had gone still again, in his seat. Naruto might have tried to figure out why, but he was still reeling under the fact that Yoshino-san apparently considered him and Shikamaru friends. And the Nara hadn’t chosen to correct that impression.

When he looked back up, Shika’s eyes were on him again. Naruto felt strangely humbled by how sharp and knowing those eyes were, the look gentling before the older man glanced away.

“Any particular reason why Arashi didn’t come with you?” he asked, after a moment of silence. Yoshino had turned back to the stove, her shoulders stiff. There was an uncomfortable tension in the air of the kitchen that hadn’t been there when they’d first stepped in, but Naruto did his best to ignore it.

“He’s not in town. Kakashi said he was away on some kind of super-secret mission, he didn’t even have time to explain anything to Bolt or me.” Naruto said, shrugging when Shika frowned at him in apparent consternation.

“Ah, troublesome. That’s just so typical. Baka-Hokage…” he sighed, leaning back against his chair and then jerking upright again, wincing. Naruto’s brows lowered, and he paid more attention to all the bandages wrapped around Shika’s torso.

“…I though you said it just looked worse than it actually was?” he asked. Shika raised his good shoulder in a careless shrug, smiling at him.

“It’s not too bad,” he said.

“Meaning that it isn’t too good either,” Shikamaru cut in, scowling. Naruto was dismayed when the accusation somehow had Shika giving the same soft-at-the-edges smile that Arashi was prone to every once in a while. He still hadn’t pinpointed what drew that smile from Naruto-the-Second, and it was times like this when he got the sinking feeling that he was better off not knowing.

“I’ll be fine, Shikamaru,” he said blandly. Shikamaru scowled up at him, muttered something
uncomplimentary under his breath, then promptly lifted his arms up to the table and set his head down on the cushioned surface they made. Naruto and Shika stared at him, while Yoshino groaned exasperatedly in the background.

“Uh…Shikamaru? Oi.” Naruto said hesitantly, uncomfortably aware of the eyes that were boring into him. Shika possibly had good reason to stare the way he was, but Naruto had no idea why Yoshino-san kept watching him so seriously.

“So…Troublesome…” he grunted, making Naruto splutter, part of him surprised, but the rest of him horribly amused by how unsurprised he was.

“Don’t mumble, Shikamaru!” Yoshino-san called out, turning back to the stove, but not before Naruto noticed the relieved cast to her face.

By the time she actually started bringing breakfast to the table (toasted bread! Fresh churned butter! Sausages! Rolled Omelettes! ACTUAL FRESHLY SQUEEZED ORANGE JUICE!), Naruto had already started trying to explain what Arashi had been up to since he and Bolt had turned up in the past. All the focus on ‘Arashi-san’ might have irritated him if it were anyone else asking, but Shika actually had a vested interest in finding out. It was just a bonus to watch his reaction when Naruto described how little Arashi actually told them, and how often he tended to disappear on secret missions. With barely any warning before he left. Shikamaru took it upon himself to actually look up during that section of the explanation, and the considering look on his face made Naruto a little uneasy before he told himself to let it go. Shika needed to hear this, he needed Shika to hear this, if only to find out if Arashi’s more worrying habits were common or rare.

The look of exasperation, equally warring with sheer irritation, was a clear indicator that, no, it wasn’t rare, Shika was apparently very familiar with Arashi’s messed up tendencies to run towards ‘the first sight of danger without thinking twice’.

The very loud snort these words drew from Shikamaru made it clear that it wasn’t specifically ‘Arashi-san’ he was talking about.

Naruto stuck out his lower lip and treated both the Naras to a sulky pout.

“I’m not that bad,” he grumbled. “Though I have nothing to say in support of Arashi. I have no idea what he does during his secret missions, and it’s not like I’m going to notice him being hurt. The Ky-” he abruptly stopped short, horrified. What the fuck. He couldn’t have gotten that cozy with these people. Could he? It was just breakfast. Breakfast. No way did freshly prepared breakfast create these kinds of stupid ‘confess you sins’ feelings in him.

Even if Yoshino-san did freshly squeeze multiple oranges for juice.

He didn’t even know people actually did that at home. Arashi tended to get some kind of fruit juice home all the time, in cartons, and he tended towards new and weird flavours all the time. But he never freshly converted fruits into juice. It tasted amazing.

His near-confession had gotten him three very different reactions from his audience. Shikamaru looked confused and suspicious. Yoshino looks shocked, as though she never expected him to bring up the topic of the Bijuu at her breakfast table. Shika, though… His was the reaction that made Naruto feel as though the ground had opened up beneath him. The yawning sensation in his gut didn’t help the mental image at all.

Shika looked oddly commiserating, amused and unsurprised all at the same time. Naruto had the sinking feeling that Shikamaru-the-Second already knew exactly what he was talking about.
Okay, was he supposed to be relieved or freaked out about the fact that this older version of his classmate – his friend – already knew about the greatest secret in his life?

“It’s okay, Naruto. Arashi is Arashi. You don’t have to think too deeply on it,” Shika said after a long moment of silence, once it became clear that he wasn’t planning on continuing further. Naruto rolled his eyes, and focused on his plate. Arashi was Arashi, huh. Since when did anyone say anything like that about him? Did people go around saying things like ‘Naruto is Naruto’ in the future?

Fuck, he didn’t need to think about this. Arashi was starting to break his brain.

“Speaking of Arashi… is anyone else going to be coming through, old man?”

Naruto choked on a surprised giggle, and shot Shikamaru a grateful look as soon as he got his laughter under control. The Nara acted oblivious. Of course.

Then the question actually sunk in, and Naruto whipped around to stare at Shika in shock.

“Are you kidding me? Seriously?!” he asked, horrified.

Shika was pinching the bridge of his nose, looking pained. Yoshino-san, patted him comfortingly on the shoulder while dragging out a chair to sit down herself, looking horribly amused.

“First – I’m not an old man, Shikamaru. I’m 35 for fu- God’s sake,” he started, hastily editing himself at the look Yoshino shot him.

“Second, I have no idea if anyone else is going to come through. Or even how many of us are going to come through, if Arashi’s plan works.”

Naruto stared him. Shikamaru rested his head on his fist, elbow on the table, food completely forgotten. Which was crazy, Naruto wasn’t about to forget food like this anytime soon even if what Shika was saying was crazy interesting, but-

“Plan?” he asked, incredulously. Shikamaru didn’t stay anything, though he did bob his head, just as interested in what Shika had to say.

Shika rolled his eyes, snatched up a sausage in his chopsticks and pointedly took a bite, ignoring the put-upon looks Naruto and Shikamaru directed at him.

“Don’t ask me. I might have helped him, and set up most of the framework of the seal on our side, but Arashi’s still the one who did the lion’s share of the work. Well, him and Or-” he abruptly cut himself off, making a face and clearly censoring himself. Naruto groaned loudly.

“Plan?” he asked, incredulously. Shikamaru didn’t stay anything, though he did bob his head, just as interested in what Shika had to say.

Shika gave a weird smile that looked more like a grimace, and ran a hand through the spikes of hair he had pulled up.

“Ah. You’re better off not knowing about that.”

“Not knowing about what.” Shikamaru asked, actually sounding curious. Shika’s answer to that was
a wide smile, eyes curving into happy arcs that looked suspiciously familiar.

“Not knowing about that.” He said, giving a low laugh when faced with the identical, petulant scowls that appeared on Shikamaru and Naruto’s faces.

“Leave it be, brats. And let me finish eating in peace, I have no idea when I’ll be dragged back. I wasn’t even supposed to fall through in the first place.” That said, Shika turned his attention back to his food, snatching up a piece of his omelette, chewing slowly and giving a serene smile when he’d swallowed.

Naruto couldn’t stop himself from gaping, even when the look on his face (and Shikamaru’s, his friend looked as gobsmacked as he did) made Yoshino-san burst into soft laughter.

“But what about your wounds? Aren’t you too hurt to go back so quickly?” Shikamaru piped up suddenly, sitting up. Naruto blinked, and leaned forward, staring up at Shika. Because the older man really was hurt badly. Too badly to travel. Or go back to wherever all these alternate dimension people were popping in from, especially when they were getting wounded so severely on the other side.

Yoshino abruptly sobered down, and setting aside her chopsticks, she directed a concerned look at Shika, who winced and leaned away from her. Much to Naruto’s amusement. Shikamaru only looked long-suffering. Naruto would have nudged him and asked why, but watching Shika and Yoshino-san seemed so much more interesting right now.

“Shikamaru’s right – you’re hurt. What if you get caught unawares when you return? Isn’t there anyway to stay here until you heal a little more?” she asked, but all Shika did was sigh, hunching in his seat awkwardly.

“I’ll be fine, Yoshino-san. You don’t have to worry about me, I can take care of myself. Save the worrying for the brats here, and Shikadai, Inojin and Bolt. If anyone needs to be worried over, it’s those three, especially when Sarada isn’t around to keep an eye on them.” He said ruefully, making Yoshino frown at him.

From the way Shikamaru slowly slunk down his seat, Naruto would bet that he wasn’t the only one who could see how vexed Yoshino-san was beginning to look. He fumbled for something to say, and found himself blurting the words out nearly before they’d actually settled in his head.

“What do we call you?”

Shika glanced at him, oddly looking surprised. Yoshino-san did too, for that matter. Even Shikamaru was frowning at him. Naruto shuttered his eyes, and shifted in his seat, but he didn’t take the question back. It was important, and if Shika actually stuck around long enough, he’d need a name that wasn’t as ambiguous as ‘Shika’ was. Hell, nearly half the men in Shikamaru’s family had that specific addition to their names. It would sound weird enough that someone was going to notice. Thankfully, the Nara looked enough like each other that Shika really could fall back into the family and be lost in a matter of minutes.

Shika gave him a bemused smile, but Shikamaru spoke before he actually could say anything,

“Maybe we can call him call him Shikato,” he said snidely, making Yoshino gasp in shock, but Shika snorted in laughter.

“Hell, why not. It’s as good a name as any other, if I end up living here on borrowed time.”

“Shika-san, don’t encourage him. Shikamaru, apologise immediately! How could you say something
like that-?"

“Eh, it’s fine, Yoshino-san. Like I said, it’s as good a name as any other. I’m okay with it.”

Naruto watched them all squabble with each other with a disbelieving expression on his face, slowly chewing on a slice of toast, generously buttered of course. He followed that up with quick bites of omelette and sausage, and leaned to the side to avoid Shikamaru’s flailing arms, watching as Shika threw his head back and gave a loud, cheerful laugh that seemed completely at odds with anything Shikamaru would be capable of. Shikamaru apparently agreed, because he stopped flailing in favour of sitting and staring at the older man.

To more than one person’s visible relief, they were interrupted by Bolt and Inojin bursting into the kitchen, carefully supporting another boy who looked around the same age as them between them, his hair messily held up in a mass of spikes very much like every other Nara male that Naruto had seen in Konoha. Naruto watched him with wide eyes and raised brows, because if he’d heard Shika right, Shikadai would be left behind even if Shika got pulled back to wherever they were all coming from.

He nearly shot out of his seat when he noticed how Shikadai was barely supporting any of his own weight, limping whenever his feet actually touched the ground for a step.

Naruto forced himself to sit down again because, even if he was hurt badly, Shikadai probably didn’t want to be fussed over. Not if he was anything like Shikamaru, who hated that kind of attention. Naruto was starting to get the sinking feeling that, whatever Arashi had been trying to do, the plan had prioritized removing children from that other dimension first. He was too scared to ask Arashi or even Shika, right now. He didn’t want to know what could make him, even alternate dimension weird older versions of him, try and send so many tiny kids away to some other dimension with no guaranteed help on the other end. Especially if the plan wasn’t supposed to have any older people travelling with the kids. And especially when the kids were coming through hurt too.

“Ah! Baa-chan’s made breakfast!” Inojin called loud brightly. Shikadai and Bolt both cheered loudly, and all scampered forward to tug chairs out for themselves. Yoshino-san looked strangely overcome at being called ‘grandmother’ with such careless enthusiasm, but Shika groaned, and heaved himself out of his chair, taking his empty plate with him.

“Don’t make a mess, kids. You know what’ll happen if you do.”

Naruto stopped with a bite of egg held right in front of his mouth and watched, fascinated, as Shikadai exchanged a conspiratory look with the two boys sitting close to him. Still so energetic, even when he was hurt. It was practically a miracle, judging by Nara standards.

“Well, it’s not like kaa-chan is here…” he said slyly.

Shikamaru choked on the gulp of orange juice that had just gone down his throat.

Shika shot the three boys an exasperated look, hip canted to one side and leaning his weight against the counter by the sink, arms folded. Naruto helpfully banged Shikamaru on the back until he stopped wheezing for breath.

“Well, your kaa-chan might not be here, but your baa-chan most certainly is. Don’t make a mess.”

“Okaaaay,” Shikadai drawled, reaching out for the jug of orange juice and offering Yoshino-san a small, sweet smile when she passed it in his direction.

“Naruto, if I pass out, do not let me fall face first in my breakfast,” Shikamaru muttered faintly, eyes
seemingly glued to the small form that had settled itself on the chair beside him. Already well acquainted with the way this fucked up alternate dimension time travel bullshit could mess with your head and the ground beneath your feet, Naruto mumbled an affirmative around his mouthful of sausage, and comfortingly patted the Nara on the shoulder.

When he looked back at Shika, standing on the other side of the kitchen, it was to see a small, amused smirk on his face. Not liking the look at all, he quickly turned his attention back to his food. Yup. Food was safe. It didn’t fucking mess with your head.

When Yoshino-san offered to bring some fresh cut fruit to the table, as if everything else she’d offered wasn’t already enough, Naruto found himself nodding eagerly even though he didn’t really want fresh cut anything. Even if the fresh juice really did taste fucking amazing.

He just didn’t want to face that expression on Shika’s face again. It was terrifying the way Arashi’s beaming smiles were terrifying. From the way Shikamaru buried himself in his plate, ignoring everyone at the table, he clearly agreed.

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“Don’t be too hard on him.”

Naruto looked up from where he was toeing on his sandals, eyes scrunching up in confusion.

“What?”

Shika was leaning comfortably against a wall, his good shoulder braced against the wood. He had a strange little smile tugging at his lips, but his eyes were dark and serious. Naruto had to convince himself not to back out the front door. Having all that attention focused on him was unnerving – Shikamaru had been sent off on some errands by Yoshino-san right after they were done with breakfast, and Bolt had innocently insisted that he needed to stay back and take care of his sick friend along with Inojin. Nevermind that Shikadai had loudly protested that he was better off without any ‘help’ from either Bolt or Inojin.

“Don’t be too hard on him, Naruto. Arashi’s an idiot, and always seems to have his foot in his mouth, but he’s our idiot. And well-meaning besides.”

Naruto twitched. His brain still felt like stalling, whenever he heard Shika speak so fondly of Arashi like that. It was… hard, to digest the fact that at some point in the future, Naruto-the-Second seemed to have become really good friends with Shikamaru and the rest of Naruto’s Academy year mates. It was even harder to look into Shika’s calm eyes, glinting with the barest hint of good humour, self-deprecating though it may be, and know that in some dimension, this was who Shikamaru had grown up to be.

He swallowed roughly, throat feeling uncomfortable all of a sudden.

“Why?” he asked, after a long moment that Shika had seemed perfectly willing to wait out.

“Hmm?”

“Why? Why is he so quiet? Why does… Why does Bolt always look so angry? And sad? What happened there?” Naruto asked finally, the words feeling like they were being torn from his chest. He didn’t look up, not too sure if he was ready to look back into Shika’s calm, serious eyes.

He heard the older man’s haori rustle softly against the wood as he shifted, and the silence was quietly contemplative. Naruto didn’t say anything, and just waited for an answer that he didn’t really
think he would get.

The weight of a hand settling on his head made his gaze jerk upwards, startled.

Shika had that soft, fond smile back on his face again. Naruto stared back up at him, throat tight.

“You know, it’s terrifying, how much like you Bolt seems sometimes. I can’t answer your question, Naruto,” fingers roughly ruffling his hair made Naruto’s indignant response to that quieten before it really started. From the smirk that pulled across Shika’s face, he could tell. “I can’t answer your question. There isn’t a single, catch-all answer to what you’re asking. And anyway, even if there were, it’s none of my business, getting into that. Arashi’s my friend and comrade, but I have no right to butt into his personal affairs – certainly not these specific affairs. You understand that, right?”

Naruto scowled up at him, not happy with that answer. Even if he did understand. He hadn’t thought about his own views on family at all till now, certainly not as much as he had since Naruto-the-Second and Bolt had crash-landed in his life. But… the cadence of what Shika was implying was something that he accepted. He didn’t think he’d be happy if his friends went around saying things about his family. At least, not without asking him first.

Shika gave a low laugh, ruffled his hair again, and let him go.

“Don’t be too hard on him. He’s trying the best he can,” he said.

“Well, he’s been sucking at it so far.” Naruto grumbled, and avoided the swat aimed at his head for that.

“Take care of yourself, Naruto. And take care of Bolt and Arashi too. They probably need you more than you need them, at this point.”

That had him staring up at Shika again, because what the heck was that supposed to mean? He could take care of Bolt, sure, the brat needed someone to keep an eye on him and Arashi was away too often to be able to do that all on his own. But how was he supposed to be able to take care of Arashi? The man was old enough to take care of himself, and he seemed to be doing a pretty good job of it too.

The soft-around-the-edges smile on Shika’s face had Naruto cringing and looking away. Shika laughed, and waved him off, turning around to go back in.

“Will I see you again?” Naruto asked suddenly, in spite of himself. Shika paused, and glanced over his shoulder, looking surprised.

“What?”

“Will I see you again? You said that you might end up going back – that you weren’t supposed to fall through in the first place. Will you come through again?”

The surprise didn’t fade away. If anything, it grew.

“I’m… actually not sure. It depends on how well we can defend the locations of the seals. The children need to be sent through, and any of us still… we’re rounding up all the children we can, everywhere we can find them. They need to come through. After that, if everything works out… Then, maybe.”

Shika’s voice was quiet. That did nothing to hide the darkness in them, or the hesitance. Naruto heard the words ‘any of us’ and ‘if everything works out’ ringing in his ears rather ominously.
It went without saying that if things didn’t work out, then no, he wouldn’t be seeing Shika again. Either because he couldn’t come through or because… he wasn’t there to be transported through whatever seals they’d set up on their side.

The comforting smile on Shika’s face made Naruto sick to the stomach. He couldn’t have been more relieved that Shikamaru and the younger kids weren’t around to hear what Shika had to say.

“Take care of yourself,” he found himself echoing, the words seeming woefully meager in the face of whatever it was that Shika had to return to face.

The answering smile he received stayed with him all the way back to the apartment, where he proceeded to heat the water for some ramen as soon as he stepped inside. Because he could do with some ramen. Maybe if he ate enough, he’d be able to forget how accepting and at peace Shika had seemed, when he’d seen Naruto off.

He silently started up the water for some tea when Shikamaru appeared at his doorstep, later in the day. They spent the rest of the evening like that, with him gulping down another cup of ramen, and Shikamaru sitting by the large windows, staring up at the sky and nursing the cup of green tea that Naruto had offered him.

Fuck dimension travel, anyway. Naruto was done with this shit.

* *

He wasn’t, though. He’d started to care, just a little, in spite of himself. It made him feel hollow inside, and made him watch over Bolt feeling a little scared and a little sick, and made him watch Arashi warily whenever the man was home. It was why that look on Shika’s face, and the confused expression on Shikamaru’s, had him wanting to break something. He didn’t like caring. He had his own precious people to worry about, damn it, but somehow these alternate dimension travelers just seemed to make things more complicated than they really needed to be.

Chapter End Notes

Well, here we go. I confess, Shika basically grabbed control of my hands and wrote himself in, he wasn’t supposed to show up this early. Neither was Shikadai. But what can you do. It seemed a good break from Naruto’s issues with Arashi, and Sasuke’s issues with family that were being dragged up involuntarily due to Arashi and Bolt. As for Yoshino’s reaction to the ‘name’ Shikato - all the translations I’ve found online translate Shikato as ‘To Ignore’, ‘Neglect’ or ‘Ostracism’ when used as a noun or verb, though the meaning might change based on kanji in usage as a proper noun. Obviously, Shikamaru wasn’t implying any possible nicer meaning of the term. If this is incorrect, please let me know and I’ll edit the chapter.

Fluff and angst, all at the same time. That’s just the way Shika rolls, he’ll blindside anyone if they’re not careful. Consider leaving a comment on your way out - even a word or so makes me bounce off the walls. And thanks for all the kudos and comments so far.

Also, since this might just be something a few of you find offensive - would you prefer if I left off the honorifics? There are plenty in Teach Your Parents Well, but they’re mostly to denote relationships among characters. Let me know if you think it's getting a
bit much, and I'll try toning it down. Or completely cutting them out.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which Naruto's faced with a discussion and a confrontation, offers up an ultimatum and slams into a (metaphoric) wall. All at the same time. Damn it, Arashi.

Chapter Notes

Not exactly a background to go with this chapter, but I’d had Paul Carter’s instrumental version of Sakura Nagashi running while writing this. And other instrumental tracks, but that one featured prominently. Atmospheric backdrop if you need one, I guess.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well. Whatever he’d been expecting when he got back home from training, it certainly hadn’t been this. He really wished he’d gotten over the need to expect things, already. Arashi and his pack of weirdos were such a pain in the ass.

Arashi, for his part, offered Naruto a distracted smile before turning his attention back to the pot he’d been stirring. Still masterfully ignoring the two limpets clinging to his legs. Naruto slowly pulled the front door shut behind himself, toed his sandals off and warily made his way to the counter.

“Had a good day? I ran into Kakashi at the Jounin station and he said Team Seven’s training has been going well.”

“He would say that,” Naruto said, fighting the urge to groan while he pulled out a bar stool to sit on. He felt so fucking tired. Stupid sensei. “He’s been making us run teamwork drills and had us sparing like crazy since you left. When’d you get back?”

“Early today morning. The old man had me locked down behind a desk since I stepped into his office, though. I only just managed to leave.”

They both gave identical sighs, Naruto slumping forward to hide his face in the nest his arms made on the counter, while Arashi sagged where he stood. After a few moments, once Naruto managed the energy and will power to look up again, he peered suspiciously at the older man.

“…you do know that you’ve got Bolt and Shikadai clinging to your legs, right?”

“Yep.”

“Any particular reason why you haven’t shoved them off yet?” Naruto asked, bemused in spite of himself. Arashi shrugged back at him.

“Too fucking exhausted. I want to sleep,” he whined, actually whined, making Naruto choke back surprised laughter.

“Tou-chan!” Bolt snapped, frowning up at him. Shikadai snickered quietly beside him. Naruto
watched with increasing amusement as Arashi finally stopped stirring to survey both the boys with a pained expression.

“Bolt. Shikadai. *Please* let go of me and… go trouble Inojin. Or something.”

Naruto snorted. Arashi shot him a dirty glance before directing his attention back to Bolt and Shikadai. Shikadai had an utterly unimpressed expression on his face, while Bolt pouted exaggeratedly.

“But Inojin’s so boring to bug, Naruto-ji. He just sits and stares. Or smiles. Sai’s made him immune.” Shikadai complained, making Naruto stiffen slightly. He avoided Arashi’s glance this time around, ducking his head back down again.

Damn. Naruto-ji, huh? That sounded way too much like what he called Shikaku all the time. He’d heard Bolt use the affectionate honorifics for whatever versions of Sasuke and Sakura he was used to – which still freaked Naruto out, whenever he stopped to think about it – but it was so fucking weird to think about other people his age having kids at some point and being an uncle figure to them.

“Shikaaaaaa you’re not supposed to call him that! What if someone hears you?!” Bolt was saying loudly, voice rising over Arashi’s sigh.

“Oh crap, you’re right – ow! Bolt! You swear all the time!”

“No I don’t, you big liar-”

“Kids, kids, stop, please.”

“Bolt, Shika.”

Everyone in the room, including Naruto, jerked around to stare at Inojin, who had somehow managed to sneak up on all of them. The pale boy had his hair down, he looked about as bored as he usually did, but something about the set of his face managed to convey silent irritation. Bolt and Shikadai immediately let go of Arashi and walked up to Inojin, looking rather doleful. Naruto stared, it was so weird to watch them like that. Even if he’d gotten used to their dynamic in the last few days, it was still weird to find out that Inojin seemed to have the best chance at making sure Bolt and Shikadai didn’t get into trouble. Naruto’d thought Bolt was ridiculous enough all on his own, but ever since Shikadai had been left behind while Shika returned to wherever these guys were popping in from, he’d realized that Bolt and Shikadai put together were far worse than anything they could get up to all on their own.

Inojin could be just as bad, admittedly, but at least he was willing to bring his friends to heel when they got too out of control. Case in point, he put a hand to both his friends’ backs and shoved them rather pointedly in the direction of Bolt’s room. They went without a single complaint. Inojin followed them after giving both Arashi and Naruto a short, apologetic bow.

“Is he always like that?” Naruto asked, once he was certain all three boys were out of hearing range. Arashi laughed, arms akimbo, still staring after the kids with a fond expression on his face.

“Yeah. His parents can get crazy, it’s like he just decided at some point that he’d be the sane one in the family. Just to be contrary.”

“Oh.” That just made Naruto more bemused than before. He still couldn’t quite get a read on the kid, but he was willing to let it go. Bolt always seemed to sing praises of him, and Naruto was willing to trust the brat’s judgement. He’d known Inojin for years, after all.
It took a few more moments for Naruto to really notice that Arashi had silently turned his gaze on him. He warily looked back at the older man, ready to duck and run if he needed to, since he hadn’t really been caught alone with him without some kind of buffer in the room. Even if that buffer tended to be Bolt, it was still a buffer. And Arashi seemed… strange, after returning from wherever he’d gone.

Tired. But also softer.

“I heard Shika dropped by when I was gone?” he asked, after a breath, arms dropping to hang loosely at his sides.

Naruto uncomfortably bobbed his head in a short nod, and waited to see what Arashi’s reaction would be to that. It had been a week since Shika had appeared and disappeared from his and Shikamaru’s life, and he still wasn’t quite over the experience. The only person who was more nonplussed than him had to be Shikamaru – the Nara had dropped by the apartment more than once for some quiet company, which had made Naruto more than a little weirded out before he realized that Shikamaru just wanted to be around someone else who knew. About Shika, about Shikadai – and maybe he just wanted to get away from home. Naruto knew he wanted a break from all the questions Sakura had to ask about Arashi and Bolt and what he felt about having family around again.

Sasuke’s grim silences during those interrogation sessions only made things worse. There thankfully hadn’t been any more offers of help, awkward or otherwise, but Naruto could still feel the offer burning in the back of his mind. Shit, that was another thing he needed to speak to Arashi about…

Arashi, once Naruto dragged his attention back to the forefront enough to notice, looked strangely pained. And worried.

“…he was right, then? He wasn’t supposed to be here?” Naruto asked warily.

“No, he wasn’t. They’re supposed to be sending the kids through first, why in the world…” Arashi turned away, back to the stove, but he seemed distracted, muttering to himself.

All of a sudden, Naruto felt sick to the stomach.

“He was hurt, you know.” He said, voice loud in the emptiness of the room. Arashi glanced back at him, visibly surprised.

“What?”

“He was hurt. He was covered in bandages, Yoshino-san had fitted him with a sling for his arm, one of his eyes was covered with gauze. Why the fuck is the ‘why’ all that important?” he demanded. Arashi looked taken aback for all of a second before his face seemed to shut down.

“No. I know something weird is going on, you and jiji and Kakashi have been acting strange for long enough that it would be impossible to not know that something’s going on. But that doesn’t mean you get to ignore one of your f-friends appearing, hurt badly, and then going back smiling because he didn’t have a choice-” Naruto broke off with a choked sound, staring down at his fists, which were clenched tight on top of the counter. They’d just started to shake when a larger pair of hands carefully covered his. Naruto jerked, and tried to get away, but Arashi held on firmly and didn’t let him go.
When he finally managed to find the will to look away from Arashi’s hands – large enough to completely surround his fists, one covered in nin-tape and bandages and the other tanned and even, not a single scar anywhere on it, smotheringly, terrifyingly like his own - it was to find the older man leaning down to look at him seriously, face scrunched up in an expression that, surprise surprise, Naruto hadn’t seen even once before. Either on Arashi’s face or his own.

“I’m not ignoring it, Narut- No, stop. Listen to me, hey!” Naruto stilled at the sharp note in Arashi’s voice, but he looked away stubbornly. It was unnerving to look up into a face that looked so much like his own when it looked older. No one in Konoha looked anything like him. Guess that was why jiji and Arashi had decided on the absentee dad schtick in the first place.

It was only after it became obvious that he wasn’t struggling to get away anymore that Arashi continued.

“I’m *not* ignoring it. I hate this situation more than I can ever explain, or convey. But there’s absolutely nothing else I could do – we needed someone with enough chakra to work as a pillar on this side, something like a lightning rod that would keep the seal functioning. There… there wasn’t anyone else who has as much chakra as I do. Anyone else who did just...” Arashi’s voice faded out, and sounded unnervingly like Shika’s had, back when Naruto had asked if he would ever see the Nara again. Naruto’s hands clenched in the hold that Arashi had on them, but the older man immediately smoothed them out, giving him a tired smile.

“I would protect my precious people with everything that I am, Naruto. Don’t think any less of me when I don’t have any other choice right now, okay?”

“But… but…” Naruto gritted his teeth and looked away, trying to ignore the weight of the hand that settled hesitantly on his head.

He couldn’t even argue against the man, damn it.

“If it helps, Shikamaru’s one stubborn bastard. He isn’t going anywhere any time soon.” Arashi said softly.

“That isn’t the point. You don’t even say anything, none of you do! Kakashi-sensei just avoids any questions I have, and jiji just smiles and tells me that everything’s okay. You aren’t even around most of the time, and Bolt and I – I mean, Bolt-” Naruto cut himself off abruptly, trying to salvage the situation, but from the way Arashi had stiffened on the other side of the counter, he’d already caught what Naruto had been trying to avoid.

Naruto stubbornly avoided his gaze, even when Arashi came around to crouch down in front of him.

“I can’t deny that we’re hiding things from the two of you. We *are*, but it’s for the best, y’know? You should focus on your training, and Bolt…”

Arashi suddenly gave a hard laugh. It sounded like it had been ripped from his throat.

“Bolt gets to live in a happier place.”

Naruto shot him a suspicious look, trying to ignore how uneasy that laugh had made him feel.

“Bolt wants *you* around, y’know.” He said pointedly, staring down at the older man. Arashi made a face, and looked away, one of his hands letting go of Naruto’s fists to rub at the back of his head.

“…He’s probably happier with you around.”
Naruto twitched, once, then pulled his hand free to whack Arashi across the top of his head. From the stunned look it got him, that had been about the last thing that Arashi had expected.

“You’re an idiot.” Naruto snapped, and Arashi’s eyes went wide before he hunched over, shoulders quivering with barely repressed laughter. Naruto aimed a kick at Arashi’s flank, even as he fell back onto the floor, still snickering helplessly.

“Oh fuck, you sound so much like Sakura-”

Naruto was about to yell a defensive *I do not* before the words actually registered and he blinked owlishly down at the older man.

“I do?” he asked, mind immediately latching on to the lack of a ‘chan’ following Sakura’s name. He already knew Sakura wasn’t Bolt’s mom, and he *still* wasn’t sure if he was relieved or disappointed about that, but Arashi sounded surprisingly close to Sakura-the-Second, whatever she was like in the place Arashi was from.

He should have expected that, though. Bolt had certainly sounded close to his ‘Sakura-ba’, even if he sounded terrified of her sometimes.

“Oh yeah, you definitely do. She says that **all. The. Time.**” The wide smile that Arashi offered him had Naruto flushing and looking down at his hands, automatically fiddling with a thread that had loosened at the hem of one of his jacket sleeves.

“Man, I think I needed that. Ha. Thanks, Naruto.” Naruto ducked under the hand that dropped on the crown of his head, mussing up his hair roughly. He instantly protested, making Arashi laugh and go back to the stove.

Staring at the older man’s back as he busied himself with removing the pot he’d left simmering through their conversation, Naruto was suddenly struck by how familiar the sight was starting to look. He’d been successfully ignoring the mark Arashi and Bolt had left on his life, it was relatively easy to do when Arashi was away so often. But in spite of himself, he’d slowly been getting used to having someone older around at home, taking care of things.

He still wasn’t happy about the situation, though. Damn it, he knew the truth, but sometimes, when he looked at Arashi, especially when he just… *took care of things*, clearly not expecting either him or Bolt to do stuff at home when he could do it instead, it was discomfitingly easy to forget that he… wasn’t actually ‘Arashi’.

Naruto-the-Second, God damn it.

Naruto shoved his face into his arms, trying not to groan out loud. All of this was too painful to deal with. He *missed* having a less complicated life. Everything seemed to have gone tits up since the shitty dimension-hopping crap had started. Having all this ridiculous thinking to do at home, when home had been *easy* before, not to mention how weird his team had been acting – speaking of which.

“Hey. Can I tell the bastard about you being me?” he asked, voice muffled by his arms. The sudden crash of the pot slamming unexpectedly into a wall had him jerking up in shock.

Though not as shocked as Arashi, who was goggling at him. It would have made him laugh, because, fuck, he looked so *dumb* like that, but he was too busy being uneasy because his question had gotten him such a violent reaction.

At least the stew hadn’t spilt everywhere. It smelt really good, and after the conversation they’d just
had, Naruto thought he really deserved something nice to eat.

“‘You being me?’” Arashi repeated faintly. Naruto coughed, waving the words away.

“I mean, can I tell the bastar- Sasuke, can I tell Sasuke that you’re not my dad? And that you’re… y’know. You.”

Naruto’d thought the question had a really simple answer – *Yes,* obviously, because why did it have to be any harder than that? He’d been uncertain about the answer before he’d slowly realized in the time that the older man had been away just how well Arashi must have gotten along with the Sasuke from wherever the hell he was from, if Bolt alternated between calling him ‘Sasuke-ji’ and ‘shishou’ – which was still so, so *weird.* But, if they got along that well, then there wasn’t any problem in letting Sasuke know, right?

Judging from the way Arashi was trading the goggle-eyed expression for something closed off, apparently not.

“Arashi-” Naruto began slowly, but Arashi shook his head, stopping him before he could get any further.

“No.”

“But-!”

“No, Naruto. And that’s final.”

Arashi turned away, reaching for the pot with a brusque motion. Naruto hurriedly pushed himself off the stool, trying to catch Arashi’s attention, but whatever openness their earlier conversation had created seemed to have been shoved aside. Arashi looked about as approachable as a stone wall.

Naruto stared up at the hunched shoulders and forbidding expression, and stifled the urge to swear violently. God-fucking-*damnit.* It just fucking figured, didn’t it.

“*He deserves to know. He thinks you’re my dad,* Arashi! That Bolt’s my *brother!*” Naruto snarled, but Arashi didn’t even look at him.

Naruto aimed a kick at the kitchen island, snarled under his breath and forced himself to walk away.

Well, fuck him anyway. Arashi didn’t get to tell him what to do. *No one* did. If he wanted to tell the bastard something, he would.

*So there.* Have at, Naruto-the-Second. *Asshole.*

※

*He carefully ignored the pinprick of hurt the lack of trust left in him, digging into him like a kunai to the gut. It wasn’t like he didn’t deserve some kind of fucking explanation at this point, right. How the heck was he supposed to understand if no one fucking explained anything?!

He’d said he’d fight Arashi and jiji on their decision to hide things. Well, looks like he’d get that chance at that fight. It wasn’t like Shikamaru didn’t already know. And if more people turned up, the dimension hopping crap was only going to get more obvious. How Arashi expected Sasuke or anyone else to take being lied to calmly when the older man was friends with his Sasuke, and with the others too, Naruto didn’t know. *Shouldn’t* he know better? *No one* liked being lied to. Fucking no one.
Naruto knew that better than anyone else.

Sasuke had better appreciate this, damn it. Since it was starting to look like no one else in-the-know fucking would.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, I guess I should accept that the weekend thing isn't going to work out - though I'm still going to aim at weekends after this. I've had this chapter done for a while, but I'd wanted to wait till I had a few more in hand. That doesn't seem to have happened, though, so I decided to offer this up to you anyway.

Also, judging from the response to my question last time, you're either fine with the honorifics or don't mind either way. Therefore, they're sticking around for now.

This fic is starting to feel like pure indulgence on my part, in between grad school papers and research, but I guess that isn't exactly a bad thing. Thanks for all your beautiful comments, and all the kudos, there are very few things make me as gleeful as seeing what you think and have to say. Please, throw a few more my way, whether you like where this is going or not. Even a word or so if that's all you want to contribute!
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Or the one in which there is unwanted melodrama for all the right-wrong reasons, and the shape of things is abruptly more different than expected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s been a whole night since he’d gotten into his argument with Arashi. And he was still seething, out of sheer outrage at how unfair the man was being. He’s had a restless night’s sleep that had done nothing to calm him down, and the tense silence between him and Arashi at breakfast in the morning had left the younger kids all silent, watchful and worried the entire way through.

Even irritated, Naruto hadn’t been able to deny that those watchful expressions were the only thing that had stopped him from starting another fight with Arashi. Purely for the sake of starting it, because he deserved an explanation, dammit. Even if Arashi and everyone else thought he was a kid and they didn’t need to tell him anything.

Especially because of that. He wasn’t a kid!

He’s wound up enough by the time he leaves home that he has absolutely no second thoughts about catching the bastard by his collar and dragging him to the side so he can spill everything. Well, mostly everything. And he wouldn’t catch him by the collar if Sakura-chan was around, she’d probably brain him before he could say anything.

Thankfully, him leaving home in a snit ensured that he was the first person to turn up at the bridge. It didn’t make him feeling any happier, obviously, but at least he got the chance to drop down between the rails and sit swinging his legs until he calmed down. Just a little bit. He didn’t need Arashi’s paranoia to know that trying to say anything to Sasuke in this kind of mood was a bad idea.

He gripped his knees tight, and scowled down at the flowing water. And was tempted to just throw himself in to cool down, because he didn’t like being this angry.

Why did Arashi have to be such a douche? He’d just been starting to think the man wasn’t a total bastard, too. Not that he’d ever tell him, obviously, but… Damn it.

He ducked his head, shuttering his eyes and willing the reflexive wetness back. He didn’t like Naruto-the-Second at all. It was just a side-effect of having someone around to take care of things, every once in a while. That’s all it was.

He started when someone’s hand dropped onto the main guard rail right above his head, jerking up in surprise.

Sasuke starred down at him, face blank.

“…are you crying, dobe?”

Naruto twitched, and looked away quickly, scrubbing at his eyes with his sleeves.
“NO! What the fuck are you talking about, there was just- just something in my eye, that’s all.”

“Hn.”

Sasuke’s silence seemed both skeptical and nastily amused. Naruto huffed, and half-heartedly swiped at the Uchiha’s legs with his right arm. Sasuke nimbly stepped out of the way, of course. Asshole.

“I need to tell you something. Later.” He said abruptly, before he could convince himself to forget.

He didn’t need to turn around and check to know that Sasuke was directing another weirded out stare at the back of his head. It made Naruto want to snigger, just a bit. Because at least the bastard’s reactions were funny enough to distract him from his irritation.

“…just tell me now.” Sasuke said snidely, leaning back against the rails with folded arms.

Naruto peered up at him with suspiciously narrowed eyes. Sasuke was dressed in darker colors than usual, and the dumb bastard had his eyes closed, head slightly tilted forward. The breeze was lightly blowing through his bangs, for fuck’s sake.

“Quit that, you’re giving me hives.” He snapped, reaching out to shove at him.

Sasuke’s eyes opened in surprise, and he peered down at Naruto, looking irritated and confused at the same time. It made Naruto want to groan and slam his head against a wall, because seriously, why’d his bastard of a teammate have to look so… so…

“Sasuke-kun, you look so cool today~” Sakura said dreamily, just walking up.

Yeah. That. Fuck.

Naruto turned away and banged his forehead against the lower rail to his left, while Sasuke grunted, hoisting himself up to sit on the upper rails, pointedly ignoring Sakura, who went pink, looking down awkwardly. She’d gotten a lot better at not reacting like that, especially after they’d gotten back from Wave, and hadn’t been fangirl-ish in the entire time since Bolt had started turning up.

…which, come to think about it, was really fucking strange, wasn’t it. He looked over his shoulder to peer at her cautiously.

“Oh, good morning, both of you,” she added, once she’d gotten over her embarrassment.

“Good morning, Sakura-chan!” Naruto replied, loud and cheerily, and shoved his curiosity to the side. He doubted Sakura would be willing to give him a straight answer, anyway. Especially not with Sasuke around.

…gah, Sasuke was giving him that weird, dead-eyed stare again. He’d gotten more familiar with the look in the last few weeks, but that didn’t mean he was at all fond of it.

“Should we just go to the training field? Since we’re all early today?” he suggested, roughly fifteen minutes later, which had been spent in silence because Sasuke was an asshole, and because Sakura-chan had retreated uncomfortably to the other side of the bridge.

She agreed immediately, much to both his and Sasuke’s surprise. And frowned cutely at them both when she noticed just how shocked they were.

“We could start warming up or something, you know. At least then sensei won’t start saying nasty stuff to us before making us do laps as soon as he gets here.” She said, sounding exasperated.
“-o-obviously, only you could think of such a perfect plan, Sakura-ch-” he broke off when she shot him a dirty look. Along with Sasuke.

“…what?” he asked defensively, dragging himself up, and easily avoiding Sasuke when he hopped back down.

“You. You haven’t laid it on that thick for weeks.” Sakura grumbled, cheeks going pink again.

He blinked at her in surprise, and glanced away quickly.

“Oh. But you’re amazing, Sakura-ch-”

“Dobe, shut up.” Sasuke cut in, sounding about as exasperated as Sakura had, earlier. Naruto subsided immediately, feeling uncomfortable.

It wasn’t like he didn’t like Sakura. He did. But he hadn’t bothered to be as loud as he generally aimed at for a while now. Mostly because he hadn’t felt like it, not with Bolt tagging along with him all the time. And Bolt knew that he wasn’t always loud. From the looks his teammates were giving him, they’d figured out at least to some extent that he didn’t come with a default ‘loud’ setting, as Ino had put it, once. When they’d still been in the academy.

“But you are.” He said, pointed, voice at a normal volume and looking at her from the corner of his eyes and lazily crossing his arms behind his head as they slowly strolled towards the training grounds. Not like they didn’t have a three hour wait, at the least.

She looked taken aback for a moment before flushing softly, a pleased smile tugging at her lips. Sasuke started moving faster, all but speed-walking so he didn’t need to walk beside either of them, and Naruto choked on his laughter, taking off after him with a yell.

His teammates? Were turning out to be awesome, the longer he knew them.

* 

The good feeling they’d started training with didn’t last for much longer after Kakashi appeared, sadly enough. All three of them stared up at him in disbelief. Well, him and Sasuke more than Sakura, for obvious reasons, but she seemed to be at least a little irritated by Kakashi’s declaration too. Thankfully.

“What do you mean, you don’t plan on entering us into the exams?” Sasuke demanded testily, sounding about as incensed as Naruto felt, for once.

Kakashi stared back at them, face unreadable.

“Exactly what I said. I want the three of you to train for a few more months, so I’ll be entering you in the next round of exams. It’s the sensible thing to do, after all it’ll give you the chance to bulk up your personal skill sets, and give me the chance to increase not only the quality of your team work but also snatch up higher levelled missions for you over time.”

“But Kakashi-sensei-” that was all Naruto managed to bite out before he went silent at the look their teacher shot him.

Because, by this point, they’d already figured out that being entered in the first round of exams right after graduating was about as prestigious as it could get. Especially if they managed to land a promotion at the end of it. But Kakashi ignored everything they had to say, instead turning around and heading for the wooden pillars set in the ground.
“…is it because you want to guarantee that we’ll all be promoted next time?” Sakura asked suddenly, brows lowered in a frown. It made both him and Sasuke whip around to stare at her.

It didn’t help that Kakashi had gone still, halfway to the pillars.

“Wait, you want to put us in as rigged competitors?” Naruto asked slowly, shifting his gaze back to Kakashi.

“Maybe,” Kakashi drawled, after a long moment.

“But what about the other teams.” Sasuke ground out.

He didn’t look nearly as irritated a moment ago. Naruto didn’t feel as irritated either, because putting them in as shoe-in candidates was kind of cool. Then again, there was something off about this entire thing. Kakashi looked way too shifty for comfort.

“Well, I don’t have any jurisdiction over what they decide to do with their teams, short of ensuring that they don’t let them get slaughtered. Beyond that… I have no idea if those teams will be entered in or not.”

“Did Arashi ask you not to put us in?” Naruto said, abrupt. Before he could convince himself to not ask.

Because there was no way he was going to broach this topic with Arashi, later. He’d been angry enough in the morning. Another confrontation like that and Bolt would probably either burst into tears or storm out of the house, and that would just make Arashi worse.

Kakashi shot him a look, and Naruto could tell he was silently asking why Naruto was forcing the topic around his teammates. Which, just… Kakashi was the one who kept going on about teamwork, dammit. Even if the alternate dimension hopping was technically classified, stuff like this about the Chuunin exam? Was something his teammates deserved to know.

So he scrunched up his face and held his ground, even when Kakashi stared at him, his single visible eye going sharp.

“…Arashi? Naruto’s father? Why would Naruto’s father have any say in what we do, as a team?” Sakura asked, confused.

…Sasuke was staring at the side of his head. Naruto could feel it, almost like a lance of heat that burned. He didn’t turn his gaze away from Kakashi, though, hoping that that would convince Sasuke to let the matter be. Then again, this was shaping up to be the worst day possible to tell him about the time travel schtick. What the hell was he supposed to say if Kakashi confirmed that Arashi was the reason that they weren’t being allowed to compete in the Chuunin exams? Sasuke wouldn’t listen to anything Naruto had to say, he’d be too angry.

Either that, or he would listen, and then he’d hate Naruto, because he’d think Naruto was the one getting in the way of him growing stronger. Whether younger or older.

“You’re right, Sakura-chan. He wouldn’t have any say at all. I’m the one who’s your sensei, after all,” Kakashi replied easily.

It made all three of them twitch. Because, over the last few months, even if they hadn’t perfected understanding Kakashi, they could still get something of a read on him. And, now? He was clearly lying. It wasn’t even a complete lie, because if it had been, none of them would’ve been able to pick it up. Their stint in Wave had taught them that – Kakashi could be a cagey bastard if he wanted to be.
And none of them would know he was lying until it was too late. But, now? He was lying and being obvious about it.

Naruto frowned up at him, the outrage loosening in his chest.

“Did Arashi bring in some intel that suggested it’s better not to put us in, then?” Sasuke offered up, tone uncharacteristically careful. Naruto and Sakura both shot him a surprised glance, before hurriedly looking forward.

Kakashi… didn’t look as cheerfully forbidding as before. If anything, the false expression had evened out into something more honestly amused.

“That’s a decent suggestion. But it’s one that I won’t be able to confirm or deny, I hope you understand that.” He said, mild.

Naruto scowled, ready to argue against that, but Sakura got a hand around his elbow and forced him to stay quiet, instead distracting their sensei with questions about what they were going to be doing for the rest of the day. Kakashi went with it, because he clearly didn’t want to waste any more of his time on questions about the exam. Or about Arashi.

Sasuke wasn’t too happy about his question being ignored, even if Kakashi acknowledged it as a good suggestion. But he seemed willing to let it go so they could keep training. Naruto would’ve been weirded out by how cooperative he was being if he weren’t convinced that Sasuke would find some way to try and convince Kakashi to let them compete anyway.

Naruto had the sinking feeling that he wasn’t going to succeed, though. He might have gotten his way if it were just Kakashi making the decision, based on their collective stats as a team, but something about the set of Kakashi’s face had convinced Naruto that there was more to this decision.

Running into team 10 later, at Yakiniku Q, only convinced him of that.

Sasuke had kicked up a prissy fit when Naruto had suggested getting ramen together after training - well, okay. Sakura-chan had kicked up a prissy fit, saying that she’d had enough junk food, so no Ichiraku Ramen. Sasuke had, obviously, agreed because he didn’t want to eat together at all, but he’d clearly thought that agreeing with Sakura would ensure that they wouldn’t eat together. Like hell.

Naruto could have told him that it wasn’t going to work, not when it was Sakura involved. She’d looked elated to have him agree with her, and had gone the distance and asked what he’d like to eat instead.

Naruto had used the long moment of silence in which Sasuke looked like he wanted to kill himself to catch them both by their wrists and drag them to the closest restaurant with halfway edible food – only halfway edible because nowhere was as good as Ichiraku.

“Oh, team 7.” Shikamaru said, sounding bored. Naruto blinked at him, because while he’d had enough reasons to see Shikamaru really often off late, he hadn’t seen any of the others in a while.

“Sasuke-kun, are you here because forehead was too much to bear any longer?” Ino asked, voice coy, and Naruto cringed, ducking away from the crossfire because Sakura predictably flared.

“Hey, Naruto.” Choji said softly, watching Ino and Sakura screech at each other with a wince.

Naruto offered him a grimace, starting to tuck himself into the open space beside Shikamaru before changing his mind. He glanced back, eying the way Sasuke was slowly edging away from the girls, and gave a short wave to catch his attention. Sasuke noticed him immediately, thankfully. Because it wouldn’t have been fun if Sakura noticed the spontaneous hand signal he’d just made.
“Mind if Sasuke sits down between the two of you?” he muttered at Shikamaru.

Choji looked surprised, but Shika nodded without any protest, quickly sliding out and letting Sasuke get in quickly, before Ino noticed any of the shifting around taking place at the booth. Naruto slid in all the way to the end of the empty seats facing the other three boys. By the time Sakura noticed what had been happening at the booth, all of them were settled and happily adding meat to the grills. Choji looked like he was trying hard not to laugh, and Shikamaru looked about as bored as always, but Naruto could swear he’d never seen Sasuke look that relieved before. Well, as relieved as he could look, anyway.

Hey, look. No wrinkles between his brows, or at the corners of his eyes. Relieved.

“Na. Ru. To.” Sakura growled, when she got close enough to them that they didn’t attract too much attention. Well, any more attention that they already had.

“Beef, Sakura-chan?” he offered innocently, making Choji choke.

She spent roughly thirty seconds looking like she was about to slam a fist into his head, and another ten looking like it was going to be more than once, especially after Ino came back. But then, Sasuke looked up at her, fingers steady around the chopsticks he still had stretched out, in the process of turning over a marinated slice of steak. They stared at each other for a split second, after which Sakura ducked her head and groaned.

“You’re both so painful. Move in, idiot-“

Naruto coughed, trying to fight his sniggers, while Sasuke rolled his eyes and looked back at the meat on the grill. Choji was staring at the three of them, arm and hand gone stiff with a piece of grilled pork belly still held right in front of his mouth.

“…wow. What’s with you guys.” Ino muttered, looking about as bemused as Choji did.

She was still visibly irritated with Naruto, obviously - she reached past Sakura to jab him in the shoulder once they’d sat down – but she seemed to be more involved in staring between Sakura and Sasuke. Naruto’s teammates weren’t looking at each other, Sakura was more involved in signaling for a hostess to come by and take their orders while Sasuke gaze was very pointedly directed at the meat on the grill, ignoring the way Ino and Choji were goggling at him.

“The two of you are going out,” Ino said after a long moment’s silence, aghast.

Shikamaru choked on the mouthful of water he’d just taken, and Naruto muttered something rude under his breath, still rubbing at his shoulder. Her nails were going to leave marks, damn it. Sakura didn’t even get the chance to confirm or deny it, because the look Sasuke sent Ino’s way was blisteringly disgusted enough to make her settle down, looking mollified.

“…so, did your sensei sign you up for the exam? Ours didn’t.” Shikamaru asked, out of the blue, just when they were starting to get settled again.

Naruto had been spending enough time with him in the last week or so that the other boy’s creepy spot-on guesses didn’t make him fumble his chopsticks, but everyone else at the table did. Well, Choji and Ino probably jerked in place because Shikamaru was willingly contributing to a conversation when he didn’t really have to. Sakura and Sasuke were probably more bothered about just how coincidentally uncoincidental the topic was.

“Ours didn’t either.” He replied, exasperated.
Ino looked gleeful for all of a moment before her face crumpled.

“Your sensei isn’t allowing Sasuke-kun to compete in the exams? That’s horrible!” she said, and Sakura groaned lowly, hiding her face in her hands.

The actions drew stares from everyone, Naruto included, because even if there had been little changes, he’d never seen Sakura-chan acting quite like this before. Till now, anyway.

“Sakura?” Sasuke asked, looking about as confused as Naruto felt. Well, as confused as his perfect face let him look, anyway.

Ino puffed up, obviously gearing up to say something that would draw Sasuke’s attention back to her. Naruto winced, he’d nearly managed to forget this dumb song and dance from when they’d been in the Academy, especially since Sakura had slowly been getting better about the ‘Sasuke-kun’ thing, but he definitely didn’t miss the screaming matches the girls used to get into when they were all in the same classroom. From the way Choji looked like he wanted to choke on his mouthful of beef and the way Sasuke’s face had gone blank, Naruto had to bet that they missed it about as little as he did.

Shikamaru just looked like he wanted to get up and walk out before things got noisy again.

“Don’t worry, Sasuke-kun! We shou- what?”

Naruto blinked, because Ino had stopped when Sakura had muttered something into her hands.

“Sakura-chan?” he asked, suddenly nervous. And, weirdly, remembering all those times Bolt started laughing nervously and backing away from Sakura for no reason other than her smiling bright and sweet. Which-how could that be a bad thing? She’d been smiling.

Ino’s lips suddenly split into an uncomfortably wide and mean smile. Naruto couldn’t sense anything malicious about it, there wasn’t any real intent to hurt behind it. He knew all about that kind of intent, could read it in a smile as easy as breathing, but the spread of her lips looked like it was meant to hurt.

“What’s wrong, forehead? Jeal-”

“I said,” Sakura cut in, voice tight, “Sasuke-kun isn’t the only one not being allowed to compete in the exams.”

Once Sakura’s intent bled through the words, Naruto was too busy feeling like someone had hit him over the head with a bat to really pay attention to how anyone else was reacting. Well, other than Sasuke. He exchanged a split-second, perfectly incredulous glance with the bastard before turning his attention back to the girls.

Ino, he was uncomfortable to see, look confused. Like she hadn’t understood what Sakura was trying to say. Not so in the case of Shikamaru, who’d abruptly leant back into the seating, brows raised.

“Didn’t your sensei tell you, Ino-Pig? Genin can’t compete in the chuunin exam unless they go in as a team. I don’t know about you, but none of us is getting the chance to go and we’re all unhappy about it.” Sakura continued, sounding so much more irate than Naruto was used to.

Which, no – he had heard her sound this irritated before. Mostly in the Academy, or in the early days after they’d become a team, during their breaks in training. When Naruto asked her to go out with him, or if he interrupted her when she was trying to talk to Sasuke. It was the ‘just-how-much-of-an-idiot-are-you’ voice. From the sudden cough that erupted from Sasuke, and the way he fumbled for a
glass of water, he’d clearly recognized it too.

Ino frowned at her, and it was a mark of just how shaken up she was, and how focused Sakura was, that neither of them noticed the way Sasuke was grappling for some water. Choji was too busy staring at the girls to help, and Shikamaru’s glass was empty – Naruto made a face and shoved his glass over at the bastard, looking back at Ino once he was sure the bastard’s fingers were locked around the glass.

“-sn’t important, forehead, Sasuke-kun isn’t being allowed to go! He’s the best genin there is, it isn’t fair!”

“How is it not fair if Sasuke-kun’s the only one not being allowed to compete! It’s unfair because none of us is being allowed to take it, we should at least be given the chance, right?” she shot back, glancing over her shoulder at him for support. Naruto blinked at her, wide-eyed.

“Naruto!” she snapped, and Naruto found himself nodding hurriedly.

“Y-Yeah! Sakura-chan’s right, Ino! The teme isn’t the only person in our team who wanted to take the exams! We’re all angry about it-ttebayo!” he said loudly, slamming his fist against the table.

He wasn’t sure if he could really believe what he was saying, though. She’d looked irritated, when Kakashi had said that he wouldn’t be entering them, but this? This was a lot more than irritation. When he looked at Sasuke, hoping his other teammate could do something about this because Sakura-chan was starting to scare him, he found that the bastard was going to be absolutely no help. He was staring at the two of them like he’d never really seen them before, eyes wide. And red- wait, what? Why the fuck had he triggered his sharingan?

Ino noticed at around the same time as he did, because she squealed loudly.

“Sasuke-kun, your eyes!” she said excitedly, dropping her argument with Sakura without another thought.

Sasuke quickly looked away, eyes going back to normal. Though Naruto could see the flush of pink over the tips of his ears — hah, he was embarrassed. Did the bastard lose control or something? That was- wait. Sakura’s shoulders were shaking.

“Sakura-chan?” he muttered warily, trying not to attract Ino’s attention. Which was going to be really difficult to do, what with the way she was chattering at Sasuke happily, gesturing at his face. Naruto flinched a bit, because there was no way the bastard was going to be okay with that. He had way too many issues with personal space to want anyone waving fingers in his face.

One teammate at a time, though.

He carefully set a hand on Sakura’s shoulder, and she whirled about to stare him right in the eye. Naruto felt his cheeks go hot, because damn. He’d automatically been taking it down a notch — fair was fair, Sakura seemed to be controlling herself around Sasuke to some extent, so he’d been trying to tone himself down too. Even if he didn’t want to. It was the nice thing to do and, Kakashi-sensei would say, it would be better for the team as a whole. But she was so damn pretty sometimes.

“I wasn’t that bad, was I,” she said shakily.

“What?” Naruto asked her dumbly, and she frowned at him, reaching out to catch him by the front of his jacket and shake him back and forth.

“I wasn’t that bad, was I?”
Naruto stared at her for a long, disbelieving moment before he managed to smile, however sickly.

“Uh, sorry to say, but you were. You definitely were. Just ask Sasuke,” he said, and she groaned, much to the collective hilarity of everyone at their table except for Ino.

Come to think of it, Ino looked like she’d just been slapped. Naruto eyed her, suspicious, while also gingerly patting Sakura on the back. His teammate looked like she wanted to throttle someone, and since he was the person closest at hand, it was probably in his best interest to keep her mostly stable.

Thankfully, that was the point at which they were interrupted by one of the hostesses, approaching them with a polite smile and pointedly directing her question of what they’d like to order at the back of Sakura’s head.

Naruto rolled his eyes and didn’t bother to say anything. The restaurants had stopped ignoring him when he passed his genin exam and started turning up at places other than Ichiraku’s with his teammates, but that just meant they directed their words at his teammates instead of him. Well, as long as they weren’t actively sabotaging his food or barring him at the doors like a few of the dumber ones used to when he was younger… It had never been too bad, he’d noticed even as a kid that the more violently disapproving citizens of Konoha seemed to either change their tune or mysteriously disappear if they gave him too much trouble as a kid. Eventually, the violent ones completely disappeared, and all that was left were people who ignored him and acted as though he didn’t exist.

Which wasn’t any better, really. At least the violent ones made him feel like people other than the old man knew he was alive.

“Dobe.” Sasuke said, bland, and Naruto blinked at him, blankly noticing that his hand had tightened on the back of Sakura’s dress. She hadn’t bother to do more than turn slightly in the grip of his arm so she could order, still mostly pressed up against his front, and that bit of closeness was comforting when he realized that all of team 10 was looking between him and the hostess oddly.

That smile on her face had gotten awfully tight, hadn’t it.

“I’m fine with anything, it ain’t ramen,” he said, sticking his tongue out at Choji when the Akimichi made a face at him.

They went back to chatting about their teachers and how plain weird they could get sometimes, after that, but Naruto couldn’t help but notice that Sakura stuck close to his side even after the hostess had left. And that Sasuke was ignoring most of the conversation and yelling taking place, especially awkward whenever Ino tried to get him to agree to a date at some point, but he still kept glancing back at the two of them, as if to make sure nothing had changed since he’d last looked at them.

It made him feel oddly overcome. Because his team had done a 180 degree shift since they’d been to Wave and come back home, and even if he didn’t really notice it most of the time because they weren’t really different… they kept watching him sometimes. And he wasn’t sure what he was supposed to do with that. He’d noticed the bastard doing it more often than Sakura, but that was Sakura-chan was awesome enough that he wouldn’t notice if she was being careful. Sasuke, though? Was an awkward idiot when he wasn’t being a broody, emo pretty-boy. It was easy to notice him acting weird.

So he squawked when Sakura tried to force some of the kimchi on him, laughed loudly when Shikamaru dully cracked one of his more sharp tongued jokes, snickered when Sasuke looked like he wanted to head for the hills because Ino was sitting and sighing at him dreamily. And ignored the way Sakura seemed to be boxing him away whenever the hostess who’d come to their table earlier walked past again.
Hey. He was used to this shit. But having people who openly objected to the way some adults treated him was still strange. Especially when it was Sakura, of all people. Or Sasuke. Shika, Kiba and Choji were easier to deal with, Naruto had hung out with them enough when he was younger that having them object to the treatment would have been easier to deal with – childhood friends over shitty adults, right. Even if they didn’t really hang out much once they got older. To the point that he’d nearly forgotten that they’d been… something, at one point. If not really friends. But having his teammates, of all people…

“Oi, Naruto-”

He looked over at Shikamaru, and met his shuttered gaze with a shrug and a grin before reaching out to fight with Choji over the rib meat that was sizzling on the grill between the two of them. It was the easier thing to do, after all. If Shika wanted to have a heart to heart, well… Sasuke already had a place booked on that for the day. Even if he didn’t fucking know or appreciate it.

* *

An hour after they’d all parted ways, and a half hour since Naruto had snuck up on the bastard to catch him by the elbow and drag him into a narrow alleyway - then down through a hole in a wall and through a network of increasingly dingy alleyways and down into the sewers at one point, before quietly breaking into an apartment building that had stairs that would lead them up to a roof that was high enough that most Konoha-nin didn’t bother to hop over it on a regular basis - found him shrugging awkwardly to avoid the bug-eyed stare that his teammate was directing at him.

“The fuck, dobe?!” he snapped incredulously, once Naruto ungagged him. Hey, he’d yelped and then he’d started snarling threats at Naruto in a dangerously loud voice that would have drawn too much attention to them. Naruto had had to take drastic action to shut him up.

Not that Sasuke was willing to accept him at his word when he said that. He was too busy freaking out over the fact that Naruto had managed to get the drop on him in the first place. Ha. Wasn’t like it was the first fucking time.

Looked like Sasuke’d forgotten all about that, though.

“Remember I said that we needed to talk?” Naruto said, cutting into the bastard’s muttering. It was starting to get repetitive. That got him another bug-eyed look.

Which… was actually understandable? He’d never really bothered to show off just how well he knew his way around Konoha’s back alleys before. Or how easy it was to break and enter places – that wouldn’t have weirded Sasuke out as much if Naruto hadn’t gone with a tried and tested method that wasn’t covered in an Academy lesson. And if he hadn’t used lock picking tools that weren’t standard issue. Maybe it looked suspicious from the other end?

He snickered a bit into his hands, because poor Sasuke looked way more disturbed than he really needed to be.

“Calm down, teme. I’ve got no plans to murder you and hide away your pretty boy corpse. That would just be sad.”

“…what’s sad is that, that? Is nowhere near as assuring as you seem to think it is.” Sasuke spat back, but at least he hunkered down beside Naruto by the low parapet wall closing off the sides of the roof without any more complaints or staring.

“I needed to make sure we weren’t followed,” Naruto explained, once Sasuke was close enough that
he could get a hand around his ankle and drag him back down, if the other boy reacted badly to what he had to say.

Sasuke scowled at him suspiciously.

“Yeah? And why would you be followed, dobe?” he sneered, tone sarcastic enough to burn. It might have made Naruto throw his arms up and give up on the entire time travel revelation crap altogether if he weren’t already so committed to it.

Arashi’s reaction made him want to tell Sasuke out of sheer spite, at this point. Well, not spite. It’s not like he actually wanted to hurt the man. But, it wasn’t fair. He had good reasons to want to explain stuff to Sasuke, after all. And there was no way he’d accept things as reasonably as Shikamaru had.

It was Sasuke. Him and reasonable didn’t even belong in the same fucking sentence.

“Because,” Naruto said, trying against all else to not yell because yelling would attract attention, “What I wanted to talk to you about is classified.”

That managed to make Sasuke shut up, thankfully. He still looked suspicious, but he was also started to look a little curious. Not that you could tell from his face, the bastard was somehow blessed with a face that didn’t convey anything. But he was quiet and listening with narrow, mostly disbelieving eyes.

Well, quiet for a moment, at least.

“Classified?” he repeated, dubiously, and Naruto groaned, scrubbing the back of his head in exasperation.

“Just shut up and listen, okay?”

Sasuke rolled his eyes, unimpressed, but he leaned back into the wall behind them, staring at him with raised brows. The asshole. Naruto gritted his teeth, and forced himself to shoulder on.

“It’s about Arashi.” He said, and unsurprisingly, that had Sasuke’s eyes going narrow again. Though he didn’t actually speak up.

Naruto eyed him uneasily, and decided to spit it out. Like taking off a bandaid, right? Right.

“Arashi’s not my dad.” He blurted out.

It didn’t get him any kind of reaction at all. Sasuke continued to eye him, narrow-eyed.

Naruto made a face, and looked down. It was probably a bad idea, telling him this kind of crap without watching him for a reaction, but he didn’t think he could keep speaking with Sasuke staring at him like that.

“Look, they still haven’t told me everything, but apparently it’s apparently some kind of combination of seals and space-time ninjuts- Whoa!” he lashed out and managed to grab Sasuke about the aforementioned ankle before the bastard could actually get too far away.

He had to avoid the kick aimed at his ribs right after, but he couldn’t find it in himself to complain when he noticed the look on Sasuke’s face. The other boy actually looked pained, and those spots of red high on his cheeks looked more like incensed humiliation than anything else.
Damn. What the fuck had he said that had pissed the bastard off so much, anyway?

“Sasuke- hey! Quit that!” he yelped, rolling out of the way of another kick, this one aiming for his gut. And dragged Sasuke along for the ride, because he hadn’t actually let go of his ankle.

Sasuke hit the roof without a sound, easily rolling with Naruto and somehow finding the balance to first break the hold Naruto had on his ankle and then straddle him, dragging him up by the collar with a snarl and aiming a punch for his face.

“Sasuke! Fuckin’ ow, get the fuck off me you-” Naruto snarled back, jerking his hips to spin them around and slam Sasuke back down on the concrete.

And even if it was way too tempting to get his hands in Sasuke’s hair and bang his skull against a hard surface a few times, because that punch had fucking hurt, damnit, he forced himself to just pin the Uchiha down. Thankfully Sasuke seemed more than ready to yell at him instead. Which, no, that was a bad idea. Naruto really hoped someone hadn’t heard them yelling already. So he caught the edge of Sasuke’s ridiculous, high collared shirt and dragged it up enough to shove it into his mouth.

“Mmpf!” Sasuke growled out around the cloth, looking more indignant by the second.

Naruto laughed nervously.

“Remember me telling you this shit is classified? I don’t need someone alerting the ANBU. Or Kakashi, because I’m pretty sure Arashi told him I might try to tell you about this shit. And then we’ll both be in trouble.”

That, more than anything else, seemed to make Sasuke pause for thought. He looked more than a little ridiculous, choking on his own collar, and from the dirty look Sasuke shot him he could tell exactly what was going through Naruto’s head. Naruto offered him a wide grin, and sat back a bit. Didn’t let go, though, because that would just be stupid.

Sasuke spat the cloth out of his mouth, cringing at the way it sagged wetly against his throat, and scowled up at Naruto.

“Did you or did you not just claim that your father is a time traveler.” Sasuke bit out.

Naruto laughed uncomfortably in response.

“Hey, I didn’t claim my father’s anything. It’s not like I know who the fuck he is, Arashi certainly isn’t speaking up.”

Sasuke stared at him, looking more vexed by the moment, before suddenly going still. Naruto frowned down at him.

“…you didn’t deny the time travel thing.”

“I didn’t confirm it either, did I?” Naruto asked, because honestly, Arashi had insisted that it wasn’t time travel.

Apparently being from the same time stream, reality or dimension meant that them existing in the same moment would have created a paradox of some sort. It had left Naruto blinking owlishly at him, especially when Arashi crossed over into some kind of dizzying conversation about it with Kakashi, complete with mentions of multiple sealing matrixes and what looked like math equations spilling out over sheets of paper laid out across the coffee table in the living room.
Naruto and Bolt had both beaten a hasty retreat to their rooms, feeling like they would begin to steam at the ears if they had to listen to any more of it.

“You didn’t have to, dobe – if you’d been saying anything else, you’d have been yelling in my face by now.” Sasuke said, lips twisting.

The expression he made was ugly enough that Naruto winced and rolled off of him, allowing him to sit up. At least it looked like the bastard was going to stick around before jumping to conclusions now.

“…so, time travel. Arashi’s… not you dad?” Sasuke asked after a long moment with his gaze firmly directed at his knees and not directed at Naruto, once he’d spent enough time mulling the thought over.

The tone was strange. Fucking hell, Sasuke and fucking families. Naruto made a face at the side of his head, confident that the bastard wasn’t going to notice it. He desperately missed the days when he didn’t know just how weird Sasuke could get about families. And the days when he didn’t know that, most of the time, Sasuke weirdness about families seemed to have latched on to Naruto’s supposed family. Since Sasuke’s only reaction to Sakura’s parents tended to be annoyance or boredom.

Maybe it was shinobi families that he got weird about. Or the fact that Naruto had been the only other orphan that Sasuke’d had any real interaction with. None of the other genin who’d successfully graduated their year were family-less, after all. And they were all clan kids, to boot. That probably twisted Sasuke up badly too.

“He’s not,” Naruto agreed, letting the thought go before it made his head ache too much.

He didn’t like to think about shit like this. It left him feeling sick to the gut. Especially since thinking about families made him involuntarily remember just how the confident cut of Arashi’s shoulders, and the fact that he always seemed to be there off late if Naruto needed something, was starting to become familiar. It was getting too easy to forget that he was Naruto-the-Second, and he… couldn’t deal with that. He really couldn’t deal with that.

It would, Naruto thought a touch sullenly, have been a fucking dream if Arashi had really been his dad.

He was an asshole, and Bolt seemed to be lonely more often than not, but he would be Naruto’s dad. A dad, if a dumb, deadbeat one who never seemed to understand how to connect to his kids. But one that seemed to care, however awkwardly.

“If he’s not you dad…” Sasuke muttered, still not looking at him, but his shoulders were hunching slightly, and Naruto found himself giving a sharp laugh that had Sasuke jerking in place.

“It’s been a couple decades since he was a deadlast. Guess things change, eh.” He muttered, smiling weakly when Sasuke glanced up at him, gaze sharp even through the bangs that were shadowing his face.

“Why’d you tell me?” he asked, voice hard. And just so slightly off, with an edge of disbelief that was completely different from the disbelief he’d been voicing earlier, before Naruto had gotten all of this shit off his chest.

Naruto offered him a toothy, bright grin that had Sasuke cringing back, eyes going wide.

“Because I didn’t want you finding out when the other you shows up.”
Sasuke went still again, parsing that thought, and slowly began to shake. Naruto shook his head, and looked away, crawling back over to the wall and giving the bastard at least some bit of space to get over that. At least Naruto’d gotten the chance to get over the reality of Arashi and his choices in relative privacy. What little privacy he could get with Kakashi and Jiji constantly watching him, anyway. And with Arashi and Bolt camped out in his tiny little apartment, before Arashi had declared that they were getting a bigger place.

“And he’s...” Sasuke said, in a small voice, after an indeterminate time later.

Naruto, for his part, was staring up at the sky. He’d watched it slowly darken from blue to pinkish-peach, and now, the wide expanse above them was shaded over in bruise purples and faint traces of blue and black. Not night. Not yet.

“Yeah.”

“...he’s nothing like-”

“Me. Yeah.”

“And Bolt-”

“Fuck, Sasuke, quit focusing on Arashi. That’s not why I fucking told you and you fucking know it-ittebayo.” Naruto said, somehow finding it in himself to keep his voice composed even though he wanted to yell the words in Sasuke’s face. But no.

ANBU. Kakashi. Needing to deal with the look on both Arashi and Jiji’s faces when they realized that he’d breezed past every order, implied or otherwise, to keep Sasuke out of the loop.

Sasuke gave a rude snort, and slowly found his way to the spot he’d been seated in earlier, hunching over on Naruto’s left.

“We should tell Sakura.”

Naruto blinked at that, and gawked at him in surprise.

“What? Why?!?” he asked incredulously. Why the hell would he want to share this kind of miserable shit with Sakura-chan?!

Sasuke gave a short laugh and shrugged at him with a single shoulder, managing to make the motion look cool even though Naruto suspected his face was looking suspiciously blotchier than before, hidden in the dark of twilight that was beginning to settle over them.

“Well, she’d probably be happy about this,” Sasuke muttered back.

Naruto turned that strange thought over, and he had to admit, Sasuke made sense. They were the ones with the big dreams and with reasons to be leery about the future, after all. Sakura-chan would probably be excited about seeing some version of herself, all grown up. Looking absolutely stunning, no doubt. And being a confident adult.

Sasuke had enough regrets, reasons for vengeance and a bloody dream that made him as unwilling as Naruto to face what any possible future for him could bring. They were very different from Naruto’s reasons, but they were good reasons to not want to see what Sasuke-the-Second would be like, in the flesh.

Naruto found himself laughing a little helplessly. Because, this? This was why he’d wanted Sasuke
Getting slapped in the face with all those issues and no warning at all would have been nasty. Hell, his family related weirdness would probably make him implode, if he’d run into his future counterpart the way Naruto had run into Arashi, Bolt and Himawari. Which was another terrifying thought – what if Sasuke-the-Second had kids? Having multiple maybe-Uchihas appear out of nowhere in his living room would either make Sasuke break down or he’d have a mental break and go fucking psycho.

“We should tell her,” Sasuke repeated, sounding as pained as Naruto felt.

And, yeah. He was right. She would be happy enough about it to make up for the two of them, once she got over the shock. And hey, “those who abandon their comrades are worse than trash”.

Kakashi should be proud.

“You want to grab dinner together?” Naruto asked, once he got his laughter under control. Because he didn’t really want to go home to face Arashi and Bolt, after this. Not immediately, anyway.

Sasuke eyed him, a little suspiciously, before giving a put upon sigh and agreeing.

“As long as it isn’t ramen.”

Naruto wailed a bit, because dammit, he wanted ramen. He needed comfort food. And his daily dose of ramen wasn’t being met anymore, not with Arashi keeping an eye on the food he was eating. And telling every other damned adult that Naruto was likely to see to keep an eye on him too.

…he was more than a little grateful that he still hadn’t had to deal with Arashi and Iruka-sensei at the same time. Arashi actually seemed to be avoiding him, from what Naruto could tell. And he didn’t really want to know why. But, at least it meant that they weren’t ganging up against him.

“But we went to Yakiniku Q for lunch,” Naruto complained, once they’d dusted themselves and set off.

The bastard gave a snide laugh at that, and Naruto could nearly hear the silent “and you think I care, why, exactly?” being shot in his direction. He outright pouted, more than a little sulkily, and lashed out with a fist to punch Sasuke in the shoulder and make him go stumbling in the dark.

It was worth stumbling over the leg Sasuke stuck out to trip him up right after. At least he got to hear Sasuke squeak like a scared little girl when his shove nearly sent the Uchiha toppling down the stairs.

Sitting in silence and staring up at the sky with Sasuke at his side was unnervingly therapeutic, he was coming to realize. He’d never really spent time with his teammates outside of training before. At least, not before their mission in Wave. Not before Arashi and Bolt had crash-landed in his life with all the confusing shit they brought with them. And after that, and after Kakashi had decided that they needed all the team building opportunities they could get, he’d found himself finding ways and means to get out of the crazy three versus one survival spars Kakashi had decided they needed to do offlate.

Spending time with his teammates outside of training had suddenly become a way to ensure Kakashi didn’t drive them all around the bend. Since the frequency of the three versus one spars dropped down by a suspicious amount whenever they did.
Being dragged off to eat dinner in a tea house was never going to be a top priority in his life, though. Team building opportunities or not. Since the food was bland, and the looks the hostesses directed at him had been anything but friendly. A lot worse than lunch. He had the suspicion that Sasuke had decided to silently slink out after him to keep strolling in the night out of some weird, niggling feeling of guilt. That he would never admit to, obviously. It was Sasuke.

“Has… has he said anything? About the other me?” Sasuke muttered, and Naruto sighed, feeling his face scrunch up in discomfort. Because Arashi had. He’d said a lot, in all that he hadn’t said, and the way Bolt kept bringing Sasuke-the-Second, Sasuke-the-Shishou, all the damn time when Naruto least expected it only added to that.

“Not what you want to hear,” Naruto found himself saying, instead. Because that was true too. Sasuke would want to know if he succeeded in his dream. If he’d gotten vengeance for his family. And that was something Arashi wouldn’t answer even if Naruto decided to ask him directly about it.

That was something Naruto didn’t need to test him on to understand. He knew himself, after all. And for all that he was a prickly, broody, emo pretty-boy, the bastard was his friend. Well, his teammate first, but also something of a friend. Sacrificing yourself for someone meant you were friends, right?

Naruto would never understand friendship. Not really. He understood precious people because of Haku, though. And even if he wouldn’t be caught dead admitting it to the bastard’s face, Sasuke… was. He was a precious person. The same as Sakura-chan, Iruka-sensei, Jiji, and Kakashi. And Konohamaru. And Shika, Kiba and Choji. Maybe Shikaku-ji and Yoshino-san too. Definitely Teuchi and Ayame. They were all his precious people. And he wouldn’t betray them or their dreams to a little kid. Even if that little kid once used to be him.

Sasuke seemed to sag in place, head hanging low over the dark of the river flowing beneath them. Naruto sighed, and found himself patting the other boy awkwardly on the shoulder. What was more surprising than that was the fact that Sasuke could have pushed him away, but he didn’t.

He didn’t.

“Maybe you shouldn’t have told me,” Sasuke muttered lowly, when they parted ways. Naruto grinned at him, a little amused by the tone.

“You don’t really mean that, do you.”

“No. You probably shouldn’t have told me anyway.” Sasuke shot back, bland.

Naruto gave a bright, sunny laugh, because obviously the bastard had to find something to complain about. Passive-aggressively.

“Probably. But you’re stuck with knowing, now.”

The look Sasuke shot him at that made his breath catch right in his throat. Because it looked disbeliefing, angry, pained and grateful all at once. It made him want to scream, because he hadn’t done anything to deserve a look like that.

“G’night,” he said, calling it after the bastard as he went. Sasuke waved at him over his shoulder, not bothering to look back, and Naruto stared after him until he turned a corner and walked out of sight.

It was a while before Naruto actually found the will to trudge his way home, though.

He couldn’t get the shape of that look out of his head.
(Have at, Naruto-the-Second.)

(Naruto’d been right.)

(Being right didn’t make things hurt any less, though.)

Chapter End Notes

1: I have issues with using RL country and language specific terms for anything in a world as radically fictional as Naruto’s canon ‘verse is, but since Choji’s favorite food is apparently Korean barbecue, I’m going to go and say just calling kimchi kimchi isn’t going to be much of a faux pas. Since ‘spicy fermented cabbage salad’ just doesn’t roll off the tongue as well.

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Hey guys, looks like I finally managed to post something on the weekend. If anyone’s actually paying attention to my rambling about days on which I try to post, I’m definitely aiming at Sundays from here on.

Before any wary readers leap for my throat - this isn't a SNS/SasuNaruSasu fic. Or a Sasuke/Sakura fic. Or even a Team 7 OT3 fic - this isn't a shipping fic at all, I tend to make stuff like that explicit in the tags. But, feel free to read this as you like. I love all teh ships.

Also, got a question for you – do you think I should switch out Bolt for Boruto instead? I’ve been sticking with Bolt since that’s technically the Romanization of the name if you don’t indicate the accent. But the translators for Kodachi’s sequel to Naruto seem to be going with Boruto. This… probably isn’t as major a shift as I’m making it out to be, and just boils down to preferences. Either way, I thought asking for a second opinion or thoughts would be good. If it weren’t already obvious, I’m fine either way. So, if you have a take or opinion about this, feel free to fire away.

Honestly, this fic only seems to be getting more and more self-indulgent as we go forward, but I'm having fun writing it, so I guess that's okay. Also, whoof, I didn't realize just how large this chapter had gotten, ahaha... Hope you enjoyed it (Sasuke! Big Reveal! Much melodrama! Sakura having second thoughts about being the ultimate fangirl!), and consider leaving kudos and comments on your way out. I'd love to hear anything to have to say, even a word or so will do! As always.

EDIT: Anyone who's confused about the relationship between Sasuke and Sakura, or just wants some insight into what's going through their heads since Naruto isn't likely to understand either of them all that well right now, check out the comments to this chapter. There's a response to the question there.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!