The Greatest Thing You'll Ever Learn

by quartzapple

Summary

Iruka is a 20-something with a plan: get a good job, get married, get a house, have kids. What he didn't expect is for the plan to be ruined by an enigmatic new colleague who Iruka just can't seem to forget. Kakalru yaoi with lemons and plot!

Notes

So, this was originally posted to fanfiction dot net, and it's still there - I'm just posting it here too in case it gets removed. I've taken out the author's notes because they're dumb, but if you really want to read them they're still on the original ff.net version. I'm uploading 10 chapters at a time. Given that there are 100 chapters to this fic, it's going to take more than a week, but I promise it will all be up.

Thanks so much to everyone who has reviewed, and thanks for all 1K+ reviews as of September 2012 - I read every single one of them, and I really appreciate it. Without further ado, here is my very special monster:

Update 2018: I wrote this when I was about sixteen having never been in a relationship and no idea how adults experience life let alone love. Now as an #adult, this whole fic seems patently naive. If you want a cheesy love story with little to no relation to the real world, read on. If you're a jaded humanoid with little to no human emotion left in you, read on - it may
remind you of your humanity.
It Just Takes Some Time

Hey, don’t write yourself off yet

It’s only in your head you feel left out or looked down on

Just do your best, do everything you can

And don’t you worry what their bitter hearts are gonna say

“Damn,” I cursed as a few fragments of eggshell slid into the clear mixing bowl along with the contents of the egg. I scrambled for a fork to fish them out, trying to speed up the cooking process as much as possible. That was the secret to a good cake: the self-raising agent in the flour is activated by liquid, so after you put in the egg you need to mix it and get it in the oven as fast as possible. I finally picked out the last piece of brownish shell, wiping the fork free of egg white and flour on my apron, before stirring the cake mix.

Baking. Possibly the most therapeutic exercise ever, possibly with the exception of sex. But since I didn’t exactly have a girlfriend, and I was far too boring to even consider going to a bar or a club, that option was out.

It’s not like I had never had a girlfriend. I had properly dated three girls when I was at high school, all lasting for a number of months before the initial interest we had in each other fizzled out and we moved on. We stayed on good terms, or as good terms as we could have been. I even took the third one to senior prom. We coordinated our outfits and everything.

My high school girlfriends were all a bit like me; a little bit boring, very mundane, and very ordinary. The first girlfriend took my virginity, and the other two were a chance to practise. By the time I finished high school and moved on to the local university, I had decided to either find Miss Right or to stop dating altogether.

It wasn’t that I didn’t enjoy the sex. What teenage boy doesn’t enjoy sex? It was that I didn’t really like the girls. They didn’t catch my eye the way I caught theirs. They were always pursuing me, not the other way around.

As a result, I hadn’t had any sexual partners for a long time. My self-imposed chastity had stretched out longer than I had originally intended it to. I was meant to go to university where I would meet a nice girl doing a respectable course, and we would graduate together and then I would propose and we’d get married and have two nice children and a nice dog and a nice little house. What I wasn’t supposed to do was to focus on my studies, leave little time for any actual social life and end up doing a teaching degree on top of my English literature degree and end up back at high school, this time as a teacher. Instead of a nice little house, I had a mediocre flat, though it was undeniably little. I didn’t even have a dog.

I stirred the cake mix a little harder. My parents would probably be so disappointed. It was their plan, too, that I would marry and have children while I was still young. I was closer to thirty than I was to twenty, and I wasn’t getting any younger. I was supposed to have met Miss Right by now, and made her Mrs Umino. They had really wanted grandchildren.
To be honest, the children were definitely taking a back seat in the plan of my life. I was a high school English teacher; I had enough kids to deal with. It wasn’t that I didn’t love my job. I loved my job, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world, but the kids were definitely a handful, and I really didn’t need any offspring of my own added to the pile.

Still, without my proper man’s job, without Miss Right and without my nice little house, the kids certainly weren’t a possibility. At all. I was sort of a father figure to Naruto, my unofficial favourite student, but that was it.

I finished stirring, pulling the spoon out and tapping it hard against the side of the plastic bowl. I dug out baking tins, and roughly doled out the mixture into each tin. If I was going to be super pedantic and precise, I would have used my weighing scales to get an even amount in each tin, but I usually only did that for special occasions. Besides, I wanted this cake to have something of a homemade touch to it, they way my mother’s cakes always did. Even if I couldn’t get it exactly perfect, I could try.

My mother’s cakes were the best. They were soft and spongy and light, always the perfect creamy yellow with just the right texture, homemade jam and a light sprinkling of icing sugar on top. They melted in the mouth and it was impossible to resist another slice. She always served them on the blue plates with proper pastry forks she had inherited from her grandmother, which I still had in a fancy box somewhere. The blue plates were long gone, and I didn’t really have anyone to serve the cake to, so there was little point in bringing out the nice cutlery.

My own cakes were good. They weren’t as good as my mother’s, but your own cooking never tastes quite as good as your mother’s. I didn’t know how to make jam, so I had to buy it from the supermarket. They never had the right flavour, so I had to use raspberry. Strawberry jam on cake sponge is a travesty. I could never get a completely even distribution of icing sugar on the top, either, or I would use too much and it would overpower the cake-y, vanilla flavour of the sponge.

Besides the release of tension I got from baking, I had another reason to bake a cake. The apartment next to mine was finally getting its new tenant, and they were moving in tomorrow. It was a weekday, so I had to teach, but I would be prepared with a little neighbourly welcome gift after school. I would make sure to somehow find time between getting home and marking a stack of essays on the importance of generic female character number one in whatever text one of my classes was studying. I would bring the cake over, invite myself in, politely ask if he or she needed help unpacking, eat cake, and then leave. And then my duty as a good neighbour was over, and I could happily ignore them for the rest of my life.

The last tenant wasn’t so bad. A middle aged woman, fresh from a divorce but still with enough kick in her to try and seduce me, but she had quickly got the message that I wasn’t interested. Miss Right was not a middle aged divorcee, and the seducing was the other way around, preferably once we were legally married.

I stuck the cake tins in the oven and set the timer. I slipped the band of the apron over my head and untied the back, briefly glaring at the offensive pattern on it. Yellow and pink flowers, with blue ribbons. It was Mother’s. As ghastly as it was, it was convenient for covering my clothes. Showing up to work with cake mix all over your shirt was not a good way to present yourself to a bunch of kids who could smell food a mile away.

Teaching English literature to a bunch of fourteen to eighteen year olds was not a part of the plan. I was originally supposed to become a police officer or a businessman or a doctor, something more traditionally male than an English teacher, but I wasn’t smart enough to be a doctor, I didn’t have the right mindset to become a businessman and I wasn’t active enough to be a police officer. I was the
only male English teacher on the entire staff at Konoha High School. Teaching – especially teaching something like English lit – was a girly job, or at least that was what I had thought until I actually tried it. Dealing with a horde of screaming, crying and fornicating teenagers is as complicated as heart surgery. The kids themselves were all individuals, and I had to treat them as such. It made for better working relationships, which made the kids work harder. It generally helped if they liked me, so I worked hard to get the balance between being nice and being firm.

But it wasn’t just the kids. English literature is by no means a soft subject. It comes more naturally to some people than others, and I had been the type to fly with it. It fascinated me to no end how an author could mean so many things with one sentence, or how the structure of a novel could reflect aspects of the story, or the historical or social or political implications of a text and how they can be interpreted. It wasn’t just novels, but I was better at analysing prose than I was at poetry.

Combine the demon-children and a classic? The end result is a classroom full of uninspired teenagers and mediocre essays. Inspiring love of literature was half my job. They didn’t have to be passionate about it like I was, but they just had to learn to live with it, even learn to like it. There were always a few who were naturally talented, but I had to get all of them to at least try.

English literature was certainly a ‘real’ subject, but I hadn’t thought of turning it into my job until I got to applying for university. To fulfil the plan, I should have done something else; medicine or physics or economics, but I chose English literature. I enjoyed it so much that I didn’t realise there weren’t a whole lot of jobs out there actually related to that degree, so I turned to teaching.

After you got past the hellion students, the staff room gossip, the borderline-poisonous food, the heaps of marking, the long terms and the inter-subject rivalry commonplace at Konoha High, teaching was a great profession.

I sat down at my dinner table with my lesson planner, deciding what torture to inflict upon my classes in the coming week. Konoha High only took four years, from fourth form, which was age fourteen to fifteen, through to the upper sixth, which was seventeen to eighteen. It was a small school, with relatively few kids per year. The kids were split between classes depending on ability, but the top few were usually put in lower classes with advanced tutoring on the side. For example, Naruto was of average ability at English literature, but his best friend, Sasuke, was very good at the subject. Rather than separate them, Sasuke remained in Naruto’s class as a kind of example student. It wasn’t the best system around, but it worked.

Although we were partway through the Autumn term, a new teacher was set to arrive the next day. Tsunade, our loveable yet unorganised and borderline alcoholic headmistress, had neglected to tell us about the addition to the staff team, and we only heard about it from Shizune at the end of last week. Shizune was Tsunade’s personal assistant, spending her time removing bottles of whatever alcohol Tsunade had managed to smuggle in and forcing her to do paperwork, usually by bribing her with alcohol. Occasionally Tsunade’s husband Jiraiya would drop in and they’d disappear for a while into the back room of the office, much to the amusement of staff and teachers alike, before Tsunade started yelling at Jiraiya for writing yet another porno book and ‘accidentally’ leaving a copy in the library.

The students had quickly learned not to pick up any books that had ‘Icha Icha’ in the title up and to just surrender it quickly. It was better for everyone’s sanity, and it stopped Tsunade breaking holes in her desk with her stapler – or at worst, her fists.

The beeper on the oven went off, and I checked on the cake. It was perfect. I left it out on the shiny silver cooling racks overnight, swept my papers into a more organised pile and put the relevant ones into my planner, and prepared for bed.
I had a feeling it was going to be a long day tomorrow.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Open Highway

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

You better stand tall

When they're calling you out

Don’t bend, don’t break

Baby, don’t back down

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

I woke up before my alarm clock went off, the greenish lettering glowing in the dark informing me that I had either an extra half an hour of sleep or an extra half an hour of getting dressed. Considering how an extra half an hour of sleep was unlikely to make a dent in the tiredness I would feel by the end of the day, I swung my legs over the side of my bed. I stretched and yawned, the cold air of my bedroom prickling my skin into goosebumps. It was too cold for September.

I dragged myself into the shower, combing my fingers through my hair under the warm jet of water. I always untied my hair to sleep, but it got badly tangled and painful to brush, so a shower was a good distraction. I brushed water out of my eyes and reached for my shampoo, piling my hair onto the top of my head with sweet smelling lather. Although it was technically a brand of shampoo marketed at women, I liked the fruity smell, and it had usually faded enough by the time I got to school.

When all the bubbles were rinsed from my hair, I just stood with my face upturned for a few minutes until the water started running cold. I turned off the water and wrapped a towel around my waist, not bothering to dry the rest of my body off. Even the towel was just a force of habit left over from sharing a house with my parents. Although it was cold, the water woke me up a lot, and helped me focus. I was by no means a morning person.

I finished breakfast quickly, and took the raspberry jam out of the fridge and set it down next to the photo of my parents on the window sill. Cold jam on cake was just wrong. Unless the entire cake was chilled, cold jam detracted from the entire taste and texture. Although the jam lasted longer if it lived in the fridge, the finished cake was worth the additional expense on jam.

Still, if it was for my new neighbour, I didn’t mind. I had to make a good impression. There’s only one chance to make a good impression, and ‘cake’ was usually synonymous with ‘good’ in my experience.

I dressed in my generic suit, complete with matching tie, and piled my various bags of school things by the door; one bag of fourth form exercise books, two bags of upper sixth essays, and a half-filled bag of worksheets that needed photocopying later. My dolphin-themed pencil case stuck mockingly out of the top of one bag. It was an ongoing joke – if I threw out the dolphin themed pencil case and bought myself a new, less dolphin-y one, then the new one would disappear only to be replaced by yet another dolphin themed one. I’d gone through about twelve in two years. My fellow members of staff apparently thought it was hilarious to remind my students and me of a certain aquatic mammal that had the same name as me. The joke got old about two weeks after I was born.

My parents were the only ones allowed to call me dolphin or make references to my name, and even then I had brushed it off and pretended to be annoyed by it. With anyone else it seemed a little bit like blasphemy, but I wasn’t about to mention it and spoil the fun. Dead parents tend to be a good
Konoha High was too far to walk with the bags of marking, so I had to drive. My car was small and easy to get into little parking spaces, which was great for the crowded car park outside the school. Only staff and the head boy and girl got their own spaces, everyone else with a car had to park on the road. As a result, exclusively teachers drove to school, with the exception of one or two seventeen year old boys trying to impress the girls with their flashy, overpriced cars.

However, this morning there was traffic. I was going to be late. Great. I hoped the teachers from the classrooms next to mine would have the sense to register my students if I was late. My form class had a small tendency to do stupid things while I was gone – or at least, one of them did, thus inspiring most of the rest of the class to go wild. As much as I liked him, Naruto could be a huge pain in the ass.

Sighing, I flicked on the radio.

“…and this morning, we’ve had below average temperatures across the region for the time of year, and it doesn’t look like it’s going to improve. In fact, the weather office has put out a warning for snow if the weather doesn’t take a turn for the better, so be prepared for a surprise if-” I pressed the button, changing channels.

“…the local news, we’ve been asking people exactly what they think of Konoha’s snow defences! The majority of people have said they’re a little uncertain about the quality of measures in place to prevent total lockdown, especially considering the chaos we had four years back when-”

I switched the radio to a random music station and shifted my car forward a little. It really didn’t look promising. I liked to be in school at least an hour before the students started arriving, just to set everything up and have a moment of peace before the kids turned up and started talking too loudly and running in the corridors and doing teenager-ly things.

At long last, I reached the school. My favourite parking spot was occupied by Anko’s dusty grey car, so I picked a new spot beside a sleek silver one I didn’t recognise. It looked a little too nice for a teacher, considering our general salary, but I supposed people got lucky sometimes. I locked the car and made my way across the lightly populated car park, regretting not taking my winter coat out of the back of my wardrobe.

“Did you hear about the new sensei? I heard he’s really hot!”

“Yes, I did! I can’t wait to meet him!”

“I wonder if he’s single…”

“I really wish I took physics now just so I could be in his class!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, no one that hot could be single!”

It looked like the new teacher already had fangirls. I smirked a little. It would serve him right for being so mysterious. It would be hilarious if he turned out to be some ancient balding geezer with a beer belly and bad teeth, and it would certainly shut the girls up for a while. However, considering the horrifying accuracy of the Konoha High gossip mill, which was apparently secretly headed by Tsunade herself, this was unlikely. Although I did pity the new teacher. He was in for the shock of his life.

The interior of the school was much warmer, but the groups of giggling girls seemed to be everywhere with only one topic on their lips. I admit it made me a little curious. Who was this new
teacher who had already captured the hearts of so many teenage girls without actually being here? Still, I’d meet him in staff briefing, so I wouldn’t have to wait long.

“I heard he’s an ex-soldier, and he has to cover his face to hide the hideous scarring he got in a war!”

“I heard he’s actually a spy for Sound Academy! Oh, I really hope he isn’t, because Tsunade-sama would never forgive him!”

“I heard he’s a ninja!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Miyuki, there’s no such thing as ninja!”

Okay, now my curiosity was really piqued. A soldier-ninja-spy with the body of a demi-god and an aura of mystery.

“I’m sorry for being a little late. The traffic was bad,” I said as I pushed open the staff room door. Most of the other teachers were already here, probably as anxious to meet the new teacher as the students were.

“Iruka-sensei! Never fear! It is hip and youthful to be fashionably late like the young people basking in the flames of their youth that we teach every day!” Gai, possibly the most enthusiastic PE teacher ever, stood up to greet me, striking a pose in his offensively tight green tracksuit. It was possibly against the school dress code, but it was too funny to get rid of. His teeth gleamed unnaturally brightly and the overhead lighting shone on his practically polished bowl cut.

“Ah, thanks, Gai-sensei,” I said, making my way to a vacant seat near the coffee maker. The staff room was well furnished, improved a lot since Tsunade was made headmistress. All the wooden chairs had been taken out and replaced with sofas and armchairs, and a coffee machine big enough to serve an army was installed in the back nicknamed ‘The Boss’. She was clearly someone who knew the needs of teachers. I scanned around, looking for an unfamiliar face, but I couldn’t find one. “I take it the new teacher isn’t here yet?”

“Right on, Iruka-chan!” Anko bubbled from over the top of her coffee cup, probably not the first one of the day. Although The Boss was a good idea most of the time, giving coffee to Anko was not the best of plans.

“Iruka-sensei, please,” I corrected.

“Don’t be so uptight, Iruka-sensei!”

“Somebody please get that coffee off her,” I mumbled, digging into one of my bags for my own coffee mug. There was a mug tree next to The Boss, but I liked to have my own. It was the one piece of dolphin-themed paraphernalia that I would tolerate because it was actually funny, if only because I rather loved the caption, ‘Dolphins are Gay Sharks’.

“No need, Iruka-sensei, I just finished!” She slammed the mug on the desk with a touch too much force.

“Excellent,” I checked the wall clock. Briefing was supposed to start five minutes ago. “So he’s late, then?”

“Yup!”

I filled my mug up with coffee, taking a sip of the tar-black liquid. Although it was ridiculously strong and had too much sweetener in, we were all addicted to it. It was practically a part of the job
“So he’s not here yet, then?” The door banged open, revealing a slightly drunk looking Tsunade accompanied by a rather tired Shizune.

“Apparently not,”

“Huh. Someone give me a coffee,” Shizune immediately reappeared at her side with a steaming cup. “Does this have any liquor in it?”

“No, Tsunade-sama,” She sniffed at the steam, not detecting any.

“Why not, Shizune?”

“Because you’re at work,”

“I’m the headmistress; I can drink if I want to!”

“No, you can’t. Let’s just sit down over here and wait for our new teacher to arrive, okay?”

Shizune pulled Tsunade into a seat and we all waited, making small talk or going through our planners or checking marking or trying to catch up on sleep. Five minutes passed, then ten minutes. Across the room, Gai was talking exuberantly about something and Anko was giggling into yet another cup of coffee. I took out my planner and doodled in a margin, looking over my notes for the day.

The door clicked open.

The first thing I noticed was that his face was covered, his nose and mouth with a tight black surgical-style mask, and one eye with an eye patch. From what face I could see, he was young. Not quite a ninja, but a pirate, maybe? That in itself was odd. Was he sick? Above the eye patch his silver hair stood on end like he’d put a finger in an electrical socket. It wasn’t silver with age, but I had never seen the colour on a young man before. He was dressed in a black suit jacket with matching trousers, but the top button of his shirt was undone and his tie was loose.

“You’re late, Kakashi-sensei.”
I’ve known a few guys who thought they were pretty smart
But you’ve got being right down to an art
You think you’re a genius; you drive me up the wall
You’re a regular original, a know-it-all

“Maa…sorry, Tsunade-sama. You see, there was this mother duck and her four ducklings trying to cross the road in front of the school, and I had to escort them back to daddy duck at the pond, and then—”

“Don’t worry about it, Kakashi, just go sit down somewhere and let me start briefing,” Tsunade sighed. I watched as the new teacher walked across the room, all eyes drawn to his covered face and wild hair, his state of undress and his slight slouch. And what kind of lame excuse was that, anyway? Punctuality was the mark of a good teacher, a necessity of professionalism. That was definitely a grade dropped in my books.

To my mild surprise, he sat down in the seat next to mine. From up close, I couldn’t see what was holding his hair in place. There weren’t the tell-tale dark streaks of gel or the stiff, rigid powdery web of hairspray. There weren’t even clips or pins. It appeared to be-

“Completely natural, Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi whispered, turning to face me. His one dark eye was visibly full of boredom.

“How did you know my name?”

“It’s written on your coffee mug,” He tapped one finger to the bottom of my mug. I lifted it up to check, eyes tracing the lettering of my name. I’d forgotten I’d written that there.

“Oh, right,” I said, a slight blush spreading across my cheeks.

“If you two are done flirting, I’d like to start briefing,” Tsunade called from across the room, causing my blush to darken.

“We are not flirting!” I protested, possibly a little too loudly. All heads turned to stare at me, Gai looking like he was actively resisting launching into a speech about true love or something equally sinister. Anko giggled from behind her mug of coffee.

“Then why are you blushing?” Tsunade raised an eyebrow, then turned back to the rest of the staff. “Anyway, on with briefing. As I’m sure you’ve all noticed, we have a new teacher joining us. This is Kakashi Hatake, who will be teaching physics, taking over from…”

I tuned her out, discreetly glancing at Kakashi. He was certainly mysterious, although I couldn’t comment on whether he was as hot as his fangirls thought he was. From my close proximity, I couldn’t smell any coffee on him like on most teachers. Instead there was a darker, muskier scent that I couldn’t quite place. I took in another lungful of air, trying to put a name to the scent.
“…if you’ve finished sniffing Kakashi-sensei, Iruka, then I thought I’d mention you’re the lucky guy who gets to sit in his classroom and observe his teaching for today. It’s purely a formality, but I wanted an experienced existing member of staff to watch and report back to me,” My blush returned full force. Had I been that obvious? It wasn’t like I liked the smell or anything, it was just curiosity.

“But why me? I don’t know anything about physics, and I have my own class to teach,” I really didn’t want to be stuck in the back of a classroom all day, watching someone else do their job. Especially not Kakashi.

“I will be personally covering your classes today. You forget, I have a degree in literature, too,” Tsunade smiled, suddenly looking pleased with herself.

“It sounds more like an excuse to get out of doing paperwork,” I grumbled.

“It’s not. Briefing over, and I’ll see you all at break,” Tsunade practically flew from the room, Shizune in tow. As nice as she was, she could be incredibly embarrassing. I really pitied Shizune for having to put up with her.

I drained the last of my coffee and shoved the empty mug back into the top of a bag.

“Can you find your classroom on your own?” I asked, turning towards Kakashi, only to find the seat empty. I sighed and stood up, hauling the heavy bags with me. I needed to be quick if I was going to register my form and write notes for Tsunade on what to teach. Chances were she’d either completely disregard the notes and just have the kids read the text for an hour, or she’d forget she was supposed to be teaching and end up drinking herself to sleep while the kids ran wild. I grimaced at the thought, and made a mental note to check on my class every half an hour.

The corridors were full of students rushing to their classrooms for morning registration, some in colour co-ordinated lumps or in gaggles of girls with distinctly similar haircuts. I followed a gang of brightly coloured lower sixth form girls as they deposited members of their group at different classrooms. A lone goth kid sloped off into a bathroom. A basketball flew over my head, three well-built boys running after it.

The only words on anyone’s lips were about the new teacher.

Kakashi-sensei. My mind kept being drawn back to his covered face, his tall, lean figure and his casually messy appearance. I wanted to know more, to see what was underneath that mask. Something about him was intrinsically interesting.

No, wait. I definitely didn’t want to find out anything about him. I wanted to correct his appearance to something a little more formal for work and have nothing but a completely professional, work-based relationship. I couldn’t care less about what he looked like, or what he was hiding. Even if I felt the tiniest bit of curiosity, it was purely out of desire to get along with him like I would any other colleague.

I pushed open the door to my classroom. The majority of my form was already there, with the conspicuous absence of Naruto and Sasuke. Due to the small class size at Konoha High, my form was only about fifteen students big, and most of them were well behaved and quiet.

Setting my bags down on the top of the teacher’s desk, I fished out my planner and began to scribble out some notes for Tsunade. There were already extra copies of the texts in the desk drawers, so that shouldn’t be a problem. The work I had planned for the day wasn’t exactly complicated, and if everything went according to plan, the day would run smoothly.
“Sorry, I’m late, sensei!” Naruto Uzumaki’s loud, cheerful voice called from the door. His shirt was untucked and his tie was loose, but it wasn’t deliberately and casually messy like Kakashi’s was. This was just the general disorder that was Naruto.

“Naruto, how many times do I have to tell you that orange is not an appropriate colour for a school tie?” I glared around the overstuffed bags on the desk.

“But I love this tie! And I only just finished scraped all the ramen off it,” He raised a hand to scratch the back of his head, grinning.

“Hn, dobe,” Sasuke Uchiha appeared behind Naruto, black suit sharp and neat as ever. “We’ve been going to this school for how long? Learn the dress code already,” He strolled past Naruto towards the back of the room, Naruto’s eyes following his every step.

“Naruto, go sit down. I need to register you lot, then you can get to class,” I flicked through my planner to the registers, wrote in the date and began to call names.

“Hey, Iruka-sensei, have you met the new physics teacher?” Naruto called from the back when I was about halfway through.

“Yes,” I frowned. It looked like I wasn’t going to be allowed to forget about Kakashi even for one minute.

“Is he as cool as everyone says?” He asked excitedly.

“I don’t know, I only just met him,”

“Is he as handsome as everyone says?”

“I don’t have an opinion on that,”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, now be quiet so I can do the register!” I barked, finally shutting Naruto up. Sasuke smirked and punched Naruto lightly on the arm.

The lesson bell rang just as I finished the register. I swept the various bags off the desk and stashed them underneath it, keeping only my planner and a pen. I was tempted to bring a copy of one of the class texts, but that would give the wrong impression. I needed to be alert and work properly with the new teacher, try to be helpful.

I left the classroom with the students, wandering over to the science block. The inane giggling and gossiping was actually rather comforting. I knew this environment, and I knew how to work in it. I liked knowing I was okay with everything around me, but Kakashi was a new factor, and for some reason he threw me off kilter.

Turning the final corner, I opened his classroom door and sat myself at the back. No one but a few students had arrived yet. I recognised some of them from the back, having taught them in previous years. All very intelligent, all very talented, all a part of upper sixth.

Five minutes later, the class had all arrived, but Kakashi hadn’t turned up yet. I noted it down in my planner as the students talked to each other, going through notes or reading their textbooks.

“You’re late, sensei,” A student at the front said as the door slid open.
“Thanks for that observation, kid,” Kakashi walked across the front of the room, nose buried in a small orange book I immediately recognised: the forbidden *Icha Icha Paradise*. My eyes widened a little. Not only was he late, but he was late because he was reading pornography? I noted it down furiously, lettering denting the fragile paper. He shut the book and slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket, and took out a board pen. “I am your new physics teacher, Kakashi Hatake. Kakashi-sensei will do. I expect you to work hard, and I won’t tolerate anything short of perfection from this class, considering your abilities. This term, we’re covering mechanics, materials and waves, staring with scalars and vectors. Does anyone know what any of that means?”

Four hands immediately shot up.

“Yes, ah…Neji,”

“Scalars are quantities that are fully described by a magnitude or numerical value alone. Vectors are quantities that are fully described by both a magnitude and a direction.”

“Correct. Now, when this is used in association with…” I tuned his voice out. I couldn’t fault him on actual teaching, or his introduction, although the class probably had something to do with it. This class was too sensible to attack him with ridiculous questions, unlike some of the younger classes. That would certainly be amusing.

I sat back and watched the lesson unfold. Although I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about half of the time, it looked like the students did, jotting down notes and flicking through textbooks and question booklets as the lesson progressed. Kakashi stood at the front, occasionally noting an equation or a definition down on the board behind him, other times sitting at the front and reading the dreadful orange book while the class worked through a set of questions in silence.

When the bell rang again to signal the end of class, the students filed out quickly and were replaced by a small horde of fourth formers. All the female students clustered forwards, inching the desks closer and closer to the front to try and get a better look at Kakashi, who sat slouched in his chair with *Icha Icha* propped open and a mildly amused look in his eye.

“I want the first two rows to move their desks back at least five inches, and then we can begin properly. I am Kakashi-sensei, and I’ll be teaching you physics this year, starting with the topic of thermal radiation, moving through the electromagnetic spectrum, electricity, radioactivity, the origins of the universe, sound and mirrors. If you want the top grades, you’ll pay attention and try hard in class. Try and win my favour by working hard and doing extra studying. That kind of thing really impresses me,” He stood up, putting *Icha Icha* away again. “Any questions?”

“Is that your natural hair colour, sensei?”

“What’s under the mask?”

“What is your favourite meal?”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“What do you think of blondes?”

I suppressed a smile. Kakashi-sensei was in for a long ride.

oO..O..O..Oo
Higher Ground

Well I, I just wanna see the light
And I, I don’t wanna lose my sight
Well I, I just wanna see the light
And I, need to know what’s worth the fight

By the time break rolled around, I had completely forgotten about my own classes. It was too funny watching Kakashi’s newly found fangirls drooling all over their desks whenever he turned to look in their general direction, and practically swooning if he addressed them directly. The boys – well, most of the boys – sat at the back, looking vaguely bored, waiting for the novelty of the hot new teacher to wear off.

I couldn’t fault Kakashi on his teaching at all. He explained all the concepts he taught clearly, followed the syllabus to the letter, occasionally adding in fascinating pieces of information to keep the kids on their toes. In the upper sixth classes, he even explained a couple of degree level theories to the class to better explain what the textbook meant, and the class actually appeared to understand them. He explained the theories completely without notes, detailing the more complicated bits with interesting analogies about kittens and balls of string and how this could be applied to some stupidly advanced theorems.

This man wasn’t just a mystery, he was a genius.

By the time the fangirls had all been shooed out, the orange book was back out and an apple core had mysteriously on his desk. It looked like he even ate mysteriously.

“So, Iruka-sensei, how did I do?” Kakashi said, not looking up from the book. My face twitched slightly; no matter how good this guy was, he was still reading porn instead of listening to me. What I was about to say had to be more important than some crappy romance novel, right?

“I’ll tell you after I give my report to Tsunade,” I stuck my pen in my pocket and closed my planner for emphasis.

“Worried what I say might influence your report?” Mild amusement filled the one visible eye. Either the porn was getting to a good bit or I was just that hilarious to needle.

“Not at all! It’s just good practise to give the report to the person it’s intended for first,”

“Sounds like an excuse to me,”

“Well, it’s not!” I said rather petulantly, clasping my planner to my chest. “I need to go and make sure Tsunade hasn’t spilled vodka or whiskey or whatever the hell it is she drinks all over my desk. I’ll be back after break,” I strode from the back of the room, shooting a look at him over my shoulder. His back was turned to me, the back of his silver hair shining in the halogen ceiling lights.

“It’s sake!” He called helpfully as one hand came up to wave goodbye.
I winced.

The corridor was, as usual, filled with students. Since the weather was so unexpectedly cold, no one wanted to go outside so they hung around in the corridors, huddled in groups and cliques. It was social apartheid at its finest; the popular girls gathered closest to the bathroom, where the mirrors were, thus making them apparently the prettiest and most desirable by default, followed by the less popular girls, who had learned to carry hand mirrors, followed by various smaller groups of other generic high school stereotypes right down to the outcasts, self-inflicted or otherwise. It was pretty much the same for the boys, but with the sportiest boys at the top of the food chain.

It was a cruel and unforgiving system to say the least, a condensation of the human population into one group of young people confined within a set of walls. But it prepared them for the worst of life, and that was possibly the best lesson school could give them.

I made my way back to my classroom. Fortunately, it was still standing – I had half expected a pile of smoking rubble or a large crater where my desk had been. There didn’t seem to be any damage, either. I thanked any deities that were watching for that small mercy. I couldn’t even smell alcohol, so it looked like Shizune had been thorough in removing all of Tsunade’s stash.

Two small piles of class work sat on the desk. Apparently my notes had actually been read and the work completed. I briefly considered buying a lottery ticket, based on the way my luck was going so far today.

I slid into the chair at the desk and picked up the first sheet from the top of the pile and began to read.

‘…to show that the relationship between Oedipus and his father was unintentionally…’

The next one read much the same, analysing the same characters in much the same way. That is, until I got about three quarters of the way down the page.

‘…without this trigger, the eponymous character would never GO FOR IT, SENSEI have fallen into…’

Skipping back to the top, I made a mental note to remember exactly which student had written the paper. I generally asked students to write their name in the top of the margin, but this paper was conspicuously free of any names. I set it back on the table, and reached for the next paper. Like the first, there was no name on the top of the page and ‘GO FOR IT, SENSEI’ hidden somewhere in the text. I looked at a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, setting each paper back down on the table with increasing force.

This had ‘matchmaker Tsunade’ written all over it.

Growling, I shoved the stacks of paper into a bag and endeavoured to mark them without plotting Tsunade’s murder. As tempting as it was, my life would be really screwed if I ended up in prison. My parents would be so disappointed.

We had definitely not been flirting in briefing. Flirting was showing a superficial interest in a person romantically, and I was definitely not interested in another man romantically. To me, that was just odd. I had only ever dated and slept with women. I didn’t have anything against gay men and women; I just wasn’t one of them. I had enjoyed sleeping with girls when I was a teenager. Just because I taught English lit and had long hair didn’t mean I was gay.

I wondered how many other members of staff were in on this little joke. I tried not to think about how many ways I could kill them all and not get caught. Slit their throats and dissolve the bodies in a
“Yo,” A familiar voice called from the door.

Wait a minute. Who the hell said ‘yo’ anymore? Turning my head slowly, I faced the interloper.

“Kakashi-sensei. I thought you’d be in the staff room or back in your classroom,” I said, not bothering to hide the slightly murderous tone in my voice. Or reading your porn, I added silently.

“Maa…well, I’m in between scenes at the moment. You see, Ootonashi and Kazumi were just caught in the height of passion by Kazumi’s sister, Midori, who is secretly in love with Ootonashi’s best friend and—”

“You know, I really don’t care. This day has been too long already,” I unfolded an edge of one of the papers from where it had got caught on the bag. I just wanted to get home, crawl under my kitchen table and have a nap. As much as I loved my job, it could be very trying.

“Go for it, sensei,” He quoted. “I wonder what they mean by that,”

“I couldn’t hazard a guess,” I raised an eyebrow sarcastically.

“We should go back to my classroom. The bell will go in about—” He was cut off by the sharp ringing of the bell in the corridor. “-right now. Shall we?”

I didn’t reply. Instead, I just picked up my planner and pen and let him lead me back to his room. The rest of the day was passed in much the same way; watching Kakashi-sensei teach his subject brilliantly, read porn and passively fend off fangirls. I wondered if he actually realised they were there – but of course he did. He was clearly highly intelligent, and drooling adolescent females are hard to miss. He just didn’t acknowledge them.

During lunch, I found another two piles of class work sitting on my fully intact desk. There were no names on the top again, but I didn’t even bother to look through them for a message. I would have words with Tsunade later.

By the time the final bell rang, I had jotted down enough notes in my planner to write out a proper report on Kakashi’s first day of teaching at home. Combined with the trials of the day, I wasn’t likely to forget a single detail. I kept replaying little actions over and over in my head during the drive home; the way he waved a hand to casually wave at me whenever I left the classroom, or one hand turning a page of *Icha Icha*, or the way his visible eye twitched upwards when a student did particularly well.

Not that I was thinking about him or anything.

Back home, I finished the cake for my new neighbour. Their stuff had apparently been moved in during the day, if the large piles of cardboard moving boxes in the foyer of the building were anything to go by. Raspberry jam and a dusting of icing sugar, set onto one of the serving plates that didn’t have chips in the edge, two slices already cut in a casual invitation. I briefly considered bringing beer, but I didn’t know if my neighbour was male or female, and I really didn’t want to give the impression I was a casual drinker. I only drank on special occasions, like my parents did.

I left my tie on but left my suit jacket hanging over the back of a kitchen chair. With the cake in one hand, I left my flat and crossed the short space down the hall towards the newly occupied set of rooms. Our doors were identical, the only difference being the brass numbering to the right of the doorframe; mine was number six, and the new neighbour’s was number seven.
Raising a fist to knock, the door swung open. A pair of hands with several large boxes piled in them obscured the face of the person on the other side. Thinking fast, I stepped back and smiled, putting on my best ‘good neighbour’ face.

“I’m sorry for disturbing you while you’re unpacking! I’m Iruka Umino, from number six. I heard you’d be moving in a while back, so I baked a cake. It's good to meet you,” I babbled through my smile.

“Ah, Iruka-sensei. I thought I recognised your voice,” My neighbour set down the boxes and stood up.

“Kakashi-sensei.”

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
You’re hot then you’re cold
You’re yes then you’re no
You’re in then you’re out
You’re up then you’re down

“Do you want to come in or…?” Kakashi said, kicking the boxes further against the wall.

“Uh, sure,” I mumbled. I gripped the cake with both hands, worrying about dropping it. My hands shook a little, but I passed it off as tiredness. There was no way I was actually nervous or worse, excited.

There were boxes everywhere, erratically stacked and placed along walls or in the middle of rooms, piled on top of each other to form a kind of bizarre cardboard jungle within the flat. Stuff poked out of the top of some of them; a frying pan and a set of wooden spoons, a bag of dog food, clothes hanging haphazardly over the side.

“You have a dog?” I asked, noticing the large bag of dried dog food. It was a nice brand, with a picture of an obscenely happy dog practically smiling on the front, rather expensive looking.

“More than one, actually. They’re staying at the kennels until I’ve finished unpacking. I don’t want my things chewed, buried and sat on just yet,” he looked at me contemplatively, assessing my reaction with one visible eye. “They’re not noisy or anything, don’t worry. You’ll barely notice they’re here,”

“Actually, I like dogs. I had one when I was a very small child, but it got hit by a car and I couldn’t bear to replace it at the time. I never really got round to getting a dog now I live alone,”

“So there’s no Mrs Umino or future Mrs Umino, then?” Kakashi enquired, only half paying attention as he moved across the room to check the contents of a box. Surely the answer was obvious; I didn’t have a wedding ring.

“Not quite, thought I am looking,” I said as I looked for a place to put down the cake.

“Our boss seems to think I’m more your type than the sweet yet bland little lady you have your heart set on,” Instead of spluttering and choking to death on my own garbled words, I bit the inside of my cheek and tried to answer as calmly as possible, carefully ignoring the part about him.

There was no way he was ‘my type’. I didn’t have a type, did I? And whatever type I did have, it had to be female. Preferably with breasts and-

“Tsunade’s always been like that. She tried to set Gai up with Anko a couple of years back,” I smiled at the memory. Pairing those two up was possibly the worst idea ever, considering their personalities. Anyone who had spent more than a minute in either of their presences would know they were not suited to each other. Too much energy. “She prefers to pair men up together, even if
she knows they’re straight. It’s a bit humiliating, actually,”

“And how did that turn out?”

“About as well as putting a very flamboyant turtle in a pen with a hyperactive snake,”

“So not well at all, then?”

“Tsunade allegedly cried herself to sleep over that one. Cake?” I raised the cake to eye level, peering out from behind it and smiling.

“Cake. What about it?”

“Would you like to eat some?”

“I’ll trade you as many slices as you want for helping me with my boxes,”

“Deal.”

The next hour and a half was spent lugging heavy cardboard boxes up the flight of stairs to our floor, trying to open the front door with one foot or one hand, then finding a spot somewhere in the flat that wasn’t already occupied with piles of boxes. Finally, all the boxes ended up stacked somewhere within the flat, perched precariously on top of each other, mostly labelled with vague labels like ‘kitchen’, ‘wardrobe’ or ‘dogs’.

Out of curiosity, I opened the box labelled ‘books’. At first glance, it looked like I had accidentally opened a box full of children’s books. All bright, shiny colours, numbered from one to about fifteen, laid out in perfect order with spines creased from use. I pulled the seventh one up, glancing at the cover. It was Icha Icha. They were all Icha Icha. I had found Kakashi’s porn stash.

Blushing, I stood up and shut the box. I did not need to know about what kind of things he was into. Icha Icha was known for being one of the most unashamedly dirty – although well written – erotic novels out there, but I didn’t know there was such a long series. It looked like Kakashi owned every one.

“Every single one up to Icha Icha Challenge, because Icha Icha War isn’t out yet. The first book, Icha Icha Paradise is definitely the best, though,” Kakashi’s voice said from somewhere behind me. “Although there was this one scene from-”

“I really don’t need to know, thanks,” I blushed even harder, if possible. My face was going to melt off with the heat of embarrassment at this rate.

“Anyway, that was the last of the boxes, so do you want that cake now?”

“Oh, sure,” I mumbled. I had to work with this guy, I couldn’t know about his dodgy habits, although it’s not like he was making a secret out of them or anything. He read pornography in public, in a school full of impressionable teenagers. That was definitely not appropriate.

I followed him into the kitchen, boxes and crates of packaged food and cutlery scattered across the counter in general disarray. I had to physically restrain myself from moving to put things away in cupboards and tidy things up a little. The mess was vaguely irritating.

A kettle clicked and suddenly a slice of cake appeared in front of me.

“Make yourself comfortable, Iruka-sensei,” He handed me the plate and a fork, gesturing towards the
kitchen table. There was a fruit bowl resting in the middle, empty except for a bundle of knotted charger cables for phones and other electronics and a single apple.

“We’re not at work; you don’t have to call me sensei,” I slid into a seat, looking at my slice of cake. I was suddenly very hungry.

“You’re more of an Iruka-sensei than an Umino-san, and I think you’d object to ‘Ruka-chan on principle’,”

“You got that right.” No one had ever called me ‘Ruka-chan, not even my high school girlfriends. It sounded way too girly, and there was no way in hell Kakashi would ever get away with ‘chan’ for me. We were far too old for that, and we were definitely not lovers.


“Tea, with milk and sugar, please,”

A steaming mug of tea was placed in front of me. I inhaled the delicious steam. Tea, much like baking, was therapeutic. Mostly it just tasted like hot water with a hint of the innate tea flavour underneath, but this was good. It was better quality than I was used to, with a more subtle flavour. Although I was certainly no tea connoisseur, I knew this was expensive stuff.

I opened my eyes again, not having realised I had shut them in the first place. Kakashi was staring at me from across the room, a slightly bemused look in his visible eye.

“Aren’t you going to eat your cake?” He said. He lifted up his plate, covered in a light dusting of crumbs, indicating he’d already finished his slice, apparently having removed his mask to eat while I was busy inhaling the steam with closed eyes. Damn, I really wanted to see what was under there.

“Oh, of course,” I devoured the cake in less than thirty seconds. I hadn’t realised how hungry I was. It must have been the additional stress from a certain new teacher I had to babysit.

The single eye watched me eat, the bemused look shifting into something between mild amusement and something I couldn’t place. It was strange how one eye could be so expressive when the rest of the face was covered. I wondered exactly what was hidden by the mask and the eye patch. People wore masks when they were sick or didn’t want to catch a disease, but I hadn’t heard Kakashi coughing and he didn’t seem ill. Eye patches were usually used after cataract surgery, or if someone was missing an eye. Was that it? Did Kakashi only have one eye? The questions bubbled up in my mind, turning over and twisting and presenting themselves to me in so many different ways, but I couldn’t ask any of them. It just didn’t seem appropriate, somehow.

“Do you need any help unpacking?” I asked. I didn’t really want to help unpack, I needed to get home and start marking, but it was polite to ask. If he was any kind of good teacher, he’d say no and spend the evening marking, too.

“Maybe tomorrow; you have about five stacks of class work to censor,” Kakashi replied. I ground my teeth; I had completely forgotten about Tsunade’s little gesture.

“Don’t you as well?”

“Nope. I haven’t taught more than five lessons, so there’s no way I could have homework to mark and I trust the older students to make their own notes. I’ll collect the fourth and fifth formers’ work on Friday and go through it at the weekend,” He paused, tilting his head enquiringly. “If you have to mark every day, then how do you have any time to yourself?”
“I don’t really have all that much time to do anything, and I suppose I don’t really have many hobbies,”

“You should try something physical, Iruka-sensei. I hear it’s good for stress,” I nearly dropped my teacup. I was not stressed, just-

-pedantic, highly strung, overly neat, worrying to the point of neurotic-

Okay, so maybe I was a little bit stressed, but it wasn’t anything serious.

“Really? I just don’t have enough time at the moment. I need to get back to marking,”

“See you tomorrow,” His eye curved up into what I assumed was a smile.

I left Kakashi’s flat internally groaning at the piles of offensive marking I had to do. Part of me wanted another slice of cake. You can never have too much cake.

Oo.Oo..Oo.Oo
Seeing It In My Dreams

What you've got, boy, is hard to find
I think about it all the time
I'm so strung out, my heart is fried
I just can't get you off my mind

I ticked another identical set of answers from one of my fifth form classes and signed it off. Personally, I considered my effort rather excellent; I had yet to throw something at a wall or hunt in my cupboards for alcohol. Marking was boring as hell at the best of times, but when a devious headmistress is trying to imply something, it became stressful.

Another paper, another offensive 'GO FOR IT, SENSEI', another red tick.

Five classes of twenty five students, all with the same message hidden somewhere in the text. One kid had actually been imaginative enough to write it as an acronym in the first letter of each sentence. Another had illustrated their paper with crude stick men doing very crude things. I circled the doodle and wrote a sharp note about propriety next to it.

Whatever the message, it was drilled into my brain.

I signed off the last fifth form paper and started work on the lower sixth papers. Once again, sneaky little messages were wormed into the writing, some a little more personalised. One, actually entitled 'Questions on chapter GO FOR IT, SENSEI twelve', was in Naruto's clearly identifiable handwriting. Resisting the urge to strike it through with my red biro, I folded my fingers around my mug of tea and tried to focus on the answers.

An hour and a half later, I had just resorted to skim reading and ticking. Annoyance was bubbling up in my chest with every 'GO FOR IT, SENSEI' I read, making my hands shake and a vein in my forehead throb with anger. Sipping my cold tea, I put the last paper back on the pile and stood up.

Taking a deep breath, I undid the top button on my shirt and loosened my tie. According to the clock on the wall, it was getting close to eleven thirty.

I picked up my mug of cold tea and dumped it in the sink, next to the baking tins, spoons and containers I had yet to wash. There was still cake crumbs stuck to the inside of the tin.

Cake. Cake that I had given to Kakashi, who was not only the newest member of staff, but was also my new neighbour. Oh, joy of joys.

After one day of possibly too much contact, I still knew virtually nothing about him. I knew that he liked to read porn and had an unknown number of dogs. And that he was a genius, but only someone that eccentric could be a genius. No, it wasn't eccentricity, it was just strangeness and mystery. I didn't know enough about him, but I doubted anyone knew much about him. Somehow, we had ended up spending much of the day together, and I had hardly seen him interact with anyone but me.
The students liked him. The girls thought he was hotter than the Sun, and the boys seemed to be impressed by his teaching style. That's not to say there weren't exceptions. He even had a couple of fanboys, which I wasn't expecting, although the overly studious girls were pretty standard. He spoke easily and calmly, a hint of casual boredom lacing all his words, which conversely only made his subject more fascinating. If someone that smart was bored by advanced level physics, then surely it couldn't be that hard.

His initial arrival was a fault. Being late enough to miss part of briefing was very unprofessional, and the excuse as to why he was late was ridiculous.

The pornography was also a problem. If the school library couldn't stock it, then there was no way a teacher should be reading it in front of the students. That was definitely a bad influence.

Other than that, most of his face was covered for no apparent reason. Maybe he was blind in one eye, or had an eye condition or surgery recently, but covering up the rest of his face for no reason? All it did was make people ask questions, and keep colleagues up late at night thinking about what's underneath the mask. Surely Tsunade had seen his face, if for nothing but security checks. And what about his passport or drivers license?

Not that I was kept up thinking about it. I turned on the tap and added a small amount of washing-up liquid to soak the cake tins overnight. The clean smell of soap and lemon floated up from the sink in a refreshing wave. I rubbed a finger over the bridge of my nose, tracing the scar. Nothing smelled quite as good as washing-up liquid-

-except possibly Kakashi, who smelled just like-

No, definitely not. Washing up liquids, and all cleaning products, certainly smelled better than Kakashi. Not that I actually remembered what he smelled of, and definitely not that I had been sniffing him in briefing. That was perverse, childish and incredibly odd all at the same time.

I turned back to my kitchen table, where my marking was stacked in neat piles across the end. I shuffled the papers a bit, straightening loose pages, and then grouped them properly for the morning. Organisation was the key to a healthy, happy and stress-free life, or so I'm told.

I flicked off the lights in the kitchen, walking through my living room and into the bedroom. I changed quickly, tossing my worn shirt and underwear in the direction of the bathroom, carefully hanging up my tie, jacket and trousers. I made a mental note to iron them at the weekend. With a lot of attention to detail, I brushed my teeth, flossed, washed my face and then brushed my hair. Brushing my hair was a little futile since it would be full of knots by the time I woke up, but it was that or I braid it or something, and I wasn't about to do that.

Flipping off the bathroom and bedroom lights, I stumbled blindly towards my bed and collapsed across the top of it, exhaling heavily. It had been a long, long day. Pesky headmistresses and their pesky hobbies, enigmatic new teachers, classes full of conspirators, cake and a new neighbour who also just happened to be the enigmatic new teacher.

I wondered if we could carpool.

I crawled under the sheets and tried to drift off, eyes pressed shut and breathing even, but sleep wouldn't come. My mind was too occupied with the day's events. So I began to count back from one thousand, my usual tactic inherited from my father for when I couldn't manage to sleep. Somewhere around six hundred, I lost count and gave up, letting the encroaching darkness of sleep take me.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
I recognised I was dreaming immediately because the clouds were lime green. Clouds are definitely not normally lime green. Instead of immediately losing the dream or snapping awake, I drifted through the dream space, past a very flamboyant turtle and a hyperactive snake giggling in a corner, through an ocean of marking, and towards the offensively large cleavage of Tsunade.

"What do you think you’re doing, Iruka-sensei?" She called down from her vantage point, her giant head looming over me. One eyebrow was raised, and the tone she used was all too familiar; it was the teacher voice. Everyone had a teacher voice; it was the voice that students learned to obey when they were about five and never lost it. Naturally, it’s an invaluable resource for a teacher. Tsunade’s was particularly compelling. "Why don’t you just nip back over to Kakashi’s place with a cup of sugar or something? I’m sure he’d love to see you!"

"Yeah!" Giggled the hyperactive snake. "You two look so cute together!"

"No, we don’t," I replied calmly. "I like women, and Kakashi is too-"

"Too sexy? Too fascinating? Too handsome? Too intelligent?" Tsunade listed, teacher voice compelling me to obey and accept what she was saying. It was in her eyes too. Obey, obey, obey, make it easier on yourself, obey...

"Face it Iruka-chan, you can’t hold any of that against him," The snake somehow pouted, her voice dropping several notches in pitch.

"Just watch me!" I said rather petulantly, crossing my arms across my chest. Suddenly I was seven again, back in my robot pyjamas in my parent’s old living room with the squashy sofa and the coffee table stained with ring marks from too many mugs of tea.

"That’s not a very youthful attitude, Iruka-sensei!" The flamboyant turtle spoke up, posing from its corner.

"I don’t see what youth has to do with any of this," I said as I morphed back into my adult self, although I retained the pyjamas. I had always liked those pyjamas.

"Youth has everything to do with it! You must experience the joys of youthful romance while you are still young!" The turtle did a small twirl, a rainbow appearing over its head. A pair of gay pride flags appeared in the hyperactive snake’s arms – wait, the snake had arms? – and Tsunade smirked.

"Wait, what are you implying?" I narrowed my eyes. I really hoped they weren’t implying I was-

"Gay as the fourth of July, darling!" The snake squealed. Her eyes bugged out of her head as a very naked Kakashi started walking slowly towards us, his-

I woke up with a start, hitting my alarm clock with enough force to hurt my hand. I really, really hated my subconscious sometimes.
Showering was...awkward. Although I hadn’t let the dream progress far enough for anything to actually happen, I felt like I had had a very satisfying dream. After all, I lived alone and didn’t date. It was sheer willpower that I hadn’t given into temptation and given myself carpal tunnel syndrome already.

Instead of guiltily jerking off to a stock image of my second girlfriends’ breasts, watching them flatten into a smooth plane beneath that button up shirt he was wearing yesterday-

No. Definitely not doing that. I crawled out of bed, instantly missing the warmth of my quilt and pillows. No matter how many years I taught, I would never leap out of bed in the mornings and throw myself at the kids with more enthusiasm than the entire student body combined. That was definitely not normal. Instead, I dragged myself into my bathroom and turned the shower on hot enough to steam up the mirror and leave a layer of condensate on the tiles.

Showering was supposed to be relaxing, like baking, but today I couldn’t look at my body without recalling the dream. Suddenly, I was all too aware of myself, all too aware of my legs and my arms and my torso and the way my hair fell down my back and the scar across my nose. I was aware of every one of my imperfections, too many for me to count on my fingers.

I shut my eyes and ducked my head under the water, fumbling blindly for my shower gel. If my shampoo was girly, then I made sure all my other bathroom products were manly. My shower gel was unscented, with a moisturising agent that was specifically targeted at men. Not that I had a thing about moisturising.

I cracked open an eye to squeeze out a little of the creamy white liquid onto a sponge – and then dropped it, half choking on childish laughter and horror. Shower gel looked all too much like-

No. I wasn’t going to say it. I wasn’t twelve. There’s nothing funny about that, it was just because of that weird dream.

What, afraid of a little bit of man milk, Iruka-sensei? Tsunade’s voice echoed mockingly through my head. I grit my teeth and grabbed the sponge, working the not-semen-like-at-all shower gel over my stomach, rubbing it into a bubbly lather. After blindly soaping the rest of my body, I let myself take an extra minute under the shower jet, letting the water chase the bubbles off my skin, just enjoying the sensation.

After realising I had spent significantly more than one extra minute, I rushed through my morning routine and managed to pick the suit jacket and tie that specifically didn’t go well together, very nearly over-filled the sink, banged my thigh on a cupboard door, spilled the milk, and knocked over
the photo of my parents on the window sill. Today was not looking like a good day.

When I pulled out of the car park with not a minute to spare, Kakashi’s car was still parked and its owner was nowhere to be seen. Figures. The guy would probably be late to his own funeral.

There wasn’t much in the way of traffic, and I made it in time. I swung into my favourite parking spot, which was mercifully free of Anko’s grubby little car, and walked briskly into school. My heavy bags bumped painfully against my legs, adding a few more bruises to the collection.

Fortunately, my classroom was deserted. I shoved the bags under the desk and reclined in my chair, shutting my eyes. Yes, today, everything was going to go fine. All my dream-induced bad luck had definitely run out, and there weren’t going to be any more problems all day long. It was going to be an easy day, with students who behaved well in class and didn’t run in corridors and only talked when they were answering questions and didn’t doodle on the desks, all handing in their spotless homework in on time. Then I could go home, drink tea and mark it, and give them all a big, congratulatory tick to say-

“Morning, Iruka-sensei!” Naruto’s obnoxiously bright and cheerful voice called from across the room. I wanted it desperately to be a hallucination. It wasn’t that I didn’t like Naruto; it was that I didn’t want to see his – or anyone’s – face yet this morning.

“Good morning, Naruto,” I said back, internally prodding myself to be normal, which meant not murdering students. “Can I help you?”

“Not really, sensei, I just felt like being early this morning,” his lightly tanned fingers gripped the doorframe, swinging lightly back and forth with wide eyes, looking back into the corridor.

“Any particular reason?”

“I was hoping to catch Kakashi-sensei and ask him about this cool physics thing he showed Sasuke in class, but Sasuke said that there were other theories that were more compelling and factually based, and then Sakura jumped in and started siding with Sasuke, which meant that I have to side with Kakashi-sensei out of fairness,” He gasped for breath. “And that’s basically it,”

“So what was the theory?” If it was complicated enough for Sasuke’s genius class, then there was no way Naruto or Sakura – or I, for that matter – were going to understand a word of it. But considering their long-term rivalry, Naruto had to side with whatever opinion opposed Sasuke, be it right or wrong, and Sakura had to side with Sasuke as a part of some hormonal teenage girl attraction she’d had going since they were twelve. It was amusing when it was sport-related or eating-related, but when it came to academics Sasuke usually beat Naruto hands down, which could be a little depressing to watch.

“Oh, just something about quantum entanglement or something,” He said casually, like we were talking about the weather. Quantum what? That sounded ridiculously advanced.

“Is that relevant to the course?” I questioned.

“I don’t think it is, but-”

“Then you shouldn’t be arguing with Sasuke about things that don’t matter. You aren’t even taking physics!” Sasuke was by far the more mentally and academically gifted of the two, which usually rubbed off well on Naruto, who still strived to beat him even though there wasn’t a chance. It was probably a good thing Naruto wasn’t taking physics with Kakashi-sensei as a teacher, considering his apparent tendency to teach advanced level stuff for fun.
“True, but Kakashi-sensei is really cool! He reads porn and teaches shit-”

“Teaches stuff, Naruto,” I corrected automatically. It comes with the job.

“Fine, teaches stuff about stuff that all of us normal people without IQs of over about four hundred can’t even begin to wrap our heads around. While reading porn. Hell, he reads the stuff by Granny Tsunade’s husband, and that’s the dirtiest smut out there-”

“Why do you even know that?”

“I’m a normal sixteen year old boy, how can I not know that?” I certainly didn’t read porn when I was sixteen! That may have been because I was recovering from depression and I had no sex drive to speak of, which put an end to girlfriend number two, but I wasn’t reading porn that early! Surely that isn’t normal.

“You’re far too young to be reading pornography! What would Sasuke say?”

“I don’t care what that bastard would-”

“Talking about me, Naruto?” Sasuke appeared behind Naruto, one hand resting casually on his shoulder. Naruto jumped a little, then turned around and grinned cheekily.

“Yeah, I was just saying how much you loved to jerk off to *Icha Icha* in your free time,” He said playfully, eyes full of perverted implications.

“Hn, dobe,” The dark haired boy smirked and leaned against the opposite side of the doorframe, his black suit contrasting sharply against the white-painted wood. They really were as different as chalk and cheese, Naruto and Sasuke. Naruto liked orange, was obnoxious, loud and annoying, while Sasuke wore exclusively black and red, was quiet, intelligent and very proud, but they couldn’t seem to get enough of each other. If we were characters in some kind of badly written romance novel, they would certainly be the main characters who fell hopelessly in love, much to the amusement of the reader.

“See? He’s not denying it!”

“We are not talking about that in my classroom, or in any classroom for that matter!” I barked over the increasing volume of Naruto’s voice. *Not* appropriate.

“What about biology or sex ed?”

“This has nothing to do with that!”

“But they teach you about wanking in sex ed,”

“Seriously? I don’t remember that part,” I thought back to the meagre sex education I’d had when I was about twelve, although I couldn’t remember most of it. It was very much ‘peg A goes in slot B to assemble product C’, accompanied by a stringy old lady who looked like she’d hit us with her stick if we talked during her lecture, who warned us about diseases and teenage pregnancy and drove the fear of God into each of us. Sex suddenly seemed very unappealing for at least three years, at which point I conveniently forgot everything.

“I mean in the twenty first century, Iruka-sensei, not the eighteenth,”

“Oh ha ha, very funny. Now get the hell out of my classroom and don’t come back until the bell-”

The bell rang, cutting off what I was about to say. What was that about my luck again?
Can't Let You Go

‘Cause we belong together now, yeah

Forever united here somehow, yeah

You got a piece of me

And honestly

My life would suck without you

After morning registration, the kids filed out and my first class of the morning filed in. A class of fifth formers, all fairly good at English lit, although most of them didn’t really seem to care much for the subject. It was a shame, really.

After the last straggler walked through the door, pulling it closed behind him, and the class was properly seated, I turned to face them properly.

“Everyone here? No absences? Right, let’s get started properly. Who can tell me what happened last week in our book?” I said, standing up to write the date on the whiteboard behind me. The smell of board markers stung my nose, the heady smell of the solvents sharp and unwelcome.

“Captain Robert Walton had just found Frankenstein,” Someone called out from the class.

“Can anyone add any more detail to that?” I asked, turning back to the kids. There were a few hands up, but I couldn’t feel any real enthusiasm for the story. It was too early in the morning to really appreciate Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Unfortunately for them, I had a lesson plan, and I would stick to it come hell or high water. I pointed to someone at the back of the room.

“Right before that, they saw a tall figure in the distance on a dog sled, which Frankenstein was chasing after,” The kid mumbled, voice barely audible. Somewhere to the left, a pair of girls giggled and someone dropped a metal pencil tin, the racket cutting them off.

“Alright. This lesson, we’ll try to finish off the rest of the first part, and then we’ll analyse the epistolary form…” I ran on automatic mode, trying to make sure the students got the right notes and understood the text. I had given them *Frankenstein* because I thought they would enjoy it more than other texts of the time; it has murder, romance and monsters all rolled into one, but it is so much more than that. If only one or two students really came to enjoy the novel, then I would be happy.

When the hour was up, I set a series of questions as homework. I sat down in my chair and rubbed my eyes, holding them shut. Although I was tempted to get them to write an essay, I wanted to go through technique with them first. Essay technique is very important; it isn’t enough to just spew facts onto a piece of paper, it has to be written eloquently and in order, just like-

“Mornin’, Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi’s voice said from behind me. I resisted the temptation to melt onto the floor and die.

“Good morning,” I replied, not opening my eyes. I was half convinced I was still dreaming, and I’d
I forced my eyes open wide, taking in all of his fully clothed appearance. Dark suit, dark shirt, dark tie, mask and eye patch. It made him look even more enigmatic than before, managing to make him dashing and dangerously handsome at the same time. His vertical hair was dull under the overhead lights, looking more grey than silver against the paleness of the whiteboard behind him. I wondered if it was natural or if it was from some kind of dye, and if it was, why silver?

“Any reason you’re staring?” He asked, cutting off my train of thought. One visible eyebrow was raised slightly, mockingly amused.

“I wasn’t staring!” I retorted. I wasn’t, I was just…uh…

“Okay, you were looking at my body very hard then. Any reason you were looking at my body very hard?”

“I wasn’t – oh, whatever,” I rolled my eyes, thinking up an excuse. “I was checking your appearance. I have to report to Tsunade about you at lunch, if she’s sober enough to listen. That’s what I was looking at,”

“And do I pass?” He struck a pose, eye narrowing seductively for an invisible camera. In that pose, you could really see everything; the definition of muscles beneath clothing, the proportions of his body, the lines and angles that drew people to him. They eye only accentuated it, almost ‘come hither’, twinkling in the lighting.

“You’ll do,” I said curtly, looking back at my lesson planner.

“I’ll take that as a compliment, sensei,” He chuckled, relaxing his body. “Anyway, I wanted to ask you if you were free on Saturday evening,”

“W-what?!” I gasped, hands clawing in my lap. Was that some kind of proposition?

“The science department is taking a few of the upper sixth classes to an out-of-town research station, and we need a couple of extra hands. I’ve asked around, but no one is free and they suggested I ask you,”

“How many students are we taking?”

“About fifty, just my class and two of Ibiki’s,” I shuddered at the mention of Ibiki. If anyone was cut out to be a drill sergeant rather than a chemistry teacher, it was Ibiki. Very strict and borderline sadistic, no one dared set fire to things in his class. One kid who not-so-accidentally set fire to a chair was in detention for three months and was apparently scarred for life.

“How late does it go on for? I don’t have anything going on on Saturday, but late nights and early mornings are not my forte,” I couldn’t survive without my seven and a bit hours sleep, and even that wasn’t ideal.

“We’re taking a coach out to the research station at about three, and we’ll probably be back at about eight. Is that early enough for you, sensei?” The eyebrow rose in its mocking-amused arch again.

“Oh, course,” I pouted a little at the dig. Thank the gods it wasn’t some kind of date. I could never live that down. “Do you need any papers signed or…?”

“You’re employed by the school, so you’re already covered,”
“Good, good. Now, if you wouldn’t mind, my class will be arriving any second, so could you please leave?” I peered around the door, looking for any sign my class was beginning to arrive. A couple of keen students were looking in, watching the exchange between us.

“See you ‘round, Iruka-sensei,” He left with a smile and a wave, before turning around and walking quickly out of the room. I sighed, and motioned for the confused students to come in.

Just when I had nearly forgotten about the distraction of Kakashi-sensei, he turned up and reminded me again just why I couldn’t get the guy out of my head. He made me want to pout and argue back, act petulantly and deny everything while sneaking little glances at him when he thought I wasn’t looking. I felt about thirteen again, first developing an interest in other humans as something other than friends, objects to annoy or get to do things for me. But it definitely wasn’t a crush or anything as stupid as that. No way in hell. Just because I thought about him a lot and could appreciate certain aspects of his appearance didn’t mean I wanted to do anything. It was completely natural and platonic.

“Iruka-sensei?” A timid voice called from the front of the classroom. I looked up into Hinata Hyuuga’s wide, pale eyes, and realised the class was waiting for me to start.

“Oh! Uh, I’m sorry, we can start now. Has everyone got their copy of Hamlet?” One kid near the back raised a hand, and I fished in the desk drawers for a spare copy, throwing it in his general direction before turning back to the board. “I assume everyone finished reading through the key points of the play I specified. Which character was I asking you to focus on?”

“Ophelia, Hamlet’s potential wife,” I was preparing them for the first essay on the play, analysing the portrayal of Ophelia. Fairly easy, and a good way to warm up their essay-writing brains, and it was interesting to see who would defend Ophelia’s character from a feminist perspective and who would condemn her as a hysterical and dependant girl. What would be even more intriguing is who would argue both. First essays always tell the reader a lot about the author.

“And what is her fate in the end of the play?” I asked, opening my heavily annotated copy of the text.

“She goes mad after her father is killed and drowned in a brook,”

“Can anyone tell me what is significant about this specific line…?” I stood up to write on the board, turning my back to the class. As soon as I stood up, they started whispering and giggling. I narrowed my eyes, glaring holes into the board. I listened carefully; the words ‘Kakashi-sensei’, ‘Iruka-sensei’, ‘dating’ and ‘oh my god, that’s so cute’ came up a lot, usually followed by a string of giggles. A vein in my forehead twitched.

“Sensei, how do we-” A student started.

“Am I really going to have to clear this up now?” I asked, turning slowly to face the class. I glared out over them, putting on my best teacher voice and trying to be as intimidating and authoritative as possible. “There is nothing going on between Kakashi-sensei and I. We have a purely professional relationship, and we both intend to keep it that way. Just because Tsunade seems to have deluded herself into thinking we’d make some kind of adorable couple doesn’t mean you should, too. Now, if I hear one more word about that in my classroom, I won’t hesitate to throw you in detention until the day you leave, okay?”

There was a silence. Most of the students stared wide eyed at me, one or two looking down guiltily. Hinata looked like she was about to faint.
“Maa, actually Sensei, I wouldn’t mind dating you if you’d give me half a chance,” I jumped about three feet in the air. Kakashi had appeared in the doorway again, leaning casually with one arm against the wood. How did he get there without me noticing?

The class started to laugh, the tension broken. I pinched the bridge of my nose. I hadn’t gotten rid of him for five minutes and already I was feeling awkwardly unlucky again. Going crazy and drowning in a river was looking like a good option right about now.

oO..Oo..O. Oo
You Make Me Love You

You're vain, your games, you're insecure
You love me, you like her
You make me laugh, you make me cry
I don't know which side to buy
Your friends are jerks, when you act like them, just know it hurts
I wanna be with the one I know
And the seventh thing I hate the most about you
You make me love you

Two classes later, and it was lunchtime. Although I was hungry, I didn’t eat for two reasons. The first was that it was almost certain that if I dared enter the dining room, then a food fight would start and I would get something stuck in my hair or thrown in my face, or I would get the burned bit at the edge of the tray, or there wouldn’t be any cake left. The second, possibly worse reason, was that I had to report to Tsunade about Kakashi.

I fished a bruised apple out of one of my many bags and walked out of my classroom, locking the door behind me, notes in one hand and apple in the other. I’d learned my lesson and I wasn’t taking any more chances today. I bit into the apple, half expecting a worm or a lump of mould, but it was perfectly normal. Huh. Looks like my luck was looking up.

I sped up my pace a little. The faster I got there, the faster I would get out. Meetings with Tsunade fell into a number of different categories depending on her sobriety. If she was completely sober, she was likely to punch you through a wall or throw her stapler at you. If she was drunk, she was likely to ramble at you for a good hour and fall asleep on the desk. There was no midpoint with Tsunade.

I finished the apple and tossed the core at a bin. Predictably, I missed.

The door to Tsunade’s office loomed ahead of me. I remembered the first day I taught, approaching the office and knocking only to be greeted with a stapler slamming into the wall beside my head and Shizune quietly leading me out for a cup of tea and an explanation. The kids were nothing compared to that.

I knocked three times and let myself in. Something clanged against the wall to the right of my ear, probably the stapler.

“You’re late, Iruka-sensei,” a voice called from underneath a desk. Several sheets of paper covered the holes bored into it by angry fists and stationary. A half-full bottle of sake stood to the side, precariously close to the edge.

“I’m sorry, Tsunade-sama,” I replied, moving forwards into the room. Tsunade’s head appeared behind the desk, a small cup clasped triumphantly in her hand and a lopsided smile on her face.
“Don’t worry about it, Iruka,” She smiled, pouring herself more liquor. “Sake?”

“No thank you, I don’t drink at work,” I wrinkled my nose at the strong smell. You could probably power cars or bleach walls with that stuff.

“Of course you don’t, silly me,” She said, laughing. “So, tell me all about Kakashi-sensei,”

I shuffled my notes a little, fishing out the first page. Somehow, a paper with ‘GO FOR IT, SENSEI’ printed on it in large letters had worked its way into the pile. I made a mental note to ask my class about that later.

“I observed a full day of five of Kakashi-sensei’s classes, one upper sixth, two lower sixth, one fifth and one fourth form classes, like you asked me to,” I started, shoving the offending paper to the back of the pile. *Nothing was going to go wrong with this meeting, nothing was going to go wrong with this meeting,* I repeated over and over in my head as a mantra. “I sat at the back and watched, not offering help or support, just watching how he teaches. He taught the correct syllabus at the correct level for each class based on student ability, although he had a tendency to explain more advanced topics unnecessarily on occasion. Although this did intrigue the students, I don’t believe-”

“So he did good?” Tsunade interrupted, setting down her empty cup and pouring herself another drink. “Anything he didn’t do well?”

“He was frequently late, which is very unprofessional and gives a very negative impression to the students, and he read pornography during class! I think it was that *Icha Icha* series, the one your husband writes,”

“Ah, so he has good taste, then. Yes, I don’t mind giving you away to him, after all,”

“Giving me away?”

“I haven’t really - hic - found anyone just right for you yet, but Kakashi - hic - seems good for you,” She said, her voice getting lower. “You balance each other out, y’know?”

“No, I don’t know. What do you mean, we balance each other out?”

“You’re – hic – boring and uptight, and he’s cool and sexy,” She grinned. “Perfect Romeo and Juliet,”

“Hardly Romeo and Juliet, Tsunade-sama,”

“Oh, no, no! It is! I’ve seen it! You can’t stop looking at him when you’re – hic – together! And I know he likes you, too! You see, when my – hic – husband, Jiraiya,” She paused, her face twisting with concentration. “Yeah, Jiraiya was younger, he didn’t like me at all. No, instead he loved that snake bastard, Orochimaru,”

“Jiraiya and Orochimaru? As in, the Orochimaru, headmaster of Sound Academy?”

“Yeah, that prick. I watched ‘em fall in love and all. It was really romantic and cute, and Orochimaru was much nicer in those days. Don’t bloody know what happened in the mean time, though. Jiraiya was thinner but he still looked like a procu- porca- porcupine,” She smiled, drumming her fingers over the desk and putting down her sake. A dreamy look glowed through her eyes, and her face softened. “They were so sweet together, although Orochi tried to hide it for so long. That he was gay, y’know? Jiraiya was always too much of a pervert to stick to one gender; he had to have it all. It’s like, I kinda see that in you and Kakashi,”
“I don’t see it at all. I am not interested in Kakashi in the slightest. I’m straight, completely straight. I haven’t even thought about it.” I said, a little indignant. It was really irritating how everyone – including, apparently, my own subconscious – had decided that I was suddenly gay. I’m pretty sure it doesn’t work like that. And besides, I liked women. I had had sex with women and enjoyed it.

“Then why are you so flustered when I mentioned it?” She slurred. I squashed the teacher in me, resisting the temptation to correct her tenses.

“Because it’s degrading. I don’t like being forced onto someone, or having someone forced onto me. I’m not some doll you can play around with,”

“I know you’re not, Iruka-sensei, but I’m serious. You’re the cute blushing one with the temper and he’s your cool, sleek, dashing handsome prince.” She poured herself another cup, repressing a smile that was sneaking across her face.

“We’re not in a fairy tale, and I am not the princess,” I looked away, colour rising to my cheeks. Not only was I supposedly gay, but I was the girl in the relationship? That was insulting.

“You are definitely the princess. Height rule, sensei!” She chimed.

“Height rule?” I was confused. Was that some kind of fangirl thing?

“Whoever is taller is -” she cut herself off with giggles, laughing into her sake cup.

“Whoever is taller is what?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, let’s just say Jiraiya was taller than Orochi in those days, and Orochi sported a limp a lot when they got together,” My eyes widened a little. That made sense; if I was the woman, then I was the one taking it up the-

“So you’re implying that I’m the submissive party in this relationship?” I cut my own thoughts off, replying curtly.

“Hah, you just admitted to having a relationship!” Tsunade downed the last of the sake and clapped her hands together in triumph. I almost felt bad for having to shoot her down, since a relationship wasn’t even nearly possible.

“I meant theoretically!”

“Of course you did, sensei,” She grinned conspiratorially. “Anyway, I think that will do,”

“But I didn’t even give you the full report,” I looked over my papers again, digging through them for the second page. I’d analysed Kakashi’s teaching style and everything, stayed up late writing out criticisms and methods of improvement based on teaching guidelines. Although I wasn’t a physics teacher, I knew how to teach.

“I don’t give a rat’s arse about the report, sensei, it’s your love life I’m interested in,”

“I’ll let myself out, then,” I stood stiffly, suddenly feeling the urge to run away very fast and hide in a corner for a while, far away from Tsunade and her alcohol. I think I preferred nearly being murdered with a stapler.

“Goodbye, Iruka-sensei!” She cooed, and I walked very quickly out of the door without a glance behind me. I leaned against the wall outside her office, trying to relax myself. It was just Tsunade, just drunk, crazy Tsunade and her drunk, crazy delusions. Her claims had absolutely no weight, and
it was all in her head.

Still, I absolutely did not need to know that choice piece of information about her husband and Orochimaru. I had always known he was creepy, but thinking about him in bed with Jiraiya? Purely disturbing.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
It's Just A Matter of Time

You can’t mistake my biology

The way that we walk

The way that we talk

It’s there in our thoughts

We’re gonna cause a controversy

The way that we walk

The way that we talk

So easily caught

I really must have angered some obscure god of fortune because my week was full of trouble. Nothing went right, from my job to my flat. The kids seemed more restless than usual, more talkative and less inclined to work properly. I was inundated with little messages of encouragement, evolving from ‘GO FOR IT, SENSEI’ to ‘seme or uke?’, whatever that meant. Despite their lack of enthusiasm, I still managed to collect piles of work for marking, which took me much longer than normal to mark.

The only positive thing during the week was the lack of Kakashi. He was either too busy or had got the message that I didn’t want to see him, but he stopped visiting my classroom during the day and I didn’t see him back at the flat. He had completely disappeared.

Not that I had a problem with that. It was better that way. Definitely. Yeah. Not that I was lonely or anything.

By the time the weekend rolled around, I was thoroughly exhausted. Friday was always a trying day; two fourth form classes, one upper sixth and Naruto’s class. Explaining to the budding pervert that not every example of imagery in a poem, novel or play is some kind of allusion to a penis is not the ideal way to spend a Friday morning.

“You’re so obsessed with penises someone might think you’re gay, dobe,” Sasuke had said loudly, causing Naruto to blush and throw a pen in Sasuke’s general direction. The class had giggled, and I had ended up giving them all a stern talking-to about sexuality in the modern world, which didn’t leave me enough time to set them any homework.

Friday night itself was hectic. I had a huge pile of marking, but I couldn’t focus on any of it. My mind kept drifting back towards Saturday afternoon, to the trip I was helping Kakashi-sensei supervise. I was suddenly very conscious of what I was going to wear.

I pushed away the stack of papers and padded into my bedroom. My wardrobe loomed before me like some kind of impenetrable barrier, mocking my poor taste in clothing. I rolled my eyes at myself and pulled open the door. Not jeans, jeans were too casual. I couldn’t wear a suit because it was too
formal. Would it be cold enough for a jumper inside? Was a button-down shirt too formal for a school trip?

I pulled out a couple of pairs of trousers, laying them across my bed and wondering what would go with them. I bit my lip, rifling through my shirts and jumpers, but nothing caught my eye.

I stepped back and took a deep breath. Why did I care what I looked like? It was only a few sixth formers and Kakashi. It’s not like they would care what I looked like.

*No, it’s because it’s Kakashi-sensei that you care*, Tsunade’s voice in the back of my head whispered. I frowned, squashing the voice and pulling out a dark green jumper and a collared shirt. That would do; nothing special, nothing out of the ordinary. Exactly what I would wear on any normal day at home alone, but still formal enough to mark me out as a teacher supervising a bunch of kids.

*That and the green really brings out the brown in your eyes.*

I hung the outfit on the wardrobe doorknobs and began to peel off my shirt and tie, dropping them lazily on the floor. It was too late at night for anything, and I wasn’t going to be able to focus on anything except annoyingly memorable co-workers and their expressive eye-

No, it was just that I was tired. I picked up my shirt and carried it into the bathroom, stuffing it into the laundry basket. My trousers and underwear followed it, the lid of the basket falling shut with a satisfying *whump*. I pulled out my hair tie and wandered over to the sink, combing through my hair with my fingers. It was getting too long again, reaching past my shoulders and tangling, but it was such a hassle to get it cut. Another thing to add to my to-do list.

About ten minutes later, I went to bed. I couldn’t sleep. My eyes were glued to the ceiling, where a patch of shadow had managed to take on exactly the shape of Kakashi’s head. I raised an eyebrow; apparently light and inanimate objects were mocking me now, too.

I forced my eyes closed, trying to remove all images of Kakashi from my head in the hopes I wouldn’t dream about him. Instead, visions of his face with his eye curved up in a smile, leaning against the doorframe, orange pornography in hand flooded my mind’s eye. His lazy voice filled my head, they way he spoke my name echoing through my ears. I could still *smell* him.

*Somehow, I knew I wasn’t going to get any sleep*..

It was definitely cold enough for a jumper. In fact, it was probably cold enough for two jumpers and a coat. Clouds had rolled in from the north, accompanied by weather warnings over the coach radio all the way to the science station.

I had barely slept the previous night, and the rocking of the coach on the uneven road was very soothing. Sat at the extreme back, as far away from Kakashi-sensei as possible, I let my head rest against the cold glass of the windowpane, watching my breath condense on the freezing surface. The students were all very well behaved, talking in small groups, listening to their own music players, using their mobile phones or going through their notes. There was nothing but the quiet babble of conversations. I would kill for a class so well-behaved.

Yawning, I turned to look out of the window. A few flakes of snow drifted down from heavy clouds, falling onto the fields we drove past. The research station was still about a mile away, far enough to be classified as ‘out of town’ and a favourite destination of school science trips. Come to
think of it, there was no real reason why one of the other science teachers shouldn’t have come. Not all of them could have been busy. This whole setup reeked of Tsunade’s little conspiracy.

But was it so bad? Yes, it definitely was, but there wasn’t really any reason I couldn’t at least be friends with Kakashi. We were colleagues after all, and I was friendly to all of my colleagues as a matter of professionalism. Besides the porn, the lateness and the lack of professionalism, he didn’t seem to be a bad person. He was smart, had a sense of humour, cool, could deal with the kids, handsome-

No, not handsome. Just attractive, in the way one man can appreciate how another man looks.

There was undeniably something about him that drew me to him. I wasn’t going to try and pretend there wasn’t, but I wasn’t going to come out and say it was anything vaguely romantic. It was just interest in one human being for another. Curiosity, and that’s all. Nothing sexual in the slightest.

Tsunade – and everyone else, for that matter – seemed so sure about my sexuality. Did I really come across as gay? Yes, I had long hair and tried to dress well, but that didn’t make me look gay. But then again, how do you look gay? I don’t think most normal gay men walk around with pink feather boas and tight shirts; for one that would be really inconvenient. No, gay people look just like normal people. For all I knew, Kakashi could be as gay as the fourth of July and I wouldn’t know it. He did say that one time he would date me…

It wasn’t any of my business whether Kakashi-sensei was gay or not. Either way, it didn’t affect me because I like women. I had had three girlfriends, all of whom I’d slept with and enjoyed sleeping with them. I couldn’t say I had specifically been in love with them, but I’d enjoyed the sex. I just hadn’t wanted to date anyone for a long time.

Well then, it’s definitely time for you to dip your toe in the dating pool again, sensei, Tsunade’s drunk voice crooned. I lifted my head and let it drop back against the window with a thunk. Maybe it was, just not how she was thinking. People have one night stands all the time, and from there I could think about dating someone. But how do you meet people? Tsunade and Jiraiya were childhood friends. Asuma and Kurenai, both teachers, met at work and have been together ever since. My parents met at university. My dating pool was pretty much restricted to my co-workers, many of whom now seemed intent on pairing me up with Kakashi.

Part of me almost wanted to give into their demands and date him just to shut them up. Another part rejoiced at the idea, but I stepped on it quickly. That was definitely never happening in a million years.

The coach ground to a halt, the snow falling faster around it. I stood up, wrapping my jumper tighter around my body as I walked quickly down the aisle towards the door. Kakashi stood just outside the coach door, waiting for me with an umbrella in hand. A small smile crept across my face; that was certainly a cute gesture.

I forced my lips back into a straight line. No, it wasn’t a ‘cute gesture’; it was a perfectly normal, perfectly platonic gesture that I didn’t appreciate romantically.

“Thanks,” I said, ducking under the umbrella. Underneath the thin plastic shield defending us from the falling snow, I was pressed close to his body, and I couldn’t help but shiver, but not with cold.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Your Heart is My Sky

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

‘Cause every time we touch, I get this feeling

And every time we kiss, I swear I could fly

Can you feel my heart beat fast?

I want this to last

Need you by my side

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

“To your left, we have the residential block where our some of our researchers live during extended projects, and to your right is the station itself. The majority of our projects are centred around crop research, and the usage of certain chemicals in different regions and circumstances is paramount to…” The guide rambled. Most of the students looked where she pointed, first towards the small block of houses then towards the much larger metal and glass structure of the research facility.

“Normally, I would take you across one of the fields, but the snow is coming down rather heavily and I don’t want to keep you outside in this weather, so we’re staying inside instead,”

I took up my position at the back of the line of students, herding the stragglers inside. I shivered, regretting leaving my coat at home. Kakashi was leading the students, talking to the guide at the front of the line. The loss of the umbrella left me open to the falling snow, flakes falling onto my hair and my eyelashes. I ran a hand over them, trying to brush out what I could. Snow was pretty, but worry snaked into my gut; I had the most horrible feeling we were going to get stuck out here.

I shot a glance at the parked coach, the driver reading a newspaper behind the wheel. If the driver made a break for it because of the weather, I would personally set Tsunade on him. And tell her that she had taken her sake.

The facility was much warmer on the inside. Even though the outside walls were mostly glass, the heating system was very efficient. Heat radiated up from the floors and out of strategically placed heaters, most kids shedding their coats and scarves as we worked our way deeper into the building.

I looked back out of a window, only to see the coach disappearing through the snow. My fists closed in anger; that bastard was leaving us here! That was definitely not part of his job description! There was no way I was going to be stranded in this place with nothing but a bunch of teenagers, a pack of nerdy scientists and Kakashi-sensei for company. Hell, forget setting Tsunade on him, I was going to tear him limb from limb myself.

I made my way around the back of the students, all standing stock still and listening, or in a few cases, taking notes, on what one rather enthusiastic scientist was babbling about. I had to tell Kakashi about the lack of transport, since it was now his problem. I smirked a little; this wasn’t an easy trap to get out of.

“…so anyway, that’s why quantum theory explains consciousness, since regular mechanics can’t. It’s all superposition and quantum entanglement inside the brain that gives rise to brain function, ergo consciousness,” Kakashi said, gesturing with one hand. He was talking to the guide, who was staring at his covered face through her glasses with the same fangirl eyes too many of the students seemed to
have. He seemed completely oblivious to it, and continued talking. “I agree, however, with Chalmers on the fact that we seem to speculate that everything complicated that we don’t really understand we automatically label ‘quantum something-or-other’, including brain function, and that computational and neural theories hold a lot of weight as well.”

“But what about Stapp’s approach?” The girl replied, shifting a little closer to him. “I think the philosophical implications of his approach are far more interesting, what with the whole ‘universe is constantly evolving by choice’ thing. I love having difference choices, don’t you?” She reached forwards to place a hand on his arm. I sped up my pace, frowning.

“Kakashi-sensei, the coach is gone,” I spoke maybe a little too loudly, causing the girl to jerk back like she’d been burned. “I thought you should know.”

“It looks like we’ll have to stay here, then,” he looked down at the girl, eye full of something that made something in my chest twinge. “Can you put us up for the night?”

“I have to clear it with the site manager, but feel free to use our living quarters for as long as you like,” There was a bit too much emphasis on the ‘you’.

“Thanks, I’m really grateful,” Kakashi’s eye curved up into its happy little arch, and the twinge got worse. An incredibly small, very childish part of me was actually jealous. I squashed it quickly, and pretended I didn’t feel anything.

“Alright, on with the tour!” She clapped a pair of perfectly manicured hands together. “Could you finish up over there, please?”

“Right,” I grumbled, watching as Kakashi walked away with her in tow, her hips swaying just a little too much, and her body too close to his. I pursed my lips, resisting the urge to death-glare her.

But there was nothing wrong with her flirting with him at all. It was good if women showed interest in him, if he got a girlfriend and put a stop to all these ridiculous rumours. If at least one of us proved we weren’t gay, then Tsunade and every other person at school would stop trying to push us together, right? The guide was cute, a little overenthusiastic and perky, but she was cute. She was physically well proportioned.

I tried to imagine her with no clothes on.

Nothing.

In a wild moment of complete stupidity, I tried to imagine Kakashi with no clothes on.

By the gods.

I quickly repressed absolutely everything and walked forward rather robotically, catching up with the group again. A couple of kids gave me a slightly odd look as I walked forward stiffly, furiously pulling my jumper down.

By the time the tour was finished, the snow was too thick to even consider calling the coach company up and demanding they send a driver. It was beyond dangerous to drive in this weather, and the roads were likely blocked already. So instead, we herded the kids across the courtyard towards the block of housing for the residential researchers. Fortunately, a full apartment was free, consisting of three rooms and a bathroom. We split the kids between the two main rooms, girls in one and boys in the other, blankets and bedsheets and cushions donated left, right and centre from the long-term residents. The guide looked rather disappointed that Kakashi wasn’t going to spend the night with her. I was secretly very pleased. It was horribly trashy to sleep with someone on a school
trip!

Then came the awkward decision of the room for the teachers. The third room was the smallest, mostly because the floor space was taken up by one large double bed.

“I’m not sharing a bed with you,” I stated, refusing to look at Kakashi.

“Then where do you plan on sleeping?” Boredom crept into his voice, his eye mocking through the low light from the bedside lamp. He began to peel off his jacket, and I looked away quickly.

“The floor,” I said quickly.

“Not enough space,” He replied.

“The kids’ room,” The jacket hit the floor.

“Not enough bedding,” His shirt crept up to reveal his stomach.

“The ceiling,” His face was covered by the cloth.

“Too much gravity,” The shirt hit the floor.

“God, anywhere but here!” I swept a hand over my eyes. I was tired, too tired to be making a fuss about sleeping arrangements. It was just a bed. It didn’t matter. We were both normal guys, sharing a bed shouldn’t be a problem. I was out of options. “Fine. I don’t care, do whatever,”

“Great!” His eye curved up into a smile again, but this time for me. Blood rushed to my cheeks, and I was suddenly grateful for the lack of lighting.

I turned my back to him and began to pull my own jumper over my head, keeping my eyes shut for as long as possible. I had to open them again to undo the buttons on my shirt, but I snuck a glance back when I got to my trousers. Kakashi stood behind me, looking in the mirror, combing fingers through his hair. The mask and eye patch were still firmly in place, but every other item of clothing was gone.

Including boxers.

My heart almost stopped. There was no way in hell I was going to take my underwear off and share a bed with this guy in a billion years, but I couldn’t tell him to put his underwear back on. I couldn’t see it in the pile of clothes on the floor. Did he go commando? On a school trip? My eyes bulged at the thought.

I dropped my trousers and shot under the quilt, covering as much of my body as possible.

“Maa…Iruka-sensei, I’m not going to molest you in your sleep or anything,” he drawled, eyebrow rising. He walked forward, and I kept my eyes firmly on his face. Anything below shoulders was strictly forbidden. Especially his-

“I didn’t think you would,” I said defensively, moving my eyes to stare at the far wall. “We’re two adult men; we don’t do that kind of thing,”

“Well, that depends. If my partner is willing, then I certainly will,” I froze. Was that- “Don’t be so uptight about everything, sensei. We live in the twenty-first century, it’s perfectly acceptable.”

The bedside lamp flickered out, and the bed depressed next to me.
I wasn’t going to get any sleep tonight, either.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Hold Me Close

Come on now, try and understand
The way I feel when I’m in your hand
Take my hand, come under cover
They can’t hurt you now
Can’t hurt you now
Can’t hurt you now

“Good morning, Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi drawled, his face close to mine. I could feel a pressure on my waist, a hand trailing over my bare skin, raising goosebumps along my flesh. I shivered into his hand, wiggling my body closer to his. The hand slunk lower, gliding over the skin of my behind, curving round to grip my thigh and pull it up.

I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding, tentatively reaching out a hand to touch the broad, flat planes of his chest. His skin was so pale compared to mine, so fine and soft but still manly. A heavenly smell radiated from him, enveloping me in a cocoon of Kakashi’s unique scent. A smile crossed my face as I leaned in to kiss his chest, but suddenly stopped when I felt his hand sink lower.

“My, my, Iruka-sensei. That’s quite the hard-on you have,” He whispered, a finger trailing up my heated flesh. I gasped, throwing my head back as the hand grasped my erection, moving slowly.

“You like this, don’t you?”

“Mmm, Kakashi, I-”

“You like it when I touch you, when my hands are all over your body,” His voice was pure sex as his hand increased the speed and pressure on my member, the other hand moving up to caress my face. His touch was electric, sending jolts of intense pleasure through every cell in my body. Even through his mask, I could see him smirking. Somehow, that made his touches all the more potent, knowing that he was enjoying this too. His touch was impossibly good and all too soon I reached my climax, spilling my seed into his hand. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t,” The hand on my face covered my eyes, and I felt his breath ghost across my lips before his own impossibly soft lips connected with mine in a small, chaste kiss. “I lo-

I woke up slowly, relishing the warmth on my body. I never really woke up so warm at home in my own bed, so this was a rarity. I snuggled closer to the source of warmth, inhaling a lungful of that addictive smell, fists curling in-

Wait, where was my quilt?

My eyes popped open, and I realised with horror that I was half sprawled across Kakashi-sensei, my head resting on his chest. I resisted the urge to scream.
“Good morning, Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi drawled from somewhere behind my head, and suddenly the dream came rushing back to me. My whole body tensed, and my eyes widened.

No. No, I absolutely did not dream anything like that, that was perverse and disgusting and sick and wrong and about Kakashi-sensei. My colleague. Who I had to work with. My male colleague that I had to work with. I was not allowed to have sex dreams about him!

My thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door, which, to my horror, swung open.

“Sensei, can we go for breakfast now or do we-” The student stopped in mid sentence, eyes as wide as dinner plates as she took in the scene before her; the two of us, apparently naked in a bed together, my head resting on Kakashi’s chest. She giggled and backed out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

Shit.

I sat bolt upright, head swaying with the sudden head rush. My hands tangled in my hair, a look of horror contorting my features. Shit, now the entire student population would think Kakashi and I were a couple within a matter of hours. As if accidentally snuggling wasn’t enough, another human being had to witness it.

I was still finding it hard to wrap my head around both the dream and the snuggling. Why the hell would I be dreaming something so-

Erotic? Sensual? Stimulating? Tsunade’s very unhelpful voice called from the back of my mind. No, it certainly wasn’t erotic, sensual or stimulating. I was just repressed, and Kakashi was just there. A convenient other body. Just a face attached mistakenly to a fictitious object of my desires.

But I had enjoyed the dream. And it was undeniably Kakashi in the dream doing those things to me. What did that say about me?

Once again, I was being forced to ask uncomfortable questions about my own sexuality. Kakashi was definitely a man in the dream, his voice it’s normal deep, sensual tone, the pure sex in his voice sending shivers down my spine and-

Not going there right now. The early morning was definitely not the time for such questions, and I was certainly not in the right place to ask myself those questions. I’d do that later, at home, with a bottle of wine.

“Maa…you ready to get up yet?” Kakashi’s voice asked from across the room. I hadn’t even noticed him moving. I watched him through the curtain of my hair as he straightened his mask, picked up his shirt from the floor and began to button it shut, sealing away that flat, firm chest that I’d been resting my head on just minutes before.

Damn, I wasn’t supposed to be thinking like that. I slipped out of bed, grasping my own clothes from the floor and turning my back to him as I dressed. I felt eyes on me the entire time, or at least, I thought I did. It could have been my perverted and paranoid imagination.

“Have you seen my hair tie?” I said, digging through my pockets. I couldn’t find it anywhere. I crouched on the floor, scanning the carpet for the little band of black elastic.

“I can’t see it,” He replied. “Just leave it down, it really suits you,” Embarrassingly, my cheeks flushed red. I looked away, furiously hiding my blush. He wasn’t making me blush with his stupid compliments in his stupid sexy voice. That was ridiculous.
“We should see about feeding the students,” I said stiffly. I straightened up, casting all my thoughts and doubts about myself, my emotions, Kakashi-sensei and my sexuality to the back of my mind, and walked out of the door.

The minute I emerged, all the students went mysteriously silent.

“Good morning, kids. Did you all sleep well?” I spoke loudly, trying to alleviate some of the tension that crept into the room.

“Uh yes, Sensei. Did you?” One girl spoke up, cheekily grinning.

“Adequately. Now, due to our circumstances, we’re going to have to go to the staff canteen in the main part of the research station for breakfast,” I paused, eyes sweeping the students. “The bad news is, the snow is about a foot and a half deep, and none of us are equipped for snow, so we’re going to have to run across the courtyard,”

The students let out a collective moan at the prospect of getting cold and wet. A few shivered in their thin jackets. I felt awful for making them go outside, but it had to be done.

“And then we can have a snowball fight after breakfast!” Kakashi announced cheerfully from behind me. “Who can tell me what the velocity of a snowball travelling six point three two metres in four and a half seconds?”

“One point four zero four four metres per second!” The class chorused.

“Correct! You can decide on our snowball match: students versus students or students versus teachers?”

“Students versus teachers!” They shouted brightly, a few giggling.

“Alright, after breakfast, Iruka-sensei and I are team one, and all of you are team two. Whoever hits the opposite team with the most snowballs wins!” Kakashi said happily, his eye curving up into its own little smile. I couldn’t help but smile myself. He was so adorable when he got like that. “Now, to breakfast!”

The students raced down stairs, throwing on shoes and socks. The doors flew open, letting in a few falling snowflakes. The kids hopped through the snow like porpoises, occasionally falling down and brushing the snow off themselves before darting off again towards the main facility. There was something about snow that made me so happy, despite my awkward morning. I wrapped my arms around myself, suddenly very cold.

A pair of arms scooped me up, and their owner began jogging across the courtyard. I squeaked in surprise.

“Kakashi-sensei! Put me down at once!” I laughed, too happy to protest seriously. Instead, I clung onto the front of his shirt, gloriously wrapped up in his arms. “What will the students think?”

“I don’t really care,” He said, smiling down at me. The rocking motion of his arms as he ran was soothing and warming, and I forgot all about being cold.

I was almost disappointed when he put me down on the doorstep of the main facility, a few students shooting us fangirlish looks. I ignored them, walking inside with Kakashi in tow. The inside of the building was wonderfully warm, the efficient heating system driving the chill from all of us. Breakfast wasn’t bad either, even if the canteen was only serving toast and jam with no butter.
During the snowball fight, Kakashi and I got utterly destroyed by the kids, and ended up dripping wet and frozen to the core. I was so exhausted by the time the road was cleared enough for a new coach to come and collect us that I didn’t even care that we had to share a blanket.

O.O..Oo..Oo..Oo
Scream

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Everything is F’ed up straight from the heart

Tell me what do you do when it all falls apart?

Gotta pick myself up, where do I start?
‘Cause I can’t turn to you when it all falls apart

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

About half way through the coach ride home, my brain unfroze. I was sitting very close to Kakashi-sensei, wrapped up in the same blanket, suddenly very aware of everything around me. I could hear my own heartbeat in my ears as clearly as the jabber of the kids and the whoosh of the warm air from the air conditioning. I could smell the unique scent of wet clothing and the special scent that was Kakashi. I could feel pure electricity running over every inch of my body that was in contact with his, even through the clothes.

Fortunately, we were both exhausted and barely exchanged a word during the whole ride back to school, which was more than I could say for the kids.

“…I would kill to have been in Reiko’s place this morning!” One girl squealed. I could imagine the look of pure jealousy on her face as she imagined what Reiko, or whatever the name of the girl who had seen us this morning, had witnessed.

“I know, right? They’re totally a couple!” Another voice said excitedly. I could hear a pair of hands clapping with glee at the idea.

“They’re not just a couple, they’re totally in love!” Wait, what? What were the grounds for that?

“You don’t know that!” A third girl piped up, a small voice of reason in a sea of complete irrationality. There was no way in any of the seven layers of Hell that I would ever be in love with Kakashi. It would be completely ridiculous, inappropriate, perverse-

“People who just have sex don’t cuddle afterwards, Kanako,” The first girl defended. I resisted smacking my hand into my face. That was actually a valid point; even I had to admit that. They just caught us at a very inopportune moment, and our actions were just badly misinterpreted. Everything between Kakashi-sensei and I was completely platonic.

Especially that sex dream.

“So you think they had sex in the room next door to us? I so wish we had stayed up a bit later!” My eyes almost popped out of their sockets. There were people who actually wanted to hear that? Who the hell were these girls?

“So who do you think topped?” The first girl said gleefully. Topped.

Oh. The one who was dominant in the sexual situation. That made sense. My mind shrunk to a small point in my head; why were they even discussing this? I wanted to crawl away and hide, but at the same time my dignity wouldn’t let me stand up and tell them off for being inappropriate.
I tried to think of anything else. I began naming every one of Shakespeare’s female villains. Queen Margaret. Lady Macbeth. Reagan and Goneril.


“Who said the girly one has to bottom? Although I agree, Kakashi-sensei would top Iruka-sensei any day, no question,” I almost choked on my breath of air. This wasn’t just a question of dignity, it was a question of masculine pride. Yes, I had long hair. Yes, I taught English Literature. But that didn’t make me the automatic bottom of the relationship. Not that there was a relationship.

“Oh God, that’s hot. Do you think they live together yet, or…?”

I stopped listening. It was too humiliating. I had the most dreadful feeling that Kakashi was awake beside me, listening in on the conversation, too. That was even more humiliating.

When the coach pulled in to the school, I got away as fast as I could manage. I didn’t care that I was still wet and cold, turning the heating system in my car up to full blast and steaming up the windows. I turned the radio on, letting some obscenely loud vile song fill the car with something other than my thoughts. I hadn’t wanted alcohol so much in years.

I thanked the gods that Kakashi wasn’t home when I got back. I flew up the stairs and locked the door to my flat, resisting the temptation to just lie on the floor and die. Instead, I walked calmly into the kitchen, took a wine glass off one of the shelves and a bottle of wine from the back of a cupboard and poured myself a large one.

I didn’t really care that tomorrow was a school day, and I had to be up early. I didn’t care that I still had marking to do. I didn’t care that I would be drinking on an empty stomach. I wanted to be drunk, irresponsible and normal, for once.

I didn’t bother sipping the wine; I just threw back mouthfuls like shots. I hadn’t done shots since my university days and I’d never really got the hang of it, so trails of dark red liquid spilled out of the glass and out of the corners of my mouth. I giggled at myself; I must look like a vampire.

No, vampires were overly sexual beings. They took what they wanted and got away with it, especially these days with vampirism being a metaphor for the loss of virginity and sex.

Why was everything about sex? It wasn’t always about sex. My eyes wandered over to the picture frame on the window sill. My parents looked out, their smiling faces frozen in that one moment. It was a picture taken during my twelfth birthday, when my mother had baked one of her special chocolate cakes and we had eaten the whole thing together, chocolate staining our clothes and fingers and faces. My mother was wearing her apron in the picture, the same one hanging on a peg on one of the kitchen walls. A long streak of chocolate ran down my father’s face, his eyes twinkling as he looked at my mother with the kind of absolute love perfect married couples share.

They were perfect, it was undeniable. My mother was beautiful, all soft, tanned skin and dark hair, brown eyes glowing softly. She was little, but she made up for it in personality. Everyone loved my mother, but no one loved her as much as my father. Tall and handsome, he gave me most of my facial features. He worked a lot, but he was never angry or upset with anything anyone did. He was perfect, too.

Of course, there were little blips. They weren’t exactly the most liberal-minded of parents, but their disappointment was punishment enough for me. Half of me still clung to their traditional family values like a limpet to a rock, while the other half peeled away slowly like an old scab. It was still
And then they had to go and ruin it all. One night, they didn’t come home. I sat up, worrying and waiting, nursing a mug of hot chocolate, waiting for them. But they didn’t come home. I waited up until three in the morning, when the police finally called me. There had been an accident. A drunk driver had ploughed into their car, and there were no survivors.

Fortunately, Sarutobi-sama, the previous headmaster of Konoha High, was a family friend. He briefly took custody of me until I was sixteen, letting me live alone. I couldn’t live in my family home for long; it was too painful to be there without a family. For about a year, my life was put on hold, but I picked myself up and moved on.

Or at least, I thought I did. My parents were very much alive, and living through me. Everything they had taught me was being turned on its head. I downed another glass of wine, the booze going straight to my head.

As much as I loved them, they hadn’t really made my life easy. I grew up with expectations; I had to do something good with my life, something manly and strong and powerful. Instead, I became a teacher. And not just any teacher, and English Lit teacher. I couldn’t have picked a girlier subject if I had tried, maybe with the exception of needlework.

Every step of the way, I had felt the weight of their disappointment. Disappointment that I wasn’t a lawyer or a doctor, disappointment that I hadn’t got my own house, disappointment that I hadn’t met a nice girl and married her yet.

But did I really want to meet a nice girl? I couldn’t say I liked living alone, but I was used to it. Anyone I lived with would have to be used to my lifestyle, the way I lived and breathed my teaching job. They wouldn’t have to worry about mess or cooking or shopping; I could do all that myself. I didn’t need a neat little housewife. No, if I was going to find love, I wanted a passionate romance with fire and birds and explosions of joy. I didn’t want two point four kids and a dog. I wanted to be alive.

Suddenly, I felt very dead.

I wasn’t really alive, was I? I got up, I went to school, I taught kids who didn’t give a shit about my subject, I went home, did marking, and went to bed. That wasn’t life.

I felt alive when there were changes, and my undeniably favourite change was Kakashi. He was new, exciting, dashing, and mysterious. I wanted to know more, even though I really, really didn’t. Half of me craved him, and half of me wanted to push him away. The alcohol let the part that wanted him grow, cracks forming in the dam.

My parents would be so disappointed.

I felt a tear roll down my cheek, landing in my mostly empty wineglass.

No, I wasn’t supposed to be crying. Drinking was supposed to make me feel better. It was supposed to cheer me up, help me think from a different angle, sort out my problems through a drunken haze and then make fun of myself when I sobered up again. But I was. I was crying in a kitchen chair, a glass of wine in hand and my colleague’s face in my mind. A loud sob escaped my lips.

There was a knock at the door.

“Iruka-sensei? You left something on the bus. I’m coming in, alright?”
More Than I Can Be

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

When I am down, and oh, my soul’s so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then I am still and wait here in the silence
Until you come and sit awhile with me
You raise me up so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas
I am strong when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be

“Tsuchikawa?” Kakashi said, his voice full of concern. I couldn’t look up, I couldn’t bear to see his face. I covered my mouth with my free hand as I tried to choke back another sob.

“Oh god, how humiliating. Please, just leave whatever you have and go away,” I pleaded, setting down my wineglass. I tried to push myself up to a standing position, but my legs wobbled out from under me and I hit the floor in an undignified lump. I must have knocked the table as I fell, because the wineglass fell down beside me and smashed on the floor. “Shit.”

I scrabbled at the glass, sweeping the shards into my hand roughly enough to score lines down my fingers and palms.

“No, let me,” Kakashi appeared on the floor next to me, a piece of kitchen roll and steady gentle hands at the ready. Tears clouded my vision. Why was he helping me, even though I had been such a bitch to him? I had been cold and impolite and unhelpful, all qualities I despised, but he was still helping me. It made no sense. I was confused, and I hated being confused.

Even worse than the confusion was the sweet, sticky feeling in my chest. I loved how kind he was, even though I was a useless, boring, horrible bitch. Worse still was that I didn’t deserve it.

He swept the last of the glass onto the kitchen roll and wrapped it up carefully, placing it gently in the bin so none of the sharp fragments would escape into the other rubbish. I watched through misty vision as he ran his hands under the tap and plucked a handful of tissues out of the box on the side, his tall body dark against the pale wood of my kitchen.

“Why are you doing this?” I whispered between sobs. He didn’t answer. Instead, he crouched in front of me and dabbed my bleeding fingers with the corner of a paper tissue.

“I’d get you some bandages from the bathroom but I’m not sure I want to leave you alone right now,” He whispered back, pressing a tissue over a particularly deep slash. I blew an errant strand of hair away from my face, still loose from this morning. One of Kakashi’s gentle hands reached up to push it behind my ear, and I couldn’t stop myself leaning into the touch a little.
“Thank you,” I said. I was barely audible, my throat closing up with tears.

We sat there for a while, Kakashi cleaning my cuts while I cried. I suddenly felt about six again, running home to my mother with a scraped knee and crying while she poured antiseptic on it. But this was different. A mother’s love is a very different kind of love to this. I wasn’t even really sure what love was anymore. How does a human being feel when he is in love? How does he know he’s in love? Why is he in love? Does he even care why?

Like I’d know. I hadn’t loved a single one of my girlfriends. I had loved my parents in a family kind of way, but I had never loved another person they way my parents loved each other. I had never looked at someone with loving eyes, and felt the comfortable weight of loving eyes on me. I had never just lain back in a bed with my lover, just enjoying the company.

Well, I had, but it was accidental, and we were hardly lovers.

For a moment, I felt even worse. The closest I had ever come to something actually loving was with my very male colleague, and even that was accidental. Was I really so unlovable? Was I just not trying hard enough? I couldn’t be the same happy, cheerful person my mother was and I couldn’t be the calm, loving person my father was. I couldn’t be anyone but me, but I wasn’t so sure I wanted to be me anymore. Nothing about me was right anymore; had it even been right to start with?

Kakashi’s arms drew around me and pulled me close. I shuddered a little and let myself be pulled forward into the circle of his arms, drawing my arms up to my chest to knot my fingers into the front of his shirt. Guiltily, I let myself rest there, inhaling his precious scent, pressed up against his firm chest, snug within the circle of his arms. My made my body relaxed, and though tears still ran down my face to soak into his shirt, I stopped shaking so furiously.

I let myself have my guilty minute, then I began to pull away.

“No, Iruka. You can stay as long as you need,” He pulled me back into his lap with his strong arms, and I started crying full force again. Hands stroked down my back, through my hair, over my shoulders. Fingers drew delicate, soothing lines on my skin though my damp shirt.

We sat there on my kitchen floor, Kakashi’s arms wrapped around me as I spilled my tears into the front of his shirt. Before I knew it, it was getting closer and closer to dinner time, and I hadn’t had any lunch. Embarrassingly, as my tears subsided my stomach started to growl.

“See, crying makes you hungry,” Kakashi chuckled. I smiled and swiped a hand over my eyes, pushing a way a few stray tears. “Can you stand?”

I gripped the edge of the table with painful fingers and hauled myself to my feet, dropping heavily back into my chair. I felt a little bit proud of that; after being so useless and collapsing in a tearful heap, I could still pull myself up. It was a nice metaphor for hope.

“Thanks, but I’ll be fine now. You can go home if you like,” I said hoarsely. I’d manage to cook and clean myself, somehow.

“And risk you burning down the whole block of flats? Don’t be silly, I’ll cook for both of us,” His eye curved up into its unique little smile, and I felt very warm again. But there was no way he could actually want to cook for me. I had just taken up hours of his time, ruined one of his shirts and I hadn’t even thought of a way to thank him properly yet.

“You don’t,” I started.

“I want to,” He interrupted. “I’m not really a great cook, so I hope you don’t mind frozen pizza at my
“Well, you are a bachelor, Kakashi-sensei,” I laughed. I hadn’t been round to his flat since I had helped him carry boxes, and I was a little curious as to how it looked now everything would be sorted out.

“I hope you don’t mind dogs,” He held out a hand to help me up. The alcohol was mostly out of my system, but neither of us trusted my legs. I clung rather weakly to his arm, just close enough to smell him. Now he mentioned it, I could smell the distinct scent of dog on him. I had always wanted a dog as a kid, but my mother was allergic to fur. I had just never gotten round to getting one after their accident.

“Oh, I love dogs—”

“Because I have eight of them,” I didn’t know whether to laugh or retreat. Was he being serious? Did the land lady really let him keep eight dogs? Well, he had probably just stunned her into agreeing with his intellect or his good looks, like everyone else.

“Oh,” I said a little blankly. I rather hoped they liked me; being driven away from Kakashi’s apartment by a pack of pissed off dogs was not high on my to-do list. We left my flat, pulling the door shut behind us.

“They all really want to meet you,” He paused outside his front door, hand poised, ready to open the door.

“But they’re dogs, how can you tell?”

“You’ll know when you meet them,” He winked mysteriously and pushed open his front door.

Immediately, I was tackled by eight very excitable lumps of fur in varying shades of colour. Some were short, some were tall, some were wide and some were skinny, but they all rushed towards me as one, sniffing me furiously and licking every inch of exposed skin. I let go of Kakashi and sunk down to their level, holding onto a collar for support. I giggled as a wet tongue swiped across my face, joined by a multitude of others. A tiny dog hopped into my lap and sniffed my loose hair, before hopping back down and walking lazily over to Kakashi.

The other dogs all stopped, and looked to the short dog and their master.

“They like you,” He nodded, and the dogs returned to their previous positions, sniffing and licking and leaning on me. I scratched a few ears and patted a few backs, surrounded by their glorious doggy smell.

“Good,” I smiled at Kakashi, tearing my eyes of the pack. He smiled back, my world suddenly spinning, the warmth from being in his embrace returning with full force and I almost forgot about the dogs. That is, until one particularly large one pinned me to the floor and started to lick my face with abandon.

oO..Oo..O..Oo
School was bad. I hadn’t been the subject of romantic rumours since I was a student myself, but being the object of romantic rumours as a teacher was horribly invasive and very awkward. From the moment I set foot through the doors, students were shooting me sideways glances and giggling behind their hands, nudging their friends and speaking in lowered voices.

The bolder students asked me outright if Kakashi-sensei and I were dating.

I think I handed out about six detentions within two hours.

Instead of setting my mind at ease, giving detentions to kids who wondered actually made me feel odd. For two hours, I stood in front of my class dodging questions about my love life and my sex life, some questions so blunt poor little Hinata nearly fainted. Other kids were more tactful, but I answered every question exactly the same.

“It’s none of your business,” I answered politely, keeping my back carefully turned as I wrote out an essay title on the board. Just because I was being polite to them didn’t mean I wasn’t going to punish them in other ways.

“But Iruka-sensei-” One kid started, their hand raised tentatively.

“No. I’m serious, it is absolutely none of your business who Kakashi-sensei or I date, it has absolutely zero bearing on your lives, and therefore you will be getting absolutely no straight answers from me. I won’t even dignify your questions with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’,” I said sharply. My fingers clenched a little too hard around my board marker, furiously resisting the urge to launch the pen at the student.

You do realise you basically just confirmed to all of them that you and Kakashi are going out, right? Tsunade’s voice enquired condescendingly.

It wasn’t anyone’s business. I’d say exactly the same thing if Kakashi-sensei was a woman-

So you’d do him if he was a woman? Imaginary-Tsunade raised an eyebrow. That seems a little bit like double standards, sensei.

It wasn’t a question of double standards; it was a question of that being completely impossible. I was a normal, heterosexual man, ergo Kakashi was completely off-limits. There was no way I’d go there, even experimentally.

Even if it was Kakashi, who was obscenely handsome despite having most of his face covered, ridiculously intelligent, a brilliant teacher and a lovely person. Even his dogs were lovely. Besides,
even if I was interested, he would deserve someone better than me.

There were no more questions that lesson. I spent the remainder of the hour stomping around at the front, losing my train of thought whenever Tsunade’s voice interrupted to throw in another useless little comment or prompt, reverting to lecturing the class rather than getting them to actively participate. The class scribbled down notes as I talked at light speed, not daring to speak another word. I wasn’t teaching well at all.

“I want you to focus on the attitudes to the sexual liberation of women in your essay, paying attention to the characters of Lucy and Mina. If you’re looking for a higher grade, you might want to think about the brides as well, or possibly the men in the text. If you have time, do a first draft and hand it to me and we can go over it sometime during break or lunch, but I want your final drafts in next Tuesday. Any questions?” A single hand rose at the back. “Yes, Naruto?”

“Can I talk to you after the lesson?” He said brightly, seeming to be completely oblivious to the oppressed and terrified mood of the rest of the class.

“Is it related to ‘Dracula’?” I asked, snapping the lid back on the board marker with a little too much force.

“Kind of,” Naruto fidgeted a little with his sleeve nervously. I’d known this kid for years, and I knew his body language well. I wasn’t about to make him say something he really didn’t want to in front of the class; it was only fair.

“Is it related to my personal life?”

“Not really,”

“Then fine, we can have a word. The rest of you, have a nice break,” I clapped my hands and jerked my head at the door, pony tail waving with the motion. I smiled a little, remembering Kakashi’s compliment from Saturday. Did I really look better with my hair down? I reached a hand up to brush through my hair, considering taking the hair tie out.

Then I drew my hand back down sharply, holding it firmly by my side. I was being ridiculous; why should I make myself look nice for Kakashi? He was just a colleague, just a friendly colleague. I blushed; friendly colleagues don’t comfort you when you’re crying drunk on your kitchen floor. I had carefully managed not to think about that all morning, but now the sensation of Kakashi’s arms around me returned, and I blushed a little harder. I could smell him again; smell of dog masked by the rest of him, visible eye curled up into a smile as he looked down at me.

“Sensei?” Naruto said from somewhere very far away. I tore myself back to the present, gripping my desk with my bandaged fingers. Kakashi had dug out an old box of sticking plasters, and we had made a mess all over his kitchen table trying to tear them out of their wrappers. I smiled a little wider, remembering his expressions and little mannerisms, the way the littlest dog – Pakkun, I think his name was – watched us with a bored expression from across the room the whole time-

“Yes, Naruto?”

“You know about romance, right?” Naruto said uncharacteristically quietly. I leaned my hip against my desk, setting my pen back in its pot.

“Not in the slightest. I thought this wasn’t going to be about me?” I raised an eyebrow, my voice bored. Surely we weren’t going to go through this again. I could very easily make those six detentions seven.
“It isn’t, really. I just kinda wanted some advice, y’know?”

“What kind of advice?”

“Well, you know how you and Kakashi are dating and everything?” Naruto’s ever present smile brightened a little, presumably at the idea. I hid my clenching fingers behind the desk, glaring holes in Naruto’s head.

“No,” I replied firmly. Why did nobody believe me?

“I kind of like somebody,”

“Sasuke, right?”

“How the hell did you know? Have you been spying on me?” He gasped, outraged. Although honestly, there were probably more people who had noticed how preoccupied those two were with each other than there were people who hadn’t. It was just one of the usual fixtures of the school.

“No, it’s just really obvious to anyone with half an eye,” Which brought to mind all kinds of pictures of Kakashi-sensei, with his one visible eye and-

“I know you’re dating Kakashi-sensei and all, so-”

“We’re seriously not dating, Naruto,” I interrupted.

“could you tell me how you tell a guy you like them? Please?” Naruto pleaded, completely ignoring me. My face twitched with irritation; it seemed to be another one of those unlucky days.

“The way you tell anyone you like them, but it really depends on the person. Do you know if Sasuke likes you?” It was a very reasonable question. During my school days, I only asked out girls who I knew were interested in me. It was generally a good way to avoid getting rejected, which could be humiliating if you were half-serious and crushing if you were very serious.

“I don’t really know,”

“Is Sasuke into guys?”

“I don’t know,”

“Then I think you should talk to him about that kind of thing. You could bring it up in relation to ‘Dracula’ if you want, if you don’t want to ask him outright,” Actually, that was a good idea. I planned to assign a project relating to the prominence of sexuality in ‘Dracula’ next week, and pushing Naruto and Sasuke together to talk about homosexuality would be a great chance to humiliate both of them while getting them to be more open. After all, there were no boundaries in English literature.

“Thanks, sensei. But what do I do if he says no? You said yes to Kakashi-sensei, didn’t you?”

“Then you pick up your friendship and carry on. One of the greatest privileges is to work and live near someone you love, even if they don’t reciprocate your feelings. It would be a challenge, but I know you could do it,” I carefully ignored the second question, tactfully answering the first.

“Do you think he likes me?” His eyes brightened with hope, shining happily in the artificial lighting. He was such a sunny person, which really complimented Sasuke’s preoccupation with all things dark. They would make a very cute couple.
“I couldn’t possibly say,” I twisted my lips into a self-satisfied, teasing smile.

“Because I know you like Kakashi-sensei, and I really think he likes you. He’d have to, since you’re so-”

“So what, Naruto?” I cut him off, glaring playfully.

“So-”

“So adorable, right Naruto?” Kakashi-sensei’s voice called lazily from the doorway, curtly cutting off whatever Naruto was about to say. I narrowed my eyes a little at Naruto, refusing to look at Kakashi for a second. I stopped my hand twitching towards my hair.

“Uh, right. Thanks, sensei!” Naruto raced out of the classroom, pushing past Kakashi and dashing out into the corridor. I let out a sigh at his departure; the room suddenly seemed much calmer.

“What was that all about?” Kakashi said, strolling into the room. He was dressed messily again, with his top button undone and his jacket slung over one arm despite the cold. Somehow, it really suited him, and I preferred it to the strict structure I was used to imposing on clothing. It was relaxed, more casual, much more like him.

“Naruto wanted advice on how to ask Sasuke Uchiha out,”

“Uchiha? Yeah, I teach him physics,” He paused, wandering around behind me. I didn’t look back, my eyes staying fixed on the desk in front of me. “He actually asked me the same thing earlier, grumbling about some blond moron he couldn’t get out of his head. I felt obliged to help him, since he’s my student,”

“So it looks like Naruto has a chance, then?” I resisted the temptation to arch my back as one hand reached up to pull my hair tie loose, unknotted it gently and pulling it free. No one had ever played with my hair before, and it felt surprisingly good.

“If he actually does it, yes. I think they could both use a little push, though,”

“Of course, Kakashi-sensei,” I said. “What do you suggest?”

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Think of Me

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

If I could fall
Into the sky
Do you think time
Would pass us by?
‘Cause you know I’d walk a thousand miles
If I could just see you
If I could just hold you
Tonight
oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

“So what exactly did Sasuke say?” I asked, my back still turned to him. His fingers laced through my hair, pulling down gently through silky strands. His hands were warm, even though it was a cold day. Snow was still on the ground from the weekend, a weekend where so much had happened.

“Maa…I’m not really sure how much I should say,” I said. He didn’t sound like he was concentrating on much besides my hair, digits moving up to run through the hair closest to my scalp. I resisted the urge to moan. That was getting seriously good, but I didn’t think to stop him.

“We have to set them up, now we know there’s a mutual interest. Come on, it will be a sweet high school romance!” It sounded exactly like half of the books in the school library; boy meets girl, or in this case, other boy, boy and girl initially don’t like each other and try to outdo each other, boy and girl have belligerent sexual tension, boy and girl confess to loving each other, boy and girl have sex and live happily ever after. Although the sex was optional depending on the age range of the books.

“You sure there’s a mutual interest? Sasuke sounded pretty serious when he talked to me,”

“I’ve been teaching these kids for years, and just watching them interact with each other screams that they’re perfect for each other. And Naruto has gotten really jealous of Sakura recently, too,” All the little sideways glances, the loss of the sparkle in an eye, and the pouting were all a dead giveaway.

Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura had known each other since they entered first year together at Konoha Middle School. Originally, Sakura had a huge yet unrequited crush on Sasuke, while Naruto was busy trying to win Sakura’s heart. During their second year, the headmaster of Sound Academy had head-hunted Sasuke, and convinced him to transfer. Naruto tried for years to get Sasuke to transfer back, and only succeeded when they entered fourth year and resumed the previous routine, but now Naruto was competing for Sasuke’s heart with Sakura. Not that Sakura actually had a chance.

“Yes, that was one of Sasuke’s concerns. Naruto apparently had a small crush on Sakura at one point, and that’s been plaguing Sasuke for years now,” I pointed out. Sakura was sweet really, but the boys were destined for each other. Written in the stars, foretold by ancestors kind of destined for each other, ever since Naruto started pining for Sasuke when he transferred out.
“I think that was just a part of their never-ending competition, really. They’ve always been like that, trying to outdo each other and get whatever the other has. Maybe if they shut up and admitted they liked each other, things would be much simpler,”

“And possibly less violent,” Kakashi added. One finger trailed down the back of my head, making me tip my head back involuntarily. I caught myself at the last minute and turned around, immediately regretting the loss of his fingers.

“Oh, I doubt that. So what did Sasuke tell you?” I enquired. I was actually quite curious; if students were allowed to pry into my personal life, there was no reason I couldn’t discreetly, quietly find out about theirs. It’s amazing how much you hear from the front of the classroom.

“He started off by insulting Naruto in multiple ways, mostly calling him an idiot, stupid, annoying, overly persistent, ranting about how irritating he could be. Then he listed all the things that really annoyed him, the colour orange and the ‘believe it’ stood out, but he was worried about losing Naruto to a girl. It really reminded me of this one part in *Icha Icha Violence* where Kaname and Sunako were—”

“I think we can skip the comparisons to *Icha Icha*, please,” I folded my arms across my chest, giving him one of my best teacher looks.

“But it’s really relevant! And *Icha Icha* is a great series; you just never gave it a chance. Jiraiya-sama is a great author. You’re far too closed-minded, Iruka-sensei,” He patted one of his pockets, and I immediately glared daggers at the unsuspecting waste of paper. Kakashi-sensei was clearly highly intelligent; why was he wasting his time on literary trash like *Icha Icha*? Surely anything is better than that.

“I am not, I’m just old-fashioned,”

“You’re trying to set up two of your male students, which is not only a very girly thing to do, it’s a very modern concept. Just accepting the idea of two men in a relationship is a relatively modern issue,” His hand left his pocket, but his voice remained a little bored. I wanted to turn around and present my hair to him again, but that would look incredibly-

Forward? It wasn’t like I was presenting my body to him. It was just nice having someone play with my hair. Little girls play with each other’s hair all the time, and that isn’t sexual at all. No, this was completely platonic and not arousing in the slightest.

“True, but that’s different. They really like each other,” I defended.

“And that makes it different?”

“Yes, I suppose it does. Anyway, you were saying about Sasuke?”

“He was saying that he was very worried about losing Naruto. He then immediately denied it, and pointed out that if a girl made Naruto happy then it was okay. He never explicitly mentioned that he liked him, but I’m—”

“Very perceptive, yes,” I interrupted him, smiling.

“I was going to say ‘a genius’, but yeah,” I giggled at his words. It was true, but he clearly didn’t know the meaning of ‘modesty’. But I rather liked that, for some reason.

“Did he mention anything about his own sexuality?”
“Mostly he implied that he didn’t like girls himself, and that he didn’t want to lose Naruto to a girl. I’m pretty sure he’s gay,” Kakashi said. His hand twitched towards his Icha Icha pocket, and I resisted the temptation to reach out and grab it. Reading porn during a conversation, much less a conversation in a school, is completely inappropriate.

“Well, with the number of fangirls he has, he’d have to be to fend them off so successfully,” I chuckled, remembering his first day. His fangirls were worse than Kakashi’s. Screaming hormonal girls chasing the unfortunate Uchiha down a corridor while Naruto cried with laughter in a corner were a routine occurrence during the first few weeks.

“That, and my gaydar is very effective,” He smiled, the muscles beneath his eye registering the expression. I was getting better at reading him.

Suddenly, I wanted to know what was under the mask. What was hidden from the world by one piece of black fabric and an eye patch? Was he hideous? Was he scarred? Was he hilarious? Was he sexy? I almost smirked at the last one. That was already a given.

“And how do I register?” I asked, letting the smirk appear.

“As gay as a handbag full of rainbows, darling,” He smiled properly, letting one hand come up and wave dismissively. I repressed a sudden urge to giggle.

“I think I need another glass of wine,” I smiled, as I realised what I had just been thinking. No, there was no way I was ‘as gay as a handbag full of rainbows, darling’, and I did not think he was sexy. Not at all, totally not me. We were just friends.

Even though you want to- I hastily stomped on inner-Tsunade. I was not having an internal debate right now.

“If you’re going to drink, invite me over first,” He warned, half-jokingly. I seriously didn’t want to have another breakdown, and I really didn’t need that humiliation again, although I really appreciated the comfort. If I remembered hard enough, I could still feel his arms around me, and his hands on my hair. My fingers were still bandaged from the broken glass, a constant reminder of his kindness.

“Good plan. Naruto was basically saying that he wasn’t sure how to ask another boy out, if Sasuke liked him back, and asked me all kinds of annoying things,” I refused to say it explicitly. I’m sure he knew what I was talking about.

“Oh yeah, I heard the rumours about us. Students kept asking me if there was anything going on between you and me, and I kept redirecting them to you,”

“So you were the reason I just gave out six detentions?” My eyes widened, and then narrowed.

“Possibly.” His own eye narrowed, but more playfully. He took a step forward in challenge, which I responded to. I pushed myself away from the desk, taking my own step forward. I was close enough to smell him again, to see the stitching on the face mask.

Close enough to kiss, Tsunade contributed helpfully.

“I am going to kill you, very, very slowly,” I couldn’t stop myself from grinning.

“But what would this school do without me?”

“We only just got you,”
“And I’m not going anywhere, don’t worry,” He reassured jokingly, resting one hand on my shoulder. I raised my hand to cover it, smiling. I couldn’t help feeling very happy that he was staying, even though logically I knew he wasn’t leaving any time soon. He’d only just got the job, after all.

“I won’t. I was thinking of pairing Naruto and Sasuke together to do a project on homosexuality in ‘Dracula’, our class text. They’d have to discuss it together, talk about the morals of it, not only based on the characters but their own opinions, too. And they’d have to present it to the class,”

“But what kind of implications are there in ‘Dracula’? I can’t really remember any,”

“Mostly Harker and Dracula during the first part, and the group bromance of the later parts. Oh, and the close friendship between Mina and Lucy,” I tried to focus on the work and keep the incredulity out of my voice. He’d read ‘Dracula’? I mentally slapped myself; of course he didn’t only read Icha Icha. There were only a few out, and he couldn’t just read them over and over again.

Could he?

“If you prompt them enough, I’m sure they’ll get it,”

“Any ideas for what you could do?” I asked, giving in to the temptation to turn around, bending over the desk to reach for a stray pen. Fingers immediately returned to my hair, petting and stroking and weaving. I could feel his body pressed against mine, and I tried not to press back into his warmth. This was illegally good.

“I only teach Sasuke physics, so lab partners is out of the question,”

“And I wouldn’t let Naruto handle much more than a ball-point pen, let alone a science lab,” Although that should go without saying, since most teachers wanted the school to remain in one piece at least until December. By then, most of us would agree with the students that the accursed building should burn.

“I could ask them to help me do something during lunchtime? Set up an experiment, maybe, and just casually leave them to their own devices all alone in the classroom,”

“And lock the door,”

“This is starting to sound more and more like an Icha Icha novel, Iruka-sensei,” His voice was low and teasing, hands sliding silkily through my hair. I turned my head a little to look at him, his face even closer. I could see the faint line of a scar peeking under the edge of the eye patch, increasing my curiosity as to what was under there.

“I’m sure real life isn’t nearly so perverted, Kakashi,” I rolled my eyes at him, smiling.

“You’d be surprised.”

Oo.Oo.oO.Oo
Wrong From Right

I'm not that typical baby
I'm a bad kid like my mum and dad made me
I'm not that cool and you hate me
I'm a bad kid, that's the way that they made me

Immediately after break, I had an upper sixth class full of presentations to watch and grade. Although I tried to mark accurately and fairly, I was too preoccupied. I had too much on my mind, and I couldn’t think properly about my subject. The temptation was there to just give everyone a B grade or above at random and dismiss them early, but I forced myself to work. When they left, I breathed a sigh of relief. Fortunately, I didn’t have a class to teach in the hour before lunch. Free lessons were a godsend, where the majority of students and staff alike retreated to warm corners and sipped coffee or tea and caught up on late homework or marking, or sat around and gossiped.

However, I couldn’t do any of that. I couldn’t go into the staff room without getting all kinds of awkward sideways looks, assumptions filling the eyes of my colleagues. Worse still if Tsunade was there, gloating about her latest success in matchmaking. The absolute worst would be the female members of staff clustering around me, pawing at me for information about Kakashi-sensei.

Admittedly, they had good grounds to think something was going on. A student had seen us in a bed together in a rather compromising position, a fact that had been all over the school and back again before the first class of the day was over. It was fortunate that there hadn’t been any photos, or I possibly would have had to leave.

Now I was alone, I could think straight in both senses of the word. What had I been thinking? I suddenly felt acutely aware of what I had been doing. I had basically been flirting, responding to Kakashi’s touches, in exactly the way I knew I shouldn’t. It was against everything my parents had ever taught me, giving the impression that I was possibly interested when I knew in my mind that definitely wasn’t. In fact, it was unfair on Kakashi-sensei, sending out that message. It was almost like leading him on.

In fact, personal relationships with a colleague would be very detrimental to work, and anything above a friendship would be highly inappropriate unless it was full-blown marriage, and that was certainly impossible for me.

Hell, why was I even thinking this through? Surely it should have been obvious that there wasn’t a chance I could let anything happen.

Did I want something to happen? I pulled my chair up to my desk and flopped into it, resting my head in my hands. If I said ‘no’, then I’d be lying. I did sort of want something to happen, I just wasn’t sure what. Everything was so new and so unnatural that I wasn’t sure what I wanted, either. I had to marry a good girl and have a proper family, but did I really have to have one right now?

Yes, yes I did have to have one. In my opinion, and certainly in my parents’ opinion, thirty was the marriage cut-off age. My parents were both married at twenty five, and I was already twenty six.
That gave me four years to find someone and settle down properly. I wasn’t even sure about how to find someone anymore. At university, there were other people the same age all around me. At work, everyone was my age or older. I didn’t have much of a social life, and I didn’t know too many people. I certainly couldn’t see myself marrying any of them. Where would I be in ten years?

In all honesty, I couldn’t even think about ten years time. I might have moved towns, got a new job at a different school, or got a new job altogether. All the people I knew might have changed. I would have changed. I could be dead in ten years time. It was too far ahead to think about, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to anymore.

Wait. In ten years time, I would like to still be here, teaching English lit at Konoha High. I would like to be correcting poorly behaved students and marking essays. I would like to be fending off a drunken Tsunade and fishing her husband’s porno out of the library. I would like to keep things exactly the same. I might even like Kakashi-sensei to still be around, as a friend and a neighbour.

Yes, friendship is infinitely better. Friendship is safe, steady and stable. Three ‘S’s, three very good, platonic values. Three things that anyone might want in their life.

But at the same time, I was afraid. I was setting myself up for something I didn’t understand, and I wasn’t sure I would ever understand. There was always the voice at the back of my head, the absolute antithesis to inner Tsunade, who whispered quietly about everything ending in ruin. The voice born after my parents died. No, it wasn’t born after my parents died, it just grew. Perversely, it drove me to achieve. I wanted to prove that I could still do well, even without my family, that I could live by myself and be a fine, normal, upstanding citizen. And I had, hadn’t I?

If I let things stay as they were, then I was setting myself up for temptation. I wasn’t religious by any means, but I could understand temptation. I was tempted to let things progress, just to see where they were going, and I couldn’t – wouldn’t – let that happen.

Love – I was back to love again. Yes, I had to love the theoretical nice girl I married, and I had to love the children we would raise together, but I didn’t know any other kind of love. If I let go of what my parents expected, could I find that same kind of love? And would I ever find it with the right kind of person?

But then, who was the right kind of person? Were they like me, or were they like them? And then, if they weren’t like me how did I know we loved each other? If I couldn’t be sure, then I couldn’t marry them. I didn’t want to go through the horrors of divorce, dragging our children along by the wrist and scarring them forever.

Was that supposed to be an appeal of love, the mystery and the change? Because all it did was terrify me.

The right kind of person couldn’t be like me, because I didn’t really like me. I could name other people I liked, but only one really sprung to mind: Kakashi. Even though I hadn’t known him long, he was kind, smart, funny, gentle, and he had eight dogs. No bad person could have eight dogs. I smiled a little to myself, remembering his own little pack. They had really taken to me, too, smothering me with doggy affection.

Would I think of Kakashi like that if he was a woman? If he suddenly sprouted breasts and walked around in a mini skirt I’d be more worried than attracted to him, but it was a real thought to chew over. As much as I tried to block it from my thoughts, I had dreamed of him like that as a man. That could never happen, though. Miss Right was called Miss Right for a reason, that primary reason being she was female.
But I couldn’t think any more now. I was at work, and I had more important things to think about than my own petty personal problems. Sleeping on it would probably help.

“Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi’s low voice called from the distance. I dropped my head onto the desk with a thump. If there was a reason I had repressed that dream, it was because it was probably evidence of my spiral into insanity. “Iruka-sensei?” The voice called again. My subconscious was really persistent.

I felt a hand on my shoulder, and I almost leapt up out of my seat in shock. I whipped around, eyes wide as they landed on the owner of the voice. I wasn’t hearing things after all – although being crazy might be more of a blessing than a curse.

“K-Kakashi-sensei. Don’t you have to teach right now?” I said as I wiped a hand over my eyes. My vision was a little off; had I managed to fall asleep or something? The school bell rang, the sharp ringing creating a pause that was slightly too long. I had to stand there, just looking into his face, until it stopped. I had never hated the bell more in my life.

“Nope, I let my class go early. I have some very interesting news,” We were standing close again, and students were rushing past the open classroom door. A few looked our way, knowing smirks on their faces. I panicked; it was too much, too soon, and it was too different. I couldn’t deal with anything anymore.

“I’m sorry; you’ll have to tell me later. I really need to go right now,” I pushed Kakashi away gently with one hand, scooping up my discarded jacket from the floor where it had fallen.

“But it’s lunch break. What do you have to do that’s so urgent?”

“I, ah, need a word with Tsunade. Yeah, I’ll talk to you later.” I hurried out of the door, pressing against the rush of the students towards the dining room. I didn’t look back.

Oo..Oo..Oo..Oo
Something To Sing About

If you wanna play it like a game
Then come on, come on, let’s play
’Cause I’d rather waste my life pretending
Than have to forget you for one whole minute

I walked very quickly out of the classroom and down the corridor. I didn’t really need to talk to Tsunade, but I did need to get away from Kakashi. I didn’t think straight when I was around him. There was something about his presence, something in his aura – if I believed in auras, that is – that threw me off. I forgot about everything else when he was around, including my morals.

Was it morals that kept me from pursuing anything with him, or anyone who was pretty much guaranteed not to be The One? Were they even my morals? Either way, I couldn’t think when he was near me, and I needed to think. I had an entire lunch break to try to avoid Kakashi, and short of locking myself in a cubicle in one of the bathrooms, there weren’t a lot of hiding places. Instead, I headed to the least populated area of the school: the science labs.

The science labs were the oldest and coldest part of the school. The heating was very inefficient, so teachers usually just pulled out Bunsen burners and stuck them at strategic points around the classroom to give the kids a bit of warmth. With very few decent radiators and a ridiculously low temperature, very few kids would bother gathering in the science block.

My shoes were silent on the tiled floors as I let my mind go blank, staring at the display boards without really taking any information in. Something about cadmium, the structure of the heart, and gamma radiation vaguely crept into my head from the brightest and shiniest boards. The boards were intersected by doors and windows; although most of the blinds were pulled down to give the classes a bit of privacy and to remove distractions.

The uses of silver nano particles in socks…the adaptations of cacti…the application of geothermal-

My brain stopped working as I saw through a crack in one of the blinds.

Two students were in the classroom, one pressing the other back over a table, hips moving together in an obscene rhythm. I recognised the untucked, rumpled back of Naruto’s shirt and the bright blond of his hair. All I could see of the other student were the distinctive cufflinks, red and white fans, as one hand wrapped around the creased shirt to grip the thin fabric tightly, pulling the writhing bodies together. I thanked the gods that the rooms were virtually soundproofed.

Naruto and Sasuke were making out on a table in the science department.

Oh, my god.

“See, I told you it was important,” Kakashi-sensei’s voice whispered from behind me. I nearly jumped a foot in the air, but at that point I was already so shocked a stampede of hippopotamuses raging down the hallway wouldn’t have frightened me. I just nodded blankly, my eyes fixed on the
events unfolding through the crack in the blinds.

Their pace was really picking up, Sasuke pulling Naruto down harder on top of him, crushing their lips together. A loud moan escaped the room as a leg shifted position. I suddenly felt incredibly awkward.

“I’m fairly certain we shouldn’t be watching this,” I said slowly, my brain and my tongue only semi-connecting. I was watching two of my students have dry sex on a table. Why was I watching this? Why hadn’t I run away and stabbed myself in the eye sockets with a pen yet?

“It is a little voyeuristic, yes,” He admitted with a small smile in his voice. I didn’t turn around. Instead, I took a step away from the window, but I could still see too much of the thing happening through the blinds. Now, I had a rather nice framed view of their legs, wrapped around each other and moving with each grind.

“Then why aren’t we leaving yet?” My voice was monotone. I was feeling incredibly disturbed by everything all of a sudden. Instead of Naruto and Sasuke on the desk, I could see Kakashi and I doing all the things more than half the school already assumed we did. In horror, I took another step back, retreating further.

“You’re standing on my foot,”

“Oh. Sorry,”

“It’s okay,” He paused, contemplating something deeply. I was half expecting something profound, fascinating and insightful about the nature of teenage romance. “Do you reckon this calls for a celebration?” It wasn’t quite as impressive as I had hoped.

“Why? This-” I gestured wildly towards the classroom, one arm swinging awkwardly in front of me. “-doesn’t affect our lives in any way,”

“Ah, but it was all our doing! We set them up, and now they’re finally releasing all that built-up sexual frustration. All over the desk,” He snickered a little, one hand coming up to pat my shoulder comfortingly. Lightning shot through my body at the fleeting contact, and I repressed a shiver. Instead, I stepped away, tiptoeing towards the exit. He threw one last glance through the crack in the blinds, solidifying my belief that he was very much a pervert, and followed me.

“Oh god, stop making it sound so-”

“So what?” His footsteps were quieter than mine, despite the effort I was making. It just came naturally to him, I guessed, like every other amazingly smooth movement. Once again, the image of the two of us up against a desk, bodies moving with lust and-

Absolutely not.

“So good. This is possibly the most inappropriate, nonsensical, perverse thing that could possibly have come out of it!” I said too loudly. I thrust open the science block doors, letting them slam into the walls on either side. I probably dented the plaster, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. I had promised myself that I wouldn’t think like that. There was nothing, nothing, going on. Nothing was going to go on, nothing had gone on, and nothing would ever go on. It was an oath, a vow. Cross my heart and hope to die.

“How is it perverse? They clearly rather like each other, and they’re both consenting young adults. There’s nothing wrong with it at all,” I noted his points, although I would never admit they were valid. Naruto and Sasuke clearly liked each other, despite the competition and the constant
squabbling, and the release of tension would be good for both of them. If they became a proper
couple, then maybe the eye of the school would be directed away from Kakashi and me and towards
an actual couple. Still, it would break more than a few hearts in the process, but it would definitely be
worth it.

“It’s virtually in public. In school. On one of your desks. That’s what makes it perverse,” I argued,
albeit with less conviction than usual. I did think my own argument had merit; school was the least
appropriate place to practically have sex. It was better than in plain public view, on a beach or in a
nursery, but it was still in the top five places not to ever have sex. Kakashi had to teach in that room,
and god knows what stains would be left behind.

“I still say it calls for a celebration. Come round my place at seven, eh?” Kakashi-sensei took a
couple of steps ahead of me and turned around, a smile plastered across his face and his hand raised
in a small wave.

“But I don’t-” I said lamely as he disappeared down the corridor.

Tonight was going to be awkward.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Take Me Home Tonight

It's hard to feel the rush
To brush the dangerous
I'm gonna run right to, to the edge with you
Where we can both fall over in love

I raised a hand to knock on Kakashi’s front door, warily expecting it to open before my knuckles connected with the wood. I didn’t want to knock; knocking was a request of entry, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to go in. I didn’t know what to expect. This was supposed to be a celebration, and celebration was very easy to equate with alcoholic knees-up. Considering my most recent experiences with alcohol, I wasn’t terribly keen on getting drunk anymore. Slowly, I brought them down, and sure enough the door swung open.

“Iruka, you’re early,” Kakashi said. He stepped back, letting me walk into his flat.

It was less homely than mine. I had photographs and paintings and colours, while his was shades of white and grey and was rather impersonal. Everything smelled of dog, but I couldn’t tell much about him besides that.

“Only by about five minutes. It’s not like I had a long distance to walk,” I defended as I walked into his sitting room. The dogs took up most of the sofa, all eyes instantly turning to me as I entered. The smallest dog hopped down, using one of the dogs on the floor as a stepping stone, and walked up to me. “Hello,” I said, crouching down to stroke it behind the ears. “Remember me?”

“He’s not going to talk back, you know,” I shot a look at Kakashi, who merely shrugged and moved towards the kitchen.

“Of course I know that. It was rhetorical,” I called to him as he disappeared through the door. Glass clinked softly, quiet against the harsh noise of the tap running. I strained my ears, anxious not to miss a word.

“Feel free to kick the dogs off the sofa if you want to sit down. Is beer okay with you?” Kakashi called back. I didn’t have the heart to remove the dogs when they looked so comfortable, so I shifted towards the coffee table, pulling the little dog onto my lap. It looked up at me blankly before resting its head on my leg and going to sleep.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” I said. I petted the dog with one hand, leaning back on the other to try and see into the kitchen.

“Good,” Kakashi’s head stuck out of the door, eye in its happy curve, before it disappeared back into the kitchen.

Suddenly, an idea struck me. If I could get him drunk enough, I might be able to convince him to take the mask and eye patch off. Or if that failed, I could always remove it myself if he passed out. The desire from before, the craving to see what was beneath the mask, had returned with a
vengeance. It probably wasn’t exactly a unique desire among those who had met him; I imagined very few people had ever seen his face. Maybe Tsunade, since she presumably had to interview him, maybe previous lovers, his parents and family.

Come to think of it, I knew nothing about his family at all. I looked around the room, looking for photo frames or albums or anything that might give me a clue. Peeking out from behind the edge of a closed curtain was a silver frame, a small section of photograph visible between it and the dark fabric of the curtain.

I gently pushed the dog off my lap and walked towards the photo, pushing aside the curtain. It was a wedding portrait, the bride and groom standing holding hands in a small rose garden. The groom was unmistakably Kakashi’s father; they had the same dark eyes and bizarre hair, and even the same face shape. I wondered if Kakashi’s other features resembled those of his father, or the softer, more feminine features of his mother, presumably the bride in the photo. She was tall and thin, but frail and pale. Her dress looked slightly too large for her tiny frame and her hair was dull, but any other traces of illness were lost in her expression. They both looked incredibly happy.

There it was again, that married couple love, unique and specific to each couple. My parents had it, presumably Kakashi’s parents had it, and many other couples I knew had it.

“Maa...it’s rude to go through other people’s things, Iruka-sensei,” Kakashi said from behind me. A bottle of beer appeared in front of me, fingers long and pale against the dark glass. Although I wasn’t much of a beer drinker, I still kind of appreciated it. The alcohol content was lower than that of wine, so it was better for a small celebration, especially on a school night.

“I wasn’t going through your things; I was just looking at the photo. These are your parents, right?” I asked, looking pointedly at the photo.

“Yes,”

“Do they live in town, or do they live somewhere else?”

“They’re both dead, actually,” His voice was blunt, but fairly expressionless. Clearly not something he was comfortable talking about, but I could understand that.

“Oh, Oh, I’m so sorry for bringing it up. Mine are too,” I replied softly. There wasn’t much to say, besides the apology. Dead parents were a touchy subject for everyone.

“Have a beer,” He shook the beer in front of me, and I took it. It was still warm from his fingers. I returned to my place on the floor, shifting the little dog back into my lap. Kakashi sat down next to me, beer in hand, running a finger over the nose of the dog. He snorted appreciatively.

Two hours and many empty bottles later, I was completely drunk. Instead of crying buckets into the dog’s fur, who had moved from my lap as soon as he had realised the kind of state I was getting myself into, I was leaning back on the coffee table giggling. My plan to get Kakashi drunk had completely backfired; instead of staying relatively sober and tricking him into drinking more, I had ended up drinking just as much yet somehow getting twice as drunk.

“And that is why Bram Stoker is an idiot. ‘Mein Gott’ is German, not Dutch! He clearly didn’t do his research, but there was a whole lot of confusion about the difference between Deutsch and Dutch in ye olden days,” I rambled. There were about a million other ways Bram Stoker was an idiot, but I couldn’t remember them, for some reason.

“I’m sure he was,” Kakashi replied, his voice dripping with boredom.
“One year, I had to teach ‘Dracula’ from some shitty script version, written by an illiterate American. They didn’t get the characters right at all. And Mrs Westenra, Lucy’s mother, didn’t die at the right point to make the plot go right,”

“Alright,”

“And then they just kind of shrugged it off, and got over it quickly. Yeah, Lucy was sick from being metaphorically fucked by Dracula, but even if I was in her place I would still have mourned my mother much more thoroughly,” I ranted, the train of thought dominating my brain. I took another swig of beer, draining the bottle and reaching for another one. My fingers closed around thin air, grasping vaguely to the right. I shuffled a bit, and they closed around something soft and warm. I looked; I was holding Kakashi’s arm instead.

“Absolutely. Say, Iruka-”

“When my parents died, I couldn’t stop myself at first. I didn’t want to believe it, that they were dead, y’know? They’d always just been there, and then they weren’t. I was fifteen. How the hell was I supposed to deal with my whole life when I was that young? I didn’t have any other relatives to take me in or anything, and I was just a kid,” That haze from the week before, the combination of alcohol and the weight of everything was piling up again in my mind.

“Iruka-”

“I sold the house and everything, got enough money to last me a long time. I could still buy myself a nice new home with that money if I ever met the right girl and all, there was more than enough money tied up in the property. My parents never even-”

I was cut off by a warm pair of lips colliding with mine.

Instead of being instantly repulsed, like I knew I should have been, somewhere in the back of my mind, I just kind of froze. And then instantly melted once I realised my mouth was open, and a foreign tongue was steadily making its way across my lips.

Somewhere, a part that obviously wasn’t paying much attention to current goings-on, I realised that the mask must be off for this to be possible, but the rest of me was engaged in egging me on. All the non-verbal chants of ‘go for it, sensei!’ from my classes were back, and parts of me were obeying. In another dormant part of my brain, I knew I was going to regret everything in the morning, and that I wasn’t going to be able to look at Kakashi without thinking about my drunken actions, but most of it didn’t register.

One of my hands, clearly on autopilot, found its way into the silvery spines still illogically vertical on Kakashi’s head. In return, his arms wrapped around me and pulled me into his lap. I had two choices: scream and run away, which was steadily looking less and less appealing, or continue. All my complaints were registered somewhere, and I knew it was because of the booze, but I couldn’t bring myself to stop. Because I wanted it.

From my new position, I began to kiss back. One of Kakashi’s markedly more steady hands pulled my hair tie out, and began to stroke through my hair. I moved my tongue somewhat sloppily, the beer making any finesse I thought I had left over from my teenage years disappear, tasting the alcohol in both of our mouths. I hadn’t kissed in years, but I remembered what it felt like a bit. Girls usually tasted fruity or makeup-y from lipstick, or sweet from sugary party drinks. It was always a kind of stage one before the party really started and we ended up going all the way, or it was a small public display of affection. Either way, it was never really erotic; it was just a stepping stone to other things. This was erotic, though. It was different and unknown. I had no idea what would happen
I soon found out. I yelped as I over-balanced, the alcohol messing with my head combined with a lack of oxygen, and I toppled out of Kakashi’s lap onto the floor. My fingers, thoroughly knotted in his hair, pulled him along with me. One of his hands, now freed, worked their way to the waistband of my trousers. Once again, my higher faculties pointed out that this was very, very, very bad, but my brain ignored it. Too much else was going on, and my body liked it.

The hand in my trousers began to move. And by the gods, it was better than the kissing. I moaned into his mouth, refusing to break the kiss. A trail of saliva was pushed out of the corner of my mouth, warm and wet against the side of my face. I was suddenly reminded of my dream, and the obscene dialogue within it.

I wondered for a moment if this was all just a dream, something odd conjured up by my subconscious to try to satiate my brain. I quashed that thought; my brain wasn’t nearly this perverted.

The best details were lost on my beer-muddled brain. I could distinguish nothing but the rhythm of fingers and tongue, heavy breath and Kakashi-smell. Pleasure was building up almost painfully, my first proper release from someone else in years. It made me question why, exactly, I hadn’t jumped Kakashi the minute he walked through the staff room doors on his first day.

I vaguely recalled something about other members of staff being present, along with something about my parents and morality. Probably not important.

I squeezed my eyes shut as my body shuddered in climax, curling upwards into his embrace. I was exhausted, but happy and strangely fulfilled. I let my head drop back down, and looked with unfocused eyes at the ceiling.

There was a mark in the paint that looked exactly like this one lampshade I had when I was six. Isn’t it funny the things you notice when you’re drunk?

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Damn

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Last Friday night

Yeah we danced on table tops

And we took too many shots

Think we kissed but I forgot

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

“…’Ruka…” A low, gorgeous voice called from somewhere very far away. Either way, I was in a happy, fluffy, slightly headache-y dreamland, and I wasn’t about to leave. I’d had the most random dream about Kakashi-sensei and I, doing something so bizarre it could definitely never be real. That was why it was definitely a dream.

“Mmm, too tired, let me sleep,” I replied sleepily. Yes, definitely a dream. Just a very realistic dream, if the state of my underwear was to be taken into account.

“…’Ruka…” The voice called again, this time louder and more present. A hand began to stroke my hair, which I was sure I had tied up the night before. Had it gotten loose? Either way, that meant it was probably just another part of that weird dream, so it was okay. I could deal with the dream when I was properly awake.

“Go ‘way,” I lifted a limp hand and swatted in the voice’s general direction, not making contact with anything. There was a light now, above my closed eyelids. It was getting more and more disturbing, and if it stayed I was going to wake up properly. I wasn’t sure I wanted to wake up properly this time.

“Iruka, wake up. We have to go to work in half an hour,”

“Holy shit!” My eyes snapped open, and I threw myself into a sitting position. “That was definitely all a dream, right?”

“What, the drinking and then the kissing and the hand job? If it was, then we just had the same dream,”

“Holy shit,” I held my head, shutting my eyes tightly. That was actually real. We had actually done that. Kakashi and I. Together. Holy shit.

“It wasn’t that bad, considering what we could have done,” His tone of voice implied it was passé, just another day for stupid sexy sensei. I pouted a little; well, it might be normal for stupid sexy sensei, but it certainly wasn’t normal for me! And what the hell was this ‘stupid sexy sensei’ thing my brain had come up with? It was completely inaccurate; Kakashi wasn’t stupid at all.

Oh god, what we could have done. That was infinitely worse.

“Just – no,” I spat out. My tongue was disconnected from my brain, making stringing together coherent sentences very difficult.

“This one time when I was drunk at university, I woke up in a bed with five different members of my
Sometime during while I was busy freaking out, he had managed to move to crouch in front of me, shirt half buttoned up and a tie hanging limply around his neck. From the angle I was at, I could see directly down the shirt, and I couldn’t stop my eyes wandering down and across the pale planes of his chest. With one hand he tugged down the side of his shirt. I froze for a second, half-certain that whatever happened last night was about to continue, until the shirt slipped far enough to bear his upper arm. Sure enough, a simple black tattoo rested there, like a brand against the pale flesh.

“I think I’d rather have a tattoo,” I muttered. God, anything but what had happened. I needed time again, time to go away and force myself to conveniently develop amnesia and forget everything that had happened, preferably since Kakashi had arrived. This was getting way too complicated for my liking. Hell, it was getting too anything for my liking.

“Can I safely assume you don’t want anything to come of this?”

“Yes,” I pressed my eyes shut. I couldn’t look at him. It was too humiliating.

“And you never want to mention it ever again?”

“Yes,”

“You’re actually a very selfish person, aren’t you, Iruka?”

“What do you mean?” I looked up, eyes open but slightly narrowed. Selfish? How was I being selfish, trying to forget an incredibly embarrassing moment? Surely that was the natural thing to do, if you do something so humiliating. Something both of us should forget, move past, and continue on like nothing had ever happened. And possibly swear off all alcohol forever.

“Last night wasn’t just about you, you know. I was there too, playing a rather active role, if I remember correctly, which I’m sure I do. Just because you want to forget it doesn’t mean that I do,” Deft fingers began to button up his shirt, but his one visible eye never left mine. It was harder and steeled, a side of Kakashi I had never seen before. It occurred to me that I hadn’t ever seen him angry, or upset, and I really didn’t like it. It was actually rather scary.

“What the hell are you talking about, Kakashi? We’re colleagues, men, we can’t do that kind of thing and just-”

“Yes, we can. It’s the twenty-first century, we’re both adults, and society is long past executing or imprisoning people for being gay. You should know; after all, not only have you defended homosexuality to your class on a number of occasions, but you also actively encouraged two of your students to pursue a relationship. That sounds a lot like double standards to me,” One of his eyebrows lifted slowly, but his eye remained the same unwavering pool of grey. It was incredibly compelling.

What he said was half true; I had nothing against homosexuality, especially not in literature. One should never judge history based on the standards of the present, and understanding other people’s viewpoints was essential when studying texts from the past. As a side effect, love had just become love. In the end, there wasn’t a lot of difference between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy and Sasuke and Naruto. If a relationship was loving, I wasn’t about to object to it, which was why I had encouraged Naruto to pursue Sasuke. They genuinely liked each other, and would make each other happy. The only way I could make myself happy and fulfil my parent’s wishes would be to marry a good woman, so that wasn’t even an option. Loving her was a part of the package.

“Fine, I have nothing against gay people – I’m just not one myself,” I defended. And it wasn’t a
double standard. I could accept homosexuality; I just didn’t have to *do it* myself. Even though I apparently already had. I resisted the urge to shrink a little at that thought.

“‘You didn’t resist me at all last night,’” He pointed out. I flinched, being forcibly reminded of his hands on me, of my hands on him. His hair was remarkably soft despite its unnatural style and colour.

Not that I remembered that. No, it was all just a blur of beer and colours and hands in the wrong – right – places. And that was it.

“I was drunk,”

“So was I. That’s not an excuse,” He shot back. Behind him, one of the dogs cracked open an eye to look at us wearily. I frowned; this was not a trivial matter, it was actually rather important. I had to work with Kakashi, live next door to him. I couldn’t have something like this hang over us. We had to forget it; it was the only way.

“Yes, it is. Drunk people aren’t exactly the most sensible people ever; I’m not about to announce to the world that I’m gay based on one accidental night with you,’” I raised my voice a little, trying to make my point come across more clearly. I couldn’t – I wasn’t -

“What if it wasn’t me? What if it was someone else?” Kakashi’s voice was steady, impossibly calm, gently probing.

“No, it’s *because* it’s you,” I spluttered. “I wouldn’t let anyone else do *that* to me,” That was a ridiculous thought.

Then I blushed deep red. Wait, so had I just admitted to Kakashi that he was different? Okay, so maybe he was kind of different, since I’d already dreamed about him before, but that was also completely out of my control. Just because I thought about him a lot and stuff and liked him as a person didn’t mean that I was falling in love or something. That was even more ridiculous, just so long as I didn’t give that impression.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I-I don’t know,” I stammered, pushing myself to my feet. “I have to go. I need to get dressed for work,” I made my way towards the door, head throbbing with the sudden onslaught of movement. Damn hangovers. I gripped the doorframe as I passed through it, trying to stop my knees from shaking. If I had less than half an hour to get ready, there was no way I was going to be teaching right all day. I should have known it was a bad idea to drink ever again.

I shot a look back at Kakashi, who was still sitting on the floor looking at me. His shirt was completely done up, hiding his tattoo and the rest of his body. His tie was properly done up, but I knew it would have slipped by the time we got to the staff room for briefing. I just prayed that everything else would have slipped from his mind by then, too.

“You should probably consider showering; you smell like sex,” Kakashi called helpfully.

I just glared and left.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Frightening

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

How many times do I fly through your head space?

Now it’s speeding away from the safe place

Yeah

Your skin

Your touch

Your lips

You rush, too much

And here it comes

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I let Kakashi’s front door shut behind me with a bang. It definitely wasn’t quite a slam, but it wasn’t a quiet noise. Still, if the pounding in my head was anything to go by, my entire day wasn’t going to be quiet. I suppressed a groan; I wanted nothing more than to crawl back into my bed and forget to breathe, but I didn’t exactly have a choice anymore.

I dug in my pockets for my front door key, scraping my knuckle over the pointy edge. I pulled the key out, glaring at the offensive piece of metal. I resisted an incredibly childish urge to throw it across the corridor. I stabbed it into the lock, twisting none too gently, relishing the feeling of the lock grinding under the strain of my hands.

As the door swung open, I charged down my own hallway, tearing off my clothes and dropping them on random articles of furniture. A small table caught my shirt, a sock found its way into the fruit bowl, and my trousers ended up on the sofa. The only piece of clothing that made it to the washing basket was my underwear, which I was all too keen to wash.

On the basis I probably did smell bad, I hopped in the shower and let it run cold. I wasn’t about to let myself enjoy my morning shower today. The water finally began to warm up, but I stepped out and roughly wiped down my dripping skin and squeezed my hair with the towel. Fortunately, the mirror was steamed up too much to see my face. I wasn’t too keen on my own face anymore.

I dressed quickly, forcing myself to eat a couple of slices of bread and jamming a couple of aspirin down my throat. I made myself just neat enough to be respectable, but not enough to look like I was trying. I couldn’t bring myself to care.

I ran fingers through my hair, and shivered. Kakashi had done that last night, too.

I left my hair down, telling myself it was better to let it dry flat even though that had never stopped me tying it back up before.

My hands shook slightly as I locked the door to my flat, separating my door key from my car key and my window key and my school key. I regretted not colour-coding them or something, although the bright colours would probably be detrimental to my headache. The stairs down to the ground
floor were equally awful. They kept moving slightly, making my head and stomach lurch in an uncomfortable tandem. The cool glass of the building’s front door looked incredibly appealing.

I stopped as I walked outside. It wasn’t the cold, or the fact my car had a thick layer of fresh snow on it, or even the rather fat cat perched on top of it that made me halt. Kakashi was already out, leaning casually against the side of his sleek car, porn in hand. My face twitched; surely the real thing was better than that crap.

“If you think I’m letting you drive in your state, you’re clearly insane,” He called across the small car park, one hand lifting from the book to turn a page. His grey eye remained fixed studiously on the book in front of him.

Last night, besides being a hideous mistake, was a really wasted opportunity. I hadn’t even managed to touch his face, let alone see it.

Well, touch it with something besides your lips, Tsunade’s voice said, making an impromptu and incredibly unwelcome reappearance. I repressed a growl.

“I’m fine,” I called back, making my way across the iced over paving. Whoever had forgotten to put road salt down on this car park was going straight to hell. My feet skidded a little, and I tried to move like I was ice skating or skiing, not that I had done either in years. My thin jacket wasn’t nearly warm enough against the cold, and I was already beginning to shake, throwing my balance off. I tried to keep my eyes down, away from obvious distractions leaning against their cars.

“Friends don’t let friends drink and drive,” He said, his voice mockingly sing-song. I scowled at the floor, gripping my keys painfully tight.

Friends? Could we still be friends, after what had happened? Were we even friends to begin with? Everyone seemed to think we were more than friends already, but I wasn’t about to declare even a friendship to the world. It was like tempting fate, a self-fulfilling prophecy. We’d be pushed together harder, and cave under the pressure.

Either way, regular friends did not do what we had done last night. If they did, then they were friends with benefits. I had never had a friend with benefits before. Did it count as a benefit, considering I’m not gay? On the other hand, was I about to let one night of wrong spoil whatever bizarre friendship had formed between us?

Part of me wanted it to.

“I’m not drunk, just kind of hung over. Besides, this is all your fault, you know. It was your idea to get pissed on a school night - ooof!” I slipped and landed heavily on my hands, wincing as the key bit into my newly tender flesh.

“I didn’t make you drink, in exactly the same way I didn’t make you kiss me,” Although I still refused to look at him, I could feel his presence behind me. He had moved completely silently, despite the snow underfoot. I had to admit, that catlike tread was rather impressive. One hand gripped my shoulder, helping me to my feet.

“Oh, just let that drop already,” I griped as I shrugged it off, reluctantly walking over to his car. In the end, dying wasn’t really a very good option. Living in humiliation was still living. If all else failed, I could change my name and move to another country or something.

“Get in the car,” The door to his car clicked, opening remotely. I felt a pang of envy; my car didn’t do that. I watched out of the corner of my eye as he walked around the front of the car and climbed
in, barely sparing me a look. It looked like both of us were playing the same game. “Have you eaten?” I let my eyes sneak up to watch him as he began to buckle up. Pale, ungloved fingers moved without trace of cold. My flesh was still warm with the ghost of those fingers.

Last night couldn’t possibly have meant anything to Kakashi, could it? We barely knew each other, really. You had to know someone in order to want them romantically, and he didn’t know much about me at all.

“I had some bread,” I muttered petulantly, remembering the dull, boring slices I’d wolfed down earlier. My stomach roiled at the memory; it wasn’t even particularly nice bread. I hadn’t baked a load of break in ages, mostly because I had no one to share it with. Maybe I could split it with-

No. Absolutely not.

“Have a banana,” A banana appeared in front of my nose.

“I hate bananas,”

“Eat it,” Kakashi commanded, waving the obnoxious fruit. Who the hell had made bananas so yellow in the first place? It was a dreadful colour for a fruit. I seized the fruit and peeled it angrily, glaring at Kakashi as I slowly bit off the end, realising I had lied. I loved bananas. A low snigger emerged from his covered lips.

“What?” I demanded, glaring down at the banana instead. What the hell was so funny about a banana?

“I just really wanted to see that,” His eye narrowed with mirth, locked on the road ahead. Either the aspirin was extremely effective or he was making me forget about feeling like crap, but the drive was actually okay. The road had been nicely de-iced, and the traffic was remarkably light for the time of day.

“See what?” I asked again, taking another mouthful of banana.

“Never mind, Iruka, never mind,”

By the time we got to the school, staff briefing was already well underway. I bustled down the corridors with Kakashi in reluctant tow, bursting through the staff room door with a sharp knock.

“I’m sorry I’m-” I started, looking over the room of wide eyes and small smirks.

I was cut off by a peal of laughter from the corner of the room, where a pair of blonde pigtails were bobbing as their owner shook with laughter.

“Iruka, you naughty boy!” Tsunade squealed, giggling. Suddenly, the room came to life, female members of staff clustering around me very claustrophobically. Questions poured from their lips, but I couldn’t hear a single word. The ghastly smell of makeup and perfume surrounded me, choking the life out of the air.

“What?” I deadpanned as I tried to move back towards the door.

“If that necklace of love bites is anything to go by, you certainly have been a naughty boy!”

I nearly melted with embarrassment. I suddenly remembered why mirrors were a good idea again.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Not The Only One

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Oh, you’ve got me down on my knees

Oh, and in my mind I can see

How perfect everything could be

But you won’t give us a try

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

The walk from briefing to my form room was incredibly painful. Although I couldn’t see them, the string of love bites around my neck felt like brands, and certainly attracted as many eyes as they would if they were. I had done my best to keep my shirt collar high and let my untied hair fall in front of my shoulders, but it wasn’t enough to hide them.

As I walked through the corridors towards my form classroom for morning registration, my hearing suddenly fine-tuned to specifically pick up the voices of all the girls, ranging from whispers to outright exclamations of surprise or even, though I shuddered to think about it, joy.

“So it’s true, then…?”

“Oh my God, I knew it was…!”

“That that means they’ve, y’know…”

“They are such a cute couple…!”

“Do you think Kakashi-sensei blindfolds him…?”

“I heard Iruka-sensei’s into some really kinky shit, too…!”

I had to physically restrain myself from reacting. How could they even think I was some kind of-of-of sexual deviant?

I was going to kill Kakashi for marking me. Slowly.

I shoved open the door to my classroom, scanning wearily over my form class and swaying a little while carefully avoiding eye contact with any of them. It was too early in the morning and felt way too awful to deal with the kids. Stabbing Kakashi multiple times in the chest with a blunt object was looking increasingly appealing.

“Is everyone here?” I asked, digging a pad of paper and a pen out of one of my desk drawers. I hadn’t remembered to bring my bags, so I had no supplies, no register, and all the marking I had managed to get done earlier yesterday evening was still sitting on my kitchen table. It meant I’d have double to carry in tomorrow. No, stabbing was too kind a death. I needed something more violent, definitely.

The class immediately split in half. Half of the kids started whispering behind their hands or talking discreetly to their neighbours, while the other half read the atmosphere and stayed silent. Generally, it was the smarter ones who stayed quiet.
“Sasuke and Naruto are-” One student called from the front, raising a hand nervously. Well, at least some students had survival instincts enough to try and act normal.

“Probably making out somewhere, let’s just assume they’re here,” I cut her off, marking down their absences on a piece of paper. Just because I didn’t have all my normal equipment didn’t mean anyone was getting off easily. Although I didn’t exactly remember what I was supposed to be teaching today didn’t mean I couldn’t give it a good try.

“But Sensei-”

“Sorry we’re late, Iruka-sensei!” The door swung open and hit the wall loudly, revealing a widely grinning Naruto and a tired-looking Sasuke standing behind him. Both of them looked slightly pink in the cheeks, a small blush I really hoped was just from hurrying to registration.

“I don’t care, just go and sit down,” I snapped. “And tuck your shirt in, Naruto!”

If registration was bad, the rest of the morning was hell. I had no idea what I was supposed to be teaching, so mostly I just had the class read from their copies of the set text and answer a bunch of questions I made up. All the while, all eyes were on my neck, where the string of purple markings shone like beacons. Fortunately, my irritability seemed to be creating some kind of aura of don’t-piss-me-off-or-you’ll-be-dead-faster-than-a-bug-on-a-windscreen thing, so the classes stayed mostly silent. Even more so when I threatened detentions, or even worse: a talk with Tsunade.

What I couldn’t understand was why Tsunade, and apparently the rest of the female staff and the majority of the students, were so fascinated by my love life. Tsunade was partly understandable; she was married to the king of perverts himself, so she was almost certainly secretly perverted herself. Or not so secretly, if truth be told. Matchmaking among the staff was something of her hobby, when she was trying to avoid stacks of paperwork and between drinking binges. Being headmistress seemed to mostly involve sitting around doing a lot of paperwork, so anything would be a good distraction. The other women, however, I couldn’t understand for the life of me. Why would the idea of two men in a relationship be appealing to women? Yes, Kakashi-sensei was physically attractive, but why me of all people?

Oh, let’s see…your personality, your appearance, your unbridled, raving attraction to him, my inner-Tsunade listed. And then there’s that little matter of your repressed sexuality-

Oh God, not that argument again.

Think about it, Iruka-sensei…what’s better than one sexy guy? Tsunade’s voice paused for dramatic effect, apparently waiting for my answer. I glared at my desk, furiously trying to block her out. Two sexy guys all over each other, licking and touching and sucking and fu-

My eyes widened. No, my own subconscious did not just think that, even if it was in someone else’s voice. I really needed some kind of psychological help.

I turned my attention back to the class work, writing up another question that popped into my head on the whiteboard. I was lucky the class was enjoying the text enough to work hard; the upper sixth were easily the easiest to teach. They were analysing in detail *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and I was trying not to think about the consummation scene. That was one of the original reasons why the book was only privately published at first. I had first read *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* while I was at high school, where it still attracted odd looks from those who knew what it contained and bored looks from those who didn’t. Those who did either laughed it off, deciding I was a normal teenage boy with a normal sex drive, or giggled behind their hands that I was reading erotica.
I couldn’t say I particularly enjoyed literary sex scenes. I read and analysed texts from a technical perspective, commenting more on the flow or the quality of the scene, as opposed to how hot it was. Written sex scenes were never as good as the real act, and I had come across more than a few dodgy euphemisms in my time. ‘Glowing golden rod’ was still my favourite.

Hey, I just had a great idea! Why don’t you go and buy yourself some gay porn and try getting off to it! That will prove once and for all if you like men or not! Tsunade’s voice crowed. My fingers twitched on the desk at the idea. There was no way I, an upstanding, moral, dignified teacher could walk into an adult shop and buy pornography. That was completely reprehensible and would be hideously embarrassing.

Still, it didn’t explain exactly why I found myself outside the dubiously named ‘Yes, Master’ after school. Fortunately it was a good fifteen-minute drive away from the school, which hopefully meant no students or teachers would be in the general vicinity to watch me walk through the shiny black doors, past the 18+ sign, and through the pink bead curtain on the other side. The shop was actually rather well lit, a number of lamps hanging from the ceiling casting bright light onto the products that lined the walls. My eyes widened; I didn’t know what half of this stuff was, never mind what people did with it.

Keeping my head down and my eyes averted, I walked past a shelf of oddly coloured plastic penises towards the rack of books near the back. I could feel the blood rising in my cheeks, and I was almost certainly as red as a tomato. Immediately, I recognised the covers of all seventeen editions of Icha Icha, and a small display with a poster behind it that advertised volume eighteen in obscene detail. A small pang of sadness cut through my extreme embarrassment; I hadn’t spoken to Kakashi since this morning. He hadn’t come to visit me even once, and I had a horrible feeling that he was avoiding me.

My fingers twitched compulsively, reaching out to seize a copy of new Icha Icha. Would pornography make a suitable, platonic peace offering? I scanned the blurb, picking out the key words that made my blush grow one level brighter. How could people read that stuff with a straight face? Not only did it sound ridiculously cliché, but it sounded completely obscene.

I almost kicked myself. Of course it was obscene, it was porn. People don’t read porn for the plot; they read it for the sex. And then-

I suddenly had a very odd vision of Kakashi in a school bathroom somewhere, sneakily jerking off with Icha Icha in hand. If I blushed any harder, I would pass out from blood loss.

“I never knew you had such great taste, Iruka-sensei,” I almost jumped out of my skin as the voice of the man I had been imagining spoke quietly from behind me. The book fell from my hands, landing with a dull thump on the floor. “Icha Icha War is out today, so I came as quick as I could. It looks like we had the same idea,” He brushed over the cover with a sleeve, visible eye looking at me coolly from under his eyelashes. I had never noticed how long they were before. That was strangely appealing.

“W-what on Earth are you talking about? I’m here for something completely different!” I squeaked, randomly seizing a book from the rack to the side and charging towards the checkout.

“See you at home, Sensei!” He called cheerily from across the shop.

“What the hell are you-” I hissed back, whipping around to glare at him but I couldn’t spot him anywhere.

Well, that could have been a whole lot more awkward. For one, there was no way in hell I could
apologise for last night without dying of embarrassment, even if a whole day to stew in the stares of teenagers and my own rising guilt was enough to make me consider that maybe my reaction was a bit selfish. But only a bit. And I still wasn’t going to apologise.

Maybe I’d just bake that bread after all.

I set the book in my hand down on the counter, looking up into the amused eyes of a heavily made up transvestite. He flipped his long blond hair over one shoulder as he scanned the book, depositing it into an unmarked bag.

“That your boyfriend, hon?” He asked, leaning forward on the desk.

“No,” I said flatly. Why would anyone get that impression?

“Then why not? If I were you, I’d go for him,”

“It’s not like – I’m not-” I spluttered. Why the hell did everyone assume I was gay? Did I give off some kind of weird scent or pheromone or something? Whatever the reason, I really wanted another shower.

“Sure, sure. That will be £7.99, yeah?” The transvestite smirked knowingly, pushing the bag towards me.

“Right, thanks,”

“You enjoy that, hon!” I seized the bag and stalked out of the shop, swatting the bead curtain out of the way. That was nearly eight pounds wasted, but since I’d bought it I supposed I’d have to read it.

Either way, Kakashi wasn’t ignoring me anymore. I felt a tension release in my chest. That was good to know.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Blow Me Away

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Never judge a book by its cover

Or who you’re gonna love by your lover

Love put me wise to her love in disguise

She had a body of a Venus

Lord, imagine my surprise!

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

During the sprint to my car from the sex shop, all through the drive home, and through the tentative and jumpy walk up to my flat, the bag hiding the book was a burning presence. I could feel it looking at me, begging to be picked up and read. Naturally, I told myself to grow up; that inanimate objects, especially pornographic books, could not do that kind of thing.

In fact, I threw the bag into my sitting room and forced myself to sit down at my kitchen table and mark a set of class work. However, my brain was completely unable and unwilling to focus on marking when I had *erotica* just waiting for me in the other room. Snarling at myself, I scribbled another generic comment on some poor fourth former’s question paper with a bit too much force, denting the paper with my red biro. It was porn, for god’s sake! Why the hell would I want to read it?

Because you’re a single young man who hasn’t had sex in years, sniggered Tsunade’s voice from the back of my mind. Oh wait, are we counting that little thing you did with Kakashi the other night, or are we only counting penetrative sex here? Although I’m sure he’d be up for that if you asked.

I set down my pen roughly, took a sip of tea, and marched into the other room. Upending the bag and letting the book fall onto the sofa, I snatched it up and sat down. I was not going to be defeated by this crappy dirty book!

“Ayumu sighed softly as Takahiro stroked a hand over his bare chest, lightly pushing aside the thin fabric of his unbuttoned shirt to let slim fingers glide temptingly across the soft skin. Ayumu arched his back, trying to press into the hands, but his lover’s—”

Wait, what? This was a gay romance novel? How the hell had I managed that? Still, it could be about necrophilia and I’d still read it; the content wasn’t the point. I just had to finish the book, and then I could burn it or something.

“‘P-please,’ rasped Ayumu, suddenly deprived of all touch. Yet, the sensation raged onwards, through his sensitive skin, into his chest and stomach, and straight into his erect, weeping cock. ‘Do s-something,’”

‘Like what, Ayu?’ Takahiro teased. He blew a cool breath over the tall, proud erection before him, lips tantalisingly close. Just a few more inches and he could be kissing the stiffened flesh before him. The very thought sent shivers down Ayumu’s spine.

‘I-I-I—’ he stuttered, body flushed with pleasure. His hair stuck to his face, long strands clinging to his
sweat dampened cheeks and forehead. It was by far the most arousing image Takahiro had ever seen, to gaze upon his younger lover splayed out beneath him, wild with lust.

‘I don’t know unless you tell me,’ Takahiro teased. He moved one hand to touch Ayumu’s inner thigh, feeling the muscle tense beneath the soft skin.

‘T-touch me,’ the smaller man whispered. His voice was barely audible, embarrassed and desperate to feel his love’s hands all over his body, but in one specific, delicate, throbbing place. He felt like he would go crazy without it, and had never felt more alive.

‘What was that?’

‘I want you to t-touch me,’ the pretty blush spread across Ayumu’s cheeks darkened as he repeated his request, silently praying that Takahiro would indulge him.

‘You’ll have to be more specific, Ayu. We can’t all be genius medical students like you,’ Takahiro smirked, a vision of the man beneath him as he had first seen him, perched in a leather chair in the library with his pale blond hair hanging loosely over one shoulder, a book in hand. From that day, he had known that Ayumu had to be his, no matter what. Despite the desperation he felt to simply take Ayumu, he knew he had to wait; in fact, making Ayumu beg was sending pulses of pleasure to his own cock, as if the words from his lover’s lips were caressing him like a tongue or skilled fingers.

‘Touch my cock,’ Ayumu said boldly, thrusting his hips upwards slightly for emphasis, then immediately blushing hard again. He felt dirty, but he loved it, every corner of his body begging to be defiled by Takahiro’s handsome hands.

‘Your wish is my command,’”

I snapped the book shut. Oh, my god.

For one, that was horrible writing. Using fancy adjectives after every noun did not make it good writing, so much that it was bordering on purple prose. To be fair, I hadn’t read the entirety of the novel and I couldn’t really judge it properly based on a single extract, but it still seemed like an awful lot of bother to describe a sex scene.

Or so I told myself furiously, ignoring the stirrings in my own body. It was just because I was repressed, and that is all. It really, really wasn’t because of anyone or anything; it was just a natural hormonal response.

I skipped ahead a little, hoping to find something that was less obscene.

“‘Takahiro!’ Ayumu gasped as he felt the first two fingers press into his delicate orifice, the scent of the sweet-smelling lubricant drifting up from where Takahiro rested lazily between his legs. The fingers pressed deeper, past the first and second knuckles to rest in his snug heat, brushing against his inner walls. ‘I-’

‘Shhh, Ayu, it will feel better in a moment,’ Takahiro whispered seductively, twisting and curling his fingers to brush one of the most sensitive parts of his lover’s body.

‘Aaah!’ Ayumu cried, throwing his head back as pleasure raced through his veins. He knew theoretically that the invading fingers were stimulating his prostate, but his mind was wiped clean of all thoughts other than the man above him, and the desire he felt.

The blond was thankful for the lubricant; without it, he knew he should feel a burn, some kind of pain, but instead he felt only pleasure at the intrusion. He was swept away on a sea of desire at the
thought of Takahiro being inside his body, any part, although he longed for Takahiro’s glorious cock most of all.”

I snapped the book shut again, painfully trapping my finger between the pages. I didn’t think it was impossible to embarrass myself and feel utterly humiliated when there was no one around to see it, but apparently it was completely possible. Here I was, a normal, respectable teacher, reading erotica in which a young man was currently being finger fucked by someone. I wasn’t even entirely sure who the characters were besides their names, but it was all incredibly awkward. I felt almost voyeuristic, watching them in their act.

My mind wandered to the content. Truth be told, I knew how two men had sex. It didn’t take a genius to work it out, and from what I had accidentally managed to discover in my teenage years and from what I had read in less risqué books, I suddenly felt like I knew too much and too little all at once. An author could only describe a situation so far, and without actually experiencing something the reader couldn’t fully appreciate the writing.

Wait, what the hell was I suggesting? There was no way in any of the seven circles of hell that I would ever do that just because I was kind of curious.

I blushed furiously as the images placed in my mind by the perverse book changed. It wasn’t Ayumu and Takahiro entwined in passion anymore, it was me and Kakashi. Every nerve ending in my body flared, and the sensation of my clothing against my skin was suddenly incredibly uncomfortable. Blood rushed confusedly through my veins as the image changed, becoming less coherent as blood left my brain and flowed towards-

No, anything but that. I picked up the book and read on; trying to stifle any kind of misinformed bodily reaction. That definitely wasn’t a fantasy or anything; it was just a product of my newly damaged psyche. Yes, that was it.

“Takahiro pressed forwards, pushing his unveiled manhood into the tight, velvet hole between his lover’s peach-like cheeks. He seized the slender hips, pulling Ayumu onto himself. Ayumu sighed with pleasure, repressing cries of ecstasy as his fantasy came true: his Takahiro was inside of him, and he had never felt so complete.”

I put the book down slowly onto the sofa seat beside me, pulling my hands away from the glossy cover and blanking my mind. I could feel the heat in my face, blushing bright scarlet at the flowery text. That was just- It was so- How could-? Why-? What did-?

There were some things that didn’t bear thinking about.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Promise I’ll be kind
But I won’t stop until
That boy is mine
Baby you’ll be famous
Chase you down until you love me

“Iruka,” Kakashi whispered, thrusting a final time before shudders of orgasm wracked his lithe form and I felt the warmth of his seed spill inside my-

I sat up sharply, coming down from the high of my dream as soon as I remembered exactly what had happened.

Oh, my god.

I had had a sex dream. About Kakashi. One that involved full, proper, penetrative sex. And, if the awkward state of my pyjamas were anything to go by, I had really, really enjoyed it.

Naturally, it was all based on that ridiculous dirty book I had forced myself to finish before going to bed. Hell, the dream was even in such stupidly explicit and unnecessary detail that it was obviously not my fault. As if I, and English literature teacher, could ever dream in purple prose!

More to the point, I had had a sex dream about Kakashi. I had dreamed about being fucked by Kakashi. Why would I dream something like that, something so disquieting and abnormal? I mean, it wasn’t precisely abnormal to have sex dreams every now and again, but most of the time I didn’t remember who it featured, or if it featured anyone real at all. And even then, it was all just a sense of tangling limbs and unspecific pleasure. Instead, last night’s dream had been very precise about what and who I was doing.

Or who was doing me.

I flinched, and forced myself out of bed. The details of the dream were already beginning to slip my mind, the sensible half of my brain carefully erasing every second while the less-sensible half begged to keep it. I repressed that side as I pushed my soiled pyjama trousers off and pulled the top over my head, moving a quickly towards the bathroom.

The washing basket lid closed over the evidence. Within a matter of days, the physical evidence would be gone forever, and it looked like my brain was getting rid of the mental evidence, too. Pretty soon, it would be erased from existence completely, and I could pretend it had never happened.

I ran a few fingers absentmindedly through my hair as I turned the shower on, catching on a few knots that had formed during the night. I couldn’t bring myself to brush it out properly; the brush was somewhere near the mirror, and I didn’t think I could look at my reflection just yet without blushing furiously. School was certainly going to be interesting.
Stepping under the warm water of the shower, I felt compelled to scrub every part of my body within an inch of its life. Instead, I restrained my hands from forming claws and gently cleaned myself up and shampooed my hair with exactly normal amounts of pressure and care. No more, no less, because I was very much normal this morning and nothing of any note had happened inside my head last night. Or so I told myself.

I abruptly turned the water off and stepped out, drying myself quickly before dressing. I didn’t pay much attention to what I was wearing, although a clearly insane part of my mind reminded me of how difficult it would be to remove a tie and a collared shirt quick enough, just in case of workplace trysts. I firmly stepped on that part and continued my morning routine as normal.

I was making good time, partly as a consequence of showering pretty much immediately after waking up, and took a moment to sort through all the marking I was supposed to have brought to school the day before. There, resting on top of the pile was the atrocious erotic novel and the cause of my crazy dream. I resisted the temptation to throw it through the window, but knowing my luck it would probably land on top of Kakashi’s car or something and he’d know I’d read it or something and get a really weird impression of me.

Oh god, he’d been there when I bought it. Knowing how nothing escapes him, he’d probably seen the cover too, and deduced what was inside. He knew I’d bought gay pornography. Oh, crap. Although considering he read Icha Icha in front of teenagers, I still looked reasonably more dignified.

That book was abysmal. The writing was bad, the characters were completely stereotypical and two-dimensional, it was written exclusively in purple prose and the number of odd euphemisms for different parts of the male anatomy was truly staggering. Never before had I heard a penis described in so many unconventional ways, and I was certainly very well-read.

I was drawn to the question of why people would read that kind of thing. It was clearly targeted at women rather than men, considering the language, tone and plot combined with the focus on the sheer femininity of the receiving party. Was it the kind of book someone like Tsunade, who seemed to be fixated with hooking men up with each other, would like to read? Would they get any kind of sexual fulfilment out of it? Considering my reactions whilst reading the book and the dream it triggered, did I fall into that category?

No, I certainly didn’t. It was just because I hadn’t slept with anyone in a long time, and because Kakashi had been on my mind a lot. And that was all. It wasn’t like I was turning into one of those trashy heroines – or, in the case of the gay section in that sex shot, heroes – who took one glance at the male lead and fell head over heels in love with them or anything. For one, I was a man, and I didn’t know what to expect from love in the first place, having never loved anyone in an emotional manner in a way that wasn’t familial. My girlfriends from my teenage years had all been hormonal experiments, and I hadn’t really thought about loving someone who wouldn’t be my wife eventually.

Would it be possible for me to love someone who wasn’t the nice girl my parents had planned for me? I felt a pang of guilt at considering disregarding their wishes, at the possibility of discontinuing the Umino blood line. Could I let myself love Kakashi?

Did I have a choice?

No, the kitchen table on a school morning was not the place for that kind of internal debate. I swept everything on the table top into a bag, wincing as I heard paper crumple at the bottom. I’d have to bump that kid’s grade up in apology.

I hurried out of the door, refraining from casting a glance at Kakashi’s front door as I strode past.
wasn’t even going to think about him today. Yes, I had been lonely yesterday when he was avoiding me, but that didn’t mean anything. I enjoyed his company, and that was all.

The drive to school was surprisingly smooth, but apparently that was as far as my luck ran. I was once again subject to amused and excited glances the moment I appeared in corridors, and I had to physically force my way through a gaggle of courageous fourth former girls who were all anxious to know exactly what was under Kakashi’s mask in order to get to the staff room for briefing.

“…which is why we had to reschedule the dance to this month, despite the themes. And on that topic, we’ll need the usual number of staff chaperones and supervisors for both the night itself and the set-up…” Shizune read through her notes, dropping each neat square of paper gently on a sleeping Tsunade’s lap as she finished each card. Tsunade snored softly, but no one dared wake her. It would mean a fate worse than death.

Half listening to the announcements, I let myself drift off a little too, clearing my mind of work-related thought.

-smooth fingers brushed across my thighs, drawing a desperate mewl from my lips as they skirted the area that he knew was most sensitive, deliberately drawing out the sensations-

Snippets of the dream surfaced in my mind, furiously reminding me of exactly what my subconscious had dreamed up and dumping it at the forefront of my mind.

-a soft mouth and a caress of a tongue, swiping along my length, up and down in a tantalising rhythm-

Worse than actually remembering it, my body was starting to react to the memory of it. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, staring blankly at the door. Just a minute or two and I could get out and hit my head against a wall or something until I forgot again.

-the moan was torn from my lips as I felt him push inside-

-fast rhythm, rocking my hips back to meet every thrust-

-breath coming in short gasps as my ecstasy grew-

-sticky streams of white burst from-

The door clicked open, and the man of my fantasies sauntered casually into the room.

“…the girl’s bathroom near the sports hall has been—”

“I’m sorry, Shizune, but I have to leave,” I said loudly, flying out of my seat and across the room. I kept my head down, avoiding the stares of my colleagues. My arm brushed Kakashi’s as I practically ran through the door, sending sparks of electricity through my covered skin. I could feel a furious blush glowing across my cheeks as my fingers knotted into fists, heading for the nearest staff bathroom.

I shoved open the door and headed straight for a sink, turning the cold tap on and leaning over it. I had just spent morning briefing fantasising about sex with another man. Another man who happened to be my colleague and neighbour, who I had had drunken something with the night before. I was seriously messed up.

The door creaked open.
“Iruka?”

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
That I’ll never talk again,
And I’ll never love again,
I’ll never write a song,
Won’t even sing along,
I’ll never love again,
So speechless,
You’ve left me speechless,
So speechless

I didn’t lift my eyes from the plain white ceramic sink bowl. I knew exactly who it was standing just inside the doorway, probably leaning casually against the wall, looking at me through a lidded dark eye. I knew their tone, remembered it from before, casually caring without being overly invasive. And I knew they were the person I most wanted and least wanted to see.

Out of anyone working at Konoha High, this was a worst-case scenario. Anyone else would either tactfully leave me alone or give me a consoling pat on the back, and I would force myself to pick myself up to save face. But this was bad. Not only because I had to live next door to Kakashi, but because he confused me on every level I could possibly be confused on.

“Iruka,” He repeated. I stopped myself looking up. I pushed my sleeves back, running my hands under the cold tap and then rubbing the cool water over my face, as if somehow the water could wash away my embarrassment.

Once again, the sheer obsceneness of the situation struck me. I had been sitting in morning briefing, allowing myself to fantasise about sex with Kakashi. I hadn’t even tried to stop myself, or at least not very hard. I shrank inwards again, humiliated at myself. The evidence was stacked against my complete heterosexuality, considering the recent events. Not just the sex dream, but the porn, too. And the drunken thing. And pretty much everything since Kakashi had shown up for his first day at work.

“Iruka? Are you in there?” In my identity-based conflict, I hadn’t noticed Kakashi move to stand directly behind me, and I jumped a little when I felt his hand on my shoulder. Concern had leaked into his voice, but I couldn’t bring myself to look at him. It was too humiliating.

“No,” I said bluntly, forcing myself to look up. Immediately, I knew it was a mistake. I looked into the mirror mounted on the wall just above the sink, and got a delightful view of my cherry red face plastered with a mortified expression, and a worried looking Kakashi standing behind me. “Please leave a message after the tone,”

“You didn’t do the beep,” He pointed out, tugging lightly on my shoulder. I refused to meet his eyes
in the mirror, staying firmly in my position over the sink.

“So don’t leave a message,” I replied, still using my answer-machine monotone. Despite what I wanted to portray, I definitely was home, but it was burning down in front of my eyes, and I wasn’t so sure the fire department was going to arrive on time, and even if it did I wasn’t sure where to start fixing the damage.

“I think I have to, if we don’t want a repeat performance of the other week,” He said softly, other hand coming up to rest on my unoccupied shoulder. The weight of his hands was somewhat comforting, but distracting at the same time. He was the object of my misguided fantasies, and physical contact wasn’t exactly making things easier. “And I think you need to talk,”

“Talking will make it worse,”

“How do you know until you try?”

“Because it’s you I’m talking to,”

“I could get someone else in here, or you could go to see the counsellor or something if it’s me that you can’t talk to,”

“Talking to someone else would be worse,”

“Then why me?”

“Yes, why is it you? Why is it always you?” I turned around sharply, weight on the balls of my feet as I stared up into his covered face. “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since you walked late into the staffroom with your stupid excuse weeks ago, and nothing I do can make it better. Hell, everything else is making it worse, and it’s getting bad. I can’t be normal like this,”

“Like what?”

“Like this,” I gestured wildly with one hand, waving to every part of my body. I still wasn’t exactly sure what this was yet, but I would be damned if I didn’t work it out eventually. “I’m not supposed to be like this,”

“Maybe not, but no one has a choice about that,” Oh, that. Like. Romance. Love. Emotion. Stuff girls gossiped about and boys generally avoided, mass-marketed through television, the internet and literary fiction across the world. The subject of more books, poems and plays than one could count.

Wait, was that what I felt? Love? No, love was supposed to be overpowering, birds singing and bright lights coming from nowhere. You were supposed to be swept off your feet and run off hand in hand into the sunset together. It was supposed to be obvious and romantic and special and passionate.

I did feel overpowered, but there wasn’t birdsong and the only light was from the overhead bulbs. I felt sort of swept away, but it was the morning so there weren’t any sunsets to run off into. It certainly wasn’t obvious or romantic, and was questionably special and passionate. Did that qualify?

“God, how childish are we? We’re talking like schoolboys discussing who the hottest girl in the class is,” I smiled depreciatively, looking to the side, suddenly nervous to look at his face. Had I just admitted to myself that I liked Kakashi?

“Hmm, I always preferred the teachers,” He admitted. My gaze snapped back to him.
“W-what?”

“When I was about thirteen, there was this one teacher at school I idolised. He is still one of the people I respect most, even today. I had a bit of a crush on him,” He elaborated, the muscles in his face twitching into a small smile. This close, I could see the skin move enough to exactly read his expression, even if I couldn’t see his features. It was actually quite nice having that kind of insight into the mystery.

“Huh?” I said blankly.

“I wasn’t the only one, though. Everyone really liked Minato-sensei, and he was happily married. I think he had a kid, too, before he died, though I don’t know what happened to the kid. And then I grew up too fast, went to university, got a flashy yet unemployable physics degree and a teaching qualification and ended up here. But I still prefer the teachers. Anyway, it was because of him that I learned that you don’t get to choose who you like,” One hand had returned to my shoulder some time during the speech, and was slowly working its way down my arm. My skin tingled wherever he touched, even through my clothing. Not enough to make me feel uncomfortable, but just enough to feel unsettled. “See, you’ve got me doing it now,”

“So it’s-” I started.

“It really isn’t that bad,”

“Why did-”

“Just agree to one date with me, and you can decide how you feel after that. I won’t make you do anything you don’t want to, I won’t make you act like a couple, and I won’t force myself on you. Just one date and you can completely ignore me for the rest of your life,” His voice was quick and somewhat more cheerful than usual, eye radiating trustworthiness that I felt hypnotisingly compelled to believe. “Also, I won’t take no for an answer,” His hand met mine, my eyes widening impossibly further as he laced our fingers together.

“But-”

“I’ll pick you up at three on Saturday, okay?” His visible eye curved up into its trademark happy arch before he dropped my hand and walked quickly from the bathroom.

“Uh-”

The bell signifying the start of registration rang, but I didn’t leave the bathroom. I stood there, not entirely sure of what had just happened. Had I just agreed to go on a date? I hadn’t had any kind of date literally in years. More to the point, it was with Kakashi.

So what exactly did that mean? Did it mean that I wasn’t alone in my like thing, if I was admitting there was a like thing going on? And what did that make me?

First, I was pretty sure that any kind of like thing was mutual, what with the asking me on a date, the hand holding and the other, more unmentionable things that had happened before. I had a date. An actual, human to human date. People who liked each other went on dates. Did that mean I had admitted liking him?

So, theoretically, if I did like him what did that make me? Was I bisexual or something? I wanted to believe liking – falling in love, lust, whatever – wasn’t a choice. I wanted to believe it wasn’t my fault if I was about to let my parents down.
Slip and Slide

When I’m with you, baby, I go out of my head

I just can’t get enough, I just can’t get enough

All the things you do to me and everything you said

I just can’t get enough, I just can’t get enough

We slip and slide as we fall in love

And I just can’t seem to get enough, oh

So I had a date. A date. The thing people did to get to know each other romantically. I had taken my girlfriends on dates before. I had taken them to the park or to the cinema or to a restaurant, and then taken them home again. We had talked about teenage things, usually school. We talked about our friends, teachers, and complained about homework. Then we had parted ways. She usually kissed me before she left. Would it be the same thing with another man?

That was kind of the crux of the matter, after all. If I had been told a month ago that in the future, a tall, mysterious stranger would arrive and throw my life so off-kilter that I would voluntarily drink myself silly I would have told them to shut up and get back to work, because only teenagers and Tsunade would think something so irrational.

Was it really so irrational, though? The entire purpose of this date was to establish if I had somehow managed to develop feelings towards Kakashi. It wasn’t to learn more about him, and it wasn’t to get a kiss at the end. It was purely experimental.

Or at least that’s what I told myself as I flicked another imaginary speck of dust off my trousers as I sat on my sofa at five minutes to three, specifically not anxiously awaiting the knock at my door to signal my date’s arrival. It wasn’t like I had made an effort or anything with my appearance, either. It was just a coincidence that I had made sure my nicest jeans were clean and my favourite shirt was ironed and that my shoes were polished. And I certainly wasn’t anxious about looking appealing or anything, even if I had debated the whole morning about tying my hair up or leaving it down. It had ended up being tied back.

No, I definitely wasn’t making that much of an effort, and I certainly wasn’t excited, anxious, nervous or happy about the date. It was just an experiment.

Ten minutes later, I was pacing. Had I been stood up? Was it all some kind of ridiculous joke? Was it an excuse to humiliate me and prove a point? Kakashi was five minutes late, and I hated it when people were late. I hated it when students were late, I hated it when members of staff were late, but mostly I hated it when Kakashi was late. At least other people had reasonable excuses, usually something halfway believable, instead of some crap about small animals or old ladies needing rescuing. Fluffy bunnies and pensioners would not cut it this time, and I would forcibly remove his limbs one by one from his body if-

There was a knock at the door.
I shot out of my seat and stormed towards the door, wrenching it open. I drew in a lungful of air, preparing to unleash verbal hell upon the man in my doorway when I stopped.

“Yo,” A bunch of flowers was pushed into my face, distracting me from the forthcoming tirade.

“I’m not a woman,” I snapped, seizing the flowers in one hand and tossing them onto a small table near the door. “I do not appreciate this. Do I want to hear your excuse as to why you’re late?”

“There was this kitten stuck in a flower pot, and I had to help it—”

“-get back to its little brothers and sisters and mummy to play with a ball of string or something? You must deserve an award for helping the poor, innocent creatures of the world by now,” I said. I rolled my eyes, but I still smiled. As annoying and stupid as they were, I had to admit they were funny.

“Probably,” He said, a smile in his voice. I stepped out of my flat, locking the door behind me. I vaguely wondered if he was going to try and hold my hand as we walked outside to his car, but I remembered that we weren’t doing couple-y things, and that probably constituted as couple-y. I wasn’t entirely sure whether to be relieved or disappointed.

“So where are you taking me?” I asked as he held the car door open for me. I had to give him credit for being a gentleman, even if I wasn’t a lady.

“You’ll see,”

“Can I have a clue?”

“No,”

“Why? Is it something I’m going to hate?” I said suspiciously. If Kakashi had some kind of romantic boat trip or sissy romantic film or romantic dinner planned, I was going to refuse to speak to him for a week. If he planned to take me to some kind of swing club or sex bar, I was going to kill him.

I was actually sort of worried about the location. What if people we knew saw us together? If any student witnessed it, there would be no way I could deny it, and then I’d have to sit through Tsunade crowing about her matchmaking genius and the stares of the teenage girls would be that much more awkward because they’d know whatever perversions they were picturing was likely.

“I hope not; that would be detrimental to the point of taking you out,” He said like he was stating the obvious.

“What is the point?” I frowned. It wasn’t obvious, at least, not to me.

“Because I like you and I want to know if I have a chance or not,”

“Oh,” I said quietly. That was a confession, wasn’t it? An actual outright confession. I wasn’t sure what to say in response, especially since he seemed to know what I was feeling, too. Someone, Kakashi, liked me. Like liked me. That kind of like. The non-platonic kind of like. That explained why he wanted to take me on a date, put up with my bitching and had done things to – with – me before. I wasn’t sure how to carry on a conversation after his admission, and I didn’t try very hard. The silence was awkward, to say the least. Although I wasn’t going to reject him, we both knew I wasn’t going to leap into his arms and declare my own eternal, undying love, either.

Fortunately, wherever he was taking me wasn’t too far away.

“Ice-skating,” I said bluntly. “You’re taking me ice-skating,”
“Yep,” He replied, unlocking the car doors and stepping out. I followed, looking tentatively up at the open space that housed the seasonal outdoor skating rink. It was cold enough for snow, so it was cold enough to open up to the public again, and even from the car park I could see something unusual about the people on the ice.

They were all couples. Kakashi had brought me to a couples-only skating session.

“But I can’t skate,” I protested. “I’ve never even-”

“You’ll love it, I promise,” He began walking towards the skate hire booth, and I followed quickly, markedly walking next to him. This was a date, and I was going to act properly. Just because I wasn’t sure about ice-skating didn’t mean I would let myself freak out and hurt his feelings or something.

I winced as I realised my attitude on occasion must have been painful to be around. I hadn’t exactly been sensitive the morning after our drunk thing, or tactful about my opinions about certain types of relationships. I really hoped I hadn’t done too much damage.

We hired ice-skates and strapped them on in silence, nervous on my part and mildly amused on Kakashi’s part. I kept shooting the ice terrified looks, like it might open up and swallow me whole, or if it might melt beneath the blades of my skates and I’d be left standing stationary like an idiot in ankle-deep water. The couples on the ice all looked very cutesy and happy, most skating rather well in circles around the edges of the rink. Most of them looked to be about my age or older. I suddenly saw the logic in coming to a couples-only skating session; there wouldn’t be any groups of students present, unless they were there on dates themselves in which case they’d be far too busy with each other to notice members of staff.

“Ready?” Kakashi said casually, offering me a hand. I took it, and he helped pull me up. I had a little trouble balancing on the steady, non-slip floor surrounding the ice rink; my face fell at the mental images that conjured at what would happen on the ice.

I stumbled my way over, blushing as I realised my hand was still in his, as I followed him onto the smooth surface of the ice.

O.O.O.O.O
Happy and Safe

We would be so happy, you and me
No one there to tell us what to do
I'd like to be under the sea
In an octopus' garden with you

Naturally, the second I put my blade down on the ice I fell over. I was still holding Kakashi’s hand, and somehow he managed to stay upright, smiling down at me. I could see the muscles in his face twitch with quiet laughter, the few visible patches of skin lifting gently. This distracted me from my utter humiliation at failing so hard at skating on my first try, and felt a smile creep across my own lips.

“Come on, we’re blocking the entrance,” Kakashi lightly scolded, pulling me to my feet.

“How do you- ah!” I squeaked as I began to unbalance again, clinging on to the nearest very stable object, wrapping my arms around its warm middle. I didn’t expect it to pat me back lightly, gently encouraging me to stand up again. I relocated my death grip to his arm, digging my fingers into the dark material of his shirt.

Slowly, we began to move. Well, it was mostly him doing the moving and I just tried to point my feet in a conducive direction, eyes wide and suspicious. Whenever I tried to loosen my death grip, I would feel my knees give way or my feet turn weirdly or slip out from under me, a very unmanly squeak escaping from my lips and my death grip returned as strong as ever.

Actually, once I got past the cold ice, the uncomfortable skates, and the confusing fact I was on a date, this wasn’t so bad. It could have been worse. And I hadn’t sustained any grievous bodily injuries or anything, or at least, not yet. There was still time.

“Why ice-skating?” I mumbled, tilting my head to look upwards at Kakashi. Surely there were more traditional things to do, or less couple-type ideas. Ice-skating certainly wasn’t exactly traditional, and it wasn’t exactly usual, either.

“The outdoor ice rink just opened, and I thought it would be better than dragging you to see a film or something,”

“Oh. Really?” I asked.

“And we’re in public, so you don’t have to worry about me trying anything,” He added, fixing me with the single, piercing eye.

“I didn’t think you would! You’re not really-” A hand crept down from my shoulder, sneaking past my waist to rest on my hip, fingers just brushing against my behind. I blanched and jerked away instinctively. “Ah! I take that back! You’re a complete pervert!” My face coloured red as I wobbled, fingers still tangled in the fabric of Kakashi’s shirt as I tried to put space between us. For some reason, I was still smiling, and I couldn’t bring myself to be angry or annoyed. It must have been the
atmosphere, being surrounded by so many happy couples.

“Says the man who bought smut-ridden gay porn,” Announced Kakashi, a little too loudly for my liking. He leaned in close to me, making me blush for a second. Was he going to kiss me or something? Instead, he bypassed my lips entirely. “And read it,” He whispered in my ear, warm breath caressing the cartilage.

“How did you know I- oof!” I tried to be outraged, but ended up toppling over instead, landing rather painfully on my ass.

“Iruka, are you alright?” I glared up at him, a combination of humiliation and outrage in my eyes. This was a conspiracy.

“I-I think I just bruised my coccyx,” I complained, shifting uncomfortably on the ice. I could feel it, cold and damp through my trousers. Great, I was going to have an embarrassing wet patch as well. He lifted a hand to cover a snigger. “It’s not funny! It’s exactly my luck that I end up with a limp or something and then-”

“Every student already thinks we did that, and so does most of the staff. It’s not exactly revolutionary,” He pointed out, offering me a hand again. I marvelled at his ability to stay upright, think straight and bait me at once, despite me falling all over the place.

“But that’s not the point! The point is that-”

“If I buy you a coffee, will you forgive me for dropping you?” I nodded mutely in response, letting him pull me towards the edge of the ice and off the rink, where I could walk relatively better with minimal assistance. Somehow, I still ended up holding his hand. Although it was cold enough for gloves, neither of us had brought a pair, and his skin was hot against mine, keeping my fingers warm. It was kind of nice, actually. So nice that I almost forgot to be embarrassed. At least, until we got the first few questioning looks from other people around us.

I blushed a little, although not nearly as much as before. It was like I had developed some kind of on-off switch for blood flow to my head whenever Kakashi was involved, and I had absolutely no control over it. It was a little unnerving, but it wasn’t unwelcome either. It was strange how things that would have repulsed me a month ago weren’t really so bad anymore.

We made our way over to the skate hire booth, where another hut rested next to it. A girl stood behind the counter, pouring various steaming drinks into Styrofoam cups and handing them out for extortionate prices, giggling with stars in her eyes whenever a cute couple walked past. As soon as she spotted us, I wanted to melt into the ground.

“Can I help you lovely gentlemen?” She asked happily, her bright hair bouncing around her head as she caught sight of our hands, still clasped between us. Oh god, not another fangirl.

“Two coffees, please,” Kakashi said succinctly, digging a wallet out of his pocket.

“Right away!” She bustled around the small, overheated hut, digging out cups and filling them with coffee. It probably wouldn’t be strong enough, but I wasn’t about to refuse coffee. “Here you go, that will be £5.40,”

“Thanks,” He took the cups off her as she grinned from ear to ear, unlinking our hands, and placed one in my newly free hand. I looked at Kakashi over the rim of the cup as I took an experimental sip, smiling somewhat guiltily as I saw him looking right back.

Somehow, we managed to find a table without me tripping over, although there were close calls. I
would imagine minor burns would put a crimp on any date.

Bizarrely, or at least bizarrely to me, the weirdness of the date had just kind of fizzled out. Whatever I had been expecting had been proven to be wrong. Truth be told, I hadn’t even known what to expect, but I had imagined it would be awful and embarrassing and awkward. This wasn’t awful, even if it was embarrassing, but it wasn’t really embarrassing in a way that was really bad. I could get over it because I wasn’t the only one around failing at ice-skating. Just because Kakashi could do it didn’t mean I had to be able to; he did manage to be able to do everything perfectly without trying.

It was still a little bit awkward. We were at a couples-only skating session; therefore everyone around us assumed we were a couple even if I knew we weren’t. It made me think more about my attitude and opinions and feelings towards my date, which was possibly half the reason I kept slipping over on the ice besides my general lack of balance. I couldn’t stop my mind wandering to the warm body I was clinging to like a lifeline.

“You didn’t drop me, you know,” I mumbled from around my coffee cup, staring at my reflection in the dark liquid, considering what I was going to say. He hadn’t dropped me, after all. I was just clumsy and unstable enough to let myself fall.

“What?”

“I’m just a terrible skater, and I don’t think—” I cut myself off. No, there was no way I was going to finish that sentence, never out loud. It was too-

Too what? Too deep? Too cliché? Too true?

“Think what?” He asked, setting down his cup on the frozen surface of the table, looking at me properly.

“No, it’s stupid,“

“Tell me,”

“No way, it’s too embarrassing!” I protested, fixing my gaze on the coffee. I wouldn’t – couldn’t – look up. Not yet. I set the cup down on the table across from his, still looking at the drink. It couldn’t talk. It couldn’t make me feel awkward. It couldn’t make me want to do weird things.

“I’ll find out one way or another, Iruka-sensei,” He said teasingly, fingers creeping across the table.

“Hey, where are you going with my coffee?” I squeaked as one of his hands seized my half-empty cup, and he bolted off towards the ice. Moments later, he appeared at the side of the rink closest to the table, sniffing the coffee delicately.

“This stuff is good,” He crooned, beckoning me closer with his voice. I stayed rigid in my seat. There was no way I could go near the ice without his help, and I wasn’t going to make a fool of myself chasing after him. He took a sip from the cup. “Does that count as an indirect kiss?”

“You complete—” I stumbled on the correct insult. ‘Bastard’ was a little too harsh on a date. “I’m coming to get you!”

After all I didn’t think he would let me fall.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Listen To Your Heart

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And then you took the words right out of my mouth

Oh, it must have been while you were kissing me

You took the words right out of my mouth

And I swear it’s true

I was just about to say ‘I love you’

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I hobbled my way across the solid, nonslip floor towards the entrance onto the ice, the desire for coffee overcoming my lack of balance. There was no way I was going to relinquish my coffee without a fight. I struggled badly off the ice; I already knew the ice was going to be hell, but at least I was moving, and I was upright.

I fixed my glare on Kakashi, who had moved back a little from the entrance, sliding back a little as I moved forward. I wasn’t closing the gap fast enough.

Finally, I reached the border between ice and regular ground. This was it. If I failed here, then the coffee would never be mine. This had to go well.

That was possibly tempting fate just a little too much.

I set one foot on the ice, one on the nonslip ground and pushed off. I shot forward, much faster than I had envisaged when the plan popped into my mind. So fast, even, that it even made Kakashi’s visible eye widen a little, setting his limbs in a braced position as I moved ridiculously fast forward. We collided with a thump; I wrapped my arms around him as my blades caught on his boots, and I ended up twisting to fall backwards, shutting my eyes and bracing myself for the fall.

The fall itself hurt a bit as my back collided with the ice, but something else fell on top of me. Not heavily, but I could feel its presence through my clothes, a warm weight lightly pressing down. I realised my arms were wrapped around it, and that it was breathing.

I cracked an eye open.

“I saved your coffee,” Kakashi said from above me. Our faces were inches apart, close enough to feel his breath, had the mask not been in the way. I felt a bubble of annoyance rising in my chest; what was with the mask, anyway? Never before had I wanted to see a small strip of fabric burn so much.

“Is there anything you can’t do?” I asked sarcastically, marvelling at his outstretched hand. Somehow, he had managed to land without shattering his wrist while keeping most of his weight off me and keeping the coffee upright at the same time.

“I’ll have to think about that one,"

“People are staring,” I said a little nervously. People were pausing to look at us as they skated by, hiding smiles behind their hands. I wasn’t sure what was worse; the ones who giggled like it was
funny or the ones who giggled like it was cute. “Get off me, please?”

The single visible eye rolled in a small circle, and Kakashi’s warm weight lifted off me. It was rather cold down here without him, actually, and I was acutely aware of where he suddenly wasn’t. I think I might have preferred him being on top of me, actually.

I took the offered hand, and pulled myself up into a standing position in the loosest sense of the word. It was mostly Kakashi doing the standing, while I clung like a limpet to his free arm as he dragged us off the ice. I got a few winks from other people who passed us by. I wasn’t sure whether to laugh or blush again. I seemed to be doing that a lot recently.

Once we were off the ice, I took my coffee back and downed the rest in one gulp. There was no way I was letting coffee out of my sight again.

We didn’t return to the ice much after that, mostly sitting around and chatting or watching other couples while sipping coffee. When we did go back on the ice, I managed to fall over no less than seventeen times, eight times of which I fell firmly on my ass. I just knew it was going to bruise, and that I would be sporting an apparently telling limp tomorrow. Fortunately, it was still the weekend so I didn’t have to face the wrath of my colleagues or the kids.

During one of our casual silences, where we just sat and watched the other couples skating in circles around the ice, I carefully watched Kakashi out of the corner of my eye. I was at the right angle to see his half-shut visible eye and what little was visible of his face, the pale skin where the mask ended and skin began. Once again, I wanted to pull off the mask. I wondered exactly what would happen if I dared reach across the table and unhooked it, whether he’d be angry or disappointed with me. I’d already had one opportunity to see what was under the mask, and I had wasted it, but at least it had shown me a way of getting underneath it.

The drunken thing, the making out, nearly-sex, hand job on the floor thing had been my best opportunity. When he had shut me up with a kiss I could have opened my eyes and seen what was under there, although I think I had been too distracted and too drunk to think straight. Yes, I had certainly been distracted; I had been a little busy trying to remember to breathe while he did things that no one else had done in a long time.

It might have been the atmosphere, the coffee or the tiredness that was starting to sink into my bones, but I couldn’t bring myself to feel anything bad about that thing. It was still embarrassing, but I didn’t want to go and crawl in a hole and die because of it. Instead, it had leaked into the bizarre and confusing world of my fantasies.

My new fantasies were humiliating and embarrassing. I didn’t understand them properly, although I was pretty sure I knew what, or who, had caused them. Fuelled by the drunken escapade and the dirty book, any old, vague fantasies about pretty women had long since disappeared. I couldn’t deny that Kakashi had somehow become my object of desire.

I scratched a fingernail into the wood of the table we sat at. There, I had admitted it to myself. Instead of a sudden revelation or epiphany striking me from the back of my subconscious, I just got a quiet, ‘I told you so!’ from Tsunade’s voice.

Told me what, exactly? Mostly Tsunade and everyone else had been trying to force me into gay or whatever, and so far I had managed to prove them sort of right. The object of my desires was a man. A very male man. Surprisingly, I was dealing with it okay. I hadn’t reached for the vodka yet, although that might have had something to do with the very public setting.

The other thing they had been trying to do was set us up to go out, which we were currently doing.
We were on a real, proper, actually-happening date.

And then there was the issue of love. I couldn’t say I loved Kakashi or anyone for that matter since I lost my parents, and I wasn’t sure if I could see it happening or not. But that could have been my parents speaking. If I fell in love with Kakashi, then the chances of my good job, nice house and two point four kids went out of the window. If I wanted to respect my parents’ vision, then I wouldn’t voluntarily choose to love him, but I was reminded by the niggleing thought that it wasn’t exactly a conscious choice.

“It’s six o’clock,” Kakashi’s voice said from the edge of my consciousness.

“Huh?” I said stupidly, not quite taking anything in. I was too busy watching the skaters go round and round while my thoughts spun in my head. I had almost admitted to wanting to defy my parents for a moment there. How odd.

“The rink closes in half an hour, so we should head home,”

“Oh, right. Well, thanks for today,” I smiled at my boots as I unlaced them, carefully not looking in his direction. I didn’t want anyone to see my expression.

“The date technically isn’t over until we’re home,” He pointed out. Plasticised shoelace ends made satisfying snapping noises as I jerked them through holes, wriggling my toes free. It was almost saddening, taking off my skates. It meant the day was over.

“Alright then, feel free to take me home,”

“Anxious to get this over with?” I looked up, a little surprised. Why would he think that? Had I been acting like I wanted to get home fast?

“No, no, I really enjoyed today! Really!” I insisted. With a final tug, my skates were off.

In silence, we made our way towards the skate hire booth, trading the skates for our normal shoes. The ground felt strangely uneasy under my feet, despite the lack of ice.

It’s probably because you’re not holding hands anymore, whispered Tsunade’s voice unhelpfully. I mentally swatted her away, suppressing a little smirk at her antics. Even they were getting less annoying.

My hands were cold again.

“So I don’t have a chance, then?” The conversation started again when we got in the car, Kakashi’s voice completely unreadable. I didn’t dare look at his face again; I didn’t want to see what was in his eye as he asked the question. I didn’t want to see what kind of expectations he had, or any disappointment at my answer, or excitement if I said the wrong thing.

“I never said that,” I said hastily. “I need to think about it before I can give you an answer,”

“I can live with that,”

When we got back to the block of flats, he walked me to my door again, conversation having slipped back towards work. Work was a safe topic. At the door, the conversation paused, an air of expectancy creeping in. It could have been me, with my previous date experience. The girl always gave the guy a kiss as they parted.

A thread of recklessness wove its way into my thoughts.
I rose up lightly onto my toes and pecked Kakashi on the cheek, lips catching both skin and mask, watching as his eyebrow rose into his hairline.

“Goodnight Kakashi!” I said brightly, quickly unlocking my door and retreating through it.

I was going to say, *I don’t think you’d let me fall.* I hoped that was still true.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
It Doesn't Matter

I'm beautiful in my way
‘Cause God makes no mistakes
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way
Don’t hide yourself in regret
Just love yourself and you’re set
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way

I touched my fingers to my lips and leaned against the door, trying not to over-analyse what I had just done. My lips still tingled and my body was awash with adrenaline, pulling my lips into a bodily-drug-induced smile. I had kissed him. How daring!

I knew you could do it! Tsunade squealed happily from the back of my mind, pushing her way forward. I resisted the urge to skip happily into the kitchen, where I put the kettle on and fished an apple out of the fruit bowl. The apple never made it to my lips; no, I wasn’t sure I could use my mouth for a while, or at least until the thrill of my actions wore off.

As I watched the kettle boil, I carefully rested my hands in front of me on the counter, specifically not touching my lips and not giggling. God, I was turning into a virginal thirteen year old girl over this. It was by no means my first kiss, or even my first instigated kiss, and it wasn’t on the lips. We’d done that already.

But it was still kind of significant. I couldn’t say it turned my stomach or made me want to throw myself under the wheels of a bus. On the contrary, I was actually a little bit elated. It was probably a combination of the risk and the adrenaline, but it made me excited, but not in a sexual way. Although I certainly would have been excited if other things had happened, I wouldn’t be in the same mood.

Maybe it was because it was just past the ‘platonic’ line, just crossing into ‘I’m maybe just a little bit interested in you’ territory, or maybe because it was a risk, but I couldn’t help smiling happily as the kettle clicked. Even the click was a happy noise.

I poured the tea and let myself fall into a kitchen chair, mood deflating a little at the prospects of marking. That returned me to another point; Kakashi was a teacher too, so he understood the lifestyle that came with the career. Make no mistake, being a teacher wasn’t just a job for me, it was a whole way of life. From my virtual celibacy at university to my lack of real social life as an adult, my job had consumed everything. Marking, preparing classes, worrying about students, dealing with problem kids, it was all constantly on my mind.

Or at least, it had been until Kakashi had turned up. It was odd how one man could walk through a
door and alter the course of my existence so easily.

But what was it, exactly, that had done it? At first it was annoyance; the nonchalant attitude, the porn, the mask, the lateness. I had wanted to fix that, going as far to suggest ways to combat it in my report to Tsunade, although she had been far less interested in that as in my love life.

Then, it had changed to a sort-of-maybe friendship. Conspiring to push Naruto and Sasuke together, even if it came together without much prompting still created a sense of camaraderie.

Then it got stranger. All the time, people around me, namely Tsunade and students, had been implying that there was something going on. From carefully concealed messages to rumours, it had been everywhere since Tsunade caught me sniffing Kakashi during staff briefing. I wondered how they would react if they knew we had not only gone on a date, but had come close to drunken sex on the floor. Lots of screaming, I’d imagine.

The date was…not what I had expected. Although I didn’t know exactly what to expect, I hadn’t thought ice-skating of all things. It was hardly a traditional date idea, although I had to award points for originality. I couldn’t deny that it was a fun and interesting experience, even though I was embarrassingly bad. The number of times I had fallen down alone was in the double figures, although surprisingly I had only managed to pull Kakashi down once.

A shiver ran down my spine. The way we had landed, his body lightly on top of mine, face inches away brought images from my dream to the forefront of my mind. Was that what I wanted? Did I want Kakashi to-?

I could have smacked myself for being so childish. I was making myself blush at the idea of sexual relations, despite hardly being a virgin. Alright, so I did have zero experience in any kind of sex with anyone but women, but that wasn’t grounds for blushing. That was something girls did.

But that brought me back to my point. Did I want Kakashi to top me in the completely, truly and totally hypothetical scenario of sex?

I picked up my cup of tea and took a strengthening gulp.

Wait, why was I even going there? There was no way I would just have sex with someone for the hell of it, least of all a friend and co-worker, especially one with romantic intentions towards me. Yes, it was the twenty-first century, but that didn’t make it right to have sex with everyone for no apparent reason. I flinched internally a little; that had been exactly what I was doing when I was drunk at Kakashi’s. I hadn’t stopped to think about the repercussions, not even for one second, and even if I had they would probably have only been the repercussions for me. It hadn’t crossed my mind to consider Kakashi’s feelings until much later. Guilt crept silently into my head at the thought, and I shifted uncomfortably in my chair.

No, the drunken thing on the floor hadn’t just been random nearly-sex, after all. It was, in part, what had triggered this date.

My eyes wondered to the photograph of my parents on the windowsill. Wherever my parents were now, I couldn’t believe they would be happy with me if I destroyed their dreams for me. It was all I really had left of them, besides money and possessions.

An idea struck me. I stood up, retrieved my jacket from the chair I had tossed it over and tipped my half-finished tea down the sink. It was already dark, time seeming to have flown since I got home, but the cemetery didn’t close until ten.
I was going to visit my parents.

I shut the door carefully on my way out, tucking keys into my still-damp jeans. I glanced at Kakashi’s closed door as I passed it, wishing for a moment that one of us had all the answers, but I knew neither of us did. I wouldn’t be deluding myself into thinking staring at my parent’s memorial plaque would somehow give me insight into what they would want for me. Even so, I didn’t stop as I walked quickly out of the door, pausing only to note the presence of a certain neighbour’s car before I left.

The cemetery wasn’t too far from my flat. It was past rush hour, so the traffic had died down, the street lamps bathing the world in a golden yellow glow. It was just dark enough for them to be necessary, yet light enough that the yellow contrasted starkly with the dark blue of the sky. It wasn’t unappealing, though.

The cemetery itself was large. Snow had been cleared from the paths and the graves, stacked in towering piles looking over the graveyard like icy sentinels of death. The main feature was the largest memorial, a memorial to people of Konoha who had died for worthy causes; some police officers, soldiers, a politician. The list was eerily long, and it grew every year. Surrounding it, at a respectful distance, were personal graves and memorials. There were some traditional headstones, stone arches rising from the earth to cast shadows over graves in the sunlight, while other smaller, polished plaques looked skyward, slowly collecting dust and dirt. My parents had a shared plaque, their ashes buried beneath it.

I made my way across the cemetery, following all too familiar gravelled paths, glancing at bouquets and wreaths of flowers. Some were fresh, some were shrivelled and old. A few were nothing but rotting piles of brown. I inwardly cursed; I hadn’t brought flowers to my parents’ grave for a long time now.

At last I reached it, the polished granite looking skyward like all the others. Pale grey lettering spelled words I couldn’t bring myself to read. I didn’t like looking at their names or dates, or the generic sentiments I had hurriedly chosen in my grief. I stepped off the path and crouched down, resting one hand on the cold stone.

“Hello,” I didn’t say. “I’m back.”

I paused. How exactly was I going to explain my situation? Even though I knew they were dead and gone, I didn’t know how to tell them about my love life. Before they had died, I had had The Talk with my father about safe sex with my girlfriends, but I was sure he knew I didn’t love them. Teenage like and adult love are two very different things.

“Work’s good,” I silently answered the unasked question. “In fact, that’s sort of what I wanted to talk to you about.”

I stopped again. It was about work, wasn’t it? Kakashi was a colleague; therefore it fell under the umbrella of ‘work’, but at the same time it was already too close to ‘personal’ and ‘romantic’. Could it be under all three at the same time?

“Actually, work is more than fine. I love my job, and I love my students and my colleagues and—”

Wait, I love my colleagues? I suppressed a bout of highly inappropriate laughter. “—and it’s all good. Really good, really. I enjoy teaching, even if it wasn’t what we always intended.”

That brought us back to the subject matter. Intentions.

“I-I’m not good at hiding things from you. You’re my parents, and you know me too well for me to
hide anything successfully, so I’m not going to try. But I think I might have messed things up again. I know I messed things up when I went to university, and I’ve been messing up ever since, but I can’t say I don’t regret my mistakes, because I might have disappointed you.

“But I think I might have messed up worse. I could still have hypothetically met the girl you imagined, but now I’m not sure I want to meet her. Or maybe I already have, but she’s not what you would expect. She’s not a ‘she’ at all, and I don’t know if I love-”

I had come back to it again, that rambling tone that I couldn’t stop spilling into my thoughts and explaining all my darkest, innermost thoughts to whoever would listen. Of course, I wasn’t speaking out loud, so it was better, but at the same time it was worse. I was talking to my parents. The old pang of sadness and grief swept through my body, my vision clouding with the first inklings of tears. It was strange how so many years could pass but I would still cry over my dead parents every time I visited the grave.

Or maybe it wasn’t so strange. Maybe it was normal.

“I don’t know if you’d be happy for me, which is why I came to ask you something. I want to know whether you’d be okay with it – with me and Kakashi as a couple, even if he isn’t a woman. It means we can never have children, and that there won’t be a picture-book family life ahead of me. I don’t even know if it would last forever. But I still wanted to ask. Even if I know you can’t answer.”

Oo.Oo.Oo.Oo
Hope To God

You could crush me
Please don’t crush me
‘Cause baby, I’m a dreamer for sure
And I won’t let you down
I swear this time I mean it

There was no answer. There was no holy beam of light from the sky to directly deliver a message from the heavens to me, no ghostly apparitions, no whisper of wind to indicate my message was heard. I didn’t have a divine revelation. I didn’t get any comfort, or any answers. I was truly alone out here, the cold biting at my gloveless hands and my nose. At some point, a few strands of hair had worked their way loose, hanging down in front of my face in dark threads, slightly obscuring parts of the lettering.

I shifted onto my knees, reaching one hand tentatively forward to trace the engravings, coldly stating the names and dates and vague sentiments surrounding my parents. That was another regret; I had never really thought much about what I would have engraved on the plaque when they died. I didn’t know what to say. But what do you say, when you’re fifteen and you’re suddenly an orphan?

“I didn’t know what to tell you then, and I don’t know what to tell you now,” I admitted silently, tracing the first letter of my mother’s name. “At least when I was fifteen, I didn’t really have to think about my future. I never even really had a rebellious phase, and I think you were grateful for that, but I hope you don’t think this is some kind of rebellion. I promise I did try.”

But still, I couldn’t get rid of the voice at the back of my mind that told me I hadn’t, that I hadn’t tried hard enough. I hadn’t looked for romance at university, and I hadn’t looked for romance seriously since I had graduated. Yes, I was dedicated to my career, but that didn’t mean I had to be a recluse.

“I’m an adult, now, so I should be able to make my own decisions. I shouldn’t even really need you anymore, but I still do. And I need you to accept whatever decision I make, because I think I need to-”

Need to what? Take my own desires into account? If I did that, then I knew what I would let myself do. I would let Kakashi continue to pursue me, and I knew I would give in because I wanted it. Maybe it wasn’t a divine revelation, but it was a small relief to admit it to myself all the same.

“I need to be happy.” I finished lamely. I stroked a thumb over the cold sentiments, brushing a small clod of dirt out of a grey ‘e’. Only then did I let my tears fall, still silent. The whole cemetery was silent. The wind didn’t blow, there were no other visitors, and the caretaker was elsewhere. It was just me and the piece of stone I was pretending to talking to.

Not for the first time, I tried to imagine my life if my parents hadn’t died. Maybe if they had waited just two minutes before setting off back home, or if the drunk driver who collided with them had had just a few drinks less, then my life would be completely different. I probably wouldn’t be a teacher. I
probably wouldn’t have met Kakashi. But that was a completely different life that I would never have, and I couldn’t say whether it would make me happier because I had never lived it.

My parents were dead. I was alive. I wanted to be happy.

I had been happy on the date. It was an easy contentment, comfortably awkward. I could more than live with that, I wanted that. I wanted that contentment, and I wanted to be comfortable. The awkwardness would fade with time, but the happiness wouldn’t.

The sensation of butterflies, bubbles, even spiders in my stomach and electricity across my skin when we touched. The physical desire, the dreams, the drunken kissing and more. I wanted more of that, because it was new and exciting. It meant I wasn’t stagnating, and it would make me happy.

I wanted to be swept off my feet, to fall in love hopelessly and deeply and truly, to never look back and never doubt myself. But questioning meant there was doubt. Asking my parents, even though I knew I wouldn’t get any real, physical answers, was a sign of doubt. I couldn’t help but doubt everything. Did I want Kakashi, or was it that I had just gone too long without sex? Did I want romance, or was it just loneliness?

My parents were silent.

I regretted coming already. All I had done was push myself back. Maybe if I hadn’t come to the cemetery, I would have stayed in my long-passed elation, indicated in some way that I wanted more than just friendship from Kakashi, and refused to look back. But I had to visit the grave sometime, and I had to come to my senses eventually.

It seemed I had lost all common sense since I thought of coming out to the cemetery. For some reason, I had temporarily deluded myself into thinking that I could obtain some kind of answer or comfort or sense of right from trying to communicate with the dead. The dead were gone, and they couldn’t answer. They weren’t real anymore.

No, I could feel my arms around a strong, warm body as my ice-skates slipped. I could smell dogs and musky uniqueness whenever we were close. I could taste him on my tongue even through the alcohol. That was real. This wasn’t.

I stood up and turned my back on the grave, brushing my fingers roughly over my eyes. I could cry over dead parents for them, but not for me. That was just selfish.

My head throbbed with the internal debate. I desperately wanted an aspirin. Confusing myself by filling my head with conflicting arguments was only going to make everything worse, not better. I turned and crouched by the plaque again, sweeping a hand over it in apology.

Somewhere, I registered that parents were supposed to be supportive of their children. They were supposed to love them unconditionally, and want them to be happy.

Somewhere, I accepted this line of argument. I would try to be happy, and if Kakashi was going to make me happy, then I would try. I could always crawl back to my parents for a round of internal ‘I told you so’ if it failed.

I traced the engravings again, tuning out everything but the cold stone in front of me and the sounds around me. Cars from the main road, a police siren in the distance, quiet footsteps somewhere across the cemetery.

“Bye. I’ll visit again soon, I promise,” I whispered. It was okay to talk now; the spell had been broken, and normalcy was returning slowly. Except it wasn’t. “I miss you.”
I began to walk the gravel path back towards the centre of the cemetery, where the stone monument stood. The owner of the footsteps I heard was standing by it, obscured by the shadow of a nearby tree, reading the inscribed names. I was a little surprised; I hadn’t expected anyone else to be at the cemetery so late, especially since it was so cold outside.

So, I had made up my mind to try to be happy, which directly translated to letting Kakashi know he had a chance with me. I had no idea how to do that. I was almost completely uneducated, save for a hopelessly trashy porn book, how two men went about something like that. Sure, the date had been very normal, compared to other dates I had been on, but that didn’t necessarily mean everything else would be normal.

I wasn’t even sure if I was interested in Kakashi romantically. Yes, there was physical attraction, and I loved being around him, but I still didn’t really understand. There was too much-

I stopped dead in my tracks. The figure by the cenotaph stepped out of the shadows and turned to look at me, their face illuminated by the light from the street. Tall, well-built, bizarre hair and a covered face. It couldn’t be anyone else.

But the expression I didn’t recognise. There was a weight to the visible eye I had never seen before, but a weight I immediately knew I never wanted to see again. There was no casual boredom, no mild amusement, just old, painful hurt.

I started walking again, picking up my pace to close the gap between us. It took too much time, but I couldn’t run. The air between us was charged and heavy, almost oppressive, daring me to turn back. But I didn’t stop. I wanted to see that heaviness gone, to make the sadness disappear. He made no move to walk towards me, glancing once at the stone block before looking back to me, head turning impossibly slowly.

At last, I closed the gap. It occurred to me that I had no idea what I was supposed to do once I got there, but my body was running on autopilot. Instead of thinking of something comforting to say, I threw my arms around his neck and pulled him close, shutting my own eyes tight. By the time I had realised what I had done, I shut them tighter, preparing for rejection.

But it never came. Hands rose to my waist, gently pulling me closer still. I breathed a sigh of relief.

I was going to try this time, and try hard. Because it was Kakashi.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
You'll Remember Me

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I've never made promises lightly

And there have been some that I've broken

But I swear in the days still left

We'll walk in fields of gold

We’ll walk in fields of gold

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

There wasn’t anything but the sound and sensation of breathing. The traffic in the distance and the noises of the world outside the cemetery blended into nothingness, leaving nothing but the sound of air escaping our lungs. Mine was somewhat harsher and more ragged, a consequence of my tearful moment and the pace I had moved at to reach Kakashi, whereas his was slower and gentler. I could feel the movement of his chest even through the layers of our clothes.

This was always the case. I couldn’t think of a time when I wasn’t somewhat flustered, uncomfortable or excited, and when Kakashi wasn’t collected and composed, either calm or bored. It was the way things always were.

I wasn’t sure how long we stood there, wrapped silently in each other’s arms, chilled by the cold air and warmed by clinging arms. I was sure, however, that it was infinitely better than being apart.

When I began to shiver from the cold, we pulled apart. I hadn’t dressed properly to come out in such cold weather, especially at night. Kakashi was dressed more sensibly, with a proper winter coat and gloves. It looked like his appearance was planned and deliberate, although there was no reason why it shouldn’t be. People didn’t just randomly go to graveyards to look sadly at memorial stones. They went to see the graves of friends and relatives.

“I didn’t expect to see you here,” He said, words alien in the silence. It felt sacrosanct to break it, but it had to be done. We couldn’t be silent forever, even if the graveyard demanded it.

“I didn’t expect to see you, either. I just decided to come out here,” I replied, my voice equally out of place in the quiet. Hearing my own voice was even odder; I sounded awkward and stilted. It didn’t belong out in the open.

“To visit your parents?”

“Yes. They’re somewhere back there,” I inclined my head a little in the direction I had come from, although it was stating the obvious. People didn’t come to cemeteries for no reason, and this was the major cemetery for Konoha. “I don’t visit them nearly enough anymore. I used to be quite good at visiting them and leaving flowers, but I just kind of…forget, sometimes. Why are you out here, too?”

“Similar reasons. Are you cold?” He said, eye warming a little in concern. My shivering had been getting increasingly obvious, my thin coat nearly useless at keeping the cold out. I liked that concern, that care, the level of desire to keep me safe and sound. It made me feel wanted. A smile twitched at my lips, but I tried not to let it show.
“A little bit,” I admitted, pulling the thin fabric over my knuckles and balling it in my fists. I would worry about stretching the arms out of shape later.

“You should go home, maybe come back in the morning. It’s only going to get colder tonight,”

“You’re staying, then? How did you get here? Your car was still parked outside the flats when I left,” I mentioned the second part quietly, hoping I didn’t sound like a stalker. We lived next door, so surely it was natural to be aware of your neighbour’s car. I certainly was.

“I walked,” He said shortly. I internally raised an eyebrow; he had enough energy to walk out to the cemetery after a full afternoon of ice-skating in which he was doing the majority of the work. It couldn’t be an easy job, looking after a completely inept and unsteady moron trying to balance on a pair of ice-skates.

It occurred to me that today had been full of physical contact. First the hand-holding, though partly out of convenience, that we could get away with because we were surrounded by couples, then the death grip I had on Kakashi the entire time we were on the ice, the chaste kiss outside my front door, and now the embrace by the cenotaph. Every touch was different, but the effect was the same; electric and exciting yet calming and warm at the same time.

The siren outside the cemetery picked up again, its dull wailing breaking the silence again.

“Then let me drive you back. It’s too cold for walking,” I offered. I vaguely remembered I was parked illegally, and the idea of getting a parking fine wasn’t too appealing, but I’d risk it if I had to.

“It’s too cold for anything,” He pointed out.

“That didn’t stop us coming out here, though. Whatever reason you’re here must have been important enough to brave the cold for,” I stated the obvious, trying to work out how to ask why he would come out to the cenotaph. No, I knew he would come here to honour the dead, but I didn’t know who, and I didn’t know how to ask. I wanted to ask, but I didn’t want to bring it up and make things upsetting.

“I come here four times a week, more if I can manage it. I like to read the names on the cenotaph,” He averted his eyes to look at the stone block, flickering back to me in quiet contemplation.

“Did you know someone on it?” I said quietly. I was going to have to risk it. The curiosity was too great, and if I didn’t know I couldn’t make it better. And I wanted to.

“More than one, Iruka,” His voice dropped, soft yet tired, like he had told the story too many times, although maybe not aloud. Sob stories are sometimes best told in silence.

“Can I- can I ask who?” I stuttered, stumbling over the words.

“If you like,”

“Who did you know who’s on it?”

“Minato-sensei is on here, along with two of my friends. My mother and father are buried elsewhere in the graveyard; suicides don’t constitute memorable deaths,”

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have-”

“Minato-sensei died a hero, although I regret a lot of things about my years with him, and I regret never finding his child. Rin died a long time ago, before Minato-sensei, and I regret being unable to
return her feelings for me. Obito died to save me, and that is why he is remembered on this stone. Its better they’re remembered than forgotten.” If it was anyone else, they would have cried, or rambled or been unable to speak. But not Kakashi. I just watched as his eye sunk back into the cold depression that had scared and worried me enough to drive me to embrace him.

It crossed my mind how many people must walk past the memorial stone, but how few people actually stop to read it, or how few people actually spare a second for the people whose names are inscribed on it. How many names had already been forgotten?

There were no memorial services specifically given for the people on the memorial. There wasn’t a uniform religion that dominated the cemetery, either, so any small commemoration services were few and far between. A small article or two may appear in the newspaper, but only when a new name was added. The other names remained forgotten.

“How do you remember them?” I asked softly.

“I talk to them. Ask them for advice sometimes or tell them about my life. I think they’d like to be kept updated,” His eye never left the blocky shape of the stone, tracing the edges and sweeping across the face. Memories flickered through it, light and dark and bright and dim. It was quite mesmerising and astoundingly beautiful.

“Do you ever bring flowers?”

“I always come on the spur of the moment, so I usually forget. It’s the thought that counts more than the wreath, anyway,” The eye warmed a little, pulling a smile from my lips. He held out a gloved hand. “We should go home,”

“We should,” I echoed, taking the hand.

Was that enough? Was that some kind of sign? Was that enough of an indication that yes, Kakashi had a chance with me? I wouldn’t have taken the hand if he didn’t, but at the same time I wanted to say it, but I found I couldn’t force it past my lips.

Instead, we walked in silence down the path and through the gates. Snow began to fall lightly again, depositing a new layer of white on top of an already greyed layer of old snow. The cemetery would need clearing again soon, especially if this new bout of snow lasted long. The roads would need clearing too. I didn’t particularly like driving in the snow; I didn’t like driving much at all, but it was necessary. It was the best method of getting from point A to point B, even if it was expensive and dangerous.

Still, I had to take risks in life, and driving in the snow seemed comparatively tiny compared to what I forced myself to do.

“You have a chance,” I said once we were sitting in the car, completely stationary.

“Thank you.” He replied.

I couldn’t stop the smile from creeping over my face as I pulled out of my illegal space. Good things did come out of cemeteries, after all.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Tell The World

Never guess where I just came from, I had sex
If I had to describe the feeling, it was the best
When I had the sex, man, my penis felt great
And I called my parents right after I was done

I set off extra early for work on Monday morning. It wasn’t because I was avoiding Kakashi. It was just that I wanted to be in earlier, since I hadn’t been in at an ideal time all of last week and I needed to get things done. Sunday had been spent almost entirely in the kitchen, drinking too much tea and marking mountains of upper sixth essays, and I needed to get them in and get them filed away and put in the proper places before students started showing up and making a racket.

Of course, the distracting presence of a certain person wouldn’t be very helpful, either.

The pair of giant, overflowing bags glared at me from the backseat of my car as I drove, daring me to skip the traffic lights or speed up. I resisted them. Just because I wanted to get rid of them didn’t mean I was going to break the law.

I cast a sideways glance at the passenger seat, where Kakashi had been sitting on Saturday night. A small smile crept over my lips when I remembered exactly what I had told him. I had actually done it, despite the gloomy atmosphere and the inner dilemmas. I had let him know he had a chance. More than a chance, if I was being realistic. I wanted this to work, whatever it was.

I still felt a little bit guilty for asking why he had come to the cemetery. It might have been better to take a different route out, or not to ask questions at all, but at the same time I felt somewhat honoured that I could be trusted with such personal information. No one knew very much about Kakashi, which was what had drawn my attention in the first place. Even though that curiosity was being sated, I was still drawn to him.

The school staff car park was nearly empty and completely devoid of other people, students or teachers. The quiet was a nice change from the usual babble from groups of kids hanging around with friends before class, although these days I was more used to whispers every time I walked past, even if I seemed to be in the process of proving their theories correct.

I walked quickly through the near-empty corridors, passing a few keen students and drowsy members of staff, moving towards my classroom. The school was just about perfect before most people got here; quiet, efficient and mostly empty, but then the teenagers and noisier teachers would turn up, and it would all go to hell. Still, it was part of my job description to avert that, mostly through threats of detention and extra work if the kids failed to comply. Most of them obeyed, and the few who didn’t learned quickly if they were smart.

I manoeuvred the door to my classroom open as gently as possible without outright kicking it, dumping heavy bags on the desk without much concern for whatever I had just squashed.

“Iruka-sensei!” A bright, excited voice shouted from behind me. I resisted the urge to collapse on the
floor and die. It was too early for this.

“Yes, Naruto?” I said calmly, turning to face the source of the noise. The offensively bright tie was crooked, but I managed to stop myself lecturing him about proper school attire. When he didn’t answer immediately, I assumed something was up. “What do you want?”

“I, ah, kinda wanted some more advice,” He shifted somewhat nervously, shuffling a foot and smiling like an idiot. This wasn’t going to be good.

“About what?”

“Well, I asked Sasuke out last week. And he said yes,” His smile grew into one of his infectious ear-to-ear grins, and I couldn’t help but smile back, even though I registered at the same time this conversation was probably not going to be so good.

“I know,” I said deliberately, remembering the no-so-subtle make out session Kakashi and I had witnessed not so long ago. People who weren’t going out didn’t make out and weren’t all over each other like that, so it was a given. However, I wasn’t about to admit that I had seen it. That would be creepy.

“How do you know that?”

“Teachers know everything, Naruto,” I replied cryptically, although half the student body had probably already guessed it. Anyone with half a brain could see that Naruto and Sasuke had something going, some kind of painfully obvious attraction that had been there since day one. It had always been just a matter of time.

“Well, if you know everything then you’ll be able to answer all my questions, then!” He said as he moved back to sit on a table. My eyebrow twitched; I hated it when people sat on my desks. Chairs were invented for a reason.

“I’m sure the school counsellor would-” I offered.

“You’re the best person to ask, since you’re going out with Kakashi-sensei, and I don’t really know many other same sex couples-” He interrupted, eyes wide and innocent, but I could see a twinkle of inner pervert lurking.

“But we’re not-”

“-and I thought it would be best to ask you because you’re you. Anyway, Sasuke’s getting worried – the bastard won’t admit it to me, but I know he is really – so I thought I’d ask you-”

“On what basis-”

“-because you know more about being the bottom in sex, and that’s-”

“Naruto! Firstly, stop talking so loudly, and second, stop assuming stupid things!” I said loudly, slamming my hand into the desk to cut him off. If people walked past and heard what he was saying, they’d get a really odd impression of both our personal lives. If Naruto wanted to publicise his love life that was fine by me, although Sasuke might have something to say about it, but mine was strictly off-limits.

“But I really need some help here, Iruka-sensei!” He whined, turning undefeatable puppy eyes on me. I felt my resolve crumbling as I locked eyes with the obscenely big, blue eyes. It was like kicking a puppy.
“Fine, fine, I’ll tell you whatever you want, just stop referring stuff back to me and Kakashi. It isn’t anyone else’s business,” I caved, rolling my eyes.

“You really like him, don’t you?” He said slyly. I refused to dignify that with an answer, although I couldn’t help the small blush that grew across my face at the implications. Everyone else was right, and it was a terrifying prospect to think that I didn’t even know myself well enough to see it before they did. Then again, the student body and gossip mill aren’t really known for their inaccuracy, so I wasn’t really to be blamed.

“If you want advice on sex of all things, ask sensible, relevant questions,”

“Couldn’t you just tell me about it?”

“Couldn’t you just use the internet like a normal teenager?” I suggested, turning to dig through a bag to break eye contact. I wasn’t a parent, and I had no idea how to explain that kind of thing to a kid. There was a reason we hired speakers to come in, or had biology class, or something. That was where we talked about sex, not English literature class. I wasn’t qualified for that kind of thing.

“You can’t tell how accurate the stuff on there is, anyway. Like in porn videos, they never—”

“I don’t need to know what happens in porn videos!” I interrupted a little too loudly, although if porn videos were anything like the book I had, then I already knew. Then again, that book was targeted at women, and gay porn videos would be more male-friendly and possibly more accurate.

“Oh yeah, I forgot. You have Kakashi-sensei for that, right?” Naruto winked cheekily, and I paled a little at the insinuation. I had only just let Kakashi know I was open to the idea of dating and all that, there was no way I’d just sleep with him. Just because I’d dreamed about it didn’t mean I was about to leap into bed with him.

“Can you drop that, Naruto?” I growled, reminding myself that killing students is a good way to get fired and locked up. “Just tell me what you already know about sex,”

“What is this, ‘good parenting one-oh-one’?”

“Just do it,” I rubbed wearily at an eye. If this was what giving the sex talk is like, then having kids in any way was going out of the window. It was terrible, not to mention incredibly off-putting.

“Heh, that’s what she said,”

“Naruto,” My teacher voice emerged at long last, accompanied with a cutting glance in his direction. “Not appropriate,”

“Couldn’t you just assume I know nothing and tell me everything you know? I guess I could just ask someone else. Unless there’s a reason you’re not sitting down,” Once again, I restrained myself from committing murder.

“I’ll assume you know how sex between two men works; insert peg A into slot B and all that. The, ah, dominant partner can’t just start ploughing away without really hurting the other partner, so there has to be a lot of preparation and lubricant. And even then you have to be slow. If it hurts too much, stop, and if there’s a lot of blood, stop,” I gripped the edge of the table, rattling off everything I had managed to pick up from the dirty book. I wasn’t entirely sure how accurate it was, but some of it should be common sense. “Condoms equal safe sex, even if there isn’t a risk of pregnancy, sex isn’t all about penetration, and the emotion is the most important part!” I threw in a couple of generic lines, hoping to distract from the actual physical sex part. The thought of explaining in annotated detail what went where was mortifying.
“And what about like, kinky things? Like bondage and-”

“You’re far too young for things like that!” I half-shrieked, scandalised. How did teenagers even know about these things?

“If I’m old enough to have sex then I’m old enough to be kinky,” He replied, mostly failing repressing laughter. This wasn’t a laughing matter; sex was a serious issue, and alternative bedroom play or whatever was too awkward for words.

“I never said you were old enough to have sex in the first place! Go and chase after your boyfriend or whatever, just get out of my hair!” I demanded. Not for the first time, I cursed the legal age of consent, the media, and oversexed teenagers. Sometimes, this job would be great if it wasn’t for the kids.

“But I still have questions about-”

“If it’s anything to do with sex, ask someone else! Go and look at pornography or something! Talk to Sasuke about it! Just not me!” I said loudly, pointing at the door.

“I’m going, I’m going,” He said, the smile never dropping from his face. “Thanks, Sensei! I really appreciate it!”

I exhaled loudly, glaring for a second at the closing door, daring Naruto to come back. If he did, I would throw a board eraser at him. There was no way in hell I would even think of sex for the rest of the day, not even if Kakashi showed up. I let my eyes droop shut as I sank into my chair, suddenly exhausted. Not everything in life was about sex; it was just another facet of a relationship. Emotions were more important. Even if it was-

“I thought you handled that quite well, Iruka-sensei,” My eyes snapped open at the sound of a certain voice, the mocking tone around ‘sensei’. “And I’m impressed with your knowledge, for a virgin,” Kakashi’s voice whispered, warm breath caressing my ear. I repressed a shudder with unadulterated embarrassment.

“I’m not a virgin, you bastard! I’ve slept with women before!” I yelped. That was an attack on my masculinity, and I didn’t appreciate it one bit. And how the hell had he got behind me so quietly?

“I’m not counting that kind of sex,” He whispered, one hand creeping to my shoulder, the contact fleeting and heavy and seductive all at once, momentarily distracting me from my irritation. Why was everyone so obsessed with sex today?

“I’m not having this argument twice in one day, and if you’re thinking I’ll give in that easily you’re mmm!” I was cut off as my head was jerked around by my pony tail, lips pressed against protesting lips in hot contact. One of my hands automatically rose to swat at him, but somehow ended up resting on his side instead.

This time, although my brain was somewhat distracted, I managed to keep my eyes open. The mask was down, and I could see everything.

oO.Oo.oO.Oo
The Sweetest Dream

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

_ I don't wanna miss one smile _
_ I don't wanna miss one kiss _
_ I just wanna be with you _
_ Right here with you, just like this _
_ I just want to hold you close _
_ Feel your heart so close to mine _
_ And just stay here in this moment _
_ For the rest of time _

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Put simply, Kakashi was-

What, exactly? I couldn’t exactly say he was the hottest thing on two legs, since I had already deduced that before seeing his face. I wouldn’t compare him to a young Greek god on the basis that that would be inaccurate; he looked nothing like the statues or murals or painted pottery I had seen in museums. I couldn’t compare him to famous film stars or models because I didn’t find any of them attractive.

There was no peal of bells, no sparkles and no birdsong. Instead, there was a slightly crooked smile, thin lips framing surprisingly ordinary teeth underneath a straight nose. The smile pulled up more on the left, where more face was covered. It was a shame, really. He had such a beautiful smile.

I couldn’t help the idiot grin that pulled across my face at the prospect of getting to see Kakashi’s face. It was just _there_! In front of me, like it always was, but so much more because I could actually see it all. I tentatively reached a hand up to run a thumb down his uncovered cheek, following the line of a small scar near his lips.

“How did you get this?” I whispered, touching the slightly lighter raised line of skin with a gentle thumb. It ended by the left corner of his mouth, where soft lips began. My fingers joined my thumb, gliding slowly over the pale pink of his lips as they relaxed from their smile.

“Heidelberg duelling scar,” He said shortly, lips tipping up into a smaller smile. It was paradoxical how he could manage to smile and still manage to look somewhat bored at the same time; but there was something else I recognised, the mild amusement that always seemed present whenever I was doing something stupid or vaguely funny.

“I highly doubt that, you-” I started, but I was cut off with yet another kiss. That seemed to be the de facto method of shutting me up today, but I wasn’t complaining. I made a small, slightly annoyed noise, pulling backwards out of the kiss. “We’re at school, stop doing that!”

“Can I do it when we’re not at school?” One eyebrow rose. Somehow, I had always imagined the rest of Kakashi’s face to be rather expressionless, considering how much emotion was displayed
through the eye if you knew how to look, but each little facial expression, each twitch of muscles and each quirk of the lips was a new discovery, and I was hooked.

In fact, I was more than a little hooked. The level of trust it must take to remove the mask is incredible, and it was such a compliment, and it wasn’t one I was sure how to repay. There wasn’t anything I could think of that was really appropriate. ‘Thanks’ didn’t quite cover it. So instead, I darted forwards and pecked the tip of his nose.

“Let me think about that,” I leaned back again, taking in the full picture. From what I remembered of Kakashi’s family photo, he looked a lot like his father. They had the same face shape, the same hair colour, the same eye colour. But his nose was like his mother’s, just subtly different from the very masculine line of his father’s. “Hmm, it depends on whether you keep the mask on or not,”

“Am I really that stunning?” He said, flashing a dangerous smile. I got a good view of his teeth; just off-perfect, not unnaturally white, and straight enough. This close, I could smell his dogs on his clothes and the trace of coffee on his breath. It crossed my mind that it must be rather difficult to eat or drink with a mask on, and I endeavoured to bake more for him in order to see him without it on.

“Not at all. I wouldn’t want to-” I started, but I was shut up with another kiss. This one was deeper, more sexual as he pushed me back in my seat, tipping my head back for better access. Somehow, my hair tie worked its way out of my hair, and my carefully arranged pony tail fell down around my shoulders. Almost instantly, a set of pale fingers weaved their way into it, exactly adjusting the angle of my head. I closed my eyes and went with the sensation as warm lips pressed against mine, moving in a slow rhythm. My lips parted fractionally at a nip to my lower lip, letting a hot, probing tongue dance teasingly across my lips before moving inwards.

For the moment, I had managed to completely forget that I was sitting at my desk at work, and that my workplace was a school. I also forgot that the majority of the female population appeared to be creepily obsessed with my love life, and that Naruto hadn’t closed the door as he left.

Also, I had apparently forgotten to repress any small moans that may have been emerging from my throat.

I didn’t realise exactly why kissing Kakashi in near-public was a bad idea until I heard a string of giggles, the creak of the door opening just a little wider, and the snap of a camera shutter.

I jerked backwards with a small yelp, suddenly coming to my senses. Kakashi’s hands in my hair kept my head almost exactly in place, a half-suppressed smile spread across his face. I suddenly wanted the mask to spontaneously combust, so I never had to go without seeing that smile again.

“Well, that didn’t last long.” He said, mockingly disappointed. A hand unknotted from my hair to set the mask back in place, pulling away slowly. “Although I think we might have just made school headlines,”

I sat there in silence, the implications running through my head. Students had seen us. Not just seen us holding hands or something semi-innocent that I could explain away, but they had seen us kissing. Normal people didn’t just do that on a whim with the nearest random human, so it very much indicated that we were in a relationship. I wasn’t even sure exactly what my relationship with Kakashi even was yet; yes, there was clearly mutual attraction, and one date, but we weren’t going out or seeing each other officially or anything. Now they would all jump to the same conclusion, the exact conclusion I had been trying to deny for weeks.

Worse still, they had photographic evidence, the hardest kind of evidence to fake. No doubt it would be all over the school and probably the internet, too, by the end of the day. Hell, probably within the
hour. And then I would have to face not only my own students and their embarrassing, terrifying questions, but other members of staff.

How the hell had about two kisses turned into my public humiliation?

“Ah yes, I came to tell you that I volunteered us last week to help chaperone the upcoming winter dance,” Kakashi said casually, as though we hadn’t just been caught and photographed kissing.

“What?” My voice was flat. That was possibly an even worse prospect than being publicly outed by some kids half my age. “You do understand what that means, right?”

“We’ll be standing in a corner while the students party,” My eyes widened. That was possibly accurate, but a huge simplification of what would happen. In my first year of teaching, I had somehow managed to get myself involved in chaperoning the winter dance, and I swore never to go near it again. There was a good reason for that. The only thing worse than regular teenagers is drunken teenagers. It’s like giving a rhinoceros cocaine.

“We’ll be pulling random horny, drunk teenagers off each other all night! We’ll be covered in vomit before the first hour is up! And the morning after, we’ll be as deaf as rocks!” I said loudly. “Why the hell would you do that?”

“It’ll be funny,” He replied. “Besides, it’s a good distraction from whatever it was they just saw,”

“I can’t argue with that. Even if I am going to kill you for volunteering me,” My eyebrow twitched slightly. Just because I had been kissing this guy less than two minutes ago didn’t mean I had any qualms about killing him. It was completely justified.

“If you’re going to kill me, give me some advance warning; I need to arrange someone to look after the dogs,”

“You’re missing the point,”

“I know. I’ll see you at break,” He stood up properly, walking backwards towards the classroom door, one hand waving lazily. “Have fun with the students!”

Once he was definitely gone, I turned and slammed my head on the desk. Why hadn’t it occurred to me at the time it was a bad idea to kiss in school? It was probably something to do with suddenly seeing Kakashi’s face.

Yet somehow, it was worth it. Sort of.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Endure

The whole damn world is just as obsessed

With who’s the best dressed and who’s having sex

Who’s got the money, who gets the honeys

Who’s kinda cute and who’s just a mess

Never before had I realistically considered committing mass murder. There were times in my life before where I had had moments where I thought that the world could do with a few less screaming teenagers, but I had never actually constructed a full, fool-proof plan upon which to act.

“Oh my God! It’s true! That’s so cute!”

“Kakashi-sensei and Iruka-sensei were kissing!”

“The photo has been, like, taped to the wall of the girl’s bathroom!”

“There’s a photo? Oh my God, I’ll die if I don’t see it!”

With every word spoken in italics, my will to kill increased. I wasn’t sure how it was possible to speak in italics, but apparently girls had that ability. The plan was slowly falling into place: wait until break time, leave school to buy a gun, hide it under my desk until lunch, and then gun them all down during lunch. Naturally, the main downside to this plan was that I would be committing mass murder and would be sentenced to life in prison for it, although anyone in my position would probably let me off on justifiable mass homicide.

I couldn’t bring myself to go to staff briefing. It would be exactly the same as facing the girls in the hall outside, peeking in through my classroom door. Once I fought my way through the hoards of screaming teenage girls, inside the staff room there would be high-pitched squealing, invasions of personal space and declarations that everything about Kakashi and me was ‘so totally cute’.

In fact, I wanted nothing more than to crawl under my desk with a good book and pretend that I didn’t have to teach today, and that this morning had never happened. Well, the part after the kiss, just the part where I was photographed. I didn’t want to miss a thing with Kakashi, not now I had seen his face. Trust teenage girls to go ahead and ruin the moment.

I was still reeling from the shock of the reveal. Aside from the enormous trust element, just Kakashi’s face alone was enough to shock me. Part of me recognised it was because he had deliberately concealed his face since day one, and suddenly seeing it right in front of me was breath-taking. And then there was his actual appearance. Definitely passable. Okay, maybe more than passable. Definitely more than passable.

For a moment I was grateful to the mask for keeping it all covered up and away from prying eyes of fangirls. It was mine.

The bell rang, indicating the start of registration. Almost immediately, students, mostly female, started
flooding through the doorway. Most of them didn’t even bother to disguise their curious glances and adoring stares, clearly picturing Kakashi all over me. I repressed a shudder; it was one thing to be undressed by someone’s eyes, but it was something entirely else when the person to whom the eyes belonged was half your age and picturing you with someone else, equally undressed.

“Good morning, Iruka-sensei!” Naruto’s excited voice called from the doorway. I looked up, slightly shocked. The apocalypse must be on the way if Naruto was turning up early.

“Sit down and be quiet. That goes for all of you,” I grumbled from the front of the classroom, although I doubted anyone heard me. Even if they did, gossip was far more important.

“Hey, Sensei! Is it true? Are you actually going out with Kakashi-sensei?” One girl called from somewhere near the back, eyes bright with excitement.

“Of course it’s true, they were kissing!” Another girl replied, equally loud. She turned around to face the first girl, pulling out her mobile phone and pressing buttons. From my angle, I could vaguely see a small, awkwardly coloured image on the screen. It was the photo. The only photo that currently mattered to anyone, featuring me and my love interest-date-guy-colleague-thing, and I couldn’t even get a good look at it. If luck wasn’t clearly already not on my side, it would have taken a turn for the worse. Short of a meteor falling on my head, it wasn’t getting any worse.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean they’re going out,"

“Is Iruka-sensei really the type to just kiss anyone, though? We’ve never seen him with anyone before, and according to Tsunade-sama-

“Oh yeah, I nearly forgot! The old hag wants to see you, Iruka-sensei! She told me to tell you to go see her once you’ve registered us, and apparently it’s really important!” Naruto yelled over the girls from the back of the room, the girls continuing their minor squabble about my love life somewhere in the background. He grinned excitedly, turning on the unfortunate sitting next to him. “I bet it’s about the photo!”

“What else would it be about, dobe?” Replied Sasuke. Despite their apparent relationship upgrade, if the terribly embarrassing sex talk was anything to go by, things seemed absolutely normal between them. They still insulted each other and fought casually, but there was some kind of loving undertone to their arguments. Their insults seemed to be more endearing than anything else. I vaguely wondered if that was how Kakashi and I came across, when we talked.

“You’re just hung up on the fact I have a photo of you drunk off your face with your hand down my-

“That’s enough!” I shouted before the conversation got obscene, a vein in my forehead beginning to throb. The class quieted for a second, survival instincts kicking in. “Just shut up for one minute, then you can gossip to your hearts’ content,”

“Even about you, Sensei?” One particularly brave or stupid girl said.

“No,” I dug around in a bag for my register, refusing to dignify that with a look. I could already imagine the dazed stars twinkling in the backs of her eyes as she imagined exactly what Kakashi and I would look like, dripping with honey as we licked each other’s-

Okay, not going there.

“But you said we could gossip, and that’s all we want to talk about,”
“At least pretend not to be talking about me until I’m gone! Isn’t that good bitching practise or something?”

“Oh my God, Iruka-sensei swore! The end of the world is nigh!” Naruto yelled from the back. I winced at the volume level, sure that several of the window panes were one more scream from shattering.

“Naruto! One more outburst and you’re in detention until you’re dead, got it?” I growled, stabbing my register with a pen. That mass murder plan was looking increasingly viable.

Once they were all registered, the babble started immediately and I was out of the room like a shot. Even if it meant subjecting myself to the terrors of Tsunade, it had to be better to hearing the theories about anything related to Kakashi and myself.

About half way there, I realised that was exactly what Tsunade was going to do, but it was too late to go back and pretend Naruto had forgotten and never given me the message. I walked significantly slower from there one.

When I knocked, the familiar metallic thump of a stapler hitting too close to the door for comfort echoed through the wall, and I let myself in. There was no way I was prepared for what was on the other side.

“Iruka-chan! I’m so proud of you!” Squealed a very drunk Tsunade, surrounded by all the female members of staff. My eyes widened. How was this even possible? Didn’t they have their own forms to register? They stood in a cluster by Tsunade’s desk, all with identical ear-to-ear grins plastered across their faces, some clutching copies of the photo in their hands, one or two giggling tipsily from the back.

“W-what?” I choked. That was apparently all the provocation they needed. All of them rushed forwards, trapping me with outstretched arms and tugging me around like a ragdoll, clinging onto me at awkward angles and screaming or pushing my clothes back in search for god knows what.

“Congratulations on your success!” Tsunade’s excited, drunken voice called above the racket of giggles and squeals emanating from my female colleagues. My head was pulled back by my hair as someone began scanning my throat for love bites, and I was suddenly intensely aware that my hair was loose, and that Kakashi had done it. What was it about my hair that was so pull-able?

“Success – with – what?” I said forcedly from beneath the dog pile of women, who were steadily pulling me to the floor.

“This!” She waved a large print-out of the photograph in front of me.

From the angle the photographer was at, it looked much more passionate and sexual than it had really felt. I looked almost wanton, with my head thrown back and a hand clutching onto Kakashi’s side as he ravaged my mouth. Fortunately, all of his face was hidden behind my head, but the photo compensated for that. I looked very much the lustful maiden, despite being clearly male, to his handsome, dashing prince. The setting, my own desk, made it all the more personal and all the more forbidden.

Forget shooting everyone at school. I was going to shoot myself.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Like

I was like, she was all, he was all, they were like, we were all

Like oh my God, like, totally, we were like, I was all, they were

All, he was like, she was like, oh totally, like oh my God

“Here’s the plan,” Tsunade said happily. She rolled up the large picture of the kiss and moved to stash it away, and for the first time since I was a child I tried to set something on fire just by glaring at it. Unfortunately, probability was not on my side today, and the piece of paper remained fully intact. I had a nasty feeling that no matter how many copies of the photo I destroyed, the master copy would be carefully protected. “We’re going to keep you in here until you tell us exactly what Kakashi looks like under the mask,”

“And what he’s like in bed!” Anko giggled from somewhere behind me. It looked like Tsunade wasn’t the only one who had been sipping the sake.

“I-I wouldn’t know!” I stuttered, blushing. Seriously, why was everyone so obsessed with my sex life? I didn’t even have a sex life until recently, and it hadn’t been fabulously exciting or anything. There hadn’t even been any actual sex. Maybe sex life was a bit of a stretch. ‘Kissing and groping’ life might be more appropriate.

“Yeah, right. Spill it all, Iruka-chan!” Tsunade smirked, although the would-be smug and slightly intimidating effect was dimmed by the alcohol.

“And stop calling me ‘Iruka-chan’!” I spluttered. Why the hell were they all doing this? At school I was definitely ‘sensei’, it was in my job description. Besides that I really, really hated pet names. It possibly stemmed from my hilarious first name; people quickly learned not to make dolphin references after the first few rants and raves.

“Oh yeah, I forgot that right was reserved for the boyfriend,” The smirk deepened, taking on a knowing edge. Why the hell were they all doing this? “Anyway, tell us!”

“Oh what?” I replied, shooting back my own menacing, challenging look. For one, I wasn’t going to tell anyone what Kakashi looked like. That would be a huge betrayal of trust, one I’m sure we would never recover from. The thing we had, whatever it was, was good the way it was. Glimpsing the face, even for just a few minutes, was indescribably special.

Secondly, they had me pinned to the floor and preventing me from teaching. I wasn’t going down without a fight, even if they were women.

“We’re going to keep you here all day long,” She said lowly, quickly enhancing the effect by reaching for the bottle of sake perched precariously on top of a pile of paperwork. I briefly wondered whether Shizune was in on this, and if she was how Tsunade had managed to bribe her into getting out of doing paperwork.

“But what about our classes? The kids aren’t going to teach themselves!”
“I already got the guys on it,”

“But what if—”

“Who cares? I’m headmistress, I can do whatever the hell I like! Now tell us what Kakashi looks like!” The bottle was slammed down on the table with a dull *thunk*, and every pair of eyes in the room turned to look at me. Some of the female members of staff holding copies of the photo even turned them to face me.

And so the assault started.

“And what he’s like in bed!”

“Is he a good kisser?”

“How big is his-?”

“Have you gone on any dates?”

“Does he have any interesting kinks?”

I could feel their pink-tinged voices sink into my psyche, joining my inner-Tsunade in bombarding me with inappropriate questions. I thought I would go deaf from the high-pitched screaming. They didn’t let me up for a second, their small, feminine bodies pinning me to the floor. It didn’t even cross my mind that it could be interpreted as being sexual in any way. They were just weapons under Tsunade’s villainous control.

About ten minutes of torture later, there was a knock at the door.

“Come in!” Chorused the pack, eyes narrowing as the door swung open, turning to glare at whoever was interrupting their interrogation. I seriously pitied whoever it was; they were about to get the shock of their life, and then be torn limb from limb by the apparently rabid female teachers. What a horrible way to die.

“Maa…Iruka-sensei, I never knew you were such a ladies’ man,” I slowly craned my head back to face the open door. Kakashi leaned casually against the door, one eyebrow subtly raised. I could imagine the expression behind the mask; slightly amused, a twitch of the lips despite the mostly bored look in the eyes.

I could practically feel the tension rising in the room. Every single face was turned towards Kakashi, one dilemma clearly on all their faces: to seize and interrogate or to seize and remove the mask?

Before any of them could make a move, the sake bottle hit the table with another clunk. All eyes shot back to Tsunade, who was perching tipsily on her desk, rolling the bottle around its circular base.

“Don’t worry, Kakashi, he’s all yours,” Tsunade said, smiling drunkenly. “But before I let you take him away and ravage him or whatever it is you kids do these days, I wanted a word,”

“About?”

“The upcoming winter dance. The student council did a fabulous job this year, and we have all the chaperones we need, thanks to you two. Specifically, I want you two to put this—" She reached behind her, fumbling for a moment until her hand came forward again with a small envelope. A couple of the women on top of me giggled. “-with the kids on the ticket desk. They’ll know what to do with it,”
“And our payment for this is…?” Kakashi ventured.

“Eternal glory,”

“For watching a bunch of teenagers get drunk and grind on each other?” He said. I repressed a snigger; if my previous experiences and my own high school dances were anything to go by, that was exactly what would happen. Somehow, someone always managed to smuggle alcohol in, and almost everyone managed to get at least one mouthful of it. Those who got more an a few gulps started performing some clothed yet still obscene pseudo-mating ritual with a member of the opposite sex. As chaperones, we would have close to no power short of sending kids home and pulling them off each other. The chaperones never found the alcohol; possibly because the kids somehow downed it all before we had a chance to search properly. It was amazing no one died of alcohol poisoning, really.

“That, too,” She said shortly. “Now, everyone get the hell out of my office before Shizune gets back,”

At once, all the women let go of me, leaving me sprawled awkwardly on the floor. Kakashi offered a hand, earning a grateful smile from me and a couple of squeals from onlookers. We all scuttled out, all the ladies shooting Kakashi and me gleeful looks as they practically skipped down the hall back to whatever class they had abandoned. Somehow, our hands hadn’t managed to unlatch after pulling me up, which was possibly the source of the squealing.

I dropped his hand like it was red hot and took a couple of steps away. Part of me recognised this was completely ineffectual; most of the student body already had photographic evidence of us doing much worse than just holding hands, but it was still a public display of affection, and I wasn’t entirely comfortable with that. Even if I did feel strangely colder and a little guilty for it.

“You do realise you’ve just signed both of our death warrants, yes?” I spoke up, looking at Kakashi out of the corner of my eye. In once glance, I was already acutely aware of his presence. I followed every step, every motion and every movement with my eyes. It was absolutely intoxicating.

“Don’t blow it out of proportion,” He sighed.

“We’re going to die at this dance, mark my words. Have you ever seen a room full of drunk, randy teenagers? It’s like an orgy, but with added clothes,”

“We can treat it like a date if you want to,” I actually turned my head to face him at this; a date? At the winter dance, which was closer to mediaeval torture than fun when it came to chaperoning duty?

Actually, I could see the point. It would be dark, there would be dancing, and there would be couples everywhere. Since we had essentially been outed to the entire school, it wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to be standing in a corner and watching the kids together. It would be sort of like attending the dance as a student, only with less dry sex.

“We’re chaperones, not students,” I pointed out. We weren’t going to the dance to have fun; we were going to stop the kids doing unspeakable things to each other in the middle of the dance floor. Or outside. Or in the bathrooms. Or in their cars.

“That doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy the dance,”

“Generally, yes it does. We’re there to stop the kids enjoying themselves,” And each other, I added silently.

Sometime during the conversation, I had moved back to his side, and I had the oddest sensation I had
already agreed to whatever he was proposing. After all, it couldn’t be that bad if he was there.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Let It Go

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

So raise your glass if you are wrong
In all the right ways
All my underdogs
We will never be, never be
Anything but loud
And nitty gritty dirty little freaks
Won’t you come on and come on and raise your glass
Just come on and come on and raise your glass
oO..Oo..oO..Oo

The weekend rolled around far too quickly for my liking. Not only had the evenings flown past, letting marking pile up into mountains of epic proportion, looming over me like some kind of malevolent fate. Even worse than the marking was the dance, which made the marking look positively easy and fun in comparison.

Before I knew it, I was dressed in my best suit and tie; just because I was dreading chaperoning the dance didn’t mean I was going to dress sloppily. And the fact that it was another date with Kakashi might have had something to do with it. How did I know it was a date? Specifically because I was perched on the edge of my sofa, glaring holes through the wall in the direction of my front door. The parallel to the first date was unmissable; he was already late, despite the fact we had to get to the school before the kids started showing up in droves.

I resisted all and any temptation to get up and start pacing. Nerves fluttered like butterflies in my stomach, completely irrationally of course, but they were present all the same. My mind couldn’t help but speculate on what might happen; whether or not Kakashi would turn up, even though I knew he would eventually, what would happen at the dance, whether or not anything might happen at the dance, and what it would be like. It was our second official date, but the first one surrounded by people we had to see almost every day.

In all honesty, I didn’t want to be outed at my workplace in the way it had happened. I would have much preferred it to be on my own terms, rather than being photographed opportunistically by some obsessive teenage girls. I supposed I was technically dating Kakashi, since we went on dates, but we weren’t going out. I couldn’t refer to him as my boyfriend, or whatever the applicable term was.

In fact, I found it rather surprising how well I was taking everything compared to how I could be acting. I had given him a chance, instead of pushing him away very violently. I hadn’t actually murdered anyone at work, despite the temptation. Hell, I had confronted my dead parents about it all, although that was possibly an indicator that my mind was collapsing.

I was pretty sure I was mentally sound. Probably.
Either way, there wasn’t anything I could do about the week’s events. Mostly I had spent the week dodging groups of girls demanding to know various highly intrusive questions while Kakashi mysteriously vanished every time a group drew near. I had a sneaking suspicion he was on the sidelines somewhere, laughing.

At long, long last, there was a short, sharp knock at my front door. I shot up from my position on the sofa and marched towards the door, wrenching it open and glaring at my unfortunate date on the other side.

“Before you start, I’m sure there’s a good and vaguely philanthropic reason for your lateness, which you can tell me once we’re in the car. Now let’s go,” I said snappily, although I couldn’t help but smile a little as I took in his appearance. We were required to follow the dress code for the dance, which meant proper, formal suits. For once, possibly the first time I had ever seen it, every button was done up, the smart black tie was tightened properly, and the shirt was tucked in. In short, he looked stunning. The suit clung in all the right places, emphasising his masculinity. Who could be mad when something like this appears on your doorstep?

“Excited, are we?” One fine eyebrow rose amusedly, traces of a smile creeping across the visible portions of Kakashi’s covered face. I resisted the urge to rip it off and get a proper look; I could already see in my mind’s eye exactly what was going on under there. His face was something I could never forget.

“Hardly,” I replied.

The trip to the school took barely any time at all, a combination of light traffic, nervous quiet and anxious anticipation. Despite my not-so-voluntary position as chaperone, I knew little about the dance. I couldn’t remember any themes, but I doubted there would be one. The organisers had begged the use of the sports hall of Tsunade, so all physical education had consisted of running laps of the tennis courts since Wednesday while the organising committee decorated it in their free time. The doors had been locked, so only a select few knew what it was going to look like.

Somewhere during the car journey, it dawned on me that this was a second date. What, exactly, was the etiquette for a second date? What about holding hands and kissing and whatnot? Would I be expected to dance? Instead of deciding answers to those questions, I steeled my mind. I had a job to do, and I wasn’t going to be distracted from it. Not even by Kakashi.

The plastic sign that announced the name of the school was hung with streamers and balloons. I had a bad feeling about it already. The gates to the car park were already open, similarly covered in bright decorations. I couldn’t make out the colour too well in the darkness, but it couldn’t be a good sign.

“You ready?” He said, shutting off the engine. I nodded once, and opened my door. The night air was refreshingly cold, the smell of city and aging snow in the air. There were few cars in the car park; either we had managed to be early, or students were walking. I was betting the former, despite the improbability.

I kept my eyes on the ground as we walked forward, polished black of my shoes blending in with the dark tarmac. The sound of music drifted across the open area from the sports hall. My hands pulled the sleeves of my suit jacket down across my knuckles, shivering slightly.

As soon as we stepped through the doors, the heat and the noise assaulted us almost violently. The room was hot and dark, lights glowing dimly from corners towards the cleared space for dancing. Towards the back, a sound system was set up, pumping music out of speakers set strategically around the room. Sets of chairs and tables were placed around the border of the room, leaving space
near the front for a table mostly covered in snacks and drinks. I wondered how long it would take for half of those drinks to become toxically alcoholic.

“Kakashi-sensei! Iruka-sensei! I’m so glad you could make it!” A voice called over the music, drawing my attention to a girl sitting behind a desk. I had completely overlooked her; she blended in fantastically well with the overwhelming surroundings.

As my eyes adjusted to the low light, I could see exactly why she blended in so well with the surroundings. There did seem to be some kind of theme, although it wasn’t really very controversial, or even very annoying. Everything, from her dress to the streamers to the table cloths, was red. Not just a bright, happy, shiny red, but a dark, lustful, passionate scarlet.

“Iruka-sensei, I want you in the far left corner and Kakashi-sensei directly opposite. Is that okay?” Her quick, hurried tone of voice made it clear there would be no arguing. “Enjoy the dance!”

I watched as Kakashi drew the envelope Tsunade had given him out of his inside jacket pocket, placing it on the desk and quietly thanking the girl. She slit it open with one red-painted nail, eyes widening dreamily as she looked at the contents. I moved forward and seized his hand and dragged us away from the desk. If the girls were getting that dreamy look, it could mean only one thing. Humiliation was imminent.

I located a couple of chairs in a corner and sat down huffily in one of them, eyes fixed on the door. In my head, I began to formulate some kind of backup plan; if a bunch of screaming teenage girls burst through the door and demanded Kakashi and I do something ‘totally cute’, there were fire exits in four different locations, and they all set off sprinklers set into the ceiling if opened while armed. Cold water tends to put anyone off.

Each time the door opened, I braced myself for the worst. Fortunately, for the first half an hour, all the girls who arrived had dates to distract them. My own date waved occasionally from across the room, small book having emerged already, and although our eyes never met he always seemed to know when I was looking at him.

“Let’s get this party started!” A positively ecstatic voice yelled from the entrance. All eyes turned towards the speaker, silhouetted in the door frame. “Naruto has arrived with his sexy boyfriend, and it’s time to party!”

I resisted the urge to smack my head into the nearest wall. It looked like the alcohol had arrived.

This was going to be a long night.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Taking Over

Now what?

We’re taking control

We get what we want

We do what you don’t

Dirt and glitter cover the floor

We’re pretty and sick

We’re young and we’re bored

“Naruto and Sasuke!” I shouted over the racket. “For the sixteenth time, keep it clean!”

Once again, I was completely ignored. I knew they heard me; two pairs of eyes flickered vaguely in my direction before reverting to each other, slightly hazed with the alcohol I knew they had consumed before coming, but since they weren’t completely wasted and weren’t carrying any alcohol on them they got to stay.

So, naturally, their dancing was closer to a mating ritual than to an actual dance. It was incredibly uncomfortable watching any of the many couples grinding on each other, hands in places where hands shouldn’t go outside of the bedroom and hips moving in obscene rhythms.

The music didn’t help. Whoever had picked the playlist had possibly picked the most inappropriate songs ever to play at a school dance. Every single song seemed to be centred on the very passionate, very sexual romance of two or more people, complete with bizarre euphemisms and fast, heavy rhythm. With music like that, it was no wonder the kids were acting upon their carnal desires.

The darkness of the room had steadily changed over the two hours I had been spending sitting gloomily in a corner from smothering to comforting. The darker it was, the more I could pretend I didn’t see what was going on. Although they were few and far between, there were some couples who were getting rather into it not so far away, and I couldn’t help but blush furiously whenever I saw it. Didn’t they have any shame at all?

The song playing finished and students began drifting on and off the dance floor, either in pairs or in groups. Those leaving headed for friends sitting at tables, for the snack table or for the bathroom.

Come to think of it, they were using the bathroom an awful lot considering how little of the provided drinks were disappearing. I kept my eyes fixed on the door, watching as another couple stumbled out of the door, hands swinging happily between them, the same hazy look in their eyes suddenly very recognisable. A loud giggle burst through the chatter between songs as the girl stumbled, pulling at their linked hands to stay steady. Something was definitely going on in there.

I looked across the room towards Kakashi, who was leaning against the opposite wall, porn in hand. His eye was on me this time, the first real eye contact since we had taken our positions in the hall. I
jerked my head once in the direction of the bathroom. He shook his head once, a ‘don’t get involved’, resettling against the wall. I frowned, and waved impatiently. Even though his face was completely shadowed, I could practically see his eye rolling as he pushed away from the wall, navigating the space between us, sidestepping couples and dodging groups.

“Something’s going on in there, and I want to check it out."

“Are you sure you need my help for this? I was just getting to a good part,”

“I think the safety of the students takes precedence over your pornography, Kakashi,”

“Alright, alright, let’s go and have a look,”

The corridor leading to the bathroom was dingy and smelled like bleach. Someone had turned off the lights, and the only illumination was coming from underneath the disabled door. I lead the way, pushing down on the door handle and peeking around the corner, listening carefully for any unusual sounds.

Fortunately, the small room was empty of people, and remarkably clean. I shrugged and stepped forward, pulling Kakashi along with me. I moved towards the back of the bathroom, looking behind the sink in the corner, checking for any bottles of illicit substances or suspicious bags.

“I don’t think there’s-” I started, cut off as the door slammed shut, metallic noise of the key twisting in the outside lock. “-anything here,” I finished lamely. Squawks of half-hysterical laughter slipped under the door.

“Iruka-”

“Unlock this door immediately! This is completely inappropriate behaviour for students, especially tonight! If you don’t want to be removed from the dance and put in detention for the next month, I suggest you open this door right now!” I yelled, marching over to the locked door. I pushed on the handle, knowing it was entirely futile but hoping somehow the force of my anger could open the lock. If the lock knew what was good for it, it would just bend to my will and we’d all get out of here in one piece. This was exactly why I didn’t want to chaperone a bunch of teenagers; they were smarter than we gave them credit for, and I had fallen right into their trap. If anything, I was as angry at myself for not realising it as I was at whoever locked us in here.

“Iruka-“ Kakashi started, placing one calming hand on my shoulder. I shrugged it off, trying the door again, resisting the urge to kick it like a child.

“Not only will you be removed, but I will personally escort you to Tsunade-sama’s office on Monday morning for this-” Kakashi’s hand returned to my shoulder, spinning me around. “What? What could be so urgent that you mmf!”

Warm lips covered mine, cutting off my indignant speech. I opened my mouth in a small gasp of shock as my head collides with the door, the hand on my shoulder pushing me back none too gently, and I let out a muffled noise of mild protest that came out all too like a moan as his tongue slipped past my lips and flicked across mine. I cracked open an eye I hadn’t realised I had shut, catching the playful challenge in the dark eye just a few inches away. I kissed back, my lips curving into playful arcs as I moved my own tongue back in challenge. My hands rose up to grip his shoulders, fingers digging distractingly into the dark material covering his shoulders.

Somehow, with one messy kiss against a bathroom door, I had managed to completely forget about being pissed off. In fact, the only thing I could coherently think about was the man attached to my
lips. So much so that when he pulled away for air, the first thing I did was not to yell or swear or glare at him. The first thing I did lean back in for more. It was completely intoxicating, no doubt partly because of the forbidden location. We were in a bathroom at the school dance. A dance where we were supposed to be preventing students from doing exactly what we were doing.

That shocked me into pulling away again before I got too carried away. We had to get out of here and get back to the main hall before something happened.

“Do you have any hair pins?” Kakashi asked, voice completely composed as he returned the mask to its normal position. I stopped myself pouting; I really liked looking at it.

“Do I look like the kind of guy who wears hair pins?” I replied, raising an eyebrow at the ridiculous statement. Yes, I had long hair, but I was not a woman. Just because I owned and wore hair ties didn’t mean I had a variety of other accessories for my hair.

“Yes,” He said. I could hear the teasing smile in his voice, and I had to physically restrain myself from reaching out and tugging down the mask to see it, and possibly attaching my own lips to it. There was something oddly sexy about that voice.

“No,” I narrowed my eyes a little, although my glare was more playful than menacing.

“Then I think we’re stuck here until-” He said, cut off as the metal of the lock clicked. I stepped to the side a little, automatically putting space between us. Just because we had already technically been found out already didn’t mean I wanted people to get the wrong idea. Even if we had been kissing.

“Kakashi-sensei! Iruka-sensei! I’ve been looking everywhere for you!” The girl from the ticket desk opened the door, keys hanging from her fingers. “No one had any idea where you might have been, and then someone said you two had probably gone off to find a quiet corner, so I assumed you’d be around here. Why did you lock yourself in, though?”

“We didn’t,” I protested, somewhat futilely. I could see the glint in her eye as she put surprisingly accurate ideas together; gaining a look I’d seen on Tsunade when she was planning something sinister. A small shiver ran down my spine. This probably wasn’t going to end well.

“Well, you’re out now, so maybe you can get back to the dance now?” This girl was going to make a fantastic manager one day. We followed her mutely back into the hall, the darkness seeming all the more smothering compared to the bright light of the bathroom. Instead of going back to his own corner, Kakashi stayed with me. I felt a smile spread across my face; after what had just happened, being abandoned wasn’t all too appealing.

The song over the sound system came to an end with a click, and the buzz of a microphone filled the room. I looked towards the back, where a student stood holding the innocuous pink envelope from Tsunade, now torn open.

“Attention, all students,” He said, clearing his throat. “Please move to the sides of the room, because we have a special request from our headmistress, Tsunade-sama. As she generously allowed us use of the sports hall for tonight, she has sent us a song request. Kiba, if you please,” He waved a hand towards the sound system, and a rather familiar song filled the hall.

My heart nearly froze in my chest. So far, every song had been upbeat and fast, but this song was slow and melodic. It was a slow dance song. Although it meant that the kids would hopefully stop attempting to do each other in the middle of the hall, it meant it was couple time. All the school’s
official couples would be expected to demonstrate themselves, as per social standards. It was like an announcement, a statement to all the people in the room that the two dancers were together.

Normally, I would be able to deal with this. The one time I had been roped into chaperoning before, I stood on the sidelines and watched as young love blossomed on the dance floor and I thought poetic thoughts, revelling in the calm and relative quiet before the pace picked up again and we were back to grinding. But this year, I was half of an official couple myself. The choice weighed heavily on me at the very thought of the dance, of confirming further to the student body that I was indeed dating Kakashi.

Fortunately, the decision was made for me.

“May I have this dance, Iruka-sensei?” Kakashi asked, extending a hand. The vague amusement had returned to his voice, and the rush from the bathroom was still very present. There was no way I could resist him.

“Why not?” I replied, taking it.

Maybe this evening hadn’t turned out so bad after all.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
See What I See

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

When I see your face

There’s not a thing I’d change

‘Cause you’re amazing

Just the way you are

And when you smile

The whole world stops and stares for a while

‘Cause girl, you’re amazing

Just the way you are

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

So there I was, being led by the hand to the centre of the dance floor. I could feel every pair of eyes in the room on us, and I could practically hear the unanimous verdict; they’re going out. They’re a couple. They’re together. If anyone had told me, or pretty much anyone else in the entire hall that I would be dancing with my date at the winter dance, and that said date would be another guy, I would probably have told them to stop daydreaming. Unless they were Tsunade, in which case running very fast in the opposite direction.

Part of me still wanted to run. Even if it was too late to deny everything, considering the photograph of our kiss in my classroom, the first date, the drunken accidental thing, the dreams and the fantasies, part of me still wanted to run. If I ran, then I wouldn’t be hurt if everything collapsed around me, and I wouldn’t feel humiliated or mortified if something happened, and I wouldn’t have to think about what I expected of myself if I let this continue.

The much more sensible part of me promptly shut down this argument. I recognised, for the most part, most of those arguments were completely invalid. The entire risk of getting into a relationship was the risk of heartbreak. If it doesn’t hurt when you split up, or even think of splitting up, then what was the point of going there in the first place? If something happened and I didn’t feel at least a little bit embarrassed I was probably going insane, since I seemed to feel that way about nearly everything. And realistically, I knew what I expected of myself already.

But the biggest point was that turning and walking away wouldn’t hurt just me. If I let go of Kakashi’s hand and ran away I’d be hurting him, too. It hadn’t been all about me since I started referring to us as ‘us’.

So I let myself be led onto the dance floor, right into the middle. Lights glowed dimly overhead, the soft lighting casting shadows over Kakashi’s face, obscuring further the few parts I could see. Although I had only seen his uncovered face twice and though both times I was rather distracted, I could remember every detail. I could imagine the small, victorious smile, tugging slightly on the small scar to the left of his lips. He wouldn’t blush; I could manage that for both of us.

His warm hands took my wrists, gently pulling my hands into place on his shoulders before
retreating down my body to rest on my hips. I raised an eyebrow, but didn’t audibly complain. Why the hell was I *always* the girl?

We started swaying gently in time with the music. All kinds of ridiculous fluffy metaphors sprung to mind, usually involving the dark, midnight blue oceans and the surging tides, or stalks of golden wheat in a lush field or something equally superfluous. No, that kind of thing belonged in the ‘reject’ pile at publishing houses, and failing that in the sex scenes of bad erotica. I suddenly felt like I was starring in one when hands began to drift from my hips and stray downwards. I squeaked indignantly and closed the gap between us, trying to evade the hands. Naturally, it didn’t work, so I settled for glaring at Kakashi instead.

“If we’re going to do this, at least set a good example,” I said, suddenly cursing our slight height difference. It was hard to be menacing to someone if you had to look up to see into their eyes.

“Live a little,” I breathed a sigh of relief as the hands relocated to my back, pulling us even closer. Even if it wasn’t completely appropriate, it was better than being groped. Our faces were just inches apart. “My little dolphin,” He leaned in to whisper in my ear. I blushed scarlet.

“You basta—” My centre of balance suddenly changed as I was dipped, fingers digging into the back of his black suit jacket. My head spun as I was suddenly parallel to the floor, supported by nothing but Kakashi’s arms. “I swear to God, I’m going to kill you,” I mumbled through gritted teeth.

“If you say so,” He replied, hidden smirk written dangerously in his eyes.

“I’m deadly serious,” I said, trying to affect my teacher voice. Instead, I just sounded rather petulant. “When we get home, I’m going to bake you a cake full of cyanide, or plant explosives under the bonnet of your car, or booby trap *Icha Icha* or something.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” He gasped in mock horror, holding me tighter as I tried to wiggle free. Blood was rushing to my head, and it wasn’t exactly the most comfortable angle. Worst still, every wiggle seemed to drive our hips together in an almost obscene manner, and considering our location and job that was very, very bad. If the chaperones were allowed to dry hump each other in the middle of the dance floor, the kids would get a distinctly wrong impression of both us and the purpose of dancing. It was not to try and get as far as possible without taking your clothes off. Even if it did feel that way a little bit.

“Revenge is sweet,” I said with a grin.

“And so are you,”

“I am *not* sweet. And think of less girly terms of endearment,”

“What’s wrong with ‘my little dolphin’?” He asked playfully, dropping me a little lower. My eyes widened; any lower and my hair would be brushing the ground. It said a lot about his physical strength that he was able to hold me like this; I wasn’t really heavy, but I certainly wasn’t light, either.

“Everything,” I said flatly. It was too dolphin-y, for one. Secondly, I wasn’t little.

“What do you have against dolphins? They’re really *fascinating* aquatic mammals,” He said, pulling us back up to a standing position, but keeping me close. I could feel every line, every contour of his body through both of our clothes. We kept swaying with the music, the pace of the song keeping the rhythm even and easy. “I’m sure you know how *smart* they are,” His voice dropped an octave, barely above a whisper. “How *dangerous* they can be,” He leaned in closer, hot breath drifting past
my ear teasingly. “And during the mating season, the males can-”

“I really don’t want to know!” I squeaked, jerking my head back. Whatever titbit that was about dolphin sex, I could probably continue to live my life completely happy without ever hearing it. I wasn’t allowed to escape, though. We were still incredibly close, physically pressed against each other, locked in place by my arms.

“Are you sure?” I could hear the smirk of amusement return, teasing me shamelessly. I resisted the temptation to step on his foot.

“Positive,” I shot back.

The song finished, and I began to pull away. One dance was surely enough; we’d made our statement, we’d had our fun, and now it was time to retreat to opposite corners and stop being so temptingly and infuriatingly close. Suddenly, I could very much appreciate where the kids were coming from; being pressed up against a certain person can make one desire to do certain crazy and highly inappropriate things, even in public.

“One more dance, and then I’ll let you get back to glaring holes in people’s heads,” Kakashi said, tightening his arms around my lower back. “There’s just half an hour left, anyway,”

“Really?” The evening had passed so quickly, especially since the incident in the bathroom. We couldn’t have been dancing for too long, but regardless, we were supposed to be chaperoning, not dancing ourselves. This was probably in violation of our job descriptions, but it was worth it. I felt inexplicably safe inside the circle of his arms, even on the bizarre dip. Being so close was truly electric.

“Time flies when you’re having fun,” His voice took on the same tone and implications from the dolphin metaphor thing from before. It wasn’t exactly a school-friendly tone, but it sent all-too-detectable shivers down my spine. In response, fingers started to rub soothing circles across my lower back, dipping tantalisingly lower with each stroke. My eyes widened, and I repressed all odd noises that wanted to emerge either in protest or encouragement. I couldn’t stop the blush that spread across my face at the touch; it was amazing most of my body was able to function at all, considering how it felt like the majority of my blood was occupying my face. Still, I was grateful it wasn’t occupying…other areas. That would be awkward and difficult to explain.

When the second song ended, we did retreat to our separate corners, although I spent much less time glaring at students and much more time catching myself staring across the hall at a figure propped lazily against the wall. I couldn’t help it.

No, it definitely wasn’t a bad evening.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Heart Beat

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Own me, you own

And rattle my bones

You turn me over and over

‘Till I can’t control myself

Make me a liar

One big disaster

You make my heart beat faster

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

“I’m so glad its over,” I said wearily, letting myself slump into the car seat. I was rather grateful
Kakashi was driving; despite having done very little at the dance, I was tired. Falling asleep at the
wheel and dying horribly in a car crash was not anywhere near the top of my priority list.

“I thought you enjoyed that last part,” He said. I turned to look at him, tempted to reach out and tug
down the mask to see precisely what the rest of his face was doing. I could imagine a teasing smile,
but I wanted to actually see it. After being so close during the slow dancing, the kissing in the
bathroom, and now being sat less than a metre away, the mask felt like some kind of barrier.

“What, the part where you almost dropped me or the part where you tried to explain the intricacies of
dolphin mating to me?” I replied sarcastically, recalling the adrenaline rush and the dodgy
implications of the entire dolphin sex metaphor thing. Being outraged about things like that was fine
in private, but in the middle of the school hall, surrounded by students? That was embarrassing.

In fact, a lot of the evening had been in some way embarrassing, but in hindsight it was sort of
cathartic. There wasn’t any realistic way I could deny what had happened, considering the number of
witnesses. Even if I could deny it, it wasn’t sure I wanted to. It was a similar kind of relief to
confronting my parents; another restriction was gone, another wall was knocked down, and a strange
sense of freedom emerged from behind it.

“How about the part where you voluntarily got incredibly close to me when we were dancing?” I
could imagine a wolfish edge to the smile, a hint of teeth showing between kissable lips at that
memory. My skin tingled at the memory of the sensation of being so tantalisingly close, just a few
bits of cloth separating us. Either I was impossibly repressed, or slow dancing was one of the dirtiest
things one could participate in with clothes on.

“You were groping me! What was I supposed to do?” I retorted.

“You could have slapped me and stormed off,” He pointed out. I supposed that was technically an
option, but it would rather ruin everything. Did I really give the impression that I was more likely to
retaliate with violence or shouting than reciprocate? Recently, since the first date, I really had been
trying to go with whatever Kakashi had wanted. Maybe it wasn’t enough. An odd plan began to
form in my mind, although I wasn’t quite sure how it would precisely work yet.
“I’d rather not,” I said quietly. I was not about to explain my reasons aloud for that. It would be way too humiliating.

“Why?”

“I’m not explaining that,” I blushed and looked out of the window, but I couldn’t stop myself seeing one quizzical eye in the dark, reflective surface. There was no way I was going to get out of this one now that he was interested.

“Why not? Anyone else would have been dead within seconds,” Kakashi pointed out. The car swung expertly into his designated parking space outside the flats, engine dying out with a small hum. I kept my eyes fixed on the window as he turned his full attention to me.

“It’s because it’s you, you idiot,” I replied, instantly colouring deep red as I realised what had escaped my lips. “O-okay, that sounded way more like a confession than I intended it to. What I mean to say was that we’re dating and I want you to be happy and you get certain privileges and I don’t really mind and that you’re too—”

“Iruka?” He interrupted me. I turned my head, eyes wide. I suddenly felt very vulnerable, considering what I just let escape. If he shot me down now, I wasn’t entirely sure what I would do. For one, I didn’t have any alcohol in my flat anymore, and going to work would certainly be impossible. I couldn’t face him if he rejected me. We lived next door to each other. How would I be able to live in my own flat, knowing Kakashi was just a door down?

“Yes?” I choked out, praying to any gods that were listening for everything to be okay.

“Be quiet,” He said softly, leaning across to capture my lips in a kiss. I hadn’t even noticed the mask coming down. I just sat there in mild shock, taking in what this presumably meant.

Firstly, I didn’t have to quit my job or move or do anything equally rash.

Secondly, he apparently liked me enough to put up with my crap.

Thirdly, I liked him.

*Thanks for that one, Captain Obvious*, Tsunade’s voice made a sudden reappearance. I promptly dropped a mental nuclear bomb on wherever she was hiding inside my brain, cursing her for killing my train of thought.

I couldn’t help but smile as I began to kiss back, leaning forward and gripping his shoulder to keep myself in place. I felt his shoulders shake slightly under my hand with quiet laughter, alive and warm under my hands even through the suit. It was all too restrictive; the car, the clothes, the close proximity but being unable to do anything. It was like being a teenager all over again; knowing I wanted to do something, but not really knowing exactly what.

Naturally, my body already knew what it wanted, as indicated by the awkward tightening of my trousers. I could have laughed at myself; how repressed was I, getting aroused just by kissing? I hadn’t felt this inexperienced in years, and I didn’t really have the excuse of being a hormone-addled teenage boy anymore.

My free hand rose up to trace the lines of his face, committing everything to memory. As my fingers trailed up into his hair he nipped at my lip, requesting entry that I willingly gave. I didn’t wait for his response, pressing my parted lips anxiously against his, trying to coax his tongue out, hands moving on autopilot to fumble with his tie.
“Eager, are we?” Kakashi said, hand coming up to cover mine. “Just so you know, we’re not having sex in my car; the stains are a bitch to get out of the seats,” I blushed furiously at the statement; did I want to have sex? I knew I wanted something, but that was mostly just my body acting on subconscious desires, and it wasn’t exactly being too subtle about it, either. I hadn’t really thought properly about sex with Kakashi, about whether I wanted to do it or not or when and how and where and all kinds of stupid technicalities that suddenly presented themselves to me. Admittedly, a car was probably not the best place to try anything.

With that in mind, I moved back and opened the car door with slightly trembling fingers, stepping out into the cold night. With one look over my shoulder, I ran across the short strip of paving separating the car park from the flats, pausing at the door to look back again. I frowned slightly; Kakashi had somehow managed to catch me up already, apparently just a few paces behind me the whole time. I didn’t run up the stairs; falling and breaking my neck was probably a mood killer.

Adrenaline and excitement raced through my veins as we reached my front door. Most of my completely Kakashi-intoxicated brain was begging for me to seize him by the tie and drag him over the threshold, but another part was holding me back. Instead, they reached a compromise; I reached out and pulled down the pesky mask that had somehow managed to return to its normal position, planting a firm kiss over his amused, knowing smile.

As I turned and walked through my own front door and into my kitchen, whatever had possessed me suddenly disappeared. What the hell was I doing? There was no way in hell I was actually ready for sex. My pace slowed considerably, nervousness gripping my throat and stopping me from saying anything encouraging or otherwise.

Warm arms embraced me from behind, a chin coming to rest on my shoulder as hands strayed downwards.

“I-I-” I started as one hand dipped into the waistband of my suit trousers and into my underwear, shoulders tensing as it didn’t stop on its downward descent towards the most obvious symptom of my arousal, barely affected by my nervousness.

“We don’t have to have sex,” Kakashi murmured into my ear, one finger reaching out to gently touch the tip of my member. I shivered with pleasure, relaxing into his embrace a little. “There are other things people can do with each other, ‘Ruka,”

“We sh-should at least move to my bedroom,” I protested weakly, trying to keep my hips still as the hand in my underwear moved to stroke slowly down my length. The kitchen was not the best place for any kind of sexual activity; I had to eat in here tomorrow morning, and I did not want to have to clean up suspicious puddles or stains or whatever before cooking.

“So you don’t find the location arousing? You didn’t seem to have much of a problem with my car earlier,” His voice was dangerously low, subtle and sexy, each word seeming to match a hand movement.

“Just do it,” I forced out, going against every instinct by seizing the wrist attached to the hand making delicious motions and tugging, walking awkwardly in the direction of my bedroom.

It randomly occurred to me that I hadn’t ever actually had sex in the bedroom, or anywhere in flat at all for that matter. And by extension, my bed. I wasn’t going to point it out, though. I pushed open the bedroom door and flicked on the light switch, still holding onto Kakashi’s wrist. Naturally, my bedroom was neat and tidy. There were no clothes on the floor, and the bed sheets were clean and tucked in properly. Almost immediately, Kakashi sought to rectify this, pushing my jacket off my shoulders and letting it drop to the floor. I couldn’t bring myself to care about the mess. I mimicked
his actions, slipping my hands under his suit jacket and pushing it off, then moving on with slightly shaking hands to properly remove the mask. It fell to the floor next to the jacket, forgotten. My own shirt and tie followed quickly, both our pairs of shoes coming off somewhere in between. Every fleeting touch as a button came undone, every lingering caress sending lightning shocks of teasing pleasure through my body.

At some point, I found myself being pushed back to sit on my bed as my trousers and underwear slipped over my hips and past my thighs, pooling on the floor around my ankles.

“Do you trust me?” Kakashi asked, a handsome lopsided smile gracing his features. I nodded, despite feeling rather horribly exposed. I was completely naked, and short of seizing the quilt and wrapping it tightly about myself there wasn’t any way to hide. He knelt between my knees; face inches away from the most intimate parts of my body.

He pressed his lips to my inner thigh in a small, light kiss, one pale hand moving to part my knees further. I made myself relax as his free hand trailed across one thigh to lightly grasp the base of my cock, applying a tantalising amount of pressure. I hissed, letting a breath I hadn’t realised I had been holding go between my teeth. I knew I wasn’t going to last long. Smirking at my reaction, he leaned forwards and ran a tongue up my length, eyes holding mine in a way that was just as teasing as the touch.

My heart was racing in my chest. I couldn’t stop the loud moan that escaped me as his lips parted and enveloped me, sinking slowly down. I felt his tongue moving teasingly against my sensitive flesh; every single touch was teasing, fleeting, and it set waves of pleasure through every part of my body. When his head started to bob, it was all I could do to stop my fingers tangling in his silver hair. Instead, I knotted my fingers into the bed sheets, biting my lip and trying not to move. The sensation is unbelievable, too good to be true. Hot and wet and warm and lightly sucking and-

I felt a finger gently tracing the sensitive skin around my entrance. Instead of feeling disgusted or turned off, the new, forbidden sensation was incredible. Combined with the movement of his skilled tongue, it wasn’t long before my back arched and I spilled my seed into his mouth. I blushed, embarrassed at that. None of my girlfriends had ever let me finish in their mouths, but it was definitely hot.

I watched as Kakashi’s throat lightly bulged as he swallowed. I repressed an incredibly childish giggle.

“Bedtime,” He said shortly, voice a little rough.

“But you haven’t-”

“Yes, I have,” He lifted a hand, covered in evidence. I felt slightly disappointed I didn’t do anything to help. “You’ll want to clean the sheets tomorrow,” I couldn’t stop myself laughing at that, for once not caring at all about the state my room was in. Instead, I took the sticky hand and pulled its owner onto my bed, sliding beneath the covers.

It was a warm night, despite the chill outside.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Tomorrow

And it really doesn’t matter if we don’t sleep
And it really doesn’t matter that we don’t eat
No it really doesn’t matter, really doesn’t matter at all
‘Cause we are so young now, we are so young, so young now
And when tomorrow comes we can do it all again

The shrill beeping of my alarm clock woke me up, insisting that I wake up at once in order to shut it the hell up. I leaned across my bed, stretching an arm out to tap the button on the top, and collided with something warm lying in the middle of my bed. I cracked open an eye, letting it lazily wander upwards to meet an even lazier eye looking down at me from its vantage point on a stack of pillows.

“Good morning,” I said, stifling a yawn. I stretched my arm again, completely missing the alarm clock, and only succeeding on pulling myself further onto Kakashi’s very naked chest.

“Morning,” He replied drowsily. One pale arm emerged from beneath my bedding, effortlessly reaching out and tapping the ‘off’ button on the alarm. A dark eyebrow quirked as it saw the time proudly proclaimed in luminous green lettering as six am. “Why the hell are we awake at six?”

“It’s set for work,” I said. I never disabled the alarm, even on weekends. If I kept myself up late on Fridays trying to get marking or planning out of the way, I let myself sleep through the alarm, or just turned it off and went back to sleep. Disabling it had, strangely enough, never crossed my mind last night.

I sighed happily as I recalled last night, letting myself sink into his arms as the memory surrounded me. The room didn’t precisely smell like sex, but being so close to Kakashi I couldn’t help but inhale his scent with every breath. I felt incredibly lame as I forced myself to name the actions of the previous night. ‘Blowjob’ seemed incredibly crude and childish all of a sudden.

“But its Sunday,” He pointed out. One of his hands moved to run through my hair, which had mysteriously come loose at some point last night without me noticing. Long, pale fingers gently tugged at knots, teasing locks trapped under my shoulders free. I lifted my head and moved my arm so my face was pressed directly against his chest, mimicking almost exactly our positions from the night we spent at the science station. Except this time, we actually had done something. Fortunately, there were no teenage girls around to see it, since I was fairly certain breaking and entering was still a crime.

“Go back to sleep, then. I’m making breakfast,” I moved to push myself off him, skin protesting as it immediately began to miss the sensation of being pressed against Kakashi’s. A strong arm snaked around my shoulders, pinning me in place.

“Can I request pancakes and coffee?”

“Only if you help,”
“I can’t cook,” I raised a curious eyebrow. If he couldn’t cook, how had he managed to survive this long? “I never learned.”

“Someone, call the papers! I’ve discovered something the amazing Kakashi-sensei can’t do!” I exclaimed in mock surprise, grinning widely.

“Anything but that!” The arm around my shoulders tightened, pulling me close against him. From my adjusted angle, I could hear his heartbeat. The even rhythm of lub-dub noises echoed through his pale skin, soothing underneath my head. It was proof that he was here, that he was real. That last night wasn’t some kind of delusion; if it was a dream, I’d probably be clothed, and I certainly wouldn’t be in bed with a figment of my imagination.

“Don’t worry; I’m much too comfortable right here to move,” I admitted. I rubbed the tip of my nose on the closest patch of skin available. In response, the fingers still in my hair massaged my scalp a little, before trailing tantalisingly down towards the back of my neck. Why was it always my hair? I wasn’t so sure I wanted to get it cut if Kakashi was so fixated on it. “But what about breakfast?”

“Food can wait,” He said with a lopsided smile, thumb emerging from my hair to brush across my cheek. The tenderness of the gesture was rather opposed to his other sentiments, however. “There are more pressing matters on the agenda, like what to do with my completely naked lover while equally naked in his bed.”

I carefully considered his words; were we lovers? We went on dates, kissed and did bedroom-type activities. I was pretty certain that qualified us as ‘lovers’, although I wasn’t so sure about the ‘love’ part. There was certainly an element of physical attraction. But then again, I wasn’t about to jump into bed with him just on the basis that I found him physically attractive. No, I was emotionally attracted, too. I couldn’t help but be a little possessive at the thought of his face, how I was one of the few people who had seen it, the amount of trust it signified, and the restrictions it brought tumbling down. It would be rather difficult to kiss with a strip of cloth in the way.

It wasn’t just the face, though. It was the way he talked and the way he made everything look so easy, even while giving the impression that it was such a chore. It was the casual defiance of rules, from the porn to refusing to show his face. The personal, softer side, developed by a past I knew little about.

I wasn’t explaining it right, but how could it? It was more complicated than that.

Of course, I might have been more able to coherently list the reasons I hadn’t killed him yet if one sneaky hand of his wasn’t creeping its way up my thigh. I narrowed my eyes and covered his hand with my own, gently stopping it in its tracks.

“It’s too early in the morning for that,” I protested.

“Are you sure about that?” My body rebelled, letting Kakashi’s hand on my thigh continue its tantalising journey upwards, fingers lighting a trail of fire on my skin. I squirmed a little as the hand got higher and higher, teasingly stopping on my hip.

“Positive. Last night was n-nice, but we can’t spend all day doing things like that. I have marking to catch up on and I have to do the laundry and stuff,” I said rather quickly. There was no way in hell I would be able to say ‘no’ if he tried to seduce me, and I genuinely did have things to do. They all paled in comparison to the pleasure Kakashi’s touch promised to bring me, but I had to be strong and resist. Even if I really didn’t want to.

“Just ‘nice’? Aren’t you supposed to be an English lit teacher? Come up with a better adjective than
‘nice’ or I’ll be deeply offended,’” He said, mock-seriously. Unsounded laughter dripped into his eye, and I couldn’t help but smile in return.

“Astonishing? Wonderful? Unbelievable? Prodigious? Marvellous? Legendary?” I listed flatly, each word getting more and more superfluous, although I secretly agreed that every word I listed was more appropriate than ‘nice’. I was fairly certain my incoherent noises of pleasure last night were more than enough in the way of compliments.

“I like that last one,” He grinned.

“I’m not saying it,” I pouted, eyes widening a little as the hand on my hip began to retrace its movements, sliding backwards to slide across the flesh of my rear. I kept my lips tightly shut to avoid making any humiliating noises.

“Do I have to prove it again?”

“Prove what, that you’re good at everything?”

I couldn’t help the small squeak that emerged from my lips as the hand tightened, grasping a handful and squeezing none too gently. His smile widened at my reaction, and I resisted the urge to hit him. Although it didn’t require too much effort.

“Not cooking,” He pointed out. With a small huff, I began to remove myself from his embrace, sliding myself up into sitting position. Strangely, the hand on my ass followed, moving to hold onto my thigh instead, and his other hand remained in my hair.

“Everything that’s not cooking, then,” I said, rolling my eyes.

“But especially sex,”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about,” He pulled my head down for a small, rather chaste kiss before letting me escape to the kitchen. Walking out of the bedroom was quite humiliating, considering my complete state of undress and the eyes fixed on completely inappropriate areas of my body whichever way I turned. A blush permanently covered my face as I moved out of the room, very conscious of the way I walked and stood and even breathed. I knew I could really do with a shower, but the chances of getting one alone were about nil.

I did make pancakes and coffee, in the end. I even put them on nice plates and served them to Kakashi in bed. Naturally, he did the washing up.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Monday morning, and I was ready for everything up to and including nuclear catastrophe. As I pulled my car through the gates of the car park, I steeled myself against the inevitable onslaught of intrusive and personal questions that were surely coming my way imminently, from both students and staff. There was no way I could get away with skipping another morning briefing; I had avoided them as much as possible recently, and I knew I was missing out on something.

I parked my car and retrieved my bags from the back seat, letting a series of sharp corners bump heavily against my leg in penitence for skipping out on marking. Since I had missed out on Saturday’s marking session, I was really supposed to have done everything on Sunday. However, I hadn’t factored Kakashi into the equation. The only time I had managed to get him out of my flat was when I reminded him that he had to feed his dogs, which took all of about ten minutes. We ended up marking together, which eventually devolved into chatting.

In short, I had ended up staying up half the night to try and get all the marking done that I needed, cutting the amount of sleep I got in half, and by extension, my patience.

My head spun a little as I walked through the corridors. Although lack of sleep wasn’t an entirely new concept, I had still overslept and ended up skipping breakfast.

The school was rather noisy by the time I got in. The usual groups of students clustered in the halls, leaning against rows of lockers or notice boards, talking or giggling loudly. Eyes flickered over to me, and the volume of their conversations wavered as I walked past; I told myself that it was completely normal for teenagers to be secretive. That they were just discussing their secret boyfriends or parties or something teenager-ly. Something that definitely wasn’t related to me at all.

The staff room door loomed ahead of me down the corridor like some kind of sinister portal to hell. That was a fair comparison, actually, considering Tsunade and her minion’s penchant for torturing people. My pace slowed significantly. I felt a worm of nausea curl through my stomach at the prospect of facing my colleagues. If I was in their position, I would see what I was doing as horribly unprofessional. Not only was I indiscreetly seeing another member of staff, but I was indiscreet enough that the entire student body knew. There was a reason we had to maintain a level of professionalism at work, but Kakashi’s face flashed into my mind and I couldn’t seem to recall it.

I reached out my hand, but froze halfway to the door handle. I really didn’t have to go to morning briefing. I could always beg the morning notices off another teacher. It wasn’t strictly necessary to
attend every single morning, and I had done fine last week without it. The thought of subjecting myself to the demon women made my head ache. My hand was halfway to my pocket I had run out of paracetamol about a week ago.

No, I had to go. I bit the bullet and pushed open the door. The hubbub of general chatter paused for a moment, taking in the novelty of my arrival, and then returned to its previous level. I practically smiled at that; apparently I could still come to work without being one of the star attractions of the freak show that was my life. Or fetish show. Or whatever the hell it was.

I made my way towards the coffee machine, ignoring a few congratulatory winks from my co-workers, drawn in by the siren song of bubbling and dripping and rushing liquid, fishing my coffee mug out of one of the bags. I smiled a little at the dolphin motif as I filled it to the brim, letting myself sink down into an empty chair. The parallels to the day Kakashi and I met were not lost on me.

Something about the coffee smelled off. I took an experimental sip, but I couldn’t taste any difference. It was the same cheap, overly-strong blend that we always used in the staff coffee machine, but something was wrong with it. I wrinkled my nose and cradled it in my hands, warming my fingers.

Kakashi was predictably late. Briefing began without him, pausing only to take short, mildly amused note of his ridiculous excuse upon turning up late, and finished without other interruptions. Truthfully, I could very easily have not bothered coming at all; nothing of any note was really announced, and certainly nothing relating to my department. Arrangements for the upkeep of the playing field and the upcoming staff dinner didn’t interest me in the slightest.

After briefing, I practically ran to my classroom. That was yet another reason as to why I shouldn’t go; it made me slightly late for registration. Naturally, the kids didn’t care at all; on the contrary, I was greeted with a few giggles and wide grins. I politely ignored all of it, feeling my headache growing. Somehow, I knew it was going to get worse.

“Congrats on the sex, Iruka-sensei!” I clamped my jaw shut, turning my head slowly towards the source of the noise. Naruto stood in the doorway, trademark smile even wider as he proclaimed the thoughts of every student in the room. The only thing holding him back was Sasuke’s hand in a pale death grip on his arm, a silent warning I was rather grateful for.

“Naruto,” I said menacingly. “If you don’t sit down and shut up right now, you’ll be in detention until the day you die,”

“You already used that threat before, Sensei. Hmm, maybe you’re getting nicer now you’re getting laid?” He pondered curiously, looking me up and down as if looking for some physical evidence of deeds I hadn’t done. I think we stopped hanging bloodied bed sheets out of windows as flags of proof of lost virginity many, many years ago. Although I would not imagine that would be very applicable to men.

“Naruto-” I started, glowering. There were no words to describe how irritating this was getting. It was possibly the lack of sleep and food, but Naruto was more unbearable than usual this morning.

“I mean, just look at Sasuke! He’s practically sunshine and rainbows now we’ve-” I slammed my fist down on my desk, cutting him off sharply.

“Naruto! I do not need your speculations on my personal life! And none of us need to know what you do in your free time! This is your final warning,” My eyes narrowed, vein throbbing almost painfully in my forehead. This job was going to give me an aneurism one day.
“But Sensei-”

“No,” I interrupted him. “Whatever it is, just no."

I registered the class, shooting them menacing glares over the top of my register whenever I heard the faintest sound of a whisper. I couldn’t help it; school was just not working out properly today. The coffee was wrong, I wasn’t feeling my best, and the kids thought I was sleeping with Kakashi, although to be fair that wasn’t too much of a wild assumption to make. In fact, they’d thought as much for a while, so I didn’t really have grounds to be especially annoyed at them today. If anything it was a logical conclusion to make.

After registration, my first class was very good and easy to teach. The text was genuinely interesting to the kids, and most of them focused properly on the lesson. I tried to be more rational and teach well, as they deserved. However, being pissed off seemed to have been all that was keeping me properly alert, and I couldn’t nip out of the classroom for coffee in the middle of the lesson. I stood I shrugged out of my jacket, feeling too warm in my well-heated classroom, hoping the cold would shock me awake.

“This technique is known as Chekhov’s gun, where a seemingly unimportant element is introduced early on and later returned to as it becomes significant. For example, if the title of a book is noted in a library by a character in passing, yet the book later becomes vital to the plot when the character must use the book to solve a problem, thus leading to the defeat of the evil overlord, world peace, true love, et cetera,” I recited to the class, remembering almost exactly the definition from my own high school study guides. I leaned against the board at the front, my eyes wondering to a point on the ceiling that looked a little like a moose. Anything to keep me awake. “Chekhov’s gunman would be where a character serves as the element. Can anyone give me any examples from modern films or literature?” Hands flew up, and I pointed at someone near the middle without really looking to see who it was.

“From ‘Great Expectations’, would the escaped convict be Chekhov’s gun?” The said. I looked in their direction, but I couldn’t seem to focus properly on their face.

“Yes, that’s a good example, although it would be Chekhov’s gunman as the convict-” I heard myself cut off, vision warping then darkening. I raised a hand to my head, shutting my eyes to steady myself. “I’m awfully sorry, but I’m going to have to dismiss you early. Please go to the library and read up to chapter nine, then do some private study if you have time,”

“Iruka-sensei? Are you alright?” A girl’s voice asked, drowned out by the sound of scraping chairs and excited chatter as students left, getting further and further away. I tried to smile to reassure the kids I was fine, not trusting myself to speak.

At some point I must have collapsed, because my knees gave out and I fell to the side, but I don’t remember hitting the floor.

Oo..Oo..Oo..Oo
I slowly became aware of an annoying humming sound, drowning out the comforting droning of an engine. Wait, an engine? I didn’t remember being in a car. The last thing I remembered was dismissing my class, so why could I hear an engine? Come to think of it, whatever I was lying on was vibrating slightly. My classroom certainly never did that before.

I forced an eye open, looking hazily in the direction of the humming. I couldn’t quite make out who it was; my eyes refused to focus, and I couldn’t distinguish properly between colours for some reason, so the figure blurred into one two-tone blob.

The humming paused and I detected some movement from another direction.

“He’s waking up,” An unfamiliar voice said from somewhere near my head, accompanied by the shuffling of cloth on cloth and soft metallic clinking.

I squeezed my eyes shut and stared at the ceiling of wherever I was, forcing my eyes into focus. Engine noises. Pale ceiling with white-painted things on it. Light coming through high set windows. A growing sense of motion. My eyes flickered over to the blob, now resolved into a more detailed image. Blonde hair, brown eyes, blue blouse.

“Welcome back to the land of the living, Iruka-sensei,” Tsunade greeted. I repressed the urge to groan in despair. Of all the people to be stuck in a confined space with, Tsunade was by no means the safest or the least awkward; at least she didn’t seem to be drunk.

“Where the hell am I?” I said, although it came out more like a gritty slur.

“One of your students called an ambulance after you collapsed. You were still unconscious when the
ambulance arrived and we would have just taken you to the nurse’s office in any other circumstance, but you fractured your right wrist on landing so we thought it would be pertinent to take you to up to the hospital,” The other voice explained calmly, drawing my eyes towards them. Their green uniform identified the owner as a paramedic. “We won’t know the extent of the damage until it’s x-rayed at the hospital, but it’s rather amazing how you managed it, considering the short distance of your fall,” I twitched my wrist experimentally, grimacing and wincing as sharp, burning pain shot through my joint. The paramedic gave me a stern glare, and I carefully decided not to try that again.

“Which means, no more late nights for you, and don’t come to work if you’re sick. You can’t teach if you’re dead on your feet,” Tsunade chastised, teacher voice switched up to the max. It was nigh-impossible to resist.

“You also have a slightly elevated temperature,” The paramedic added. “I have to agree with your employer, working a stressful job in poor physical condition,” Tsunade smirked, the medical expert on her side, although considering she managed to do her job just fine despite being drunk half the time it was a little hypocritical.

“But I didn’t have a cover or anything prepared,” I protested. I didn’t like taking days off. The only time I had let myself take a day off was when I was bedridden with flu, and that was years ago. I learned my lesson and got a flu jab every winter, braving the needle for my students. Leaving my class in the hands of another teacher felt intrinsically wrong; I couldn’t monitor them and check what they were doing was right or make sure they behaved, and I was bored at home without something to do. I needed to work, no matter how stressful it could be.

“The cover teacher could have improvised. You could have called in and arranged something,” She pointed out, folding her arms. I had to admit that was technically true, but it didn’t mean I wanted to do it. As long as I could stand, I would teach. Then again, I had fainted.

“I just don’t trust other teachers with my classes. Some of the kids are definitely a handful, and you need to be-

“Hey, I did more than okay when I covered for you a few weeks ago,” She said somewhat resentfully. I quirked an eyebrow, the obnoxious ‘GO FOR IT, SENSEI’ motif echoing through my mind. It was one of the first instances of the students’ active participation in the plot to push me towards Kakashi.

I was more than a little conflicted. On the one hand, I very much resented the interference of the students and other teachers in my personal life. I had worked hard to keep my work as professional as possible, never letting my personal life, or lack thereof, distract me from work, and that had all been shattered by the arrival of one man. Now, the entire student population knew about us, and had apparently had the right answers from the beginning. I wasn’t sure whether I should resent them or thank them, but resentment was winning out. The invasion of privacy was like a personal affront, one I certainly didn’t appreciate.

“You only did it to get out of paperwork, and all the classwork had inappropriate messages written in it,” I said, letting my displeasure leak into my voice.

“Yes, but it was definitely helpful,”

“Helpful?”

“You went for it, didn’t you?” She smiled knowingly, overblown and fantastical tales of romance and passion flashing through her eyes. I couldn’t understand why Tsunade of all people would want to play matchmaker. Whatever kind of perverse pleasure she gained from it was beyond my
understanding.

“That’s none of your business,” I said sharply.

“A good headmistress ensures all her members of staff are happy, and Kakashi-sensei has certainly made you happy,” She said with a small, nonchalant wave of the hand. I was happy before Kakashi, I think. I wasn’t over the moon with joy, but I wasn’t suicidally depressed, either.

No, that’s a lie. Less of a lie, more of a small inaccuracy. Happy people don’t drink themselves miserable.

“Why are you so obsessed with us, though? It’s unreasonable how fixated half the population of the school is on my love life, and it’s really intrusive, not to mention degrading. How do you think I feel, having people speculate over what I do in bed and with whom? It’s a violation of my privacy, and I just wish…” I tailed off, feeling a little guilty for arguing with Tsunade. For one, she was my boss, and irritating your boss isn’t a good plan if you want a long-term career. Secondly, in her own twisted way, she was kind of trying to help. I just didn’t want it.

The poor paramedic watched from the sidelines, a look of mild terror crossing his face. He clearly would have preferred me to remain unconscious, and I think I agreed. If I was unconscious, I wouldn’t have to face Tsunade.

“You really do love him, don’t you?” She said thoughtfully after a small pause.

“What?”

“Never mind, never mind,”

“Seriously, what do you mean?” I repeated my question. If she had said what I thought she said, then-

Then what? It brought a pressing question to the front of my mind: did I love Kakashi? Was I falling in love? It was more than a little frightening to think about, and I wasn’t about to have a huge internal debate about it in front of Tsunade.

“You’ll understand one day, Iruka-sensei.” She smiled knowingly again, and I grit my teeth against another irritated reply. “He was panicking when he heard you’d fainted. He really wanted to come in my place, but he had to teach and my paperwork can wait,”

“Really?” I asked, knowing instantly who she was talking about. Who else would it realistically be? It was nice to know someone was worrying about me, that someone cared enough to want to drop everything to stay by my side. More than nice. Elating. I couldn’t stop a small smile creep across my face at the idea of Kakashi accompanying me to the hospital instead of Tsunade.

“Really what? My paperwork can wait or that Kakashi was worrying about you?”

“Uh-”

“We’ll arrive at the hospital in about two minutes. Do you think you’ll be fine to walk into accidents and emergencies?” The paramedic interrupted us awkwardly, clearing his throat. The moving vehicle shifted, turning a sharp corner. I frowned down at my body; had it really been necessary to put me on a stretcher? Surely being unconscious and slightly damaged wasn’t enough reason for an ambulance escort.

“Yes, I think so,” I replied.
“Are you sure? Try standing once the ambulance is stationary, and I’ll assess you there,”

Somehow, I managed to prove I didn’t need to be wheeled in like an invalid, and even managed to make my way into the hospital without much support. Tsunade hovered beside me the whole time, ready to catch me if I looked like I was about to topple over. This proved extra incentive not to pass out again; more humiliating than being wheeled in by paramedics on a stretcher for a broken wrist was being *carried* in by Tsunade.

In the end, I came away with my wrist and a good part of my right forearm in a cast. The x-rays showed I had managed to fracture my wrist, although the angle my hand and wrist must have made in order for the break to happen was a pure fluke. It was just my luck that fainting would get me a trip to the hospital and a rather annoying cast. Fortunately it didn’t cover my thumb so I could still write, but that didn’t stop Tsunade from ordering me to let Kakashi take care of me for the six weeks I had to keep it on.

It was going to be a long six weeks.

oO.Oo.Oo.Oo
Lights Out

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And if we can’t find where we belong

We’ll have to make it on our own

Face all the pain and take it on

Because the only hope for me is you alone

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

“Remind me why we’re going out for dinner again?” I asked rather sulkily, picking absentmindedly at the corner of my cast, held against my chest in a sling. Kakashi shot a quick look my way, before fixing his eyes back on the road. It seemed like everyone was chauffeuring me somewhere today, although I appreciated his renewed concentration on driving safely. I didn’t need any more broken bones.

“Because you’re not cooking with a broken wrist,” He said simply, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“I’m perfectly capable of cooking; besides, the doctor said the fracture isn’t even that bad,” In fact, the doctor had said it would be a good idea to let someone else take care of lifting and carrying for a while, but I wasn’t going to tell Kakashi that. In any case, he probably already knew.

“You got back from the hospital a few hours ago. I’m not letting you out of my sight for at least another twenty four hours,” The trip back from the hospital had been more traumatising than breaking my wrist. Tsunade had to get back to the school to pick some things up and sign some last minute things off for Shizune, so she had called Kakashi to come and pick me up. There were no words for how mortifying it was to be swept into an open-mouthed kiss in the middle of a hospital. The wolf-whistles from the nurses and patients on the walk of shame out were completely humiliating, but I clung steadfast to Kakashi’s hand and walked quickly, enduring it for him. He didn’t have to come and pick me up, after all.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t need a babysitter,” I said, scowling at the offending cast. It was a badge of my stupidity, evidence that I had managed to injure myself enough that I was apparently unable to carry out basic household tasks. If I had landed at just a slightly different angle, my wrist would be completely intact and we wouldn’t be having this conversation.

“Tell me that again when you’ve regained full motion in your wrist,” I wriggled my fingers in response, watching the shadows they cast over my lap in the light from the street lamps we drove under.

It wasn’t that I didn’t appreciate the concern. I just didn’t want him to worry, which, if Tsunade was to be believed, he was.

“The cast isn’t coming off for six weeks! You can’t stay with me every second of every day for six weeks!” I protested. Although I might not mind so terribly anymore.

“I suppose I can’t stay with you for every second, unless that’s an invitation for me to move in,” He said, teasing smile spilling over into his eye, amber points of light reflected in the dark iris.
“No way in hell! And I can cook; I’d just have to go easy on my wrist,” I pouted. I wasn’t completely useless, just because I couldn’t use one of my wrists for a while. “But seriously, why couldn’t you have made us both dinner or ordered takeaway or something?”

“Just think of this as another date,” He said, bringing a slight twitch to my lips. I couldn’t help it; I still felt like an inexperienced kid when it came to dates with Kakashi. I never knew what to expect, but I always inexplicably enjoyed them. All two of them. Including the after-activities of the second one, although I would never admit it, even under pain of death.

“That’s your excuse every time I’m reluctant to do something,” I mumbled.

“It works, doesn’t it?” He said, clicking the indicator on and making a left turn. The lights dimmed as we turned off the main road, heading towards a different part of town. I had only been to this part for social events I was obliged to go to on the basis that I had had virtually no social life before. It was where all the nice restaurants, cafes and function buildings were, mixed in with a small theatre that rarely played anything besides local comedians and school productions.

My eyes narrowed, but I didn’t say anything. This was clearly a planned event, but the schedule had been bumped up by the opportunity presented by my inability to cook.

I couldn’t say whether I would have preferred to eat Kakashi’s home cooking, or even a takeaway pizza or something. It would have meant staying in one of our flats, together, alone, not in public. Considering the steamier events of Saturday night, I knew I was supposed to be mentally preparing myself for whatever came next. If we got that far. If I didn’t break everything off in a moment of insanity. If I didn’t drop down dead.

“No,” Or at least, I wasn’t going to say it was because it was more time to spend with him, talking and being near each other and doing date-y stuff. That was all too embarrassing, not to mention horribly cliché and cheesy.

“I’m also partly responsible for this-” He stroked one finger along the top of my cast and along my fingers, teasingly making my covered skin beg for contact. “-so think of this as an apology meal of sorts. If I hadn’t distracted you all of Sunday, you would have got more sleep and none of this would have happened,” His hands fixed themselves back on the steering wheel, fingers tightening and loosening, over and over in some kind of nervous rhythm.

I wanted to reach out and cover his hands with my own, to reassure him it wasn’t his fault at all, that it was just a minor fracture and it would be healed in a few weeks, and that he didn’t have to worry about a thing. But I didn’t because one of my hands was restrained by the sling and it would be awkward to reach across my body to touch him, or at least that’s what I told myself.

“It’s not your fault; I know I don’t take good care of myself,” I said grudgingly, trying not to sound encouraging. It honestly wasn’t his fault. It was my choice to stay up late, and my choice to come into work. It wasn’t really rational to blame him for my own stupidity.

“Which is why I’m taking you to dinner,” He said, pausing for a minute as he pulled the car into the car park outside a restaurant. “I’ll take good care of you, I promise,”

“Thank you,” I said, echoing the sincerity in his voice. I couldn’t help but smile a little, the lack of lighting thankfully hiding any obvious blush creeping across my cheeks. No one had actively cared for me since I was fifteen. No one outside my family, ever. And no one ever romantically. The knowledge sent a shiver of giddy pleasure through my stomach, and I bit the inside of my lip to keep from grinning widely.
Did I care? If our roles were reversed, would I offer to do Kakashi’s cooking, or take him to dinner if he wanted? Would I pick him up from the hospital? Would I drive him places until he could manage on his own?

I had a feeling I already knew the answer, but I wasn’t sure how to admit it.

The engine died, and suddenly my door was being opened for me, a pale hand offered to help me out.

“I’ve got a broken wrist, it’s not terminal,” I said, rolling my eyes but taking his hand anyway. It would be rude not to.

The restaurant was nice, too nice for a spontaneous meal out. Also, the food was just a tad overpriced for what it actually was; stapling fancy foreign names to a dish didn’t make it worth any more. I could probably have made several of the meals on the menu at home, if I had the ingredients, the time and a fully functioning right limb.

I frowned when the hostess and the waitress lingered a little too long at our table, asking Kakashi if there was anything, and they meant anything, that they could get him. Scratch that, I bit my tongue in an attempt not to tell them to grow some modesty and dignity, and then take a long walk off a short cliff.

“You can stop glaring, she’s gone now,” Kakashi said, a smirk present in his voice as I shot an evil look at the swaying hips and too-short skirt of the waitress as she sashayed away from our table. “I’m only interested in one person, anyway,”

“Poor bastard,” I muttered, purposely avoiding his eye. I glanced around the restaurant, taking in the softly glowing lights, the dark wood panelling separating the tables, the scarlet walls, the cherub motifs, and the soft, crooning music playing over the speakers. It had clearly been decorated with couples in mind, although I wasn’t complaining. The tall dividers separating the tables meant privacy, and if this was supposed to be a date, that would be preferable to having some girl flirt with my Kakashi.

Wait, my Kakashi?

“I don’t blame you though; if that waitress starts flirting with you she might mysteriously disappear, never to be heard from again,” He said offhandedly.

“I’m sure that could be arranged,” I grinned, exchanging conspiratorial glances.

Conversation varied between how I would manage to eat the pasta I had ordered with a fork in my left hand and the best method of disposing bodies. I didn’t even notice the overt flirting the waitress tried the second time round. All was well with the world, for once.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Who I Am

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

From a nation under God

I feel its love like a cattle prod

Born free, but still they hate

Born me, no I can’t change

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

Despite my protests, Kakashi insisted on paying the bill. I had also forgotten my wallet, which may have had something to do with the way I gave in so easily, although I insisted on paying next time. I was pretty sure there would be a next time. I also insisted on decreasing the tip we left for the waitress, muttering something about flirting with customers for money and its parallels to prostitution rather loudly on the way out.

The cold air hit me like a solid wall. The wind had picked up at some point, tossing the smell of city and snow around, completely drowning out the delicious smell of spices and herbs from the restaurant. I had draped my thin coat around me as a kind of cloak, since I couldn’t wear it while my arm was in a sling, but it was really poor insulation against the cold. Fortunately, the car was parked just a short distance away, just a short stretch of paving between the restaurants and bars and the car park.

Music pulsed from somewhere along the street, drawing my attention to the most out-of-place building in the area. Neon lights on a gaudy sign advertised the place as ‘The Basement’, a name I vaguely recognised. From what I remembered, it wasn’t the most reputable of places in town, and people had been complaining about its location since it opened. I watched with a faint smile as four guys were kicked out by the tall, burly man on the door, stumbling drunkenly down the street.

“You’ll get cold like that,” Kakashi said, manoeuvring my undamaged arm into the sleeve of my jacket and pulling it tighter around my body. I didn’t miss the way his fingers lingered deliberately on my arm, or how his body heat practically radiated across the short space between our bodies, or how close he got to me just to put my coat on properly. “Is that better?”

“Thanks,” I nodded, smiling. We walked too slowly, the cold night air biting at my skin despite my coat. At some point, my hand found Kakashi’s, and I kept my eyes trained firmly on the ground, futilely trying to hide a blush rising to my cheeks. Public displays of affection were so public.

I couldn’t deny that I enjoyed dining out, especially in the company of a certain stupid-sexy physics teacher. It was really touching that he cared enough to take me out to ensure I ate properly, then paying for it. Even if putting my coat on for me was a little mother hen-ish, I still kind of appreciated it. It was a cold night, after all. And his hand was warm.

It suddenly struck me how lucky I was to have Kakashi. Without him, I wouldn’t have been able to get back from the hospital. I would have had trouble making myself food tonight. I would have been alone in my flat, probably marking and drinking tea, the prospect of which suddenly seemed incredibly dull next to a sort-of date.

“…Hey, Ken, are those two guys?” An alcohol-slurred voice said loudly from behind us, not too far
down the street. I turned my head; it was the four men who had been kicked out of the club, tottering towards us, beer bottles clenched in their hands. I could practically smell the drink on them from where I stood.

“Nah, that one’s a chick,” Another voice grunted. “I think,” Their silhouettes drew closer as they caught up to us, backlit by the lights from the buildings lining the street. I was suddenly very aware of how alone we were; there weren’t any other people walking or driving by, and the nearest other people were separated from us by glass windows and shop fronts.

“Iruka, don’t-” Kakashi’s hand tightened around mine, but I turned to the approaching group of drunks. I didn’t let go of his hand.

“I’m not a woman, thank you very much,” I said curtly. Just because I had long hair didn’t automatically make me female, and it was insulting to assume so just because Kakashi was obviously male.

“Aw, fuck, they are dudes,” The first guy said, sneering. I could see them more clearly now they were closer; they were all heavily built, dressed for a night at a bar and clearly drunk out of their minds. “Fuckin’ faggots,”

My eyes widened a little at their words. This was something new, something I had never encountered before. Everyone else I knew had been supportive, if not downright encouraging of our relationship. I hadn’t heard a single word of disapproval from anyone but myself. It suddenly occurred to me that I had been incredibly lucky; no one had said anything derogatory at all. I hadn’t been excluded or discriminated against, and I hadn’t anticipated any negative reactions. I was completely unprepared for it.

“Fuckin’ sick, man. Can’t believe this city still has queers, fuckin’ unnatural bastards,”

“You fags are goin’ straigh’ to hell, I swear,” My anger level grew with each insult, each phrase that left their mouths making my fingers curl tighter and tighter around Kakashi’s. I vaguely registered somewhere that I might be hurting him, but my body didn’t respond.

“Grow. Up,” I growled through gritted teeth. The odd angle of lighting lit their faces into odd sneers and grins, leering through the darkness.

“But this is fun! So you two, like, suck cock? Eat shit? Got AIDS yet? Goddammit, you’re disgusting,”

“You don’t understand what you’re talking about. Just leave us alone,” I spat out. How dare they assume things like that? They didn’t know anything, anything at all. If it wasn’t for Kakashi’s continued grip on my twitching fingers, I would probably have done something very stupid. Although I wasn’t a violent person by nature, I wanted to punch these ignorant idiots. I wanted to shout and rant and tell them they were wrong.

“Heh, the lil’ ladyboy’s getting’ pissed,”

“Why you-!” I started, putting one foot forward.

“Iruka, calm down,” Kakashi said from beside me, drawing my attention away from the group of youths by tugging gently on my hand. His face was cast into shadow, making his expression unreadable, but subtle killer intent radiated from him.

“How can I possibly be calm when-” I exclaimed, watching as his free hand dipped into his pocket, retrieving the small, dark square of his mobile phone. I stood still, a little confused. How would a
I understood as soon as he dialled three familiar digits.

“Yes, I’d like to report a group of young men disturbing the peace. How, exactly? Being drunk in public, shouting homophobic insults at my partner and me, inciting violence. Four of them,” He spoke deceptively calmly, eye fixed on the group of men as they heard what he said into the phone. They began to retreat as soon as their booze-addled minds comprehended what Kakashi was saying, stepping drunkenly backwards, before turning and running.

“F**kin’ unnatural!” One yelled back at us, lobbing a beer bottle in our direction. Fortunately, it sailed over our heads. Unfortunately, it covered us both in cheap beer.

The minute they were gone, the phone was away. A fake call. Genius.

As Kakashi tugged on my hand, urging me quickly towards where he had parked the car, I realised I was breathing heavily. Adrenaline still raced through my veins, wearing off with every heartbeat, and gone by the time we reached the car.

We were silent until the car was on the road, the doors locked. My breathing refused to slow, and I could still feel my pulse racing. I was so stupid. Everything I had done I had done wrong, and if Kakashi hadn’t been there I would probably have ended up getting into a fight and ending up back in hospital. It was stupid and risky and irrational.

“Are you okay?” He asked softly, casting a soft glance in my direction. The deathly calm was gone from his voice, replaced with genuine concern. I breathed a sigh of relief; he wasn’t mad at me for being an idiot.

“I’ll be fine in a minute,” I whispered, closing my eyes. Would other people think what those guys had thought? Would they do what those guys did? Or would it be worse if it was a subtle kind of derision, a refusal to speak to me or an unnecessarily cold demeanour? “That was really smart, pretending to call the police. I just kind of lost it. Wasn’t thinking,”

“They were looking for a fight, so there was no point in giving them one. We were outnumbered and you’re injured, and I’m not risking your safety,”

There was a small pause. I brushed a finger across my cheek, whipping away a droplet of beer running out of my hair. Despite the irrationality of it all, a small voice in my head still wondered if the words of the men had any meaning. If it was unnatural to be with another man. My eyes prickled for a second, but I repressed any stupid tears. This wasn’t something to cry over, it was just me overreacting.

I decided immediately that I didn’t care. It wasn’t wrong to me, and it wasn’t wrong to Kakashi, and that was enough. It was more than enough.

“But didn’t it make you angry, hearing what they said?” I said, my voice a little stronger.

“The fact they upset you made me angrier. If it was just me, I could have ignored it, but you’ve never been exposed to something like that before. I couldn’t stand there and do nothing,” He replied. One hand left the steering wheel to run down my upper arm, a gentle, reassuring caress. I couldn’t resist leaning into it a little, taking whatever comfort I could from it. I wanted him to pull the car over so I could sit here and rest my head on his shoulder, touch his skin, reassure myself that he wasn’t going anywhere and that he was real. That it wasn’t wrong, and that I wasn’t sick or disgusting.

“We’re going to need a shower when we get home,” I said as another droplet of beer escaped my
hair. “I don’t want to stink of beer all night,”

I don’t know what I was hoping for by saying that, but it earned me another caress, and I couldn’t regret saying it.

Oo..Oo..Oo..Oo
Where We Make Love

Come on and run

I'm gonna marry the night

I'm gonna burn a hole in the road

I'm gonna marry the night

Leave nothing on these streets to explore

"You can’t shower in a cast," Kakashi said as he unlocked his front door. Immediately, all eight dogs, save for the smallest, launched themselves at our legs. Stepping through the door, I bent down to offer my hand to them, which they sniffed and licked and nosed. I couldn’t help but smile; they really were adorable.

I brushed my hand over a probing muzzle, drawing a jealous yip from another and another, begging me to shower them with affection, too. That was another good thing about dogs; they couldn’t talk. If they couldn’t talk, they couldn’t judge or resent you. They just wanted petting, feeding and walking, offering snuggles and affection in return, but they always seemed to get their own way. In a way, they were smarter than their human owners.

“What? Why?” I replied as my brain finally registered what he said. Dogs are very distracting when they’re being cute.

“If you get the cast damp, the material gets soft and can reshape so your wrist won’t heal properly,” He explained, turning to run a pair of fingers along the hard, white surface before moving to untie the knot at the top of the sling. I stretched my arm out, revelling in the new range of movement, but still keeping it out of reach of the dogs.

“So how do I wash, then?” I asked. He took my fingers in one warm hand, gently tugging on them to pull me out of the short stretch of hall.

“In a bath,” He said, moving one hand to pull down the mask and stepping closer. “Are you sure you’re okay?” I nodded before his lips met mine in a small, chaste kiss. We were in the sitting room, just metres from the patch of floor where we had first done things, even if it was under the influence of alcohol. I suddenly felt intensely guilty; my behaviour the morning after had been really, really inconsiderate.

I pressed my lips to his in a firmer, more desperate kiss, looping my undamaged arm around his shoulders and rising onto my toes to find a better angle. If I couldn’t explicitly tell Kakashi that I wasn’t going to run away, then I could at least show it somehow. One of his hands came to rest on my hip, pushing me gently down and away. I pouted in question, eyes widening a little at his reaction.

“I brought you home to clean you up, not molest you on the floor of my living room,” He said,
raising a hand to stroke his thumb over my lower lip. “And the dogs are watching,” He whispered, casting a sly glance to the door, where the dogs were watching with an uncannily knowing look.

“They were watching last time,” I grumbled, staying in exactly the same position. I could feel his body heat radiating towards me, urging me to move even closer, remove all the barriers and feel nothing but hot skin and-

“The bathroom’s through there, go and run the bath however you like it. I need to feed the dogs,” He said quickly, planting a peck on my nose before moving backwards towards the kitchen. The dogs seemed to understand, and they scurried past me into the kitchen after him at the promise of being fed. It was rather late; I hoped the dogs hadn’t been neglected because of me.

Is it possible to molest the willing? By definition, it isn’t.

I walked into the bathroom and turned on the taps, watching as the bath slowly filled with water. There wasn’t any bubble bath, and I wasn’t about to experiment with using shower gel or shampoo as a replacement, so I left the water pure. Steam gently wafted upwards, curling away from the stream of water falling from the silver tap.

I pulled out my hair tie and began to unbutton my shirt, watching myself with an odd kind of curiosity in the mirror over the sink opposite. It was just big enough to frame my face and upper body, more and more of my skin revealed as I unbuttoned the shirt. I wasn’t bad, I supposed. I just wasn’t stunning, like certain other people. I couldn’t undo the button on the cuff of my shirt to slip it over my cast with one hand, so I ended up sitting rather lamely on the edge of the bath, naked except for the shirt I had somehow managed to wear all day. It was amazing it had survived, really. My trousers and underwear made a neat puddle on the floor where I had kicked them. I could clear them up later.

“Still alive out there?” I called, trying to see around the door, but the kitchen wall obscured Kakashi from my vision. There was no reply, so I settled for gnawing at the infuriating button on my shirt with my teeth, trying to undo it without chewing through the thread.

Alone in the bathroom, my mind couldn’t help but wander back to what had happened barely half an hour ago. I stopped chewing on my shirt sleeve and let it fall into my lap. I couldn’t feel ashamed of my reactions, but I couldn’t help but still feel a little shaken at their words. Sick. Disgusting. Was that really what some people thought about two men being together? Before Kakashi, I honestly hadn’t thought about what gay men do in bed. I knew, but I didn’t really have an opinion on it. As long as it wasn’t harming anyone, then it was okay, but some people clearly didn’t see it that way.

Now, the idea didn’t disgust me at all. A few choice dreams, a dirty book, a little bit of experimentation – wait, was it just experimentation? Experimentation was the thing teenagers did, drunk at parties, or inquisitive young adults did in hotels with strangers. No, what we did wasn’t experimentation. What could I call it? Intimacy? Expression of desire? Making love?

Whatever it was, it wasn’t sick or disgusting. It was right and affectionate and ardent and erotic. But it wasn’t wrong. It couldn’t possibly be wrong. My heart lurched with pain at the very idea of it being wrong.

I could feel a pair of eyes weighing heavily on me from the doorway. Smiling, I turned my head and raised a hand to beckon Kakashi, my lover, into the room. Not casual fuck. Not fellow deviant. Lover.

“You’re still dressed,” I pointed out. He had somehow found the time to change over the course of the day, because I remembered him wearing a different shirt this morning to the one he wore to the
restaurant. Naturally, he managed to look handsome in both, but it was rather difficult to bathe fully clothed.

“Your shirt’s still on,” He noted. “You’re lucky they didn’t cut it off at the hospital,” Quick, pale fingers undid the offending button before turning on his own clothes, which dropped to the floor somewhere near mine.

“I don’t know what I’d do without you,” I said, grinning.

“Keep the cast out of the water,” He chided as I moved to step into the bath, rolling my eyes. The water was almost too hot, but it was very relaxing. Truthfully, most of the thrown beer had gotten on our clothes, so it would be a more idea just to wash our hair, but I wasn’t about to turn down an excuse for a bath. I never had time for baths.

The water rippled and formed little waves as Kakashi moved to sit behind me. I leaned backwards, enjoying the sensation of skin over-sensitised by the hot water and the close proximity. I wriggled a little, resting my head on his shoulder. Damp hands wove into my loose hair, gently tugging out knots and tangles, illegally sensual. I failed in stifling a small moan.

“Why is it always my hair?” I mumbled, although I was by no means complaining. It felt fantastic to have Kakashi play with my hair. It was amazingly relaxing and soothing.

“Scoot forwards for a second,” He whispered, and I complied. Hands tilted my head back and pulled my shoulders down towards the bath water, the ends of my hair completely immersed. “Stay still,”

“What are you-” I asked, stopping myself as warm water ran through my hair. I glimpsed a cup before shutting my eyes, smiling softly at the luxurious treatment. No one had done this for me since I was a small child, and I had forgotten how relaxing it was. A few more cups of water were emptied onto my hair, thoroughly soaking it, before the hands were back, coating my hair in citrusy shampoo. I vaguely recognised it as a part of Kakashi’s smell. I repressed a childish giggle; now we’d smell more like each other. That was a cute sentiment. The bubbles were rinsed from my hair and I opened my eyes, looking into his upside down face.

I sat up, pushing myself back against his chest and coming into contact with – something. Something I recognised. I turned my head, raising a mocking eyebrow.

“What? Can’t a man enjoy washing someone’s hair?” He defended, grinning somewhat guiltily.

“Sexually?” I said, twisting around in the water to face Kakashi. That was when I noticed the eye patch, which had always been present before even when the mask was off, had gone. A scar trailed from below his eyebrow to his cheek, its trail left obvious in a thick white line running down the centre of the eye. I resisted the temptation to run a finger down the scar, to feel the raised, smooth skin under my fingers. If he covered it, it was clearly something he was uncomfortable with.

“Maybe,” He leaned forward and kissed me, neither of us bothering with taking things slowly. My mouth was immediately open, his tongue immediately probing. One of his hands moved to my hip, pushing our bodies closer together so I was practically straddling his lap, my growing arousal tantalisingly close to his.

My head fell to his shoulder as the hand replaced itself on both our cocks, pressing them together and moving in a fast, steady rhythm. My left hand moved down to cover his, and I could feel his breathing becoming more and more rapid as his shoulders shook slightly under my head. The mutual pleasure, the closeness was incredibly arousing, and I knew I was right. There was no way this could possibly be wrong.
Neither of us lasted long, dirtying the water with our combined essence. I wrapped my other arm around his shoulders, holding us in place. This close, I could practically feel his heartbeat. Yes, I was definitely right.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Enough

If I lie here
If I just lay here
Would you lie with me and
Just forget the world?

I couldn’t sleep. My jaw stretched almost painfully in a yawn, and I snuggled down into unfamiliar bed sheets and increasingly familiar arms. Despite being thoroughly exhausted from the bath and my long, tiring day, I couldn’t sleep. At some point Kakashi had drifted off behind me, wrapping me in his arms and pulling me close like a giant human teddy bear. I could feel soft breath tickling my neck, the slow rhythm reassuring and soothing. I knew I should be able to drop off immediately, to settle back into those arms and sleep, but I couldn’t.

I could feel every line, every inch of Kakashi’s body behind mine, pressed against my back. The pressure wasn’t too little or too much, just enough that I couldn’t forget he was there if I tried. Despite the fact we were both naked, it wasn’t a sexual kind of closeness, but neither was it platonic. It was just a touch of skin, a closeness that could only be achieved without any physical barrier. To be given and to give that physical intimacy so freely was incredibly precious.

What else was precious to me? I supposed my career was precious; I would put up a fight for it if I thought I was going to be fired, and it encompassed most of my life. It had pretty much defined who I was since I had decided to become a teacher. I was and would only ever be Iruka-sensei to the thousands of children that had passed through my care over the years, stuck in the limbo of ‘sort-of-a-person-but-not-quite’, the way a child recognises their parent is there to provide a service until they realise that they, too, are autonomous humans.

My parents were precious to me. Although I had pushed them to the back of my mind recently, they were still present. If I was being overly sentimental, I could pretend that was their way of watching over me, despite being dead.

Other than my parents and my job, there was only one other thing that stood out as eminently precious. Something that had changed the way the other two precious things affected my life, shifting all the focus away from them and onto itself. Although I couldn’t admit it out loud, possibly ever, Kakashi had somehow managed to become my most precious thing. I couldn’t pinpoint an exact date or hour, but he had somehow crept into my life and turned everything upside down.

Instead of a shining light, the peal of bells or angelic chorus, there was nothing but quiet breathing to accompany my small, personal epiphany.

I turned within the circle of arms to face the object of my recent obsession. I had barely thought of anything but Kakashi for weeks. If that wasn’t obsession, then I didn’t know what was. Warm breath fanned across my face, reassuring me that he was still alive, still breathing.

I suddenly felt very old. I was twenty six. In four years, I would be thirty. And then in twenty years after that, I would be fifty. I might not live that long. My parents didn’t live that long. If I died before
I was fifty, then I had a maximum of twenty four years left, and I knew where I wanted to be during all twenty four of those years.

One of my hands found its way to his chest, feeling the familiar rise and fall of his chest and the gentle thumping of his heart against his ribs.

I silently chastised myself for being such a soppy, cliché romantic. Most relationships didn’t work out, and I had no guarantee that Kakashi would want to put up with me for nearly a quarter of a century. I probably wouldn’t put up with me for that long. But I still smiled into the darkness, imagining a future that would probably never be.


Maybe, if I was lucky, or if I was brave enough to do something. But for now, I was content to just lie still next to him, revelling in the warmth and the closeness. I couldn’t ask for anything, considering how selfish I was. I never instigated anything, and it was always Kakashi taking me on dates, Kakashi taking the initiative. I was fairly useless, really. I wasn’t in a position to demand what I wanted.

I let my fingers creep up to his face, gently exploring the completely exposed skin. One finger dipped between parted lips, touching the warm moisture inside, before trailing a line over his nose. It wandered along his cheek, coming into contact with the scar, evidence of a line gouged down across his eye, its evidence permanent and horrible. Whatever had caused it had earned my hate from the moment I saw the damage. The scar tissue was smooth and raised under my fingertip, but I didn’t dare wander too close to his eye. The scar near his lips could be accidental, but I found it hard to imagine an accident where something like this could happen.

Committing every single detail to memory, I let my fingers retrace their paths, feeling and touching every inch of that perfect face. The scars made it no less perfect.

“You’re far too good for me,” I whispered into the darkness, laying a gentle kiss on his forehead before retreating downwards to rest against his shoulder, manoeuvring my wrist into a more comfortable position. At this angle, I could feel his heart beating.

I wanted to sleep. There was no way I was going to skip work, so I needed to be well-rested. I knew I should sleep, but I wasn’t sure I wanted the morning to come. With the morning came the inevitable routine that brought us into contact with other human beings, and I wanted to stay here forever, warm in a cocoon of blankets and arms.

I tucked my head under his chin and shut my eyes, endeavouring to sleep.

“I’m not,” The softest of whispers came from above me. “Go back to sleep,”

OoO..Oo..Oo..Oo

Kakashi’s alarm clock was set for seven o’clock, a full hour after mine. So, naturally, the fact I got enough sleep was counteracted by my morning panic. I couldn’t shower properly because of my cast, and there was no way I was distracting myself with a bath before work. Worse still, my clothes were still in a crumpled heap on the bathroom floor from where I had forgotten them last night, so I had to walk to my own flat in a creased shirt to fetch a new set of clothes. I couldn’t do the button on the cuff with one hand.

As gentle fingers slipped the button through the hole, my mind replayed my thoughts and actions of
last night on a constant loop. Strangely, waking up next to Kakashi made the day worth facing, and worth facing properly. Although the longing to remain in a warm heap was there, crawling out of bed and getting ready for the day together was rather fulfilling.

For one, Kakashi had an odd morning routine. Feeding the dogs their breakfast, one special dog chew thing each, took priority, and then he ate before he dressed or washed. It had never occurred to me that people might eat before they get dressed before. Naturally, I insisted on dressing myself before eating. The world really was full of strange and amazing wonders.

“Are you going to eat your toast or stare at me all morning?” Kakashi said around his coffee mug. He had great coffee too, not the cheap crap I usually bought. I preferred tea in the mornings, but I would settle for this kind of coffee any day.

I stuck out my tongue and bit down on my toast, glaring half-seriously through the hole I made taking a bite out of it. I couldn’t really help but stare. The mask was off, waiting on the table for when we set off, waiting to cover the pale features and shroud him in mystery again. Although I would love to see them constantly, the mask meant his face was mine. No one else had seen it, so I could claim it by right. It was like staking claim to a piece of newly discovered land, minus sticking a flagpole in it.

Or maybe not. I repressed a childish grin around my toast at my own lame joke.

Only after the dishes were placed in the sink, Kakashi was dressed and all the equipment for the day was collected did the mask go on. As one mask went on, another came off; I slipped my hand into his as we walked out of the door.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
The morning was shaping up unusually well. Not a single student had forgotten their copy of the text or their folders or their pens, and the single piece of forgotten homework I let slide with a promise it would be on my desk by the time I got in tomorrow morning, unusually generous for me. It was a matter of punctuality; if the homework was late, it was a symptom of sloppiness, and I was at loath to tolerate sloppiness.

After reassuring the classes that I was not about to drop down dead, that I had only fractured my wrist, and that classes would continue as normal, the kids’ standard behaviour returned, but with an extra dose of courtesy. Volunteering to carry things for me, complying when I dictated things rather than attempted to write and working more quietly than usual all made the morning surprisingly easy.

Naturally, there were blips. The discussion of contextual relationships in any novel or play managed to draw my interest more than usual. It was impossible to draw some comparisons, but I tried to keep my teacher-hat on. These people were fictional, many of their relationships idealised, some horrifically detrimental to the lives of other people, others nothing but side-stories in the lives of the main characters.

And then there was the sex scene. Of course today had to be the day my fourth form class discovered the joys of literary sex, and I had to read it aloud since no one would subject themselves to reading the description of the act. Possibly the most fun a reader could have next to actually having sex was deconstructing a sex scene.

First, there was the necessity of the scene. Was it completely necessary to the plot? Were the characters emotionally prepared? This was possibly the most important aspect of the sex scene. If it wasn’t necessary, it was gratuitous. It could be used to show the very worst qualities of a character through rape, the vulnerability of a heroine through the loss of her virginity, or the development of an established relationship.

I kept my mouth shut, refusing to draw parallels to real life. Literary sex was one thing, real sex was another. Written sex could be hilarious or even boring if it was written wrong. Real sex was-


Well, not entirely new. I’d had sex before, but only with women. I tried to remember my last sexual partner, the last girlfriend. Haruka, or was it Harumi? I winced; she wasn’t really memorable. Worse still, she was the one I took to senior prom. I couldn’t remember her dress, but I vaguely remember her doing something complicated with her hair, and then getting a little tipsy and pulling it all out of its elaborate arrangement. Her mother had given me a look when I collected her, the ‘if you touch my daughter, I’ll castrate you with a blunt knife’ look. But by then, we’d already had sex. Several times,
I think.

Sexual intercourse. Sexual contact between individuals involving penetration.

It was obviously different with a woman. Women had different equipment to men. They were biologically designed to be the slot to a man’s peg, although that didn’t mean there weren’t other ways of pleasing a woman. I just couldn’t remember precisely what they were.

In one respect, men were somewhat easier to please. We had the most obvious display of arousal imaginable, short of writing ‘I have a raging erection’ on our foreheads.

If I remembered correctly, which I was sure I did, gay sex was pretty much identical, but a different orifice was used. I shifted in my seat a little, forcing the words on the page out of my mouth. I had read more than I intended to, but if I could disguise my thoughts by multitasking then I wouldn’t have to face awkward questions if I made weird facial expressions or something.

It felt like I had bought the crappy erotic novel centuries ago. There was yet more evidence that it was targeted at women in the sex scene; all the details were glossed over, and then the receiving party was subjected to the abnormally enormous penis of their lover. At least, I was fairly certain ten inches was abnormally enormous. And I’d imagine it would be a little unlikely to stop the action during sex to casually measure each other.

And then there were positions. The author of the porno book obviously had little idea about male anatomy, considering some of the positions the characters assumed. At least one was possibly physically impossible without being a very talented contortionist.

Then there was the issue of pain. The book glamourised that to the point of completely ignoring it two sentences after it was described, and then not at all after that despite the pace they were going at. And then they just kept going and going and going for what seemed to be hours without pause or concern for anyone’s health or comfort. Well, considering the ecstatic screams it probably wasn’t an issue.

I paused in my reading to smile self-depreciatingly, turning a page in the class text. Pointing out all the obvious flaws in the dirty book was one thing, but I had no base of physical evidence to go on for some points. Some were obvious, like the issue of stamina and positions, but others I had no real way of disproving without actually doing it myself.

Doing it. Did I want to do it? Did I even have to justify it? I wanted commitment and passion and romance, certainly, and sex was part of the equation. It was a display of commitment, an act of passion, and it was romantic in the right circumstances. I felt like I had barely shown any commitment to Kakashi, although short of actually marrying him there were few ways of showing physical commitment. Being loyal was key, but I didn’t want to sleep with anyone else. I didn’t want to be with anyone else.

Did I want to do it with Kakashi? To put it shortly, yes. I was by no means bored of what we had already done. Those relatively few instances had blown any fond memories of the women of my past out of the water completely. It was different when the person you were with was special. That was where the romance came in.

Was it too early to think about sex? Some people waited for months, even years, to have sex with their partners. Some waited until after marriage.

I had to stop myself from laughing out loud. I wasn’t some love-struck teenage girl debating with her friends whether she was ready to give her virginity to her boyfriend. From what I remembered of the
mortifying sex talk from my father when I was about twelve, being in any way unsure is a sign that you’re not ready. Things should progress naturally to that point if you’re in a good relationship.

It was more than a little surprising to me that I wasn’t freaking out. I had been remarkably calm in the last week or two, save for a few episodes where someone really pissed me off. Just because I was calm didn’t mean I didn’t feel a couple of worms of worry snake their way through my stomach; no normal human wants to be in pain, and I wasn’t even sure what we were. Dating, yes. Did that automatically make us a couple?

“…sei? Iruka-sensei?” A concerned voice from the class said. I blinked twice, refocusing on the class. I had been totally lost in my thoughts, and had forgotten to start reading again.

“I’m sorry, please could you continue to the end of the chapter?” I said quickly, digging with the hand attached to my undamaged wrist in my bag for a set of worksheets. “Questions two through six, and then the rest for homework,”

A couple of snickers rang out through the classroom. I raised an eyebrow, briefly wondering what was so amusing, scanning the class for the usual troublemakers. All silent, save for a few giggles, but every pair of eyes was locked on my desk on the pile of worksheets.

A thin book had become lodged in the pile of papers, slipping out when I put them down. The cover was very recognisable: ‘Icha Icha Paradise’. I snatched the book off the table, concealing the illicit novel. I knew letting Kakashi carry my bags was a bad idea.

“Collect a sheet from my desk and do what you can before the bell goes,” I ordered, shifting the papers closer to the edge of my desk. “The more you get done now, the less you have to do at home,”

Once the class was resettled, I couldn’t resist cracking open the small orange book at a random page. Almost instantly, my face heated at the content, suddenly understanding why the ‘Icha Icha’ series was regarded as the pinnacle of erotic writing.

I re-read a couple of passages, grudgingly admitting that it was rather well-written. It wasn’t the poor purple prose I’d previously read by any means, and I got the distinct impression the author knew exactly what he was talking about. In fact, it was somewhat entertaining, once you got over the fact the characters were-

“Enjoying that, Iruka-sensei?” A very familiar voice said from behind me. Hands curled around my shoulders, head lowering to whisper in my ear. “It’s not quite what we could do, but some aspects of it are certainly applicable to-”

“Not in front of the kids!” I hissed.

Okay, forget everything I just said. I was taking a vow of chastity the minute the school day was over.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Scared

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Tell me something that'll save me

I need a man who makes me alright

Tell me something that'll change me

I'm gonna love you with my hands tied

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I was possibly doing something incredibly stupid.

Shizune waved me through, barely sparing me a glance as I approached the portal to hell more commonly known as the door to the headmistress's office.

I raised my fist to knock on the door of Tsunade’s office, pausing briefly before letting it collide with the solid wood. By knocking, I was possibly condemning myself to an extended interrogation at the hands of the most terrifying fangirl of them all, but it was necessary.

The familiar clunk of the stapler colliding with the doorframe echoed through the wall, indicating Tsunade was probably drunk. That could possibly be a blessing or a curse. If she was half asleep, she was likely to just comply with whatever I had to say and wave me out, but if she was more lucid then I’d get a full-blown interrogation.

I pushed open the door, bending down to retrieve the stapler from the floor. It couldn’t hurt to be a little helpful.

“Nice ass. Although I suppose Kakashi’s claimed it by now, right?” Tsunade’s voice slurred from the direction of her desk. I stood up, holding the stapler loosely between my thumb and forefinger, glaring at it instead of Tsunade.

“I’m not going to dignify that with an answer,” I replied, placing it in front of her on the desk.

“But your sex life is the only interesting thing going on right now! I’d much rather talk about that than do paperwork or something, and I’m down to my last bottle until Friday. Alleviate a lady’s boredom, Iruka!” Interestingly, her speech patterns were considerably normal, hinting that she hadn’t had all that much to drink. My brow creased in suspicion; if this was some kind of ploy to ferret more information out of me, then it wasn’t going to work.

“My sex life is no one’s business but my own,” I said, folding my arms across my chest. It was more than a little tiring, not to mention insulting, that all anyone seemed to be interested in these days was my love life. “Please stop asking about it.”

“But everyone wants to know about it,” She whined, picking up the stapler. I really hoped it wasn’t going to be launched at my head any time soon.

“That isn’t justification for telling you,” I eyed the stapler nervously. The red paint flashed dangerously in the lighting, but I ignored the warning signs. My dignity was worth a stapler to the face. Probably.
“You’re no fun at all, I swear,” She said, pouting and dropping the stapler. It fell to the desk with a satisfying clunk. I could have sighed with relief. “So, why the visit? I assume it’s not just a social visit, and you don’t seem to want to tell me all the delicious details of your bedroom activities, so it must be something else.”

I paused for a moment. What I really wanted were a couple of days off to try and figure out in my own time what range of motion I had with my wrist in a cast, but I couldn’t take days off. I was too paranoid about who would be taking my classes, whether the correct work would be done, and whether I’d return to find more irritating messages spread throughout the classwork.

“I want an assistant,”

“For what?” She asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“I won’t be able to write anything on the board for a few weeks with my broken wrist, and I don’t have a projector, but I’m not handing my classes over to anyone,” I explained. I shifted my arm in the sling; although it wasn’t strictly necessary, keeping the break elevated was a good plan, according to the doctor. It just made everything a little more difficult. “I can manage to dictate for my older classes, but the younger kids aren’t dealing so well with it. I know it’s a bit unreasonable, but—”

“If it’s just for two weeks, I can probably pull someone out of a sixth form class, since we’re not so close to exams. Its good training for university, anyway.” She waved a hand somewhat dismissively. I frowned; this was far too good to be true. Pulling another teacher out of their class wasn’t a smart move to make, in all honesty. It would mess up their teaching plans for the sake of my own, especially if they were teaching sixth form classes. “I know, how about Kakashi-sensei?”

“Oh god, anyone but him,” I groaned, premonitions flashing through my mind. I wouldn’t get anything done. The class would be too busy staring at one or both of us to get anything done. Kakashi would read porn when I wasn’t looking. Hell, he’d probably read porn even if I was looking. It was one thing to read inappropriate books in his own class, but it was a huge offense in mine.

“May I ask why?” She said with a smirk.

“I think I’ll be fine without, actually,” I backtracked, suddenly regretting asking at all.

This was why it was a bad idea to go near Tsunade. It was a stupid, suicidal, completely idiotic idea, and I was a complete imbecile for even thinking of it. I’d write on the board in my own blood before I let her fantasies come true.

“Are you worried that your sexy boyfriend will distract you from teaching?” In a word, yes, but I wasn’t going to say it out loud.

“No, but—”

“I’m back, my little slug princess! And I brought you some sake from that place you—” I was cut off as a somewhat familiar figure burst through the door, smiling widely while a somewhat frustrated-looking Shizune peeked around him. Evidently, everyone was being very distracting today.

“Jiraiya! I thought I told you never to call me that in public! Can’t you see I’m busy?” Tsunade cut him off, standing up and leaning across the desk. Despite her words, a smile was in her eyes at the appearance of her not-usually-present other half.

Immediately, I felt somewhat awkward. If Jiraiya had appeared, then that generally meant he was home for a short time before going off doing whatever it was authors did in their spare time. His
appearance generally meant Shizune had to move her desk down the hall a little and ask everyone very politely if they wouldn’t mind waiting until tomorrow to see the headmistress as she was probably indisposed. Either drunk out of her mind or something else entirely. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be around if that started happening.

“Busy doing what? Chatting?” He said, turning to regard me. I smiled somewhat awkwardly, trying to distance myself from the conversation without being rude.

“No, I was trying to get the details about Iruka’s sex life, but—”

“Sex life? So who’s the lucky lady? What does she look like? How big are her—” Jiraiya suddenly perked up, picking up on the ‘sex’ part. Ah yes. I had almost forgotten the part where he was a super-pervert. Almost.

“Iruka’s gay, you moron,” Tsunade cut in, stating it like it was the most obvious fact in the world.

I frowned a little at that; I was not obviously gay. I wasn’t sure I even self-identified as gay. I mean, yes, I lusted after and was romantically involved with a man, and I could barely remember the bodies let alone the faces or names of my past girlfriends, but that didn’t make me gay. Did it?

“Ah yes, I remember that odd obsession with Orochimaru and me you had years ago. Do you still have those pictures you drew of us, or did you burn them along with the photos after he ran off and joined the Akatsuki?” His voice grew teasing as he moved closer and closer to Tsunade, the desk suddenly seeming like less and less of a barrier between the two.

“I’m going to leave now,” I said quickly, retreating through the door. Naturally, I was completely ignored. I think I was possibly forgotten by that point, if the looks in their eyes were anything to go by. I resisted the temptation to run very fast in the opposite direction. The idea of my boss getting it on anywhere near me was a hideous prospect.

“I might have a few around somewhere,” Her voice came low and seductive as I half slammed the door on the way out, receiving a sympathetic look from Shizune as I half-ran down the corridor, back to my classroom.

I would never be able to go in that office ever again.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Perfect

If I could say what I want to say
I'd say I wanna blow you - away [Oh Avril, you naughty girl!]

Be with you every night

Am I squeezing you too tight?

If I could say what I want to see

I want you to go down

On one knee

Marry me today

Guess I'm wishing my life away

With these things I'll never say

I was rather desperately hoping that Tsunade had completely forgotten to assign me an assistant. By
the end of the day there was still no word from her, so I decided to assume that she continued to be
completely indisposed. All over her desk.

I winced internally at that image, taking its place as possibly one of the most disturbing mental
images ever.

The bell indicating the end of the school day had rung about three minutes ago, the shrill bell ringing
out across the school, sending the kids fleeing from the classroom in a shower of paper and pens,
voices louder than the actual bell. As a member of staff, I wasn’t really supposed to leave for a little
while, since a lot of my resources were on the school premises and it was easier to plan lessons at
school with them available, but I was taking liberties because of my injury.

The to-be-marked pile of classwork wasn’t going to fit in my bag. One-handed, I attempted to
manoeuvre the teetering stack of paper from the edge of the desk into the open top of the bag, but
somehow managed to overshoot by about a mile. As a result, papers flew across the floor in all
directions. I frowned; just what I needed.

I bent a knee to scoop up a handful of papers that had fallen near me, shoving them roughly back on
the desk. I’d have to re-stack them now. And they would be out of order. I shuffled forwards a little,
reaching out for a paper just out of arms reach, but another pair of fingers got there first.

“Need a hand?” The owner of said hand spoke from somewhere above me. I refused to look up; I
knew exactly who it was. It was about time Kakashi got here, actually, since he was supposed to be
carrying my stuff to his car and driving me home.

Naturally, I was very grateful.
“Oh, ha ha,” I said sarcastically, clicking my fingers and holding out a hand for the paper. Instead, he gripped my wrist and pulled me to my feet, using just enough force to throw me off balance.

“Gotcha,” He whispered as I fell forwards. If I had been able to use both my arms, I would have steadied myself, but as it was I let myself fall into the circle of his arms. And then I let myself have a moment, just one moment, within those arms. We were in school, and I was not being photographed again.

I raised my arm and tried to push away, irritatingly noting that the paper had been somewhat squashed. I’d have to bump the owner’s grade up a little to compensate for that. At some point, my nose ended up nestled in his shoulder, and I was forced to inhale a lungful of his scent. There was something off today, something more chemical in the mix.

“Did you wash your jacket or something recently?” I asked, voice a little muffled. At some point I had stopped protesting.

“Maybe,” I inhaled again; yes, there was the distinctive smell of fresh washing powder, somewhat clouded and dissipated by the activities of the day. I wasn’t entirely sure I liked it, but I supposed it was better for Kakashi to be clean than to smell like unwashed dog.

“We’re at work,” I said quickly, suddenly remembering where we were. “Let go of me,”

“No,” His arms actually tightened, the paper between us making an unhappy crinkling noise.

“The students might see,” I pointed out, trying to move my head to see the door. Once again, I cursed our small height difference. I was at just the wrong angle to see anything without moving closer, if that was even possible anymore. Short of actually removing clothes, that is.

I blushed at that thought. I really didn’t need to think of something like that in school.

“I shut the door,” He said, voice low and soft. We were alone.

Wait, we were in school. A school where we were teachers. In a country where public indecency was still a crime. And we weren’t exactly alone; I could hear the voices of students in the corridor, giggling and babbling and shouting as they prepared to leave the building. If we did something and they saw it, I would be forced to commit ritual suicide.

“You can do whatever you like when we get home, so just let go of me for now,” I begged, hoping to diffuse the situation a little. As soon as the implications of the words hit me, I regretted saying them. I had basically just given Kakashi freedom to do whatever he wanted to me. That was possibly not my smartest strategic move ever.

“Can I have that in writing?”

“No, now let go,”

We got home in record time, entering my flat and shoving the overflowing bags out of the way under the kitchen table. Almost as soon as I had removed my jacket, which had been rather lamely draped over my right arm because I couldn’t quite get the cast through it comfortably and I didn’t want to risk the stitching, I found myself pushed against the kitchen table, all protests sealed within my own mouth as a pair of lips pressed tightly over my own.

I instantly yielded to the kiss, opening my mouth and leaning back a little. My hand moved up to tangle in the open collar of his shirt, the fingers on my right hand wriggling pathetically as they craved to mimic the ones on the left. I kissed back properly, meeting Kakashi’s tongue where our lips
met rather than teasing him within my own mouth, smiling when I felt my hair tie mysteriously remove itself. My hair seemed to spend more time loose than bound these days.

Pressure on my upper body increased until I was forced to scoot back to perch on the table, holding myself up with a combination of my death grip on his collar and a refusal to lie on my kitchen table. I had to eat off this thing later.

He broke the kiss for a second, a hand subtly changing positions first to release my arm from its sling, and then to twist the buttons on my shirt out of place, slowly undoing them one by one. My kitchen was cold, but his hands were tantalisingly warm against my skin. Every brush of a finger as more of my shirt came undone was electrifying, warming, and I couldn’t help but lean into the touch a little.

“N-not on my kitchen table,” I protested futilely. Wherever this was going, it was not happening where I ate and worked. If it did, I wouldn’t be able to sit here with a straight face and eat ever again.

“You promised,” He whispered in my ear, leaning over me and forcing me back further. He kneed my thighs apart, running a hand down my now-bare chest, fingers lingering as they reached the line of my trousers, teasingly dipping just below the waistband but never any further. My hips shifted unconsciously in encouragement, since my conscious mind couldn’t possibly want something obscene to happen here of all places.

“I hate you,” I grumbled half-heartedly before he claimed my mouth in another kiss, hands returning to move and touch and rub and gently scratch across the exposed skin of my torso. Every trace of a fingertip was new and possessive somehow, like each inch of skin knew that it had remained untouched for years.

A ridiculous thought struck me. Was I responding to Kakashi’s touches, advances and intentions the way I was because I hadn’t done anything for quite a while? Was it just an expression of lust for the nearest sexualised object?

No, no it definitely wasn’t. For one, Kakashi wasn’t an object. He was a person, with a personality and a career and dogs. No person with dogs could be just an object. Secondly, if he was just here for sex, why would either of us bother with the dates? Sharing a bed at night wouldn’t serve any purpose, either. Or the emotions that I wouldn’t name that coiled in my chest in his presence, although it was best to pretend they weren’t there, just in case.

I wriggled my hips a little and drew my legs up, encircling his waist and pulling our lower bodies closer and confirming my suspicions. I wasn’t the only one developing an awkward bulge in my trousers.

“See? The kitchen isn’t so bad,” He murmured. I pushed my hips forward a little more anxiously. Nothing was happening. What was the point in letting him ravage me if he wasn’t going to do anything? Naturally, I could never, ever say that out loud. “Too bad it’s not really conducive to this next part,” He pulled back, giving me an appraising glance. I raised my eyebrow right back.

“What are you-” I asked flatly, cutting myself off as he scooped me off the table. “You need to stop carrying me everywhere if you want your back to function by the time you’re fifty,”

The layout of my flat wasn’t exactly difficult to memorise, and he found the bedroom awfully quickly. I realised at some point I had stopped referring to just my flat as ‘home’. Both of our flats seemed to have taken on that title. I smiled; it wasn’t quite the nice little house with the white picket fence, but it was home and I was happy in it.
“Clothes off,” I said as he put me down on the bed.

Blessedly following my orders, every article of clothing on both of us found its way to the floor. It was too early to go to bed immediately afterwards, so I’d have to force myself to get up to pick them up and probably launder them. I wasn’t about to leave a room full of dirty clothes untouched.

Instead of immediately picking up where we had left off in the kitchen, Kakashi stood for a second, just watching me. I twitched self-consciously under his gaze, taking in the way his visible eye managed to smoulder through the lower light of the bedroom. My body ached with arousal, and this was nothing but teasing.

Lacking any clothes to hold onto, I impatiently seized Kakashi’s wrist and pulled him towards me, not really thinking what I was doing. As it was, I managed to misjudge how much force I was using, and ended up toppling backwards and pulling him on top of me in a way rather reminiscent of what happened in the classroom not half an hour ago, letting a small, undignified squeak escape me as I fell. Now, unclothed, the chemical smell was gone, and it was just Kakashi. I repressed an idiot grin at that thought.

Somewhat daringly, I let my left hand sneak between us, fingers twitching with nervous anticipation at what I was vaguely trying to do. It shouldn’t be too hard. Just because I was right-handed didn’t mean I was incapable of using my left for certain things. I didn’t even reach my original target; just a light rake of nails over the top of his thigh made him shudder.

At the touch of my hand, Kakashi moved, the motion of his body pressing his stomach over my arousal, and in turn pushing his own stiffened flesh into my thigh. I could feel the heat pressing into my skin, a light sheen of sweat beginning to coat both of us, the sound of rapid breathing, the rustle of the bed sheet beneath me. I rocked gently with the motion, keeping my eyes shut throughout. I didn’t want to see myself reflected in the single dark eye, the other infuriatingly still covered with the patch.

I climaxed first, digging my nails into the flesh of his back, but he didn’t stop moving. The motion prolonged my pleasure, my grip loosening and letting my left hand fall to encourage him to keep moving. Barely five seconds later, he was shaking in my arms.

I could probably have made some great philosophical statement about the meaning of life at that point, but I didn’t. I kept my mouth shut and wriggled down to rest my head against his, synchronising our breathing. The rapid rhythm of breath made everything feel stupidly real, and reality was good.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Confetti

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I spiral into circles

And all of this is for you

So tell me how to find you now

And tell me what to do

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Kakashi left shortly afterwards. I kicked him out; the temptation was just too great to keep him around. I had a pair of overflowing bags of work underneath my kitchen table, and the papers weren’t going to mark themselves. Granted, we could always mark together, but that usually devolved into chatting.

So instead, I was alone in my flat and significantly bored. Marking wasn’t supposed to be fun, but it wasn’t supposed to be intensely, mind-breakingly, soul-crushingly dull either. My kitchen chair was uncomfortably hard underneath me, just begging me to leap up off it and do something, anything else.

“…the use of aliteration in lines thirty three and thirty six…” Messy handwriting jumped out of the page, the small mistake making me a little more annoyed than it should. My hand itched to write a snarky message next to it, asking precisely why a seventeen year old boy who had been taking English Literature for godknows how many years had failed to pick up on not only the spelling of ‘alliteration’ but also the fact that it was more precisely sibilance.

Instead, I corrected the spelling and wrote a small question mark next to the word. He could figure it out for himself.

I read through the rest of the paper somewhat guiltily, possibly being a tad too generous on the mark. As much as I hated to resort to just ticking paragraphs or scrawling question marks in the margin, I couldn’t focus on the paper properly.

Like most people, I could tune out the great distractions of the world in order to focus properly on my work. I wasn’t greatly caught up contemplating the solutions to world peace or international famine or messed up politics. I didn’t really think about much outside of my school. Instead, it was just one person who distracted me.

It would be more than a stretch to say Kakashi was normal. Although it felt like the majority of people I knew weren’t exactly normal, Kakashi was one of the less sinister, more fascinating not-normal people. Most people, namely most of my female colleagues and students, had taken a turn for the odd when they suddenly developed the ability to see the future, became creepily obsessed with my personal life and endeavoured to discover all they could about my sexual relationship with another member of staff.

Hell, we hadn’t even had sex yet and they were obsessed with it.

Sex. Every single thing I thought about recently seemed to come back to sex. Why was it always sex? Barely an hour ago we had just had incredibly satisfying almost-everything-not-including sex,
and already my mind was back on sex.

That was the reason Kakashi was the most distracting person ever. I was turning into a nymphomaniac for him.

I sipped my rapidly cooling tea, wrinkling my nose in displeasure at its lukewarm temperature. If it was summer I might have appreciated it, but it was far too cold for semi-hot tea. There were no two ways about tea; it either had to be piping hot, water newly boiled and freshly brewed, or chilled with ice and lemon in a tall glass outside. Hot or cold, not vaguely, indecisively warm.

I couldn’t stop myself rolling my eyes at my own thought process, at my own ridiculous analogy. I could, if I was going to be lame, compare myself to the lukewarm tea. Although I was still committed to the relationship-thing we had, I wasn’t aggressive, but I wasn’t shrinking away or pulling back. I was just sort of there. I hadn’t established anything. Maybe I was a little encouraging earlier, but I hadn’t instigated anything. I hadn’t even established what I was to him, exactly. ‘Person who is groped, kissed, taken out and teased’ is too long and impersonal. ‘Partner’ is too old and requires more than a couple of weeks of goings on to qualify for.

I turned over the last paper of the stack I was marking, the last minimum-three paragraph answer to some inane question demanding identical answers from every student. Still, at least English lit was an interpretive subject with lots of opinions. It could be interesting to try and work out a student’s personal opinions and even personality based on an essay, whereas a factual subject could only establish whether a student had a good memory or a talent for the subject. Subjects, say, like physics.

There it was again. Even work wasn’t safe. I took another sip of tea, trying to repress the image of the face that came to mind.

I didn’t know every single tiny detail about Kakashi’s life, but I assumed I knew more than most people. I knew something of his past, a detail that was outright painful, a little about his family history, which was just as uncomfortable, but that was about it. I knew he did a fancy degree at university and probably should have got a job earning a lot more money, but became a teacher instead. There were more physics-type jobs out there than there were literature-type jobs, so finding something shouldn’t have been too difficult, although he made a good teacher if I ignored the inappropriate reading material and the bored demeanour. Although I wasn’t one hundred percent certain, his classes didn’t seem to be suffering as a result of it.

Tsunade probably had more details about his life in between university and teaching physics at Konoha High School. I wondered how much sake it would take to persuade her to give that information up, or if she’d give me a lecture about communication or something ridiculous.

Actually, that was a point. Maybe if I just asked-

The shrill ring of the phone in the corridor interrupted my thoughts, my fingers convulsing around my pen in surprise at the sudden noise. A short, deep red line cut through a couple of letters on the paper in front of me.

I got up, a little curious at who would be calling me. It was early evening so it was likely a personal call, but I didn’t really have many people who would just randomly call for a chat. I wasn’t sure how many people I knew who actually called me enough to get their own personalised display name on the caller ID.

I didn’t recognise the number, but I picked up the handset anyway.

“Hello?” I said into the phone. It was cordless; the charging station perched on a table in the corridor.
Once again it crossed my mind that it would be easier to answer quickly if I moved it to the sitting room, but it was deeply ingrained habit to keep it in the hall. That was where it had been in my parents’ house, and I didn’t think I’d remember to look for it in the sitting room.

“Good evening, Iruka,” An unfamiliar voice replied, their tone somewhat cordial.

“Excuse me, who is this?” I frowned, re-checking the caller ID. I definitely didn’t know them, but their number was local and they knew my name. An old acquaintance?

“Don’t you remember me, Iruka?” The voice said, growing more mocking.

“No, I don’t, I-”

“Two years ago, you tattled to that Tsunade woman about a couple of marks I fixed and she threw me out. Year before that, you started teaching, could barely handle the little bastards and had to ask me for help. Hell, we knew each other at university and I thought we were friends. You remembering yet?” I froze, my hand gripping the handset tightly. Yes, I remembered, and I had honestly hoped that I would never have to see the owner of the voice ever again.

“I-how did you get this number, Mizuki?” My voice was supposed to be steady and even. I wasn’t supposed to be this angry at just his voice.

Mizuki had been a friend among my colleagues when I first got my job at Konoha High, a fellow English lit teacher. We had studied at the same university, and he had remembered me though I didn’t remember him. We had found common interest in our subject, both taking our jobs seriously. Or I thought we had, up until I caught him altering assessment marks in order to boost his class’ standards and actively lowering those of other teachers. I didn’t even have to think about informing Tsunade about his actions; it was the right thing to do. It wasn’t just my class’ overall standing at stake, but other class’ from across the curriculum.

Although it was a moderate offence, it wasn’t the first time or the first offence, and he was fired for misconduct. I had hoped I’d never hear from him again and hadn’t bothered to listen to any news about his whereabouts. I had assumed he’d left town, a mark blemishing his teaching record, in order to find work elsewhere.

“My boss knows quite a few interesting people,” A dark chuckle echoed down the line.

“Your boss?”

“I’ve been working at Sound since the old bitch fired me. Orochimaru-sama’s much more generous, more exclusive, but generous. Anyway, on to business-”

“Mizuki, I don’t give a damn what he’s paying you, I won’t sit here and talk to you like we’re still-”

“Still what, Iruka? Friends? I never really thought of us as friends, you know. I always hated you, but at the same time I always wanted to fuck your pretty little ass into the floor,” His voice grew cold and harsh, still mocking but harder. My eyes widened at his words; had I honestly been that oblivious for the year that I had known him? And why me? I flinched at the old memory of the betrayal. We really hadn’t been very good friends, after all.

“What the hell-” I protested.

“Oh wait, you’ve got someone else for that, right? The tall guy with the crazy hair and the mask? Kakashi Hatake, yes?” If it was possible, my eyes widened even further. How much he knew about me was bordering on stalker-ish, and I felt violated by it.
“How-” I spat out, getting increasingly angry. Insulting me was one thing, but it wasn’t just my personal life he was invading at this point. If he was invading Kakashi’s, too, to get to me in any way, then I wouldn’t hesitate to call the police. I tried to commit the phone number to memory, just in case.

“How do I know all about your adorable little romance? I wouldn’t want to ruin the surprise, but I recommend you go and ask your loverboy just how he lost that eye. Oh, and mention ‘Akatsuki’ while you’re at it,”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to achieve by this, but-”

“Cry me a river, dolphin boy. I don’t really care about half this shit; I just want to know you’re hurting,” His words were increasingly sadistic, and the ‘dolphin boy’ part was just patronising. We had known each other for a year, and he clearly remembered how to push my buttons.

“Why?” I growled. I knew he was deliberately working me up, but I couldn’t calm myself down. It was all just too intrusive.

“Why? Godknows,” He said, voice suddenly sarcastic. “Anyway, it was nice catching up with you. Maybe I’ll see you at the interschool tournament,”

“I don’t-” A dial tone rang out, signalling the call had been cut. “-think so,”

I put the receiver down in its cradle slowly, resisting the urge to slam it down angrily. Although I was angry as hell at what Mizuki had said, I wasn’t going to ask any questions. At least, not yet. I was too pissed off to be curious.

O-O..O..O..O
It Hurts

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I’m coming home

I’ve been gone for far too long

Do you remember me at all?

I’m leaving

Have I fucked things up again?

I’m dreaming

Too much time without you spent

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

“…we’re going to need everyone on board this year because of the sheer number of events…” 
Tsunade’s voice, uncharacteristically free of alcohol, rang through my mind. I wondered if that was a 
bad sign; she hadn’t appeared in my head for a while now, so maybe it was a symptom of my sanity 
slipping.

“…sports department was enough last year! Shouldn’t we at least…” It was looking like more and 
more of a possibility as another voice joined in, and my head moved slightly from its position on 
something firm and warm.

“…epitome of youthfulness that our students…” Gai’s voice. He’d never appeared in my head 
before. That was odd.

The warm, firm thing under my head moved a little, nearly tipping me off it. I cracked open an eye, 
taking in the surprisingly bland patch of floor, coffee table and stack of used coffee mugs in front of 
me.

“…with their recent sponsorship, we have no choice but to dedicate the majority of our resources to 
the event. If they had kept the name of their sponsor in the dark, we wouldn’t bother with this, but 
there’s no way in hell I’m letting that bastard’s school win because of a few overpowered mobsters,” 
The voices were vague in my head. If I didn’t know I was completely sane, I would possibly have 
considered them hallucinations. As it was, I knew I was sane. I was only hearing Tsunade’s 
completely sober voice through an odd haze because I was half asleep on Kakashi’s lap.

Somehow, the call from Mizuki had kept me angry enough to keep me awake for hours. I couldn’t 
bring myself to undress for an extra hour because I couldn’t get his infuriating voice out of my head, 
repeating all kinds of infuriating things.

First of all, he shouldn’t have been able to get a job at Sound Academy. Not only was it a private 
school, but the prospective students and teachers had to go through rigorous interviews and tests 
before being admitted into the ranks. Mizuki was a very normal teacher; there was nothing special 
about him, no reason to hire him to such a brilliant school. Admittedly, Sound didn’t have the best 
reputation as a wholesome, normal school; although most kids went on to become powerful, it was 
rarely through fair means.
Secondly, the invasion of my personal life made me want to break delicate things with sledgehammers. No one besides the people I trusted somewhat should know anything about my personal life. My colleagues, if I chose. My students shouldn’t, but I hadn’t exactly been entirely discreet, but that didn’t mean I was giving an open invitation to the world to track down details about my life.

Thirdly, I couldn’t stop my curiosity in what he had said about Kakashi. Although I wanted to know, to ask exactly what had happened to his eye, I didn’t want to. It would be giving in. And if Kakashi wanted me to know, he would tell me. I didn’t want to pry.

“We should have guessed that they were involved with Sound; the number of places their students have got at universities across the country are well above average,”

“We’re not bad,” Shizune’s voice said tiredly. My eyes flickered under their closed lids in her direction, imagining her standing a little way behind Tsunade with the relevant documents in hand and a tired look on her face. Whatever was going on, Tsunade was almost certainly wearing her out with it. “We’re definitely not bad, we’re good. We just play by the rules,”

Everyone in the teaching profession, and probably a few outside of it, knew that Sound didn’t play by the rules. And by the rules, I mean ‘normal lawful conduct’. They certainly had some ridiculously high-powered lawyers tucked away in the woodwork or some other legal escape hatch for every time something happened. ‘Something’ usually came in the form of an unfortunate accident that put a competitor out of commission, or a string of almost violently high scores in a national exam, or winning a large sum of money as funding for whatever went on behind the high brick walls of Sound.

Everyone who had been in some way exposed to the school system within the last decade or so knew about the Konoha High versus Sound situation. It stemmed from the head teachers, Tsunade and Orochimaru, who hated each other with a passion. The second question at my job interview for Konoha High was ‘and have you had any dealings with Sound Academy within the last ten years?’. The first was, ‘you are Iruka Umino, correct?’ No one quite knew the story behind why they hated each other so much, but it was an old grudge and it wasn’t dying any time soon. I was grateful English lit wasn’t a competitive subject, and my students weren’t really the competitive type.

“Heh, don’t expect that courtesy from them,” Tsunade bit out. I could imagine her crossing her arms over her ample bosom in irritation and sighing, before her expression picked up as she changed the situation into something of a challenge. If it was between her and Orochimaru, then it was personal.

“I expect exceeding performance from all our competitors this year. You’ve got your work cut out for you, Gai,”

“It truly shows the flame of passion in your heart that you want to win so badly, Tsunade-sama!” I could picture the over-exuberant posing and the consequent eye-twitches of everyone else in the room. Now Gai had been set on the case, whoever his victims were would be whipped into amazing physical condition in time for whatever they were organising.

It was possibly a good idea for me to find out what it was.

“What the hell did I miss?” I said sleepily, moving a hand to prod Kakashi’s leg. It didn’t yield. At all. When the hell did this guy have time to work out? He was a physics teacher; he wasn’t supposed to be toned. That wasn’t fair. I didn’t sit up, though. It was far too comfortable down here. I didn’t care if it wasn’t work appropriate; I wasn’t thinking entirely straight yet.

“I’ll tell you later, the bell’s about to go,” He said, tugging on my shoulder. Reluctantly, I moved to push myself up, but I didn’t open my eyes. I wasn’t that anxious to see the giggles and stares of my
co-workers at my not-so-subtle public display of affection. I didn’t mind too much that they knew; they all knew from the get-go, so it was okay. It was only when people investigated me-

No, I wasn’t going to think about Mizuki and his stupid machinations. It was unrelated to everything in every way, and I wasn’t going to think about it.

“It sounded-” I was interrupted by the shrill tone of the bell. “-important,”

Sighing, I relented and sat up properly, rubbing an eye with my fist. Although that little sort-of nap was nice, it had done nothing to alleviate the tiredness that sapped the energy from my bones. I let my eyes open, forcing myself to remember that we were in a school staff room, not a bedroom, and I couldn’t just go back to sleep. And that people had just watched me nap on another human being, which was a terrible mix of personal and private lives.

Naturally, I hadn’t mentioned Mizuki’s impromptu call. Mostly because I hadn’t followed his instructions, but also because I didn’t want to involve Kakashi in whatever Mizuki was trying to pull. Trying to hurt me was one thing but when other people, especially people with the status in my life as ‘incredibly important’, were dragged into the mix it became unacceptable.

“That’s what you get for sleeping through briefing,” Kakashi chided, running his hand down my spine. I couldn’t help but arch into it a little, trying to disguise it by yawning. “Come to my classroom at break, and I’ll fill you in,”

“That had better be a purely innocent suggestion,” I threatened, turning my head to look at him, but my eyes couldn’t help but be drawn to the eye patch. I knew what was under there; the long scar that cut through the eyelid, the marred eyeball. It was probably sightless. I wanted to reach out and remove the patch, but I didn’t in the same way I didn’t ask any questions.

We left briefing to go and register our form classes. Almost immediately, I found myself missing the warmth radiating through the relatively thin barriers of clothing. Corridors were cold, and so were classrooms.

Thankfully, we had gotten slightly early to shove my overflowing bags of semi-marked classwork under my desk, so my routine was still somewhat in place. The kids still answered the register in their usual tones, and Naruto and Sasuke still turned up late. Classes still started as normal, but I found I couldn’t focus again.

I slammed my hand on the table with a little too much force, raising a couple of eyebrows from my class. No, I had to focus on my job. Whatever the hell Mizuki was talking about was irrelevant as long as I was on school grounds, and my rebelling brain would just have to put up with that until I got home.

Just another eight-ish hours to go, then.

oO.Oo..oO.Oo
Finding You

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Would you do it with me?

Heal the scars and change the stars

Would you do it for me?

Turn loose the heaven within

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

“You’re getting an extension on that draft until tomorrow, but no later. If you’ve already done it, hand it to me as you leave and you haven’t got any homework tonight. If the draft isn’t on my desk by the end of the day tomorrow you’ll be in detention. Is that clear?” I announced over the growing racket of books and pencil tins being shoved into bags and the general chatter that always seemed to arise once the bell rang. Naturally, I was completely ignored, a total of two papers placed on my desk.

To be honest, I wasn’t complaining. It meant I didn’t have to try to mark them tonight.

I was rather dreading going home. I had considered disconnecting my landline phone last night, but decided against it. Although I had a mobile phone, I rarely used it and no one had its number. I wasn’t sure how much money I had on it, either, certainly not enough for a long call. I wouldn’t put it past whoever was feeding Mizuki his information to have my mobile phone number either.

It wasn’t just that I was dreading a second call. I could force myself to focus on my work better if I was at my place of work, but my flat was full of distractions. The flat next door had even more distractions in it, including the object of my distraction.

As the last student meandered out of my classroom, notably not placing a completed essay draft on my desk, I paused before following them into the corridor. Break had rolled around painfully slowly, every reference in the class texts or in a discussion than leaned in any way towards secrets, phone calls or injuries sent my mind spiralling in the wrong direction. I caught myself every time, but I wasn’t sure how much longer I could keep myself from slipping into my own thoughts.

The students all seemed to have converged on the corridor outside my classroom, forming into some writhing multi-headed beast that blocked my advance towards the science block. I kept my broken wrist pressed closely against my chest; I didn’t want to test how painful teenager-shaped battering rams were against it.

In a way, I could better understand the obsession with Kakashi’s face. I had seen the face and I had seen the eye, but I wanted to know the answer as to why it was the way it was, and why it was covered. Yes, I had been curious before, but not to the point of distraction. I had been content in the knowledge that I was the only one privileged to see it.

What I couldn’t understand, however, was what Mizuki wanted to achieve by arousing my curiosity. Since he outright stated he wanted to cause me harm, I’d just do the opposite of what he said to do; I wouldn’t ask Kakashi what happened to his eye, and I wouldn’t ask what Akatsuki had to do with it.

I knew what Akatsuki was. Everyone knew what Akatsuki was, and everyone knew the rumours. It
was a highly exclusive organisation that recruited members in their university years and put them on the paths of high-flying careers through any means, legal or otherwise. As a result, they had influence in every sector of the business world imaginable. The name of the chief of the organisation was unknown, but a number of famous people were known to be in some way connected to it, and the spokesmen were more than flash enough to compensate for their leader’s absence.

I failed to see any connection between a high school physics teacher and a shady organisation.

I stepped forward into a channel in the flock of students that had cleared itself while I was thinking, trying to clear my head of all thoughts. I wasn’t supposed to be thinking of that.

Somehow, I had managed to keep my mind on teaching my first two classes. Although my teaching wasn’t up to perfect standard, since I had been reduced to writing things very slowly on the board with very wobbly handwriting with my left hand, and since Mizuki’s call was still floating around in the back of my mind no matter how hard I pushed it away, but I managed. And I would keep on managing until I got home. I just had to focus on something else.

The contents of this morning’s briefing definitely constituted ‘something else’. I really had to pay more attention tomorrow, in case it came up again. It was the entire point of leaving the security of my classroom and battling my way down the corridor towards the science block, the density of kids thinning to none as the temperature dropped. Cold: the universal teenager deterrent.

The blinds were down, blocking the interiors of all the classrooms from view, and Kakashi’s room was no exception. My hand came to rest on the door handle, looking through a small break in the blinds at the man inside.

The porn was out, but that wasn’t much of a surprise. He was leaning back in his chair, facing away from me, a set of papers neatly in a pile on one end of the desk. A dark jacket was slung over the back of the chair. A small, silent chuckle rattled shoulders veiled only by a thin cotton shirt. Hair that defied gravity rose up on a head turned away from me, obscuring the mask I knew to be in place, which in turn obscured the fine, handsome features that in all honesty shouldn’t be hidden.

I considered knocking, but I thought I’d just give myself another minute to look. There never seemed to be enough moments just dedicated to looking anymore.

“You can come in, Iruka,” Kakashi called, turning to look at me, a smile evident in his voice. “If you’ve finished staring, that is,”

“I wasn’t staring, I was just looking,” I folded my arms and fought the blush rising to my cheeks; I was kind of staring, but I wasn’t going to admit it. It wasn’t my fault I liked to look.

“Whatsoever you say, Dolphin-sensei,” He said. One thumb turned a page of his book, and I resisted the urge to tear it out of his hands and throw it across the room. For one, it was porn in school. Secondly, he wasn’t paying attention to me if he was reading that. Thirdly, in revenge for the ‘Dolphin-sensei’ thing.

“We’re at work; don’t make me murder you,” I growled. One foot moved forward, subconsciously moving to enact the plan. Maybe I could drop the book in a bottle of concentrated acid, or roast it over a Bunsen burner. We were in the science department, after all. A few pieces of paper would hardly be the most interesting things to set fire to, but it would do.

“Ah, but if you kill me then you’ll never know what we were talking about at briefing,” The chair swivelled to face me, and the book was pressed closed in his lap. A grey eye refocused on me, and I stepped further into the classroom.
“Please do enlighten me,” I stopped a few feet from the desk, re-crossing my arms and smiling.
“Scarecrow-sensei,”

“First you fall asleep on my lap, and now pet names? Who are you and what have you done with Iruka?” Kakashi asked in mock horror, although now I was closer I could see a series of tiny, almost unnoticeable lines by the corner of his eye crinkle in evidence of a smile. That made me smile; I had been close enough to that face to know what to look for, to know when he smiled. Yet another exclusive little thing for me to be shared between us.

“Fine, fine, just tell me the news,” I said.

“Tsunade is worrying about the inter-school sports tournament between us and Sound Academy. Sound just revealed they’ve got new sponsors, so their funding has just increased. That means better facilities, therefore better grades, or in this case, better athletes,” Kakashi explained, fingers trailing over the spine of ‘Icha Icha Paradise’, clearly aching to open it. My death glares in its direction where hopefully putting them off that, though.

“And how does this affect us?” I asked. I hadn’t expected the sports tournament to come around so early this year; I really shouldn’t have missed so many briefings. Although I didn’t expect it to affect my department or the science department all that much, so it shouldn’t be too big. It didn’t hurt to check, though.

“Because of the sponsor, Sound is pushing for a bigger event with more competitions. Apparently, if they’d stayed silent things would have continued as normal, but now it’s out the organisation agreed to increase funding as part of a publicity gimmick. This means we need more students on board and more staff by default, so it affects teachers outside of the PE department,” One hand came up and waved casually, shrugging off all of Tsunade’s worries with a casual gesture.

“So who are the sponsors?” I was expecting a sports company or a research facility or a government scheme, something mundane and ordinary. Something that could score them a little extra cash, but not enough to make a difference. Although that wouldn’t explain why they were suddenly apparently more difficult to beat.

“Akatsuki,”

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
So, I'll stay up all night

With these bloodshot eyes

While these walls surround me

With the story of our life

“Akatsuki?” I repeated, not quite sure if I had heard that right.

“Yep,” Kakashi confirmed. I watched as his fingers retraced their path across the spine of ‘Icha Icha’, creeping into a position to sneakily re-open the page at wherever he had been before I had interrupted.

I had to admit I was vaguely jealous of that book. It always seemed to captivate his attention, and it was almost always on Kakashi’s person when it wasn’t explicitly visible. Not to mention the way his fingers practically danced over its spine, tracing creases and folds almost sensually.

“What’s the point? Why would they be interested in a school?” I said. Akatsuki were officially a collective of entrepreneurial businessmen, not teachers. There shouldn’t be any reason for their involvement in Sound. Equally, there shouldn’t be any involvement in many of the sectors they meddled with, but money turns all the right heads and ticks all the right boxes as long as there’s enough of it.

“Half of their ventures seem more than a little odd, but they all pay off eventually. That, or the members have a personal interest in the venture and no one says ‘no’ to Akatsuki’s money,” I wasn’t sure I wanted to know what ‘personal interests’ entailed. Hopefully just charities or specialist shops or something innocent.

“But it’s a long term venture, a school. Maybe they’re hoping to turn out some new recruits from Sound,” I suggested. “If they recruit promising university students, then getting more kids places would be of some value,”

“Maybe that’s Orochimaru’s intention in taking the funding, although I doubt it really matters. They have the funding and it’s enough to make Tsunade worry,” He replied, shifting slightly in his chair to move an elbow to an armrest. I made sure I was a couple of feet away from the desk, though I cursed my perfect eyesight; I could still see every move he made, and I couldn’t help but pay attention to it.

The single visible eye didn’t waver at all, still looking distinctly bored. I wondered if I shouldn’t have interrupted his reading.

“If it’s enough to make her worry, then maybe the rest of us should worry, too. She sounded remarkably sober, if I remember correctly,” I said. Her voice hadn’t been slurred or sleepy, and I couldn’t smell the sake halfway across the room like it was sometimes possible to. Generally, the consumption of alcohol was directly proportionate to the amount of paperwork that was supposed to be done, which seemed to be relatively high all the time. The only time the alcohol went away for a minute was when there was important business to attend to, like old rivalries.
“Yes, she did,” Kakashi paused, hands deliberately folding over ‘Icha Icha’ and looking me in the eye. “You need to sleep properly, Iruka. Stop working so late or you’ll make yourself sick, and try to worry a little less. Is something on your mind?”

“Not right now, no,” I said blandly. It’s not like I was going to admit that I had had a suspicious phone call from an old colleague demanding that I ask questions.

Guilt burned in my stomach. He knew something was up, but I was going to lie about it. If I followed Mizuki’s instructions, then I’d be giving in, and on the basis that Mizuki only wanted to do me harm then no good could come of asking questions. I was going to lie and abuse that trust because it was convenient to me.

Now I had thought of Mizuki, I couldn’t stop my eyes from locking on the eye patch, on the very tail of the scar that was just about hidden behind it, the solid block of white making Kakashi’s skin look paler and more delicate. The scars proved that it was tough but breakable, and that it would heal, but that didn’t erase the story behind them, and it was the story that was interesting. I could practically feel the raised, smooth skin under my fingers.

“Good. You worrying makes me worry. If you need to, come talk to me. My door’s always open,” He said, visible eye curving up into its happy little shape. It hadn’t done that in a while; mostly because it was occupied by other things. Or maybe I had just been looking the wrong way at the wrong times.

If Mizuki’s call was supposed to make me miserable by destroying my relationship with Kakashi, then I certainly wasn’t going to give in. If I was supposed to ask a question that would have a painful answer, then I just wouldn’t do it. It was better for me to sit around frustrated in silence than to push my problems onto other people, least of all Kakashi.

“Thanks,” I paused, taking a step back. I considered asking the question. It would take less than ten words to get everything that had been worrying me, nagging at my mind all morning, off my chest forever. But that would be giving in, so I held my tongue. “Thank you,”

I got a small wave as I left the room, the little orange book quickly re-opened the second my back was turned.

A new plan was formulating in my mind. If Kakashi was noticing something was wrong, then I’d just have to spend less time around him in order to rectify that notion. Yes, avoiding him shouldn’t be too difficult, since we spent most of the school day in our own classrooms. It was only once I needed to get home that it would be difficult, since there was no realistic way for me to get home without him, and we lived next door to each other. And we were kind of romantically involved.

I bit my lip at the idea. I didn’t really want to spend time apart on purpose, but if it protected him from Mizuki and whoever the hell else’s machinations, it would be worth it. A stupid thing like a phone call and a piece of teasing information was not enough to break up whatever we had.

My classroom seemed awfully lonely. The bell signalling the end of break would ring in about five minutes; not enough time to be worth fighting my way down to the staff room for coffee, but more than enough time to sit and think. I didn’t want to sit and think, because sitting and thinking would lead to thinking about Kakashi.

I pulled an apple out of my bag and took a bite, frowning as a bead of juice escaped me and ran over the skin of the apple just out of my reach. Despite not sleeping, I had had enough time to eat this morning. I wasn’t really hungry; I just wanted something to do that would occupy me. It was a good, fresh apple, too, not just cheap supermarket stock. It had probably come from a market, or
somewhere that sold apples really fresh.

Still, I didn’t remember buying apples. I held the apple in front of me suspiciously, like it might suddenly turn into a live animal and bite me, studying it. I hadn’t bought apples in a while because I usually forgot to buy any. That meant someone had slipped it into my bag, and there was only one logical candidate.

Great, I couldn’t even eat without being reminded in some way about Kakashi.

The small gesture made the guilty feeling increase. Although I did my best to squash it, justifying that if it was to shield him from unnecessary harm it was okay to lie a little, but it was little gestures like an apple that made it feel so much worse. What did I do in return? Absolutely nothing, other than withhold information while burning with repressed curiosity, and they were certainly not caring gestures.

The bell rang, and I finished the apple feeling somehow a little better prepared for my next couple of classes.

I fished around in one of my bags for a copy of the class text, checking my lesson plan for what I was supposed to be teaching today and for how much homework I was hoping I could get out of setting. Fortunately, it was a fifth form class so I could get away with asking them to read and annotate, naturally to varying degrees of success. Once I was submerged in work, I could completely forget about everything else.

Including that phone call. And the mystery behind Kakashi’s eye. And lying to Kakashi.

Damn. I opened the text to wherever we were supposed to be reading from, but my eyes refused to focus on the words.

“Good morning, Iruka-sensei!” A couple of students chirped as they entered the classroom early. I waved at them over the top of my book, trying to hide the frown spreading across my face. Teaching was not high on my priority list as it should have been, and I was pretty much guaranteed to be distracted for the next two hours.

I forced my face to be neutral and turned to watch the students file in, casually overhearing the babble about their lives, their school work, their teachers, their friends, sports, boyfriends or girlfriends, and other general teenage-type pursuits. It was much easier being a teenager, and running purely on hormones.

After two hours of explaining the intricacies of literary romance to a bunch of unreceptive kids, I was begging for some kind of distraction, but I denied myself a trip to the science block. I needed a little bit of space, and I needed a different kind of distraction.

Unfortunately, I was in school, so there wasn’t a lot I could do. Instead, I left my classroom and disappeared in the direction of the staff room.

oO.Oo..oO.Oo
Tell Me

Don’t tell me if I’m dying
‘Cause I don’t wanna know
If I can’t see the sun maybe I should go
Don’t wake me ‘cause I’m dreaming
Of angels on the moon
Where everyone you know never leaves too soon

During the journey back home, I was too quiet. I knew I was being too quiet; normally, we’d have some kind of conversation about our day, our jobs, current events, usual conversation topics, but today I was deathly quiet. Most questions were answered with a nod or a shake of my head, or a mumbled ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

There was no physical way to avoid Kakashi when we were in such close proximity, but I could keep my mind off him. Instead of talking, I was going through lists in my head. Before, I had listed Shakespeare’s female villains, but no more sprang to mind. I supposed I could name male villains, but they were more obvious, therefore less distracting. Instead, I settled on naming Jane Austen’s villains.

George Wickham, from ‘Pride and Prejudice’.

I kept my eyes fixed on the road in front of me, watching as the moving car swallowed up the dark grey road surface. Dark grey, almost black in the low light, just like Kakashi’s eyes. Or would be like both eyes, if one wasn’t-

Mr. Willoughby, ‘Sense and Sensibility’.

I had spent my lunchtime voluntarily supervising detentions, many of which I had set. It felt like more than half of the students I taught had been thrown into detention. Mostly, they just sat down and got on with something productive, although one or two couldn’t help but pass notes. Maybe I had been too hard on some of them; I couldn’t not punish them for neglecting to do homework, but maybe if it was because of their snooping into my personal life I could be a little nicer. Maybe a stern talking to would be better. Talking and explaining a problem or situation was always better than-

Arguably Emma herself, in ‘Emma’.

“We’re predicted more snow tonight,” Kakashi said, drawing my attention. His head was turned a little to look at me, observing my strange behaviour. I could see confusion in his eye, and I hated that I wouldn’t do anything to relieve it. “If we can’t drive into school, will you be okay to walk? We’ll probably have to leave some things at home, and just take the essentials,”

“John and Isa- Ah, yes, that’s fine,” I winced at my own slip-up. That was meant to be John and Isabella Thorpe, but I wasn’t mean to say it out loud, making it even more obvious that my mind was
elsewhere, and occupied with something completely irrelevant. I hoped my answer was enough to cover for my obvious rudeness.

“What was that? John and who?” He asked. I winced again; more lies. Just another one to add to the pile, I supposed.

Again, for what seemed like the hundredth time that day, I considered just spilling everything. I knew I had no idea what I would actually say, and even if I planned it it would come out as something entirely different. And even then, no matter how long I planned my question I could never predict an exact response.

But maybe it was a good thing, denying my own curiosity. It was probably a good life lesson.

“No one, don’t worry about it,” I dismissed, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible even though a hundred similar emotions broiled underneath the surface.

I wondered if Kakashi actually had some kind of mystical extra sense that allowed him to read my mind; it was the best explanation that I could come up with for the silence that filled the car after I spoke. It would explain a lot, but somehow I doubted it. It was just that I was painfully obvious to read because I was a terrible liar.

My eyes dropped to my knees, a hand reaching behind me to tighten my ponytail. Maybe heavy snow wouldn’t be a bad thing. Tsunade used any excuse to shut the school to avoid paperwork, so I wouldn’t have to go into work with Kakashi. I frowned; how long did I intend to avoid him for?

Today was sort of failing, since I didn’t have a choice but to be around him and awkwardly try not to speak, and exactly the same thing was likely to happen tomorrow. How long could I keep it up for before I caved? If it meant preventing the fallout from Mizuki’s scheming from affecting both of us, it was indefinitely.

Half out of desire to fill the silence and half because I was quickly running out of Austen’s antagonists, I switched on the radio. Immediately, the presenter started babbling about fresh snowfall and another predicted temperature dip. I shivered pre-emptively, though some distant region in the back of my mind conjured up images of sitting by a warm fireplace, wrapped in a blanket with Kakashi, surrounded by sleeping dogs. If it wouldn’t have attracted unnecessary attention, I would have hit myself for being such a ridiculous romantic. For one, neither of us had a fireplace.

We pulled up into the car park attached to the flats and made it inside in record time. Although it could have been my imagination, brought on by the report on the radio, it felt colder, but I refused to check the sky for snow clouds. If it snowed, it snowed.

I wanted to make a remark about the sky, or the weather, or about work, just so my voice would be heard out loud. It was almost childish, basically ignoring Kakashi. But besides actually talking about Mizuki’s phone call, and by extension asking about what happened to his eye and it’s relation to Akatsuki, was the exact opposite of what I wanted to achieve.

First, I would be giving in to Mizuki. I couldn’t forgive him for his acts at work, and I wasn’t about to do anything he said just because he wanted me to. Although it was childish, it was also kind of logical; he hated me, and wanted me to suffer. Doing what he said would cause me to suffer, so I just wouldn’t do it.

Second, I would possibly be hurting Kakashi. If Mizuki was feeding me a pack of lies, then it was fine to completely ignore whatever he said. If it was true, and asking questions would bring up a painful topic for Kakashi, then I didn’t want to ask the question. Although I was curious about what had happened to his eye, I wasn’t going to destroy our relationship over it.
Third, I would probably be damaging our relationship. After fighting through my own mentality to get to where we were, I wasn’t about to throw it all away just because of one stupid mistake. I liked what we had, and I didn’t want to call it off.

I flinched as I realised trying to avoid Kakashi had probably done just as much damage.

I unlocked my front door, trying to keep my face as neutral as possible. My fingers fumbled awkwardly with the keys. After nearly dropping them twice, I finally got the door open, pushing it back with a little too much force to be completely natural. Kakashi followed me inside, bags of work deposited by my kitchen table as usual. Inhaling deeply, I turned to face him.

“Thanks for helping me with my bags, but I really need to get some marking done and-” I started.

“Tell me what’s wrong, Iruka,” One of his hands reached out to hold my wrist, just firmly enough to indicate I wasn’t escaping easily. “Really, just tell me. Whatever’s bothering you, just say it outright and talk to me,” A hint of desperation leaked into his voice. I felt another stab of guilt at it; it was my fault, all of this. If I just told him everything now, then we could move on.

“S-seriously, it doesn’t matter,” I protested, at myself as much as him. Even if it did matter, I had to make it not matter. Kakashi’s past was interesting, but it wasn’t all-important. I could live without knowing it.

“It apparently matters enough that you won’t speak in full sentences to me, or have a conversation with me. Have I done something to upset you?” He asked, stepping a little closer. I couldn’t bring myself to meet his eyes.

“No,”

“If you don’t tell me, we can’t fix it,” He pointed out.

“There’s nothing to fix, I promise. I just need-” to ask you a very intrusive question that could potentially wreck our relationship based on the prompting of my very unreliable former colleague. I paused, taking a deep breath, looking at the floor. “I need to catch up on my marking, and you’re really distracting. So please, can we maybe talk later or something? It’s really nothing serious,”

“Fine, if that’s what you want,” He let go of my wrist, and stepped back. “Later,”

I couldn’t help but feel my heart wrench a little as he walked away.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Beautiful Red

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

This hole you put me in

Wasn’t deep enough

And I’m climbing out right now

You’re running out of places to hide from me

When you go

Just know that I will remember you

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I woke up at some point in the night. My sleep had been fitful at best, and I couldn’t drift off until a ridiculously late hour, and I could pinpoint the exact reason.

I was an idiot. There were no other words for it. Instead of going over to Kakashi’s flat after I finished the marking that probably could have waited, I stayed at home and procrastinated. Instead of giving myself a minute to think about what I was going to say and then going to say it, I triple-checked my marking, read a book without absorbing any of the words, tried and failed to make bread and cleaned the bathroom even though it really didn’t need it. As a result, it was past ten o’clock by the time I decided that I should probably go over to Kakashi’s, but talked myself out of it due to the time.

Instead of doing the sensible thing, the thing I promised to do, I had stayed at home and wimped out.

Naturally, I couldn’t sleep. Peaceful, undisturbed, normal sleep is for people with no self-inflicted problems, and I was pretty sure I didn’t fit that category anymore. I tossed and turned, getting too hot and then too cold, luminous green letters of my alarm clock glaring obnoxiously out at me from their plastic frame, reminding me exactly how much sleep I wasn’t getting. My bed seemed awfully wide and dreadfully empty. Maybe if I had done what I was meant to do after marking, then I wouldn’t have been alone in bed. But I hadn’t, and I didn’t deserve it.

It made sense that I would wake myself up at some point. I didn’t take note of the time as I padded into the kitchen; I didn’t want to know. My pyjamas were a pitiful defence against the cold, and yet another reminder that I was sleeping alone. On the basis that I probably wouldn’t be sleeping for the rest of the night, I made tea.

Halfway through making the tea, I opened the fridge to find I had no milk, and the cupboards were completely free of sugar. That was odd.

I turned around, cradling my warm teacup in my cold hand. I nearly dropped it in shock when I saw Kakashi sitting casually at my kitchen table, a cup of tea raised to shield the bottom of his unmasked face. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t read his expression through his eye.

Something was definitely wrong. I didn’t remember letting him in, and it was absurdly late at night. Something was wrong, but I couldn’t open my mouth to ask why. I couldn’t pull my lips apart at all, and no sound would come out of my throat. I was silenced.
For a second, I panicked. I couldn’t get enough air through my nose, but I couldn’t open my mouth, and I couldn’t talk. How could I function if I couldn’t breathe or talk?

“If you really wanted to know, you should have just asked,” Kakashi said blandly. He set down the tea, revealing his slightly parted lips in a mockery of my inability to speak, and tugged off the eye patch.

“W-wha-” I found my voice again when I saw what was beneath it. Logically, I knew what it looked like, but I couldn’t seem to remember. Whatever it was before, it was now completely different. In sharp contrast to the other normal eye, the revealed eye was completely clouded over with a white film. An outline of the dark iris was barely visible. I shouldn’t have been able to pick out that detail from where I stood, but my vision seemed to tunnel as I stared.

“Everyone loves a good gossip, and I’m sure you’re no different,” He sighed. “Still, I had hoped you would be,” Part of my mind realised he was off. A smaller part recognised the doubts as my own. An even smaller part recognised my own speaking tone.

“I’m not-” I protested. All the more sensible parts of my mind were swallowed up as his words struck me; was I like the people who were fixated with his face? Was I obsessive and shallow and uncaring?

“What a disappointment,” He blinked, voice echoing my parents’ sentiments for a moment. Too slowly, although I could feel time moving like it was supposed to, his eyes re-opened. The cloudy film had been replaced with a long needle that protruded from the very centre of his pupil, blood leaking out in obscene amounts and running too slowly down his cheek. It followed the deep valley the scar had become, thick and viscous like honey.

I dropped my cup of tea. I heard the porcelain break, but I didn’t feel anything fall on or around my feet.

“Oh God, what happened?” I whispered. My voice shook, and I took a step forward. Then I felt the porcelain shards, cutting like razor blades into the soles of my feet and stopping me towards Kakashi. I grit my teeth and tried to kick them out of the way, slicing through the skin on my toes and painting my floor in bright red, but it was nothing compared to the obscene stream running over Kakashi’s pale cheek.

“There’s no other reason for you to be remotely interested in me,” He continued, completely ignoring the needle in his eye. My own eyes ached at the very sight; I couldn’t comprehend how he could just sit there and bear it. “Don’t deny it, you know it’s true. You’re just curious,”

“I’m serious; we need to get to the hospital!” I choked out, trying to step forward again despite the pain.

“Serious? Two months ago, you were content to go on with your life as a repressed, virginal little twit, and now you can’t be in my presence for two minutes without undressing me with your eyes. Not that we haven’t done more than undressing,” By some fluke of warped gravity, the needle drooped down, cutting a trail that immediately added to the bloody trail running down his face. The needle fell out, and landed with a soft clink on the floor.

“How can you be talking about that when your – your-” My undamaged hand rose to cover my mouth. I was starting to feel quite sick. It was horrible, horrible, horrible-

“Oh, this-” The eye winked. I repressed the urge to pass out so I wouldn’t have to look at it any more. “It figures that you’re only interested on what’s on the outside when I’m trying to have a
serious conversation about your intentions. You’re so shallow,”

The blood kept flowing, down and down his cheek, dripping off his chin and spattering the table, his lap and the floor as he spoke. There was so much of it. A drop fell into the teacup. The mutilated eyeball had to hurt like hell, but I couldn’t move. I couldn’t do anything about it, and it was killing me. I’d trapped myself. If I hadn’t been so stupid as to get up and make tea of all things, then maybe I could have done something. I could feel normal, watery tears run down my own face, my breathing coming fast and shallow.

“I’m-”

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I woke with a sob, fingers knotted painfully into fists in my bed sheets. I could feel my pyjamas sticking to me with sweat, strands of hair plastered to my forehead. My broken wrist ached. Adrenaline rushed through my veins, skewing all my irrational thoughts.

Without even trying to clear my head, I manoeuvred myself out of bed and walked into the kitchen. It was empty. There were no porcelain shards on the floor, no blood in sight, and no bleeding Kakashi at my kitchen table.

So it was just a dream. Thank God.

I tried to let myself feel relieved, but I couldn’t. The panic from the dream was still present, along with the horror that kept my chest gripped in a vice. I couldn’t breathe properly, I couldn’t see properly. Tears still misted my vision. If I couldn’t see, how could I know there wasn’t blood all over my kitchen table? How could I know that Kakashi was okay?

Before I knew it, the door of my flat was opened and left gaping. I didn’t lock it. Cold air bit at my toes and fingers as I tried not to run across the few metres that separated our front doors. I raised a fist to knock, trying my best not to sound frantic, even though my heart was racing and I was irrationally terrified.

If he was okay, then I’d be okay. If he was okay, then everything would be okay.

When the door didn’t open immediately, I assumed the worst. He was dead on the floor, or knocked out or sick or dying or injured or something, and I couldn’t do anything. Another sob wracked my body.

I heard the inner workings of the lock click through the quiet of the empty hall, the rattle of a door chain, the scuffling noise of claws against a door somewhere beyond the front door. The door was opening. And Kakashi was opening it. My heart lifted in relief; if he could open a door, then he wasn’t dead or severely injured or something.

“Iruka, it’s four in the morning. What-” I cut him off as I practically threw myself at his chest, nuzzling my nose against his bare skin. I couldn’t look up into his face, though. If the mask and the eye patch were gone for sleeping, then I might see the needle-

I forced myself to look. Through the dim light, I could see the absence of a trail of blood. Only a dark line suggested the presence of a scar. And I couldn’t see either of his eyes, but the lack of blood hopefully meant there wasn’t any horrible, horrible mutilation going on.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. For a lot of things, I was sorry. For being useless. For never initiating anything. For avoiding him. For being completely stupid.
“Oh, Ruka,” His arms wrapped around my shoulders and pulled me closer, and I could feel his warm breath in my hair.

It was okay. We were both fine, and I could feel his heartbeat again.

oO..Oo..O..Oo
What's Left Of Me

Can you still see the heart of me?
All my agony fades away
When you hold me in your embrace

Kakashi’s bed was warm. His scent clung to the sheets, and I let myself draw in lungful after lungful of calming air. The lamp on the bedside table shone, illuminating the room with a soft golden glow. All the furniture looked surprisingly good quality, almost out of place in a small flat, the light turning the warmly stained woods a dark bronze colour. The bed sheets matched the wood, a cream and red motif spilling over soft cotton.

I shivered. The pattern looked a little like blood spatters.

Blinking my eyes, I told myself firmly to stop being so ridiculous. The pattern looked nothing like blood spatters, it was abstractly floral. Even so, I didn’t really like it. It looked like it had all been uprooted from somewhere else, somewhere old and grand. Wherever they were from, they smelled like Kakashi, and that was all that mattered. I let myself curl up a little, hating the emptiness of the spot on the bed beside me.

As if on cue, Kakashi appeared in the doorway, a glass of water in hand. I smiled at the gesture; at some point I had stopped crying, my tears replaced with sheer embarrassment. Because of a nightmare, a dream, I had panicked and woken him up in the middle of the night just to make sure he was still alive and well, which was completely irrational. Of course he was alive and well. People didn’t just drop down dead at random.

I swallowed nervously. What if Kakashi just dropped down dead at random? What the hell would I do? I honestly had no idea. Somehow, he had crept into my everyday life, and I couldn’t imagine my day without him being there somewhere. I could remember my life before, but it was all in shades of grey. Now it was full of colour, and I didn’t want the greyscale filter back.

Fortunately, he didn’t keel over. Instead, he walked over to perch himself on the bed, watching me carefully. I probably looked like a huge mess, even though I had finished freaking out. I didn’t want him to worry; that was partly what had gotten me into this state in the first place, so I’d have to explain everything. As much as I hated my own weakness in giving in, it was better than hurting us both.

“Thanks,” I said, sitting up to take the offered glass. My voice was rough from crying, and the water was cool and soothing as I took a sip. The bed dipped and buckled underneath me as Kakashi moved from his spot to come closer. One of his hands extended to brush across my hair, looping a few loose strands behind my ear.

“How are you feeling?” He asked softly. I leaned into his hand, revelling in the warmth of his touch. He was here, not dead on the floor somewhere or bleeding from the eye or something, but actually here, touching my hair, talking to me.

“Better,” I answered truthfully.
“Can I ask you for an explanation?” The hand in my hair proceeded to undo all of its work, fingers threading through the tangles that had formed in the night. I didn’t object when my hair snagged, letting him tease out the knots.

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry, by the way. For waking you up, and being a pain,” I said awkwardly, trying to delay the inevitable somewhat. I didn’t want to think about the dream ever again, if I could help it, but on the basis that I had woken him up at about four in the morning I sort of owed it.

“I don’t really mind,” He said with a soft smile in his voice. I let my eyes drift up to his face again, trying desperately to avoid looking at his eyes. I half obscured my vision with my eyelids, blocking the top half of his face from my view and watching as his lips formed the words.

I wanted to kiss them, if for nothing but to prove that they were there.

“I, ah, kind of had a bad dream,” I practically cringed at the lameness of my statement. I sounded like a kid running to their mother in the wake of a dream about the scary monster under the bed, except this felt worse than any of the memories of nightmares from my childhood. They were all vague and confusing, but this nightmare was specific and horrifying.

“What was it about?”

“You,” My eyes panned down. I couldn’t look at his face. Instead, my eyes locked on a patch of bedding, trying to assure myself that the flower patterns were definitely not like blood stains. Even if they were a similar colour.

“And what was I doing in your dream?” Kakashi asked, fingers unlacing from my hair, moving instead to stroke soothingly, a little like petting a dog. If I wasn’t busy trying not to remember the graphic and disturbing dream of the mutilation of his eyeball, I’d probably smile.

I repositioned myself to let my head slump onto his shoulder and closed my eyes, fighting back images from the dream. I didn’t want to see another needle for as long as I lived.

“It was-” Blood running over his pale cheek. “Your eye, it-” A needle embedded deep in the pupil. “I’m sorry, it was just really, really bad,” I finished with a sigh. I couldn’t even force the words from my lips.

There was a short pause. Slowly, Kakashi leaned both of us back against the headboard of the bed, and I shifted into a more comfortable position against his chest. An arm moved around me, securing me against his warmth. The dream was gone, over, finished, and we were both okay. His presence, his body heat reassured me.

“I’m sorry,” He apologised abruptly.

“What? How is this your fault?” I asked, slightly confused. As far as I could remember, this was entirely my fault; we were up stupidly early in the morning because I had an overactive imagination, before which I had rudely shooed him away, and before that I hadn’t done something to stop Mizuki’s words getting to me. Although I couldn’t say he was flawless, I couldn’t see how he was to blame at all.

“If I had told you about this-” He winked his left eye for emphasis, drawing my attention to his face again. It had obviously been a late night, and the sudden awakening probably hadn’t helped, but it managed not to detract from his appearance. Again, I silently wished for the mask, wherever it currently was, to spontaneously combust. “-then your imagination wouldn’t have had to fill in the gaps,”
“I didn’t want to ask because I didn’t know how you’d react or if you’d be mad or something,” I admitted. It sounded rather petty when I said it out loud, but it was true.

“I’ll tell you in the morning,” He unwound his arm from me, moving to push the bed sheets into a better position for us to get under. Inside, they smelled even more strongly of him. “It’s coming up to five, which means two hours of sleep. That’s not nearly enough for you,”

The light clicked out, hiding my pout in the darkness. I wasn’t that bad when I didn’t get sleep. Fainting once didn’t make me a fragile little flower.

Tomorrow could be completely normal. We could get up, have breakfast, dress, go to work, shout at kids, and continue on with our lives and forget about all this. Well, forget about the dream, anyway. I didn’t want to forget a single second when we were together like this.

Underneath the covers and in the darkness, I could be a little bolder. My fingers found his body, curling gently over bared skin or remaining splayed, relief continuing to wash through my veins that he was okay. One of his hands grasped mine, holding it in place on his chest. I suppressed a giggle.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Speak

Oh well I look at you and say

“It’s the happiest that I’ve ever been”

And I’ll say, “I no longer feel I have to be James Dean”

And she’ll say

“Yeah, well I feel all pretty happy too”

And I’m always pretty happy when I’m just kicking back with you

I woke up slowly, which was completely unnatural. I never got to wake up on my own; there was always the annoying beeping of an alarm clock rousing me from oblivion and forcing me to face the day, and I always took out my annoyance on the chunk of plastic.

However, I found myself crawling slowly out of slumber, slowly becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that I wasn’t in my own bed. Had I fallen asleep at my kitchen table again? No, it couldn’t be that; I was too warm to be sleeping at my kitchen table, and I didn’t ache all over from the awkward position. Instead, I was warm, and everything smelled like Kakashi.

Kakashi. All my memories of last night came rushing back to me; the nightmare, going to wake up Kakashi in the middle of the night, confessing what had been on my mind, and getting a promise of explanations.

I groped blindly sideways, hoping that my fingers would collide with his warm form, but they were left clutching at empty sheets. Frowning, I cracked open an eye. That confirmed that I was alone in the bed. My eyes strayed to the open door, where a shaft of sunlight crept through to cast a pool of light on the floor. It was abnormally bright for early morning.

I sat bolt upright, kicking back the quilt. If the sun was already that high in the sky, then I was late for work by a couple of hours. How the hell was I going to explain it to Tsunade?

The puddle of sunlight was interrupted as a figure moved to stand in the doorway, lightly leaning against the door frame. How the hell was I going to explain it to Tsunade?

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“Good morning,” I mumbled sleepily.

“Good afternoon,” Kakashi corrected. “It’s just past two,”

“I missed a whole day of work? Tsunade’s going to kill me,” I dropped my head into my hands, imagining the penalties. Considering it was Tsunade, it was likely to be some kind of cruel and unusual punishment. A demand for information? More prying into my personal life?

“She called school off today, and probably for the rest of the week. The snow is pretty deep and there was a problem with the boilers, and we can’t legally let the students freeze to death. Until they’re fixed, we’re all off,” He explained, pushing the door open further. Sunlight rushed in again, silhouetting him in the door frame. Somehow he’d managed to dress without waking me, and left me
to sleep in. I smiled; I never got a lie-in.

“So what do we do for the rest of the week?” I asked. If the snow was deep, that ruled out a lot of options, although I wouldn’t complain if I got carried through the snow again. My smile widened at the fond memory; even if it had been a little embarrassing at the time, it was kind of sweet.

God, we had come a long way since then. Now I voluntarily slept in the same bed as Kakashi, rather than being forced into it by circumstance. We had done almost exactly what certain members of the student and staff population thought we had. I had seen his face, and I would learn the story behind his eye.

“We could go outside in the snow-”

“Too cold,” I cut him off, pulling the quilt back up to my chin.

“-or we could stay indoors and do indoors-type things,” It could have been my imagination, but I thought I saw a wink. “Do you want coffee?” He said innocently.

“Yes, please,” I replied, trying not to grin. I supposed indoors included bedrooms, and I wouldn’t entirely object to that kind of activity.

Kakashi disappeared for a couple of minutes, probably fetching coffee. I buried myself underneath the bedding again, moving to sit up against the headboard. The wood was hard and cold against my back, and not entirely comfortable. I shifted a little, moving pillows and bedding to cushion my back, making something of a nest. A small smile crept across my face; I hadn’t made a nest out of blankets and bedding since I was a tiny child. What was it about Kakashi that made me feel like a kid again?

Being a kid was great, but I wasn’t entirely sure it was a good thing. Kids don’t feel lust or desire; they only feel the innocence of play. I certainly hadn’t been innocent for a long time, and I wasn’t playing, so maybe I didn’t feel like a child after all. Whatever it was, I couldn’t put my thumb on a name.

“I studied physics at university, then went on to do a complicated postgraduate course. I had always been able to do physics without really trying, got the grades easily, but I loved it anyway. The goal was to end up in a similar field to my father; in some kind of high-profile research facility, working with other people as good as me. I was a bit of a show-off when I was younger, and I got noticed by all the right people,” Kakashi appeared in the doorway, leaning against the frame again, two steaming cups of coffee in hand. I hadn’t heard his approach, but I rarely did. It was coming to be less shocking, more just one of his normal quirks. “Depending on your point of view,”

“Who?” I asked simply, just prompting for more information.

“I got offers from a couple of companies before I finished. They offered me positions in their facilities, but none of them really appealed to me. I wanted to do something more, discover something, make a name for myself that would be recognised for my achievements rather than my fathers’,” He sounded enthusiastic, almost wistful.

“What did your father do?” I said, a little intrigued. I didn’t immediately recognise his family name, and no celebrities sprang to mind. If it was in any way related to physics, I probably had no idea. I could name maybe two famous physicists.

“Sakumo Hatake,” He replied, lingering on his surname. My eyes widened a little.

“The philosophical physicist? The only one anyone’s actually heard of because-”
“Because he prioritised human emotion over a theory,” He cut me off. I remembered who Sakumo Hatake was, if only because I remembered reading an article in the paper about his death, and it wasn’t exactly pretty.

“Then why did he-?”

“Commit suicide? Hell if I know. For some reason, the scientific community disdained his theories to the point where he was locked out completely from the career he loved. When the door closed, it pushed him over the edge. He’d been depressed for years after the death of my mother,” He explained softly. I repressed a wince; I didn’t want to bring up painful topics. I remembered the photograph in the other room, the one with the handsome man and the frail-looking woman, clearly in love. I could imagine how much it would destroy someone to lose the person they loved the most. “I look a lot like him, and nothing like her. He didn’t even have me to remember her by. I adopted the mask after he killed himself; I thought it would be a disadvantage to enter his field if I looked exactly like the man they shunned,”

“Oh God, how old were you?” I whispered, imagining a much younger Kakashi. I had lost my parents when I was a teenager, and that was young enough.

“Old enough,” I had a horrible feeling that meant ‘very young’. “But then, I always was a rather old child.” He walked into the room and handed me the coffee, sitting down next to my nest but not touching me.

“So what happened next?” I averted by eyes to my spare hand, wrapped up in the scarlet-patterned bedding. I didn’t want to know anymore. I didn’t want to know what had hurt Kakashi in the past because there was nothing I could do about it.

No, I could make it better in the present, somehow.

“I got an offer I couldn’t refuse,” He said with a short laugh. I felt the bed move underneath me as he repositioned himself, leaning back against the headboard as well. “Akatsuki offered me all the funding I could ever want, provided I became an official member of their organisation. The intrinsic corruption of the organisation wasn’t public knowledge, but my sensei warned me against it. Being the devoted little student I was, I refused and got myself into a rather difficult position. No one refuses Akatsuki. It’s supposedly a great honour to be a part of the glorious new dawn.

“If I had joined, I would have had unlimited funding, state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and I could have studied whatever I chose. Naturally, whatever I did I’d have to credit Akatsuki, thus leaving their fingerprint on it, and I wasn’t about to do that. It had to be for me, not them. Instead, I got assaulted and my reputation ruined. I’m practically unemployable in most fields, so I trained as a teacher. Tsunade-sama hates Akatsuki, so she hired me. And so, here I am,”

“The attack was how you lost your eye?” I asked, trying to assuage my horrible mental images of needles.

“Yep. Naturally, there wasn’t a hope in hell of pressing charges. Akatsuki had more than a couple of the higher-ups in the justice system in their pocket at the time,” His voice held a hint of bitterness, one that I could completely understand. I felt anger boil through my veins at the injustice of it. It wasn’t like it was some simple street assault; it was the loss of an eye. That was surely worth trying properly. “It could have been worse. It was just the one,”

“I’m sorry,” I apologised, setting down the coffee on the bedside table and looking up into his face. There were no tears; it was bitter, but it wasn’t a tearful kind of upset. It was a deep-set understanding and hopelessness. There was nothing either of us could do about all his lost prospects.
I felt suddenly guilty; if none of that had happened, then I would never have met him. Kakashi would be locked away in some faraway place, thinking up grand schemes to explain whatever complicated concepts I couldn’t begin to wrap my head around, and I would be in Konoha High, teaching. I couldn’t help but feel somewhat happy that I had had the chance to meet him, although I knew it was horribly selfish of me.

“For what? None of this is your fault,” He pointed out, taking a sip of coffee and avoiding my eyes.

“I just am,” When the coffee cup lowered, I leaned over and planted a soft kiss on his lips.

And I was.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Smile

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

It’s not always rainbows and butterflies
It’s compromise that moves us along
My heart is full and my door’s always open
You can come anytime you want

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

The kiss didn’t last as long as I would have liked, but I wanted to push away the melancholy atmosphere that had been growing in the room. A part of me regretted asking; I liked to pretend that all was well and good in the world, and that Kakashi was perfect, ergo didn’t have a tragic past or lost hopes and dreams. But at the same time, I wanted to know everything. I had to know everything. I just didn’t want anyone to hurt in the process.

I leaned in again, pressing our lips together again, but more firmly, lingering longer. When he didn’t respond, I gripped his shoulders in a silent plea for a response. I kept my eyes shut, hoping I wouldn’t see rejection if I opened my eyes.

Slowly, his hands crept to mine. I prepared myself for the sting of rejection as my hands were removed, and the disappointment that I couldn’t do anything to distract him. Instead, his hand just covered mine, warm and comforting.

A wave of intense guilt washed over me. Why was it always me drawing comfort from him? That was hardly fair.

I tried to remember what my mother had done to comfort me when I was upset as a child. Although my feelings towards Kakashi were in no way motherly, I was hoping they’d be applicable. I could ask what was wrong, but my voice would sound awkward, and I already knew what was wrong. That would be more patronising than helpful. I could remember my mother stroking my hair, but that was different, somehow, and all my little childhood worries paled in significance.

There wasn’t really an appropriate way to express my need to comfort him. I watched his face, though I was too close for my eyes to focus properly, hovering just a few inches away after the little kiss. I watched as old emotions were recalled and repressed in turn, each one unearthed and then buried like records in an elaborate filing system. It indicated he didn’t need comfort; if he hadn’t gotten any before, he probably didn’t really need any now.

It was probably selfish of me to try, but I had to. It was compulsive.

I squirmed properly out of my blanket cocoon, moving into a better position to do whatever I could. The air was cold around me, and it smelled like dogs and washing powder and coffee and Kakashi. The bed creaked slightly.

“We should make a cake,” I said, quickly biting my lip once I realised I had actually said that out loud.

“What? Why?” He asked. I repressed a completely inappropriate small giggle at the adorable
confusion that crept into his undamaged eye at the idea; although it was a stupid idea, it wasn’t a wild idea. Baking was a fairly normal activity.

“It’s very relaxing,” I pointed out.

“And delicious,” Kakashi shot back, animation returning to his features. A lip quirked in a smile, turning kissable lips into pinkish arcs, a little colour returning to his normally pale complexion. Promises of cake seemed to be a somewhat good distraction. “But why a cake?”

“Because everyone loves cake, idiot,” I chided jokingly. Although I would have preferred to throw my arms around him and cry on his behalf or do something equally useless, it was better to continue on as normal. Completely normal. And I had been meaning to bake another cake soon. “And I’m sure we’ll finish it off if we have nothing better to do than sit around being bored until the school reopens,”

“I can’t argue with that,” The tiniest trace of a twinkle returned to his eye, and my heart jumped for joy. Even if all was not well and good in the world, I couldn’t help but celebrate that little touch of normalcy.

Though it wasn’t normalcy, was it? I was the only one who ever really got to see it. Everyone else got the boredom and the cool intelligence, but I got to see the almost adorably cheeky side, and now the vulnerability that lurked somewhere, no matter how unwelcome. That made me somewhat special, didn’t it? That I was the only one who got to see that part.

I supposed it was mutual, though. No one had seen me cry for a long time, and I’d positively have to kill myself if anyone knew I’d ever set foot in an adult shop, or that I’d actually gone on a date in godknows how many years. And then there was everything else that I wasn’t able to put into words. The worry, the emotions, the lust. All of that made Kakashi ridiculously special.

Whatever heavenly epiphany I was about to encounter was cut short by a warm pair of lips pressing gently to mine, before pulling away. I tried to follow them, tasting a revelation lost as whatever I was trying to think was messed up by the sensation of warm skin. It was almost funny, how I managed to forget myself over one kiss when I had spent the night in bed with him without forgetting everything.

No, that was a lie. The presence of a warm, living, breathing body to hold onto was more than comforting. I had lost my train of thoughts, but it was a good thing to sink into oblivion then. Thinking now would have been a better course of action, when I knew that baking a cake, or taking any kind of physical action, was just a way of skirting around dealing with what had been said.

I didn’t know what I could say in response. There weren’t words.

“Drink your coffee and get dressed, then we can go,” The bed dipped again as he moved away, retrieving his coffee and walking towards the door to give me some privacy. There wasn’t really all that much point, on the basis that we had already seen each other completely naked and done much more than simply look.

As I watched his figure retreating from the room and into the shaft of sunlight beyond, I physically forced myself not to worry. It was getting to highly unhealthy levels.

“But I don’t have any clothes,” I said flatly, despite the fact Kakashi was no longer in the room, glancing down at my pyjamas. Honestly, I had no idea why I still wore them. Old habit, probably.

“Help yourself to mine,” He called. I almost laughed at his superhuman hearing. Was there anything he couldn’t do well? I did permit myself a grin.
Naturally, I was carefully not processing anything he had told me. I could do that at home, alone, preferably with a cup of tea. Tea was probably going to be deeply necessary to calming down after a good, deep think.

Instead, I dug through the wardrobe and chest of drawers, blushing as I accidentally pulled open the underwear drawer first. I would think about that last. All Kakashi’s clothes seemed to be divided into two classes: ‘work’ and ‘other’, with a surprisingly small amount of ‘other’. A couple of pairs of jeans, a few shirts and three jumpers made up most of his casual clothes. I frowned pointedly at the lack of clothes; most people had more than three outfits in their wardrobes.

At random, I picked out a pair of jeans and a knitted jumper, steeling myself as I reopened the underwear drawer. The presence of socks didn’t detract from the presence of everything else. I thought I could better understand a teenage boy sneaking into a lingerie department for the first time now. A small, secret thrill rushed through me. This stuff was personal private.

I dug through it quickly, hoping I wasn’t breaking any unwritten social etiquette laws I wasn’t aware of. Slowly, fingers twisting in a cottony waistband, I lifted a pair of boxers out of the drawer, almost reverent in the way my eyes were glued to the inoffensive article of clothing, before tossing them quickly towards the bed like my fingers had been burned.

I suppressed a small burst of laughter at my actions, and then guiltily dug my nails into my palms in a kind of self-punishment. I wasn’t here to sneak through Kakashi’s underwear drawers. I was supposed to be supportive and kind and understanding, but instead I was snooping through his things like a curious stranger. If I was anything, I wasn’t a stranger.

I felt a curious itching between my shoulder blades, as if I was being watched intently. When I looked around, there was nothing but the beam of sunlight peeking in through the door. I smiled in its general direction, unbuttoning my shirt.

Naturally, all of Kakashi’s clothes were slightly too big, ergo I looked a little bit silly in them. I wasn’t complaining, though. It was heavenly, to be surrounded not only by the scent of him in his own house, but also by the clothes covering my skin. Of course, it wasn’t as good as being wrapped tightly in his embrace, but I’d settle for what I could get.

“Let’s bake that cake,” I said loudly, stepping out of the bedroom.

oO.Oo..oO.Oo
Escape

Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone
I’ll be waiting; all that’s left to do is run
You’ll be the prince and I’ll be the princess
It’s a love story, baby, just say yes

Somehow, we ended up at my flat. Normally, this wouldn’t have been odd; I knew I had all the right ingredients and far too many cake decorations than was practical to own, and cooking in my own kitchen would be easier since I knew where everything was. What wasn’t logical was why we had to bring the entire pack.

“Down, boy!” I squeaked ineffectually as a large set of paws landed on my usually-pristine counter, just inches away from the mixing bowl. A huge, dark nose followed it, sneaking closer and closer to sniff at the contents. I pushed at one of the paws, trying to remove the dog from my workspace, but to no avail. It just slid along the counter a bit.

“Just shove him off,” Kakashi said from the kitchen table, flicking through my recipe book. I didn’t really need it for a regular sponge cake, so I’d left it there. I was still measuring out ingredients, so there wasn’t much for two people to do, and I only had one apron, though I wasn’t about to point it out until it was absolutely necessary. It was not the manliest article of clothing ever.

“Remind me why you decided to bring them with us?” I said, turning my glare from the dog now half on the counter to the others squirming around my feet. One or two pawed at my legs, but they all turned huge, adorable puppy eyes on me.

It wasn’t going to work. I was a teacher; I had to deal with puppy eyes from students on a routine basis. Or at least, that was what I told myself. Dogs did it better than teenagers.

“They get lonely, constantly being shut out whenever you’re around,” I watched as he shut the book with a snap, turning to stroke the ears of the dog nearest to him. It turned its head and licked his hand once, before turning its eyes back to me. Or more specifically, to the butter I was weighing out. I stared back, the butter remaining firmly on the counter.

“Can you blame me? They give me that look when we’re together,” I defended. “Way to perceptive to be natural,” Since the first time I had met them, they’d been looking at me like they knew exactly what I was around for, and it was really awkward. It wasn’t the same way the girls looked at us, but it was like they still knew we were doing. It was closer to the way a parent might look at their child when they find out they’re having sex. They were dogs. They weren’t supposed to understand human stuff like that.

Then again, dogs were supposed to be a good judge of character, though that didn’t mean they had the ability to predict the future.

“But they like you,” Kakashi pointed out, standing up and wandering over to me. “See, they wouldn’t be doing that if they didn’t like you.” He pulled the dog off the counter, resting a hand
lightly on its head when it looked up at him with a slightly disheartened look on its face. It was odd how they managed to be so expressive when they wanted something.

“I think they just want feeding,” I said flatly, turning back to my mixing bowl and cracking an egg into the mixture. A couple of high-pitched whines came from behind me, accompanied by more pawing. I glared into the cake mixture, repeating over and over in my head that I was not going to let them lick the bowl when the cake was done. That was completely unhygienic.

I retrieved a wooden spoon from one of the draws and held it out to Kakashi. Naturally, I had done most of the technical work, since making a good cake is an art form, but I didn’t mind handing over the more menial jobs.

“Maybe that too,” He admitted, taking the spoon.

“Then they can forget it. Raw egg isn’t good for you,” I replied as I straightened the row of decorations I had lined up along the wall. I had bought most of them on a whim, and would probably never use half of them, but they all looked delicious. Neatly shaved bits of chocolate in a clear plastic shaker, tiny tubs of sprinkles, silver sugar balls, crystallised flower petals, icing pens, rice paper cut-outs and the leftovers of mouldable fondant had all emerged from my cupboards. I didn’t even remember buying a lot of them, but they all looked appealing.

The box of flower petals switched places with a sealed box of mixed sugar shapes as I covertly pushed the icing pens closer to the mixing bowl. Thinking up something interesting to write over a base of plain coloured icing would be a good distraction while the cake cooked.

The entire purpose of the cake was a good distraction. Whilst we were busy baking, I didn’t have to respond or react to anything Kakashi had told me. I could quite easily pretend that I didn’t know anything, and that we were just two normal guys trying to make a cake while a bunch of adorable yet slightly irritating dogs attempted to eat everything.

I fished a chocolate button out of one of the containers and tossed it in the air, watching as the dogs scrambled for it, the successful one chomping it smugly while the others gazed at me, pleading for one each. I stuck my tongue out at them. The chocolate was all mine.

“What about flour?” Kakashi asked.

“Why would anyone want to- Argh!” A handful of powdery white flour rained down on my head. Through the veil of white, I could see a rather guilty-looking Kakashi trying to smother a smile. Since I had insisted the mask stay off, he was failing. “Stop doing that!”

“Who, me?” He said innocently. I grinned and seized a small handful of flour from the open bag and blew it in his direction, instantly covering his already pale hair in a fine sheet of white. His nose wrinkled in a small sneeze before another handful of flour found its way in my direction. I attempted to dodge, but ended up stumbling slightly as a dog found its way under my feet. Claws skittered on the floor as the pack rather intelligently moved out of the way of the silly humans.

“You’ll get flour all over your clothes! And my kitchen!” I protested loudly as I met another fistful of flour full on in my face. I gripped the counter and cracked open my eyes, preparing for another onslaught and groping for the bag of flour, just in case.

“Can I do this instead then?”

“Do wha-” I wasn’t expecting to be cut off with a not-so-chaste kiss. Our tongues met almost instantly, competitiveness from the flour throwing returning in full force as I refused to be entirely
submissive. My hands left the counter, blindly finding purchase in the front of his shirt. At about the same time, a handful of flour was dumped down the back of my shirt. “No, definitely not!” I yelped and jumped back, face contorting at the ticklish feeling.

While he was distracted laughing, I dipped my fingers in the blended cake mix and wiped it off across his nose, quickly retreating before he could react. I narrowed my eyes and licked the remaining mix off my fingers in what I hoped was a semi-seductive yet vaguely threatening manner.

The oddest expression came over Kakashi’s face at that moment, a pause as the ramifications of the small splodge of cake mix on his nose formed in both of our minds. Fortunately, mine was fast enough for me to brace myself as he reached for the whole mixing bowl and tackled me to the floor.

Within about two minutes, my kitchen had gone from practically pristine to a cake-flavoured hell hole, with Kakashi and me as the main attractions. The dogs had rather sensibly fled the room. Somehow, my cast remained mercifully free of cake mix. At some point, the raw cake mix had managed to get all over our clothes, faces, hair and most of my kitchen, but I couldn’t bring myself to care as I tried to squirm away from the epicentre, thus spreading the cake mix further, usually being dragged straight back by the waistband of my borrowed jeans.

“Stop that, you moron!” I complained, though I couldn’t help but blush when a warm tongue licked a streak of cake mix off my cheek. I swatted in its general direction, colliding with an equally sticky face.

“But your cake is just so delicious, Iruka!” Kakashi said cheekily, moving in for another lick. I didn’t protest this time.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
The kitchen floor was cold beneath me, but the rest of me was warm. Too warm, in fact. Warm enough to make the prospect of removing several items of clothing more than a little appealing. Gloopy cake mix clung to my hands as I tried to prop myself up with one hand, failing rather badly. I settled for resting on one elbow, reaching forward to swipe a splodge of cake mix off Kakashi’s forehead.

Before I could move my hand back, a pale hand gripped my wrist and brought the sticky fingers to his lips. Our eyes met, sharing a look so charged it was a wonder the room didn’t set on fire. A tongue emerged to slowly lick the pale, viscous raw cake from my digits. I could have melted. It didn’t stop there, though. Slowly, he drew my fingers into his mouth, tongue sweeping across every centimetre of skin, removing all traces of food from them. All the while, our eyes remained connected. I wanted to look away, a burning blush rising on my cheeks at the obviousness of what this was supposed to be, but I couldn’t.

As I watched his cheeks contract as the pressure around my fingers increased, I couldn’t help but picture those lips wrapped around a very different part of my anatomy, one that was increasingly anxious not to be forgotten. I shifted a little uncomfortably; staining borrowed clothing would be incredibly awkward, not to mention humiliating.

I almost completely forgot about that when he pulled back, disconnecting from my fingers with a wet pop. A string of saliva still connected my fingers to his lips. I shivered at the sight. That should be illegal it was so arousing.

“I meant it about the cake,” Kakashi whispered huskily, breaking the silvery thread. I was tempted to move my hand back and retrieve more cake mix from his face, but I found myself oddly fixed in place.

“I’m glad,” I said awkwardly, trying not to show how obscenely hot I had found that little display had been on my face. “Clothes off,”

“As my lady desires it,” He replied with a smirk, eyebrows rising suggestively. I swatted at him with
my raised hand, cuffing him gently on the side of the head.

“Call me a woman again and I’ll never bake another cake for you. Ever,” I threatened.

In response, he mimed zipping his lips shut and throwing away the key. A small, slightly perverse part of my brain hoped that didn’t mean his entire mouth was out of action.

I ruined the effect somewhat by pulling his head down to mine for a kiss, tasting sugar and butter and flour on his lips, overriding the natural taste that permeated his mouth. Lips slid over lips, oddly lubricated and hindered at the same time by the texture of the cake mix. I kept my eyes firmly shut, trying not to see the smug expression that was almost certainly plastered across Kakashi’s face at provoking me into instigating something. I couldn’t help it when he was sucking on my fingers like that.

Fairly quickly, our lips parted almost simultaneously, though I was a little occupied with keeping myself propped up to really try hard in the tongue-battle for dominance. Instead, I poked and caressed as his tongue wormed its way inside my mouth. In what I hoped was a decent imitation of the finger cleaning thing, I sucked gently, drawing it deeper into my mouth.

I couldn’t stifle a moan as fingers expertly undid the button and zip on the slightly oversized jeans I wore, moving my hips in a plea for attention. Every movement sent pleasure southwards, to the point where any clothing was becoming uncomfortable.

My free hand moved to his face, blindly stroking across a slightly sticky cheek, over his jaw and down his neck, then slowly down his chest. When I reached the hem, I broke the kiss, tugging at the offensive item of clothing. My body protested when both hands left me to pull the shirt over his head, revealing the broad expanse of pale chest to me.

Immediately, I decided there wasn’t enough cake on it, my own arousal be damned. I reached for the mixing bowl, carefully avoiding looking directly at Kakashi’s face. My cheeks heated again at my idea. With hands trembling with anticipation, I painted wiggly lines of creamy cake mix down beautiful, pale skin. I almost giggled when one of my fingers encountered a pink nipple, grinning childishly.

Once my hands stopped shaking as much, I pushed myself onto my knees and focused on my strokes, painstakingly drawing something across the planes of his chest and stomach. I didn’t really have enough cake mix to do it properly, and it didn’t show up as well as chocolate cake mix would, but it would have to do.

“A henohenomoheji?” He asked, looking down. I squiggled back and looked at my own handiwork. It wasn’t brilliant, but it was clearly recognisable.

“It’s not very creative, but…” I tailed off as a strange desire struck me.

I darted forward and licked one of the lines off his skin with a swipe of my tongue, starting with the top of the pattern, slowly moving down his body until I was just inches away from the top of his jeans. The pattern disappeared under my tongue, as if it had never existed in the first place.

There wasn’t all that much internal debating as I quickly unbuttoned the jeans and shoved them down roughly, exposing Kakashi’s erection to the charged, lightly perfumed air of my kitchen. Before I could closely analyse what I was about to do, I leaned forwards and licked the head. To my surprise-come-curiosity, it didn’t actually taste really awful, although it was distinctly different to cake mix.
Carefully not pausing for too long, I tried again, licking more slowly a couple of times before engulfing about an inch entirely in my mouth. I closed my eyes, anxious not to see anything, and felt hands tangle in my hair appreciatively. I attempted a small smile, as much as it is possible to smile with a cock in your mouth, knowing I was probably completely awful at this, whatever the hell it was.

I went via what I basically remembered: no teeth, tongue, suck, move. Although I confess I was not paying the most attention to the fine details of oral sex while I was the recipient.

At some point, I noticed I probably wasn’t doing the most awful job in the world. Kakashi’s hands tightened in my hair when I established a back-and-forth bobbing rhythm with my head, tentatively reaching one hand up to touch the exposed skin on the side of his hip in reassurance that he was still there, and that I wasn’t dreaming all this in some kind of odd fantasy.

“Look at me,” He said, voice rougher than normal. I complied somewhat nervously, slowly opening my eyes and pausing for a second while our eyes met.

I had to file away most of what was there for later, to dissect along with pretty much every other thing that had happened today already. Not only was there unbridled desire in both of those eyes, the damaged one lazily half-closed while the other one blazed darkly to make up for it, but there was something softer yet sharper at the same time, something I couldn’t define. I briefly wondered if it was reflected in my eyes, too.

There wasn’t much of a chance to wonder. I broke eye contact again as the weight of what I was doing hit me again, staining my cheeks scarlet and prompting me to return to what I was doing with abandon. I moved further down the shaft than before, wincing a little as I underestimated dimensions and nearly gagged as the tip brushed the back of my throat. I set my free hand to rubbing over the shaft as I returned my attention to the head, repressing a victory cry when the fingers in my hair tightened.

I managed to fix my lips back over the head just in time as he came without much warning. I opened my eyes wide in surprise, pulling back once his fingers slackened and released my hair. Without really thinking, I swallowed.

Breathing heavy, Kakashi hooked one finger under my chin and tilted my face up.

“Congratulations, Iruka,” He said with a lopsided grin. “On your first successful blowjob.”

Oo..Oo..Oo..Oo
Hold me and love me

Just wanna touch you for a minute

Maybe three seconds is enough for my heart to quit it

Let’s have some fun

This beat is sick

I wanna take a ride on your disco stick

“What do you mean I can’t take a shower?” I squeaked indignantly as the shower curtain was pulled decisively between us, obscuring my view of Kakashi’s nakedness. I’d have to add ‘shower curtain’ to the list of items I wanted to spontaneously combust.

“We can’t risk getting the cast wet,” He explained all too reasonably, turning on the shower without a pause. I stood stock-still, trying very hard not to watch as the tall silhouette didn’t even flinch as water I knew would be too cold rained from the shower head. It was unrealistic how he could still manage to look so appealing while almost completely obscured from my field of view.

“But I’m covered in uncooked cake,” I said as I finally found my voice. I wasn’t going to be distracted. Definitely not.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something,” The scent of my shower gel filled the room, steam curling towards the ceiling. There was no way I was going to admit he was right. I twitched my fingers in annoyance, uselessly wishing my wrist fixed so I could do something.

I grumbled something about stupid idiots decidedly not getting any more sexual favours in the near future, and seized a small hand towel from next to the sink. The hiss of the sink taps joined the din of the hold shower head, the wait for the water to heat up properly seeming to crawl by.

Every second I stood there, I couldn’t help but retrace my steps. From floor of the kitchen, slight stunned silence, followed by me chasing after a fleeing Kakashi to attempt to murder him slightly for the most inappropriately placed comment ever. At some point, I had tripped over a discarded pair of jeans, leaving me just far enough behind to be irritating. Most of my murderous intentions were rather stunted upon entering the bathroom, where I had been greeted by his complete nudity.

I probably shouldn’t have been stunned into submission, but it was sort of an automatic response. It would be counterintuitive to destroy something so-

‘Delicious’ was possibly the right word. An embarrassed yet strangely self-satisfied smirk crossed my lips as I recalled exactly what I had done barely five minutes ago, much of which had involved my lips. And my tongue. And the rest of my mouth.

A part of me wanted to profess that it was only fair that I return the favour at some point, yet the rest of me was enjoying it rather too much. The idea of giving pleasure, as well as rather shamelessly
taking it, was very appealing. The eroticism of the back-and-forth, give-and-take burned deep in my body as I shed my clothes, sticking the hand towel under the hot water.

I tried not to watch Kakashi shower. On the one hand, it was a kind of perverse voyeurism and an invasion of common privacy, but at the same time I hadn’t exactly been shut out of the bathroom. In fact, I had been all but invited to watch. I tried looking everywhere but the shower, but the dull walls and the curls of steam didn’t really catch my attention the same way the slow-moving, teasing silhouette did.

Although I had no idea what to do about my hair, I ran the damp towel across my shoulders, absent-mindedly cleaning off what I could. I wasn’t really that dirty. It was mostly my face that was sticky, along with the clothes and my kitchen. I shot a glare in the direction of the shower; I would be expecting some serious assistance in cleaning the mess up later.

As my hand crept lower, still brandishing the increasingly ineffectual hand towel, I didn’t fail to notice that my previously neglected little problem was making itself known again.

The feeling of a hot, pulsing organ in my mouth was beyond arousing. Moving my tongue against hardened flesh, working up then down and back up again, fingers in my hair, and the look in his eyes took my breath away. Actually doing something that caused obvious pleasure and had been previously so forbidden, mainly by my own self-imposed guidelines, made it just that little bit more exotically intense.

I bit my lip to repress a smile at memories of overhearing the age old spit or swallow debate. It honestly hadn’t even crossed my mind. Swallowing was just kind of automatic, although I vaguely regretted not waiting a second longer to properly process the taste.

No amount of lip biting could repress the weird smile that appeared at the idea of other placed it could go. My hand trailed lower still, the temptation growing.

“Enjoying yourself?” I almost dropped the towel when the water shut off and the shower curtain jerked back, revealing a dripping and rather smug looking Kakashi, promptly stepping out of the shower. Water pooled around his feet. I’d have to clean that up later, too.

“I-I-” I started, blanching like a teenager caught looking at porn. I thanked the gods that he couldn’t read minds, although I had a horrible feeling my imaginings were written across my face, along with the scarlet blush I could feel rising very quickly.

“Because I’m the only one allowed to do that,” He closed the gap between us quickly, pressing our lips together in a kiss. At some point, I dropped the towel, my hands shifting from my body to his. My hands glided over wet skin, illegally tight and warm from the shower, flushed pink from the hot water, anxiously pulling us closer. His hands remained firmly on my shoulders, infuriatingly still but for the occasional tensing of fingers when my hands ran over a sensitive spot.

Frowning into the kiss, I pushed my fingers into his stomach, trying to prompt some kind of reaction. This wasn’t fair. He wasn’t allowed to be the object of my desire, forbid me from touching myself and then refuse to touch me! That was completely unfair! Still, two could play at that game.

I forced my hands away and clasped them firmly behind my back, lacing my fingers together to restrain every frantic digit. Just because touching was addictive didn’t mean I was going to give in again, or at least not until he did first.

Without being able to touch, the sensation of his lips on mine became electric. The tantalisingly few inches of air between our bodies became charged and magnetic, begging me to close the gap and
throw my arms around him and move and feel, but I resisted. Instead, I moved my lips slowly and seductively, keeping my eyes shut. I wasn’t going to give in by looking either. That would just make everything more tempting.

A tongue glided over my lower lip, requesting entry that I freely gave. I thought I detected the slightest hint of a curve in the lips that pressed against mine with a new kind of controlled abandon, inciting me to try harder. I tried to mimic what I had done earlier to a rather different part of Kakashi’s anatomy, licking and sucking on the invading muscle, trying to force some kind of reaction out of him.

When there was little response, rather than being upset I felt vaguely frustrated. What was the point of denying us both this kind of physical pleasure? I sure as hell wasn’t giving up on it without a fight or a valid explanation.

I lifted one hand and seized his wrist, replacing it on my hip, opening one eye to glare menacingly forward even though I couldn’t focus on his face at this close a range. I didn’t remove my grip on his wrist until I felt his fingers dance across my skin of their own accord, unable to repress a small smile of victory when the other hand joined in voluntarily.

Without warning, his hands gripped my ass and I was pulled closer, our bodies pressed skin to skin against each other. I managed not to squeak, though I did manage to half-suppress a small moan as the obvious symptom of my arousal was pressed against his damp flesh, a thrill of excitement as I felt his erection against me. It was all I could do not to start moving.

I pulled out of the kiss and tried to school my face into something other than wanton.

“I’m not having sex with you in a bathroom,” I said quickly, trying not to let anything escape through my voice.

A low laugh escaped Kakashi’s lips, and he leaned in for another kiss.

oO..Oo..O..Oo
Let’s go all the way tonight

No regrets, just love

We can dance until we die

You and I, we’ll be young forever

My flat was almost completely silent. The dogs, wherever they were, seemed to know instinctually to stay out of our way. I was hoping they’d do me a favour and lick up the worst of the mess in the kitchen, no matter how bad it probably was for them and how unhygienic that would be. Either way, I wasn’t getting out of cleaning it.

I couldn’t say I completely regretted getting uncooked cake mix all over my kitchen, since the consequence was still tantalisingly close. The air inside my bathroom was hot and sticky, almost claustrophobic in the way it brought the walls in closer, pushing me closer and closer to Kakashi, as if enough pressure would make all physical barriers fall away to let us merge into one being.

At some point, a slow, sweet rocking motion had begun, creating just enough friction to be stimulating but teasing, eyes closed and lips pressed against his shoulder. It wasn’t enough, but I didn’t want to ruin anything by moving faster. Or maybe that was the problem. I was far too used to not doing anything.

It was a thrill to go against what I kind of expected myself; I felt completely inexperienced, but at the same time trying out things and trying to figure out what he wanted was fascinating and very rewarding, if I got it right.

However, we were in my bathroom, and I had no intentions of going any further in my own bathroom. Yes, cleaning would probably be easier, but it was a bathroom. At least my kitchen was clean. Well, it had been clean, half an hour previous, and admittedly it was not the sexiest location ever, but I spent more time voluntarily in my kitchen than I did in my bathroom and I enjoyed what I did there.

Cooking was possibly one of my favourite things to do, even if it was rather a lot of effort and I never really had the occasion. Sharing it with Kakashi was surprisingly satisfying, even if our cake ended up painted over the floor, walls and our bodies. Wasn’t that what couples were supposed to do? Share?

“Not in the bathroom,” I whispered, although I wasn’t sure if I was talking to myself or to Kakashi.

I stepped back, looking into his face with what I hoped were seductive eyes, and then turned to walk out of the bathroom. Before I could take two steps, an arm wrapped around my torso and scooped me up, rather acrobatically manoeuvring me into a bridal carry. My mind re-wound to that time at the research facility, with the snow and the snowball fight and the accidental cuddling and the dream, and decided there were definitely too many clothes last time.

Oh god, the dream. Had that been my brain’s lame attempt at predicting the future or something?
Either way, I hadn’t had a sex dream for a while. Maybe it was a symptom of being less repressed, or more sexually satisfied. Waking up next to Kakashi wasn’t just a fantasy any more. It was reality. That was enough to distract me from the indignity of being carried like a little lady.

I resisted the urge to nuzzle my nose happily into his chest. I could do that later.

Somehow, we ended up in my bedroom, which I wasn’t likely to object to. It wasn’t my bathroom, and it wasn’t my kitchen or my hallway, so it was completely unobjectionable. So I didn’t have an excuse. I didn’t want an excuse. I squirmed a little against warm, damp skin, anxious for some kind of touch. The air outside the bathroom was cold, pushing me closer and closer against his chest. I could almost hear his heartbeat.

That was nice, to know I had set his heart beating just as fast as I mine was. It wasn’t quite sexy music and rose petals and candles, but I didn’t really want that. My boring bedroom was quite enough. Anything more would have been excessive, since I already had Kakashi carrying me-

I landed on the bed with an indignant yelp, glaring up at him from where I had fallen.

“You dropped me, you complete-” I started, only to be silenced with a short kiss. As his lips began to leave mine, I reached up and gripped the back of his neck none too gently and forced him back. With little resistance, he dropped his weight onto the bed beside me, letting me deepen the kiss as much as I wanted. So, naturally, I took the opportunity. I let my fingers reach out to where they had been itching to go to, tangling in damp locks of hair and crushing our open mouths together. Lips collided almost painfully with teeth, but it barely registered.

Drawing on my courage from earlier, I moved my body against his, trying to manoeuvre us into a more accessible position without being horribly blunt. I detected a slight twitch of Kakashi’s lips, and felt feather-light fingers drift down to where I wanted attention the most. The twitch of lips blossomed into a full, sinister smile as the fingers danced around the tip of my arousal, making me whine into our kiss. Unconsciously, I bucked upwards, rubbing myself against his hand.

“Don’t tease,” I whispered as I pulled out of the kiss for a second. In that one second, I caught a glimpse of his eyes. Dark and heavy with arousal, a perfect mirror for what I was feeling, but exciting and reassuring at the same time. A bout of nerves threatened, but I suppressed it. No, I wanted this.

Instead of resuming the kiss, his mouth descended on my throat, kissing and nibbling as his hand wrapped firmly around my member. My own fingers scrambled for purchase along his back, twitching at every contact and sensation. I tilted my head to the side, giving him better access to my throat while conveniently hiding my face at the same time. I didn’t even want to think about what kind of weird expressions I was making. Having denied myself for what felt like the last eternity since I woke up this morning, I wasn’t sure how long I was going to last. The skilled motions of the hand on my member, up and down, an occasional pause to stroke a thumb over the head, then back down and up again, over and over, it was all I could do to keep myself relatively still.

I dug my nails into his back reflexively as teeth bit down on my collar bone, almost immediately compensated with an apologetic lick, before returning to nip and suck on the skin of my neck. My fingers relaxed a little, only to flex and curl again as he began to pump faster and faster, my breathing getting faster as my climax approached. Every shaky breath sounded like a moan to my ears, made all the worse by Kakashi’s near-silence.

Despite being otherwise rather distracted, I felt disappointed by that. I wanted to reduce him to a quivering, moaning mess. I wanted to share the pleasure, rather than lie back and accept it all myself.
Though my body thoroughly protested, I raised a knee to tap Kakashi’s side, trying to pause his sinfully erotic ministrations. When that didn’t work, I dug my nails into his back again, but a little harder.

“Mmm?” He mumbled, barely detaching himself from the junction between my neck and shoulder. I’d probably have a lovely bruise there tomorrow.

“I want—” I said, voice half-choked with a combination of lust and lack of air. My brain was running half on autopilot and didn’t even bother trying to form a particularly coherent sentence. “More,” I really hoped that had got my message across. There was no way in hell I was going to say ‘I want to have penetrative anal sex with you’ out loud, ever. For one, it sounded too clinical and clean and passionless. It was like stripping all the glamour and subtlety out of a pretty metaphor. ‘Making love’ was hopefully a better description, but then I’d have to think about the emotional ramifications of making love.

“Are you sure you want to—” Intelligent eyes found mine, drowsily half shut with lust. Pale cheeks flushed pink, delicately enough to be nothing more than arousal and slight exertion, but never embarrassment. Nothing about Kakashi ever said embarrassment.

“Y-yes,” I interrupted a little too loudly.

“You don’t sound certain,” He said, lifting his head and resting back on one arm. I shivered at the loss of contact, and my still very aroused member was almost painfully untouched. “We’re not doing this unless you’re sure,”

I felt a smile creep across my lips, and paused. That concern made me feel all soppy and romantic, sharply contrasting with our actions. Romance was supposed to be roses and doves and soft lighting, not sweating and gasping on top of the bed sheets. Or in the bathroom.

“I want you to—” Thankfully my voice cut off before I could say anything embarrassing and complete that sentence.

“What was that?” A corner of his mouth tugged up in a dangerously handsome lopsided smile. For once, I was grateful for my ridiculous blush; he knew exactly what I meant, and that was kind of mortifying.

“Never mind,” With a smirk, he pulled away and stretched across the bed, reaching towards my bedside table. Although I was a little confused, I wasn’t going to protest the lovely view I got of lean limbs and pale skin. “Found it,”

As Kakashi pulled back I saw exactly what was in his hand. A tube of lube.

“Where the hell did that come from?” I squeaked. And why the hell was it in my bedroom?

“I put this here ages ago. I thought you’d have found it by now,” That was stupid. If I’d found it, I would have beaten him to death with it for making the assumption that I wanted to have sex, which now was exactly the case.

“J-just shut up and d-do it already,” I bit out, sitting up properly and leaning forwards to steal a kiss. Whether I was unconsciously stalling for time or not, it remained infuriatingly chaste and teasingly short, his hands remaining firmly on my shoulder.

“Hands and knees,” He whispered huskily in my ear, planting a single kiss on my cheek.
I complied, trying carefully not to think about how odd I must have looked. In fact, was this really a necessary position at all? If that dodgy porn book I had made a point of not touching since finishing was in any way accurate, then *doggy style* was not the only position possible. I’d much rather see Kakashi’s face than be forced to stare at the sheets or wall as he-

My thoughts cut off abruptly as a finger gently circled my entrance, making me shiver a little at the slightly too cool temperature of the lube. I bit my lip, trying to make myself relax in anticipation. When the finger dipped inside, I felt surprisingly okay. It didn’t hurt; it was just kind of uncomfortable. Then it began to move. The completely alien sensation of something moving inside me caused me to tense around it, freezing it in its tracks. I closed my eyes and forced myself to relax. This wasn’t just for me anymore.

Slowly, as I began to relax properly again, the finger began pumping. I let my fingers close tightly around fistfuls of bedding. It was dizzying to think that that finger was going to be replaced with something entirely different in the near future. The very near future.

“I-I think I could – manage another,” I said as loudly as I dared, trying to breathe slowly.

A second finger pushed alongside the first. My teeth dug sharply into my lip; now it was painful. Not crippingly so, but it wasn’t just uncomfortable anymore. The lube made it go in so easily but it felt like so much more inside, even completely still.

“Just breathe, ‘Ruka. Breathe,” His soothing voice said as his spare hand rested gently on my thigh. “It gets better,”

I let myself smile, trying desperately to believe his words. It couldn’t be that bad if people had sex all the time. The hand on my thigh rubbed softly and Kakashi whispered something, but I didn’t hear it.

It felt like an eternity had passed before a third finger was pressing inside, and I couldn’t stop the whimper of pain that escaped at the painful stretch, but I wouldn’t let myself complain at all. I believed Kakashi; it had to get better. And he deserved this for putting up with me. I stifled another whimper as the fingers began to move a little, pressing a hand over my mouth. I refused to let myself actually cry, and I wouldn’t let myself make another noise. I wouldn’t ruin it all here.

Slowly, it did get better, just as promised. Tolerating the slight, gentle movement was getting easier too, and as it got easier the fingers moved as one again, lightly pulling in and out, splaying and contracting, moving deeper-

“Ah!” I gasped in sudden, unexpected pleasure as the fingers brushed something. Then they brushed it again, drawing another noise from my lips, although this time it was closer to a moan. I liked that, whatever the hell it was. It still hurt like hell, but it wasn’t as bad as it had been, and that sensation was very distracting to say the least.

“Found it,” The relief was evident in his voice. I briefly considered opening my mouth to ask exactly what he had found, but I cut myself off with another, louder reaction to the movement of his fingers against that spot. Whatever it was, it was positively setting my body on fire again, fuelling my member with was rapidly hardening again between my legs.

When the fingers paused for a moment, I refused to let that get in the way of my pleasure. It was addictive, new and virtually unknown. Barely aware of what I was doing, I let myself rock back on the fingers, trying to force them against that one spot. The burn of pain was virtually gone; all I could think about was that sensation.

The fingers pulled out, and I whined a little in displeasure, turning my head backwards to see why I
was being denied.

“May I?” Kakashi asked. My eyes instantly travelled down to his cock, glistening with lube in the low light. It was notably larger than three fingers. I nodded, not trusting myself to speak without accidently voicing my mild concern, and fixed my eyes on the sheets again.

I felt the hot tip of his member rest against my newly stretched hole, anticipating whatever it felt like to be properly, fully connected to another human being in this way. And not just any other human being. It was Kakashi behind me. I felt a thrill of something akin to excitement sweep through my chest, and I clung to it, hoping the elation it brought me could somehow commit all this to memory forever. I couldn’t stop myself from tensing a little with nerves, gritting my teeth and breathing evenly. He had promised it got better, and it had. Would this be even better?

Slowly, he pushed in, piercing through the ring of muscle, gripping my hips for leverage. I tried to stay still, keeping my hands firmly knotted in the bed sheets again. My fingers gripped tight enough to tear the sheets. It still hurt, but I didn’t say anything. I tried not to make a sound, even as tears welled up involuntarily in my eyes. If I said anything, he’d stop, and I didn’t want that. Neither of us really wanted to stop. His controlled breathing and tight grip on my hips stated that clearly enough.

A sob tore through my lips. I realised too late, wincing as I realised I’d probably given myself away.

“I’m sorry,” He whispered, leaning over my back, voice tight with restraint and worry. His hands stroked along my sides, rubbing soothing lines into my skin. “I’m so sorry. This is too much for you, we should-”

“No, it’s – I’m okay, j-just keep going,” I said, trying to breathe deeply.

He planted a soft kiss on my spine and continued to press forward, fingers still rubbing delicate patterns into my skin. I tried to decipher any meanings to the abstract shapes and lines, but I couldn’t read anything into it when my mind was completely dulled.

Strong arms pulled me back into his lap, pushing his length even deeper inside me. I exhaled sharply, shuddering. This was it. The most connected two human beings could possibly be, short of being conjoined twins. As close as possible, sharing bodies. That notion, if somewhat cliché, made everything more bearable.

“How are you holding up?” Kakashi asked softly, pressing a small kiss into the side of my neck. I felt a little guilty at that; I was ruining it for him.

“I’ll live,” I replied with a weak smile. He swept away a couple of stray tears, caressing my cheek with the pad of his thumb. I leaned into the tender touch, turning my head to kiss him. The movement of our bodies was a not-so-subtle reminder of the cock buried inside me, but it wasn’t really so painful anymore. Instead of the initial stretching burn, it had reduced to a duller, throbbing ache accompanying a feeling of fullness, and wasn’t necessarily so bad.

Experimentally, I shifted my hips a little. Not doing anything would be worse than doing something, and I wanted some kind of distraction. I wrapped one hand around my severely wilted erection, trying to coax it back to life. The new sensation of having something inside me only added to what my hand was doing, though I felt a small streak of annoyance at my stupid broken right wrist. It was just my luck that I’d break the wrist on my dominant hand. Quickly, Kakashi’s pale hand covered mine, replacing my sloppy strokes with guided, smooth ones. I moaned quietly at the change of pace, unconsciously bucking into his hand, trying to increase the friction.

A soft groan came from somewhere near my ear. I froze. Had I caused that? I lifted my hips a little
and pressed down again, ignoring the burn, rewarded with another small noise of pleasure from
Kakashi. A genuine smile crossed my face; this is what I had wanted. Even if it wasn’t incredibly
pleasant for me, if I could make him make noises like that, it was worth it.

I rose a little higher, and brought myself down on his cock more forcefully, wincing at the pain.
Though it still hurt, it was very little compared to what it had initially been, and I found myself even
growing to sort of like the fullness, and the friction on my own member was only increased by my
movements. Every motion drew a gasp or a hiss or a moan from Kakashi, his breath hot against the
back of my neck, every noise a reward for my actions.

When he thrust up to meet me, I cried out in pleasure. The slight change in angle forced his member
against the spot inside me that felt amazing, making my bouncing more erratic, faster and harder. The
room was filled with the sound of charged moans and slapping skin, what restraint I had left quickly
discarded as the impassioned sensations became more and more overwhelming.

I came with little warning, crying out as I impaled myself one last time, spilling myself over our
hands and my bed sheets. My head dropped, panting with exertion and elation. Kakashi continued to
thrust upwards, quick and sharp.

“’Ruka,” He gasped breathlessly once before reaching his climax, releasing inside of me. I leaned
back against him, feeling truly content. A hand drowsily stroked my hair. “Thank you,”

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
This Feeling

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And you can tell everybody, that this is your song

It may be quite simple, but now that it's done

I hope you don't mind, I hope you don't mind

That I put down in words

How wonderful life is now you're in the world

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

There really had been no point in cleaning up after the cake fight. After the moment had passed, we ended up lying stretched out on the bed, still sticky with sweat and other bodily fluids. The air was hot and heavy, laden with the scent of sex. I wasn’t about to move any time soon, least of all to wash the bedding.

My situation more than made up for the mess. Everything was a bit fuzzy, my eyes unfocusing as they tried to shut. I couldn’t help it; everything was making me drowsy. I shuffled backwards, reaffirming to myself that Kakashi was still there, and everything that had happened was actually real. That the arm draped across me was actually his, and that the source of heat behind me was his body, and that we had just had sex.

I couldn’t help but smile guiltily at that. We had actually done it. Sex.

It had been kind of nice. It hurt, and it wasn’t as easy as having sex with a woman, but it was still good. Definitely good. Like all things, perfection would probably come with practise, and I wasn’t going to object to more practise. Well, maybe not until I regained motion in most of my body.

Yes, sex was definitely nice. It made me wonder why I had gone so long without it. Then again, I definitely couldn’t see myself bar-hopping, and I couldn’t imagine casual sex would be as good without the emotions attached. Even if that was ridiculously sentimental of me.

I turned my head to look at my alarm clock, taking in the glowing green numbers with an element of confusion. Somehow, we had managed to kill about three hours of the day by doing basically nothing. Waking up ridiculously late, trying to make a cake and having sex seemed to have taken a lot longer than it really should have. Even so, there was a great temptation to let my eyes close and fall asleep. Wasn’t that supposed to be a part of the romantic post-making love thing? Then again, it would probably apply more reasonably at night, when most people did it. I shouldn’t have been tired, considering the amount of sleep I had gotten from my long lie-in, but sex was undeniably good physical exercise.

So instead, I attempted to roll over so I could prop myself up, but the pale arm draped across me suddenly tensed, holding me in place. I squirmed a little, trapped. It wasn’t the worst place in the world to be trapped, really.

“It’s barely half past five,” I protested, though I didn’t bother to escape the arm. It made a rather agreeably warm prison.
“Your point?” Kakashi said sleepily, pressing a kiss to the top of my head. By the second I was becoming more and more convinced that it was definitely a good idea to stay in bed. Maybe forever.

“We can’t go to sleep. We haven’t even had dinner,” I spoke evenly, as if sounding somewhat rational would make my arguments more appealing. That silly notion was completely flattened when our hands met, fingers intertwining clumsily. I was practically holding the keys to my prison but I still didn’t want to get out.

“Just nap, then,” Another small kiss to the top of my head. “A couple of hours won’t hurt,”

I mumbled something incoherent about it being an excuse for snuggling; his only response was to pull me closer. The arguments could be saved for later. Snuggling was looking like a very pleasant option.

My eyes shut, but I didn’t let myself sleep. I didn’t want to miss a second of this.

Sex was nice. *Nice.* For an English lit teacher, I kept using such a boring word. Yes, sex was nice, but it was also very gratifying, pleasing, enjoyable and delicious. I smiled a little at that. Sex was certainly delicious, especially with Kakashi. Not that sex before had been boring and plain, it just wasn’t the same. Other than the obvious difference in mechanisms, which I wasn’t really opposed to, but I had never really wanted to just lie next to any of the girls I slept with. Mostly I wanted to get out of the room before someone caught us, but that was beside the point.

Was it beside the point? I hadn’t gotten involved with anyone romantically because I was looking for someone to marry and fulfil what my parents expected of me, but I had basically done the opposite of that. I had gotten romantically involved with someone who I wasn’t going to marry, and who couldn’t bear children for obvious reasons. But I had still done it. And I’d slept with him, and I was more than content to stick around and cuddle afterwards.

Then there was the sharing. Some of it was relatively ordinary, since it was common courtesy to offer to drive your colleague to work when they couldn’t drive, but other things were big. There was sex, and then there was all of Kakashi’s past. I still didn’t really know how to process it properly, but it made my personal history look positively mundane. To dredge something like that up just because I asked was so trusting. Whatever it meant, I wasn’t going to let my new knowledge impact on our relationship. Maybe it was because I was half asleep, but everything seemed a little bit unimportant. Kakashi was Kakashi, and that was all that really mattered.

Being caught was another major factor in my teenage relationships. Sleeping with someone always carried the added risk of being caught by someone else, which was half the thrill. It wasn’t that I picked deliberately stupid places to have sex with my girlfriends, but her bedroom or someone else’s bedroom always seemed to be a favourite. Now, there wasn’t any danger of being caught. We were both safe and alone, save for the dogs, and there was no chance of anyone walking in. The thrill from the risk was replaced by the thrill of who I was doing it with.

I pulled our connected hands tighter together. The thrilling part of sex was exciting and enjoyable, but the aftermath wasn’t dull by any means. My fingers contracted momentarily, eliciting a small nuzzle from Kakashi. This wasn’t dull, it was calmly pleasant. Almost completely nonsexual, despite the fact neither of us had any clothes on.

A comfortably warm feeling grew in my chest. This was actually loving. Although I didn’t have much experience to speak from, this didn’t feel like an obligatory post-sex duty. It was voluntary. He’d fought, although I wasn’t really unwilling, for me to stay. It was a quiet, calm kind of action, completely different to the fast and passionate sex, but close in much the same way. Contact of skin to skin, but a dulling of awareness rather than the hypersensitivity of sex. Touching, but in a way that
was neither platonic nor erotic.

What would I do if he suddenly got up and left me here alone? I wasn’t entirely sure, but it was painful to think about it. For some strange reason, I wanted to wake up next to him, still wrapped up in his arms. My fingers tightened again, firmly holding his hand in place. I wasn’t going to let him leave, even if he tried.

I’d have to think about all this later, when I wasn’t feeling so drowsy. I let my breathing slow a little, matching Kakashi’s lazy pace as his chest gently expanded and contracted, warm against my back. Just the knowledge that he was there, safe and well, was enough to put me at ease, and I sincerely hoped there would be many, many more opportunities to rest like this in the future.

Oh, yes, I definitely liked this one.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
A House In Heaven

Something, something about this place
Something 'bout lonely nights and my lipstick on your face
Something, something about my cool Nebraska guy
Yeah something about, baby, you and I

“…-ka? Iruka?” A voice called from somewhere off in the distance. Whatever it was, it probably wasn’t very important. Certainly not important enough to draw me out of the lovely, warm, hazy half-sleep I was drifting in. “I need you to wake up,”

Wake up? Why would I do that? I was far too comfortable and moving and thinking coherently could be saved for another time. I hadn’t really meant to fall asleep, but the temptation to relax completely in Kakashi’s arms was too great. Especially after sex.

The squishy thing – mattress? – I was lying on dipped in a couple of places, progressively getting steeper and more obvious, culminating in a warm puff of breath across my face. I cracked open an eye. Unfortunately, it was the one with vision mostly obscured by the bedding and it was dark, so all I got was a view of a series of canine legs before a long, wet tongue dragged itself across my face. I sat up instantly, only to be tackled back to the bed by the various dogs. Paws, some delicate and some heavy, trod on my exposed limbs, forcibly prodding me awake while an assortment of tongues decided that I definitely needed a bath.

“Kakashi! Your dogs are trying to eat me!” I yelped, trying not to giggle. Although I wasn’t too keen on being trampled and licked, it did kind of tickle. I shoved the quilt off, wondering how it had gotten there, and tried to bat the dogs away. It didn’t work.

“Take it as a compliment. That’s a sign they like you,” Kakashi’s voice said from somewhere nearby. “They’re also a very good alarm clock,” I wasn’t going to dispute that.

“I’m awake, I’m awake,” I sat up properly and looked around. All the lights were out, and I was half-buried in a nest of bedding. The dogs finally gave up, relocating themselves rather happily to the centre of my bed. The entire room was too dark, dying sunlight filtering in through the open windows, but all the lights were off. “What time is it, anyway?”

“Nearly seven. I wouldn’t have woken you up, but the power’s gone out,” My head snapped towards Kakashi, who, I realised as my eyes adjusted to the dark, was perched on the extreme edge of the bed. I couldn’t see much but the shape of his shoulders and hair in the darkness, but I could make out the break in the smooth line of the silhouette where a shirt began and skin ended, meaning he was already dressed. I was a little disappointed; being jumped on and drooled on by dogs was not the most romantic way to wake up ever. Waking up bathed in sunshine in the arms of your lover was definitely preferable, although since it was apparently nearly seven, the sunshine wasn’t likely.

“We’re having a power cut? Now?” I asked. There hadn’t been any power cuts for ages; there probably weren’t enough candles to light most of my flat. It was a good thing Kakashi and all the dogs were over, otherwise I’d probably be worrying about how they’d manage, whether he had a
torch, or something else completely inane.

“The whole area is down because of the snow,” He explained. “One of your neighbours came to tell you, but you were still asleep so I answered the door,”

“Great,” I could just see one of my elderly neighbours knocking on the door expecting the nice, respectable teacher from down the hall, only for the door to be opened by his semi-clothed male lover. Although I didn’t really care, it would probably end up as the gossip topic of the week for the other inhabitants.

Wait. If the power was out, then the heating was off as well. That probably explained how I’d gotten under the quilt. If the power was out, then my kitchen didn’t work. If my kitchen didn’t work, there would be no food.

Groaning, I forced myself out of bed. Outside of the cocoon of bedding, it was cold. I didn’t like being cold, especially not when completely naked. Bedrooms were supposed to be warm, not freezing cold, and preferably not dark at the same time. I stepped in the direction my wardrobe was, deliberately schooling my face into complete passivity to try to avoid wincing at the soreness of a certain area of my anatomy, even if it was too dark to properly tell what kind of expression I was making.

I dressed quickly, trying to pick the warmest things I could without overdoing it. The building that housed the flats was fairly old itself, and wasn’t well insulated. If it was this cold at seven, it would be virtually arctic by midnight.

“Do you want to stay for dinner? I’m not sure what I’ll make without electricity, but…” I tailed off lamely. We would probably be reduced to sandwiches, since I couldn’t use my stove or even my microwave, and cleaning up the mess from the cake would be a challenge in the dark. Hell, slicing bread in the dark would be a challenge.

Still, at least Kakashi had woken me up. I’d rather be mildly irritated that a random power outage had ruined my nap and my stupid hopes that everything could go well and without a hitch, for a change.

“Oh course,” A hand trailed down my arm. I shivered; I hadn’t heard him cross the room. “Now, where do you keep your candles?”

My candles, it turned out, were in a box under the sink. Half of them looked to be about as old as me, burned down to manky little stubs that would burn for about an hour at the best, while the other half would probably last a little longer. Embarrassingly, there were a couple of scented candles I had managed to accumulate at some point. Kakashi insisted they were lit, and the entire kitchen started to smell like vanilla and wild berry, or so the labels proclaimed.

The refrigerator had no power, like everything else in the flat. In the soft glow of candlelight, the very mundane contents of my fridge suddenly looked more like monsters from a children’s picture book than they looked like edible food. I peeled the tin foil off a couple of half-eaten dishes, but almost all of them required heating. Sandwiches were always an option, but I had very limited number of things to use as filling. In the end, I settled for a mostly full bowl of cold pasta and an opened bag of pre-mixed salad leaves, hoping it would do.

My eye twitched as I stood in a coagulating puddle of cake mix. It was probably unsanitary to cook in here, anyway.

“Could you grab a couple of plates? They’re in the-”
“-middle cupboard, on the shelf underneath the soup mugs. I haven’t seen one of those in a long
time,” He finished, standing to open the cupboard. In this new angle, the soft candlelight perfectly
highlighted the planes and lines of his face, making him look more surreal than human. I swallowed;
an overwhelming desire to reach out and touch that face, to see if it was really real, welled up inside
me. I quickly repressed it; first, it was a silly desire, and secondly, I knew his face was real. I’d
touched it before.

“Soup out of soup mugs is delicious, but unless you want it cold and out of a can, I can’t manage
soup,” I paused, taking the food out of the fridge. “But I can manage delicious pasta salad with-” I
squinted through the darkness to read the label on the salad, holding it closer to my face to read. “-iceberg, romaine, lollo, rosso and frisée lettuce,”

The tin foil peeled off with a satisfying crinkling noise, and I dropped it on the counter to join the
mess I’d invariably end up clearing up later.

I couldn’t help but smile when I saw the table. Everything that had been on it before, mostly papers
and a couple of books, had been swept away, replaced with the most intact candle perched in the
mostly empty jar of crystallised ginger. I was still staring when a pair of plates joined the array,
complete with cutlery. Before I could stare too long or read too much into it, I set the food down on
the table and motioned for Kakashi to sit down, attempting to walk somewhat normally or at least not
limp horribly obviously.

My kitchen chairs were solid wood and barely comfortable at the best of times, so I wasn’t exactly
looking forwards to sitting in one. If walking without looking like I was recovering from major
surgery was a challenge, sitting in a really hard chair wouldn’t be enjoyable by any means.

So, naturally, I was rather pleasantly surprised by the presence of a cushion filched from the sitting
room sofa, and I couldn’t stop smiling widely.

“Stop being so amazing. You’re making me look bad,” I said, reaching for a fork. Kakashi just
smiled.
“Hello?” I said somewhat groggily into the phone, cursing the power for coming back on in the night. After getting to bed stupidly late, Kakashi had insisted on getting up stupidly early to walk his many dogs in the snow, but I had insisted with equal vehemence that I had to stay at home and mark. In reality, I really just wanted a couple of extra hours of sleep, but apparently I wasn’t going to get it. After about ten seconds of silence, I tried again. “Hello?”

“Good morning! It’s Tsunade, the woman who pays your salary! You remember me?” A voice called perkily into the phone, a dull slamming noise echoing dully through the line. It was – I checked the time on the phone display – barely nine in the morning, and the drink was out. What an outstanding example to set to the kids.

“How could I possibly forget?” I grumbled, tempted to put the phone down again. It was too early in the morning to deal with Tsunade. I had only just gotten rid of my mental Tsunade; I didn’t need to hear from the physical one, too.

My brow creased a little at that thought; when had she disappeared from my mind, and what did that mean? I certainly didn’t miss her, and it was nice to have my own head to myself again, but I couldn’t fathom what it meant.

“Oh, good! I thought maybe with all this time off work that you’d have released so much sexual frustration that your personality would have completely changed and you’d forgotten all about your job and we’d have lost you, but I suppose not,” She rambled.

“No, I’m still me,” I replied. Although sex was distracting, I wasn’t about to suddenly become a nymphomaniac and forget all about my job. Not only did it pay the bills, but my life pretty much revolved around it.

Damn. Work. I hadn’t gotten any marking done in almost two days, thanks to Kakashi’s distractions. Although I wasn’t complaining about it by any means, I still had marking to do, and he probably did as well. We did kind of have the excuse of last night’s power cut for why we didn’t do any last night, but the activities of the rest of the day were definitely not conducive to marking, although Tsunade would never know that.

There was another quiet thumping noise on the other end of the phone, which I pointedly chose to ignore.
“Excellent, because I need you and Kakashi back in school in a couple of days,” She said, sounding somewhat less interested. Still, talking about anything but my love life was a bonus, and I wasn’t saying anything. It was an invasion of privacy, and no one had any right to know about what Kakashi and I chose to do in our personal time.

Wait, we had personal time? Sex counted, right? But that sounded like we were a couple. An actual couple. Which I supposed we technically were, although we hadn’t actually officially done much couple-type stuff besides go on dates and have sex. I suddenly felt incredibly cheap; I didn’t even know if we were officially together together, and we had had sex.

“So soon? I thought there was trouble with the boiler?” I said, trying to sound interested in work. Work was safe, boring and normal, and had zero repercussions if things went a little bit awry. I liked work for a reason.

“Shizune fixed it. Apparently someone had just accidentally turned it off or something, and there was no real cause for concern at all. I suppose we all got a few days of work for nothing,” Well, that explained a lot.

“Back in two days, then?” I paused, checking the time again. Kakashi should return relatively soon, and I needed to make sure he didn’t bring dripping wet dogs into my flat. Any marks on the carpet and they would all die. “Don’t bother calling Kakashi, I’ll tell him when he gets back.”

“Shaking up already, are we? How adorable! Tell me, did you spend yesterday doing anything particularly noteworthy? Any romantic walks through the snow? Did you make snowmen holding hands? Or did you-”

“Tsunade, we are not characters from a crappy romance novel!” I half-shouted into the phone. Just because my life felt like it sometimes didn’t make it okay to point it out.

“-spend the day at home, doing naughty things to each other? I bet you did, you lustful young men! See, I am always right when it comes to-”

I slammed the phone down in the cradle before she could make any more guesses. I let myself lean against the wall wearily, sighing and staring blankly at the opposite wall.

What was I to Kakashi? He initiated nearly everything, from taking me on dates, to coming to my classroom to spend time with me, to anything bedroom-y, so presumably he was interested in me romantically rather than just for sex. But now we’d had sex, would he still try so hard? It had to be inconvenient considering how awful I could be.

And what did sex change? Would everything go back to how it was before yesterday afternoon, or would it be different? A bolt of panic shot though my stomach; when Kakashi walked through my front door again, what was I supposed to do?

I honestly had no idea what to do anymore.

The phone rang again, the sharp ring cutting through my thoughts. After letting it ring a couple of times, I picked it up, knowing very well who it was.

“How?” I said wearily. I really didn’t have the time or patience for this.

“If you tell me all the details, I’ll give you a two percent pay rise,” Tsunade offered quickly, although her voice was noticeably beginning to slur on the last couple of words.

“Not worth it,” I said. Honestly, did she really think I’d tell anyone something so personal?
Especially since it didn’t just involve me anymore. “Good bye,”

“See, you’re defending your love! Isn’t that roma-” She cooed, cut off as I put the phone back in the cradle and walked stiffly into the kitchen, completely ignoring it as it started to ring again.

The kitchen was still filthy, even filthier than I remembered it from last night. We hadn’t cleared up after eating, instead opting to attempt to change my bed sheets in the dark without setting the whole building on fire, so empty plates still sat at the table, the candle burned down to a tiny stump. It was both sweetly happy and sad at the same time; on the one hand, it was evidence that last night had happened, but it was also a reminder that last night was over, and I had to deal with today.

I started by clearing away the candles, returning them all to their tattered box under the sink. Puddles of wax were scraped off surfaces, all traces of the power cut obliterated from my kitchen. I even flicked the light switches off and on a couple of times to make sure they were working right.

My mind began to wander as I turned my coffee machine on, making enough for two. It was cold outside, and Kakashi would probably like a coffee when he got back. Although I was thoroughly awake thanks to Tsunade’s impromptu phone call, I still wanted a morning coffee.

I dumped the dirty dishes in the sink and turned on the hot water, marvelling at the conveniences modern technology provided. I did have a dishwasher, but doing the washing up by hand was a good distraction from thinking properly.

The kitchen was still sticky, the bathroom probably needed a once-over and I had sheets to wash. Why did everything have to be so messy? I was a tidy person by nature, and having a messy house was a little unsettling. It was all proof that things had happened yesterday, things that I knew I should be thinking seriously about and probably discussing seriously with Kakashi, but I was procrastinating. If we talked, things might change and I liked things the way they were. Some good things would probably come out of a discussion, like what we were to each other and general boundaries, but if the words ‘committed relationship’ popped up the next logical word would be ‘love’, and I was nowhere near prepared to think about love. Love was terrifying, and yet necessary for a committed relationship. Long term committed relationships didn’t work unless there was love, and I really wanted this thing we had to work.

I shoved a couple of jars left out from making the cake back into their cupboard. It felt like years ago, trying to make that cake. It would have been nice if it worked, if we could have proven that we could make something worth having and delicious together, but it hadn’t really worked out properly. I had no opposition to licking cake off Kakashi, but it was the symbolism of the cake that kind of worried me.

Closing the cupboard sharply, I wrinkled my nose and told myself to stop reading into stuff. This was real life, not a crappy romance novel. I could make it work if I wanted to.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
These Selfish Things

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

What are you hoping for?

I'm here, I'm now, I'm ready

Holding on tight

Don't give away the end

The one thing that stays mine

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

My wrist looked awful in the marigold latex washing up glove. The cast distorted it and stretched parts of it into pale, custard yellow to show up the vile canary yellow of the rest of the glove. As much as I hated them and tried to avoid using them normally, they were very useful for cleaning on days when I didn’t really want to touch things with my bare hands, and especially now with my cast. Had Kakashi been here, I would have gotten him to do the washing up for me somehow, but he still wasn’t back.

The phone rang again, but I ignored it. It was probably just Tsunade attempting to get more juicy details out of me, and I wasn’t giving away anything, or giving her the satisfaction of getting me irritated, which I already was. The sharp ringing of the phone was like a cheese grater against my nerves.

My hand slipped on the knife I was washing, cutting a tiny hole in the dishcloth and my left glove. Hot water immediately spilled through the hole into the inside, stinging and burning my fingers. I grit my teeth and carried on; I didn’t have a spare, and the washing up had to be done. Yet another reason why I should have made Kakashi do it. Maybe having a manly significant other around the place wouldn’t really be a bad thing.

I smiled broadly to myself; we lived next door to each other, had keys to each other’s flats and an unspoken open invitation. Did that count as practically living together?

I heard the click of the door opening and the scurrying of claws against the floor, accompanied by footsteps. Kakashi was home. I resisted the temptation to rip off the marigolds and run to greet him. I wasn’t a dog, his wife, or a child. I could definitely wait just a couple of minutes for him to walk down the corridor, come through the kitchen door and make his presence known. And if the dogs got mud or snow on my floors I was going to-

The phone rang again, quickly cut off.

“Hello? Yes, this is Iruka Umino’s phone you’ve reached, do you-” I heard Kakashi say, listening to what I could of the conversation. There was a pause before he answered, voice harder than before. “No, that’s not the case at all,”

“Who is it?” I called, a little curious, as I started to peel off my washing up gloves without getting water everywhere. I really hoped it was just Tsunade on the other end of the line, but I had a horrible feeling about who else it could be.
At last, the gloves came off and I tried not to walk too quickly into the hall. Kakashi immediately raised one hand in the universal sign for ‘stop’. Although the mask was in place, the sense that whatever was being said by the other person was serious filtered through clearly.

“No,” Another pause. “No,” The air in the small space of my hall seemed to grow colder and more enclosed. His fingers visibly tightened around the plastic handset. “Yes,” He conceded, though it sounded like the last thing in the world he wanted to do. “That’s completely unfounded,”

I was very tempted to pull the plug out of the wall socket. Whatever this was about, it didn’t sound good. The volume on the phone was too quiet to hear, and I couldn’t see the displayed number on the handset. Whoever it was, they were prompting enough of a reaction to begin to seriously worry me.

The dogs had rather sensibly trotted away into another room. I considered following them, doing my best not to end the phone call by any means possible, but that would mean missing out on what half of the conversation I could hear, thus any chance of diffusing the situation afterwards. While I was hoping and praying that it was just an innocent cold caller who was asking all the wrong things, the chances of it being something innocent and easily forgotten were next to none.

“Kakashi, what-” I said quietly, stepping forward to put a hand on his shoulder. I could feel the tension pouring out through that one touch, and I wanted to do something to help, but I had no idea what. Guilt at being so useless again swept through me. I never seemed to be much help at all, ever.

“Never call this number again. If you wanted to threaten me, you’ll have to do a better job than that. Oh, and tell your boss that if I ever hear you contacted Iruka again, I will-”

I slammed my hand down on the disconnect button on the cradle. My broken wrist throbbed a little; I had hit the plastic cradle with the wrong hand and with too much force, but I didn’t let it show on my face. That wasn’t important right now.

“Who was it?” I asked softly, trying to sound as calm as possible despite the small bubble of panic that was rising in my stomach. We’d have to talk about this now, and I couldn’t see it all ending in sunshine and rainbows.

Kakashi paused before answering, setting the phone back down in its cradle almost delicately, almost like he was compensating for the unnecessary force I had used. He was still bundled up in a heavy coat and scarf from going outside, the mask and eye patch firmly back in place. I could see the tension in the uncovered parts of his face, though. I couldn’t miss that.

“Who is Mizuki?” When I didn’t answer immediately, he rephrased the question. “A friend? A friend who seems to know an awful lot about my history and past acquaintance with Akatsuki? A friend who also seems to be under the impression that knowing a few people gives you enough influence over other people’s lives and access to their personal information? Who is Mizuki, Iruka?”

I withdrew my hand as the atmosphere grew tenser.

“He was my colleague. He got fired before you joined Konoha High, and I wouldn’t call us friends,” I answered bitterly, as truthfully as I dared. I left out the last little part about his previous phone call. It was still technically true, but I didn’t want to let slip anything about any recent association I’d had with the man.

“He seemed to be under the impression that you two were awfully good friends,” Kakashi said almost nonchalantly, though the tension still wracking his form said otherwise. I couldn’t help but mirror it. This was all a little explosive; one wrong word and everything might be blown to bits, and I
didn’t want to pick up the pieces and start over.

“That’s wrong,” I said sharply. “I hate him. He’s a manipulative, lying bastard, and whatever he told you is probably a lie,”

“A bastard who also seemed to know a lot of things I like to keep private, all of which you know,” A touch of betrayal crept into the one visible eye, which was no longer looking directly at me. I winced at that, but simultaneously felt a little angry. I thought I had made it clear I wasn’t around just to screw with either of our heads, and I thought that what I had done was enough.

“Are you implying that I told him?” My voice rose in pitch a little, though I tried to stop any anger leaking into my voice. “Do you have any idea how ridiculous that is? I’ve had maybe an hour of time alone since yesterday, which isn’t nearly enough time to go out and spread to the world the thrilling tale of Kakashi Hatake, let alone the motivation. Would I still be here if all I wanted was information? Would I have slept with you? I thought you knew me better than that,”

I let myself exhale sharply, too loud to my ears. My eyes traced every corner of the corridor imaginable, desperately trying not to look in the one place I really should. I didn’t want to see how Kakashi would react to my outburst, which I almost regretted saying. At the same time, I was glad I had gotten that out.

After a minute that felt like an eternity, he sighed. I let my eyes find his face, taking in the sudden weariness in his eye. It made him seem too old and world-weary, all hints of a hidden smile completely missing. The tension had gone with the sigh, and he let himself lean against the table the phone perched on.

“Oh, god, this is all so screwed up,” He spoke softly, glancing at the phone.

“I know,” I replied, turning to walk back into the kitchen. “I know.”

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
A Clue

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

In another life

I would make you stay

So I don’t have to say you were

The one that got away

The one that got away

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

I was vaguely aware of the dogs brushing past my legs as I tried not to run into my bedroom. Somewhere it registered that I was being incredibly childish, running away from an argument that wasn’t really even very much of an argument, but I needed to get out of there. The corridor was too close, and the air was choking and I didn’t want to think in that kind of space, let alone talk or breathe.

So instead, I walked away. Ran away.

My wrist ached as I tugged too hard on the bedroom door with the wrong hand, but I almost welcomed the pain. I honestly deserved it for being such an idiot because, as usual, everything was my fault. Although I had only really snapped back at Kakashi in anger, I had still meant it, and I had still walked away.

Why the hell had I walked away? Kakashi was almost certainly gone now, and I couldn’t just chase after him. I should have stayed and talked it out, explained what I meant properly and calmly and ironed out the misunderstanding, but it still hurt. It physically hurt to feel doubted and distrusted, and that was part of why I had run.

I let myself slump onto my bed, the mattress depressing underneath me. My ass still hurt and last night’s dirty sheets were still piled in the corner, a less-than-subtle reminder of all of everything. Or at least, it felt like all of everything. My whole world felt condensed to this one room, with no one in it but me.

The sheets. Crumpled in a rough pile on the floor, waiting for me to transfer them to the washing machine and then to the tumble dryer, wrinkled and shadowed with evidence. Hands blindly brushing hands in the dark to pull the elasticated cotton corners off the mattress, gripping the same place on the corner of the sheet to shake out the duvet inside. A giggle at a misplaced foot, hindering what little progress we had made.

God, I was acting like he was dead.

This was all completely ridiculous. There was absolutely no reason to think nostalgically about events that had happened less than twenty four hours ago. Nostalgia is reserved for things that will almost certainly never happen again, with some kind of longing memory of the past. Fumbling around in the dark trying to strip a bed is not the kind of thing people get all teary-eyed over. That didn’t explain why the patch of wall I was forcing myself to stare at was getting all hazy and watery, though.
For one, I was supposed to be angry and annoyed, outraged at that completely unfounded assumption, not sniffling like some heartbroken schoolgirl. And I was angry, really. I had no reason for telling anyone anything about Kakashi that he didn’t want them to know himself, so there was no reason to assume I’d be the one to spill the secrets. Although there were people who’d probably like to know, I wasn’t going to be the one to tell them. If I was trustworthy enough to tell, then surely I was trustworthy enough not to tell anyone else.

I had trusted him. I still did. I couldn’t just stop trusting someone, just like that. It had taken time, a build-up of events and circumstances that had pushed us together, but some of it had been voluntary. I didn’t have to agree to spend time outside of work with him. I could have forced our relationship to stay strictly professional, but I let it progress to something else, and I didn’t even really know what the hell it was. Were we friends with benefits? Were we partners? Had I acquired a boyfriend?

We were going out. Dating. Whatever. Or at least, we had been, since I had no idea where we stood anymore. I couldn’t say if we were involved enough for one little argument to drive us apart, but I didn’t think we were like that. We had never actually said anything about officially being together, even if all of our colleagues and the entire student body already knew about our antics.

Were they just antics? Was it all just some kind of game of un-repressing the uptight teacher? If it was just a game, and if it was all coming to an end, then I had basically just let myself be tugged around for someone else’s enjoyment. I had had sex with a man. How the hell did I look at myself in the mirror, if that was the case? I would never be able to confess it all, even to my dead parents.

If it was all just some game, then it shouldn’t hurt so much. I should have been able to laugh it off, or get really pissed off like any other guy. The idea of it being a game shouldn’t make me feel so crushed, so toyed with or so completely destroyed.

I really, really hoped it wasn’t a game.

I rubbed my eyes with a fist, swiping away liquid that had been steadily accumulating in the corners of my eyes. I was being ridiculous again, and I wasn’t going to let tears fall over my over-exaggerations. I was pretty sure it wasn’t all some kind of cruel game. Cruel games didn’t involve two-way trust, and I knew far too much about Kakashi for him to risk playing me like that. For one, I knew where he lived.

Why the hell was I even considering that? Relationships don’t work like that, and it’s a very stupid idea to jerk co-workers around and expect to keep the job for long. And the Kakashi I knew wasn’t like that, at all. He was too considerate and sweet and kind and had enough patience to deal with all my flaws. After trusting me with such a delicate kind of information, the kind that neither of us wanted to talk about unless we had to, I was certain it wasn’t a game. Unless it was all a part of an elaborate lie, then it would be an incredibly stupid move to tell me a load of personal details.

After acknowledging that, I suddenly felt incredibly idiotic. I had run away from him instead of talking everything through like the sensible adult I was supposed to be, thus potentially knocking back any chance of a long-term, normal relationship but godknows how much.

I let out a sigh. Somehow, I had gone from tolerating this guy to apparently wanting a long-term relationship.

If I had just ruined my chance of a normal, healthy, adult relationship with Kakashi then I was the densest moron to ever walk the face of the planet. He was far too good for anyone, especially me, but somehow managed to put up with me. That alone probably took herculean effort, though I had to admit there were flaws. The aura of mystery that had initially drawn me in, like it had probably drawn so many others in, was built out of defensiveness and carefully guarded. It must have taken a
lot for him to decide to break those barriers and let me know what was behind them, and it probably wasn’t even the full story. Maybe if we stayed together, I’d learn one day.

But I had probably fucked it all up, and I had no idea how to fix it. It needed to be fixed. I really wanted it all to work properly, and having this argument hang over me was killing me. It hadn’t been ten minutes and it was killing me.

Maybe a cake or something would make a good peace offering, or bread, or a tart, or something edible that I could make. Food was always a good way to lighten the mood, although I had no guarantee he would open the door if I knocked. If I was left standing outside his front door I had no idea what I’d do, but thinking about it hurt.

Why did it hurt? I couldn’t define exactly where it hurt, but it was a guilty, squirming kind of feeling, like I knew something was intensely wrong but I didn’t know how to set it right. It made me want to collapse back on my bed and refuse to move until I slowly wasted away, moving only when the coroner came to carry my body off in a plastic body bag. Imagining being left on a doorstep, rejected peace offering neglected in my hand, made it hard to breathe.

It was getting hard not to imagine waking up happy, next to him, or going to work together, sneaking a kiss I’d protest about but secretly enjoy during break. Work wouldn’t be the same, either. Somehow my entire life had been completely infected with thoughts of one person, and I didn’t want to let him go now I thought I might have lost him.

I didn’t know if I was in love, but it was killing me to think that I might have blown it all.

There was no way in hell that I was going to sit around and cry over this for the next few hours. I would be proactive, and I was going to do something productive in order to make up for this, and then we could straighten everything out and I could stop feeling like something had died.

Yes, I would definitely do all that. And maybe I could work up to telling him how I felt, provided I worked it out myself in the meantime.

oO.Oo..Oo.Oo
Understand

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And I'd give up forever to touch you

‘Cause I know that you feel me somehow

You’re the closest to heaven that I’ll ever be

And I don’t want to go home right now

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I let myself have a couple more minutes on the bed before I forced myself to get up and go into the kitchen. After setting foot in the sitting room, I realised I had never heard the front door shut.

I quickly doubled back to collect the bundle of sheets in my room. Just because I rather desperately wanted to make up didn’t mean I had any idea what to actually say if Kakashi was just there. I’d probably say something completely intelligible and throw myself at him, and then he’d tell me off for being so ineloquent even though I teach English lit and then we’d laugh and-

He wasn’t there. I crossed into the kitchen, and it was completely empty. A sigh of relief escaped my lips. I didn’t have to embarrass myself any more than necessary within half an hour, and babbling like an idiot in an attempt to apologise landed firmly in the ‘humiliating’ category of embarrassments. I had to make this right properly and say what I felt.

Naturally, it would probably be easier to say exactly what I felt if I really understood it properly myself.

Baking a peace offering would probably help. Doing something physical yet neither mentally nor physically challenging would hopefully prove relaxing, and thinking was easier when I wasn’t climbing the walls with frustration or tension.

It had to take long enough to make to give both of us some time to cool off and think, but not so long it would take forever. That put bread and anything really fancy out of the running, along with anything really simple. Something sweet would be better. Maybe something with chocolate, since chocolate certifiably makes everything better.

Absentmindedly, I took the cocoa powder out of the cupboard, eyes lingering on the pretty illustration on the label. Chocolate cupcakes. That could probably work.

In retrospect, baking, a complex procedure which actually requires a lot of mental alertness and concentration to get perfect, wasn’t the best idea I had ever come up with. Three minutes into attempting to prepare the ingredients alone had already resulted in a broken egg, the wrong type of flour going into the mix and too much cocoa. How could I focus on relaxing when my mind was busy floundering around like a fish out of water?

Cupcakes were a nice gesture, but I couldn’t just leave it at that. I had to come up with something to say, and it had to be right. I couldn’t randomly start quoting love poems courtesy of Shakespeare, but I couldn’t just melt into a puddle on the floor and cry a bit. It’d already sort of done that.

So what did I do? Make some kind of grand speech about the nature of true love?
Wait, love? I don’t think I’d even thought that word since forever. It certainly felt like forever, mostly because it felt kind of like I’d been living on a completely different planet since I’d started dating Kakashi. I didn’t even know what the hell love was, let alone whether I was in it or not. I couldn’t ask people; there was no one to ask, and even if I did it wasn’t the kind of thing you ask other people.

On the second attempt, I managed to get the raw mix right and was instantly rewarded with memories of yesterday’s antics. The licking and the touching and the blowjob and then the sex. Just the memory of hands and lips on my skin was enough to send little shivers of pleasure through my body. Chocolate cake mix tasted even better, so licking that off his hot, aroused body would be exquisite.

There was no way I could deny that I was physically attracted to Kakashi, and that everything we had done from kissing upwards comprised probably the most erotic experiences of my life, but it wasn’t just because he was hot. I wouldn’t have been able to admit he was hot, let alone sleep with him without some kind of emotional connection, and that was what I had to define.

Initially, it had been curiosity combined with the pressures from my co-workers, but I supposed the attraction must have been there. That first drunken kiss wasn’t entirely one-sided. If I really hadn’t wanted it, I wouldn’t have dreamed about sex or even thought about it. It was anything but platonic.

But it had progressed. It wasn’t just random sexual attraction, certainly not now. If it was random sexual attraction, consummating it physically should have been enough, but I wouldn’t care enough to stick around afterwards if it was just that.

I easily divided the dark brown cupcake mix into their individual paper cups, plain white contrasting sharply against the darkness of the chocolate. White cups looked more professional, and I felt silly eating out of flowery ones. Although baking wasn’t the manliest hobby ever, I still had my dignity.

If it had just been sex, then I would have sacrificed all my dignity and my reputation at work for a quick shag. But that was stupid. I wouldn’t risk my entire career over a one-night stand, and I hoped I had made it absolutely clear that I wasn’t interested in a one-time thing. And I was pretty sure that Kakashi was interested in something other than sex. Dates and romantic little gestures are generally not a part of picking people up for sex.

So it was probably mutual. That was good. That was more than good, it was thrilling to know that my feelings were returned somewhat.

My feelings? I supposed I wanted to spend time together because I was comfortable being around him. Spending an evening together made up for a stressful day at work, even if it was just sitting in the same space marking. Naturally, that usually lead to less marking getting done, but that was okay because he made me happy. My workload had increased as a result, but it seemed excessive to work for hours every night to the point of falling asleep on my kitchen table. I wouldn’t mind going on like that for a long time. I wanted to learn more, even though I knew so much already. Knowing every single little detail wouldn’t be enough.

So how did I start this speech, then? After much deliberation, I, Iruka, would like to know every tiny detail about your life and take up inordinate amounts of your time. Please forgive me for being such a bitch. No, that wouldn’t work. It was about as subtle as an anvil to the face and I sounded like some kind of creepy stalker.

Twenty minutes and at least as many crappy drafts of crappy speeches later, the timer on the oven pinged, and I removed the risen cupcakes from the oven to let them cool on the side. They were all uneven but I didn’t really care. These ones didn’t have to be completely perfect, and I would make
up for it with whatever decoration I could find that I had enough of.

Would twelve imperfect, slightly wonky cupcakes and a few words be enough to make up for what we both said?

I sat down heavily, eyes still fixed on the counter-top where the cupcakes sat. I had been trying not to think about any of that since leaving my bedroom, but it was kind of inevitable. The whole argument was about a lack of trust, even though it had taken so much to get to that point in the first place. A lot of it was my fault, since I had technically been lying by omission when it came to Mizuki’s involvement, but it still stung.

No, it was just blown out of proportion. Anyone who knew anything about Kakashi’s past, excluding myself, had to have been involved in some way with a series of very traumatic events, and I was probably the only person who knew enough that wasn’t in any way actively aiming to hurt him. I realised I could hurt him so easily at this point, in the same way he could hurt me. If that one small misunderstanding could hurt so much, then a proper betrayal would kill.

I decided on love-heart shaped sugar sprinkles, in the end. Incredibly cheesy and cliché, but they kind of got across the message I wanted to send. Of course, I’d have to deliver the whole message with words, which I’d probably mess up horribly, but I had to do it. I needed to do it. Making up was never so important.

oO..Oo..O..Oo
Come Back

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I forgot to say out loud how beautiful you really are to me

I cannot be without you

You're my perfect little punching bag

And I need you

I'm sorry

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

With minimal procrastination, since I had already done enough of that, I scooped up the plate of freshly-decorated cupcakes and walked out of my front door, refusing to look at the phone as I passed it. Stupid phone and stupid phone calls and stupid secrets.

My socked feet were cold on the tiles of the corridor, and I realised I had rather stupidly forgotten to put shoes on. Even if there were just a couple of metres between my front door and Kakashi’s, I wasn’t going to turn around and walk back into my own flat for anything. If flaming meteors started falling through the roof, I’d just walk around them to get there. The floor wasn’t that cold, and it was dry enough, so it wasn’t an obstacle.

I didn’t let the hand holding the plate shake at all. I reminded myself that I wasn’t nervous in any way because there was nothing that could possibly go wrong.

The last two steps to the door were the warmest. Maybe it was because my feet were starting to go numb with cold, but I felt warmer when the front door was within touching distance. I could reach out and press my palm to the shiny white surface if I wanted. It would probably be just as cold as the rest of the corridor, but inside it would be warmer.

I raised a fist to knock, tapping three times on the door. I didn’t knock particularly loudly, but seconds later the scrabble of paws and claws at the base of the door rang through the clean plastic. They probably smelled the cupcakes. It was a pity I wasn’t sharing with anyone but their master.

Come to think of it, why hadn’t he answered the door yet? Although it had been about ten seconds since knocking, I hadn’t heard the lock mechanism click and the door hadn’t opened. I told myself that it was just because the noise the dogs were making was drowning everything out. Kakashi was definitely in, and he would definitely open the door.

Just in case, I knocked again, a little louder this time. I refused to acknowledge that my heart was beating faster and that my palms were sweating; I wasn’t supposed to get nervous about this. The door would open in a second and everything was going to be okay. Wasn’t it?

For the third time, my fist collided with the door. Just the once and harder than all the times before, sliding down the cool plastic as the nerves in my hand complained about the amount of force I used.

The door still didn’t open. The scrabbling stopped, and the corridor was silent.

I let out a breath I hadn’t realised I had been holding. So the door wasn’t opening, which meant I
couldn’t do anything, rendering me utterly useless once again. But that didn’t explain why it was so 
**brutally disappointing** to be shut out. Maybe I was just so emotionally backwards that a closed door 
was enough to set me off. As irrational as it was, I was disappointed in both of us; at me for being so 
incompetent and inadequate, and partly at him for not being home when I needed him to be.

That was even more ridiculous, and I felt like even more of a moron for even thinking that.

Even so, I couldn’t help that part of my personality that shouted for an explanation about why he 
could just take off or refuse to open the door. If he wasn’t at home, that was more acceptable, but if 
he heard me and refused to open the door then I would-

What would I do? Probably cry myself to sleep while trying to systematically erase every positive 
memory from my head while trying to stop visions of a future without Kakashi swarming through 
my mind. Alcohol would probably help, but I didn’t think I had any.

A future without Kakashi. Did that concept even register anymore? What would it be like, waking 
up every morning to go to school and pretend he was just another member of staff I didn’t know 
particularly well and had no desire to do so? Or did I pretend he was just another item of furniture, as 
inanimate as a patch of floor or wall? Or did I erase him so completely from my mind he was little 
more than a shadow?

Whatever the hell it was, it would be completely impossible. I already knew too much to pretend I 
didn’t know him, and I didn’t want to forget that. I didn’t think I could, even if I tried. Revoking a 
period of my life that had become one of the happiest times in my life would be impossible, and I 
wouldn’t even be able to look back at it on lonely nights to reminisce. It would hurt too much. I 
could live without him but I’d be miserable. I couldn’t pretend he wasn’t there because his presence 
was magnetic. I hadn’t thought about anyone else sexually in any capacity since I had met him. No 
one appealed more, in mind and body, but it wasn’t just sex. The urge to be near him was 
overpowering, and no wall or floor I had ever come across did that to anyone.

If he didn’t exist to me anymore, then I couldn’t make things right and we couldn’t be together and 
then I couldn’t do anything right anymore.

I turned around to lean my back against the wall beside the door, barely resisting as my knees gave 
out and I ended up sitting on the floor, knees drawn half-way to my chest and cupcakes forgotten on 
the floor beside me. I would probably look like a mess to any of my other neighbours if they decided 
now was the best time to go out. But I couldn’t bring myself to care.

Hell, I wasn’t even making sense to myself. If anything I was starting to sound like a dependant idiot 
with nothing more to my personality than my love life. There was more to me, after all. I had a job I 
loved. That certainly defined me more than whom I chose to date, and I *wanted* it to define me. My 
job was important, at least to the students I taught, even if I was basically just a mechanism for 
getting better grades. I didn’t have a family to define me.

Maybe that was a part of it. My parents had walked through the front door and never come back, and 
Kakashi had walked through my front door, too. But he was coming back. He *had* to come back, at 
least at some point. People didn’t just randomly disappear.

*Unless something happened and he was lying dead on a road somewhere and no one would contact 
me for days and I wouldn’t know and I wouldn’t have time to grieve and-

That was irrational and stupid and I was an idiot for even thinking that. I absolutely, definitely, 
completely, wasn’t going to cry over my own silly imaginings.
I was irrational and stupid and an idiot and why the hell did it hurt so much?

I leaned my head against my palm, jamming my elbow into my knee to shield the world from the embarrassing facial expressions I was no doubt making. And the liquid I felt against my fingers was definitely not tears. I would rather it be blood than tears.

Was this really going to be it? Was it-

“Iruka?” The voice I wanted to hear rang out through my head, although it was probably just in my head. Everything was probably just in my head. I’d probably imagined it all and- “Iruka? How long have you been here?”

I wasn’t going to look up to give my delusions any weight. I wouldn’t put it past myself to hallucinate something, considering how messed up my brain seemed to be. Well, I wasn’t going to give it that satisfaction. Take that, brain.

It was only when a cold hand settled gently on my shoulder and a shadow fell over me that I let myself look up.

There he was. I wasn’t crazy. He was actually here, where I wanted and needed him, kneeling on the floor beside me. Although it was mostly obscured, I could read the lines of worry on his face, dark eye bleeding concern and comfort. When I looked too deeply into it, I couldn’t quite remember why I was upset at all.

Without thinking it through, I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and pulled him down, burying my nose in his neck. I didn’t really care if he was annoyed with me at this point. I needed this. One of his hands came up to stroke the back of my head, and the other wrapped around my waist, pulling me closer.

My heart swelled with happiness. Kakashi didn’t hate me, he wasn’t dead, and he was holding me. I couldn’t get closer to heaven than this. I tried to unstick my jaw to mumble something apologetic, but I was afraid that if I did, I might accidentally say what was racing through my mind at that moment.

*I think I might love you.*

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Words To Say

With you in time

There’s nothing else

My life stands still

You are the will that makes me strong

Make me strong

If ever alone in this world I’ll always…

Even though it was cold in the corridor, I refused to pull away from Kakashi’s embrace. Logically, I knew it meant we would go inside where it was warmer, but it was warm here, and it wasn’t just a physical kind of warm.

It wasn’t just warm. It was safe; I felt ridiculous for ever imagining that this could never happen again, and I never wanted it to stop. Though my mind was slowly melting into a calm, relaxed puddle of romantic goo somewhere inside my head, my heart was racing. I could practically feel my blood rushing through my veins, every inch of my skin pleading for more. I wasn’t sure more what, exactly, but I wanted it.

The hand gently stroking my hair paused, and I vaguely detected a couple of words being said softly, but I wasn’t quite listening. I wasn’t sure I had re-grown the mental capacity to understand full sentences yet, almost certainly because my mind was still trying to wrap itself around a whole new concept.

Love.

I grinned. I couldn’t help it. It was definitely a result of that bubbling, hot feeling in my chest that would have made me worry about having a heart attack had I been in any other situation. Whether it was my imagination or not was irrelevant; I kept grinning.

“We really do need to go inside now, Iruka. My dogs are trying to dig a hole in my front door,” Kakashi’s voice said from near my ear, though the words didn’t really compute. Inside? Did that mean I had to move?

“Mmm,” I mumbled, not really sure what I was agreeing to, and tried to snuggle closer. Somehow, I managed to overbalance both of us, and we ended up in a kind of sprawled mess on the floor. The usual, gentle rise and fall of his chest suddenly became more rapid, and I realised he was laughing. And what a gorgeous sound it was. It made me want to reach up and-

My body moved on its own, and before I really knew what I was doing I had pushed the mask away and covered his lips with mine, swallowing a second of laughter. One kiss quickly turned into two, then three, and then my tongue managed to get itself involved. He tasted exactly the same as I remembered, though I wasn’t sure why I thought it might be different.
Somewhere down the corridor, a door clicked open and the sharp clicking of heels paced towards our location on the floor close to the staircase, but I completely ignored it. They weren’t important right now.

The kiss was a neat, non-verbal way of attempting to say, ‘I’m really sorry for being an idiot, but I really do care’, but it grew a little bit more passionate than just ‘caring’. My desperation seemed to leak over, tilting my head for better access to his mouth. He kissed back, matching every movement with one of his own. I wasn’t just warm anymore, I was getting hot.

Kakashi, apparently, realised the negative consequences of attempting to make out on the floor of the communal corridor between flats, and promptly propped himself up and yanked up his mask. I swayed slightly where I sat, breathing rapidly. I seemed to have forgotten how to breathe properly.

“See? This is why we should go inside,” He whispered as the owner of the heels passed by. “As much fun as putting on a show for the neighbours would be, you’ll regret it when we get kicked out,”

That was a good point, actually. My brain function seemed to be returning to normal as I vaguely recalled laws about public indecency, and immediately blushed at pretty much everything. Before I could do anything else impulsive, I retracted my various limbs and sat back on my knees at a hopefully semi-safe distance. No more kissing in public places. I could manage that.

Kakashi retrieved a plastic bag from the floor where it had fallen, and scooped up the plate of cupcakes I had completely forgotten. Fortunately, neither of us had accidentally kicked the plate over, so they were probably still safe for human consumption and completely intact.

“I’m sorry,” I blurted out. I snapped my mouth shut after saying it. Evidently, I was still lacking complete control of myself.

“For what?” He said, opening his front door. A small swarm of dogs emerged, a doggy smile in each of their eyes, gathering around our legs and practically herding us into the warm interior of Kakashi’s flat. “You were completely justified in everything you said. I should be the one apologising-”

“Even if I was kind of justified, I still shouldn’t have said some of the things I said,” I interrupted. “These last couple of days kind of shook me up and I really don’t want to mess anything up because I really-”

Something soft collided gently with the top of my head. I followed the line of Kakashi’s extended arm to the object and repressed the urge to grab it. A plush blue dolphin toy. My eyes snapped back to his face, narrowing slightly though more out of amusement than genuine irritation.

“I overreacted. What I said was completely uncalled for and I know you’d never do that to me, so I’m sorry,” One free finger tugged down the mask, the revealed rakish smile sending shivers up my spine, though I didn’t miss the sincerity in his eye. “And I promise I’ll make it up to you, if you want,”

There was a small pause. The dolphin fell away from my head, and the plastic bag it had presumably come from fluttered to the ground. Although the dolphin joke was a couple of decades old, when it came from Kakashi it was cute in a way it hadn’t ever been before. Sure, I had come across stuffed toy dolphins before, but no one had ever bought one with me in mind in that same way. I made a small mental note to make sure that it didn’t become a chew toy.

“Did you just biff me on the head with a stuffed dolphin to apologise?” I said slowly.
“I believe so,” He replied, an eyebrow rising slightly in challenge.

“I knew there was a reason I liked you,” I smiled openly, a small chuckle escaping me. Yes, there was definitely a reason. More than one reason, really. I felt inexplicably incredibly happy again, and I couldn’t have stopped smiling if I tried.

I blushed a little at the proposition; no one else could go from an apology into an offer of sex and get away with it but Kakashi. Still, there was no way I could really deny him other than pleading physical incapability, but even then I’d still be sorely tempted. It didn’t detract at all from the apology, though, and to be honest I had already forgiven him for everything before we had even gone inside.

My train of thought was suddenly interrupted when I was pushed against the closed door and a solid, simple kiss was pressed hard against my lips, resting for a second longer than was strictly necessary. But I wasn’t complaining in the slightest, still basking in the heat of our proximity to each other. It was nothing elaborate, but it sent the same kind of wave of euphoria through my body that any hot, heavy kiss could have.

When he pulled away, I resisted the urge to pout. I clung onto that euphoria, and to my delight its effects remained.

“What was that for?” I asked, somewhat confused. What had I done that had warranted a random kiss? I supposed that there were no rules that regulated how many times I could be kissed in one day, and we were inside where no one could see us, so it was definitely okay. I wouldn’t at all have been opposed to a repeat performance of what we had done on the floor in the corridor.

“You just said you liked me,” Kakashi said, smiling contagiously. I blushed; I guess I had.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

_Find me, here in your arms_

_Now I’m wondering where you’ve always been_

_Blindly, I came to you_

_Knowing you’d breathe new life from within_

_You sleep, here in my arms_

_Where the world just shuts down for a while_

_Blindly, you came to me_

_Finding peace and belief in this smile_

_Find some peace and belief in this smile_

_Can’t get enough of you_

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Something Good

I'm feeling it coming over me
With you it all comes naturally
Lost the reflex to resist
And I could get used to this

The kettle clicked, steam billowing out of the spout into the surprisingly neat kitchen. The last time I had been in here there were still boxes everywhere, and I hadn't really been paying proper attention to anything except Kakashi. In a way, that was still true; why would I look at the furniture when I could look at him? But now the various kitchen utensils and boxes had been packed away, the kitchen only served to showcase him.

I leaned against the wall, watching. Instead of focusing on the way his fingers curled around objects or the way his eye narrowed in almost scientific concentration and imagining ways they could be applied to other, more pleasurable activities, I tried to talk.

"Where did you go?" I said, trying to sound casual. "After leaving, I mean," I diverted my gaze to the floor, hoping I hadn't just messed everything up again by hitting a nerve.

"Just for a walk. I ended up by the memorial again," He handed me a cup of tea, though he actually succeeded at sounding casual. "I wanted a word with my sensei,"

"And what did your sensei say?" I asked. Maybe I wasn't the only person who tried to talk to dead people after all. Although I didn't know much about this person, I understood enough to know they were important. I sipped my tea, flinching as the hot liquid burned my lips a little.

Picking up his own teacup, Kakashi lead the way into the sitting room. Although the dogs were suspiciously nowhere to be seen, a rather mangled chew toy peeked out from underneath the coffee table. The corner of my mouth twitched a little as memories of the first drunken kiss flooded my mind. I had also managed to sleep on that floor, somehow. It looked an awful lot harder than I remembered.

"Nothing much, but it helped me make up my mind," He said, setting his untouched tea on the coffee table. I set mine next to it, turning back to face him.

"About what?" I said. The space between us seemed to shorten significantly, and I was suddenly more aware of our height difference, just as part of his proximity to me. I was aware of everything this close, his figure almost magnetic.

"I'm not letting you go,"

He kissed me. Lips, almost cool against my own overheating face, first pressed against the corner of my mouth, before connecting properly with my lips full on. My eyes closed, and I focused on moving my lips in synchronisation with his. Instead of the usual pinpoint precision, he was a little sloppier than usual, though I wasn't complaining. I was just as desperate for the physical contact. Our
words could be said more easily with our bodies than with our voices.

I kissed back, hard, welcoming the slightly metallic tang of the inside of my lips as the bruised against my teeth. My tongue was anxious to escape and slip into his mouth, but I still felt oddly nervous. We'd done this before, and so much more, but I still felt like I was holding back in some way. Shaking off whatever stupid insecurity it stemmed from, my hands rose to his shoulders, gripping tightly through the cloth that covered his skin. If I had longer nails, I would have literally clawed it to shreds to get to that skin.

One of the hands that had been resting on my hip snuck down and seized a handful of my rear. I let out a muffled noise of half-surprise, half-encouragement, though I didn't really have much of a reason to be surprised. Kakashi took full advantage of this, tongue quickly invading my mouth and touching and tasting the needy surfaces inside. He pulled back for a second, my eyes lazily opening to watch his lips form words.

"How's your body?" He said bluntly.

"F-fine!" I spluttered, darting forwards to kiss him again before he asked anything else humiliating. My face was probably as red as a tomato, but I wasn't going to elaborate, and certainly not out loud.

Taking this as permission granted, a hand slid under my shirt, tracing the boundary where my skin met the waistband of my trousers. I rocked forwards onto the balls of my feet, trying to find a better angle for another kiss. Coincidentally, that hand slid into my trousers, drifting towards the front of my body where the evidence of my growing arousal was steadily making itself known. My hips pushed forward, trapping his hand in place so torturously close.

"Are we feeling a little frisky today?" Kakashi whispered huskily, breaking the kiss. His voice alone in that illegally erotic tone sent waves of pleasure racing through my body, accumulating in one position particularly. My hips practically moved on their own, grinding forward, searching for a friction my body so desperately desired. I couldn't care less that we weren't in a bedroom this time; I just needed us to be closer. My clothes felt too tight and horribly restrictive; and if the bulge I could feel growing in his trousers as I tried to move was any indication, so were his.

With a sudden burst of confidence, I reached down with one hand and unbuttoned his trousers. In response, the fingers in my trousers moved closer, one long finger tracing the line of my erection through my underwear. I tried not to make a sound, letting my head drop to his shoulder. I watched my hand as I slipped it into his underwear, and mimicked his action, feeling his breath hitch as his shoulders moved.

Encouraged, I grasped what I could of his hardening member, sliding my hand slowly upwards. The sensation of his firming flesh under my fingers and the shudder it elicited made me smile; I was doing that. I was the one provoking such positive responses.

My moment of triumph didn't last too long. After a second of pause, he seemed to regain his senses, and his hand began to work some kind of obscene magic. I couldn't repress a low moan that escaped my lips. As my hand began to slow, his pace increased. My knees almost gave out, the pleasurable sensations becoming overwhelming. The one hand still gripping his shoulder clenched tighter, fingers digging into the concealed skin as I got closer and closer to climax.

Before I could fall over the edge into ecstasy, he pulled away saying something I didn't quite catch. Without any support, I let myself fall sideways onto the sofa, unbuttoning my jeans and shuffling them down my hips a little to try and relieve pressure on my almost painfully untouched manhood.

I knew I was wrong before; I was turning into a nymphomaniac for Kakashi. I couldn't help it. His
body and his touch were addictive, and I didn't have to think properly because my brain seemed to shut down the second my cock jumped to life. It was like all my blood was redirected from my head to literally anywhere else.

Only when a bottle dropped into my lap did I notice that Kakashi was back from wherever he had vanished to. I tilted my head back, just in time to catch a kiss that was probably meant for my hair on my nose.

I retrieved the bottle from where it had landed, trying not to blush at its contents, although I doubted a blush would have shown on my already flushed cheeks anyway. I probably shouldn't have, considering that we'd already had sex once and I knew exactly the purpose of the liquid in the bottle, but that didn't stop it from being somewhat embarrassing.

Before I could talk myself out of anything, Kakashi descended upon me, the cushions dipping as he joined me on the sofa. I let myself fall sideways, sprawled out beneath him as our lips met in a kiss. His hands trailed everywhere but where I wanted it most, almost specifically avoiding my lower body completely as I squirmed underneath him. I lifted my hips as my trousers and underwear were drawn down my legs, impatiently kicking them off my feet. I tugged at the hem of his shirt; I wasn't going to be the only one losing clothes here. The rest of our clothes quickly followed, tossed over the back of the sofa into a pile somewhere out of sight. I confess I couldn't have cared less, considering the situation.

A hand smoothed down the inside of my thigh, gently parting my legs. I watched his face as closely as I could so I didn't have to think about what his hands were doing.

I knew what to expect this time. Although it still stung, I was anticipating the waves of pleasure by the time the second, liberally lubricated finger entered me. It was better being able to see his face, lips pursed in concentration. Though I knew he wasn't deliberately hurting me, it was still good to see evidence of that on his face. I tried to breathe deeply without it seeming too deliberate, forcing myself to relax.

This time, he employed a new tactic: distraction. Before a third finger could penetrate the tight ring of muscle, his free hand found purchase on my member, wilting from loss of contact. The juxtaposition of pain and pleasure was strangely intoxicating, the sensations almost overwhelming. When the twisting, writhing fingers found that spot that they had before, delicately brushing over it, I couldn't help but mewl in bliss. My back arched, hips wiggling for more contact, more friction, more anything. I caught a glimpse of Kakashi's face at that moment, relief softening his features, combined with desire for the show I was putting on.

I was deemed properly prepared quicker than last time, fingers withdrawing smoothly. My eyes remained fixed on his face as he aligned himself, focused on the act at hand. When the blunt head of his cock pushed in, my hands snapped up to cover my mouth, smothering the whimper of pain that burst from my throat, though I managed not to tear up.

He advanced forwards, my body swallowing up every inch. I kept my hands plastered over my mouth, fearing that if I uncovered it I'd make some kind of weird noise, and then we'd stop. I didn't want this to stop, even if it did hurt. My eyes squeezed shut, and I tried to focus on breathing evenly and not crying.

"Look at me, Iruka," A hand stroked my hair, running down the side of my face to where my own hands covered my mouth, a silent, comforting gesture. I opened my eyes a little, looking into the face above me.

Heartbreaking levels of concern darkened his eye, face lightly pink from exertion. The tension in his
shoulders spoke of restraint. His skin, usually almost fragilely pale, begged to be touched. My hand moved of its own accord, thumb tracing a cheekbone. He caught my wrist and pressed a kiss to my palm, a silent question in his eyes.

"M-move," I whispered, barely trusting myself to speak.

"Hold onto me," Kakashi replied, replacing the hand he still held onto his shoulder. The other one soon joined it, just as he withdrew a little and thrust shallowly back in. I gasped, fingers contracting against his skin, slipping in the slight sheen on sweat that was forming across his back.

It wasn't bad, specifically. It just wasn't amazing. I could vaguely feel each thrust angling slightly differently, though I refused to look. I kept watching his face; lips slightly parted, eyes half shut, concentration and pleasure written across it.

When he found it, my whole body contracted a little in pleasure, and I couldn't stop a choked moan escaping. Satisfaction crept across his face, and he started thrusting properly. My fingers dug into his back, scrabbling for purchase as he drove relentlessly into me, my voice growing louder and louder with every shock of intense pleasure that rushed through my body. Before long, my moans were echoed by his.

I wanted to close my eyes, but I couldn't tear them away from his face. It was a whole new level of contentment to watch Kakashi's face, lips parted and breath rasping rapidly, knowing that I was doing that to him.

A hand wrapped around my member, moving in synchronisation with every thrust. It was very nearly sensory overload; I could have screamed. Fortunately, I didn't, and whoever lived in the adjacent flats probably wouldn't have been particularly happy if I had. But I didn't care. The rest of the world didn't exist. It was just us.

My sex-addled brain barely registered my approaching climax, and it hit me with unexpected force. I pulled him down, close to my body as I savoured the moment, pausing his movements for a second before letting my arms fall limply beside me as he continued, each motion more erratic than the last. Almost all rhythm was lost before he finished, dropping unceremoniously on top of me.

"I think we might have stained your sofa," I pointed out drowsily.

"I didn't like this sofa anyway," He replied, dropping his head to my chest. I ran a hand through his hair, basking in the after-sex glow. I let my eyes shut, though I didn't want to sleep. It was still the middle of the day. I couldn't help it if we picked really random times to have sex.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
I took the stars from my eyes, and then I made a map
And I knew that somehow I could find my way back
Then I heard your heart beating, you were in the darkness too
So I stayed in the darkness with you

"We should clean up," I mumbled. Plain old moving was the last thing on my agenda right now, let alone cleaning up. I was far, far too comfortable where I was. We hadn't moved, still intertwined and connected, still sprawled across a sofa. My eyes had fallen shut, but I had resisted the temptation to fall asleep here. I was supposed to be returning to work the next day, and I didn't want to mess up my sleeping habits.

"Probably," Kakashi said, echoing my lazy tone. I could feel his warm breath ghost across my bare chest and the vibrations of his throat as he spoke. At this rate, neither of us would get anything done ever again.

"Any second now," I reiterated. This wasn't negotiable. We actually did have to get up. First, the sofa cushions could probably be somewhat cleaned up, which could be suitably awkward. Then we had to clean ourselves, eat cupcakes and somehow manage to power through stacks of work that needed marking.

Over the course of the last few days, I had managed to completely forget all about work. The horrors of uncompleted work hanging over my head were a very convincing argument for getting up, no matter how comfortable I was.

"Yep," He replied, making no move to get off me. I twitched my foot, trying to stir some life into my comatose body.

I didn't remember sex ever being so draining before I met Kakashi. Last time was sort of excusable, since I had been doing most of the work and there had been more going on before, but this time was more spontaneous and I hadn't really done all that much. I didn't really have an excuse this time, but maybe it was more than just being physically tired. I did like that warm, heavy weight lying across me, radiating body heat. Even if we were both sweaty and even if we'd probably end up permanently stuck to the sofa cushions with coagulated-

"Okay, we're actually getting up now, I feel completely disgusting," I said very clearly, trying to shift myself around a little and trying not to grimace when something uncomfortably squishy and sticky made its presence known underneath me.

"Mmm," Was all my living electric blanket mumbled.

"Which means I need you to get off me. Do you mind if I use your bath?" After a small round of poking, which proved to be moderately effective, Kakashi gave in and wearily pushed himself onto his knees, still kneeling between my legs. I didn't miss the satisfied once-over he gave my body.
"Will you need any help washing your back?" He said lecherously. I resisted the urge to kick him.

"I think I'll manage," I replied.

After attempting not to limp to the bathroom, I bathed at a record-breaking speed, shooting longing glances at the shower head attached to the wall above my head. As nice the bath could be, it wasn't the most convenient method of washing post-sex ever, and it was virtually impossible with my cast. I could barely remember the last time I had indulged in a long bath, just for the purposes of relaxing while reading a book. In fact, it had probably been closer to years than months.

Come to think of it, I seemed to have spent an awful lot of my time in Kakashi's bathroom. Probably more than in the kitchen or sitting room, although maybe not as much as the bedroom in terms of hours.

That was really bad. And we had had sex twice in as many days.

No, I was stopping that train of thought right there. This wasn't random, casual sex, it was sex as a part of a relationship, and I was pretty certain that neither of us were about to up and leave any time soon. I knew I wasn't, and Kakashi's words before we did it were reassuring.

"I'm not letting you go,"

I couldn't stop the silly smile that graced my lips as I remembered that sentence. Sure, it could probably be interpreted in one hundred different ways, but I wanted to think that it meant something special.

I teased a knot out of my hair with my fingers. I had a degree in English literature; I could read pretty much anything into anything if I wanted, but I was desperately trying not to read too much into anything Kakashi said, ever. I didn't want to fool myself into thinking that there was more anything there than there actually was, thus setting myself up for disappointment and heartbreak.

Heartbreak? I hadn't even established if my heart was involved yet.

Wait, who was I kidding? The answer: no one. The second I had let myself consider him romantically, my heart was involved. As things progressed from being awkwardly annoyed to awkward dates to awkward sex, it had just become more and more awkwardly involved. Disentangling myself from the complicated grip of whatever the hell we had would be more painful than letting it progress to whatever came next.

After wrapping myself in a towel, since my clothes were still strewn across the floor somewhere, I emerged from the bathroom. The sitting room was conveniently vacated, so my dignity was spared as I managed to dress and sit on the freshly-cleaned sofa without any other living multi-cellular organism seeing either my nakedness or the twitch of my eye when I sat down too heavily. I retrieved my tea from the coffee table, where it had cooled significantly but was still drinkable, and craned my head to try and see into the kitchen. Unfortunately, a pesky wall was in the way, though I could vaguely hear cupboards opening and closing.

Bored, I sipped my tea. It was almost too cool to drink. I pressed my fingers to the side of the other mug on the table, confirming that it was at a similar temperature, not that I would have taken the mugs into the kitchen anyway after I had just sat down.

A small pair of drawers set into the coffee table drew my attention. Easing one open, I discovered a television guide and the remote. Although I didn't exactly have permission to use the television, I assumed that I probably qualified for that privilege by now. My fingers found the 'on' button, and I
started quietly channel hopping.

After about thirty seconds, I had established there was nothing on. Kakashi still hadn't finished whatever the hell it was he was doing in the kitchen and if I flicked over the channel and found one more boring program on the highlights of whatever crappy football team had beaten their generic rivals I was going to scream. Fortunately, the next channel was showing some brightly coloured kiddie movie, the next featured some zebra getting eaten by lions, a news report about some politician, and then-

Ah. Maybe television wasn't all bad. The next channel was re-running an old television adaption of 'Pride and Prejudice', and I instantly forgave it for having crap on every other channel. I settled down and let myself become immersed in the show.

"Enjoying yourself without me?" I jumped as Kakashi's voice sounded from somewhere to the side, but I didn't let my eyes wander from the screen. The sofa depressed beside me, and I scooted over a little bit to give him more room. Nothing would interrupt this. "'Pride and Prejudice'?"

"Yes, so be quiet and appreciate the Austen," I said quickly.

About ten minutes later, I ended up leaning on his shoulder, trying to focus on the TV instead of the warm body I was resting against. Somehow he had managed to passably clean the sofa and get dressed and escape to the kitchen, all whilst I spent maybe ten minutes in the bathroom. This guy clearly wasn't human.

It was increasingly hard to pay attention to the plot, even more so when one of his hands repositioned itself casually on my thigh. Not high up enough to be sexual, just a kind of casual couple-y touch. I let myself slump a little further into his shoulder at that, reassured that I was allowed to touch. The rest of the world had just kind of melted away, leaving nothing but the safety of the moment.

This was definitely better than marking.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
So don't you worry your pretty little mind
People throw rocks at things that shine
And life makes love look hard
The stakes are high, the water's rough
But this love is ours

My life was about to end. I was walking to my own funeral, towards the execution squad, across a firing range, and up to the gallows all at once. I might as well have jumped in front of a bus on the way to the school, because I would be just as deceased as I was going to be very, very shortly.

Going back to work had its advantages; it was a good diversion, it was a job I loved, and I could see my students. I needed to work to pay the bills. My colleagues were all decent people. Then again, they were also the main reason why I felt like I was about to die. Somehow, through some kind of evil twist of fate, they were sure to know exactly what happened over the couple of days we all had off work.

Possibly the only thing keeping me sane was the man carrying my second bag. Though I had been happy to babble casually during the first half of the car journey to work, a sense of gloom descended over me as we got closer.

I was sure I was being completely ridiculous, and I knew logically that there was no way they could know about what Kakashi and I had done. It wasn't like I was wearing a huge, luminous sign that broadcasted our recent sexual activity. In fact, I was making sure I was walking completely normally, standing at an appropriate distance from Kakashi, and displaying a completely neutral expression. They all knew we were together anyway, and assuming we had slept together was a perfectly natural assumption.

It was even more ridiculous that I cared. No one else's opinion mattered, and no one at work had ever spoken about either of us in a negative light. They were more encouraging if anything. Scarily so.

The corridors seemed more crowded than usual, pushing me closer and closer to Kakashi. One particularly solid student managed to step back at just the wrong moment, making me step to the side at just the wrong time to brush the entire side of my body against Kakashi's. For the one second our bodies were in contact, I felt an overwhelming urge to grip his spare hand and shout to the world that this one was mine, but I resisted, and settled for blushing instead.

Naturally, I wasn't expecting him to take my hand instead, so I was completely unprepared to let go.

As soon as the staffroom door came into view, every remotely positive feeling flew out of the window. My fingers fell slack, but his remained tightly between mine as the last couple of metres to the door disappeared under my feet. The door opened silently, framing the usual antics of the staff with its painted wooden frame.
There was about a second of silence, as all eyes turned to face us and conversations paused. And then Tsunade started to clap, swiftly accompanied by almost every other pair of hands in the room.

"What?" I said shrilly, probably condemning myself further.

"Nothing," Tsunade cooed from her usual seat, looking strangely sober. The room fell relatively quiet again, nothing but the faint noise of the more normal and consequently disinterested teachers coming from the back of the room. Tsunade was carefully repressing a wide smile, though it was painfully obvious. "We're just so proud of you two, that's all!"

"Proud? Of what?" I said through my teeth. This was going to be a horribly painful briefing.

I suddenly remembered we were still holding hands, and my cheeks instantly coloured again. It wasn't like my colleagues needed any more reason to suspect something had gone on. It wasn't like we had made any kind of massive progress within the last forty-eight hours or anything. And Tsunade totally wasn't an alcoholic, and I was a flamenco dancer, and Kakashi's dogs could speak Japanese. Right.

I tugged Kakashi further into the staff room, aiming to get as far away from Tsunade and the cluster of other members of staff with the same terrifying look on the faces as possible. I felt like I understood how baby seals feel when they're approached by enormous great white sharks.

"That you two finally-" She started, surging forward. Shizune's hand clamped around her shoulder, holding her back, although it didn't look like it would hold her for long.

"Finally what? Had s-sex? Don't be ridiculous!" I squeaked as I cut her off, cursing myself for stuttering slightly. I would have given anything to melt into the floor and never emerge again. "Of course we didn't have sex!"

"Yes we did," Kakashi said. I shot him a look of pure evil, taking in the amusement in his visible eye at my flustered state, trying to telepathically communicate a complete ban on all sexual contact for at least two weeks for that.

"Shut up!" The atmosphere in the room was becoming increasingly oppressive, the smell of coffee radiating from my over-caffeinated co-workers. I prayed to whatever kindly deities that might be listening to wipe all of our existences from the face of the planet so I never had to remember this ever again. It would probably be reappearing in my nightmares.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, Iruka! Sexual intercourse is the most youthful display of passionate love-" Gai proclaimed from somewhere, rainbows practically spilling from his voice. Almost everyone in the room flinched slightly.

"Tell me somebody taped it!" Someone squealed, probably Anko.

"No, of course we didn't!" I yelled back. Then I immediately realised what I had just indirectly admitted to. "Shit,"

Nothing could have prepared me for the wave of humiliating questions that suddenly flowed from the lips of almost every person in the room. I didn't even understand most of what anyone was saying, other than that it seemed to be incredibly intrusive and highly personal. I instinctively shrunk away, fingers tightening around Kakashi's. Panic started to rise in my chest; I felt penned in, trapped, ensnared-

I was almost completely in a world of my own as I was gently tugged from the room, my bag slipping from my hand. Fingers tensed and relaxed against mine, the only sensation I was really
paying attention to as my body propelled itself forward, guided by that hand. A door opened and closed, and then another, before one finally shut quietly behind me and the hand let go.

"What-" I began to say, cutting off as I realised I was in familiar, safe surroundings. We were in my classroom, with its familiar rows of desks and slightly dirty paint, completely empty but for the two of us.

I let myself slump slightly, my shoulders falling into a more natural line. I really wanted to fall into my chair and go to sleep with my head on the desk and completely forget about everything, but I hadn't even thanked my saviour.

I blinked twice, raising my head to look at Kakashi properly. Though it was barely visible, he was tense. Not panicky tense like I had probably been, but paws-off-my-Iruka angry tense. Before I really knew what I was doing, I had gently seized his hand and stroked a thumb over the knuckles, trying to make eye contact, but he was staring pointedly at the corner of my desk and refusing to meet my eyes.

"Kakashi?" I called softly. "Look at me, please,"

When that one grey eye met mine, I couldn't resist dropping his hand and wrapping my arms around him instead. I wasn't entirely sure why, but I didn't want to see what I saw in his eye. I'd much rather comfortably bury my face in his shoulder, and stop myself from smiling because it wasn't appropriate, but that anger was for me.

"I'm sorry. That was partly my fault," He whispered.

"Don't worry about it," I replied. His hands settled on my waist, comfortably holding us in place for a moment as the tension drained from his form. His shirt smelled like washing powder and dog, along with that smell I was so used to by now. It would have been nice to stand there forever, but once again, the bell rang at the most inopportune moment, forcing us to part too early.

"Meet me here at break?" I asked quickly, pulling back before any eager students walked through the door and got an eyeful of things they weren't supposed to see.

"Sure,"

O0.Oo.O0.Oo
My second class of the day filed out, laughing and jabbering about the class or their friends or whatever teenage-type thing kids talked about, heading off to wherever they wanted to spend their break. I really couldn't bring myself to care all that deeply about who was sick in a bush at Kiba's latest wild party or why maths class was the literal embodiment of hell on Earth. Been there, done that.

With all the kids gone, the room was abnormally quiet, save for the sound echoing through the closed door. I couldn't say it was necessarily a bad thing, a quiet classroom, but it wasn't the same. A noisy classroom was practically my natural habitat.

I stood up from my seat behind my desk and wiped the whiteboard clean. My board eraser had mysteriously disappeared some time ago, and I had no idea where the rag I had replaced it with had gone, so my hand had to do. My scribblings about the life of Tennessee Williams disappeared under my skin, leaving a streak of blue along the side of my hand.

Maybe asking the class to research his life themselves had been a mistake, especially considering the recent short break from class; no one had done it.

Still, I couldn't blame them for enjoying their days off. I certainly had.

I had possibly over-reacted a mite back in the staff room. I hadn't exactly been very eloquent and had probably exacerbated everything by my very specific denial, but freaking out because of a bunch of women shrieking questions at me? That was a little excessive. But I was completely justified in my outrage. It was Kakashi's actions alone that possibly saved me to life imprisonment for mass murder.

There was nothing I could do about it now, though. Putting it out of my mind, I collected a stack of handouts walked out from behind my desk, placing one neatly in the centre of each desk. My foot collided with something soft; looking down, the corner of a forgotten bag was sticking out from under a desk. Sighing, I picked it up. One of the kids must have left it. There were no identifying features on the plain blue outside of the satchel, and I didn't exactly pay attention to who had what bag. Silently hoping I wasn't invading anyone's privacy too much, I reached inside and pulled out a small notebook.

It seemed to be some kind of sketch book. Page after page of lovingly drawn illustrations, all with little speech bubbles and captions narrating the story. I vaguely recognised the characters; though the clothing was a little odd, it was obvious that these characters were students and teachers at Konoha High.

I skipped through quickly, trying to get a feeling for the plot. It seemed to be something about super
powered ninjas fighting other super powered ninjas. A drawing of Naruto, violently punching someone, followed by a drawing of Sasuke violently kicking someone, followed by some girl – Sakura? – standing to one side not doing much, then Kakashi entered, there was a short, rousing dialogue, and together they defeated whatever generic baddie they were fighting. A fairly respectable plot, if you were a twelve year old boy.

I flicked forward a bit, and the action died down. Then I stopped, fingers catching on a more softly drawn page.

"What the hell is this?" I muttered to myself, flicking over a page. Surrounded by small bubbles filled with moans and grunts, two full pages were occupied by an incredibly graphic drawing of two boys locked in a very passionate embrace. I recognised the characters, and had to stop myself dropping the book in disgust.

In horror, I turned the page, the characters enthusiastically moaning each other's names, luminescent blushes gracing their cheeks as the one with lighter hair thrust, with added written sound effects, into the dark-haired boy beneath him. Though the drawings weren't coloured, I had a horrible feeling they were supposed to be Naruto and Sasuke.

It was impossible to put the notebook down. I skim-read through another couple of battles, recognised an accurate portrayal of Tsunade's drinking habits, and came across another sex scene. This one was different. Naruto and Sasuke had been replaced with two other boys, ones I vaguely recognised from other classes. The speech bubbles were bigger, and the one with long hair and no pupils, quite possibly the elder of the Hyuuga cousins, was doing something rather obscene with a boy I didn't recognise. I couldn't help but wonder how accurate that was.

Although I would never, ever admit it out loud, it was strangely addictive.

"Is that book really appropriate for school, Iruka?" Kakashi's voice came from behind me, making me jump a little. I looked towards him; with this recent discovery, I had completely forgotten all about meeting him.

"Like you can talk," I replied curtly. At least I was only accidentally reading porn, and it was during break. Not that that excused reading porn in school at all. Fortunately, it was on a relatively less graphic page, though it was still obviously about sex.

"Touché," He said with a small wink. "Is it any good?"

I wavered for a second. He already knew it was inappropriate, but not how inappropriate, or who it was engaging in whatever kind of sex the author had decided. Still, he'd almost certainly read worse. And maybe done worse, though I didn't want to think about that.

"Here. Just read it for yourself," I extended my arm, holding the notebook pinched between my fingers. It was very awkward to read someone else's porn.

"Oh, my," He exclaimed mockingly, diving straight in. Pages turned quickly, eye scanning over panel after panel. "Whoever wrote this is quite the skilled young author and budding pervert. I especially like how they draws the oral sex, it's very difficult to get that perfect, though the amount the characters-

"S-stop talking about that out loud! It's porn!" I yelped, lunging forward to try and snatch it back.

"It's art," He said, spinning around to dodge my attack, keeping it just out of my reach. I leaned forward again, striking quickly and plucking it out of his hands.
"It's porn, and I'm confiscating it," I said sternly, then glanced down at the page open in my hands. "Oh."

"What is it? Who's having sex this time?" Kakashi said eagerly as he peered over my shoulder to see what was happening.

I nearly dropped the book. The latest sex scene featured me and Kakashi, and it was almost completely indescribable. My jaw fell open at the words that seemed to be coming from drawn-me's mouth. I was fairly certain I had never said those words in that combination, ever, especially not during sex. That was obscene. And worse still, drawn-Kakashi seemed to be obliging.

"Who the hell drew this?" I gasped, turning the page. Yet more sex seemed to be going on, and it went on for pages and pages, all drawn in meticulous detail, down to each reflection of light on a sweat drop and the vein on a-

"Give it here," He held out his hand, and I willingly gave it away again. I really, really needed to go and lie down in a dark room to recover. And possibly never return. I would never be able to look whoever drew this in the face again.

I averted my eyes, listening as he skipped through pages, chuckling occasionally. I didn't even want to think about who was getting up to what in that story. Hell, compared to the sex, the plot was completely forgettable.

"You'll never guess what I just found," He crowed, turning pages so fast I was afraid they'd rip.

"Oh, God. What?" I wasn't sure I wanted to know. No, I did want to know, I'd just need a large drink afterwards. There were no words to describe whoever wrote this. "Bondage? Bestiality? Heterosexual sex?"

"Tentacles," Kakashi replied delightedly, slowing down to scan the pictures more closely.

"What?" I said flatly. What did that even mean? Tentacles?

"Some bad guy they're fighting just fucked this one guy with tentacles," He explained "And the other guy kept screaming about this 'Jashin' thing. And now some chick is getting banged by a puppet – no wait, it's not a chick, it's a guy. I'm not sure that's biologically possible, though-"

"Shut up! Stop telling me all this! My mind is scarred forever!" I yelled. "Tell me who wrote it so I can stick them in detention forever."

It had to be some boy's. No girl could ever think up something so perverted. Tentacles? Seriously? And all the other characters, interrupting the plot just to have lots of graphic sex? Surely that was against story-writing-101. The drawings themselves were quite good, and the plot was okay, really. It was just-

"Um...S-sensei? C-could I have m-m-my bag back, please?" Quiet, meek little Hinata Hyuuga stood in the doorway, nervously peeking out at us from behind the curtain of her hair.

I stood there, completely stunned.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Expose

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And she'll tease you

She'll unease you

All the better just to please you

She's precocious

And knows just what it takes to make a pro blush

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Break ended all too quickly. I had a free slot in my timetable immediately afterwards, so after half-dragging Kakashi out of the door and pointing him in the direction of the science block with a handful of creative threats, I decided to risk the staff room. It was, after all, the source of coffee. The added bonus was that most of the other members of staff would be teaching or in their own class, so I probably wouldn't be pinned to a wall and interrogated.

Probably.

The corridors were strangely empty without students. Through the glass windows in the classroom doors, I caught snippets of other classes; kids sat at their desks, hopefully raising their hands to contribute rather than shouting out answers, teachers writing on boards or yelling at the class or instructing the kids in their latest, mindless task. Or at least, that's how the students would see it.

The staff room was blessedly almost completely abandoned. I carefully ignored the eyes of anyone who might have looked up as I entered; I really didn't need a repeat of this morning, and to serve as a subtle reminder that I was still rather angry with a good number of my colleagues.

When I got about halfway across the room, I realised that I had managed to forget my coffee mug. Though the mug tree had a few spares, I would rather have used my own, and it wasn't like I really had anything else to do besides marking. In fact, going for a quick walk would probably be therapeutic, after being exposed to the graphic horror of that porno comic thing.

I blushed at the mere memory of it. It was one thing to imagine other people having sex, but to write a story about it? And to illustrate said story? That was creepy.

I opened the door to my classroom, and instantly stopped. Looking out of the window across the room was a woman in a suit, seemingly completely oblivious to my existence as she stared out at the snow. A few errant flakes fell like shards of paper, blown off the roof by the wind.

"Good morning," She said, though she didn't look towards me.

"Good morning," I replied. "I'm sorry, I don't-"

"Iruka Umino, correct?" She interrupted me, turning away from the window. As she looked at me, the lack of intensity in her eyes was a little unsettling, though she should have been anything but. Her hair was an unusual shade of blue, adorned with what appeared to be a paper flower, in stark contrast
"That's right," I confirmed, walking towards my desk. "What can I do for you, miss-?"

"Konan will suffice. I'm an investigator from the Konohagakure department for education, and I have been asked to investigate inappropriate conduct among staff and students within this school," Her voice was almost monotone, and I instantly snapped into business-mode. If she was from the department for education, I didn't want to slip up and implicate myself in something stupid.

"I don't know how I can help you, then," I said. "I haven't witnessed anything, and I'd advise you to talk to the headmistress about these issues,"

"They're not accusations, as such. Merely warnings, based on reports given by a very reliable source," She stepped forwards a pace, enough for her makeup to become visible. I didn't really understand why the makeup or flower for a government investigator, but it had to be something to do with schools. Looking less threatening to kids, or something. Or maybe she just had friends high up. "For example, lack of appropriate conduct on school property, as per section 4b of your employment contract,"

"Appropriate conduct?" I echoed. When had I acted inappropriately? I hadn't missed a day of work in almost the entire time I had been employed, I had professional relationships with my colleagues, and my class grades were all average or higher. There couldn't be any reason to complain.

Wait. My relationship with Kakashi was definitely not professional.

"Engaging in any form of intimacy on school premises during school hours is in direct breach of your contract, Mr Umino, as I'm sure you should know. However, your track record has been otherwise outstanding, and you are likely to get away with a warning once the investigation is complete. You are something of a secondary investigation,"

"Who else are you investigating?" I asked, somewhat concerned. If I was only a secondary investigation, just an implication in whatever inappropriate conduct she meant, then there was only one person likely to be the primary target.

"I'm not at liberty to disclose that information at present," A stock reply, delivered robotically. Her eyes didn't move from my face, and nothing about her body language gave any indication that I should be concerned. Equally, it didn't give any indication I shouldn't be concerned. I might as well have been talking to a brick wall.

"So what happens now? I'm sure there are other things you could be doing, like informing my employer of this situation?" I replied too sharply. If it was Kakashi she meant, then I couldn't just stand there and do nothing.

"She has already been informed. I'm surprised you were unaware of my presence; I explicitly asked her to tell you I would be coming to see you," That explained it; Tsunade had forgotten, and now I had one more reason to violently murder her. "But no, my purpose today was to notify you of the investigation in order to give you the necessary notice to acquire a lawyer, as per the city's regulations, although in your situation I'd advise against the unnecessary expense. It's unlikely to go to court,"

"Very well. If that's all, then I have work to do," I suddenly wanted to be alone. If this investigation found anything, I could lose my job or face serious ramifications. I didn't know what exactly, but I'd force that out of Tsunade later, and I was pretty sure it wasn't going to be anything good.
I couldn't lose my job. What the hell could I do if I couldn't teach? I had no other relevant qualifications, so other than finding a job in another school, a task that would be made much more difficult by my dismissal from this one, would be my only option.

And worse still, it wasn't just my job on the line. If I was right, Kakashi's was, too, and it would be my fault.

"I understand. Good day, Mr Umino," Konan nodded her head once, and strode out of the door silently. It was like she had never been there in the first place, but what she had revealed had possibly changed everything forever.

As the door closed behind her, I felt somewhat guilty for not chasing her down and demanding an explanation, but aggravating the investigation would probably be the least helpful thing possible right now.

The investigation. If Kakashi was the other subject of investigation, then he would be next. I didn't want anything out in the open until we had the full facts from Tsunade, and I wasn't going to risk anything happening in the meantime. I had to protect him from this somehow.

Before I knew it, I was standing outside Kakashi's classroom door.

"You're all dismissed," I said loudly as I opened the door.

"Awesome!" One kid yelled from near the back, chairs squeaking on the floor as they obeyed me. I realised I was breathing rather heavily, and my fingers hurt where they were wrapped dangerously tightly around the door handle.

"Don't move," Kakashi spoke up from the front of the class, a noise of complaint rising from the students. "What is it, Iruka?"

I forced myself to relax. Panicking would do none of us any good, but I couldn't help but feel like that no-title-no-last-name Konan woman would come around the corner any second, and it would look even worse because I was here, in his classroom, which could very easily be spun into god-knows-what by some evil lawyer or something.

"Trust me on this one, and dismiss your class. I'll tell you in a second,"

"And what do I get in return?" One eyebrow rose lecherously; my fingers tightened around the door handle again. I was on the verge of panic here, and he was thinking about sex? Now?

"Whatever the hell you want! Just dismiss them already!" I half shouted, drawing a couple of giggles from the class.

"Alright, dismissed," He turned back to the class and waved a hand lazily at the textbook perched precariously on the edge of his desk. "I want you all to go to the library or study area and complete questions A through P. And trust me; I'll know if you don't,"

The kids rushed out, hastily stuffing books into bags as they half-ran past me, a couple a little too loudly. I shushed them with a glare; the last thing we needed was to draw attention to this area of the school.

"I'm sorry about this, but-" I started.

"First, when we get home, I'm going to eat those cupcakes off you. And then, we're going to watch the Icha Icha movie marathon on television, from start to finish, director's cut editions, and all the
actor interviews. And then-

"Stop talking about shit like that! The bloody Spanish Inquisition is here, and you're making it worse! I came to warn you about it," I snapped, attempting to revive my death glare. It seemed to be having no effect; his expression didn't even falter.

"The Spanish Inquisition? I find that rather difficult to believe," A note of laughter entered his voice, along with the natural scepticism. Maybe the board of education had nothing to do with Spain, but it was basically an inquisition. And we'd probably get majorly screwed over.

"I was speaking metaphorically," I snapped, freezing as I heard heels clicking in the corridor outside. "Shit, shit, shit. Get in the cupboard,"

"I never thought you'd be this forward at work-" One eyebrow rose.

"Do what I say, you moron!" I whispered, pushing him towards the walk-in supply cupboard, hoping that it wouldn't be too full to stand in.

If we were found, I had probably just made things infinitely worse. For one, we were now in a supply cupboard together, pressed together between an old filing cabinet and a stack of test tube racks on top of a pile of boxes. Normal, completely platonic colleagues do not do that. Secondly, I had interrupted a class in order to achieve this situation. There was no way I could justify this.

And then Kakashi picked that moment to start with the propositions.

"Ah, where was I? Oh yes, and then we're going to re-enact that scene from Hinata's little drawings. The one where I-"

"Oh my god, not that one," I yelped. "Not that one,"

"No, not the tentacle one. Tentacle zombie things don't exist, and I wouldn't let them have you even if they did. I mean the other one," It was too dark to see in the cupboard, but his voice told me everything I needed to know about what his eye would be broadcasting.

"The one where I…"

"Yep," He shuffled a little, repositioning us in the cupboard, reaching around to plant one hand on the side of my hip. That heavy, warm presence radiated through my clothes, all too close in the darkness. My shoulder was pressed against the side of his body, and I could feel everything through that perilously thin cotton shirt.

"And the one where you…"

"Yep," Fingers traced little circles on my skin, and I was suddenly glad of the dark. If it was that scene he meant, then my blush could probably be used to guide aeroplanes into airports on foggy days.

"I think I'd rather try the tentacle scene. At least that one was less humiliating,"

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Breathe

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

And yeah we all fall to pieces

But at least you fell to me

But this is the wrong night

Tell me goodnight and let it go

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

The cupboard seemed to shrink in synchrony with my trousers. This certainly wasn't helped by the hand that kept snaking just a little too close, moving back and forth in a steady rhythm my body couldn't help but pick up on.

My head tipped forward, breathing far too loud in the near-silence. Somehow, Kakashi managed to remain completely silent, the only indication he was breathing was the warm breath dancing past my ear every few seconds. It certainly wasn't helping.

"W-we shouldn't-" I whispered, trying to move forward and away from the steadily moving hands. Instead, I ended up pressed against a stack of boxes, impossibly even closer to Kakashi than before. Short of leaving the cupboard, I couldn't escape.

Logically, I knew it was an incredibly stupid thing to do, and that I couldn't defend either of us if we got caught. It was a huge risk, yet my brain seemed to be perfectly fine with it.

"Why?" A husky voice whispered as warm fingers untucked my shirt and delved into my trousers. "Give me one-" His whole hand was submerged "-good-" dipping deeper, getting closer to its inevitable destination "-reason why not,"

The air inside the cupboard was as thick as treacle and just as difficult to breathe in. It smelt like paper and chemicals and rubber and man and lust, a heady combination that removed all the oxygen, and with it most of my normal brain function.

"We're at work," I hissed futilely.

"But the kids are gone, and we're all alone," He reminded me softly, yet there was nothing gentle about it. It was seductive and demanding and hideously erotic, accentuated by the location. It was so horribly inappropriate, but that made it thrilling.

I was completely aware of the trail probing fingers left over my skin as they trailed across it, searching for one increasingly obvious destination. My common sense seemed to have totally shut down, my hips pressing backwards and insisting that I shouldn't be the only one feeling this forbidden pleasure.

"Y-yes, but I need to tell you something important," I protested, and I honestly did. I just couldn't remember exactly what. Something about a woman with blue hair? And our jobs? Probably not that important. There was a hand in my underwear. I couldn't focus on anything anymore.

"Really important," I insisted.
"Oh? Me too," He whispered. My breath hitched, expecting something exciting. What could be more important than cupboard sex and whatever it was that I knew that was probably important?

The cupboard door opened. For a second I completely panicked, thinking that it was the scary woman from the government come to catch us in the act, and that we would both lose our jobs and be fined and go to prison or something because of a really stupid one-time thing.

Fortunately, it was Shizune, Tsunade's fearsome assistant. Which was possibly worse.

"Shizune! I – I mean, we were, ah – I'm so sorry! We promise-" I stuttered. I could have exploded from the embarrassment. Being caught in the act of whatever the hell it was we were doing was bad enough, but by acolleague? Horrific. Nightmare-worthy.

The light flooding in from outside stung my eyes a little after the near-pitch darkness of the cupboard interior, though the fresh air was a relief. Shizune's subtle perfume seemed overpowering compared to the lack of air in the cupboard. The feminine smell was invasive and unnecessary, and I suddenly craved the security of the cupboard or the freshness of the corridor outside.

"Tsunade wants to see you immediately," She said curtly, tapping her foot like an impatient mother. "Please try and calm yourselves down before we get to her office, keep your hands to yourselves and your minds out of the gutter. This is important and I need her to behave,"

"You're far too good to her, Shizune," Kakashi said; infinitely more calmly than me, warm breath caressing my ear again. I shivered, despite all my attempts to calm myself down. It wasn't fair how he could manage to do that, yet I seemed to have virtually no effect on him.

Inside my head, I swore I'd do something to make him lose control. Challenge accepted.

"I feel like her mother sometimes," Shizune admitted, smiling for a second, before her face hardened back into an expression that held sway even over Tsunade. "But I'm serious; don't set her off. I've tried to keep the alcohol away from her, so now you just need to do your bit,"

The walk from the classroom to Tsunade's office was abysmal. Trying to think of the most unsexy, un-arousing things possible, from dead kittens to Tsunade and Jiraiya getting it on, was having little effect in such close proximity to Kakashi. My eyes couldn't help but stray, despite the very sensible voice in my head screaming for me to focus on the imminent danger.

The most chilling thought was that a student could walk into the corridor at any time and get mentally scarred for the rest of their lives. No student should have to see a teacher in any physical state besides complete and utter normalcy.

That thought, combined with a lot of deep breaths, staring at the floor, and the thought of dying homeless and alone as a consequence of losing my job was enough to kill any trace of erection.

Maybe I wouldn't die completely alone. If we lost our jobs together, maybe we could lose our flats together and die of pneumonia on the streets together or something. That was strangely romantic yet completely morbid, but I couldn't help but want to stay together no matter what the situation. Being forced apart by circumstance was the real nightmare.

Shizune opened the door without knocking, revealing a magically sober Tsunade sitting behind her desk. The usual alcohol fumes had been replaced with the irritation and anger that rolled off her in waves as she waved her hand sharply at Shizune to shut the door quickly. I quirked an eyebrow at that; was the situation really that bad?

In short, yes. My job was at stake, Kakashi's job was at stake, the reputation of the school could be
on the line, Tsunade's job would be shaky if news got out to the local press, and the humiliation of a court trial for something so innocuous at the time was the long answer.

Kakashi and I assembled neatly in front of her, treading softly. I squeezed his hand twice in a non-verbal attempt to communicate not to do anything stupid, although I was fairly certain that it would be completely ignored.

"Thank you, Shizune," Tsunade said with sternness I hadn't heard in a long while. "You can go now. I'll deal with this."

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
We stood silently for a moment, listening to the repetitive click of Shizune's heels as she walked a short distance down the hall. All the while, I kept my eyes fixed on the desk in front of Tsunade, trying to take in her appearance without obviously staring.

I had never seen her like this before. Normally, she was somewhat groomed, blonde hair tied back neatly, barely a trace of her age on her face, clothes pressed and fresh. But today, for the first time, I noticed shallow lines of worry straddling her mouth. Though she looked angry and irritated, she also looked tired.

"How much has Iruka told you?" Tsunade asked Kakashi. Her fingers rapped rhythmically on the surface of her desk, clearly twitching to wrap around a bottle or a glass of drink. I wondered if it was a bad idea to keep her off it; she looked strung out, and more stress was probably not a good idea. Maybe a glass of her drink of choice would settle her, but I wasn't going to be the one to suggest it.

"Not much. We were a little distracted," He replied. I kept my eyes on Tsunade, trying not to look sideways at him. "Mostly my fault, I think,"

"Well, that can't be helped now. Tell me what you know already, Iruka," She said before I could open my mouth to protest. Instead, I took a deep breath and tried to stay focused.

"We're being investigated by the Department of Education for inappropriate conduct on school premises," I explained. "Some woman named Konan is here to talk to us, and she was in my classroom about fifteen minutes ago, but I have no idea where she's gone now,"

"I think that sums it up. Konan is-"

"-A high-powered lawyer with a long history of employment by the local government. We've met," Kakashi finished. At that, I did look at him, an eyebrow raised. How on Earth did he manage to know absolutely everyone significant? I wasn't sure if it was statistically possible.

"What? When?" I asked, though I repressed most of the questions trying to burst out of my head. That familiar, nagging curiosity reared its head again, begging me to ask questions and poke and pry. I wanted to know everything about him, but I wasn't going to ask now. Especially not now.

"It was a long time ago, don't worry about it," He said casually, like he hadn't just thrown another snippet of information out there that reminded me just how little I actually knew about him. I grit my teeth and tried to focus. I could worry about that later.

"Regardless, she's here and she's stirring up trouble. God only knows what she's got on you two and"
I wouldn't put it past her to talk to the students and the other members of staff. I can't predict what they'll say, but I'm not letting you two go without a fight," Tsunade said. Her fingers stilled on the desk, moving to tweak an unruly strand of hair back into place.

"Why?" I said flatly. I wasn't an exceptional teacher. From what I had seen, Kakashi was talented, but we could both be replaced.

In the grand scheme of things, we were both just replacements for whoever had left before us, so it wouldn't really be any great scandal if two people lost their jobs to be replaced by two new people. It was pretty much how the world of employment worked, only a lot less optimistic.

"I'm not about to throw you to the wolves because you're in love. I'm sure you've taken every step to be discreet while on school property, and it's the interference of the students that has caused any problems," She explained with a smile. It brightened her face enough to shrug off the tension for a few moments, before breaking into a proper, wide grin. "And I haven't had this much fun in years. None of us are complaining about the little shows you put on, either. It's better than television,"

"I'm so glad our personal lives amuse you so much," I tried not to burst into hysterical laughter or try to murder her in equal measures. Although my life was a lot like a terribly written soap opera at times, I was not around for anyone's personal amusement.

"When you bring it to work, it's not personal life anymore," She pointed out.

"Even so, a bit of common courtesy-" I started.

"What are the likely outcomes of this investigation?" Kakashi spoke up, interrupting me. I looked up sharply, diverting my glare from Tsunade to him. "I'll accept all responsibility for both of us if necessary,"

"No, you won't! Anything we did, we did together and I'm not letting you take the fall for my actions as well as your own," I said sharply, eyes narrowing further.

"Maybe we could-" Kakashi started again, but I wasn't compromising on this.

"No. If you go down, I'm going down with you. Don't argue," I snapped. I squeezed his hand a little, trying to soften the sharpness of my words, but I meant it. I wasn't about to let him take the blame for what I had done, not now and not ever.

"See? Who am I to get in the way of such passionate love?" Tsunade's smile waned a little. "The Department of Education, however, apparently think otherwise. Did Konan explain anything about any penalties you might be facing if the investigation finds something?"

"She said I'd get a warning, and that was it," I racked my brains for anything she'd said, anything that could have any relevance at all. "And it's unlikely to go to court,"

She looked down, shuffling a couple of loose papers, forehead creasing as she scanned the top page. Replacing them, she sighed.

"She visited me early this morning, after staff briefing. Though she wouldn't outright state any consequences of the investigation, neither of you are in particularly stable positions. If the press gets a hold of it, it will be blown out of proportion and it's highly unlikely it will end well. The best outcome would be if the investigation concludes, you take it to court, appeal and are acquitted,"

"What's the worst case scenario?" Kakashi asked. I hated to think, and I almost didn't want to know; but it would be useful to know. Without really knowing, there was nothing we could do to defend
"You both lose your jobs and your teaching licenses are stripped," She said quickly. "If that happens, I'd likely resign in protest or be dismissed outright,"

The horrific scene played out in my imagination. The scary, blue haired lawyer marching around the school, being handed a notice of formal dismissal, a letter in a brown envelope containing a paper that revoked my licence and annulled my contract, and from there losing my flat, losing my car, losing everything.

My gaze dropped to the floor. I didn't want to think about that, at all. It was bad enough if it was just happening to me, but if it was happening to Kakashi too…

"Is there anything we can do?" His voice cut through my morbid imaginings, grounding me. Though it was just as awful, having someone standing beside me made it somehow more bearable. All the more so that it was him.

"There isn't much. Deal with the bureaucrats, co-operate with the investigation and try not to do anything incriminating in the mean time. If it comes to it, find a good lawyer," She advised with a wave of the hand, as if an air of nonchalance could somehow make the situation less stressful and painful. "But don't worry; you two are too good to let go,"

"Thanks, Tsunade. We appreciate this," I tried to smile, but instead of a warm and comforting grin, I probably pulled off a creepy grimace. There wasn't all that much to smile about, but I'd try.

"Good. Now, get the hell out of my office so I can think," She waved her hand sharply at the door, standing up. "And don't do anything stupid!"

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Wonder Why

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I'm stretching but you're just out of reach

You should know

I'm ready when you're ready for me

And I'm waiting for the right time

For the day I catch your eye

To let you know

That I'm yours to hold

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Teaching was incredibly difficult. The weight of my impending fate hung over my head like a millstone, just waiting to fall and crush me. How was I supposed to focus on the intricacies of literature when my entire life was doomed to crash and burn?

The students had probably twigged something was up, but I wasn't going to say a thing. They all blended into a mass of pinkish faces and coloured hair against the white backdrop of the wall, deathly silent as my brain tuned everything out.

But instead of sitting down, setting the class silent work and moping, I threw myself into my lecturing with abandon, explaining every point in ridiculous detail. The few students I bothered to take points from sounded slow and dull compared to the overly animated tone my voice took on as I babbled on and on about how this demonstrated that and the effect of structure, ad infinitum. I couldn't keep track of the time at all, and I'd only said about half of what I wanted to before the bell cut me off.

I set them either far too much homework or none at all. I didn't remember clearly through the manic haze of mild panic, but they'd probably resent what I set either way. And I was the one who'd be marking it in the end, so if I'd set too much I'd pay, too.

I had never seen students walk out of a classroom so fast.

Between classes, I couldn't help but remember, and only my own frantic pseudo-teaching could distract me. I powered through the entire day, trying not to think too closely about how my awful teaching was damaging my students, or about literally anything else. I needed to focus on anything but the investigation and its consequences. After all, if I got fired, then one day of poor teaching didn't matter.

But very specifically, I was definitely not thinking about Kakashi. If I didn't think about him, then I could want to do anything, so nothing would happen. It also sorted out the small problem still brewing in the back of my mind; if I didn't think about him, then I didn't have to think about that horrible, awful, terrifying concept of love, which made the investigation situation a hell of a lot worse.
Specifically not thinking about that stupidly handsome face that made me feel peculiarly queasy, but not in a bad way, or the head rush every time we touched, or the multitude of other mildly cliché things that seemed to overshadow everything else. And not the sick feeling that promised to evolve into something much worse if whatever I felt wasn't returned, and not the bubbling hope that promised to explode if it was.

It wasn't clear to me if it was just infatuation, but it wasn't lust alone. Whatever it was, it wasn't conducive to escaping this investigation with everything intact, so it had to be shoved to the back of my mind and dug up at a later date. It wasn't necessary and it was distracting, and the last thing I needed was more distractions.

The school day ended all too soon, and the drive home was awkwardly silent. There wasn't any room for polite conversation with the threat of the investigation hanging over our heads. My eyes were drawn to Kakashi's hands on the steering wheel, watching minute changes in the grip of fingers, the subtle ripple of skin as tendons contracted and relaxed. It was oddly mesmerising. My mind drifted to the other things those hands did, and the pleasure they-

Fortunately, my train of thought was cut off as the car stopped. I breathed a small, silent sigh of relief. It was thoughts like that that had gotten us into this situation, and I had to control them somehow. Not thinking about Kakashi seemed like a good place to start.

In silence, I led the way upstairs to my flat. All the bags were dumped unceremoniously on the floor or kitchen table, one leaning dangerously to the side. A couple of papers slid halfway out, but neither of us bothered to push them back in.

"I need to buy groceries," I said quietly. Though I didn't particularly want to go, it was a necessary chore, and it was certainly a distraction. Dragging myself through a supermarket with Kakashi in tow was not really the most ideal way to spend what remained of the afternoon, but it was necessary.

"So have them delivered," Kakashi replied. "It'll be easier on your wrist,"

"No, I need to pick the food myself. And it will be a good distraction," I said, though I wasn't sure who I was trying to convince. "For both of us, if you drive me,"

"Of course I'll drive you,"

"Then we can go home to our own flats, lock the doors and mark. Nothing more, nothing less. We're in enough trouble as it is," I continued, as though he hadn't spoken. I kept my eyes fixed on a patch of wall just behind his head like it was the most fascinating thing ever. But it was better than looking at his face. I prayed my vision would start to tunnel, so I could only see that lovely, lovely wall, and not have to watch a reaction to my words. But I did, the moment they left my mouth.

"If that's what you want," He stepped towards me. I didn't watch, but I could hear him move. My senses focused in on him against my will, and I was hyper-aware of how close he was. Every step closer was like another mountain range crossed.

"It's not, but…" I paused, steeling myself. "It's what we need. Both of us, we need to stop being so – so frisky all the time. That's what got us into this mess in the first place,"

I knew I wasn't being fair; it would be much more sensible to put a limit on the time we spent together at work, or to devise some kind of plan, or to do anything proactive. But this way, I could somewhat pretend that I didn't feel anything at all. Maybe with distance and less intimacy, whatever freaky feelings that were trying to make themselves known would die away.
"But Iruka-"

"Please, just humour me," I cut him off, looking away properly. This way, I didn't have to see anything but the patch of floor, so I couldn't even get an accidental glimpse of his expression, whatever it may be.

"Alright," Kakashi conceded. "But on one condition,"

"Hmm?" I looked at his shoes. Such fascinating shoes. Way more fascinating than his facial expression, and far more fascinating than either of our emotions. Certainly.

"This," Before I could look up or move back, a pair of arms wrapped around my shoulders, and the gap between us was closed. Even through our clothes, I could feel his warmth compared to the coldness of my kitchen, and I couldn't help but want more. I was engulfed in a cocoon of his scent and texture and presence, and I couldn't escape.

For a second, I tried to hold my composure. I wasn't going to melt or cry or hug back. I was just going to stand there, straight and stiff as a post, until he got the message and let go. It just never happened the way I wanted.

"You idiot," I mumbled, though any sense of frustration or insistence was quickly draining out of me. "You're supposed to ask first,"

But I honestly didn't really care. I let my head drop and my body relax, exhaling slowly as I leaned against him. I was exhausted, and Kakashi was my anchor, all that was holding me to the spot. Everything else could be swept away, but we'd stay safe and secure, together. In his arms, the investigation seemed trivial. What was my job compared to this?

"That wasn't the condition. This is," His arms contracted a little tighter as his voice dropped lower, and I wanted nothing more than to snuggle into him and never move again.

"What is it, then?" When he didn't reply immediately, I lifted my head to meet his suddenly unfathomable eyes. I couldn't read a single thing going on behind the dark iris. Not a single line or crease gave away stress or pondering, but it wasn't a relaxed expression either. I didn't understand. "You're starting to scare me, seriously, what is it?"

"I love you,

oO..Oo..O0..Oo
After All

And all the roads we have to walk are winding
And all the lights that lead us there are blinding
There are many things that I
Would like to say to you but I don’t know how
Because maybe you're gonna be the one that saves me
And after all, you're my wonderwall

"I love you,"

"W-what?" I froze. My mind reeled, replaying that sentence over and over again inside my head, not quite believing it. I must have misheard. "Did you just say what I think you said?"

My eyes remained fixed in place, trying to unlock the secrets lurking beneath it all. There had to be some double meaning, and the clue had to be in that face. The mask was still in place, and I would have ripped it off had my arms not been frozen in place by my sides. Because there was no way on Earth he had just said that.

"That depends on what you're thinking," Kakashi replied, voice infuriatingly calm and nonchalant, as if his words hadn't just shaken up my entire world. "But I did also say that I love you,"

"Stop it! Don't tell me that!" I squeaked, possibly louder than I intended. My fingers curled into the beginnings of fists at my sides, though I wasn't entirely sure why. Being angry wouldn't be very reasonable, but it was better than-

"Why?" He said.

"J-just don't! It makes everything more complicated! We have enough to worry about, with this bloody investigation going on, and that should be-" I started babbling, desperately hoping I hadn't offended him or done something incredibly stupid and ruined everything. I had no idea what to do if everything fell apart.

"That doesn't matter right now. It won't amount to anything; I won't let it. Anyway, I just thought I should let you know how I feel," His eye arced into a familiar curve; I hadn't seen that in a long time. But instead of being cheerful or comical, it was almost self-deprecating.

My heart throbbed painfully at that. Had I really sounded so harsh that he thought it was all unrequited? That I thought it was a joke?

His arms started to loosen, drawing back a little. I suddenly felt a lot colder without him right there. My whole body thawed, jerking forward a little too forcefully to grab the front of his shirt tight enough that I thought I might tear the cotton. I didn't want to be cold, and I didn't want to be alone, and I didn't want him to ever go away.
"Where do you think you're going?" I said lowly. I stared at his chest, unable to meet his gaze. I didn't want to see what my actions might be doing to him, if anything, but I was desperately hoping that hopeless smile was gone. I never wanted to see it again.

"Don't we need to go food shopping?" I shook my head mutely. Food shopping, like everything else in the entire world, didn't really matter anymore.

"You didn't give me a chance to respond," I pointed out, still refusing to look up. "I might need a minute,"

I had to say it. I had to say what I felt, and I had to say it soon. The longer I dragged it out, the more painful it would be, but my tongue was like a stone and I couldn't seem to draw in enough air to form a sentence. Random, semi-coherent thoughts babbled through my mind. This was a completely, stupidly, horribly inappropriate time for a love confession. There were a million other things that I should have been thinking about, but none of them seemed important anymore. There was only this man whose shirt I was currently attached to, the one who was making my heart beat audibly loudly in my ears, and who had somehow become my everything. If I lost my everything, then what would be left? It was one thing to acknowledge that idea inside my own head, but another to externalise it. And did that even equate to love, anyway?

Love, love, love. How could equating one four letter word with Kakashi make an entire symphony orchestra of colliding emotions play inside my head?

I didn't want to lose him. I didn't want to wake up in the morning alone in my bed, to walk into a kitchen where too many dogs snuffled for table scraps or looked at me with a frighteningly knowing look, to go to work and cruise through a day with no highlights other than getting home to do more work. I wanted to wake up and think, 'my god, he's beautiful' first thing in the morning because he'd be there next to me. And all through the rest of the day, the highlight would be getting home and collapsing back into his arms.

My internal ranting stopped. Yes, I was terrified of losing him, especially now. But now there was a reason I was so scared of losing him; I couldn't live without him.

"Has it been a minute yet?" He said.

"Shut up," I mumbled, forcing myself to look up again. "This is my answer," I hooked two fingers under the top of the mask and yanked it down, planting a brief, firm kiss on his exposed lips. I tried to channel everything into that one kiss; my worries and my nervousness, but also my need. "Does that count?"

"Maybe," One corner of his mouth quirked up in a breathtakingly handsome smile, before he descended, deliberately slowly, to kiss me properly. If his smile had been breathtaking, then by all rights that kiss should have meant I could never breathe again. My fingers, which were still twisted in the front of his shirt, tightened, trying to pull him down to deepen the kiss.

It couldn't end. I didn't want it to end because when it ended, I'd have to say something, and I had no idea how to express whatever I needed to say. I needed to say something meaningful, something that got what I meant across. What I really needed to say was 'I love you'. But I didn't know how. Technically, I did. It was three words, all of which I had said in other contexts, but never in that order to mean this.


I broke the kiss, breathing heavily. Somewhere along the line, I had forgotten to breathe properly. Or
maybe it was just the close proximity.

"F-fine! I…I, uh…I uh…a lot," I stuttered. I could have slapped myself. If there was ever a crap way to admit to a veritable tsunami of emotion, that was not it.

I waited for something. A confused expression, a sarcastic remark, a request for clarification, but none of those came. Instead, I got something that was so, so much better.

"I uh you, too," Kakashi just smiled, winking conspiratorially. "Cutie,"

I could have died. On the one hand, he knew what I meant, and I didn't have to say it. That was a huge, mind-numbing relief. I could have stood there and kept him in a bone-crushing hug for the rest of eternity because he understood. That was more than enough proof that he was utterly perfect. On the other, I had just made myself incredibly vulnerable. But then again, so had he. Even more so than I had in confessing first, but he'd never been the most subtle person ever.

To compensate, I fixed my eyes on the second button on his shirt, completely disregarding how it began to swim a little, and how it was taking everything I had not to grin like a lunatic and jump on him right there, and how I was probably blushing tomato red.

"Say that again and you die. I am not cute," I said, though the threat was completely void and more endearing than anything else because he wasn't allowed to die. Not now, not six months from now, and certainly not before I do.

"Yes, you are. You're also sweet, unintentionally hilarious, sexy, smarter and stronger than you think- wait, are you crying? Over this?" He replied. One finger hooked under my chin, gently lifting my face so the evidence was on full display.

"I'm not crying!" I protested, swiping at my face. It was just raining or something. Inside. Maybe the roof was leaking. Either way, I definitely wasn't crying.

"Of course not," He laughed quietly, before leaning in for another kiss.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
The Sky

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I'm only up when you're not down

Don't wanna fly if you're still on the ground

It's like no matter what I do

Well you drive me crazy half the time

The other half I'm only trying to let you know that what I feel is true

And I'm only me when I'm with you

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

It hit me when we were sitting in the car at a set of traffic lights, half way to the supermarket.

I was happy. Ridiculously, completely, stupidly, over-the-top, sing-it-from-the-mountains level of happy. I wanted to bounce up and down in my seat and laugh and cry and laugh a bit more, even though I would have looked utterly crazy if I did. My arms were itching to throw themselves around Kakashi and pull him into a bone-crushing hug, though I probably shouldn't because it would likely cause a serious traffic accident and I had no intention of letting either of us die anytime in the near future. Or ever, actually. I wasn't sure how I was going to manage that, but I would somehow.

So instead, I settled for staring at the number plate of the car in front, casting sideways glances at Kakashi and trying not to smile too obviously.

He loved me. He actually loved me. He didn't just think I was physically attractive or just kind of nice, but actually, literally, romantically loved me. The way a lover loved someone, not a friend or a sibling. And what was almost as shocking was that I was reciprocating, and that I had actually admitted it.

I glanced at him again, blushing in embarrassment when our eyes met for a second. I felt completely ridiculous as I repressed a giggle, but I couldn't help it. We were in love. Both of us. With each other.

In my mind, it was like a fairy tale, though by that analogy I was the useless and annoying princess. I really hoped that wasn't accurate.

Watching his strong hands grip the steering wheel out of the corner of my eye was strangely satisfying; his profile outlined against the changing scenery, the comforting hum of the engine filling the thoughtful quiet that enclosed the car. It would have been nice to talk, but it was also great to just sit still and watch him.

He parked the car as I dug out my shopping list from the inside of my wallet shoved roughly in my trousers. Digging it out while sitting made for some interesting squirming.

The supermarket in town was as busy as it ever was, especially since it was just after normal working hours for the majority of the inhabitants. After much pouting and very premature emotional blackmail, Kakashi finally convinced me to let him push the trolley on the excuse that I wasn't supposed to be doing anything strenuous with my wrist.
The radio played a catchy song in the background as I motioned for him to stop the trolley while I looked over a shelf. Having an assistant certainly had its benefits; I didn't have to lift anything heavy, and a single snap of my fingers had him at my beck and call. And though I was technically only shopping for me, it didn't hurt to have him there since I had a feeling we'd be eating together more frequently.

"Put that down right now! How old are you, six?" I snapped, though there wasn't an ounce of malice in my voice. I smiled as Kakashi pretended to sneak a box of chocolates into the shopping trolley. I half expected him to start swinging off the sides or pining for sweets. Though it was driving me crazy, I found I really didn't mind at all. It was more endearing than anything else.

Within an hour, a huge weight had been visibly lifted from both of our shoulders. I could see it in everything he did, and that in itself made me so happy. Nothing else mattered, just like he had said.

"Give or take twenty and a bit years," He admitted with a wink. I nearly died from the cheesiness. "But a lady never reveals her true age,"

"You're not a lady," I pointed out between laughs. "And neither am I,"

That was a fair point, actually. We were both men, but I didn't have a problem with that at all, and it was certainly too late to develop one. That was certainly a turnabout.

"We're just two completely ordinary gentlemen," He proclaimed, a hand casually finding its way to rest on my waist. I batted at it limply; I didn't have the heart to deny a little public display of affection, since it was semi-innocent. I almost wanted to announce to everyone inside the supermarket that he was mine, but I'd settle for flirting and lingering touches.

I honestly didn't care who saw anymore. Neither of us were ashamed of our relationship, and as long as all clothing remained on in public no one should be able to complain. Most of the people I knew already knew about our relationship, so it wasn't a big deal if someone I knew was here. That covered all of our colleagues, but I didn't know about other acquaintances or friends of Kakashi's.

My smile faltered for a second; I didn't know everything about Kakashi, after all. I probably never would. There were still a lot of things I was in the dark about, but maybe with time I'd be trusted with everything. It was just a matter of waiting patiently, and picking up on hints and snippets of information dropped by other people.

"There isn't anything ordinary about us," I pointed out, dropping one hand to cover his as I looked at my crumpled shopping list. Every single item was very mundane, compiled over the week whenever I realised I was running out of something.

His hand left my waist, shoes silent on the linoleum flooring. I turned my attention back to my list; he'd be back eventually. Supplying my cupboards and fridge with food was the mission, and I shouldn't have let myself be distracted. After all, if I didn't feed us, nobody would. Or we'd live off frozen food forever, which wasn't quite as good as properly prepared meals.

"Au contraire," I could hear the satisfaction in his voice as he reappeared almost as quickly as he had disappeared, wielding a dark bottle with gold foil wrappings, labelled with curly French writing.

"Champagne? What for?" I asked curiously. For one it was sort of expensive, but I had nothing against it specifically. The occasion never appeared to drink it or buy it in the first place. Still, I was in an indulgent mood.

"You need to ask?" His flirtily low voice created thoroughly obscene images in my mind; oh. Yes, I
understood why we might possibly need champagne.

"What's next, strawberries and whipped cream?" I replied before I could remember that we were in a public place. The mental image of eating ripe, red strawberries and thick, sweet cream off his chest, his stomach, his-

I desperately hoped my lecherous thoughts were not visible on my face, or I would probably be arrested for public indecency. There was a place for thinking up liberal, explorative bedroom exploits, and a supermarket was not it.

"If you like," He said. I didn't want to think about what kind of bizarre ideas were floating around his mind. The combination of being exposed to teenagers on a regular basis and frequent reading of porn was probably enough to create some seriously odd practises. "We could even have chocolate and marshmallows and vodka and handcuffs and-"

"That last one wasn't even edible!" I yelped, blushing furiously at the images that conjured up. That was definitely not a safe thought for public places. "I don't know what kind of weird pornography you've been reading but you're not tying me up!"

"Fine, fine, the handcuffs stay in the drawer," One hand waved dismissively, but I couldn't help but wonder if there actually were handcuffs in the drawer. I'd have to find out at some point, discreetly and without evidence, and possibly conceal them somewhere. Like in a bin. Or a secure lockbox.

oO.Oo.oO.Oo
Lost

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Whenever, wherever

We’re meant to be together

I’ll be there and you’ll be near

And that’s the deal, my dear

Thereover, hereunder,

You’ll never have to wonder

We can always play by ear

But that’s the deal, my dear

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Despite the snow on the ground outside, it was too hot inside my flat. Or at least, that’s what I told myself, even though I didn’t really need a reason to remain fully dressed inside my own home. Neither did Kakashi. There seemed to be something of an unspoken mutual agreement that the moment the shopping was properly settled on the floor that the clothes started to come off.

Arguably, there were many other things that were probably more reasonable and sensible to do. For example, work should probably have taken priority. There was always some kind of homework or classwork that needed marking, and I hadn’t seen Kakashi do any marking in ages. Either he did it in his sleep, or he didn’t set the same kind of amounts of work as I did.

Working rather than making out or more would have been the more sensible option, but the fingers that should have been reaching for a pen were instead tugging off a sock and pulling open my bedroom door.

Strong arms wrapped around my shoulders, turning me around to kiss me, forcing me to stumble backwards until my legs connected with the bed. The rest of my limbs were unimportant; there wasn’t anything but trying to communicate sentiments and emotions I couldn’t express through words because my tongue froze up and my breath ceased, but now every caress and touch was equally met. I hoped that meant they were understood. There were some things I couldn’t convey yet, but hopefully this was enough for now.

I broke the kiss to fall back onto the bed, pulling Kakashi with me. Our hands roamed; the curvature of shoulders was suddenly enthralling, the soft yet sharp planes of his chest enchanting, sinking continually lower until my hands were suddenly captured in one of his and pinned loosely above my head.

A firm mouth clamped over mine, swallowing any protests that might have tried to escape. Not that I should have protested. I trusted him enough. A sigh escaped my lips as his mouth relocated to my throat, sucking hard enough to begin to leave a mark, all the while keeping me from touching his body. That in itself was frustrating; I wanted to run my hands over every inch of skin, to reacquaint myself with territory that suddenly seemed new and foreign-
"Oh hell no!" I yelped as I fully comprehended the cold circle of metal clipping into place around my left wrist. "Unlock these right now or I'm withholding sex for a year!"

"I guess I'll have to make tonight count, then," That infuriatingly handsome lopsided grin dominated his face, eyes twinkling with that promise. I wasn't getting out of this easily.

"What kind of logic is that?" I said, narrowing my eyes and jerking sharply at the handcuffs. They didn't give, but my headboard creaked unhealthily. Maybe destroying my own furniture to escape was a little extreme. There were worse predicaments to be in, after all. Probably.

And why the hell were there handcuffs in my flat?

"I'll think about it," Though the confident quirk of his lips told otherwise. "Maybe I'll take them off if you ask me very nicely,"

"Unlock the handcuffs," I tried to say more forcefully, trying to ignore the gentle, teasing touch as his fine, pale fingertips trailed across my chest. So starkly pale against my darker complexion, enough to look fragile and breakable in such sharp contrast to the strong, enduring man I knew and loved.

"I think you could be nicer," The hand pinning my forearm to the bed refused to loosen as its twin traced lower, breaking contact briefly to reconnect with the top of my thigh, tantalisingly close enough to make me squirm. "And don't tug too hard,"

"Unlock the bloody handcuffs," I added in a rough pull on the handcuffs just for good measure.

"Definitely could be nicer," My eyes locked onto his as I felt his hand reach around my thigh, tormentingly close to my anxious cock. I didn't remember getting so hard; though I was sure it definitely had nothing to do with the bondage. The eye contact made everything so much more intense; his expression almost calculating as he analysed every inch of my face, watching as I tried to resist spilling everything through my eyes.

"U-unlock the-" I shut my mouth, trying to stifle a moan. There was no way I was going to admit to enjoying this while tied to my own bed. I didn't want to encourage this kind of thing. In fact, I'd be quite completely happy if the cuffs spontaneously combusted, as long as they were off my wrist first. ".-handcuffs. Please?"

Slowly, my right arm was released. Naturally, it shot up to my left, fumbling blindly around the lock, thus distracting me sufficiently. I barely noticed as Kakashi resituated himself lower.

"What was that?" He asked, infuriating expression never slipping, fingers stroking teasingly over what felt like everywhere but where I most wanted to be touched.

"Unlock-" The next couple of words were drowned in the back of my throat as his mouth engulfed me.

"Hmm?"

Any protests I was about to voice were cut off as the vibrations from the gloriously extended radiated throughout my cock. How was I supposed to protest when my brain was melting inside my head from pleasure? Anything I might have tried to say became nothing but an incoherent string of embarrassingly loud noises.

That was another thing. I couldn't use my hands to stifle any embarrassing noises I made. Every single sound of pleasure I made escaped at full volume, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it. It was another facet of the extreme exposure I felt; I couldn't move properly, and I should have felt
utterly vulnerable. But I trusted him, and I'd play along. Didn't mean I'd be happy about it, though.

I mostly forgot about everything else very shortly. The warm constriction of his mouth was illegally good, and it made all the reasons for my resistance more than a little bit futile. Everything was soft and warm and almost delicate, a terribly teasing combination. Yet there was nothing I could do to increase the friction or the pace or anything. The loss of control was almost disturbingly complete, and more frustrating than anything else.

"Enjoying yourself?" He asked, pulling away. It was probably a good thing I was restrained; I might have strangled him for stopping at that point.

"No, quit talking and…" I wriggled my hips, hoping that I'd get away with just that. If I couldn't say 'I love you', then there was no way I could ask for more.

"And?" He prompted, casting a quick glance at my restrained wrist and taking pity on it. I watched as the fiddly mechanism came undone, and I quickly jerked my hand free again, letting it hang awkwardly in midair. In the end, I settled for pushing an errant strand of hair off my face before letting it sink back down.

"Don't make me say it," If my face hadn't already been flushed with the force of my previous ecstasy, I would have blushed harder. I couldn't say it. It was too humiliating.

"You're so cute," He cooed, handcuffs still dangling tauntingly from one finger.

Drawing on the strength of my annoyance, I managed to switch our positions, straddling his stomach though I made no move to pin his hands.

"Stop lying! I'm neurotic and useless and boring and stupid and there is no reason for anyone to like me at all! And I'm horrible to you! I don't see why-" My ranting cut off as something warm and wet brushed against my palm. I jerked my hand back in surprise and mild horror. "Did you just lick me?"

"I'll lick more than just your hand if you want," A sly smile graced his lips, drawing my attention to the thin, pink curves. The temptation to lean in for a kiss was overwhelming.

"Do you think of anything but sex?" I said, trying not to sound horribly exasperated. He raised an eyebrow, obviously looking our positions up and down. I followed his eyes, noting that I was still straddling him, and that we were both naked and obviously aroused. "You may be excused just this once,"

oO.O.oO.Oo
I kissed him again, mouths opening immediately in a hot swirl of tongues and saliva. My hands grappled for his arms, trying to pin him in retaliation. I reached back and gripped his member with one hand, completely ignoring my own need, setting a brisk pace.

Thinking quickly, although most of it was probably due to the excellent distraction my hand was currently providing, I somehow managed to sneakily retrieve the handcuffs from wherever they had fallen and snap them into place around his wrists. I leaned back and crossed my arms over my chest, a smug sense of satisfaction suddenly overcoming me.

Revenge was sweet.

Or at least, it was until I looked down. Instead of surprise or shock, an oddly knowing look overtook his whole face. No widened eyes, no quick breathing, no frown; just a quirk of the lips in a telling smirk. It wasn't fair.

A resolution formed in my mind. It was kind of crazy, and I wasn't one hundred percent it would work, but I resolved to do it none the less.

I was going to melt his mind.

"My turn," I whispered, trying to school my face into a confident grin. I probably shouldn't have whispered, but it was too late. He was already tied up and completely within my power. I resisted the sudden urge to cackle evilly.

I started with his shoulders, running the tips of my fingers over delicately pale skin, smooth and warm under my touch. It was too smooth; I wanted to feel a sheen of sweat rising from that skin, slick under my fingers, knowing that I had done that, that it was me that made his heart race and body react.

For the first time, I thought I could understand what countless poets and authors wrote about when they described their lovers in comparison to great works of art or sites of great natural beauty. Kakashi wasn't like a sculpture; sculptures didn't move or breathe, and marble was cold and unyielding. Flesh was warm and soft to the touch, each inch slightly different to the next. A statue couldn't react when the fingers delicately touching it glided over a particularly sensitive spot, and it couldn't wiggle almost imperceptibly at a touch that tickled. And most certainly, inanimate objects weren't supposed to smirk in that deliberately infuriating, teasing way. I was supposed to be the one teasing! This certainly wasn't fair.

My hands still mapping that gloriously smooth stomach, I leaned down and bit his collar bone. It was
probably too hard; his breath hitched slightly, and I licked over the bite apologetically for a second before nibbling up to the column of his neck.

It was possibly a little excessive, but I wanted to touch every part of him. I wanted to feel every inch, mark every centimetre with my hands and tongue and mouth to shout to the world that this guy is mine, mine, mine, and I wouldn't be sharing. With anyone. Ever.

No, tonight wasn't all about me. I had to give something back, and this was a golden opportunity to do it sexually.

I slid back, groping behind myself until my hand came into contact with rapidly stiffening flesh. I kept my touch as feather-light as possible, trying to drag out every sensation possible. The temperature of the room seemed to increase by several hundred degrees, the air becoming suffocating as it pressed us together.

I wasn't complaining, though. I wanted to be closer, I wanted to feel him inside me again. That would hopefully prove a sure-fire method of blowing his mind as well as fulfilling my own utterly ungodly desires.

"Do we have any, ah…?" I blushed as I asked. Weirdly, I couldn't say the word. I could think it just fine and it was pretty obvious what I wanted, but asking for it was completely different. Almost like admitting out loud that I really wanted sex, even though it was obvious.

"Any what?" Kakashi replied, teasing smile on his lips, seeping through his words.

"You know what," I replied. It wasn't fair. I had him tied to my bed, underneath me, completely at my mercy, and he managed to remain completely in control. It only made me want to try harder, to try and make that control slip and see what was underneath. Even if it meant doing – or saying – things. I bit my lip.

"Yes, but I want to hear you say the word," He said, shifting a little, casually reminding me of our positions.

"Stop killing the mood or I'll get off," I threatened.

"Isn't that the point?" He quipped. My breath caught for a second.

"Pervert!" I accused, though there was no real bite to my tone. After the insult didn't work, I conceded to asking properly. "Fine, please tell me where the lube is. I know you've stashed some around here when I wasn't looking, you pervert,

"I'm a pervert for pre-empting smoking hot sex with my delicious lover? Who currently has me chained to his bed?" I replied with a silent glare. "It's in the drawer,

Specifically without getting off, in both senses of the word, I reached out and pulled the top drawer of my bedside table open, fumbling blindly for the plastic cylinder. Popping the top and squeezing out a little into my palm, it suddenly occurred to me that I had never used this kind of stuff on myself. Or anyone else, actually. So I had basically no idea what I was doing.

Well, there was one way to find out.

"Sensei," I cooed, furiously not giggling at how ridiculous I sounded to myself. "How can I make myself ready for you?" The reaction was instantaneous, and the calm mask cracked a little. Whatever the hell it was, it was working. I shifted back a little, accidentally brushing my back against his arousal. "You need to teach me,"
I ran a finger across my lips, trying to look coy. The smirk slipped back into place, confidence back at full-force at my mostly humiliating attempt at talking dirty. I probably didn't make a very good innocent schoolgirl. I was a man, for one. My obvious erection made it rather difficult to pretend.

"With your fingers, Iruka," He said clearly, almost the exact same voice he used with students except sexier. There was a darker, commanding edge, and it was illegally arousing. "I want to see three disappear inside you, and then you'll be ready,"

It was distinctly weird, using my own fingers. It wasn't something I'd ever really thought I'd do, but I tried to make a show of it nonetheless. I tried to imagine how I looked, on my knees as I tried to prepare myself without knowing what I was doing. It wasn't like I'd taken notes, the previous times. I tried to keep eye contact, though, as I fucked myself on my fingers.

His expression made it all worth it. Instead of feeling humiliated, I felt sexy. The burning lust in his eyes pushed me deeper, blotting out all traces of my embarrassment. It wasn't that bad at all. I wanted to share everything, and this was a part of it. Proving I could set aside my own needs, for the time being. I had resisted touching myself all evening.

I didn't bother with the whole ridiculous student-teacher thing again, just deeming myself stretched enough, lining up and hoping for the best.

It hurt again. Not as much as the first time, and since I was in control of how fast I lowered myself it was much more bearable. I wasn't going to let anything show on my face, though. This wasn't about my pleasure; it was about making Kakashi crazy with desire for me. With that thought in mind, I kept sinking lower and lower, trying to focus on the mild strain on my thighs rather than the uncomfortable stretch, taking every inch in.

I tried to move, but it quickly became apparent that I needed a minute. Breathing deeply, I lifted myself a little, and then lowered again, eyes shut tight. I didn't want to see the look of concern that would be plain across Kakashi's face. I didn't want him to question my actions. I'd be fine in a second, and then everything would be brilliant.

The sound of my own breathing was too much. I started moving, slowly at first, but increasing in pace as the sound of his breathing steadily increased. I sped up, aiming more steadily for the angle that blinded my already closed eyes, and when I found it I couldn't help the garbled noise that flowed from my lips. In response, Kakashi's hips shifted subtly, but it wasn't enough. I wanted him to writhe, thrust up into me, but I knew he wouldn't risk hurting me. As a result, I let my mouth open properly, not bothering to quell any noises that might have escaped them.

At some point, I became aware of a pair of hands on my hips, fingers gripping tight enough to leave bruises in the morning, guiding my up-down-up-down motions. My eyes snapped open, instantly connecting with his, a well-timed wave of pleasure washing over me at the emotion in those eyes.

Despite the technical bondage, the failed dirty talk and the teasing, this part still managed to be as loving as it was passionate. I didn't slow my pace or move any differently, it was just a connection of eyes that changed everything. It wasn't just sex for the hell of it.

It was that thought that sent me over the edge, seconds before he followed. I couldn't help but close my eyes, but the sensation of fulfilment, completeness, love, didn't change. It remained through the high of orgasmic bliss, survived as I fell forward, completely exhausted. Any half-formed plans for another round flew out of the window. Maybe next time, or whenever next I wasn't doing all the work.

"How did you escape?" I said sleepily, not really caring about the answer.
"Ninja skills," Kakashi replied. I nuzzled his arm, digging myself deeper into his side. So silly. But that was one of the things I loved about him.

"Okay,"

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Outside

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Even if the world ignites into flames

You'll be right here by my side

And as it burns away

You smile at me and say that

Not even death could take me away from you

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

The familiar mechanical bleeping of my alarm clock woke me up. For a minute, I thought it might signal the start of a normal morning, when I could get up and dress and shower and eat and get to work on time. Then maybe I could have a normal day, preferably full of students who behaved properly and productive work.

Then I remembered that anything along those lines was unlikely for a while.

First of all, I was on the wrong side of the bed. I couldn't reach my alarm clock, and the insistent beeping continued, too far away for me to simply reach over and hit. Kakashi's body was in the way, curled around me like I was some kind of living, breathing teddy bear. I wasn't complaining, though. It was quite a lovely way to wake up.

It was that funny feeling when I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to be laughing or crying. Not because I was overwhelmingly happy or sad, but because I was elated and terrified all at the same time and I didn't quite know which I should allow to take over. I could have grinned or sobbed, both in complete silence. The quiet was important somehow.

I shut my eyes and realised I didn't want to open them again, because that would mean admitting that time had passed. It shouldn't move on from the dirtied, wrinkled sheets and smell of sweat and sex and the warm presence behind me.

Kakashi stirred; limbs stirring to wakefulness, nose dipping to brush against the back of my neck. I shivered at the gentle touch relaxing back into the security of his arms.

"Morning," He whispered, hand not-so-subtly slipping down my side, inching closer to my thigh. I smiled drowsily; that was nice, waking up to gently lecherous touches. I wiggled backwards, trying to rub against him in encouragement-

"Good morning," I said, forcing myself out of my dreamy, semi-conscious state. "Paws off, it's too early for that. And we have work,"

"We could have a sick day," Kakashi suggested, hand retreating to rest on my side again. I could still feel every one of those fingers, where the tips pressed lightly into my stomach and the joints curled precisely and neatly around my bare skin. Warmth radiated from them in a constant presence, gently reminding me that they were still there.

"I think it would be a bit suspicious if we both took the day off," I protested. Suspicion was the last
thing we needed, but staying in bed was very appealing.

"I'm sure I could think of something," Fingers pressed into my skin a little more, my flesh giving way to their soft pressure, and began rubbing in circles. Steady breaths danced teasingly past my ear.

"We have to go in," I said, though I didn't sound convincing even to myself. "And we have to be as normal as possible,"

"That doesn't mean I'm giving you up, though," The whisper was soft, barely audible, and I didn't know how to respond. It was all a part of that new, exciting, terrifying thing – love. The desire to keep, to protect, to treasure. It was all there, and it scared and thrilled me all at once. That didn't mean I knew how to express it properly, though.

So I settled for rules. That was always safe.

"No kissing, no touching, no nothing. Pretend I'm a woman or something," I listed.

"Can I still do this?" He said in a lower whisper, accompanied by a slowly drifting hand moving gently across my suddenly overly sensitive to rest dangerously low on my hip, just inches away from full-on indecency.

"No! That constitutes touching!" I protested weakly, though my body refused to scoot away. Though it wasn't like I was enjoying being groped so early in the morning. It was way too early for that. Or so I told myself.

"This?" Another seductive whisper, another wisp of breath caressing my ear, all accompanied by fingers that began to trail down the rounded flesh of my-

"S-still touching!" I objected. My head tipped back as one long finger slipped between my buttocks, perilously close to areas still rather tender. I couldn't deny that I enjoyed last night, and the consequences were worth it, but that didn't mean they didn't hurt somewhat. Still, the touch was neither hard or probing, just a gentle caress, illegally tender.

"This?"

I squeaked some garbled excuse before forcing myself forwards, jolting upright with a little too much force and wide eyes. It was too early. Definitely too early. And we had work, and we had to eat, and dress, and Kakashi's dogs needed feeding, and-

"We need to get up," I pointed out to no one in particular. "I don't want to get up,"

"I'll go put the coffee on," Kakashi acquiesced, though I thought I detected a smile in his voice.

I knew there was a reason he was so perfect. After dropping a single kiss on my bare shoulder, he rose from the bed and walked silently out of the room, leaving me feeling inexplicably guilty for stopping whatever the hell it was we were doing before. Maybe if it had escalated to something more, then we would have just forgotten to go to work, and then we could spend the whole day forgetting that everything seemed to be going down the drain.

But if we missed work, it was a clear strike against both of us. If it was for a genuine illness or extenuating circumstance, there wouldn't be a problem, but being frisky wasn't exactly an excuse once you passed the age of eighteen. Any flaw, any further slipup was another set of odds against us.

I forced myself to get up and out of bed, wincing as I walked. Sometime last night, I had forgotten that I had to get up and walk around in the morning. Walk around in public, where there would
be people. It wasn't going to be comfortable in the slightest, and someone was bound to notice. Since my students and most of my colleagues seemed to take pleasure in utterly humiliating me, it would no doubt be pointed out the second I stepped through the doors.

The smell of coffee wafted temptingly through the bedroom door, more than enough to wake me up fully. Not a day passed without my daily dose of caffeine, and today was no different. Poking my head around the door, I tried to sneakily spot which direction the scent was coming from without being noticed.

"Coffee?" A voice said directly next to me. I jumped about three feet in the air in surprise, turning in time to see a highly amused expression crossing Kakashi's face before he hid it behind his coffee mug.

I merely glared and retrieved my own cup of coffee. Ridiculous though it sounded, it still managed to taste better when it wasn't me preparing it. Especially so that it was Kakashi. I licked a stray drop of coffee from where it had settled on the rim of my cup, glancing sideways at him. Not satisfied, I sipped the coffee again, making a show of tracing the lip of the mug with my tongue. Two could play at early morning lasciviousness.

The corresponding knowing smile was more than enough.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Nothing to Show

oO.Oo..Oo.Oo

Some things I'll never know
And I had to let them go
Some things I'll never know
And I had to let them go
I'm sitting all alone feeling empty
oO.Oo..Oo.Oo

"No touching," I said, counting the first item on the list off on my fingers. This was important; it was a specially designed list of things we should do in order not to get in any further trouble. It was guaranteed to work.

"Right," Kakashi replied a little distantly.

"No kissing," I listed, trying my best to sound stern and authoritative, though I wasn't sure how effective it would actually be. Creating the rules had been an attempt to strengthen my resolve, and it had worked somewhat. I just wasn't sure how to enforce them properly.

"Okay," He said. I desperately hoped my rules weren't going straight over his head.

"Nothing suspicious," I recited. "Which includes playing with my hair, whispering things that make me blush, doing anything perverted, taking my clothes off-"

"I haven't tried that one yet," He pointed out, a note of excitement in his voice. "What an excellent idea,

"Absolutely not! How about we just don't talk to each other all day? Would that work?" I turned to look at him. A dark eye stared back, amused, but completely silent. "Kakashi?" He raised a hand, an all-out grin in his eye as he mimicked the students we'd be inflicted upon within the hour. "Fine, talk now. This thing starts when we get out of the car,"

"Perfect," Before I could react, covered lips collided with mine in a firm kiss, before drawing away. The mask stayed on. It was almost weird now, the mask returning to become a more permanent fixture, covering features I had come to know so well. It was odd to expect to see a curve of lips replaced with an expanse of black fabric instead, and it didn't feel right.

The temptation was there to reach up, slip two fingers underneath it and pull it away, but we were in a stationary car in the school car park. Anyone could walk past and see-

That thought brought me to my senses. Anyone could walk past and see exactly what they were looking to find, incriminating evidence right on display.

"Be careful," I said softly. I pulled away and covertly looked out of windows and in the mirrors for anyone nearby, grateful that there were none.

"You, too," He paused. "Love you,"
Those words never failed to stun me, and by the time I managed to think of a suitable reply, he was already gone.

After waiting a suitably short time, I followed and realised I had forgotten most of my bags. The day was already taking a turn for the worse. I walked slowly to the staff room, trying to arrive well behind Kakashi. The corridors seemed to shorten to a few measly steps long each, and the staff room door suddenly seemed a lot closer than I remembered. Yes, the day was definitely looking down.

I entered as discreetly as possible, taking an open chair somewhere near the back. The gentle mindless chatter of my colleagues filled the air as we all waited for the door to open, signalling the typically late arrival of our boss.

Eventually, a thoroughly groomed Tsunade stomped through the door, followed by an equally well groomed but significantly calmer Shizune. The babble of casual conversation instantly halted as the friendly atmosphere in the room was oppressed by her bad mood. The stiff lines of her shoulders and pinched lips told everyone everything they needed to know; she hadn't had her morning drink, and she wasn't pleased.

I silently hoped this had nothing to do with the investigators and the charges against Kakashi and me, and was just the consequence of waking up too late or the bottle being misplaced. But that wouldn't explain the neater clothing.

All eyes turned to the two women, neither sitting, instead remaining standing a few paces in front of the door. Tsunade tugged angrily at the hem of her blouse, scratching at an invisible stain, before sharply raising her head to glare at the wall opposite.

"Everyone's here? Right, listen up because this is important," She snapped. "The Department for Education is investigating two of our teachers, and by extension the whole school, for inappropriate conduct. Thus, I'm implementing a new set of restrictions recommended for us by the Department.

"First, no sex. This should be self-explanatory. We're in this mess because they-" Her eyes darted first to me, then to Kakashi, every other pair of eyes in the room following suit. "-couldn't keep their hands to themselves, and because the gods clearly hate me. No matter how adorable, sexy or hilarious it is, no sex. This also includes a ban on pornography, written, drawn, animated or photographic. Circumstances can be made if it's on a special list of literary texts or something, I can't remember.

"Second, lessons should remain on topic at all times. The personal lives of teachers and students are to remain outside of the classroom and wherever possible, out of the playground, too. Teachers teach, students learn, cleaners clean, whatever. Oh, and you might have an inspector sitting in the back of your classroom for an hour today, to monitor overall standards of teaching or some crap like that,"

"Bad language," Shizune prompted softly from behind her, clearly aware of the escalating harshness of tone.

"Yeah, no swearing. If you swear, come and see me and I'll put you all in detention or something because the Department of Education thinks we're a bunch of pre-teens who need constant supervision. There are probably more rules, but I can't remember them. It's all on the internet and on the staff notice board anyway. Dismissed,"

I let out a short breath, staring at my knees. I wasn't going to look up because I could feel Kakashi's eyes on me, and I wasn't going to give into the temptation to meet them no matter how comforting it would be. Looking could lead to talking, which could lead to being left alone, which could lead to all
kinds of things we'd get in trouble for. It was like being a teenager again, constantly being chaperoned to ensure everything stayed suitable for small children.

The loud rapping of Tsunade's heels, followed by the smaller, softer click's of Shizune's, faded as she left the room without another word. No familiar, safe chattering started again. Whatever normalcy had been created had been shattered by the vague news.

And it was my fault.

I wasn't sure how, but it was probably my fault on some level. Most of my problems seemed to stem from being too inflexible, too anxious, or too eager to worry. In fact, this was undoubtedly my fault; if I had been a little colder or more resistant, I might have stopped anything remotely inappropriate from happening in inappropriate places.

But I hadn't, and now the consequences were hanging over my head like a metaphorical anvil.

I left the staff room as quickly as I could manage without being suspicious, although that was probably impossible, refusing to meet any of the concerned eyes of my colleagues. I didn't want to hear any words of sympathy or anger over the consequences my actions had brought. I especially didn't want to look at Kakashi. No matter how laid back he managed to be most of the time, I didn't want to see a layer of concern for my wellbeing buried underneath everything when I was implicit in what could lose both of us our jobs.

The corridors were full of students. None of them seemed subdued in the slightest, though that would hopefully change once rumours got out about the presence of government inspectors. Chances were school life would continue as usual, and so it should. We were a good school, and that would hopefully come across.

I passed through morning registration as quickly as possible, anxious to get the more talkative students out from under my feet before they could do anything. I managed to avoid any real loudmouths until the second lesson, when Naruto's class arrived.

I was too tired to deal with their antics. My glares as they entered the classroom squashed any jabbering as the class took their seats, thankfully quiet for the first time in a while.

"If you could all turn to page sixty nine in your copies of the text, we can get started. Would anyone like to read?" I said, trying to cover my rising exhaustion with enthusiasm. Evidently, it didn't work; not a single hand was raised to volunteer. "Alright, I'd like Tenten to read-"

"Sensei, there's someone at the door!" Someone called from the back. I frowned at them for a moment, before processing what they said.

Someone was at the door. Someone who wasn't familiar enough with me to open the door and announce their own presence. My heart sped up; knowing my luck, it was doubtlessly a lawyer or another person affiliated with the people investigating me, come to sit in the back of my room on the day when everything would go completely wrong, and then I'd get fired and-

"Come in!" I called before I could stop myself, turning to watch a figure, clad in a sharply tailored suit, step through the door.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
I got under the grip

Between this modern hell

I got the rejection letter in the mail

And it was already ripped to shreds

"Iruka Umino?" The man asked, throwing open the door with unnecessary force. I really didn't need any more marks on my walls. Without introducing himself or waiting for a reply, he strolled through the door and sat at the back of the room, pulling a notebook and pen from his briefcase and glaring at the backs of the students heads.

"Can I help you?" I said stiffly. Most of the class had gone silent, and the few who weren't were shuffling anxiously. They knew as well as I did who this was and why they were here.

Despite the neat appearance, the suit, the briefcase and everything else, something was off. I couldn't say what, but it was something. Something was intrinsically creepy about this guy. Whatever aura he was putting out, it was bizarre and unsettling and shiver-inducing.

"I'm your investigator," He drawled. "The name's Hidan. I'm from the Department of sick fu- I mean, uh, Education. That one," A second sweep over his suit confirmed that it was not only sharp, but immaculately tailored and very expensive. Though he didn't look particularly old, his silver hair was slicked back, not a strand out of place. Someone had made an effort, though I doubted it was him, based on what I had seen and heard so far.

"May I continue teaching?" I said, my voice a touch too loud, awkward to my own ears.

"Yeah, whatever," He shrugged and scribbled something down.

"Okay, let's get back to the text. Who can tell me what the author meant by this?" I tried to teach completely normally, but it was difficult. I could feel eyes on me the whole first hour, and then all through the second hour. It shouldn't have been any different; having students pay close attention to what I was saying was routine, and even having my lessons sat in on by other teachers wasn't completely odd or outrageous. But this was somehow odd.

I turned my back on the class, writing something across the board. Eyes bored into my back. I turned around again, but only the vague and vacant eyes of my class stared back. The investigator was noting something down.

The lesson continued as usual for another few minutes. Whenever I turned my back, I felt uneasy. There was something about this man that made me…unsettled. I didn't feel safe in my own classroom with my back turned. The air was too close, despite the cold temperature outside, and the skin on the back of my neck tingled constantly.

I bit my lip and carried on, sure it was all just in my head. It wasn't like anything was going to happen, right?
"…which brings us onto our next topic. The presentation of racism in-" I began, stopping when a hand lifted in the back row. "Yes?"

"Can I go to the nurse? I…I don't feel well," A small voice called. The girl it belonged to shuffled in her seat nervously; I knew her name, but it escaped me all of a sudden. She fidgeted uncomfortably, tugging on a long strand of blonde hair, eyes fixed on the front.

"Of course," I replied, taking pity on her. Her face was pale, and she looked exactly like I felt. Maybe it wasn't just me. My eyes glanced around the room for a second, taking in similarly unsettled looks on the faces of my other students. Whatever it was, no one was happy to here. "Take your things with you if you don't think you'll be coming back,"

"Thank you," She said. Her voice was too loud, a note of obvious relief ringing through it.
"Thanks," She repeated, hastily shoving things into her bag and practically running out of the door.

Maybe if I walked out of the door, I would feel safe again. It wasn't that far, just a few steps to my right and I'd be gone. From there I could go anywhere. The staff room wasn't far. People who didn't know the school might have trouble finding it, therefore that creepy, crawling, tingling sensation would be gone. Better yet, Kakashi's classroom was close, too. Since I seemed to be the focus of this investigator,

As the door clicked shut, I turned my attention back to teaching. No matter how much I wanted to – run away – which I obviously couldn't do, I had to carry on. This was a test, and I had to pass it somehow. With my eyes firmly on the tables in the front row, I began again.

"Okay," I said, trying to fix a smile to my face. "The presentation of racism in Hamlet. Can anyone tell me what is unusual about-"

"Aren't we studying Othello?" A student called out. I could have slapped myself. My mind was completely bent out of shape, and there was no way I could focus on my lesson properly. That meant the students would suffer because of my inability to deal with this properly. Guilt twisted its way into my stomach. If their grades dropped because of this-

"Oh, of course. Silly me, can anyone tell me what is unusual about the presentation of racism in Othello, then?" Not a single hand was raised, and I was met by various sets of blank eyes. 
"Animal imagery is used throughout the play, but often used towards the character of Othello to be…"

I picked my train of thought up again and rambled about themes for a while, setting the class generic written work. It was getting increasingly hard to concentrate with that glare on me. I leaned on the corner of my desk, reading over the annotations scrawled in my copy of the play, shooting glances over the top of the book to watch the class. They were behaving abnormally well, if a little subdued. Even the keenest of contributors seemed less enthusiastic. It definitely wasn't just me, then.

At last, the bell rang. Never before had I been so happy to end a lesson. Neither, apparently, had most of the students, who packed their things up and walked out of the classroom in a record time. A few didn't even bother to pack away, just slinging their things into their arms and hurrying after their faster friends to the safety of the corridors, the library and the playgrounds.

I blinked twice. Sometime while the students had been evacuating the room as if it was on fire, Hidan-no-surname had moved to stand in the gap between two desks. Not giving full names seemed to be a new thing among government investigators and lawyers. His tie had slipped down and his top button had come undone, but instead of looking casual it looked almost threatening, a deliberate flaunting of the rules, fully knowing that I could do nothing about it.
"Can I help you?" I asked, my copy of Othello slipping from between my fingers to the desk. I resisted the temptation to pick it up and hold it in front of me like a shield. Maybe literary works could go some way to warding off whatever evil aura he was emitting. "I'm afraid I don't have another class to teach for twenty minutes, but I'm sure-"

"Look, between you and me, I don't give a fuck about all this shit. I'm just doing my job; you're just doing your job, same shit day in day out. You're all fucking damned anyway, so-"

"Wait, what?" I said incredulously. Who the hell was this guy? "Damned?"

"So I'm not going to report anything really fucking suspicious. The way I see it, you're a boring-as-fuck schoolteacher who wouldn't hurt a bloody fly. My partner, however, is the meanest son of a bitch you'll ever meet, and he's been watching your man like a hawk. Good fucking luck getting out of this shit," Hidan-no-title-no-last-name grinned creepily. I resisted the urge to wince. There was far too much pleasure in that smile. I may not have been the best teacher ever or the nicest human being ever, but there was no reason to take that kind of sadistic glee in this messed up situation.

"Thanks," I replied slowly, then paused for a second. "I think,"

"Not my fuckin' problem, bitch,"

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
The longest break I had ever experienced in my entire career. I wasn't a physical addition of minutes, but it felt like hours crawled by in the time I spent sat at my desk, head resting on my upturned palm. Normally, I would have welcomed an extra couple of minutes to rest and prepare for the next lesson, but I couldn't focus on the papers in front of me. I should have been reading over whatever it was I was supposed to be teaching the upper sixth next, but my mind was elsewhere.

I flipped the paper over with my free hand, hoping something on the back would be able to hold my attention. There, in the top left hand corner of the page, was a tiny doodle. Above the immaculately drawn boxes and short pen strokes of my handwriting, completely out of place on my normally very neat lesson plan.

I smiled, and then frowned. It was certainly distracting.

It wasn't the tiny picture itself that was distracting; it was more what it symbolised. A few months ago, the margins of my lesson plans were untouched, clear from doodles, and completely blank save for when I needed extra space. Letting my mind wander enough for my hand to move on its own to draw of its own accord didn't happen frequently enough. But there it was, marring my otherwise perfect page. Was that it? Some kind of bizarre cosmic metaphor for what the last couple of months had been? It certainly didn't feel like months. It felt like days, hours, sometimes. Too quick, too sudden, too out of place.

I seized a pen; nib poised to scribble the offending doodle out of my lesson plan for the rest of eternity, and then paused. It wasn't a bad thing to doodle. In fact, some people did it all the time. They got really attached to their little drawings, and even had one they liked to go back to over and over again.

Okay, I was going way over the top with ridiculous metaphors.

I flipped the plan over, specifically not looking for anything out of place. If I could manage the first two hours of pseudo-interrogation and torture, then I could manage another two. Then it would be lunch time, and I could casually go to the staff room and just casually happen to casually bump into Kakashi in a completely casual and unromantic way. Or not. It was probably better not to be seen together all day or indefinitely until the investigators left.

The investigator who had been creepily sitting in my room for the last two hours had mentioned his
partner. Would they have some kind of good cop-bad cop routine going on? If so, I really, really hoped I had gotten the bad cop. How much worse could it get?

Worse still, the other inspector had been inflicted upon Kakashi. If either of had done something – I had no idea logically what – that could be written into some kind of report, then we were doomed. More specifically, Kakashi was doomed and I was doomed by association. I could only be grateful that this whole thing hadn't gotten out to the press. I could already imagine the headlines, and none of them were good. *Shameless Teachers Shock School.* Uncreative tabloids would love another excuse to wreck lives while making quick cash.

I carefully put the paper back on the desk, smoothed it over one, and then let my head fall forward with a *thump.* This close, I couldn't see what the hell was written on it. It was all out of focus.

There was probably a way out of all of this. If I broke our relationship off now, I might be able to escape unharmed.

*Thump.*

I shouldn't be thinking like that. It was cruel and unfair. I couldn't do that to another human being, especially Kakashi. That would be unbelievably hurtful

*Thump.*

I shouldn't even be able to think like that. If I loved him, surely I wouldn't even consider leaving him to save my own skin.

*Thump.*

Maybe I was just a horrible, horrible person. Or maybe I was normal. Or maybe I just didn't-

*Thump.*

No, I wasn't even going to consider the possibility that I didn't love him. Sure, I couldn't say it out loud. It still made me feel kind of shaky to think it, but at least I could think it. And he knew I loved him. Probably. Just because I couldn't express it with words, despite being an English literature teacher, didn't mean I didn't.

*Thump.*

Throughout all my worrying, I hadn't bothered to really look at the doodle. Sure, it was still there, but it was a picture after all. I flipped the paper over again, fixing my eyes on the splodges and lines of ink that somehow conglomered into the shape of an eye. It wasn't just any old eye, it was a specific, familiar eye, and it stared back out of the page with a distant expression. Yet, despite the distance, I could see everything in it; sadness and joy and hope and fear.

I rubbed a hand over my own eyes. Of all the things I could have drawn, I had to draw that. I had to draw something that would serve as a constant reminder that I wasn't alone in all of this for better and for worse. My actions had consequences, and most of them would directly affect the owner of the eye I had drawn. Everything I could prompt from that eye was drawn out in front of me; I could cause every one of those emotions and more. To know I had that kind of power was almost frightening.

Then again, Kakashi had exactly the same kind of power over me. If he left me over this, I would be devastated. If we made it through this, I would be overjoyed. Every time I saw him, I hoped for the best, and every time I walked away I was afraid. It was terrifying.
I let my head fall back to the table, full of silly thoughts of sitting on imaginary porch swings in imaginary houses with imaginary dogs around our ankles, holding hands and being boring old men together. No, I’d be a boring old man and Kakashi could be the interesting one with all the cool stories and-

I wasn’t supposed to think like that, not when the future was so up in the air. Would he even want me after all this was over, after all the trouble I caused? I would still want him, but that wouldn't be enough for him to stay. He had to want me, too. Going back to being alone after all is said and done would be horrible and lonely.

Now I was just being ridiculous, digging up abandonment issues I had buried after my parents died. I lifted my head and let it fall again and again, pain building up into what would hopefully be a nice, distracting headache.

I only stopped when someone nearby cleared their throat. I shot up guiltily; embarrassed that someone had caught me doing something so stupid.

"Iruka Umino," A voice spoke from somewhere above my head. I stared forward into their chest; another equally well-tailored suit and immaculate shirt greeted me, signifying the arrival of another unknown.

"Y-yes?" I replied, trying not to sound like an idiot. I already clearly looked like one. I probably had a huge red mark on my forehead from where I had been hitting it on the table.

"I knocked. You didn't hear, since you were so busy," Not a hint of a laughter seeped into his voice. That alone was kind of unsettling. "I'm the second investigator. My partner, Hidan, may have mentioned me. I am Kakuzu, and I will be sitting in on these next two lessons,"

"Alright. Please, take a seat at the back," I said as formally as I could, struck by how tall this guy was. Taller than the last one, but with the same kind of disturbing aura. He walked with the same kind of power but a different kind of self-assurance to the first man, a strange contrast if they were partners. I didn't know much about law, but I thought people working together had to be somewhat compatible.

It was probably too much to judge based on walks alone.

"I hope my partner acted completely – appropriately. Anything he did or said should be ignored. He is a complete imbecile at times," A hint of apology laced Kakuzu's voice, though anger and even weariness were present. They were definitely colleagues, then.

"Oh, I understand. We can all get a little-

"Let's not make this personal. It's just business, after all," He said quickly, taking Hidan's former seat. A notebook and pen appeared from nowhere, attentive eyes fixed on me, waiting for the students to arrive and the lesson to begin.

"Okay," I said, my voice drowned out by the bell. It was going to be another long two hours.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
The second I woke up, I knew something was wrong. For one, I was fairly certain that I hadn't gone to bed without pyjamas on, and I was also fairly certain that I hadn't gone to bed nine months pregnant.

I took a deep breath. There was probably a normal, reasonable, logical explanation for all of this. I took another deep breath. And then I opened my mouth.

"Kakashi!" I screeched. My own voice was horribly grating, several octaves higher than I remembered it being the night before.

The lump in the bedding beside me moved. It shuffled a little, faint mumblings coming from underneath the freshly laundered duvet. That was a good reminder, actually; I needed to get up and make a full breakfast before Kakashi went to work. I, of course, would sit around at home and knit or something. Knitting was suddenly very appealing.

Impatient, I reached over and pulled down the quilt, revealing my stunning, immaculate, Adonis-like, statuesque, perfect husband. I wasn't quite sure when we had gotten married – probably about the same time I had gotten pregnant – but I was fairly certain we were married.

A single dazzling eye peered out from between inexplicably dark lashes. My heart instantly melted. There was something about that look, about that gleam, that made me want to swoon.

"Ohayō," he mumbled. I wasn't quite sure why he was speaking Japanese, but I still understood perfectly.

"Why aren't you awake? You need to be at work in-" I checked the clock. "-half an hour and I still haven't swept the house, cooked breakfast, darned your socks, cleaned the windows, washed the car, tended the garden, fed the dogs, conducted the Bournemouth symphony orchestra, ironed your shirts, polished your shoes, prepared your hand-made home-cooked bento-"

"I let you sleep in, so you could have a rest," He said in a manly yet completely tender and loving way, caressing my stomach. "You're always so isogashī these days, and I think you should put your feet up more before our identical triplets arrive,"

That was a thought. I didn't want to go into premature labour or something – it might actually advance the plot forward somewhat, not to mention the question as to where the babies would actually come out of. The thought sent a shiver down my spine, quickly alleviated by another glance from Kakashi's glorious, hypnotising eye. It probably wasn't important.

"But your work is so important! You shouldn't have to do something like this for little old me!" I protested futilely, yet knowing there was no point in protesting. I was basically woman now, so I might as well fill my role as fifties' house wife as well as possible.

"As much as I love my job, you'll always come first, my love," He planted a loving and sweet yet totally passionate kiss on my full lips, a simple expression of deep emotion. "Besides, I'm not looking forwards to today. Naruto is coming on heat again,"

"What? Again?" I gasped.

"Yep, and Sasuke can't keep his paws off him. Literally. Kami, who thought nekoboys were a good idea in public schools?" Kakashi remarked, once again showing off how incredibly intelligent he
was. Who else would have thought of that flaw in public schools? I wasn't entirely sure why he wasn't running the government, being as smart as he was. Since I was just a regular school teacher (currently on maternity leave) I couldn't possibly ever compare. It was a miracle he'd even want me!

"Honey, you know Naruto is a kitsuneboy, not a nekoboy! There's a difference. If Tsunade heard you say that."

"I'd be up to my neck in enormous cleavage, but there's nothing I can do about that," I grimaced, picturing the enormous globes of flesh than hung from Tsunade's chest. Being one hundred percent gay, I couldn't help but hold a certain distaste for such things, but I couldn't help but notice how huge and wobbly and soft and jiggly they were. Naturally, I didn't want anything to do with them. No boobs for me. I was all about penis.

"But still-" I protested again, before a small, rippling pain passed through my swollen belly. I gasped, clutching both hands to my huge baby bump. "Oh my Kami, the baby is coming!"

"Oh Kami, I'll call an ambulance-"

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

I woke up with a gasp, one hand on my thankfully flat stomach, the other reaching for the bedclothes. Still breathing hard, I ripped them back, calming down a little when I didn't feel the need to describe Kakashi with any superfluous adjectives. My finger was also thankfully absent of impossible wedding ring.

"Ruka?" Kakashi mumbled sleepily. I felt a little guilty for disturbing him, but the relief at reality was overwhelming. "What's the matter?"

"Just…just a weird dream, that's all," I whispered, lying back down. Thank God shit like that didn't actually happen.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
One More Try

I know I'm a mess and I wanna be someone
Someone that I like better
Can you help me forget?
Don't wanna feel like this
Forever

The second investigator was, in many ways, better than the first. I didn't get the feeling that I was about to be murdered imminently, and I couldn't see the walls spattered with the blood of my students in my mind's eye, so that was an improvement. He swore less, too, on the single occasion he spoke between classes. That was a bonus.

The downside to all of that was that I had less to focus on, so my mind wandered. Instead of staying in the classroom, fixed on whatever topic or text the class was studying and I was supposedly teaching, it was a walk down a couple of corridors and through a few doors. Focusing on the lesson was completely necessary; I had no excuse, and I couldn't afford not to focus when it was so vital that I appeared to be an excellent teacher in order to escape whatever the hell it was I was being charged with, but it was so difficult. Not knowing what was happening across the school was so distracting.

That was how I reached my conclusion: my job wasn't my first priority anymore.

With that thought in mind, I threw myself headlong into the final two hours before lunch, forcing words out of my mouth in a voice that was gratingly false to my own ears. The amount of homework I set the two unfortunate classes was perfect, I covered the content I meant to, and they all walked away with a little more knowledge in their heads then they had before they entered. Mission accomplished.

Investigator-only-known-as-Kakuzu said something to me on the way out. I barely heard it. I think I followed him to the door, an alien smile fixed on my face as I waved him out as politely as possible.

And then I locked the door.

It was for both of our sakes. It was to make sure no-one came in and I didn't leave. If I couldn't leave, then I couldn't do anything stupid or incriminating on the other side of the door. If no one came in, they couldn't do anything incriminating on this side of the door. If I could keep myself out of the way of every other living being for the lunch hour, I could avoid courting controversy.

The time alone crawled by. Every minute seemed to last much longer than minutes should reasonably be allowed. As a result, I managed to do far more marking than I should have been able to within one hour. I barely noticed when my registration group filed in. I barely even noticed my final class. The students seemed to have decided to take pity on me and behave well for once.

I packed up in silence, left the classroom in silence, and waited in the cold by Kakashi's car in
silence. My wrist ached in silence, the snow was silent, and the non-existent wind was silent. The only noise for a good two minutes was the click of the lock of the car doors. Even Kakashi's footsteps were silent.

The silence stalked the both of us during the drive home. It followed like some kind of miserable cloud, only passively malevolent. I couldn't bear to break the silence with words neither of us wanted to hear. Or at least words I assumed neither of us wanted to hear. Today had been too stressful and quiet company was all that I needed, and I hoped it was enough for Kakashi, too.

The small space of the car was somewhat relaxing. The gentle rumble of the engine, the smell of car and dog and Kakashi was settling. I could almost pretend that today hadn't happened. Flash back to a month ago, and driving home wouldn't have been some kind of deep relaxation exercise. My students would have been noisy and annoying, but that was standard. My colleagues might have been vaguely annoying. Tsunade would have been amusingly drunk.

Remembering normality dragged a note of happiness back into my mind. It wasn't quite so silent inside my own head, but I could half-imagine the radio playing or an inane conversation happening. We didn't talk enough. I'd have to rectify that at some point.

Back inside the warmth of the block of flats, the scratching coming from behind Kakashi's door tugged at too many heartstrings to ignore. Instantly mobbed by dogs, it was easy to forget to talk. Skittering claws and panting breath filled the quiet until they calmed down and settled for milling around our feet in the kitchen, bags and bundled coats shoved to the side next to old packing boxes that no one had gotten around to putting away or throwing out.

"Was today rough?" I said, breaking the silence, a little anxious to return to the nice picture of normal inside my head.

Instead of a straight reply, he turned away and looked out of the window. The sky darkened, though lighting from lampposts streets away illuminated the city, painting everything outside simultaneously warm and cold.

"I'm sorry," He said at last. He didn't turn back to me, though. I couldn't see his reflection in the glass, but his face was still fixed on the city outside. Half-visible lines of tension worked their way through his shoulders

"For what?" I asked.

"This is my fault. If I hadn't kissed you-" A short sigh broke the sentence. "Hell, if I hadn't pursued you, none of this would have happened. You wouldn't be in this mess, and you would still have been happy to go on like before, and-"

"No! Stop saying that. I don't care about any of that. I don't care about 'what ifs', I don't regret a thing," I protested, taking a step forward. My shoes were noisy on the tiling, his shoulders moving almost imperceptibly inwards and forwards.

I bit my lip; I didn't know what to do. It was usually the other way around. I would freak out or panic or break down, and Kakashi would know how to make it better. I didn't know how, though, and I certainly didn't want to make it worse. I decided to keep a little bit of distance, just to see if this would blow over or something. It didn't look likely.

"But if I was gone, you wouldn't be in this situation. You wouldn't be stressed or worried or-"

"I don't care. I…don't care. About all of that, at all," I whispered. I wasn't sure why I was
whispering, but he probably still heard. Then I forced myself to speak louder. "It doesn't matter,"

"Sometimes, I wonder if it would matter,"

"If what would matter?"

"If I just – left. If I went away for a while," The empty boxes lined up against the wall didn't seem so empty anymore. "If it would matter if I packed my things and left. I don't think I'd really be missed, since I'm pretty much an outsider still, and I haven't made much of an effort to be liked recently. Hell, I don't like me very much at the moment," Kakashi's voice was heartbreaking. It took every ounce of my self-control not to close the gap between us and wrap him in my arms and never let go ever. "Or if I-"

"Yes! Yes, it would matter! It would matter because none of those plans include me," Self-control and restraint be damned, I practically ran across the kitchen and collided almost painfully with his back. "I'd mind if you left. I didn't fall in l-love with you so you could run away from me,"

I let my fingers gingerly trail up and down Kakashi's arms in what I hoped was a comforting gesture. Since he was taller, I settled for nuzzling the back of his neck. No matter how hard I tried to remember what my mother had done to comfort me, I couldn't remember a thing. But this was different. Comforting a child and comforting the man you love are pretty different.

"Even if I cause you so much trouble? Even if I might be the end of your career? Would I still matter then?" Vibrations radiated backwards through his back into my chest, and I pressed myself forward furiously, hoping the barrier between our beings might suddenly evaporate. I wasn't good at this. He was hurting and I couldn't do anything to help but talk.

"You're not getting rid of me that easily," I protested. In a weird attempt to prove my point, I tightened my arms to try and trap him, but he spun around easily and captured me instead. I didn't mind. I was more than content to stay caught.

"How about-" Kakashi started.

"No. Stay. Quiet now," I commanded, closing my eyes and relaxing against him. I almost cried with relief when I felt him do the same.

"'kay," He said simply. "If that's what you want,"

"It is," I smiled, eyes opening as his nose nestled in my hair. "Hey, Kakashi?"

"Hmm?"

"I love you," I almost giggled. Of all the inappropriate times to giggle, this was the worst. But I couldn't think of a better way, other than with a jaw-splitting smile, to show how happy saying that made me feel.

"I love you too," His arms tightened around me. For once, the moment couldn't possibly have been long enough, ever. "Where do we go from here?"

"We keep going, I think," I said softly. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure that's how it goes,"

"When did you get so incredibly smart?" A smile crept back into his voice, and life suddenly seemed a little more bearable. For both of us.

"I've always been this smart. You were just distracted by my amazing personality or something," I
retorted.

"That or your amazing-"

"Not in front of the dogs!" I yelped loudly, cutting him off and clamping my hands over the closest pair of furry ears.

"Oo.Oo..Oo..Oo
Come Undone

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Hold on baby you're losing it

The water's high you're jumping into it

And letting go and no one knows

That you cry buy you don't tell anyone

That you might not be the golden one

And you're tied together with a smile but you're coming undone

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

I was doing my best to be up-beat and cheerful. A set of happiness regulations were forming in my mind: no mention of work, no mention of other human beings, no mention of the investigation, et cetera. It all condensed in Kakashi's kitchen, where 'enforced happiness' easily equated with trying to make dinner.

It was all an act, of course. My hands quivered as I held a jar of pre-made pasta sauce up to the light, reading the expiration date of its contents. Kakashi broke an egg into a bowl with too much force. Any slip or blunder was either ignored or followed by a flurry of furious apologies. It was almost comical.

It was two weeks past the expiration date. I tossed the whole thing in the bin.

"Do you like raspberry pavlova?" I randomly said. The words just slipped from my mouth in an attempt to fill the quiet otherwise filled by industrious cooking.

"I haven't had it in years," Kakashi replied, pausing for a second before continuing. "An old friend of mine used to make it. She did this thing with the raspberries – yes, I like it,"

"Old school friend?" I asked, opening a cupboard, a little surprised that Kakashi was voluntarily talking about something from his past. It wasn't just me making an effort to be somewhat normal. Despite his somewhat dreamy tone, I kept my eyes fixed on the cupboard I was rifling through.

"Old everything friend. We knew each other as kids, went to the same school, ended up at the same university," He paused. I sneaked a look, meeting his eye for a second then looking away again. "Then she died. Car accident. Her whole life was over, just like that,"

"Oh. I'm sorry; I shouldn't have brought it up." I apologised, rising onto my toes, pretending to try and see into the back of the cupboard. Honestly, I could already see the back. I just didn't want to look at him in that moment.

"It's okay, really," He said. "It's been a long time,"

"Did - did you like her?" I questioned. A worm of guilt instantly squirmed through my stomach. It sounded horribly inappropriate, even inside my head, and I wished I could take it back. Before I could say anything, he answered.
"No, I didn't," He replied somewhat coldly. "That was the reason she was driving that night,"

"It wasn't your fault. You didn't make her get in that car, and though I don't know all the details-" The generic words of comfort tumbled from my mouth before I could stop them, delivering the same spiel I'd heard a thousand times myself. As soon as I'd said it, I regretted it. Not trying to comfort him, but the way I'd said it, and what I'd said. It was so cold and disconnected. Like a stranger trying to offer empty reassurances to someone they'd just met.

"Save me the lecture, 'Ruka. I heard it a million times from my old teacher, and-"

The sharp ring of the telephone cut him off, and for the first time I was grateful to whoever was calling to interrupt my cooking. Letting out a breath I didn't know I was holding, I closed the cupboard and walked towards the phone, perched on an end table in the next room.

"I'll get it," I said quietly, already half way there. I reached for the handset too quickly, almost knocking it out of its cradle, but grabbing it at the last minute.

"Good evening, Kakashi! Or is it Iruka? Or is it one of the dogs again?" Tsunade's oddly enthusiastic voice exclaimed through the phone. I narrowed my eyes; if this was some kind of bizarre call to invade our privacy again, then the interruption probably wasn't worth it.

"It's Iruka. Kakashi's kind of busy right now, but if you want to talk to him-"

"I'm here. What?" The phone was pulled from my fingers before my brain could register Kakashi's sudden appearance behind me. I turned around and frowned, a huff of protest escaping me. "Right," I stabbed the speaker mode button on the cradle with a little too much force, almost pushing the whole thing off the table, earning me a flashing eye. With the cradle re-settled, I listened in.

"-an old friend of mine – well, not old old, he's barely older than the kids you teach, but he's one of the best, and he's got a good head on his shoulders. I asked Jiraiya to see what he could do, and this was the best he could manage," Tsunade said animatedly. She didn't sound like she'd hit the alcohol yet, which was a rarity. Whatever she was talking about was probably important.

"I'm sorry, who's this we're talking about?" I said loudly, hoping my voice would carry and the noise would mask any irritation I felt.

"Ah, Iruka's back! Great, now I can talk to both of you at the same time. Marvellous invention, the speaker phone. I just got the details through on the likely dates for your hearing. Those two creepy bastards we had in today did the bulk of the investigation together, so you should be fine until next week, when more creepy bastards are coming in," She paused, waiting for either one of us to fill the silence. Neither of us spoke. My eyes were fixed on the plastic cradle, and I had no idea where Kakashi was looking. Probably away from me. "Anyway, you have the rest of this week, all of next week, and then the semi-formal court thing is the Tuesday after that. Got it?"

"Court thing? How formal is semi-formal? I wasn't aware this would ever reach the courts," I said, finding my voice at last.

"It's just some kind of conclusion thing, all a big formality before the hearing. I just called to give you the dates; I want to talk to you both in person tomorrow after school, so we can go over your strategy for the hearing," A dull clinking echoed through the phone, probably an indication the booze had emerged. "Jiraiya's home tonight, so I think I'm going to - ahh!"

There was a rustling and fumbling, breath on the other end of the phone thankfully muffling whatever was going on, before the line cut off and the dial tone sounded. We both stood there in
silence, blinking.

"That was...terrifying," Breaking the silence, I forced myself to look away from the phone. That decidedly awkward end to the conversation had left me considerably less tetchy.

"The mental image of Tsunade being fondled by Jiraiya is burned into my mind for the rest of my life. There is literally nothing scarier," Kakashi said in a monotone. I knew exactly the feeling. The thought of two people of slightly advanced age, doing bedroom-type things – worse still, Tsunade was our boss. That was awkward as hell.

"How about Jiraiya and Orochimaru?" I suggested casually. I turned to look at him, a small smirk gracing my features. The corner of his lips turned up in response, and a weight lifted from my whole being.

"At least they were young when that all happened," He replied.

"How do you know that?"

"Genius intuition," I pouted at his response, holding out my hand for the phone and replacing it back in its cradle.

A wave of fatigue washed over me. Now I wasn't busy feeling tense, I was suddenly very tired. Tsunade's words were starting to sink in. We were going to court. The investigation was coming to a close. Our fate was being decided within three weeks.

"It's really happening, isn't it?" I said blankly.

"Yeah," He replied, equally flat. "I suppose it is,"

We stopped and stared at each other for a second, all thoughts of other people draining from our minds and all the humour wiped from our eyes. Instead, they filled with silent apology and something else a little more unreadable.

I couldn't say who made the first move, but it was like that first kiss. Completely unexpected and spontaneous, an electrical connection of lips that shocked and thrilled and scared me all at once. Freezing and melting again as one of his hands rested on my shoulders, pushing me back into the end table. I retaliated by twisting my fingers into his hair. There really was no need; I wanted this. I didn't care how far it was going to go, I just wanted to be close and not talk, to make up for being insensitive and to let him make up for being a jerk. It was so much easier to let my body do the talking.

My hair tie pinged loose as the elastic snapped under his fingers. I had barely noticed his hand in my hair; all my focus was on our lips, but that brought my attention to the rest of me. My mouth opened of its own accord, legs spreading into a perfect V as I perched back on the table, clothing nothing but a thin, mildly irritating boundary between us. He was pushing back too, our combined, erratic rhythms creating a powerful friction that was all too good on my steadily stiffening member.

"Ah!" I exclaimed as his hand strayed dangerously close. My head flew back involuntarily, overbalancing momentarily. All that kept me from falling off, squashing the phone in the process, was Kakashi's firm grip on my waistband and my legs encircling his waist.
"Floor?" He suggested. I nodded vehemently.

"Floor," I agreed as he pulled me up. The phone clattered to the floor anyway, but neither of us really cared at that point. Back on safe, stable ground, we started again. It was all movements and heat and panting breath, everything slipping away into the obscurity of physical pleasure.

When we were both finished, we didn't move. I just lay on the floor, Kakashi curled around me, fingers intertwined.

"Sorry," He mumbled in my ear, nuzzling my hair. "For being all out of sorts today,"

"'s not your fault. I'm sorry for being awful," I said. Even though I was too hot, I snuggled closer. I could deal with a bit of heat to be closer. "And for giving the worst love confession in the history of man,"

"It wasn't that bad. I liked the spontaneity," A reassuring kiss was planted on top of my head. I repositioned myself to look at his face, watching his expression closely. Contentment was evident in the subtle curve of his lips and closed eyes. I decided that was an expression I liked. If making out on the floor did that, we'd have to do it more often.

"Love you," I said softly, watching one eye open. A twinkle of understanding and happiness brightened the normally dull grey. That was another expression I definitely liked.

"I know," I closed my own eyes, and let myself relax. Maybe everything wasn't going to hell, after all.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Cease

Don't say I'm out of touch
With this rampant chaos – your reality
I know well what lies beyond my sleeping refuge
The nightmare I built my own world to escape

I was already stressed from work. I did not need the added stress of this talk.

"Will we need a lawyer?" Kakashi said. We were both seated, a rarity for being in Tsunade's office. Normally, no one was in there long enough to need to sit down, and on the rare occasions it was necessary the meeting rarely went well. Most of the time it was because its usual occupant was too out of it to conduct a full-length meeting, or the visitors ended up escaping with stapler flying after them.

This was a more serious meeting. All bottles had been removed from the room, and the papers on the desk had been straightened and visibly sorted. Tsunade sat behind her desk, hands clasped in front of her. Jiraiya stood behind her, his presence visibly pacifying her.

"Do you want a lawyer?" Tsunade replied, unfolding and refolding her hands. Her nervous gesture made me twitch a little, my own fingers digging into the stiff wood of the chair I was perched on. It probably wasn't a good sign if Tsunade was nervous.

"Would it help to have a lawyer? Would we have a better chance with a lawyer than without?" Kakashi asked back. I kept my eyes on Tsunade's hands as they twitched back and forth, probably craving a glass to wrap around.

After a second, she looked down at her hands, stilling them on the desk. Jiraiya's hand came to rest on her shoulder in a comforting gesture. Her head came up again, her eyes suddenly clear.

"To be honest, it's all a bit up in the air at this point," She said. "Gaara won't let anything happen unless there's solid evidence against you, so if they have proof you've done something wrong." One hand rose nervously, wrist flicking dismissively. "-not saying that you have, but theoretically, if they had something on you then you could have the best lawyer in the country and you'd still be in exactly the same situation,"

"So basically, if they have anything on us, we're doomed?" I pitched in. Despair rose in my chest; was it really so hopeless already? I dug my nails into the chair. I wasn't supposed to be thinking like that. This was going to work out. It had to work out. We had done nothing wrong.

"Unless you want to resign now," She suggested off-handedly, striking another blow to whatever minor confidence I had built up yesterday.

"What? Why would you even suggest that?" Kakashi spoke sharply, moving quickly in my peripheral vision. I closed my eyes, just listening. I couldn't look. I didn't want to see where this was going. Although I had to try to stay strong, it was like waves constantly battering against my resolve,
just waiting for my barricades to be down.

To gain any hope would be like weakening barricades, and I didn't know how much I could risk.

"It's a way out," She pointed out.

"That isn't an option," He reiterated. Papers shuffled, fabric rustled and my nails dug harder into the wood. I could feel my heart beating in my throat. "That's giving in, something neither of us are doing."

"So you've already decided that, Kakashi? Did you ask Iruka about this?" Tsunade snapped. More papers rustled, more sharply and firmly this time, but I still refused to look. Some irrational part of me was screaming that if I looked, I'd make it real. Her suggestion of resigning would become real, the investigation would become real, going to court would become real, and all the trouble it was causing me and Kakashi would become real.

"No, but-"

"Don't you think it might be a good idea to consult your boyfriend about major decisions affecting his job?" Tsunade suggested. A chair squeaked across the floor, dulled by the distance. I cracked open an eye, confirming Tsunade had stood, leaning over her desk to glare at Kakashi.

"Yes, but-" He began.

"Iruka, what's your opinion on resigning?" I looked up as she said my name, eyes wide. I blinked twice before answering.

"I-" I started, looking her in the eyes, trying to communicate what I couldn't with words. I didn't know how to express. "No, I can't do that. This school was all I had until Kakashi, but it's still important and I'm not about to just give it up. I couldn't let my students down like that,"

"Right answer," She said warmly. A smile pulled at her face "Here's what we're going to do. When you're at school, act like you did in the earlier days. That means no touching, no kissing, no sex, no nothing. I want you in briefing every morning so you know exactly what's going on in school, and if anything happens that could compromise the situation happens, come and see me immediately. Don't make me check on you. Anything you'd like to add?"

"Don't provoke next week's investigators. We don't need the Akatsuki more deeply involved than it already is," Jiraiya continued, looking pointedly at both of us. I raised an eyebrow; like we needed reminding not to irritate sinister, important investigators.

"Akatsuki? The organisation thing?" I piped up at the mention of the Akatsuki. I had almost completely forgotten about their involvement in anything, let alone my own life. They could be operating on the moon for all I cared; I didn't see how it was relevant. Yet apparently, it was.

"Did you see the rings each investigator has been wearing?" He asked, hand falling to Tsunade's waist.

I bit my lip. My hands, still clenched around the wooden seat of the chair, inched to reach out to Kakashi. It would help calm the both of us down, I was sure of it. I could feel frustration radiating from him across the gap between us that suddenly felt like an ocean.

"No," I frowned. "I was busy teaching and trying not to do anything stupid,"

I racked my brain, trying to recall the fine details, but nothing came. Looks filled with the promise of
death and pain, swearing, bluntness...beyond that, everything kind of faded into my frenzied attempt to finish the lesson before I did something incredibly stupid and got myself fired anyway.

"They were all wearing rings with different characters on them, denoting their membership. There are a finite number of rings, all of which belong to those high up in the food chain, and we've seen three of them. There are ten rings in total, so we can assume only a small proportion of members are involved. This is a good thing, actually, since the fewer people involved the better," Jiraiya explained.

"How do you know this?" Asked Kakashi. I chanced a look at him. Whatever frustration I had felt before from him had dissipated into something more – unreadable.

"Old friend of ours used to be a ring-wearing member," Jiraiya said, Tsunade lowering herself back into her seat.

"Who?"

"Orochimaru, until that old scandal nearly burned his school to the ground," He continued bitterly, staring down into Tsunade's blonde hair. Both of his hands returned to her shoulders, rubbing gently and soothingly. "They cut their losses, but he's still got contact with them, I bet,"

"Scandal?" I raised an eyebrow. "I never heard about anything like that,"

"Some old allegations about an inappropriate relationship with a minor," Tsunade said, going back to clasping and relaxing her hands. She sighed once, before looking up and smiling wistfully. "It was years ago and it's been mostly forgotten by now, but we still remember it,"

I was suddenly reminded of the age of this couple. What would it be like, to grow old with Kakashi? To end up boring and ancient, no grandchildren to speak of, retired together until both of us ended up in the ground. I had a feeling it would be good.

"Yes, unfortunately," She said, standing again and waving her hands, shooing us out of the room. Kakashi and I both stood, letting ourselves be waved out. Getting out of the room might help. "Go home, eat, go to bed, do whatever, and I'll see you tomorrow in briefing,"

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Simple

oO..Oo..O.oO..O

And the sun will set for you

The sun will set for you

And the shadow of the day

Will embrace the world in gray

And the sun will set for you

oO..O.oO..Oo

It was about three in the morning, according to the glowing letters on the alarm clock I could barely focus my eyes on. It wasn't the familiar green glow I was used to; instead, darker red digits shone in a different font through the darkness. I stared and stared, unblinking, until my eyes teared up and I was forced to blink, but the tears didn't go away.

I let my hand slide loosely from in front of my chest, across my stomach and onto my side, tracking Kakashi's hand to where it rested. My fingers brushed it gingerly, not wanting to wake their owner but trying to draw comfort from their presence. The digits contracted momentarily, drawing a sobbing gasp from me as I paused. I didn't want to wake him. After a couple of seconds, I placed my hand over his. No movement, only warm skin on warm skin, the ridges of joints and knuckles and smooth fingernails all tangibly present. Bones and tendons and muscles and flesh underneath, just separated from the outside world by the smooth membrane of skin.

Tonight, it was too much. It hadn't been too much six hours ago, or six hours before that, but in the early morning darkness it was all too much. What could have been an eternity had condensed into the next two weeks leading up to the court hearing. It could be all that was left of my normal life, and I liked my life. I didn't want to change it.

This was nice. Lying in a warm bed, wrapped in the arms of my lover, safe and alone in the flat. I could almost pretend that there wasn't anything outside. The road outside could disappear, and everything beyond would just float away into the night where it couldn't find us. No more prying colleagues and students, no more work, no more sinister lawyers.

But the outside world did exist, and I wasn't sure how I was going to get up to face it again.

It was stupid to cry over it all. I was stupid to cry over it all. It wasn't worth this much, I knew, but I couldn't stop myself. The hopelessness of everything, the very idea that all this might just go away and that I might be left alone again was crushing. The firing squad had raised their guns, waiting for the command, and everything was in the line of fire.

I held my breath. If I couldn't breathe, no more embarrassing, out of place, silly sobs could escape me. I wasn't supposed to cry over something like this. I was supposed to be strong and to deal with this all like a man, to go to court and win the battle with words and prove my worth to the world and to Kakashi, instead of being an overly emotional burden.

It occurred to me how dependant I was on the school, and now on Kakashi, to be able to feel like this at the threat of losing it. My whole world revolved around my job. My life consisted of little else.
besides going to work and coming home again, and even that meant more work.

I had to breathe again. I sucked in a little air, trying to force just enough into my lungs to breathe but not enough to force out again, accompanied by tears. I brought my other hand up to my mouth, biting down on the fleshy part of my first finger to pre-emptively stifle any noises I might make.

The fingers on my other hand wove through Kakashi's. His presence behind me was a gentle reminder of what was going to go right. He was brilliant; therefore we were going to win in court. He was wonderful; therefore everything was going to be fine. He was amazing; therefore wasn't supposed to see my complete idiocy because it was embarrassing and stupid and I should have been better.

Somewhere, I registered that he loved me, therefore it shouldn't matter. But that didn't stop my next shuddering intake of breath, and it didn't stop him stirring behind me.

"'Ruka?" He whispered. I shut my eyes, forcing my head down. He didn't need to see me crying. It would be better if he could just go back to sleep, and I could just pass out eventually from exhaustion, free of any interaction. "It's the middle of the night,"

"Sorry," I whispered back, trying to keep my voice as flat and even as possible. Even still, it quaked and quavered a little. I ducked my chin down further in embarrassment. I couldn't even lie properly.

"What's wrong?" He said, propping himself up on one elbow to lean over me.

"Nothing," I replied, hoping my hair covered my face enough to cover any evidence of tears. I couldn't feel any on my cheeks, but I hoped all the same. "Just – just don't worry,"

I almost sighed in relief when he leaned back, untwining our fingers, then quickly tensed again as I realised he had moved to flick the lamp on the bedside table on. I shrunk inwards again, impossibly trying to contract into a ball so small that even microscopes couldn't see me. I didn't want anyone to see me like this.

The bed dipped as he shifted his weight back forwards. I tried to lift my hand to cover my face, but he quickly gripped my wrist and gently pulled my hand away. There wasn't any point in resisting.

"I can't help it. Is there anything I can do?" My eyes opened at the uncertainty in his voice. A face so full of worry instantly greeted me, guilt ripping through me at causing that worry and paradoxically for asking him not to feel it at the time. The temptation to reach up and wipe the worry from the line of his mouth, to replace it with anything, was almost overwhelming. But I stayed still, and tried to focus on breathing.

That didn't work either. I shut my eyes and opened them again, hoping something would have changed. I might have woken up from some kind of dream and realised that everything was just a dream. I didn't, of course, and I wasn't sure I wanted to. With that thought in mind, I shifted myself over and buried myself in his side, pressing myself as close as possible. Only the impossibly thin barrier of skin separating us, but it was still too much.

"Be here. Be alive, be warm, just stay," I pleaded. My voice was barely more than a whisper as I shut my eyes, inhaling jaggedly. "Don't ever leave me,"

I wasn't supposed to say those last four words, and he wasn't supposed to hear them.

"I won't," He whispered, kissing the top of my head before settling back down, draping an arm across my shoulders and pulling me impossibly closer. This close, nothing else existed. We could be alone like this. I didn't have to lose anything, least of all Kakashi.
"Promise?" I ventured quietly.

"Until you stop wanting me, I'll stay," He replied. My heart lurched at the words, lifting and beating almost audibly hard in my chest. That was what I wanted. He made me feel happy, and I wanted that. I could feel my lips trying to smile, my head dipping in embarrassment again, disguised as burying deeper into his chest.

"Forever, then?" I said. This close, I could feel his heart beating.

"I'll stay until I die," Kakashi whispered. "And if there's something after that, then there, too,"

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Everything I Need

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I'm only up when you're not down

Don't wanna fly if you're still on the ground

It's like no matter what I do

Well you drive me crazy half the time

The other half I'm only trying to

Let you know that what I feel is true

And I'm only me when I'm with you

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

"Get off my desk, Kakashi!" I snapped, only semi-seriously. I couldn't be angry when he had perched himself on the edge, swinging his legs back and forth like a child on a swing. Unfortunately, the part of the desk he had decided to sit on was covered in teaching notes, and I didn't particularly want them to get squashed.

"Make me, Iruka-sensei!" He replied playfully. I resisted the temptation to smack him with my copy of *War and Peace*. It didn't help that he sounded so happy; cheerfully defying me and making me smother a smile simultaneously.

"I'll give you an apple," I wasn't sure I actually had an apple, but if it would get him off my desk I'd find one. I'd make one magically appear. I'd go out and buy one.

Somehow, my defeated mood from last night had lifted. Maybe it was that final exchange before I fell asleep again, or maybe it was the prospect of a fresh day that had lifted my spirits, but I was feeling generally much better. And apparently Kakashi was, too.

"How about a kiss instead?" He asked playfully, tapping his cheek twice. "Just a little one, right here,"

"Did you completely ignore *everything* that was said yesterday? You know we can't do that. We can't risk anything right now," I chided gently. It was honestly more for my sake than his. A small part of my mind rebelliously desired to do what he asked and to blatantly flaunt the obvious and sensible guidelines from yesterday's talk.

I tapped my foot and attempted to glare down my nose at Kakashi. The height difference made it kind of impossible, but I tried anyway. It clearly didn't work; my teacher aura must have been switched off or something, because all it resulted in was a light tap on the nose and resulting giggles.

It was so childish, but it was still fun. And I wanted fun. We both needed fun.

"This is my attempt at normality. Is it making you feel better?" He said once the laughter had died down a little, both our smiles still perfectly evident.

I nodded. It was helping, really. It was nice to mess around. With the door locked, the school mostly empty but for staff and a few early students, it was like we had a whole new playground. I rode on
the exhilaration the gentle laughter brought. It would probably all dissolve once I set foot out of the room, but while it lasted it was miraculous.

"Let's just go to briefing," I said. I ran a hand back over my hair, pushing absentmindedly at the hair tie holding it all back. "Which means you have to get off my desk, right now!"

"If you insist," Kakashi shrugged once, and then hopped down. A small fountain of useful sheets of paper rained down behind him. I sighed half-heartedly, then dropped to my knees to pick them up. Despite the mess, I couldn't be annoyed or angry. It was a good excuse not to go to briefing. I didn't want to leave this room.

He joined me on the floor, helping to brush the papers into a pile. Our hands collided once or twice, drawing the expected and cliché blushes to my cheeks and the obligatory stifled laughter. It didn't stop it being kind of sweet, though. Even if it did mean that the papers got cleared up in about three times the time it should have reasonably taken, and even if the order got all messed up. It was worth it.

At last, the papers were all in one neat stack. I couldn't prevaricate any more. There wasn't an excuse not to open the classroom door and walk down it, a reasonable distance between the two of us just in case.

The corridors were noisy but strangely settling. The babble of the students was oddly comfortable; I didn't pick words out of their conversations, I just let their talk drift around me like waves in the ocean, weaving between packs of girls and boys congregating by their lockers or the radiators. I didn't look beside me, trusting that Kakashi was still right there. He had said he would be, after all.

The staff room was infinitely worse. If the corridors were full of mindless, soothing chatter, the staff room was full of sharp gossip. I wasn't sure what was just casual talk and what might actually be relevant. Tsunade was nowhere to be seen, so I made my way to the back. Kakashi followed.

Before I reached the coffee machine, Anko pounced.

"How are you two doing?" She squealed, fiddling with quick little fingers at the pendant on a cord around her neck. The caffeine had obviously kicked in. "Ooh, so no trouble in paradise? What's the news? Any happy announcements yet? Are you expecting yet, Iruka? Your skin looks fabulous, both of you! And how's-"

"We're fine, Anko. Calm down," Kakashi assured her. He flashed her a quick eye-smile, and I rolled my eyes. That would only encourage her babbling, and we'd never get away.

"Just fine? But this is so romantic! It's all the trials and tribulations of endangered love! God, I could write a novel about you two, that would be so-"

"Please, never do that. Ever," I said flatly. It was bad enough having one, possibly more, of the students write disturbing stories about us, let alone another adult. It was one thing for silly kids to write romance, another entirely for silly twenty-somethings. Still, at least Anko's illustrations wouldn't be half as detailed as Hinata's. I inwardly cringed at the memory.

I wasn't exactly sure how the situation could be described in any way as romantic, but it would possibly make a passable plot for some hack fiction. Nothing I'd want to read, anyway.

"I wonder how she'd describe me," Kakashi said, slyly directing his gaze towards me. I shifted a little nervously; "Mysterious, dashing, handsome, highly intelligent, slightly dangerous, all the makings of a traditional bad boy,"
"Dream on; you're an overgrown puppy and you know it," I replied with a snort. Although I wasn't going to dispute those other qualities, and definitely not out loud.

"The Wellspring of Love has certainly poured out its youthful Flames of Passion upon the two of you! The beauty of the relationship between two youthful men such as you is truly-" An overly loud voice announced before being cut off.

"Youthful?" An equally loud voice called back. My head throbbed a little at the volume.

"Exactly!"

"Right, if you've all finished being loud in the corner over there, I'd like to get this briefing going," Tsunade called. All the chatter ceased immediately to face the figure standing in the door. She stepped through, sat down heavily in the nearest free chair.

"Sorry! It's just that-" Anko yelled from our corner. I winced at the volume; was it really necessary for everyone to shout indoors? My stress level increased just a tiny bit more. My previous good mood was fast wearing off.

"I don't care how adorable or youthful anything is right now. Briefing first, then you can go and gossip somewhere else. Is everyone here?" She looked around very briefly, fixed a few people with a steely glare, and then started speaking again. "Good. I'd like to introduce our latest temporary addition to the scenery, Itachi Uchiha,"
Felt Real

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

I hate living without you
Dead wrong to ever doubt you
But my demons lay in waiting
Tempting me away
oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

"Uchiha? A member of Sasuke's family?" I said, mostly to myself as briefing ended. Tsunade had said little else that was relevant, and I ended up tuning her out to worry. She gave us very little information about this new man besides his name – not his role, not his affiliations, nothing. For all I knew, it might not even be his real name.

I walked forward, following the crowd. Regardless, nothing was going to happen. Both Kakashi and I had more self control than that. We were hardly sex-mad teenagers and the idea of workplace sex had become unappealing for all of eternity so slipping up again was more than out of the question.

"His older brother, if I remember correctly. He went to school here years ago, before I started teaching, then went off to do something complicated at university and dropped off the face of the Earth," Kakashi answered. I looked sideways at him; I hadn't heard him follow me.

"It will be interesting to see how Sasuke reacts, then," I replied, fixing my eyes forward again and walking a little faster. Maybe it was better if I didn't know anything about these people. Ignorance is bliss and whatnot. Then again, it was probably better to know as much as I could, to arm myself with knowledge against whatever was coming. It was hard to judge it.

"Maybe it will go well. Maybe he'll be happy to see his big brother," He suggested.

"Maybe," I said softly. Sasuke had never mentioned a brother; why would he never mention him if they got along, or if he missed him? I didn't hold any great hope.

"You don't sound convinced," He continued. "Sasuke went to Sound Academy for a few years, right? Do you know why?"

"Only from what I've overheard from students," I said, looking at him again. His eye met mine before sliding back to the corridor. We were nearly at my classroom, the corridor still swarming with students. Once we got there, all this would have to end until we were off the school site, so I savoured every second. "Better school, greater opportunities, power, et cetera. Not much else,"

We were nearly there. The familiar scuffed walls, the notice boards covered in posters with curling edges, bright borders marking where one ended and the other began. Doors with their windows and room numbers. Everything was familiar; everything was calming to my steadily fraying nerves. This wasn't going to be taken away from me. It wasn't. I wouldn't let it.

I stole another glance at Kakashi. Our eyes didn't meet this time. Instead, I took in his profile. It was familiar now – more than familiar; I had traced every line with my fingers, I knew every curve and bump and dip, each one was ingrained into my memory forever. I could still feel every inch of skin
under my fingertips. The secret knowledge of what was under that mask was thrilling; no one but us got to see that. It was our little secret.

I forced my eyes forward again, suddenly conscious that I had been looking for too long. My hands twitched. I wanted to reach out and hold his hand, but I didn't. No touching, no kissing, no nothing. Holding hands was just more temptation.

"That's the gist of it. The point, though, was to be better than Itachi. So far he's matched every single one of his grades and many of his achievements. All that's missing is-"

"Wait, how do you know all this?" I interrupted, looking back up at him sharply. My eyes narrowed; this was all awfully pertinent knowledge, considering he hadn't been teaching here all that long. I had taught Sasuke since he had arrived at this school and even I didn't know all of this stuff.

"I broke into Tsunade's records," He said casually. I almost stumbled at his words.

"What? How? They're confidential! She practically sleeps on top of those!" I half-shrieked. I could already imagine the consequences for that kind of action; immediate dismissal, unable to get another job, ruined life, et cetera. Another part of me secretly giggled. It took real courage to brave Tsunade's wrath to get that kind of information. A lot of stealth, too, I'd imagine. It was probably a very interesting story.

Unfortunately, we had reached my classroom. I seemed to have missed the bell; the fray of students was slowly diminishing as they scuttled off to their various registration classrooms, and with them fled pieces of my resolve.

"Ah, but if I told you it wouldn't be mysterious and secret," I could practically taste the playful smirk under that mask. My fingers twitched once. Would it really be a crime to just touch him once more before we had to part for the day? Was I really that co-dependent already, or was it just the strain of the situation?

Regardless, I resisted. One little anything wasn't worth risking two careers over and the sinister new Uchiha could be lurking around any corner. I rested my hand on the cold door handle, turning to face him.

"I expect an answer," My eyes narrowed. "Later," I added with a smile, earning me a little wave and the curve of an expressive eye.

As he turned to leave, I finally snapped and reached out to grab his hand. He paused, squeezed my fingers once, and then let go again. I smiled, warmth flowing up from the tingling in my fingers. It wasn't much, but it was hopefully enough to face whatever the day could throw at me.

With the smile still on my lips, I pulled the door open. All the students stopped talking stopped for a second, briefly glancing at my expression, before starting up again in full force. I didn't have the heart to shut them up.

"Only the usual suspects missing?" No one looked up to confirm it. "I'll take that as a 'yes' and mark Naruto and Sasuke in as late, then,"

A couple of students giggled, and I almost laughed along.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
Faster

I can't live in a fairy tale of lies
And I can't hide from the feeling 'cause it's right
And I go faster and faster and faster and faster for love
And I can't live in a fairy tale of lies

"Iruka-sensei! I'm sor-" Naruto yelled, pushing through the stream of students exiting my classroom. The bell had gone, class was supposed to begin imminently, and he had only just shown up. I adopted my nastiest frown.

"You're ridiculously late! The bell has already gone, so I can't mark you as present. You're going to have to register at the office-" My rant tailed off as he failed to interrupt me with some kind of cheeky comeback or pathetic whine. Instead, he looked genuinely upset. "Naruto, what's wrong? Where's Sasuke?"

"He's - not coming," He said slowly, as if he couldn't quite comprehend the words himself. He shifted nervously, picking absentmindedly at a scuff on the door frame he had paused against, wide eyes clouded with worry.

"Not coming to school, or not coming to registration?" I asked as calmly as possible. It wouldn't do any of us any good if I started freaking out. Besides, there was probably a logical and reasonable explanation for this somewhere. I just had to find it.

"Both. He won't come out of the bathroom," Naruto explained. He glanced nervously over his shoulder, eyes darting back twice before settling on me again, expressing the worry that radiated from him. All thoughts of detentions and other punishments had left my mind; this seemed like a genuinely good excuse to be late.

"Why? What's happened?"

"His brother's-" A faint beeping rang from his pocket. He scrabbled for it, pulling a slim black mobile from its hiding place. I didn't have the heart to tell him to put it away. With a single glance at the screen, he was out of the doorway and pelting down the hall. "Shit. Sorry, I have to go!" He called back to me.

"Naruto! Wait!" I called, jogging out after him only to watch him disappear around the corner. I slowed and followed, not really concentrating on where I was going. Somehow, I ended up in front of Tsunade's office.

I knocked twice, short and sharp. I had no idea why I was there. It was a stupid idea. A really, really stupid idea, and I wouldn't get anything out of it that I couldn't get out of Kakashi later, but curiosity pulled me in. I wanted to see these files for myself. Since they were so closely guarded, they had to have something worth looking at in, and there was always the chance that Kakashi had missed something important. It couldn't hurt to ask or to peek.
"Come in!" Tsunade's unnaturally cheerful voice called from inside the office. I prayed that meant she had been drinking so she'd be easier to manipulate. I didn't get my hopes up, though; the presence of a new investigator pretty much ruled that out.

"Good morning, Tsunade," I greeted her, forced smile fixed to my face. If she wasn't drunk, then I'd have to be nice to get what I wanted, despite the fact she wasn't exactly my favourite person ever, though she had been helpful recently. However, if she let me see the files, I might be forced to reconsider my opinion.

"I'd return the sentiment, but it's been anything but good," She huffed, head cradled in her hands. I almost pitied her; she looked exhausted. The thought crossed my mind that was probably how Kakashi and I looked as well. The situation was taking its toll on all of us. "I thought we had gotten rid of the bloody investigators, but they just had to send their most terrifying investigator ever to ask a few questions,"

"Questions?" I repeated. Questions didn't sound good; yet another thing for me to worry about.

"Generic, stupid, useless, intrusive questions! If they weren't who they are, I'd file a counterclaim. My own marriage has nothing to do with either you or Kakashi. How long I've had my position, the name of my predecessor, my annual income – completely irrelevant! And those eyes– but that doesn't matter. While I'm still sober, what can I do for you?" Venting seemed to perk her up a bit; she sat up straighter, hands resting on the desk.

"I need a favour. I want access to-"

"If it's to do anything illegal, you know I can't put the school in-" She cut in, eyes narrowing.

"It isn't illegal, and it might even be helpful. I want access to the personal files of a couple of students. It isn't really good practise, but I need to know all the details we have on record about Sasuke and Itachi Uchiha," I replied sharply. "I know you have them, and I need to know exactly what's going on,"

"Fine. You can have them," She said, an evil sparkle appearing in her eyes. My stomach instantly dropped. "On one condition. I want photos,"

"Please, please don't be so unreasonable-"

"What are two or three little photos of you and your boyfriend kissing for access to the Uchiha boys' personal files? Hell, I'll give you access to the whole family, including the crazy uncle. They all went to school here, mostly before my time, though,"

"Any specific requests, Tsunade? Any other humiliating things you'd like while we're on the subject?" I said through gritted teeth. This was taking things too far; could I really do something like that for information that might be completely useless? It was almost like prostitution. That thought sent a small shiver up my spine.

I resisted the urge to walk out of the room, to get away from the sheer ridiculousness of Tsunade's demand and pretend it had never been made. But if there was the chance the files could actually help, then I couldn't see another option. I'd just have to find a way to weasel out of giving her the photo.

"No, I think that will be enough," She grinned once, digging through her desk drawers to produce a tiny key. Somehow, I managed to keep a lid on my temper. "Naturally, none of these files leave the room. You were never in here, I never gave you this key, and you never touched anything. I'm going to go and nag Shizune now, so I'll be around if you really need me,"
I let myself into the tiny archives room, locked the door and leaned back against it. The whole room smelled of dust and old paper. The shelves pushed against the walls were lined with hundreds upon hundreds of thin card files of varying thicknesses, labels in varying states of decay, all arranged in chronological order.

Sasuke was easy to find. Itachi was a little harder, but his file was thicker and stood out among the others in his year. For good measure, I pulled out a couple of Uchihas from their parents' generation, along with a couple of unrelated students to check for any background events. It couldn't hurt to be extra thorough, or as thorough as possible within the hour and a half I had left.

Most of the files were dedicated to grades, all of which were perfect. Sasuke had had a couple of initial stumbles, but Itachi had been awarded the highest grade possible in all things since the very start. The notes from teachers and examiners included in the files both praised both of their obvious academic prowess, noting Itachi's natural talent and Sasuke's almost violent determination to succeed. One teacher noted that Itachi appeared to be Sasuke's role model, but that didn't explain much either. Neither of them had any kind of serious record of detentions or misbehaviour or truancy. Neither showed any kind of disrespect towards teachers, or if they had it hadn't been recorded. Neither had any kind of urgent medical issue that required a note in the file. They were both model students in eerily similar ways.

I flipped through the files of other family members, but none save for a few showed the same kind of perfection. Cousin Obito Uchiha was anomalously substandard, their father Fugaku Uchiha was talented but not quite as good as his sons, even their mother was only average. The only pattern the family seemed to show was overall good academic ability. They all finished school with excellent grades and went to top universities, which is where the files stopped.

Nothing was really helpful. All I had learned was that Uchihas did well in school. There wasn't going to be any deeply personal information in any of these files, and the only possibly useful information I could glean was that Itachi had never failed anything in his life, hence that we were still probably utterly doomed.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
The Dream

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

’Cause I need this now, and you need this too

Why should we wait on anything at all?

The way the light swims across your face

How could I dream of anything but

The real you

Yeah, the real you.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I sat tensely, steaming mug of tea cooling between my hands, as I watched Kakashi's pen scratch across another student's paper. It was odd to see him do something as normal and mundane as marking classwork. Stupid of me, really, not to think of it. It was part of being a teacher, though it wasn't usually anyone's favourite task.

Marking was an excellent distraction, though. I could have used a distraction. Knowing the monumental level of stress I would likely be attaining, I had tried to keep working at a reasonable level while trying not to overload myself with work. It might have helped. Thinking too much wasn't conducive to remaining stress-free and worry-free, but leaving myself with nothing to do let the panicked thoughts drift into my brain, painting graphic pictures of where we'd be if we lost our jobs.

Watching one set of pale fingers drum casually on the table while the other danced the pen across the paper in a messy scrawl, I shuffled down a little on the sofa. Had I been the one receiving anything in his handwriting I'd insist on it being re-written legibly. It was almost funny how someone so skilled at teaching could have abysmal handwriting. That brought a small smile to my lips; it was nice to sit and watch, even if we were quiet.

After the latest investigator had left, an odd calm had overtaken the school. The students carried on as normal, not that there had been any real or significant change in their behaviour to start with, and the other members of staff seemed to have decided to carefully avoid talking about the investigation. There wasn't anything they could do. I had no idea if any of the investigators had talked to them and I wasn't going to ask, but I hoped nothing had been said that could cause any kind of damage.

There wasn't anything that could, to be honest. I was just worrying too much. It was going to be fine.

That train of thought kept me strangely relaxed, considering it was the night before the hearing. Our fate was going to be decided tomorrow, and I was just sitting calmly and quietly on a sofa watching Kakashi do ordinary, boring work.

I sipped my tea. It was still too hot, but I swallowed another mouthful, watching as the surface of the liquid rippled back and forth, skewing my reflection. My smile had faded, but I didn't look upset or worried or tense like I should have been. I blinked twice, not quite comprehending how that didn't change. Maybe I had reached some kind of state of absolute mental tranquillity. I smirked at that; more likely I had just reached my emotional limits and my mind was refusing to take anything more onboard.
My reflection rippled as I blew on the tea.

There wasn't an awful lot I could do anymore. Doom or prosperity would come out of tomorrow, but there wasn't anything I could do to bolster the chances of one or the other. I supposed refusing to sleep, wandering around panicking or drinking myself silly were probably good ways to increase the chances of a bad outcome, but there wasn't a lot I could do to improve the situation.

There was nothing I could do. I was essentially useless, dead weight, pointless, ineffective-

"Done," Kakashi's voice cut through my rising internal panic. I looked up again, raising an eyebrow at the substantial stack of papers his hand rested on. Either he worked as fast as lightning or there was less work in that stack than there appeared to be. I was betting on the former.

"Already?" I replied, keeping my voice as level and normal as possible. Maybe being left alone in my own head hadn't been the best of ideas.

"It's been-" He glanced at the clock. "-an hour and a half. I usually get through them faster,"

"I know," I said with a slight quirk of my lips. That touch of arrogance was more endearing than anything else.

"About half of them got the same equation wrong," He remarked casually as he glanced at the pile, the barest traces of a frown on his face. "It was probably my fault; I need to go over it again with them because it's important for the exam,"

"I don't get physics at all. Science was never really my strength, but I always loved literature," I set down my tea on the side table. His chair scraped quietly along the floor as he pushed away from the table, shooting the pile one last glance before sauntering over to flop down on the sofa next to me.

"Hmm, me too," He said with a pointed glance towards the coffee table, where a brightly coloured book sat all too innocently, considering its contents. I narrowed my eyes.

"What you read isn't literature," I replied. No matter how good the quality of writing was, it was not literature. The work had to have some kind of artistic merit to qualify as literature; if I wouldn't be willing to let my students study it, it was certainly not literature.

"It's erotic literature," Kakashi insisted, as if the added sex somehow made a work better.

"It's pure rubbish! I have nothing against sex in literature, but not if the whole story is one long sex scene!" I professed. There was probably an art to writing sex, but there was no way I was going to try it. I'd leave that to the perverts. From the hideously written gay porn I had bought all those weeks ago to Hinata's disturbing drawings, I'd be content to never have to look at any form of written or drawn sex for the rest of my life.

"You've clearly never read the good stuff, then," He grinned, reaching for the book. "I'll lend you some of mine and then we'll see what is and isn't rubbish. In fact, they're very useful. You can learn a lot of interesting things from porn,"

"Like what?" I said, a little worried as he flicked through the garishly coloured book. The innocently white pages flicked past too fast for me to read the words.

"All sorts. For example-" He stopped thumbing through pages and held the book in front of my face, leaning in close to watch my reaction. That alone probably wasn't a good sign.

It's probably a good thing he didn't let me actually hold the book because I likely would have thrown
it across the room.

"Y-you seriously expect me to accept that as literature after what I just read? That's pure pornography!" I shrieked. I could feel my cheeks burning. Whoever the hell had written that was either seriously experienced or seriously depraved. I had barely read more than a couple of sentences, but I couldn't think of enough words in my vocabulary to describe how terrifically obscene what little I had read was.

"You can learn a lot of useful things from porn, you know," He whispered, suddenly all too close. My face suddenly burned for another reason; I hadn't realised just how close we were sitting. The proximity shouldn't have been a problem, but being exposed to that porn increased my embarrassment levels by a factor of twenty.

"Like what?" I risked asking, not really sure I wanted to know the answer.

"This," He answered simply. I cocked an eyebrow in question, turning to look at him. He just smiled, then leaned in to kiss me.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
I want your psycho

Your vertical stick

Want you in my rear window

Baby you're sick

I want your love

The kiss was slow, but not passionless. There was something there on the edge of it that I couldn't quite taste or catch a hold of with my clumsy, tired movements, but I could feel it. Whatever it was, it escaped me as soon as Kakashi pulled back.

"Forget tomorrow," he whispered in my ear. "Pretend tonight is it, and that tomorrow isn't going to come. Just you and me, tonight,"

I nodded in what was probably approval, tilting my head for another kiss. I tried, I really did, but there was still a lot on my mind, and it was hard to just shrug off. Kakashi's tongue swept across my lips, smooth and wet and sensual, sending a small shiver through my body, shaking the foundations of my worries a little. A hand came up to cradle my face, one finger darting out to stroke over the bridge of my nose, tracing the smooth scar that refused to fade. I smiled a little into the kiss. My own hands found his shoulders, just gently holding on, assuring myself he wasn't going anywhere.

His free hand moved from wherever it had been over my clothes, making sure to brush once, twice over a nipple before disappearing into the waistband of my trousers. I moaned at the sudden contact as his hand began to stroke me through the fabric of my underwear. The combination of the increasingly deep kiss and his skilled hand quickly brought me to full erectness.

At some point, my erection was freed, the cooler open air heated by our bodies. I wasn't thinking, which was excellent. It was just me and this amazing man, bringing me closer and closer to the edge.

Suddenly, his hand withdrew, and he kissed the top of my head once before slipping off the sofa and disappearing into another room.

Time passed, probably a minute or so, as I sat there, trousers and underwear pushed down to my thighs, throbbing erection begging to be touched. I should have felt awkward, sitting there looking so utterly lewd, but instead I practically quivered with anticipation.

I didn't have long to wait; Kakashi re-emerged from wherever he had been, stripped naked and walking casually across the floor towards where I sat. My eyes drank in every line of his body hungrily, catching every little sound his feet made on the floor. As he reached me, I could practically feel the heat radiating from his body. I raised an eyebrow questioningly. What was he-?

My question was answered as he straddled my thighs.

"What – ah – do you think you're doing?" I forced out, eyes widening. He didn't mean to do that,
did he? We had never done it the other way round before. We just…hadn't. Though the thought had occurred to me, I had never brought it up. It isn't the kind of thing you just casually bring up, after all.

"Having sex with you," he replied as he reached beneath himself. Oh God, he did. I tried to keep my eyes on his face, and not on the twitching muscle in his arm, subtle movements which caused the most ridiculously erotic images imaginable to flash through my mind. I stifled a moan at the thoughts.

"Obviously," I said. My eyes flickered downwards. I almost blushed like a schoolgirl at what I saw; there were simply no words for it. "But we've never-

Kakashi cut me off with a kiss. It wasn't gentle or soothing, like the first kisses had been, but it wasn't really rough or forceful. It was more of a wordless reassurance that it was going to be okay. That it was natural, and right, and just another sharing of bodies.

My breath hitched. I felt a hand wrap around my cock as he shifted on his knees. I could barely breathe with the anticipation.

"It's your turn. Is that-" he began to lower himself. I stopped breathing as I felt the head of my cock breach the tight ring of muscle, every single cell of my skin singing with the sensation. "-okay?"

"Ye-" I started, forcing myself to inhale again, choking myself off with a small gasp as he sunk lower in my lap. "Oh God, don't stop,

This was so hot it should have been illegal. I tore my eyes away from his chest, smooth, pale skin diverting my attention from anything and everything else, because this was something else. This was crazily stimulating, all hot and tight and-

"Hah, good, because I don't think I can," my eyes darted to his face. Lips, pink from kissing, slightly open to let controlled breaths escape in and out. Cheeks, dusted with red, the colour slowly spreading. Eyes sparkling with something that made my stomach do somersaults. Meeting my eyes, one corner of his mouth quirked up. "Gravity and all that,"

"Don't even – think about it," I gasped. I wasn't sure if I meant physics or stopping or anything at all, provided that ridiculously amazing friction never had to end. It was mesmerising, feeling his body suck in every inch, every inch that I felt, disappearing into that squeezing warmth.

Breathing heavily, his fingers dug into my arms and his head fell forward to rest on my shoulder. I raised a hand to trail down his spine, fingers sticking in tiny, fresh beads of sweat rising on supple skin. I could feel his heartbeat. It was racing, a close reminder that he was here, alive, with me. There wasn't anything my brain could really process. Certainly not stupid worries, or legitimate worries, or whatever.

Kakashi was one smart man.

"Touch me," he breathed. Without a thought, my hand moved to circle his erection, coaxing it to fullness. With an audible exhale, he rose up. I bit my lip, stifling a loud noise of pleasure from escaping. My eyes darted downwards, taking in everything that was happening below. It was hard not to watch my member sliding from his body, eyelids flickering at the pleasure it caused. It was hard not to think about doing this again, or him doing me like this again, just so long as it happened again.

I didn't take that long. It should probably have been embarrassing, but my mind had switched off. I came with a small yelp, bucking upwards to spill my seed within him. A combination of both our hands brought Kakashi to completion.
We just sat there for a moment to catch our breath and restructure our minds.

"I think we might have stained the sofa," I whispered as the thought suddenly occurred to me.

"Don't care," he replied sleepily, nuzzling my shoulder. The small movement radiated down through his body, altering his position just enough to cause my cock to twitch. "Do you want to go again?"

I was about to reply when a yawn ripped across his face.

"No, let's just go to bed. We'll see what we can do about the sofa in the morning," I said. My fingers strayed to his spine again, tracing over the humps and dips of vertebrae. He was mesmerising, clothed, naked, awake or semi-conscious. And he was exactly what I needed.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo
All You Need and More

You can run into my arms
It's okay, don't be alarmed
Come here to me
There's no distance in between our love
So go on and let the rain pour
I'll be all you need and more

I woke up far too early. I knew that before I rolled over to look at the alarm clock, only to remember that it was on the other side of the bed. I still wasn't entirely used to sleeping in someone else's bed. That didn't mean it was unwelcome, though. Still half asleep, I burrowed back under the duvet and deliberately pressed my back into the warm body beside me. Kakashi didn't stir.

Without moving, I tried to focus on that warmth. To pretend it was just another morning, that I could go back to sleep and wake up again in an hour to go to work as normal, or that we could just lie here for hours, days, years, and never have to move from this bed ever again, and that there wasn't anywhere we had to be and nothing we had to do.

I imagined I could feel the blood flowing under his bare skin. I could feel his heartbeat echoing through his ribcage. The rush of air as his lungs pulled in air and let it go again. It felt like an unspeakable cruelty that two people could never be one, no matter how close they could get.

My cheeks heated; we could never be one, but it was possible to feel like one.

The sex was great. Mind-blowing. Stunning. Exactly what I needed. I could probably have used a hundred superlatives to describe it, and every one of them wouldn't be quite accurate because there is no way to adequately describe sex with the person you love in the same way it is impossible to describe why you love them. It wasn't like the first time, which had been nervous and fumbling; I didn't exactly know what I was doing, but it was loving all the same. It was distraction-sex, but it didn't feel - cheaper, exactly. Just different.

I curled and uncurled my fingers, frowning slightly as one set of fingertips brushed over the fraying, worn edge of my cast. I had practically forgotten it, what with all the ridiculous and stressful drama, but it was due to come off soon. I wasn't sure when, but I was pretty certain it was soon. As annoying and inconvenient it could be, I sort of liked the cast. It was a reminder, a little fragment of the past that proved that it had happened, and that I wasn't in some kind of crazy dream or made-up fantasy. It was a little bit more proof that the hot skin I could feel against mine was there, another tangible layer of evidence.

I decided I liked tangible evidence very much.

The other hand closed around a handful of duvet. It smelled like a different washing powder and dog, but not much like Kakashi, probably because he ended up sleeping over at mine a lot these
days. Honestly, there wasn't much point in having separate flats.

That was a thought, actually. Were we at the moving in together stage yet? Did he want to move in with me? Did I even want to move in with him? I didn't know about the first two, but the third was immaterial; I still had a month and a half left on the lease for my flat.

Leases. Leases were probably legal stuff. Sort of related to the stuff I didn't want to think about.

And Jane Austen wrote six novels, two published posthumously, and two other works were left unfinished. There are twenty five tales in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, but it is unknown whether the collection is complete.

I rolled onto my front and huffed into the pillow. Thinking about literature was a far less effective distraction technique when compared to sex.

At the mere thought of the stuff that I definitely wasn't thinking about, a bolt of queasy uneasiness shot through my stomach. I wasn't supposed to think about that. I had to get all the sleep I could, otherwise I'd be exhausted during the thing I wasn't thinking about and I couldn't mess it up. So I definitely, absolutely wasn't going to think about it.

The pillow smelled a bit more like Kakashi. Clutching furiously at happy memories – coffee on our first date, the field trip weeks ago, cooking together – and focusing on the heat radiating from his body, I drifted off back to sleep.

I couldn't recall what I dreamed about, but it wasn't bad. That's all I remembered of it.

At some point, I woke up. The temperature had suddenly dropped, and the depression in the bed to my left was missing. I opened one bleary eye, brain finally processing that Kakashi was no longer in the bed. Focusing my eyes on the alarm clock, I nearly screamed. I was going to be late for work, we were both going to be so late for work, and we were going to be fired because we couldn't risk any-

"Good morning!" Called an inappropriately cheerful voice from the doorway. My eyes instantly snapped towards its owner. Panic rose in my mind; this was exactly the kind of thing we didn't need, and everything could go to hell because of one stupid little accident, and it would be my fault.

"Have you seen the time? We're going to be late! Why didn't you wake me up at-" I shrieked, then stopped as my drowsy mind finally woke up. "Oh,"


"We don't have to be anywhere for another two hours, so I thought you should sleep in," he explained as he walked forward, the tray held steady. I propped myself up, pushing the pillow into a better position to lean on. Slowly and carefully, the tray was lowered into my lap.

"What is this?" I asked stupidly.

"Breakfast in bed," he said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world – which I supposed it was. When I didn't respond, he continued. "I'm trying to be romantic,"

I couldn't suppress a smile.

"Thank you," I can't believe you exist. I couldn't say that last part out loud, ever. Instead, I grabbed his wrist and tugged twice. He brought his head down obligingly for a kiss, though it wasn't the most successful kiss ever because of the awkward angle and the fact I couldn't stop smiling. I pouted
childishly when he pulled back.

"I'll just grab my own food and then I'll be back," he ducked to kiss the top of my head once. "Don't go anywhere in the meantime,"

"Wouldn't dream of it," I replied, probably grinning like a maniac. Whatever the hell I had done in my life must have been amazingly good to meet this man. I had to have been an absolute saint in a previous life, or have saved the life of the person who will cure cancer, or have instilled a love of books in the next literary genius. Whatever it was, I was eternally grateful to whatever cosmic forces that must have made it possible.

My eyes lazily trailed after his naked form as he re-entered the room. I wasn't going to turn down an incredibly opportune moment to ogle what was mine.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

When the sun shines, we'll shine together

Told you I'll be here forever

Said I'll always be a friend

Took an oath, I'mma stick it out till the end

Now that it's raining more than ever

Know that we'll still have each other

You can stand under my umbrella

You can stand under my umbrella

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
Faith

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I'm awake, I'm alive

Now I know what I believe inside

Now it's my time

I'll do what I want 'cause this is my life

Right here, right now

Stand my ground and never back down

I know what I believe inside

I'm awake, I'm alive

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

It was like walking to my execution. And even then, it was made a hell of a lot better and worse by Kakashi's presence. Better because his presence was soothing and inspiring; in a smart suit and tie, he looked like he could accomplish anything. He radiated confidence and power in a way I'd never seen before, and I was doing my best to emulate it. I tried to mimic the way he stood up straight, shoulders back, the self-assured march to the front of the dim courtroom. Worse because of the attention it drew, and the fact it was sprung by absolute necessity.

Gaara, the district judge Tsunade had talked about, sat alone at the front underneath the huge Konohagakure emblem. Not a single expression crossed his face as we walked towards him. He looked far too young to be so high up in the legal food chain, but if Tsunade said he was a prodigy or something I would believe her. Younger hopefully meant more liberal and more likely to let us off.

All eyes were on us as we walked to our seats, sliding into the long wooden benches. They were cold and hard and angular, the exact opposite of settling and comforting. But that was probably how they were designed. The tight tension in my chest gripped a little harder. This was real. We were in court, charged with some kind of decency violation, and we had to defend ourselves against government lawyers. Government lawyers that all belonged to the same slightly dodgy association.

I stared into my lap. This was really happening. If this didn't go right, my career would fall apart. So would Kakashi's. Tsunade's job was also somewhat at risk. I wasn't qualified to do anything else. What the hell could I do if I lost my job?

A gentle hand on my thigh, obscured from the view of the rest of the courtroom by the angle and the wooden desk in front of us, alerted me to the entrance of the investigators-cum-lawyers from hell.

I sat in a daze through most of the opening. All the formalities went over my head, everything I'd talked about with Kakashi and Tsunade and Jiraiya went out of the window. I just rested my hand over Kakashi's twisting my fingers between his and clinging on for dear life.

This had to go well. It had to.
The first stretch of time went without any hitches. I answered robotically, the beginning legal proceedings flashing by as my mind shut down in preparation for the second, nerve-wracking part.

"Did you observe them touching in a sexual way?" Gaara's monotone questioned. He hadn't moved from his position in however long we'd been in court; chin resting on folded hands, elbows on top of various papers he kept referring to. Whenever he turned his piercing green eyes towards us I automatically sat up straighter. Whatever had given him that air of authority was incredibly effective.

"Well, they were sitting very close and holding hands in the staff room when I first observed them," the shark-like Kisame Hoshigaki said, teeth glinting in the light. I didn't remember him. It was probably testament to how preoccupied my mind had been that I had managed to miss him entirely. "And later, I saw Mr Hatake embrace Mr Umino and-"

"In a sexual way, Mr Hoshigaki. In an overtly, unmistakably sexual way that could be mistaken for nothing else. Did you ever observe them touching in a sexual way?" Gaara clarified, glancing down at the papers.

"Never overtly sexual, per se," the investigator admitted, sending a glance towards his partner, Itachi Uchiha. The memory of that cold, empty stare still sent shivers down my spine.

"Is there any other evidence that these two men had any kind of sexual contact while on the premises of Konoha High School? Photographic, witness statements, et cetera?" Gaara asked. Despite the monotone, he sounded like he knew what he was doing and knew the outcome, but wouldn't give it away. His gaze fixed on the prosecutor's bench, there was no way to gain any answers from his face. Not that I was likely to be able to read it anyways.

"There is a photograph," Itachi began somewhat tentatively. "Exhibit B, please." Somebody near the front shuffled some papers and dropped something, the dull slap echoing throughout the hall. They nodded, and Itachi raised the slide changer. "I feel it necessary to warn you that this may be inappropriate for younger people. Given the situation, it is necessary to display it to the court, however inappropriate it may be,"

"Very well. Project the image,"

I almost died of humiliation. It was very obviously us. I was pushed back onto my desk, hair out and mussed about my shoulders, the angle of my head carefully hiding most of Kakashi's face. Other than his hand in my hair, it just looked like our faces were really, really close. The memory of the sounds I had made, the squirming arousal that had begun to flourish properly, brought a blush to my face. It was the photo taken all that time ago, still horribly familiar.

My eyes snapped shut. The image was still burned onto my retinas. The warm hand on my thigh moved back and forth, reminding me of Kakashi's comforting presence, the only thing keeping me somewhat calm.

"As you can see, the accused are quite obviously sexually involved. Although there are no laws against it in our modern, liberal times, one must think of the children when looking at this image. Of course, this was confiscated from one of the students at the school during the time of investigation. What must they think to see such a spectacle being played out in one of their classrooms, by two well-respected teachers no less?" Itachi replied in his own monotone. Unlike Gaara's, it left no room for argument. The consequences for failing to agree lurking under his voice sounded worse than accepting whatever fate would befall us.

No, I couldn't think like that. I had to resist, and we had to fight this thing. Whatever it was, we weren't going down.
"Confiscated from a student, you say? Is this student present?" asked Gaara, turning his frightening gaze out over the filled seats. Each and every occupant was a face I recognised, most plagued with worry or stoically supportive. That alone was a huge weight off my chest – if they believed in a positive outcome, I could too.

"I - I am, sir," a quiet, meek voice called from way to the left. I looked over, squinting through the darkness to find Hinata quivering in her seat some way behind the row of suited lawyers. I couldn't help but pity the girl as she rose shakily to her feet, stumbling slightly as she walked forwards. She exhaled sharply as she sat down, not realising the microphone was on, blushing pink as she became aware of her blunder.

"Go on, Miss Hyuuga," she paused, despite Gaara's encouragements. She bit her lip, and then opened her mouth to speak.

"I – I would like to start by saying that this whole t-trial is wrong. I don't c-care what my teachers were doing, they d-don't deserve this. I'm o-only here because m-my father insisted," her wide, pale eyes drifted over us, imploring our forgiveness. I couldn't help but smile a little. "I-I took the photo. And I'm s-sorry for violating y-your privacy,"

"You're forgiven, Hinata," I said, trying to look as positive as I could in the situation. It probably wasn't very comforting. "I know you didn't mean any harm,"

"B-but it's being used against you!" she protested.

"A valid point. Now, sentiments over, could you describe exactly what you saw Mr Umino and Mr Hatake doing when you took this photograph?" Gaara continued. He glanced down at his notes again, arm moving for the first time from its position to seize a pen from a small jar to his right. His gaze once again fixed on Hinata, she spoke again.

"J-just kissing. That's all. I don't think they w-went any further because I left the r-room shortly afterwards. They d-didn't know I was there, and I took the photo without permission, and I'm so s-sorry for that-"

"Was it in any way obscene, overtly sexual or traumatising to witness?" he interrupted.

"N-no," she replied weakly.

"Have you witnessed any similar incidents on school property?" His voice came harder and stronger, hand scribbling something on the paper before him without looking at it.

"No,"

There was a pause. He turned his eyes from her to the paper, reading over what he had written and then writing more. The silence was filled with the scratching of his pen on paper, barely relieving the tension. The air was too tight again, too hot and oppressive in the rapidly heating courtroom. He glanced up at Hinata once, who nervously tucked a strand of dark hair behind her ear, before writing again. It felt like hours passed as he wrote. My fingers tightened around Kakashi's. It probably hurt him, but he didn't shrug me off or pull away. I'd have to thank him for that later.

"That will be all, Miss Hyuuga. Thank you," Gaara said at last, setting his pen down and returning to his former pose.

"Thank you," Hinata squeaked, scampering away from the seat like a frightened mouse.

Another one of the investigators stood up and cleared his throat. I glanced over; the dark figure of
Itachi, silhouetted by the windows behind him, towered over the seated investigators. I suddenly understood why they were letting him handle much of the procedure; he was impossibly competent.

"I call the second witness to the stand: Mrs Tsunade Senju, headmistress of Konoha High School," at Tsunade's name, I looked up, scanning the room for the familiar blonde pigtails. I glanced through every row, but I didn't see her anywhere. "Is she present? If not, I call the third witness-"

"That's enough, Itachi!" A familiar voice called as the courtroom doors slammed open. A figure stood in the doorway, panting hard, arms stretched wide as he held the door open.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo
I'm gonna fight for what's right
Today I'm speaking my mind
And if it kills me tonight
I will be ready to die
A hero's not afraid to give his life
A hero's gonna save me just in time

"Sasuke?" Itachi said, not a note of surprise leaking into his voice. Either this was completely expected or nothing fazed him anymore. "I don't have time for you now. Wait outside and we can talk later,"

"No, this is important! If you have any Uchiha pride left, you'll come with me now," Sasuke protested. He began to walk forwards, fists clenched at his sides. "Or are you too far gone to realise how stupid you look?"

"Sasuke. Please don't make me have you removed," Itachi replied blankly.

This was odd, to say the least. Although the interruption wasn't necessarily unwelcome, since it broke a bit of the tension, it was very confusing. I had no idea what was going on. This was some kind of family matter, and I didn't really want to get involved with it. Hell, I'd be willing to just quietly trundle along through life as calmly and quietly as possible from now on, provided I could keep things how they were before all this investigation rubbish started.

"You don't, do you? This is all a part of some stupid loyalty thing!" Sasuke's voice rose as he came to a halt. Then he turned to look at the front of the courtroom, eyes flickering past the benches to rest on Gaara. "Leave my brother out of this! He's a good lawyer, and this whole thing is ridiculous! I don't want-"

"Sasuke, is it? The younger Uchiha brother? I'm afraid your brother has chosen to do this of his own free will, and any consequences that befall him as a result of the trial are a result of his own actions, no matter how well qualified he may be. Now-" Gaara replied, voice dripping with chagrin.

"You don't understand! He's only here because the Aka-" Sasuke began, only to be cut off as the door slammed open once again.

A familiar curvaceous figure emerged through the door, quickly coloured by the room's hard lighting. All sound in the room faded to be concentrated in the clicking of heels on the floor as Tsunade walked forward, stance imposing, eyes fixed on Sasuke with a steely look in them, leaving no room for questions. It was full teacher mode.

"That's enough, Sasuke. Please wait outside with Naruto, and wait for a little while to talk to Itachi," she commanded. One hand came to rest on her waist as she stared him down.
"But-"

"That's final, Sasuke," she said sharply, before jerking her head towards Itachi. Her eyes practically made me shiver with the icy loathing she was sending towards the man. "I'm here. What do you want?"

"Could you please take a seat, Mrs Senju?" Itachi spoke as impassively as ever, gesturing lightly with one hand to where Hinata had been sitting before. Tsunade walked forwards, heels clicking out a staccato rhythm that cut sharply through the silence. I wasn't sure if I should have been angry that she was late or grateful that she broke up whatever bizarre spat that was occurring between the two Uchihas. Sasuke was completely forgotten. No one watched as he left the room, dismissed.

"Seat taken. I repeat, what do you want?" she snapped. "And make it quick, I have liquor to drink and a husband to get home to, next to a stack of paperwork that could reach to the moon and back."

"Alright. Could you please clarify the decency terms of your employment contracts with all your members of staff?" he questioned.

"No indecent contact on school premises," she stated shortly as if it was that simple. Which it probably was. Everything was just too overcomplicated, both inside my mind and on paper.

"Define 'indecent contact'," Itachi probed.

"Sexual conduct on school property. Though it would also extend to drug use or other questionably moral behaviour. I don't classify what these two did as indecent," she asserted, flipping a loose strand of hair back behind her ear. She didn't look nervous in the slightest; she gave the impression that she spent every other day in courtrooms, talking plainly to terrifying lawyers. "Hell, I'd encourage it. It's good to show the students an example of a healthy, happy homosexual relationship."

"Ah, which brings us to a rather interesting aspect of the charge. Tell me, is this charge being brought against these two men because they're given to public displays of affection well within the grounds of decency as decreed by their legal employer," Gaara paused dramatically. It was like a bloody soap opera in here. "Or is because they're both male?"

"The first, of course," Itachi said swiftly. An eyebrow rose, picking up instantaneously on the bait. "The court is no place for homophobia."

"The court is exactly the place for homophobia," Kakashi stood suddenly, all eyes instantly turning to him, mine included. It was barely believable that this guy was the same man who liked to read porn everywhere and anywhere, who couldn't cook to save his life, who had a ridiculous number of dogs. But it was him. "This entire trial is about homophobia. If I was a woman, no one would bat an eyelid at me kissing Iruka. It's not against my contract, so there should be no issue, and no trial."

"On the contrary, this trial has nothing to do with gender. It's merely about public decency."

"Tsu- Mrs Senju, would there have been an issue had one of us been female?" Kakashi interrupted him, turning to look at Tsunade.

"Not at all,"

"Would our actions have been more or less decent had one of us been female?" he continued.

"No," she didn't pause.

"In your opinion, is this investigation biased?"
"Yes," she said after a beat.

I almost breathed a sigh of relief. Tsunade was on our side. Maybe I had been questioning it subconsciously before, or maybe my ridiculous sudden paranoia was getting stronger, but hearing her say that was very comforting.

"Konan, on your first day of investigation, did Iruka or I do anything untoward? Did we overtly display our relationship? Did either of us act anything but surprised that anyone would want to interfere with our careers based on a photograph and a single, completely legal incident?" Kakashi asked. Instead of lazy, his drawl was almost menacing and interrogative in a completely paradoxical way. It was completely stunning.

"I suppose not," she replied. "Mr Umino in particular was very surprised and very nervous. It could be taken as something of an admission of guilt."

"Guilt in what? Worrying about my partner and our jobs?" I spoke up and stood, surprised at myself yet more than slightly outraged at what was being said. That made no sense at all. "If a robotic lawyer in an expensive suit approaches you and tells you that you're under investigation, yes, you'd be automatically nervous, but that is not an admission of anything."

"And why, precisely, would you be concerned? Surely if you had nothing to hide, then you wouldn't be so nervous," she replied flatly, blinking once. My fingers gripped the smooth, polished wood in front of me, nails digging into it where probably hundreds of nails had been dug in anger before.

"I was concerned because the Department of Education was threatening to have both of our licenses revoked over this incident! I was concerned because everything was just starting to work…" I tailed off. This was supposed to be impersonal. I wasn't supposed to bring us as a couple into it. But the two things had become so interlinked in this investigation that it was hard to tear them apart so easily. I wasn't sure when it had happened; it just did.

"The fact of the matter is, was the contact inappropriate or not? Both Mrs Senju and Miss Hyuuga disagree. Mrs Senju's opinion is obviously important, as she issued the contracts of employment, but Miss Hyuuga's opinion likely reflects that of much of the student body. Naturally, Iruka and I both disagree. I wouldn't dream of doing anything so inappropriate. Think of the students!" Kakashi said, repeating the ridiculous sentiment. I sort of wanted to laugh hysterically at that.

"We are thinking of the students, Mr Hatake. That's our job. To put it plainly, what you and your partner did could very well be damaging to some of the more fragile or impressionable students," Itachi stood again, Konan fading into the black blur of the background. It was terrifying how desolate his voice could become. It was like he was reciting words he'd learned a hundred years ago, but had bored of and didn't really want to remember. "For example-"

"How, exactly?" Kakashi's voice didn't waver. My hand crept closer to his, warmth radiating between them. A subtle note of amusement tainted with irritation crept into his tone. "Are you accusing us of making students gay? Surely you know it doesn't work like that. I'm fairly certain we stopped thinking like that fifty years ago."

"Of course not, we aren't-" Itachi began.

"Order!" Gaara's voice cut through the rising voices. "Back to the basic issue. We've heard from the employer, from a student, from both parties, but I think I've heard enough."
Beautiful

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I see your true colours
And that's why I love you
So don't be afraid to let them show
Your true colours
True colours are beautiful
Like a rainbow

Gaara rose to his feet and the entire room held its breath. He could probably have stood there for hours and we'd all have suffocated; the air was unbreathable, pressing down on my chest and constricting my heart in its crushing tentacles. It felt like my life was hanging by the finest of threads.

Kakashi’s fingers tightened, squeezing mine once. I glanced at our intertwined hands. It wasn't just my life hanging by a thread. Even so, we were still together. It would be enough, even if everything went to hell and we lost everything, we would still have each other, and-

"Frankly, this is ridiculous," my head snapped up. As my mind processed the words, a kind of bizarre roiling erupted in my stomach. Could I dare to hope? Would I dare to hope? "In all my time in this court, I've never come across a case so frivolous-" his hand collided sharply with the surface of his desk. "-pointless-" the room almost shook with the force of the next blow. "-or unfounded as this,"

For a second, there was silence. The air in the courtroom seemed to thicken in that moment and I couldn't breathe again – but it wasn't crushing disappointment. It wasn't overwhelming sadness. It was elation.

"But sir, they-" a voice spoke up, but I barely registered it. It wasn't important at this point. Whoever had said it was irrelevant now.

"Two men kissing is hardly a crime punishable by death, Mr. Uchiha, no matter where your loyalties may lie. Neither is it a basis for a court trial. Had this come to my attention sooner, I would have quashed this ridiculous charge and saved these two gentlemen a lot of stress. Unfortunately, it's come to this, and I'm required to make a statement.

"All charges against Kakashi Hatake and Iruka Umino are hereby dropped on grounds of lack of evidence. Contempt of court charges will be brought against all those involved with the plaintiff. An inquest will begin next month into the inner workings of the Department of Education, and I expect at least one corruption charge to be handed to me, personally and swiftly."

"Understood," Itachi said, monotone never wavering. "On behalf of the Department of Education, I would like to issue a formal apology to Mr Umino and Mr Hatake. I am deeply sorry for any harm the investigation caused and all expenses for legal proceedings will be covered without question. Should you decide to charge for compensation-"
"I don't think so, Uchiha," Kakashi said. "I'm willing to forget everything provided we are left alone for the rest of our lives. And we'll gladly assist in any corruption investigations within the Department of Education,"

I watched the line of his jaw move as he spoke, and I was positive it was the most beautiful jaw in the history of mankind.

"Thank you, Mr Hatake. I'm sure your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. With that, I conclude this sham of a trial, and I hope nothing this ridiculous ever darkens these halls again. Dismissed,"

I didn't see the faces of the other people in the room as we walked out, hand in hand. All I saw was Kakashi, who seemed to glow, casting everything else in a kind of greyish unimportance. I wasn't aware of the eyes that passed over us, bright with joy or rage, it wasn't possible to tell. A bomb could have exploded outside and I wouldn't have heard it.

That was it? That was all? No consequences, no further investigation, nothing? It seemed too good to be true, but I wasn't going to question it. Not yet, anyway. Maybe once it had sunk in I'd actually question it, but not yet. I was content to revel in the freedom it granted.

We had done it. It was over. I could barely believe it.

The door opened in front of us, people outside the room parting to let us through. I must have been grinning ear to ear because all these random strangers smiled back, even though they probably had no clue what had been going on. My feet flew across the grimy carpet leading to the doors to the outside, cold sunlight shining in through the clouds. A few flakes of snow drifted down, visible against the dark background of the trees across the street.

There were probably forms that we were supposed to have signed, documents to be written, stuff like that, but I didn't really care. Clearly Kakashi didn't either. One hand grabbed an umbrella, and we were outside.

Then, as sudden as the first time, his lips were on mine, pressing hard and firm and soft and gentle all at once, shielded from the rest of the world by a carefully angled umbrella. My heart leapt. I could barely contain the joy spilling through every cell in my body, and I was sure that it wasn't the last time he'd make me feel that way.

I had a feeling it was going to be a long night.

oO..Oo..Oo..Oo

The end.

oO..Oo..OO..Oo
All I Want For Christmas

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

I don't want a lot for Christmas
There is just one thing I need
I don't care about the presents
Underneath the Christmas tree
I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas
Is you

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

"Merry Christmas!"

I froze in my tracks, one socked foot still hanging in the air just above the floor, bundle of neatly wrapped presents under one arm. Slowly, I turned my gaze from the tasteful tree stuffed in the living room corner towards the source of the greeting. My face coloured. The bobble end of the silly, oversized Santa hat perched on my head fell forward, not quite obscuring my vision.

"I was trying to be sneaky! Go back to bed! Right now!" I snapped, but I couldn't stop my lips turning up in a smile. Kakashi's smirking figure in the doorway shook with a chuckle before retreating – though the door didn't fully close. I glared at the gap. "Bed!"

"But sensei!" he wailed. My smile turned into a proper grin. It wasn't possible to be grumpy at Christmas.

"Bed! Now! Or no presents!" I shouted, clutching the bundle of presents to my chest possessively. Naturally, the threat was completely empty; he would get every single one of these presents after I spent so much time trying to covertly work out what he wanted and what he'd like and what would be meaningful somehow.

I crouched to arrange the presents neatly to the left of the foot of the tree, big ones on the bottom, little ones on the top, trying to hide the gaudy tree stand Kakashi insisted on using despite its hideousness. Everything was so much easier once my cast had come off, last week precisely. Wrapping up presents was the hardest challenge. I got through at least twice as much paper as I should have, and countless rolls of sellotape. I resisted the temptation to squeeze any of the other pile, my pile, on the right. Many were book shaped. A smile crossed my lips again; he knew how to make me happy.

It would have been sensible to arrange them in the night, but the thought didn't occur to me until we were otherwise occupied. Hiding the presents had been a challenge in itself. It hadn't taken long at all to move into the same flat – mine, naturally – and it hadn't taken long for a team of dogs and
Kakashi’s keen logic and oddly attuned nose to find anything I tried to stash away, especially food and Christmas presents.

A flash of doubt entered my mind. What if he didn't like what I'd gotten him? What if it was all wrong, or brought back bad memories, or if it was just stupid? As if to dismiss my thoughts, a cold nose nudged my neck. One hand absentmindedly reached back to pet the soft head before straightening another parcel.

It should be fine. It would be fine. He loved me, so it would definitely be fine.

"Okay, you can come out now!" I called as I stood up and straightened my hat.

And thus, the great unwrapping began. Shreds of wrapping paper that would require intensive hoovering out of the carpet flew everywhere, dogs chased and chewed balls of scrunched up wrappings, and presents formed a less-than-neat circle around us. Kisses were exchanged as thanks for presents and just because. I think I preferred the just because ones.

Finally, surrounded by bright, festive detritus and gifts (the socks were definitely a hit), a final box appeared. It was smaller than everything else, wrapped more plainly in red tissue paper. Wordlessly, I took it into my hand and carefully peeled off the paper. I didn't want to tear it, even though it was just the wrapping. Inside was a scuffed box that had probably been covered in velvet at one time, with rusty hinges and a small stain on one corner.

I paused. If this was like every other romantic story ever, I knew exactly what it was going to be, and that scared me. I looked up, my gaze loaded with questions and worries and-

"Open it," he said softly. My free hand stroked once over the lid, silently asking, 'are you sure?' "Go on,"

So I did. And it wasn't like all those movies and books and songs. No cheesy romantic music started playing over cliché dialogue, no fire crackled in the hearth, no mistletoe appeared over our heads. It was just a single gold band lying on a bed of silk. A part of an inscription winked in the light: 'to the one-

Immediately, I snapped the lid shut. It almost hurt my eyes to look at it, but it was a good kind of pain. I wanted to open it and look again and again so I could keep feeling that pain, that glorious ache, that built in my chest just thinking about it. I kept my head bowed, not daring to look him in the face. If I did, I probably would have laughed and cried and screamed and said all kinds of ridiculously romantic and probably very stupid things, and I wasn't sure I wouldn't explode.

"You don't like it," his voice was barely audible. My lips collided with his before I really knew what I was doing. I just had to shut him up somehow. My hand tightened around the little box as the other supported my weight, newly repaired wrist twinging in protest at the sudden exertion, but I didn't care.

"Thank you," I gasped as the kiss broke. "Thank you,"

"You want it, then?" he said incredulously, grey eyes filling with indescribable emotions. His whole face lit up, and mine changed to mirror it. Every single detail, every line, every angle, I had committed to memory again and again, I wanted to remember this expression. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

"Of course I do, you idiot! I'm only sorry I can't give you something like this back!" I replied
breathlessly, grinning like an idiot.

"It was my father's wedding ring. We can't be legally married, but you can wear my ring. Seeing it on your hand every day will be enough for every Christmas for the rest of our lives," Kakashi explained. "And maybe things will change one day. Maybe one day, we can get it done legally – if you'll put up with me until then, that is," he winked, and my heart melted.

The ring slid on like it was made for me, and then he kissed me until I cursed my dependency on oxygen. My heart raced; I slid my hand under his shirt, and his beat just as fast to the same dum rhythm as mine.

Not fine. Perfect.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

Fin.

oO..Oo..oO..Oo

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