Write Me A Love Story

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Write Me A Love Story

by narutophobia

Summary

"Of course, Naruto. You had to go and fall in love with someone who doesn't want a romantic relationship at all. Great fucking job."

In which Naruto and Sasuke share the same University Dorm, Naruto somehow falls head-over-heels in love with a brooding Sasuke, whereas Sasuke is oblivious to it all since he has other things on his mind.

Those other things being that he is, in fact, the heir to an international-billion dollar company, and there's no food left in the kitchen except for instant ramen. Again. Fucking Naruto.
Chapter Notes

i accidentally deleted how stupid am i?

Just a quick note before you read: I am British, therefore there are some different spellings than the American spellings, for example: 'colour' and 'color', 'math' and 'maths', etc. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter I:

Heretofore, I had never been in love.

Falling in love was something that I never expected, nor wanted. I was only nineteen at the time, after all. When I was sixteen, I couldn’t separate my love of pizza from the girl I liked, so I always presumed that they were the same thing, however, I soon was able to differentiate the two types of ‘love’.

One love made me happy — content with what I had. Something that I liked to have. Something that was a convenience — this was love for ramen. On the other hand, romantic love is hard to exemplify. I remember, once, I asked my mother what love felt like — what it actually meant to her. My father and my mother, despite their long marriage, were in heavenly bliss; even a young, oblivious me was able to figure that out.

Her response was to ask me what I thought love was. Naïve, seven year old me gave a vague example such as ‘marriage’, after all, that was what we had been taught in school. My teacher’s words had been drilled into my head: *When a man and woman love each other, they get married.*

In response to my vague answer, my mother chuckled slightly and ruffled my hair, much to my annoyance; I remembered despising my mother’s proclivity of ruffling my hair, my cheeks puffing out every time she happened to do it. But, even to this day, I remember her reply word-by-word:

*Love is hard to define. It's not something that you can simply put into words; it's not something that you can describe to somebody. It's an intimate feeling, and it's different to everybody who experiences it.*

I also remember shrugging her off, whilst telling her to stop being so ‘mushy’.

But now, I realise exactly what she meant. Love is spontaneous. Unpredictable. One day, you will be sitting down, minding your own business, and it will hit you like a ton of bricks. Soon, your whole life will wrap around that one person subconsciously, and you will only realise it until you know that you are already in too deep to simply discard your feelings for that one person. And the thing is, you won’t mind. Not one bit. Because you love them, and you would do anything for them.

And I don’t regret anything. Not one bit.
University. Naruto couldn’t believe it. He was actually here — in an actual university. All hopes of being able to actually scrape into a university were squandered by unsupportive, spiteful teachers who seemed to have a personal vendetta against him for one reason or another. As if it was his fault that they were stuck being teachers! Though, Naruto would be pretty bitter too if he ended back up in high school as a job.

One of the main reasons that he hated high school was that none of the subjects had intrigued him. Day after day, he would sit in lesson, fiddling with his pencil and sketching mini drawings in his books; he abhorred lessons such as science and maths, along with every other lesson. Everything bored him. Meetings where his parents were called in to discuss his ‘attitude towards learning’—Mr and Mrs Uzumaki, Naruto is a bright boy, however—and it soon came to light that Naruto was diagnosed with minor clinical depression.

Years of meetings with psychiatrists made him almost immune to them. They didn’t help whatsoever. Their platitudinous words became a monotone, buzzing in his ear; they always said the exact same thing. Every single one of them. His grades, and his life were stuck in the drain. Nothing interested him. He was just so exhausted from every little thing his mind could think of. He started to reject his friends, alongside his family. He couldn’t sleep. He lost weight, and he started to snap out at people — those people being the only people who seemed to care enough: his mother, his father, and his lifelong, childhood friend, Ino Yamanaka. All of his other friends ran off, not that Naruto blamed them, of course.

Being depressed for no reason. What a joke.

Naruto remembered That Night clearly, too. Ino’s puffy red eyes staring at him in complete shock. Complete horror. A bloody razor held in a vice grip, prisoned inside her shaking hand. His mother’s screams as she collapsed to the floor, while his father cuddled her, mumbling sweet reassurance into an inconsolable Kushina’s ear, but it wasn’t very convincing; Minato’s voice was as shaky as a drunkard’s hand, as Ino’s hand, and the cracks in his voice didn’t help with consoling Kushina that much either.

He had survived that night. Barely.

Guilt plagued Naruto constantly after that, but he was stuck in a hole. Trapped inside there, with no possible means of somehow crawling out. It was around that time when Iruka came into the picture. He was the new school counsellor, since the previous one had retired. Naruto was ‘obligated’ (forced) to visit the school counsellor at least three times a week — this made the school actually think that they were making a difference. Not that they really cared. They just needed to look good.

Ino joined him to most of his meetings. She was his rock. Naruto wasn’t that pleasant to Iruka at first; the young — and what Naruto presumed — inexperienced counsellor tried his best to get through to Naruto, but Naruto shunned him. Pushed him completely out, despite Ino’s constant pleads. Despite his mother’s obvious trepidation. Despite his father’s solemn looks and forced smiles at the dinner table as Naruto stared at his meal, refusing to eat it.

And that was when Iruka gave Naruto that book. At first, Naruto scoffed and shoved the book back into the man's face, saying that he didn’t want it and he hated books. Iruka flashed him that heart-warming smile and sighed before softly placing it back onto Naruto’s lap. Naruto glanced at the book before raising a brow at Iruka. That was when Iruka placed a reassuring hand on Naruto’s shoulder and explained how that book helped him cope with his depression when his parents died.

The Tale Of An Utterly Gutsy Shinobi.

Reluctantly, Naruto decided to read the book. And it was the best choice that he ever made.
Something about the story — the emotion, the conflict, the characters who he learnt to love — managed to drag Naruto in. Other works by the author were also able to catch Naruto’s eye, and more and more books ended up on his bedside table. The man was a guy in his mid-fifties, going by the pen name ‘Sage’ — his real name being Jiraiya — and was soon able to become Naruto’s role model.

Monthly, would Naruto write to Jiraiya. Sometimes, Naruto would even send rough drafts of his work to the man, albeit, he never received a letter back. Though, that was probably because the third and final instalment of his famous (or infamous) trilogy ‘Icha Icha Paradise’ was hitting bookstores soon, and he was apparently stacked with emails and letters.

In addition, Naruto also decided that he wanted to write stories to match the calibre of Jiraiya, and so he decided to follow in the man’s footsteps. Konoha University: the same university that Jiraiya had also attended. Mere sweat and tears managed to pull Naruto through his final two years at high school — along with help from Ino, since she had the highest test scores in their class — and managed to get decent grades in maths and science. His English mark really stood out though, and he had barely scraped through the acceptance to Konoha University.

Looking back, Naruto’s younger self would never believe he was able to make it to this point in his life. To actually want to do something. The possibility of something actually piquing his interest. And now, he was majoring at it in a rather top notch university.

Luckily for him, Ino had also applied for Konoha University; it was no surprise that she made it in because of her amazing application letter, achievements, and on top of all of that, her father was one of the top psychologists in the country and all, so it was practically a given that she made it in. One of the first to be accepted, actually.

So, despite everything that went against him, Naruto was actually in Konoha University, and was actually with his best friend, doing something that he actually wanted to do. He was feeling pretty great right now.

With the exception of his banging hangover.

It was nowhere near as bad as Ino’s hangover, though.

Naruto sighed as he rolled his suitcase onto the campus, waiting for a huffing Ino who was travelling rather slowly behind him. Plump, purple pillows rested directly underneath her icy blue eyes which were half lidded, already trying their best to get back to sleep. Naruto had once already tried to point out to Ino that she was holding the suitcase the wrong way around, if the sound of scraping fabric against granite wasn’t already a major hint, but he had just been flicked on the head (rather harshly) with an acrylic nail. Naruto decided not to correct her again, for his own safety.


Icy blue eyes darted up with lowered, plucked eyebrows. Platinum blonde hair, tied in a high ponytail, lurched forward, as the irritated girl came to an abrupt halt. Releasing her suitcase, she folded her arms crossly and looked like a teacher about to scold a student — with Naruto being the student. Ino’s bad mood wasn’t unexpected. After all, at home, there was a massive party since it was most people’s final day before going to university. Naruto decided not to get too drunk, maybe a little tipsy, but Ino was the complete opposite; despite being known as the smart one between the two, Ino was rather reckless when the subject came to alcohol. The night always resulted in Naruto — and sometimes Gaara — having to drag a nearly unconscious Ino home.

Fortunately, Ino’s parents were mostly — if not always — out of the country, due to work
obligations. This made it much simpler for Naruto to carry a blubbering Ino through large halls, not having to worry about waking up Ino’s parents. Naruto couldn’t face showing up at his place at five a.m in the morning, or Kushina would not show mercy, so Naruto usually stayed over at Ino’s on late nights out.

“I’m trying, Naruto.” She snapped. “You think I asked for this? My head is pounding.”

“Then you shouldn’t’ve drunk so much alcohol. ‘M hungover too, y’know.”

Ino’s father had helped Naruto through his much more darker times. Ino’s parents and Naruto’s parents had always been very close ever since they became neighbours. That’s how Ino and Naruto met — and how their friendship blossomed. Because Ino’s parents were always busy with work, Ino used to stay with Naruto’s family a lot. The two even wound up going to the same nursery, primary school, middle school, and high school, and now they even went to the same university. As Gaara had once said, the two were truly inseparable.

“Whatever,” Ino scoffed, huffing once more. “If my roommate even dares make a noise, I’ll attack her faster than . . . than light.”

“Way t’make a good first impression.” Naruto said with a hint of sarcasm.

“You’re hardly one to criticise me.”

“You’re hardly one to criticise me.” Naruto mocked in a high pitched voice.

Releasing a light laugh, condensed breath exited out of Ino’s slightly chapped lips. Wrapping one arm around Naruto’s, she continued walking as a slight smile graced upon her lips. Naruto just grinned back, while using one tanned finger to poke Ino’s pale cheek. If Ino were wearing makeup, she would have slapped Naruto’s hand right off, while spouting nonsense about how he could have accidentally wiped her makeup off. Faint acne scars were still visible on Ino’s skin, and he remembered how self-conscious she used to be, and how she would never go outside without wearing makeup. And now here she was, as confident as ever, walking through Konoha University Dormitories with remnants of last night’s makeup still on.

Naruto was always right, though. Even without makeup, Ino truly was beautiful. Even with a messy ponytail, joggers, and mascara stained under eyes, she was still cute.

When Naruto reached his dorm, he sighed in relief. Ino’s dorm was only two floors below his own, so the goodbye was short and sweet. In all honesty, they were too tired to even say goodbye. The two just grunted at each other, before going their separate ways.

Walking through the doorway, haphazardly handling his keys, Naruto was welcomed by a hoard of his suitcases that he placed there shortly before. Lazily dismissing them, Naruto dragged himself over to the couch in the living room before practically collapsing on it.

He had some extra time before his roommate got here, since he obviously wasn’t there yet. And he wouldn’t want to sleep in one of the rooms, just in case his roommate wanted one in particular. So he just decided to quickly rest on the couch. Sleep was inevitable, and his foggy mind could barely fathom a coherent thought, especially with the alcohol still in his system.

Without thinking about anything else, Naruto instantaneously fell into a peaceful slumber.

Cerulean eyes opened slightly. Once. Twice. Rubbing his face with slightly callus hands, Naruto
grunted slightly before shifting his body and hoisting himself up. Fingertips covered sensitive eyes as he rubbed them, trying to adjust them to the cheap, lurid light. Having a hangover wasn’t making anything easier, either.

Eyes were watching him. Flinching slightly, Naruto turned around to meet three pairs of eyes. Dark eyes. Dark eyes that were assessing him quietly, as if he were a final test question or something. Naruto cocked a blond brow in response, still lightly dazed from his sleep.

Two of them were much older than the other boy — a boy who was seemingly Naruto’s age. Naruto couldn’t help but stare at the boy. He was the epitome of beauty. Ebony locks, spiked up in all different directions — though, it wasn’t messy like Naruto’s — framed a pale, porcelain face that emitted a healthy glow, supported by a strong, chiselled jawline. He was tall. Naruto was taller, but only by a few centimetres. His gaze was cold and calculating, and he was staring at Naruto unashamedly.

The other men didn’t seem as threatening. Especially the one with the bowl haircut and thick eyebrows, sporting a bright green spandex suit and orange leg warmers? Ohmygod? Naruto loved orange, it was his favourite colour, but his eyes burned as he stared at the grotesque colour coordination and tacky outfit. An unnatural shine was given off his dark black hair against the harsh light, as if his hair was covered in a thick layer of gel. The other man, despite looking fairly young, had white hair? Covering his face was a surgical mask, and his right eye adorned an eye patch. Between the mask and the eye patch, Naruto could see a scar running down his eye and to his cheek.

Baffled, and still slightly disorientated from just waking up, Naruto blinked dumbly at the three, who stared back at him in turn. Was this a daylight robbery?

Did he leave the door open by accident?

Was he dreaming?

“Ah, sorry to have waken you.” The man with the eye patch said, as Naruto could faintly make out a smile behind the mask.

“S’fine.” Naruto replied back, still dazed from sleep.

To say he was lost for words would be an understatement.

“I’m Kakashi Hatake,” the man continued, encircling an arm around the teenager standing next to him. “This is Sasuke. I presume you’re his roommate.”

“Yeah — yeah, of course. S’rry.” Naruto replied, slightly embarrassed. Of course he was his roommate.

Standing up and wiping his hands on his trousers, Naruto grinned at the boy and held out a hand to — uhm, what was his name again? “Nice t’meet ya. Name’s Naruto Uzumaki.”

Glancing at Naruto’s hand, the boy shrugged and grunted in acknowledgement, refusing to remove his hands from his trouser pockets. Frowning slightly, Naruto withdrew his hand and looked slightly uncomfortable. Why? Out of all the people who applied for Konoha University, why did he get roomed with an asshole?! Or someone who was coming off as one, at the very least.

“I take it that those suitcases in the hallway are yours?” The boy asked.

“Uhm, yeah. I’ll move ‘em soon. I was just thinkin’ t’wait till you got here, since I didn’t know what room you wanted an’ all.”

“I’m not really bothered about the room. They’re all the same, after all.” The boy replied, rather
“Now, now Sasuke. What did I tell you?” Kakashi reminded, squeezing the boy’s arm. “Play nice.”

“I am.”

Naruto snorted, which earned him a glare from the raven haired boy.

“Got something to say?”

“Dunno. Have you?”

“Ah, what a lovely display of youth! The energy!” The bowl-hair cut guy exclaimed, grinning proudly at Sasuke.

Sasuke flashed the man a look of disdain, obviously repelled by the man’s optimism. Naruto laughed internally. Proves the asshole right!

Exhaling through his nose, the boy — Sasuke — unfolded his arms and placed his hands on his hips, and stared at Naruto rather blankly. Underlying the blank expression, there was something Naruto couldn’t make out. Annoyance? Disdain? Repugnance?

“Well,” Naruto started, “if it doesn’t matter to you, I’ll be takin’ the room on the right.”

“Maybe I wanted the room on the right.”

“You said there was no difference.”

“Well, maybe I was incorrect.”

“Fine! Take the room on the right! I’ll have the room on the left.”

“Well, I haven’t seen the left room yet — maybe I’ll like the view better from there.”

“Are you tryin’ to piss me off?” Naruto challenged, taking a step forward.

“Are you accusing me of trying to piss you off?” Sasuke retaliated, also taking a step forward.

Sparks of anger, something akin to rivalry, hissed and crackled between the two boys. Intense stares loomed over one another; black to blue, blue to black. Clenching his fists to his side, Naruto tried his best not the punch The Bastard™ square in his face. Naruto didn’t usually get this worked up, but it was the sheer audacity of the guy! It was like he was *looking* for a fight! Like he was *trying* to make this as hard as possible. Like he *wanted* a punch in the face.

“Now, now. I’m sure we just got off on the wrong foot.” Kakashi intervened, trying to calm the tense atmosphere slightly. “Maybe if we sit down, have a nice cup of coffee—”

“I hate coffee.” Naruto replied, his gaze on Sasuke unmoving.

“Tea, then.”

“I hate tea.” Sasuke said. “You know that.”


“What?”
“Nothin’.”

“Nothing my ass.”

“Want me to kick it while you’re at it? Since you’re such a bastard.” Naruto smirked, staring at Sasuke who’s grin had the same amount of vigour in it.

“You? Kick my ass? Listen here—”

Placing a hand on Sasuke’s shoulder, Kakashi looked at the teenager rather seriously. Ever since the man had walked in (and Naruto had been awake, of course), Naruto hadn’t seen a more serious look on his face — the guy seemed rather laidback, after all. His soft eyes seemed much more firm, almost intimidating, highlighted by the mere aggravation on the man’s face. Even with the mask, Naruto could tell whatever the man was going to say, it was going to be serious. That weird guy — whose name Naruto didn’t know yet — had shut up, too, and the optimistic grin had been wiped of his face; a more serious stare had taken over.

“Sasuke, you’re shaking,” the man said, and Sasuke’s eyes widened slightly, as his gaze turned towards his shaky hands. “Try not to get too excited here. Me and Gai won’t be here. I trust it that you do know that.”

“Of course I know that, stupid.” Sasuke replied monotonously, knocking Kakashi’s hand off of his shoulder as if it were a flea.

“Then don’t push yourself.” Kakashi stated firmly. “I’m being serious.”

“I won’t.”

Sighing, Kakashi nodded at a blank faced Sasuke, and Naruto had a feeling that there was something hidden there. Something that he wasn’t meant to know; a dirty little secret. Not that Naruto cared, since he didn’t want to know anything about The Bastard™, period.

Kakashi’s seriousness cleared up in a second, and Naruto blinked at how fast his facial expression was able to change. Smiling, Kakashi sauntered over to Naruto and bent down slightly, placing a friendly hand on Naruto’s shoulder.

“I apologise on behalf of Sasuke,” he said sweetly. “Even if Sasuke can get a little too worked up at times, he means well — on the occasion. But please, go to whichever room you want, since Sasuke’s behaviour was beyond childish today.”

“Hey, Kakashi—”

“Sasuke, you were in the wrong,” the other man, who Naruto presumed to be Gai, interjected whilst looking at Sasuke rather seriously. “Why don’t you go outside and cool down for a bit? Take a look around the grounds or something.”

Sasuke’s gaze turned over to Naruto and stared at him for a few moments, and Naruto stared — with much less annoyance — right back at Sasuke, with a rather vacuous look on his face. Sasuke’s gaze resumed back to Gai, and he sighed before nodding and turned to the door, without looking back.

After hearing a rather loud door slam, Kakashi and Gai both sighed, as if releasing a breath they had been holding for a long time. Turning to Naruto, Kakashi flashed him a sympathetic look.

“Once again, I apologise on behalf of Sasuke.” Kakashi said. “He can be a little rough around the edges, but he’s actually a nice boy when you get to know him.”
“I’ll believe it when I see it.” Naruto grunted. “No offense, but he’s an asshole.”

“Mah, mah, let’s not make any hasty conclusions. Once you get to know him, I’m sure you and Sasuke will be great friends.”

“Why’s he so . . . mean?” Naruto asked, exasperated.

“Sasuke’s. . . He’s been through a lot. He’s got some walls up to protect him. Walls which are there for reasons that I cannot tell you, since it’s not my place — I’m sure you understand. I’m sure when you two get used to each other, it’ll all be fine.”

‘He’s got some walls up to protect him’. The words echoed through his mind, and the familiarity around the words panged in his chest. Images of his past, the way he pushed people out, even the people closest to him, flashed in his mind. New people, meeting new people, was out of the question. Naruto wouldn’t ever be pleasant to them; he didn’t care about them. They were irrelevant to him.

The bottom line was, whatever Sasuke's situation was, Naruto wasn’t one to judge someone’s cold behaviour.

“Yeah. . . I guess I can understand him on that one. . .” Naruto muttered underneath his breath.

Turning his attention to Kakashi, he flashed him a grin, “yeah, I guess. M’sure Sasuke and me will be friends soon.”

“Thanks, Naruto.” Kakashi said, holding out his hand. “I’m sure Sasuke will appreciate it.”

“No problem.” Naruto replied, shaking Kakashi’s hand.

Wrapping an arm around Naruto’s shoulder, Kakashi leaned closer to his ear. Naruto tried to lean away, but Kakashi’s grip was strong — much stronger than Naruto had expected from a guy whose face was mostly covered.

“I couldn’t help but notice when I walked in. . . are you, perhaps, a fan of Jiraiya’s?” He asked, "I saw some books sitting on top of your boxes, and I thought that, maybe, you were a fan."

“Yeah. Uhm, do you read Jiraiya’s works too?”

“Well Naruto,” Kakashi hummed quite happily, “it seems we have a lot to talk about.”

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, that's the first chapter. Whether I continue or not is really up to you guys, really. I have a whole plot summary in my head (and planned out) so things will get better, eventually. Hopefully. I'M TRYING OKAY.

This fic is probably going to deal with some topics such as: depression, anxiety, asexuality, previous self harm and the symptoms that can come with mental illnesses, among other topics; I know loads of people like to romanticise things such as mental illness for the sake of 'love' and plot, but it can have some real life damaging effects on somebody and their behaviour, mindset and the way they interact with other people. Some side effects of mental illnesses shouldn't be 'romantic' at all, and it can really affect
a person and their whole mindset towards people, and I'm going try my best with my mediocre writing skills to convey that.

But, I'm saying this truthfully: this is not going to be a sad, angsty fic. There will be angst in here, and there might be darker chapters than others, but this fic is really about how you can overcome such obstacles in your life, despite how impossible it seems. Naruto's one example of that, and Sasuke will be another. They'll deal with their problems in different ways, and so fourth. And, in conclusion, I promise this fic isn't going to be depressing; if it goes according to plan, it'll be quite fluffy.

Sorry for the rambling, but thanks for reading (if you've even stayed this far). ( ̄_̄ )o
Chapter Notes

I'm not very proud of this chapter; out of all the five chapters I've written thus far, this is by far my least favourite. It's more of a 'Naruto meeting some of his friends' chapter, so nothing really transpires between Naruto and Sasuke.

I'm really sorry.

And alsooooo, I want to just thank everybody for their kind reviews on the previous chapter. I really do appreciate your feedback, so if you have any faults with my story, don't be afraid to just comment or something since I am open to — and appreciate — constructive criticism (or else how would we all improve)? But honestly, despite it being seeming a bit impersonal, it makes me happy that people seem to be enjoying this story so far. I was quite reluctant to upload this since I didn't think anybody would actually like this story or my scruffy writing style? SO THANK YOU!♥ ♥ ♥

(dont judge me based off this chapter tho)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter II:

Naruto had always dreamed of going to a university. Actually getting into Konoha University was one of the best things that he had done for himself. It was a sense of accomplishment; something that he had wanted for so long and had he done it all by himself. He was accepted because of his own achievements. Little did his high school self know that a bastard going by the alias of Sasuke — real name: The Bastard™ or Satan — would ruin everything for him.

What annoyed Naruto to the very core was that out of all the people in the university Naruto could have have been paired up with for a roommate, it had to be him! Yesterday, he was able to meet Ino’s roommate; a girl with bubblegum pink hair and seafoam green eyes named Sakura. She was a beauty! Her bubblegum pink hair framed her pale face perfectly, and her naturally rosy cheeks contrasted elegantly with her shoulder-length hair. According to Sakura herself, she was previously a brunette with long hair, and she cut her hair shoulder length and dyed it pink as an ‘act of defiance against her parents’, as she phrased it; she didn’t interpret as to why, but Naruto decided not to ask any questions, either.

The thing Naruto liked the most about Sakura was that she was so easy to talk to. Naruto wasn’t the best at meeting new people; he, apparently, either came off as really awkward — since he never really knew what to say — or, the majority of the time, came off a little too strong. But with Sakura, it was different. The conversation flowed naturally, and it was as if he was catching up with an old friend.

It turns out she was studying Medicine, since she had always been interested in doctors and nurses at a very young age. Since then, she has always pursued her dream of being a medic. Her dream was to come here, too, ever since she had discovered that one of the top medics in the country (before she retired) Tsunade Senju, was a professor here.
It somehow reminded Naruto of his idolisation of Jiraiya.

Ino and Sakura seemed to be best friends already, too. They were giggling and laughing on the way back to their dorms, and they seemed to have a lot in common with each other from what Naruto had observed the half an hour that he was in the university café with the two girls. Naruto was almost green with envy — why couldn’t he have a nice (or at the very least, pleasant) relationship like that with his roommate?! Fucking Sasuke.

When Ino asked if she could meet Naruto’s roommate, he had to quickly explain to her the awkwardness of the situation between the two, and the fact they hadn’t spoken since Sasuke’s first day upon arriving. All he had been doing was brooding in his room or sometimes, on the occasion, the kitchen.

Ino just chuckled and insisted that it couldn’t be that bad and that Naruto was probably blowing everything out of proportion. Eventually, Naruto gave in to her demands. Not that Naruto really cared; if she didn’t believe Naruto when he warned her about Sasuke’s taciturn personality, then she could learn that by herself. It wasn’t Naruto’s fault that she was so ardent on meeting Sasuke, A.K.A The Bastard™.

They reached Naruto’s dorm rather quickly since it was only a seven minute walk from the café to Naruto's dorm. Smooth, manicured hands gripped tightly onto her latte cup as Naruto fidgeted with his keys, trying to warm up her hands with it since it was too hot to drink, but the cup the beverage was encased in provided the perfect heat to warm up hands which were victim to the biting cold weather. Pale blue eyes inspected the room as she proceeded into the dorm when Naruto had managed to open the door.

“What’re you doin’?” Naruto asked, looking at her with a raised brow. Almost suspiciously.

“Hm, I was just checking to see if your dorm was nicer than mine.” Ino stated, glancing at the ceilings. “Luckily, it’s not—I dare say that my dorm is better, even.”

“Yeah. That’s probably cause your room's full of fancy candles and posh rugs.”

“Posh rugs?” Ino repeated, laughing.

“I dunno what girls have! Your room at home is jus’ filled up with makeup, but I don’t expect your sittin’ room to be covered in mascara!”

“Well, it probably will be by the end of semester.”

“I don’t doubt you.” He retorted, grinning.

Ino smiled at Naruto before walking over to the coffee table and placing her drink down on top of a coaster. Unwinding her fluffy, mint scarf from around her neck and removing her matching hat, she placed them onto the (rather bare) coatrack that stood idly beside the front door, along with her grey coat.

“So, where’s this mysterious Sasuke?” Ino asked, obviously curious, eyes dancing around the room.

“I dunno. Somewhere.” Naruto shrugged, “either in his room or in the kitchen. He don’t like bein’ disturbed, though.”

“Your depiction of him is probably much worse than real life. I bet he’s a nice guy.”

“Was Satan a nice guy, Ino?”
“Well, technically, Satan was never a guy. He was an angel. And, going by the fact he was, at one point, an angel, I can deduce that he was a good entity at some stage in his life.”

Naruto tucked his hands inside of his green parka while scoffing. Shaking his head while grinning, Naruto followed by a smiling Ino, walked into the kitchen. To his surprise, or non surprise, Sasuke was sitting in the kitchen, idly flipping through a book bound in leather. Leaning his head on one arm, his eyes moved along with the words before glancing at the other page. He only disrupted his reading to glance up at Naruto and Ino. His eyes gave away no emotion — his gaze was inscrutable; it made Naruto almost uncomfortable as he shifted slightly underneath Sasuke’s stare. Shivers ran down Naruto’s spine in response to Sasuke’s aloof look, and the coldness in his stare almost rivalled the weather outside. Ino simply stood behind Naruto, without a care in the world. An almost dumb smile plastered onto her face.

“Is this Sasuke?” She asked, her head peeping around his shoulder as her platinum blonde hair swayed to the side, and her blue eyes twinkled in mirth.

“Uhm, yeah…” Naruto answered awkwardly, turning his attention back to Sasuke. “Sasuke, this is Ino. She jus’ wanted to come round and meet you, I guess.”

It was rather awkward for Naruto to speak to Sasuke. After their first day, Naruto hadn’t said a word to Sasuke whatsoever. So to talk to him now and introduce somebody to him, despite never having a conversation with the guy, seemed rather pointless. Like Sasuke would care anyway.

“Hn.” Sasuke grunted, turning his attention back to his book.

Instead of feeling offended by Sasuke’s obvious dismissal, Ino approached him and sat down next to him, making Naruto almost jump back in complete horror. Ino had always been known as a gregarious person, sure, but there was a boundary! The boundary being that you don’t sit next to somebody who was obviously a moody bastard! Or the antichrist!

“What are you reading?” She inquired, resting her arms on the table.

“Does it really matter?” He drawled.

Ino furrowed her brow slightly — making Naruto smirk internally to himself, she was cracking — before it reverted to her usual sweet demeanour, and she flashed her signature sweet smile, an underlying wickedness in it.

“Hm, no, I was just wondering, really.” She replied, a tune in her voice. “Naruto reads too, did you know? Since he is studying English. Maybe he knows the book you’re reading, Sasuke.”

Rather loudly, Sasuke slammed his book shut and stared at the countertop, a dark undertone in his usual casual glare, making both Ino and Naruto jump in surprise. Wide-eyed, Ino stared at Sasuke, almost looking reluctant to say something. Never had Naruto seen Ino rendered speechless.

“Why did you want to meet me?” Sasuke demanded, an edge to his voice. Naruto couldn’t see the look Sasuke was giving Ino, since Sasuke’s back was faced towards him, but Ino’s face looked rather intimidated. Naruto’s fist clenched at the mere sight.

“I just wanted to meet you. Naruto told me—”

Grabbing his book from the countertop, Sasuke shoved past Naruto and walked out the kitchen. The vehement glare on his face, much more harsher than it was usually, was surprising. When Naruto got over his initial shock, he quickly turned around and gritted his teeth together — how dare he treat Ino like that!
“Bastard! Come back here you—”

A hand on his shoulder stopped him from continuing the sentence. Looking behind him, a smiling Ino’s hand was on his shoulder, and Naruto was perturbed by Ino’s state of calmness.

“How’re you so calm?” Naruto asked, frustration dripping from his voice.

“I like him.”

What?!

“W-what did you just say?!” Naruto shrieked, his jaw hanging open.

“Hm, it’s hard to explain. I’m sure you’ll understand soon — I think. He’s just very,” a pause, as she pondered the correct word, “careful. In a good way. And hot.”

Naruto just raised an eyebrow at her. A perplexed stare covered his face, as Ino’s smile puzzled him further. He knew Ino long enough to know she wasn’t faking it; she was genuinely smiling despite Sasuke’s callous behaviour. Before Naruto could reply, or even speak, Ino tapped him on the shoulder.

“I’m going now. Sakura’s probably bored without me; who wouldn’t be? I’d miss me too.” She sighed, before smirking. “See you around. Don’t forget, your lecture is tomorrow!”

“How could I forget?” He grinned, trying to hide the anger swelling in his gut at Sasuke’s treatment towards Ino.

Ino let herself out, collecting her scarf, hat, and coat while she was at it, along with her latte. Naruto waved her off, and she gave a wave before heading down the stairs; luckily for the both of them, Ino’s dorm was only a couple of floors below his, so it wouldn’t be hard to meet each other. Something that Naruto was rather grateful for.

Cold weather nipped at his tanned neck, making it colder and colder; in hindsight, Naruto knew that he should have brought a scarf, or at least managed to grab a coat on the way out. If Naruto wasn’t going to his first lecture, he would have probably ran back to his dorm and grabbed one, but refused to be late for his very first one.

Being known as the class clown in middle school, Naruto was always tardy to his lessons. Walking in late, getting scolded at by the teacher — he always did things to make people laugh. To make people accept him, and find him likeable. It was always easy for Ino to make friends with other people since she was the biggest extrovert he had ever met. In a flash she could start a conversation with somebody, while Naruto just stood idly by her.

In high school, Naruto hardly attended lessons at all; he was either cooped up in Iruka’s office, or anywhere else. His grades started to suffer since he had missed so many lessons, and he refused for that to be the case again. Nor did he want to be known as the ‘class clown’, either. Despite the fact it made it more easier for Naruto to talk to people, many people mocked him and didn’t take him seriously because of it; he didn’t want the situation to wind up being a copy of middle school.

Breathing out, a trail of smoke left his mouth. He was dressed in the first things he could find: a pair on black jogging bottoms, and an orange hoodie. Comfortable enough to walk to his lectures in, and from what he saw on the way to the building, many students were wearing their most comfortable clothes too. Surrounded by yawning boys and girls with messy buns, eyes half shut, Naruto didn’t feel like he was the only one uncaring of the effort he made.
Unfortunately for Naruto, his building was on the complete other side of the campus. When he first heard this, Naruto couldn’t say that he wasn’t annoyed. Why did he have to make the effort of travelling all the way across campus! Why did God hate him so much? First Sasuke, and now this? Probably because Naruto didn’t really believe in him, but still!

Frost coated the remaining grass and made the grass much rougher than usual. An audible crunch could be heard every time Naruto took a step. Not that Naruto necessarily minded, though — in all honesty, he liked the noise. It reminded him of stepping on crunchy leaves in the fall, only less slippery.

Things between him and Sasuke hadn’t gotten better, either. If anything, things between them had grown worse — more hostile. An obvious tension filled the room whenever they collided, despite Sasuke always hiding himself in his room. On the odd occasion, when Sasuke ever left his room, Naruto would bump into him in the kitchen. Guilt, or a feeling akin to it, festered whenever Naruto saw him, and he didn’t know why! Kakashi’s words — Sasuke’s . . . He’s been through a lot. He’s got some walls up to protect him — clung onto his back like a bad omen; he somehow felt like he was the one responsible for Sasuke’s antisocial behaviour. But what did Naruto do? Surely Naruto wasn’t the reason why Sasuke had cooped himself up in his room.

Right?

Naruto didn’t even notice how badly he was worrying about Sasuke until he started showing physical symptoms every time Naruto’s mind wandered over to the whole Sasuke ordeal. Constantly, Naruto would shake his leg, bite his lip, fidget, or anything else. Mrs ‘I’ve already had one psychology lecture so now I’m an expert’ Yamanaka pointed it out to him, and said that he needed to stop stressing about the whole Sasuke situation.

To state one thing about himself, Naruto would say he was an empathetic person. Therefore, what Sasuke could be feeling right now plagued his mind; just by appearances alone, you couldn’t tell somebody’s inner turmoil. He remembered how stoic he thought Gaara was, how unfeeling those jade eyes were, before he actually knew the guy. When Naruto befriended Gaara, he was almost blown back by the amount of feeling Gaara actually showed, since the redhead never showed a trace of emotion outside of the counselling office.

Maybe Sasuke was the same as Gaara?

The only emotions of Sasuke that Naruto had borne witness to were frustration, anger or annoyance. Mostly, though, it was just a passive look on apathy. The most emotion Naruto had ever seen was when Ino visited that one time; never had Naruto seen Sasuke looking so angry. Things between the two unravelled further after that. Naruto, despite not liking the way Sasuke treated Ino at all, was not one to judge somebody’s flashes of rage and pushing people away. As much as he despised watching Sasuke do it because it was just plain ignorant, Naruto used to be the same.

Clicking his teeth, Naruto snapped himself out of his thoughts. Once again, he was overthinking the whole situation. Maybe Sasuke just didn’t like Naruto; he wouldn’t be the first person to. Besides, Naruto had this lecture to go to, he didn’t have the time to be worrying about Sasuke so much — he barely knew the guy!

With his designated building within sight, nervousness soon overtook Naruto’s subconscious and all thoughts of Sasuke were pushed aside. Knees buckled at the sight of the tall, almost emitting an intimidating aura, building; you could easily tell how old and grand this university was. The architecture was seemingly ancient, and it was obvious how old fashioned it was. From the outside, Naruto couldn’t help but observe the dinginess of the building — how daunting the building seemed to be. He wondered how his professor would be. According to Ino, her professor was unnerving.
Scars tattooed his face allegedly, and he claimed to previously work in Government affairs — whether that was true or not was not known, but the way Ino sounded, she was obviously demoralised by the man.

Taking a deep breath to calm his nerves, Naruto huffed and stuck his chest out, trying to convey confidence and self-assurance. Something that he knew all universities wanted — according to Yahoo Answers, anyway. His vice grip on his notepad grew tighter, and if Naruto had known how tight it was, he would have also realised how crumpled his papers were getting.

Blue eyes looked around the building as he walked in, trying to find the correct room. Walking into the erroneous room would be embarrassing to say the least; it was something that he refused to do.

When he found the correct room, he hesitated. This was really it. Why he was so nervous, he had no idea. A slight bit of nervousness, sure — that was a given. It would be stupid not to be nervous, however, with the way his stomach was turning, and his non-existent breakfast refused to stay down in his gut, Naruto wondered whether or not to go in. Surely if he missed one lecture it wo—

“Are you going to go in or not?” A voice behind him drawled.

Jumping slightly, Naruto quickly turned around to see a boy with his brown hair tied up in a ponytail, almost reminding him of the end of a pineapple. Tucked neatly between his rib and his arm was a small notepad and a pen securely inside the rim. Tears pricked in the corner of the boy’s eyes as he yawned, but his monotonous look stayed on Naruto.

“I’ve been watching you for at least three minutes.” He continued, “I was walking behind you, not in a creepy way. I don’t think talking to yourself is healthy, but whatever makes you comfortable.”

Naruto’s cheeks flashed a violent red, until he could compete with a stop sign, out of sheer embarrassment. This guy (a guy in his lectures, nonetheless!) saw Naruto talking to himself, and hesitating. How embarrassing! He really hadn’t gotten off to a good start already!


“Don’t worry ‘bout it,” the guy said, flashing Naruto a lopsided grin, “being nervous is kinda obvious. I’m not judging or anything, if that’s what you think. You might want to calm down a notch, though. Trust me, it won’t be as bad as you think.”

Naruto stared at the guy, before grinning. His tense demeanour dropped off of his chest instantly, and relief washed over him as he sighed, releasing a breath he didn’t even realise he was holding. Scratching the back of his head — the nervous habit he had somehow picked up over the years — to hide his awkwardness, Naruto opened the door while still facing the mysterious boy, making sure not to fall through the door or anything that would (somehow) make this moment even more embarrassing for himself.

As Naruto scanned the lecture hall, he was relieved that only a few amount of people had arrived at the lecture as of yet — Naruto counted six — and had somehow all festered to the back of the classroom.

At least they knew their priorities.

“My name’s Shikamaru,” the same boy, Shikamaru, said from behind him, “Shikamaru Nara. Yours?”

“Nice t’meet ya,” Naruto said sincerely, holding out his hand. “Name’s Naruto Uzumaki.”
Shikamaru shook Naruto’s outstretched hand before they headed to the seats on the other side of the room nearest to the windows. Since grey clouds were blocking out the sun, Naruto had no problem with it; when the weather cleared up, however, Naruto was staying far away from the windows. Having the sun metaphorically punch you in the face wasn’t fun, and all the squinting Naruto had to do managed to give him a headache over time. He remembered one of his assigned desks in high school was located near the window, and he always wore a black jumper on sunny days.

“D’you know who our lecturer is?” Naruto asked, as he and Shikamaru got settled into their seats.

“I heard it’s some guy named Asuma. Apparently, he’s pretty good, I don’t know if we actually got him, though, it’s just what my roommate told me.”

Naruto’s mind twitched at the word ‘roommate’, and his nose subconsciously scrunched up. Sasuke had been completely eradicated from his mind, and now the thought of him had come back with a crushing force.

“Hm? I’m guessing that you don’t get along with your roommate?” Shikamaru asked, putting his head on the desk.

“Ah, that. It’s complicated. . .” Naruto laughed awkwardly.

“Getting stuck with a roommate you don’t like. Troublesome.” Shikamaru sighed. “I won’t pry into your business, though.”

Naruto leaned back in his chair slightly, sighing. “S’not that I hate him, s’just. . . he’s so broody, y’know? Like, he’s stuck in his room all day, and he’s flat out rude. If I ask him somethin’, he’ll just glare at me or somethin’. When I met him, he refused to shake my hand and was obviously bein’ difficult to piss me off. He’s just so. . . ugh.”

“Sounds troublesome,” Shikamaru agreed. “So, what about you? Have you done anything to him?”

Naruto pondered for a moment, his eyebrow furrowing. He couldn’t think of anything he had done — especially while knowing he did it to annoy Sasuke intentionally. He wasn’t that type of person. Once again, the idea of him doing something to annoy Sasuke unknowingly floated around his mind, but he barely had a chance to speak to the guy.

“I really can’t think of anything.”

“Then maybe he’s just a guy who’s hard to get along with. . .” Shikamaru said. “Do you want to be friends with him?”

Naruto’s head snapped around to Shikamaru, staring at him, his eyes slightly widened, but not enough to show the initial shock. Did he want to be friends with Sasuke? Once again, Kakashi’s words echoed in his mind, being much louder than the rest of his thoughts.

“I. . . I don’t know. . .” Naruto answered honestly. “If I could be friends with him, that’d be great, but I feel like I’d have to jump a lot of hurdles to do that, y’know?”

“Hm,” Shikamaru hummed. “Maybe it’d be worth it.”

Naruto stared at Shikamaru for a moment, contemplating his words. Would it be worth making friends with Sasuke? How would he even do it? Making friends with The Bastard™ would save him a lot of grief in the near future, he guessed. Kakashi’s words echoed through his mind for the umpteenth time; he could feel the urgency in Kakashi’s words. An almost request, he assumed. Maybe making friends with Sasuke would be the best for both of them.
“So, anyway, enough about me. How’s things with your roommate goin’ for ya?”

“Choji? Yeah, he’s pretty chill. Studying culinary arts — wants to be a professional chef or something.”

“Really?! Wow, that’s pretty cool. I bet he can cook anythin’ for you. You should take advantage of that privilege, y’know.”

“I will.” Shikamaru smirked before looking face down in his desk.

When Naruto averted his attention away from (was he sleeping?! Shikamaru, he perceived just how many students had swarmed into the lecture hall while he and Shikamaru had their little chat. There were some people he had seen strolling around campus, or sitting idly in the café, but most of them he had never seen before. Maybe they had different accommodation? Or maybe Naruto had just never crossed paths with them. He had only been in the university for a couple of days after all.

Just before Naruto was about to ask Shikamaru if he knew anybody else taking this class, an obviously older man walked into the classroom; his stature commanded silence and respect even without speaking. The first thing Naruto noticed was the height of the man, and his posture was as straight as a board; ash coloured, spiky hair sat on top of his head and matched his well-trimmed beard. Hanging out of the corner of his mouth was an unlit cigarette — were you even allowed to smoke in here?! Dark eyes flickered across the whole class, as if inspecting them. Naruto just stared, and was slightly taken aback when dark eyes landed on him — or the sleeping boy next to him, who didn’t even bother lifting his head, or opening his eyes for that matter. Staring at Shikamaru for a good minute or so, the whole populace of the hall turned their heads and tried to see what their supposed lecturer, or so Naruto surmised, was looking at.

“Hey, you,” the man said, looking at Naruto. Naruto couldn’t help but notice his gravelly voice, as if he had a bad throat infection, an obvious sign that he had one too many cigarettes, “is the boy next to you alive?”

“Uhm, I think so. . .” Naruto replied, dumbfounded.

Naruto’s reply was retorted with an intense stare, and he eventually buckled. Not that he knew completely, but he was guessing his lecturer was hinting to wake Shikamaru up, or something. Poking the boy’s cheek, he waited until Shikamaru shifted slightly in his seat.

“Yo, uhm, Shika. . . I think that the lecturer wants to talk to you.”

Lifting his head up slightly, Shikamaru’s tired eyes locked with their lecturer’s. None of them said anything for a while, and Naruto looked between them back and forth with a furrowed brow. When the lecturer smirked, Naruto felt himself ease slightly.

“Kid, what’s your name?” The man asked.

“It’s rude asking somebody else’s name without giving yours first,” Shikamaru droned.

“Asuma Sarutobi — also known as your lecturer. Any other would’ve kicked you out by now, you know. It’s not essential to go to lectures, so when you do, I suggest you pay attention.”

“No other lecturer wouldn’t be smoking, but here we are.” Shikamaru retorted. “I think you missed the ‘No Smoking’ sign before you came into the building.”
“Touché, slacker.” Asuma smirked, flipping open his lighter and lighting his cigarette butt.

Bright embers emerged from the cigarette tip, and he inhaled before blowing smoke out of his mouth. Naruto gawked at the sight of it. The mere lax nature of his professor was astounding! Naruto couldn’t deny the ease that flooded him knowing that his professor was relaxed — or so what he had observed so far. At least he wasn’t stuck with some ex-military guy who was covered in scars and got the job as a lecturer here through dubious intentions or whatnot.

Lowering his hand down, and therefore the cigarette, Asuma’s eyes raked his whole lecture hall. Naruto saw a curve in his lips as his eyes focused on a rather horrified looking bunch of girls sitting in the far corner. Grey eyes turned to Naruto, and Naruto stared back at him rather with a rather bored expression, waiting for the actual lecture to begin.

“Hm, I’ve made my first impressions on you all already.” Asuma stated whilst looking away from Naruto, his stance firm. “Now that that’s all over with, I guess I’ll introduce myself; I’m your new professor Asuma Sarutobi. I’m not expecting you to come to all of my lectures, since I know some of you will be more interested in partying — this isn’t my first class. Though, if you miss something since you can’t be bothered to come, don’t expect me to help you. This class is your responsibility, it’s just my job to fail or pass you.”

A wave of aggravated sighs and scoffs washed across the entire classroom. Looking around the room, Naruto saw many people flash each other dubious looks, and mutters of ‘he can’t be serious’ were barely audible. Frowns and scowls were flashed Asuma’s way, who just seemed to find the whole situation rather humorous.

“Yes, scowl and sigh at me, I’ve heard it all before, however, the fact of the matter is that you all are legally adults here, and being an adult comes with responsibilities. Those responsibilities being attending your lectures. This isn’t high school now, and you won’t need to know the quadratic formula, but this is for your degree after all. I also except for all your coursework and assignments to be on time. Depending on your excuse, I may let it slide, but I will hound you for it.”

“He sounds like my mom.” A voice behind Naruto whispered.

Eye rolls and huffs of annoyance were all directed at Asuma, who seemed to not find it just as amusing as before. Instead, he took a puff of his cigarette and closed his eyes in exasperation.

“Listen, I understand how demanding university can be, and why some of you are annoyed since high school is a walk in the park, really. Getting away with homework or having a day off didn’t really affect anything, but things are more serious now. This is about your future.”

People across the room glanced at each other with puzzled looks on their faces as quiet murmurs surfed across the whole class. After the whole class had settled down from Asuma’s words — which Naruto hardly minded, since after what Ino had told him about Ibiki, he got off rather easily — the lecture loomed on for another forty minutes. A single lecture was estimated to be a total of fifty minutes, and since ten of them had already zoomed by because of Asuma’s words, the lecture finished rather quickly. Luckily for Naruto, today’s lecture wasn’t a double. Or even worse, a triple.

When Naruto’s coevals flooded out of the room, he and Shikamaru followed lazily behind them, being the last ones out. Shikamaru’s head had been down for most of the lecture — which just focused on the basics of writing and literature — but he still looked like he was going to fall asleep. Hands placed behind his head, Naruto idly walked out of the building, with a yawning Shikamaru trailing behind, his eyes half lidded.

“What did you think of our professor?” Shikamaru yawned.
“Asuma? Seems alright, he’s better than my friend’s professor.”

“Yeah, I heard the professors at this university were strict, so I’m happy I got Asuma,” Shikamaru drawled, staring at the clouds. “Nearly put me off going here. Strict teachers are the one thing I really cannot do.”

“I can understand where you’re coming from.” Naruto said, reminiscing his middle school days where all of his teachers hated him. Wasn’t nostalgia beautiful?

“Well, anyway, I’m gonna go back to my dorm and catch some sleep. Maybe I’ll see you round?”

“Hm, yeah, probably. If y’need me, dorm 302. West building.”

“Dorm 206, east building.” Shikamaru replied, sticking his hand up in a way of saying goodbye. Naruto waved back, before heading his own way back to his dorm. Thinking back to what Shikamaru had said to him in the lecture, he was more confident in facing Sasuke; maybe he’ll just talk to the guy or something, or just try and make friends with him. It wasn’t the first time Naruto would have to take the first step in making a friendship with somebody, after all.

Walking through the icy grass, which he was rather thankful for since the mud was solidified, and he didn’t have to trudge through the dirt, Naruto pulled his hoodie over his head, feeling his ears slowly decreasing in temperature. Hands stuffed in his pockets, and his head hidden beneath his hood, Naruto was rather snug for somebody walking through below freezing temperatures — okay, maybe he was exaggerating, but it was fucking cold!

When Naruto finally reached his designated floor, he couldn’t help but sigh in relief. After climbing up eight blocks of stairs, and walking by a duo of blushing, giggling girls — what was this, grade school? — he was finally free for the rest of the day. Sleep was the first option, then maybe he would see what Ino was doing. The idea of trying to befriend Sasuke had somehow latched onto the back of his mind, but now that he was able to actually do it, the idea seemed less appealing.

Feeling his phone buzz against his hand because Naruto had, prior to leaving the house, shoved it into the pockets of his hoodie, Naruto grabbed it and looked at the glowing screen alerting him that he had a text message from Ino.

Ino

hey, do you want to go out? i’m guessing that you just got back from your lecture so you’re probably hungry. it was a single right? i’m craving food. is it okay if sakura comes? she’s hungry too. she knows this really great place and i thought you’d like to come with us

btw if you’ve got a double or something, i’m sorry that i probably made you hungry for no reason :)

At that exact moment, as if on cue, Naruto’s stomach growled. He didn’t have breakfast after all, since he thought it would be better to have it when he got back. Mulling it over, Naruto decided to go. It would put off trying to make friends with Sasuke, and he could ask Ino and Sakura for some advice, maybe. Unlocking his phone, Naruto sent a quick text back.

Yh ill come to ur dorm now
Wait there ill be 5 mins

And he made his way down to Ino and Sakura’s dormitory, food in mind. He was really hungry.
This is a little edit note: i feel like i've confused everybody, and i'm sorry. Naruto's recovered from his depression before the story, but it hasn't gone away fully. for example, he doesn't get suicidal thought anymore, nor is he irresolute/ 'too tired' to do things such as his studies; however sometimes his depression can come back very slightly, and that can affect him. but since it's very vague when it DOES come back, he's not taking medication because of how dangerous some medication can actually be?

If Naruto was diagnosed with severe chronic depression etcetera it would be a different story entirely, since that is MUCH harder to beat and i doubt it would go in the span of two years? however, since he was only diagnosed with minor clinical depression in the first place, it was much easier to 'beat', despite if sometimes his mindset can be affected by it. you'll see what i mean later in the story; for the most part though, naruto is an optimistic person in general, and so in this fic too.

i hope i've cleaned up any confusion!!
so i (most likely) failed my maths test, need to revise biology, physics and chem, and the new naruto episode emotionally ruined me, so without further ado, here is the new chapter(깃발)

i'd be lying if i said i was 100% sure this chapter has no mistakes, but i'm really tired so i'm probably going to fall asleep after writing this. i'll check it in the morning or something.

also wanted to thank everybody for the really nice comments!! you guys fuel me to write chapters more quickly!! i've got some upcoming tests so updates will be a tad slow, but after that i'm free to engulf myself in sns hell.

Chapter III

Naruto stared at the freshly made pancakes in front of him in awe. Steam slowly emerged from the pancakes, indicating that they were still warm, if not already made clear by the waitress who told him not to touch the plate for a minute or two since it was fresh out of the oven.

Opposite him, Sakura and Ino poured syrup and icing powder onto their pancakes — Sakura had recommended that they all get the pancakes because apparently ‘they were the best’ — whilst discussing some film that they watched last night. Naruto was almost envious, but pushed the bitter feeling aside. Instead, he would focus on the mouth-watering pancakes sitting in front of him, literally asking to be eaten.

“So, Sakura, how’d y’know such a nice place?” Naruto asked, looking around the diner.

When Naruto thought of diners, the image of a dingy, rundown place appeared in his head like the one in The Nightmare on Elm Street remake at the start of the film, however, looking around at the capacious diner Naruto couldn’t help but realise how quaint and tranquil it was. Clean, tiled floors and a retro design were executed perfectly, and if the smell of the food was as good as it tasted, Naruto had probably found his new favourite place.

“Well, let’s say when I was going through my rebellious stage, I went out more often that not. Me and my friends always went to new cities looking for the next party, and once or twice I ended up here at six in the morning. And, when me and my parents were driving up, I recognised the place.” She explained, trying to sprinkle as much icing sugar as she could onto her pancakes, “the owner here is really nice, and so is the food.”

“It looks really nice!” Ino exclaimed, glancing around the diner, obviously impressed by the décor.

Families were littered everywhere, and the sound of the bell chiming whenever somebody walked in rung over the murmur of conversations between everyone. Thankfully, it wasn't too loud in here, and no children were screaming, either. Loud, screaming children were the one thing that Naruto couldn’t handle. He was the university student.
Deciding to take a bite out of his pancake, Naruto cut it up with his cutlery — it cut like butter — and put a rather large chunk of it into his mouth. He couldn’t help but close his eyes in absolute bliss. The pancake wasn’t too sweet, but it also had flavour — the texture and softness was just right and melted onto Naruto’s tongue. Food like this was to die for.

“So, what’d you think?” Sakura asked, rather hopefully.

Naruto groaned and gave a thumbs up, trying to savour the flavour of the pancake. A soft, cute giggle escaped Ino’s lips as she used a hand to cover her mouth. Leaning across the table with a napkin, she wiped the left corner of Naruto’s mouth while still smiling.

“You missed a spot.”

“Jus’ savin’ it for later.” He retorted, grinning.

“So, are you two boyfriend and girlfriend, or something?” Sakura questioned, looking between the two rather oddly.

“No way!” Naruto denied, holding his hands up and quickly swallowing the pancake to clean up any misunderstandings. Ino looked just as embarrassed, as her cheeks glowed a bright red, but she didn’t say anything.

“Hm,” Sakura hummed, unconvinced, “so what are you two? Friends with benefits? Cousins? Step siblings?”

“Just friends,” Naruto explained. “We’ve been friends since we were four.”

“Four? You’ve known each other for fourteen years?!” Sakura gasped.

“Yup,” Naruto replied. “Ino’s honestly been such a good friend to me, I dunno what I would’ve done without her, honestly.”

“Anyways, Naruto, how was your first lecture?” Ino interrupted. “I forgot to ask.”

“It was pretty good, actually. I didn’t get stuck with a horrible lecturer like you did, thankfully.” Naruto laughed, whilst Ino frowned. “But seriously, he seems pretty cool, except he was smokin’ in it — surprised he’s allowed to do it, but whatever works, works. Oh! And also, I met this guy called Shikamaru. He’s pretty cool.”

“Ibiki is a monster.” Ino sighed, deflating. “He’s just so scary.”

“Oh, Sakura, did you meet Tsunade?” Naruto questioned, turning his attention to Sakura.

“No,” she grumbled, sinking down in her chair, “she’s apparently dealing with some important business so some stand in is filling in for her. Shizune or something.”

“Aw man, that sucks.”

“But anyway, how are things between you and Sasuke?” Ino asked.

Seafoam green and powder blue eyes stared at him, waiting for Naruto to answer their question whilst Naruto stared at them with a pancake hanging out of his mouth. Quickly, he swallowed it (damn, all these questions were making him have to rush his pancakes!) and leaned back into his booth, closing his eyes in frustration. Or irritation. He felt a lot of negative emotions whilst thinking about Sasuke. Damn bastard.
“I dunno. We haven’t spoke, but ever since Ino came over, he’s been even more angry...”

“I’m sorry Naruto—” Ino started.

“No, don’t apologise, s’not your fault.” Naruto interjected, “s’just, I wanna try and make friends with him, y’know, I jus’ don’t know how to go about it.”

"You want to be friends with him?" Ino repeated, flummoxed.

"Well, not friends, but more like on good terms. Like, if he stopped sending me ‘I Want To Kill You’ vibes, it’d be pretty good.”

“Why not a peace offering of some sort?” Sakura suggested.

“Like what? A knife to stab me with? No thanks.” He laughed bitterly.

“I mean,” Sakura said, pushing a pancake towards him as a hint, “why not bring him some food or something. Nobody, especially a university student, would pass up food.”

Staring at the pancakes, Naruto contemplated Sakura’s words. Maybe that wasn’t such a bad idea.

Naruto stared at the box in his hand, almost accusingly. Naruto had decided on asking for two pancakes to go so he could at the very least try to make a compromise with Sasuke, but now that he was actually standing outside of Sasuke’s door, he didn’t know how to go about it. How would he even go about it when the probability of seeing The Bastard™ outside of his cocoon was very, very low.

Sasuke wasn’t anywhere to be seen in the apartment, not even the kitchen. Naruto thought that maybe he was at a lecture, or somewhere else, but Sasuke’s shoes were lined up perfectly next to the door; a tell-tale sign that Sasuke was somewhere in the apartment, and since Naruto couldn’t find him, Sasuke had probably barricaded himself in his room. A shock, really.

Well, fuck.

Knocking on his door was always a solid option, but what if Sasuke quickly opened the door, stabbed Naruto, and left him to die? It was something that he wouldn’t put past Sasuke, especially considering his moody behaviour recently. What if Sasuke was a wanted felon? Or a psychopath! Well, sociopath to be more accurate. What if he was in there, planning Naruto’s death as he was just standing there? Perhaps the reason why he was always cooped up in his room was because he was planning Naruto’s death this entire time?

Shivers ran down Naruto’s spine at the thought of the last thing that he saw was Sasuke’s glare. Pits of endless black orbs staring right into his soul, before he blacked out. Shaking his head from such irrevocable thoughts, Naruto took a massive breath and decided it was now or never.

Knock. Knock.

He did it. Naruto actually did it. He, Naruto Uzumaki, actually knocked on Sasuke’s — enter last name here, probably Lucifer — door. Three, solid knocks. Naruto waited at the door, awkwardly shuffling on his feet. When there was no response, Naruto presumed that Sasuke might still be asleep.

And that’s when he heard a shuffling noise coming from inside Sasuke’s room. The sound of somebody dragging their feet across the floor grew nearer and nearer, and the anticipation was
building up inside Naruto. Why was he so scared to face Sasuke? All the jokes about him being Satan were fables. Not actually true.

Well, he hoped.

The door clicked, and slowly opened. Naruto leaned his head slightly to the left, trying to look at the gap in between the door, until Sasuke emerged. Dark, vivid bags rested underneath Sasuke’s eyes, and the sheer darkness of them contrasted greatly with his marmoreal, pale skin. Despite Sasuke’s hair being somewhat spiky, it was always, in its own way, neat. And now, an exploding firework of black rested on top of his head.

Leaning against the door, Sasuke folded his arms and stared at Naruto almost derisively. Dark eyes narrowed at him, but Naruto couldn’t really take note of that, since only one thing seemed to register inside of his head: Sasuke was shirtless. It wasn’t like Sasuke had a six-pack or anything, but Naruto could appreciate that he was well toned. Very well-toned.

Nonetheless, he was still a bastard.

“What do you want?” He asked sharply.

“Well, y’see,” Naruto quickly looked up, his tanned cheeks flushed with pink, “I was just wonderin’. . . if maybe you wanted this?”

On cue, Naruto held out the box containing the pancakes and looked up rather sheepishly to see Sasuke’s facial expression. A flummoxed expression was wiped across Sasuke’s face as he stared at Naruto as if trying to interpret whether Naruto had an ulterior motive or not. The surprised — almost off guard expression — disappeared in an instant, and his usual insouciant demeanour resurfaced.

“And,” he added quickly, "to see if we could, maybe, talk?”

Sasuke’s enigmatic stare loomed on Naruto for a very long time. Unflinching, Naruto stared back but with a softer gaze, and a lopsided grin on his face. After a long moment of assessing on Sasuke’s part, he wordlessly moved aside from the door and left it open — an almost silent invitation. Sighing internally to himself, Naruto walked inside Sasuke’s room and couldn’t help but appreciate how organised it was compared to his own. Books were stacked neatly adjacent to one another and a couple of picture frames were littered around the room. No sight of discarded clothes were on the floor, and Naruto couldn’t help but make the mental note of how different Naruto and Sasuke actually were to each other. There was no question that Sasuke would probably feel nauseous at the sight of Naruto’s room compared to his own, especially since he had only been in the dorm for three days! Naruto had never been an organised guy, though.

Sasuke sat on his bed, and Naruto noticed that the bed covers were slightly skewed. Naruto placed the box of pancakes next to the bedside table directly adjacent to Sasuke’s bed, and Naruto couldn’t help but catch a glimpse of the rather elegant, and obviously very expensive, picture frame sitting on top of it. From what he could see, Kakashi and Gai definitely weren’t in the picture. Instead, a man, a woman, and two boys stood there. One of the boys, the youngest, looked identical to Sasuke, except there was one difference.

The little boy seemed happy, wrapped up in the older boy’s arms.

Was that Sasuke? Naruto swallowed subconsciously, as he inspected the frame a little more closely; the only woman in the picture was prepossessing. Long, ebony hair fell to just above her waste, and her smile seemed genuine, and peaceful. Despite her eyes being closed, Naruto assumed that her eyes would be dark just like everybody else’s in the picture. One more observation he made was
how much the little boy in the picture — who Naruto didn’t know if he was Sasuke or not — reassembled her.

The elder boy was smiling too, though, his smile was softer. More nonchalant. Faint lines were obvious underneath the boy’s eyes which made Naruto’s brow furrow slightly; the boy, even though he was obviously the eldest between the two, seemed to be only thirteen, or fourteen, from what Naruto could deduce. Why did he have such heavy lines, probably from lack of sleep, underneath his eyes?

Everybody in the picture was smiling except for one. The eldest man. Naruto surmised that that was the father of the family. Instead of soft smiles, or grins, the man had a stern expression on his face, and his inscrutable stare reminded Naruto of Sasuke’s current disposition. Despite that, though, the man’s stare seemed to have no hostility in it, unlike Sasuke’s. Just an austere stance.

The picture was that of a happy family.

A sound of somebody clearing their throat snapped Naruto out of his thoughts. He quickly jolted his head up and managed to bang it on the lamp in the process. Clutching the back of his head, Naruto looked at Sasuke with another lopsided, and goofy grin, slightly embarrassed.

“Are you finished?” Sasuke asked rather dismissively.

“Heh heh, sorry, guess I just got a little carried away.” He chuckled, “who are they? Your family or somethin’?”

Sasuke stared at Naruto. Instead on the usual dark glare which promised a painful death, it was a stare of indifference. No underlying dark stares or lowered eyebrows highlighting Sasuke’s displeasure in something Naruto had done — it was just a blank stare.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Sasuke replied easily, relaxing himself slightly. “So, what did you want to talk about?”

“Oh, yeah, so well,” he stammered, not sure how to phrase this. He should have planned this out a little, first! Grabbing the box from the nightstand, he practically threw it at Sasuke, “I got you pancakes.”

“You wanted to talk about pancakes?”

“No! I wanted to talk about friendship.” He blurted out.

To say Naruto had never seen such an expression of cluelessness on Sasuke’s face would be an understatement; the boy looked rather confused, if anything. At least he didn’t look as threatening, just bewildered. Naruto guessed he was going in the right direction though, since the only emotions Naruto had been able to catch glimpse of from Sasuke was anger, or frustration. Confusion wasn’t the expression on Sasuke’s face that he had hoped for, but at least Naruto wasn’t scared for his life.

“If you’re looking on advice on how to make friends I really can’t help you—”

“No, I mean. . . friendship between us.”

Okay, now Sasuke looked slightly afraid. Maybe a little creeped out. Did Naruto come off as too strong? But, there was no backing down now, Naruto intended to finish what he had started, despite the amount of bruises he could be leaving with today. Or stab wounds. It didn’t seem like Sasuke had anything obviously sharp enough to stab Naruto with, but his nails looked rather long, and—
“Friendship between us? What are you implying?” Sasuke interrogated, dark eyes narrowing slightly.

“Like, maybe we could be friends?” He babbled.

Hands darted to Naruto’s mouth as soon as the words sprung off of his tongue. He sounded so childish! Regret slowly oozed into every pore in his body, and he deflated slightly at the confounded look on Sasuke’s face — he obviously wasn’t expecting that. In all honesty, neither was Naruto. He always imagined of doing it with much more grace and poise, not babbling like a monkey.

“Why would you want to be friends with me?” Sasuke asked suspiciously, “I’ve been nothing but rude to you upon arriving here, I was mean to your girlfriend, I was obviously trying to be difficult when we first got here, and—”

“Okay, hold up. One, Ino is not my girlfriend. And, two, I jus’ think we got off on the wrong foot, is all. I’m sure if we started over, then maybe we could be, at the very least, civil?”

... Silence.

... Naruto was practically thrown out of Sasuke’s room. After flashing Naruto a nonplussed stare for at least thirty seconds, Naruto barely had time to react before Sasuke had forcibly shoved him out of the room and abruptly slamming the door in Naruto’s face before he could even interject!

What. A. Bastard!

And he didn’t even return the pancakes!

The audacity of that guy made Naruto want to punch him in the face! Naruto tried to be the good guy, he brought Sasuke pancakes, made the first move to try and create a friendship, and he got shoved out of a room for it! That was the last time that Naruto tried to be a nice guy towards Sasuke!

“That’s three bucks I’ll never see again. . .” He mumbled, shoving his hands in his pockets.

Fucking Sasuke.

For the rest of the day, Naruto decided to release his anger and watch reruns of Friends while munching on some tortilla chips which he picked up from one of those cheap stores down the road, along with some other snacks. They would last him for a week, if he ate it wisely, and if worse came to worse he could always steal the food that Sasuke had brought. After all, the bastard did owe him some pancakes! And an apology!

Deciding not to think on such trivial matters — the trivial matter being Sasuke himself — Naruto turned his full attention back to the television that was being drowned out by the rather loud crunching noise Naruto was making while eating his chips.

Click.

The sound of a door being unlocked. Considering where the noise came from, it was either his bedroom door or Sasuke’s door that had made the noise, and since Naruto wasn’t in his room, he could only go with the latter. His nose scrunched up at the thought of Sasuke, and a feeling akin to
bitterness swelled up in his gut — an almost guilt feeling. The idea of Sasuke, or seeing him, just made Naruto feel almost nauseous. He was so angry!

The unmistakable figure of Sasuke practically glided into the room. He was wearing the same dark navy joggers as previous, but he had at least decided to wear a hoodie this time. Damn exhibitionist. A lax air surrounded him, as if he didn’t make himself known as being the biggest bastard in the world an hour or so ago.

Sasuke’s gaze turned to Naruto, who replied with a silent stare, though his eyes narrowed slightly. One thing that Naruto couldn’t help but notice was the sheer tenebrosity of Sasuke’s eyes. They were so dark and enigmatic, and Naruto couldn’t help but to think of all the things hidden in them — all the dark secrets that Sasuke didn’t want anybody to know. Underlying in those eyes, was something which Naruto couldn’t quite pinpoint. Something that was well hidden, but at the same time, painfully obvious.

“Do you mind if I sit down?” Sasuke asked, standing above Naruto.

“I have no more pancakes or promises of friendship for you to push out of the door, Sasuke.” Naruto huffed childishly while pouting, his gaze fixed on the television.

Sasuke loomed over Naruto for a long time, and it wouldn’t really be a problem for Naruto to ignore him with the exception being that Sasuke was blocking the television, so Naruto was just staring at Sasuke’s leg. Sasuke didn’t know that though, so Naruto kept his unperturbed gaze forward, transfixed.

“I know you can’t see the television.” Sasuke drawled.

Without saying a word, Naruto adjusted his legs slightly, creating the smallest piece of room at the end of the couch that was just about big enough for Sasuke to squeeze himself into. Awkwardness followed shortly after as the two boys kept their attention on the television, and Naruto’s pout didn’t waver in the least.

“So, would you mind a conversation?”

“Depends, will I get pushed out of here, too?”

Sasuke laughed hollowly and relaxed back into the couch, sighing.

“Maybe I deserved that.”

“You deserve a punch in the face.” Naruto mumbled.

“So, can we talk or not?”

Sighing, Naruto reached behind him and grabbed the remote, pausing the television. He manoeuvred himself so his back was rested on the back of the couch, and it gave Sasuke much more leg room to sit comfortably. Vehement stubbornness made Naruto refuse to even look at Sasuke and instead he tried to looked anywhere else. The wall was a nice alternate.

“I spoke to Kakashi.” Sasuke said, in that same, unfeeling voice; a monotone.

Naruto didn’t reply. Instead, he settled for a childish pout and crossing his arms, looking away from Sasuke.

“And I told him about your proposal — about being friends.”
“Did you tell him how you shoved me out of your room?” Naruto asked cynically.

“I said it how it actually happened, not how you’re making it out to be. Stop acting so petulant!” Sasuke snapped.

“Listen here, bastard—” Naruto barked, standing up from the couch and pointing a finger accusingly at Sasuke, “I tried my best to try an’ make things easier between us, but you decided that it was too difficult!”

“Making friends is easier for some people than others.” Sasuke grumbled. “Not that you would know, as obtrusive as you are.”

“Yeah, well even if it is hard for you to make friends, when people ask to try and bury the hatchet, you don’t shove ‘em out your room!”

“Will you get over that? I came here to have a conversation.” Sasuke stated solemnly, “I don’t know why, but Kakashi really wants me to make friends with you, and while I’m not going to apologise since I have no proper reason to, maybe, maybe, we can be civil.”

Naruto stared at Sasuke for a while, hand in mid-air as if time had halted in its tracks. The room had grown rather silent as a thick tension settled between the two; instead of one of hostility or anger, it was mostly awkwardness, and Naruto could hear the gears in his head suddenly start to move, processing Sasuke’s (rather rude) proposal.

Civil didn’t sound so bad.

Collapsing himself onto the couch, Naruto spread himself out, much to the displeasure of Sasuke, but luckily enough Naruto wasn’t able to see the look of irritation as Sasuke squashed himself at the end of the couch, avoiding Naruto’s touch. Naruto blew out a breath and looked over at Sasuke, and then he grinned.

“Hm, maybe bein’ civil doesn’t sound too bad.” He grinned.

Sasuke’s brows raised slightly, as if in shock. Almost like he didn’t think that he would make it this far. Perhaps a tinge of disappointment, too.

“D’you wanna watch this with me?” Naruto asked, pointing at the television, “s’better than bein’ cooped up in your room all day, an’ all. It’s slightly worryin’, actually.”

“I don’t have anything better to do.”

Naruto looked at Sasuke in the corner of his eye, before facing the television and grinning, pressing play. Throughout the many episodes, little huffs of amusements left Naruto’s mouth as Sasuke watched with the same stoic expression he always wore. Thankfully, he didn’t look bored, he just looked rather intrigued actually.

It was only near the end of the episode when It actually happened. Slipping between his lips, when Chandler made a remark of some sort, Sasuke let out a very unobtrusive laugh, almost missing Naruto’s ears. But it didn’t, and Naruto’s gaze lingered over to Sasuke, whose gaze was transfixed on the television, rather engaged. One arm was propped up against the side of the couch and held his head up, making him look rather comfortable. On his face, the corners of his mouth had twitched up slightly, and his whole gloomy persona had disappeared.

Only one thought popped into Naruto’s mind:
Huh, Sasuke’s kinda cute when he smiles.
Four

Chapter Notes

i am so so so so so so so so so so so so so so sorry for my updates (or lack thereof) but please try to understand that my biology teacher scares the shit out of me and i can't fail her class otherwise she will have no problem moving me down since she hates my guts due to an altercation (*ahem*MISUNDERSTANDING ON HER PART*ahem*) i had with her in seventh grade. and i need to focus on my chemistry revision too. but after that (since i've already done my maths and physics test) updates will be biweekly instead of weekly! Hopefully.

((also i may have started erased like last week and it's so good))

i can't believe this fic has only had four chapters in four weeks?! i'm ashamed D:

please don't think i'll quit this because i won't i'm just a disgusting excuse for a human being whose only talent is procrastinating :'(

(once again, sorry for the mistakes. i have no beta i only have myself and as we all know i'm not reliable)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter IV:

A dim, amber glow emitted from the street lamps as Naruto’s dark silhouette cast shadows across the empty streets. Pulling his scarf further upwards, Naruto tried his best to cover his neck as much as possible due to the unforgiving, chilly weather as the wind howled. Swirls of mist exhaled out of his mouth as his grip on his grocery bag grew tighter whilst he tried to withdraw his hand more into his coat almost acting as a makeshift glove.

Sasuke had asked him to buy some groceries since they had ran out of ingredients. For some reason, Sasuke was very adamant of not being the one getting the groceries; whilst Sasuke’s refusal of going outside was rather odd to an extent, Naruto couldn’t complain since Sasuke was the one doing the cooking. Cuisine had never been Naruto’s strong suit, but out of sheer stubbornness, Naruto refused to eat Sasuke’s cooking since they were only claiming to be ‘civil’ to each other — Naruto didn’t know what Sasuke could have done to the food! He could have possibly spat in Naruto’s half! However, after Naruto had managed to burn, or ruin in any other way, his food despite many various attempts, Sasuke placed a plate of (rather deliciously looking) Chinese food in front of him, reassuring him that it wasn’t poisoned, whilst mentioning it was compensation for the pancakes. Subsequently, Naruto and Sasuke made an unspoken agreement that Sasuke was the chef of their dorm, since they couldn’t afford to waste any more food because of Naruto, and because their dorm would most likely burn down otherwise. And, in return, Naruto was the one who went to buy the groceries.

Naruto smiled slightly to himself. He was rather fond of Sasuke’s cooking.

Over the past three weeks, the whole situation between Naruto and Sasuke had become much more
easier — the tense atmosphere around the duo had eased significantly and Naruto, if he dared use the word, would even consider that they had become something akin to friends. Not that he would ever mention that to Sasuke — he preferred to keep his head on top of his shoulders, thank you very much.

Naruto was able to find shelter from the biting weather as he quickly ran into his dormitory building, relieved that he was finally safe. Clutching the grocery bag, Naruto mentally groaned as he faced the stairs ascending upwards.

Eight flights of stairs.

After having a triple lecture today, and spending the remainder of the day with Shikamaru, Ino and Sakura, he was very reluctant about going back outside so he could grab the groceries that Sasuke needed — though, Sasuke in the kitchen was the equivalent of a parent in the middle of a fit of road rage, *you didn’t disobey them* — despite Naruto questioning if he could even do it or not. The things he did for Sasuke. The Bastard™ better appreciate this!

Somehow, Naruto was able to drag himself up onto his designated floor, panting and grabbing onto the slightly chipped rail, crimson and rust blending together in a harmony. Relieved, Naruto walked slowly towards his dorm room, trying to conceal his breathlessness, but he was probably making it worse. He pushed open the door, and the hissing noise of something being added to a frying pan was the first thing he heard. Walking over to the kitchen, Naruto practically threw the grocery bag onto the kitchen counter, and Sasuke stared the bag rather indifferently.

Fuck, how warm was it in here? He didn't even know if being outside was worse or not! Their dorm could get quite hot when Sasuke was cooking after all since he never decided to open a damn window, which meant that all the steam stayed inside their dormitory!

“Did you get everything on the list?” Sasuke asked.

“Yeah, an’ I ain’t going back!” Naruto panted, slamming the list down on the kitchen countertop.

Sasuke flashed him a look that almost said ‘if you haven’t got the right things you damn well are’. Naruto just replied with a pant — shit, *since when did he get this out of shape?!*

“You seem slightly out of breath.” Sasuke said, obviously amused.

“You think?” Naruto muttered.

“You think?” Sasuke snorted.

“You shouldn’t be so out of breath from one little walk.” Sasuke snorted.

“Bastard,” Naruto huffed. “I have had nothin’ to eat today, and I haven’t had one moment to relax. I’m survivin’ off one smoothie, and I am cravin’ this meal more than I crave pizza.”

Sasuke didn’t reply. Rather, he returned back to spreading the sauce around the pan, whilst shuffling through the grocery bag, seemingly satisfied with Naruto’s purchases. Peaking his head over Sasuke’s shoulder out of mere curiosity, Naruto’s eyes scanned the empty frying pan, and recalled the things that he actually just brought.

“What are you makin’, anyway?” Naruto asked.

“I’m making something called ramen.” Sasuke replied, “it’s a Japanese dish.”

“Oooh, traditional. How fancy.” Naruto cooed. “Call me when dinner’s ready, yeah?”
“Maybe.” Sasuke grunted. "Where are you going?"

"Outside. I need to cool off. S'too hot in here."

Naruto flashed Sasuke a grin before heading outside in an attempt to cool off. He wasn’t even that hot, but in between his stomach growling, how hot it was inside of his dormitory, and the smell of food, Naruto knew that he wouldn’t be able to resist trying to steal a bite — food had always been his weak point. Sasuke’s kitchen rage wasn’t fun to be on the receiving end on, either. That was something he had learnt the hard way when he tried to taste something that Sasuke had made previously, almost making him lose a finger in the process.

*Note to self: don't anger Sasuke whilst he's holding a knife.*

Crisp, frosty air trailed through spiky blond locks, brushing it back so Naruto didn’t have to. Grabbing onto the rail, Naruto crouched down and overlooked the campus. Lights flickered on in most apartments as contours of shapes and shadows flashed around the windows casually. Giggling girls were laughing (rather loudly) whilst walking across the campus, seemingly disorientated whilst gripping onto each other if their lives depended on it — *oh*, one of the girls just fell over. Yeah, they were probably drunk.

Sighing, a small billow of breath rolled off Naruto's tongue. It felt nice to relax for a bit. Letting ideas such as essays slip away was rather comforting. In the middle of his thoughts, Naruto didn’t hear the door opening, or the footsteps approaching him from behind.


Turning around, Naruto saw a rather tall brunette looking at him with a sceptical look on his face. The first thing Naruto noticed as soon as he turned around were two vivid, crimson tattoos almost reassembling fangs on both of his cheeks. Exactly symmetrical. Just by looking at the boy, the first word that popped into his head was ‘feral’. Scruffy, brown hair rested on top of the boy’s head, and almost compared with Naruto’s. Despite the animalistic-looking features on the boy (sharp, black eyes, and conspicuous canines that were longer than the average human being) he didn’t look scary at all. The boy’s grin seemed quite friendly, and the boy emitted an almost welcoming aura.

“Nah, nothin’ really. Jus’ university stuff. It’s only three weeks in and I’m stressin’ already. Kinda stupid, actually.” Naruto huffed, turning his attention back to the overview of the campus.

“I understand where you’re comin’ from with the university stuff,” the boy reassured, exhaling smoke. “I didn’t even wanna go here, but my parents forced me so I could continue my family business. My older sis is really smart, so they expected me to be like her. Honestly, I ain’t cut out for the university sorta life.”

“That sucks.” Naruto sighed, “I get where you’re comin’ from, the university life isn’t really suited for me either, but you gotta do what you gotta do.”

Naruto huffed out a laugh. He didn’t even know who this boy was, and they were having a conversation like they were old friends.
“So, what’s your name?” The boy asked.

“Naruto,” he replied with a grin. “I live there.” He nodded towards the door behind them.

“I’m Kiba.” Kiba told him, “I live two doors down. Surprised we haven’t bumped into each other before. What are you studyin’ anyway?”

“Literature.” Naruto responded, “it’s the only thing I’m half decent at.”

“Huh. I’m studyin’ veterinary medicine — it was always my parents dream for me to become a vet.”

“What about you? D’you wanna be a vet?”

“Perks of the family business.” He grinned.

Naruto just smiled at him. He didn’t know why, but he felt bad for the guy. He knew what it was like to be forced into doing something that he didn’t want to do, the main example being school; he couldn’t even imagine being forced to do something at university he didn’t want to do. Kiba didn’t seem sad, daresay, but it seemed like the idea had numbed inside of his brain, so he was immune to feel any melancholy from it.

“It’s not that bad though.” Kiba intervened, “I mean, have you seen how hot some of the chicks here are?”

“Ladies are suckers when it comes to vets. Treasure your gift.” Naruto jested.

“Because you’d know all about it.” He mocked light-heartedly.

“As somebody who has been a girl’s best friend for many years, I can assure you.”

“You’re a diary?”

“The best kind.”

Before Kiba could retort with another clever line, the sound of Naruto’s door opening caught both of their attention.

“Idiot, your food’s ready.” Sasuke’s voice said.

“Comin’, Sasuke.” Naruto called, whilst standing up and dusting himself down, since, unlike Naruto Sasuke couldn’t stand mess; even the smallest speck of dust or dirt would drive him crazy. “I’ll see you round, yeah?”

“Course, you can’t get rid of me that easily.” Kiba grinned, “not that you’d want to. We should go to the cafeteria tomorrow or somethin’.”

“You're askin' me out on a date even though we've only had one conversation? And to the university cafeteria too? How could I refuse.” Naruto joked. "But, I'm not busy tomorrow so I guess so."

“Yeah, course. Everybody loves me.”

“Only cause you’re a vet.”

“Go eat your food.”

Waving a goodbye to Kiba, Naruto entered the apartment as Kiba made his way back to his dorm.
before stomping out his cigarette, tucking his hands in his pockets.

“Smells fuckin’ beautiful in here, Sasuke.”

He wasn’t lying. The aroma of spices, flavour and meat (was that pork?) lingered around the apartment, creating a homily atmosphere. Naruto’s mother was a good cook; on the occasion Naruto’s mother — who was Japanese — would make sushi or tempura, though the tempura didn’t bide well since he wasn’t a fan of vegetables or fish. He had even tried sake before, which he had enjoyed. He had never had ramen before, though, and he was eager to try it.

“I know.” Sasuke replied easily.

“Arrogant bastard.” Naruto joked jovially.

“What was that?”

“Nothin’.” Naruto hummed.

Naruto walked towards the table and two bowls were located in the places Naruto and Sasuke sat, a pair of chopsticks resting on top of the bowl. Steam undulated from the bowl, and Naruto’s mouth brazenly watered at the smell. Naruto sat down eagerly, his mouth dribbling with anticipation as Sasuke sat down before him.

“Itadakimasu.” Sasuke mumbled whilst clapping his hands together.

“Did you just insult me usin’ a different language?” Naruto inquired.

“What?”

“It-dicky-ma-thingy-majig.”

“Idiot, *itadakimasu*. It’s a Japanese phrase meaning thank you for the food.”

“Oh. But you’re the one who made the food so why’re you thankin’ yourself?”

“It doesn’t matter, moron.” Sasuke sighed, as his fingers traced circles on his temples. “But aren’t you Japanese?”

“Hm?”

“Well, Uzumaki is a Japanese name, isn’t it?”

“Ah, *that*. It’s a long complicated love story between my parents.” Naruto said, “d’you wanna hear?”

“I don’t mind, really.” Sasuke replied in a bored tone.

“Basically, don’t wanna brag or anythin’ but my dad comes from this really successful business family called the Namikaze Corp, which is like this business that deals with electronics an’ all that. So one day my grandfather, *well I’m not actually allowed to call him that*, so my old man’s old man decides to take my dad on a business trip so he can learn more about negotiatin’ or some crap like that. The business trip was in Japan. So, when my dad was there, he somehow managed to spill coffee all over my mum’s shirt, and apparently she shouted at him in the middle of the street. Pretty fuckin’ hilarious, if ya ask me. Anyways, so they somehow bump into each other again cause it turns out she’s an intern at the company my dad’s dad was tryin’ to negotiate with. And then my dad had
the balls to ask my mum out on a date, and after a lot of persuadin’ on my dad's part, my mum finally said yes. Enter some sappy bullshit love montage, blah blah blah, and they were in love. My dad’s parents were sayin’ that he was gonna get engaged to some girl he’d never met before, and he refused, so they said it was either my mum or the company. He chose my mum.”

Naruto broke apart his chopsticks, whilst gulping in as much air as he could into his lungs so he could finish his story.

“And long story short, my dad was banned from ever usin’ the Namikaze name ever again, and they got my mum kicked off her internship, so they moved to America usin’ my mum’s surname when they married. Since my mum’s the dominant one in the relationship and my dad’s a pushover, she got most of the choice on decidin’ my name, and she liked Naruto. And now here I am.”

Naruto wondered why he was divulging this information to Sasuke. It wasn’t confidential information since Naruto himself didn’t necessarily care if people knew, but Sasuke was one of the last people Naruto thought he would share this with. Perhaps it was a futile attempt to try and make conversation with Sasuke?

“Interesting.” Sasuke hummed, clearly not that interested.

“That’s all you gotta say?! After I just shared my long, intricate story into the origins of Naruto Uzumaki?!” Naruto exclaimed sarcastically.

“I never asked.”

“You seem slightly jealous that I’m the grandson of billionaires.” Naruto sighed dramatically. “I know what you’re thinkin’, wow, Naruto was cool enough without all of these tragic backstories, and now he’s somehow even cooler.”

Any sort of humour quickly disappeared from Sasuke’s features, and his movement halted; his whole body became rigid. His facial expression changed from neutral to inimical in a matter of moments.

“Naruto. Shut up.” Sasuke bit out sharply.

Looking up, with a few noodles hanging off his chopstick, Naruto noticed how tight Sasuke’s grip on his chopsticks were; Sasuke’s hand was shaking at the intensity of his hold on them. Dark bangs covered Sasuke’s eyes, so Naruto wasn’t able to see them. Not at all. He almost looked scary.

“Sasuke, it was just a joke—”

“It wasn’t fucking funny.”

Naruto flinched at how harsh Sasuke’s words were. They cut through Naruto like a sharp blade — a blade with steel as icy as Sasuke’s tone. As cold. Swallowing the left over ramen in his mouth, Naruto’s eyes didn’t stray from Sasuke at all. His mouth had turned dry at seeing how serious he looked — how intimidating.

“I’m sorry—”

“I’m going to bed.” Sasuke interjected, abruptly standing up from the table, making it shake.

Why was Sasuke being so difficult? Why was he being so hard to understand? Just when Naruto thought that things between them were going decent, something like this would have to happen. Although, why? Naruto couldn’t comprehend why. He definitely hadn’t said anything wrong. He couldn’t have.
Standing up after Sasuke, Naruto followed shortly behind the boy as he stalked through the living room at a rather brisk pace. Naruto’s hand reached up for Sasuke’s shoulder, grabbing it and trying to turn the irate boy. Immediately, at the slightest touch of Naruto’s hand on Sasuke’s shoulder, Sasuke quickly slapped it off. Refusing to turn around, Sasuke spat out harsh words as Naruto stared at the boy’s clenched fists in worry.

“Don’t fucking touch me, Naruto.”

“Okay, I understand that you’re angry, bu—”

Sasuke simply quickened his pace out of the living room, leaving Naruto to bask in what used to be a warm area. It now seemed cold and empty. He guessed that he was back at root one with Sasuke. Fucking great.

Returning back to the kitchen, Naruto stared at the two bowls of ramen sitting on the table, which had definitely cooled down from before. As Naruto stared at the ramen, he noticed that, despite his (and Sasuke’s) bowl being untouched, he certainly wasn’t hungry anymore. Thinking about eating food that Sasuke made almost felt wrong. His stomach churned.

Naruto didn’t want to waste the ramen, since it did look nice, so he decided to cover the two bowls in cling film (saran wrap) in case he or Sasuke ever wanted to eat it again. Naruto did want to try it, but with his stomach turning, along with the thought of eating it without Sasuke felt almost absurd, Naruto decided that he would retire, too.

Storing the ramen in the freezer, Naruto flicked off all of the lights and dragged himself to bed. He felt like utter shit. He practically collapsed onto his bed after discarding his jeans and hoodie, and he closed his eyes. He was fucking exhausted.

Why did Sasuke have such a violent reaction at a small joke?

_Bang._

Blue eyes opened slightly, but fluttered closed shortly after. His mind was too foggy from sleep to note anything.

_Thud._

Blue eyes blinked open. Manoeuvring himself slightly, Naruto hoisted himself up using his arms, and looked around his unlit room, the only thing giving his room any shred of light being his digital clock and the artificial, dingy orange glow from the lights outside peeking through the small gaps in his curtains. He rubbed his eyes slightly, trying to adjust his eyes to his alarm clock.

2:18 A.M.

What the fuck, why was he awake at eighteen-past-two in the fucking morning—

_Smash._

Naruto darted up, alarmed. The sound of the noise came from a place beside his room. Sasuke’s room. Naruto’s incoherent, still-dazed-from-sleep mind pondered for a moment. Sasuke was in a mood with him. Would it really be a good idea to wander into his room at two in the morning?

_CRASH!_
Fuck.

Was Sasuke okay?

Quickly darting up out of bed — haphazardly throwing a shirt over him in the process — Naruto ran across the hall and opened the door to Sasuke’s room loudly, as it collided with the wall.

The first thing Naruto noticed was that Sasuke’s bed covers were skewed in all different ways, but Sasuke himself wasn’t in the bed. Next to Sasuke’s bed lay a small field of broken glass, with tiny drops of a crimson liquid on it — Naruto didn’t even want to think about it — and a very familiar picture laying beneath it. Even Naruto could conclude that it was the photo frame that he had accidentally caught glimpse of before.

Sobbing. Distinct sobbing could be heard from the top left corner of the room. Cautiously, Naruto eased closer to the sound. The voice that sounded an awful lot similar to Sasuke’s. Moonlight shone through Sasuke’s window, tracing a silhouette crouching on the floor, curled into themselves. Slender pale arms covered their ears as they rocked back and forth, muttering to themselves between sobs.

Sasuke.

“Fuck. Shit, Sasuke.”

Naruto ran over to Sasuke and quickly knelt down beside him, but Sasuke didn’t even seem to notice. His eyes were screwed shut as tears cascaded down porcelain cheeks.


Incomprehensible mutterings were mumbled through Sasuke’s quivering lips, among other things.

“It’s all my fault.” Sasuke ground out through clenched teeth, his voice breaking.

“What’s your fault?” Naruto asked in a hushed whisper.

“There’s so much blood. Blood’s everywhere. Why did she protect me? She could have had a chance—”

Did he perhaps have a nightmare?

Sasuke’s breathing began to grow more erratic with every word that came out of his mouth. His chest heaved as an endless trail of sobs managed to escape Sasuke’s mouth. Naruto didn’t know why. It was on pure instinct. He wrapped his arms around Sasuke’s lithe frame and cradled him towards Naruto whilst Naruto rocked him back and forth slightly, stroking ebony locks. Maybe Sasuke just needed comfort.

“It’s not your fault, Sasuke.” Naruto muttered into Sasuke’s ear softly.

Reassuring words exited Naruto’s mouth instantaneously. Upon instinct. Naruto didn't know what Sasuke had apparently done, but he said anything that he thought would comfort Sasuke.

“It is. She protected me. I-if she didn’t, then maybe she would still be here—“

Blood dripped from Sasuke’s hand and onto Naruto’s leg, but Naruto hardly noticed. Nor cared. He didn’t know what was going on, or the full story, but he didn’t care. All that was racing through his mind is that he wanted to help Sasuke.
“Your mother protects you because she loves you. She loves you, Sasuke.”

“She hates me. I’m the reason she’s dead! I’m the reason they’re all dead. T-th-the c-c-car… My f-fault.”

Naruto flinched slightly. Dead? His thoughts lingered over to the picture which he stared at the first day he came into Sasuke’s room, and Sasuke’s blank stare when Naruto asked if they were Sasuke’s family. His dead, cold stare.

Sasuke almost sounded like he was choking, and Naruto was worried. Majorly worried. Continuing with the subject would be fruitless — no. Worse. Naruto had a feeling that Sasuke didn’t even know that Naruto was there. That Sasuke wasn’t even aware that he was talking to Naruto.

“Sasuke, I want you to listen to me, okay?”

No response. Only sobs.

“Follow my voice, okay? Listen to me. Can you do that Sasuke?”

Sasuke’s hand had fell down to touch Naruto’s arm, and he clenched his hand tightly. Naruto couldn’t help but to wince at the amount of pressure that Sasuke had placed around his wrist.


Sasuke didn’t listen.

“Please Sasuke.” Naruto pleaded with a hoarse voice, getting teary-eyed, “I-I know this is h-hard. Just… just please listen to me, okay?”


After a countless number of times, Sasuke eventually managed to listen to Naruto and steady his breathing slightly. Good. At least Naruto knew that Sasuke was vaguely conscious of his actions.

“Okay. Sasuke, I want you to imagine that you’re on… that you’re on a beach.”

Sasuke lay limp in Naruto’s arms, nowhere near as tense as previously.

Naruto didn’t know if this would work, since he didn’t know what was happening to Sasuke. Though, whenever he went through depersonalisation after having a panic attack, or during one — something that he thought Sasuke would going through now, though he wasn't sure, but he hoped to God that it would work — his parents, or Ino, would give him, as Iruka called it in simple terms, a ‘reality check’. Trying to make Sasuke’s mind try to sense colours, sounds, tastes, and smells. The one that he was using now was the one that helped him the most, so he hoped it helped Sasuke.

“I want you to imagine the sound of the waves as the cold water brushes against your toes — how the hot sand buries them as the fresh, sea air slowly blows into your face. You can hear seagulls cooin’ as they fly past you in the distance. And the sunset — oh the sunset. It’s so beautiful on the horizon. Can you imagine it Sasuke? The beautiful sun settin’ on a pink, purple, orange, yellow and blue sky, growing smaller and smaller. It’s still nice and warm, though. This beach is always warm. And calm. Very, very calm and relaxin’. It’s your favourite place after all.” He whispered into Sasuke's ears. "You can hear the waves crashin’ onto the shore calmly, almost tryin’ to lure you in, and you can taste the sea-salt on your breath. Faintly, but you can still taste it, right?"

Naruto could feel Sasuke’s breathing against his arm. Soft and even. Naruto sighed in relief as he
realised Sasuke had fallen asleep in the middle of Naruto’s beach calming technique — the words were indented onto the back of his brain, and they were fairly useful. Never would Naruto expect to use them on other people, but now he was glad. A sense of gratification that he was able to help Sasuke settled into his chest.

Scooping Sasuke up in his arms, Naruto walked over to the bed and placed Sasuke down, securing him inside of the covers, being careful to mind the shards of glass on the floor.

“Fuck, I’m gonna have to clean that up.” He sighed to himself.

Naruto picked up the picture on the ground and held it up towards the moonlight so he could see the picture properly. Naruto’s gaze lingered on Sasuke’s smiling face in the picture, and he looked at Sasuke’s mother. Instead of curiosity like the first time he saw the picture, a feeling of sorrow festered in Naruto’s gut.

*You died protecting Sasuke, huh?*

Naruto’s mother had always said that a mother’s love was the strongest love. She was right.

Naruto looked at Sasuke in the picture once more, before placing the picture on Sasuke’s bedside table and looking at the now grown up version of Sasuke, sleeping unperturbed inside his bed, contrary to a few moments ago. Huffing, Naruto let a tender smile creep onto his face.

Perhaps he would be able to comprehend some of Sasuke’s mannerisms, now. Hopefully.

*Sasuke’s. . . He’s been through a lot. He’s got some walls up to protect him.*

“You really are a pain in my ass, Sasuke.”

Chapter End Notes

*party poppers burst* woo! back to revision!!!!

((sorry for any mistakes))
Chapter V:

Perhaps, this hadn’t been the best idea.

After Naruto had cleaned up the scattered shards of glass that remained on the tawny carpet, and wrapped Sasuke’s furious wound as a nonstop flow of vermillion oozed out of his hand, he had decided that sleeping in Sasuke’s room was the best alternate; if Sasuke woke up once more, Naruto would be right there to halt Sasuke’s panic in its tracks. Sleeping in Sasuke’s bed was out of the question, of course. He had grabbed a few pillows and his duvet from his room and settled it down onto Sasuke’s floor, near the middle of the room so Sasuke wouldn’t accidentally stand on him when he got out of bed.

In hindsight, Naruto should have thought of the awkwardness the following morning as he woke up to Sasuke, dishevelled, staring at him with austere eyes. Sasuke, who made it clearly obvious that he didn’t want to speak to Naruto.


“It is my room.”

“Hm, I can see your point.”

Naruto’s façade of a smile faded as his gaze dropped from Sasuke and he stared at the orange covers that he had wrapped himself up in, pulling his legs inwards to rest against his chest.

“Hey, listen—”

“Thank you.”

Slightly startled, Naruto’s head instantly jumped up to look at Sasuke who sat on his bed, refusing to look at Naruto. Out of pride, Naruto suspected. A few moments of silence passed between the two, and Naruto stood up, rolling his duvet so it was easier for him to carry it back to his room as he stuffed two pillows between both of his arms.
Before Naruto walked out of the room, he looked at Sasuke obliquely from the corner of his eye, seeing the infinitesimal hue of red on his cheeks (obviously out of embarrassment and wounded pride) and his glare on the wall.

“I’m not gonna hound you for any answers or anythin’, if that’s what you’re thinkin’.” Said Naruto, seeing Sasuke shift slightly in the corner of his eye. “It'll just be a little secret between us.”

Without uttering another word, Naruto walked out of Sasuke’s bedroom and into his own, dumping his sheets and pillows onto his naked bed. He sat down on his bed and rubbed tanned hands over his face, as they trailed through his flaxen hair. He was tired, to say the least. Being woken up by Sasuke at two in the morning, and again at — Naruto quickly checked his clock — seven-thirty in the morning. Was Sasuke fucking serious?

A small, dull twinge of pain was slowly beating on his wrist almost like a second heartbeat. Rolling up his sleeve, Naruto saw a livid rash of bruises adorning his wrist looking like somebody had grabbed him very tightly; his mind recalled the night prior, Sasuke’s tight grip on his wrist last night — in the exact same shape as the bruise on his hand.

He slowly rolled his sleeve down, trying to conceal the bruise. It wasn’t a big deal, but he thought that maybe he should try and hide it from Sasuke; he didn’t want him feeling as bad as he already did from last night.

He also remembered that he was meant to meet Kiba today. Setting his alarm to twelve-thirty, since Naruto did love a lie-in; he buried himself underneath his covers and fell asleep almost immediately.

“I dunno, I feel kinda bad.” Naruto said.

“Why?” Kiba laughed, cluelessly.

“I feel like I took you away from your roommate or somethin’.”

“Shino? Nah, he’s at his entomology lecture, anyway.”

“Entomology?”

“Studyin’ bugs. Shino’s a cool guy, but he has some sort of obsession with ‘em.”

“Like spiders an’ all that crap?” Naruto asked, shivering slightly at the mere thought of spiders.

“Yeah, sometimes he keeps ‘em in his room. It’s a bit creepy.” Kiba recalled; obviously seeing Naruto in discomfort about the spiders, he grinned internally to himself whilst continuing his anecdote. “Yeah, like before I was sleepin’ and I see Shino standin’ over me, so I’m like ‘what the fuck man’ and he tells me that I accidentally swallowed one of his spiders while I slept and it was probably crawlin’ around inside me—”

“KIBA SHUT UP!” Naruto screamed, physically cringing.

Kiba howled with laughter seeing the terrified look on Naruto’s face. Eventually, his arms clutched onto his stomach as it started to ache slightly from his laughing, much to Naruto’s displeasure. A big pout had plastered itself onto Naruto’s face as he crossed his arms almost childishly, understanding that Kiba was just trying to get a reaction out of him.

“Aw, lighten up, Naruto.” Kiba said, wrapping an arm around said blond, “the café’s in sight, and I need to introduce you to this raspberry smoothie they do.”
“I wish that you swallowed a spider in your sleep.” Naruto muttered underneath his breath.

Kiba snorted while opening the door, as the smell of hot drinks suddenly decided to take over. The two tried to find a table where they could sit; the café was quite crowded today, since it was a Friday and most people didn’t have lectures — Naruto almost had to pity Shino, even though he had never actually met the guy before.

They eventually found a table to sit two people comfortably, located in the corner, until—

“Naruto! What are you doing here?” A familiar voice exclaimed.

Turning around to see the voice, Naruto saw no other than Ino and Sakura sitting on one of the couches, idly sipping their hot chocolate and coffee. Naruto walked over to them, followed by a confused Kiba.

“Hey Ino, Sakura.” Naruto grinned.

“Hey Naruto.” Sakura replied, “who’s your friend?”

“Oh, this is Kiba.” Naruto chatted, gesturing to Kiba, “Kiba, these are my friends: Ino and Sakura.”

“Do you guys want to sit down?” Sakura offered.

“Yeah, if that’s alright.” Kiba said.

Smiling, Sakura nodded and gestured for them to sit down, much to Kiba and Naruto’s relief — sitting in the corner wasn’t something they particularly wanted to do, especially a table coated in coffee and left over mugs.

“So, Kiba, what are you studying?” Ino asked.

“Oh, veterinary medicine.”

“Really? That’s so cool! I always wanted to be a vet when I was younger.” Ino sighed.

“Told you. They love it.” Naruto whispered into Kiba’s ear.

Kiba laughed slightly before turning his attention back to Sakura and Ino, “so, what are you two studyin’?”

“Well, I’m studying psychology, and Sakura’s studying medicine, so I guess you two are on the same boat.” Ino smiled.

Naruto couldn’t help but notice a somewhat attraction between Kiba and Ino as he looked in between both of them. Ino’s longer-than-usual smiles along with her straying eyes and Kiba obviously not taking his eyes off her at all. Smooth. Perhaps it was just an instant attraction that would waver in a few days, and if not, Kiba seemed like an alright guy; better than Sai — Ino’s previous boyfriend — at least. Sakura, for the most part, seem rather concentrated on her hot chocolate as Naruto looked at the drowning marshmallows — something seemed to be bothering her a bit.

“We were just going to go out and eat. Do you two wanna come?” Ino asked.

“Well I’m not doing anything.” Kiba said.

“Neither am I.”
“So it’s sorted then.” Ino chirped.

The walk to the restaurant was slightly awkward; awkward in the sense that Ino and Kiba were literally miles ahead of Sakura and Naruto, who trailed behind somewhat slowly.

And Sakura obviously wasn’t in the most talkative mood, either.

“Hey, Sakura, are you alright?” Naruto asked, “you seem a bit pissed off.”

Sakura flinched slightly at Naruto’s words, before smiling coyly at him and shaking her head, insisting that she was fine — another lie. Naruto wasn’t one to pry into people’s information, however, since he found it intrusive and rude, so he never nagged people about anything if they were obviously reluctant to share, so he decided to leave it. It was something Sakura obviously didn’t want to discuss, so Naruto changed the subject to something else.

Sitting in the restaurant was awkward, too. Back and forth, Ino and Kiba flirted making Naruto feel nauseous; the attraction was obvious, sure, but Sakura and Naruto sat in front of them, looking around the restaurant — looking at anything but them. Kiba and Ino didn’t seem to mind, though. Good for them.

Naruto couldn’t help but notice the sheer ostentatiousness of the restaurant. Slow, jazz music hummed in the background, quiet enough to not disturb conversation but loud enough to make some people dreamily rock their head back and forth — Naruto being one of them. Beautiful women and wealthy men sat beside each other; crimson lips smiled at every word the man in front of them said, and the pellucid laughter escaping the woman’s laughs were characterised by elegance.

Naruto felt as though he didn’t belong here. He was a university student for god’s sake! Why was he at some fancy restaurant in the first place? Sasuke’s food was much better anyw—

Sasuke.

Naruto’s mind seemed to forget the almost gaudy restaurant surrounding him. Instead, his mind focused on Sasuke. Sasuke whom he had left at their dorm all alone, especially after the previous night. How could he be so dumb?!

Leaving Sasuke alone for such a long period of time — going out somewhere with Kiba close to the dormitories was one thing, and going to a faraway restaurant was another.

Abruptly, Naruto stood up, shaking the whole table. At least he was able to snap Ino and Kiba out of their lover’s rendezvous for a moment.

“Naruto, what are you doing—” Ino started.

“I have to go.” He said almost urgently.

“Why—”

“Shit, fuuuck. I really have to go; I’m sorry to bail on you guys.” He almost pleaded, despite not needing anybody’s permission to leave if he so wanted.

“Naruto, man are you oka—”

“I’m fine.” He said, “I just really have to go. I’ll see you guys later, maybe.”
Before Ino, Kiba or Sakura could even interject, Naruto had practically ran out of the restaurant, muttering incomprehensible things underneath his breath. Trepidation ran through his veins; how could he forget Sasuke?! What if he was on the apartment floor, scratching his raven hair out of his head?

“Naruto, wait!” A voice called behind him.

Darting his full body around, caught up in an almost frenzy, he saw a panting Sakura running towards him, waving her hands in the air as if to wave at him to stop, which he already had. When she reached Naruto, she panted and placed her hands on her knees before smiling and looking up at Naruto, seafoam meeting blue.

“Do you mind having an extra person to walk home with? Fourthwheeling is one thing, and thirdwheeling is another.”

“Sure. I’m sure none of us wanna see Kiba and Ino suckin’ each other’s faces off, do we? Disgustin’.” He chuckled.

Sakura’s laugh was louder than usual. Instead of the realistic, tuneful laugh an over-elaborated laugh left her mouth, making it obvious it was put on for show. Staring at Sakura, she seemed alright. Happy, even. A bright smile was plastered on her face as stray pink locks fell in front of her face due to the slight breeze that rolled past them, almost like a calm wave.

“Sa—”

“C’mon, let’s get back to campus.” She giggled, grabbing Naruto’s hand, “then maybe we can actually do something.”

Naruto stared at Sakura, obviously sensing something was off. But what? Settling for a shrug, Naruto let himself be dragged along by Sakura — not like he had a choice in the matter. For some reason beyond Naruto’s comprehension, she was freakishly strong which he didn’t expect since Sakura possessed such dainty arms.

Sakura forced Naruto to take the long route, that Naruto acquiesced. Eventually, though, he was able to let himself be tangled in her whims, as she offered to buy him some ice-cream, which he laughed at. The weather was in the minus zone; why the fuck would he want ice-cream?! Instead, they settled for freshly made crepes with a melted chocolate centre.

Orange and purple dyed the sky as the sun slowly disappeared into the sunset, almost sinking. Naruto couldn’t help but think how beautiful the sunset was; orange perfectly matching with purple to create a simple, yet effective, harmony. Traces of pink, and even the smallest specs of blue were slightly visible too, as they washed over the sky together, saying goodbye to the sun. The street was empty, almost unhabituated — it was almost creepy. The tranquil street was decorated with pretty cottages that obviously had a meticulous amount of effort put into each design.

They made conversation out of small things; minor things. Making jokes about Ino and Kiba, university itself, Tsunade and Jiraiya, among other things. Talking to Sakura was calming. Conversation with her eased his mind from his disquietude about Sasuke — about him leaving Sasuke. How stupid could he be?

When they arrived back onto the campus, the two said pleasant goodbyes to one another before Naruto practically darted up the stairs and straight to his dorm. He shook the door handle. Locked. Cursing underneath his breath, Naruto fumbled with his keys and quickly unlocked the door,
practically pushing himself inside.

Frantic; erratic. Hasty, echoing steps thudded into the dorm. Naruto was aware of how desperate his movements were, but the anxiety that filled him was overwhelming. His gut plummeted, thinking of Sasuke lying on the floor, trembling. His stomach felt like he was on a rollercoaster which wouldn’t stop going down.


Butterflies slammed against his stomach when he realised Sasuke wasn’t on the couch, nor the kitchen. He wasn’t anywhere to be seen. Surely he was in the apartment? Of course he was in the apartment — Sasuke never left the pissing apartment. The only place Naruto could think of was Sasuke’s bedroom; his sanctuary.

Being the impetuous person he was by nature, Naruto quickly ran over to Sasuke’s room and — with a tremendous amount of force — slammed the door open. Since the door wasn’t locked, like Naruto thought it would be, he practically fell into Sasuke’s bedroom, creating a ruckus whilst doing so.

Naruto blinked, before turning to see Sasuke sitting languidly on the bed, typing slowly on his laptop. He looked at Naruto, emitting an insouciant demeanour. Perched on the rim of his nose was a pair of thick framed, black glasses framing his marmoreal features perfectly; even just by looking at him, the saturnine manner he composed himself with was almost overwhelming.

“What are you doing?” Sasuke asked rather pointedly.

“You’re okay. . .” Naruto murmured, mostly to himself.

Sasuke flinched at hearing Naruto’s words, and looked back at his laptop with a scowl on his face.

“I’m not made out of china.” Sasuke spat, his tone acidulous, “you don’t have to check up on me; I’m not your concern.”

“You sort of are.” Naruto said.

Sasuke looked at Naruto, his sharp gaze accusing Naruto.

“What makes you say that?” Sasuke smirked mirthlessly, his tone resentful.

“Because. . . you’re my roommate.”

A small breath of air breezed past Sasuke, combing through his dark hair with chilly fingertips as Sasuke stared at Naruto, his eyes widened an infinitesimal amount whilst Naruto grinned sheepishly at him.

“Déjà vu. . .” Sasuke muttered.

Frowning at Naruto’s benign grin, Sasuke closed his laptop lid and slowly lifted himself from his bed. Sasuke’s splenetic look made Naruto take a few steps back, growing more wary by the second. Sasuke’s movements didn’t stop, nor did he stammer. Sasuke just kept advancing forward to Naruto until he reached him and slammed him against the wall.

A loud bang emphasised how hard Sasuke pushed Naruto into the wall as Naruto winced at the harsh treatment. Sasuke brought his forearm to rest against Naruto’s neck as Naruto gasped slightly at the lack of air Sasuke was providing him with, but Sasuke didn’t relent his merciless hold. It was
“What do you want from me?” He spat out, and Naruto could hear the gruffness in his voice.

“I—I don’t know you’re talkin’ about. . .” Naruto croaked.

Sasuke’s laugh was cynical. Cruel, almost. Instead of believing Naruto, the force he placed on Naruto’s neck tightened, until Naruto rasped for air.

“Listen, Naruto, do you think you’re the first person to try and get close to me?” He asked. “Do you think I don’t know what you’re doing?”

“Sasuke. . . I don’t know. . . what you mean.”

“I don’t know how you managed to get into a dormitory with me, or maybe it was plain luck, but you’re not fooling me. You may have outsmarted Kakashi and Gai, but I’m not as stupid.”

Naruto stared back, dumbly.

“True, I believed you at first, admittedly. You seemed too innocent, too dumb, to play a façade. Inviting that girl over — Ino Yamanaka,” he spit her surname out like poison, “and telling me that story of your ‘parents’; it was a giveaway. Trying to get me to tell my very similar story.”

Naruto was confused — beyond confused, even. But, he couldn’t organise his thoughts since they were growing darker as Sasuke’s grip on his neck increased, and he was deprived of more and more oxygen. Half of Sasuke’s words weren’t even processing in his mind properly.

“R-really. . . S-Sasuke, I don’t—I don’t know what y-you’re talkin’ about. . .” He wheezed.

“You’re not the first person to try, Naruto. So, what do you want? Money? Leverage? Information?” Sasuke accused, his grip growing tighter. “The fact that you do literature as a course, too, maybe you were planning on writing a book about it? It is an obscure little secret, I’m sure you would get a lot of leverage about it.”

“W-why do you think—”

Another bitter laugh escaped Sasuke’s mouth.

“How I’ve been treating you. . . surely any person wouldn’t persevere. Surely, any other person wouldn’t be so concerned in building a friendship with me — the only reason I can see. . . is that if somebody had an ulterior motive.”

“S-Sas’ke. . .”

Naruto couldn’t think anymore. Swirls of darkness slowly overtook his sight, as small dots swarmed his vision unmercifully. He felt his body go slightly limp, and Sasuke’s arm slacken a significant amount. He felt his eyelids drooping slightly, as air slowly came back into his lungs, and his support on the wall — given graciously by Sasuke — disappeared, leaving him to fall onto the ground. Darkness was the last thing he saw, and his own harsh, laboured breathing was the last thing he heard.
ripc naruto

but seriously... yeah, Sasuke’s behaviour is very... ‘rash’ (that word doesn’t even describe it!) in this chapter. I feel like the way I’ve written Sasuke is going to get a lot of backlash etcetera, since he’s very untrusting when it comes to Naruto (and people in general) and now he’s even resorted to violence. I want to redeem his behaviour in this note now, but then I may ruin the story? So I just want to tell you to all be patient.

((once again, i am sorry for any mistakes))

PTSD can make people more violent, and that is exhibited in this chapter.

I really love Sasuke as a character (even though i hate him at the same time), so I would never write him like this without any explanation, after all. It’s like in canon; his behaviour isn’t the best, but it is not for empty reasons. He had reasons for every action he did — whilst many people may disagree with some of the things he did (rightfully so) he did have a clear motive which was understandable in the least. And that’s how it is in this story, too. Well, I hope.
Six

Chapter Notes

((not proud of this chapter, and it's not beta'd either so sorry for any mistakes))

i decided to upload this chapter a little earlier; it's not that much but it's a little thank you to Kittygirl for always leaving really nice comment/support and for defending me against those really angry seven year olds going on every sns fic and sounding bitter....

anyway, thank you Kittygirl!
((and everybody else who has commented, gave kudos, bookmarked. this fic wouldn't be continuing if it wasn't for you guys!!))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter VI:

Naruto stirred in his bed before opening his eyes, waking himself up. Cold pressed against his neck, and his fingers ghosted his Adam’s apple, feeling a damp towel laying on his neck mirroring where Sasuke’s fingers had been prior. Removing the towel from his neck, Naruto felt the iciness surrounding it. It almost made it hard to breathe. Suffocating. Perhaps it was from Sasuke’s cold hands, which had been awfully cold, or the towel. Or, maybe, it was a mix between the two.

Thoughts haphazardly ran around his brain as he tried to sort them into order — it was harder than it appeared to be. Still being dazed from sleep, his mind wasn’t in the best state. When he got out of his bed and walked over to the mirror, he couldn’t help but see the livid contusions gracing his neck, almost resembling a choker or a necklace of some sort.

He remembered it now.

Sasuke strangling him. Sasuke spitting words, laced in the most deadliest of poisons, which Naruto didn’t understand — words he couldn’t comprehend. Whether it being he didn’t know what Sasuke was talking about, or his brain receiving a deficient amount of oxygen, he didn’t know.

Naruto couldn’t help but note the amount of bruises Sasuke had given him in the short span of a day was quite impressive.

Naruto checked the time on his alarm clock — 10:30 a.m.

Perhaps Sasuke was still outside. Naruto couldn’t help but feel slightly bitter about the fact that Sasuke strangled him until he passed out, but that was understandable. He made a mental note not to mention it to Ino if he could help it, since she wouldn’t go easy on Sasuke at all, and Naruto could sense some bad blood between the two already, for whatever reason.

Speaking to Sasuke was the first thing that popped into his mind. Would that be the best idea, though? Or would Sasuke flip out like he did previously? Why Sasuke had such violent tendencies, Naruto wouldn’t know. Did he want to know? Not really. He presumed that that was a stone best left unturned, because you didn’t know how many things you don't want to see are underneath — or
something along those lines.

Were they back at stage one? From enemies, to friendly(ish), to enemies once more? Naruto couldn’t help but feel disgruntled. All that effort — the pancakes — for nothing?

Honestly, Naruto didn’t know why he was so determined on making friends with Sasuke. He didn’t know why he was trying to make life easier for him. He just... wanted to.

It was possible that he saw himself in Sasuke.

Years ago, that used to be him; the boy who barricaded himself in his room. Maybe it was his own selfish desire that wanted him to help Sasuke, because he would feel like helping himself. Because he saw himself in Sasuke. But surely, even Naruto wouldn’t even be able to try and make friends with somebody after that person almost suffocated him to death.

So, why did he want to help Sasuke?

Especially when Sasuke obviously didn’t want it. Especially when Sasuke rejected Naruto’s advances in creating a friendship or an acquaintanceship — anything, really. Sasuke didn’t want anything to do with Naruto; it was obvious that Sasuke thought of him as a hindrance.

Hitherto, Naruto had always been told he was (before his depression had grown rather serious) a tolerant person. Teachers would always say to Naruto’s parents — Naruto remembered that since it was the only positive point the teachers actually gave him — that when it came to bullies (or as they phased it, ‘the meaner kids’) he was very forbearing.

Then again, there could be the chance that Ino shouted at them in Naruto’s place.

The question was: would he ever be able to convince Sasuke to be a proper friend? Beforehand, they were on friendly terms — hell, Sasuke would cook for him — but they weren’t ‘friends’, per say. Naruto didn’t class Sasuke as a friend, and vice versa. Naruto just wanted to be, as Sasuke said, civil.

So, why did he care so much?

Why did he care so much about Sasuke’s wellbeing?

Why did he thoughts always return to Sasuke?

Shaking his head from thoughts about Sasuke — something that he had caught himself doing a lot recently — Naruto walked out of his room before looking around to make sure there was no creepy Sasuke lurking in the hall with a knife.

When Naruto headed toward the living room, he didn’t know what to expect. Sasuke idly sitting there, Sasuke sharpening a knife, Sasuke running away from almost killing Naruto — not that Naruto was bitter about it at all. However, Sasuke was nowhere to be seen. Upon entering, he was welcomed by silence. Complete and utter silence. No murmuring television in the background, no bubbling pot in the kitchen, or anything else.

It was almost sinister.

Looking around the rest of the apartment, even Sasuke’s bedroom, Sasuke wasn’t anywhere. Did he actually run away? Naruto had thought that in jest, but there was always the possibility that he actually did. What Sasuke had done may have possibly gotten him kicked out of Konoha, or even worse!
So he just left Naruto on the bed, dead or alive, with a damp rag on his neck?!

But, when Naruto went into Sasuke’s room — he didn’t care about being polite anymore, since Sasuke had fucking suffocated him — everything seemed to be in place. Surely Sasuke would take some belongings with him if he was going to run away? Even that picture was there — though it lacked that opulent photo frame of course.

_Click._

.Keys.

_Keys being turned inside of the lock._

Naruto instantly whipped his head around, very alert.

_The sound of a door opening was overly-familiar to Naruto._

Two pairs of feet entering through the door.

Naruto quickly retreated to behind a wall, where he was easily concealed.

“He’s in here?” A boyish voice asked.

“Yes.” Sasuke’s voice replied.

“I can’t believe you’re actually doing this, man. I’ve never done this before, but I guess I’ll have to help you. Not many people would.”

“I had a feeling you would help me.”

Naruto’s eyes widened. Were they planning to hide his body?! ‘I can’t believe you’re actually doing this’ along with ‘not many people would’ seemed pretty suspicious. Sasuke had always been a shady person, but to go to this extent! Naruto didn’t want to be buried in a dumpster. He wanted a nice funeral. One with a tombstone and everything! Or cremation sounded pretty cool too. It was a better alternate to buried in the woods!

Sasuke had actually hired a hitman for this!

Naruto could stand his ground against Sasuke, maybe, but against a professional hitman? With guns and stuff? No fucking way! Not even Naruto was that confident in his defensive skills!

“So, where is he?”

“In his bedroom.” Sasuke spoke. “He was still unconscious when I left.”

_Fuck._

He could either give up, or die fighting. For pride’s sake, he decided to go with the latter. Balling his hands into fists, Naruto jumped from around the corner and stood in a challenging stance, ready to fight.

When he jumped around the corner, Sasuke, and the guy he was with, flinched at his sudden appearance. Assessing the guy who was accompanying Sasuke, the first thing that Naruto noticed was his ashy-blond hair that almost looked white — it didn’t possess the greyish tint compared to Kakashi’s. On the contrary, Naruto couldn’t help but notice the cyan tint the boy’s hair seemed to have instead, and his vivid purple eyes stood out tremendously.
“I can’t believe you’d actually hire a hitman to kill me, Sasuke! That’s fuckin’ messed up! Even for you!” Naruto barked.

Sasuke and his *guest* stared at Naruto rather blankly, but Naruto wasn’t putting his guard down for one second. He had a tennis racket (he thought) somewhere in his room, and he wasn't afraid to use it!

Instead of a incomprehensible ball of Sasuke’s ‘guest’ running towards Naruto at the speed of light, he burst into laughter. Whilst opening his mouth, Naruto could see the male’s serrated teeth, almost reminding him of a shark — the guy was beyond creepy! That was something you would see in The Hunger Games! And why was he laughing at Naruto? Did Naruto really come off as so weak that is was laughable? Well, he would show him—

“Fuck, Sasuke, you didn’t tell me he was funny.” The boy practically howled, gripping onto his stomach. "A hitman! Hah!"

“What’s so funny?” Naruto asked, regretting it instantly.

“Suigetsu isn’t here to kill you, idiot. He’s here to help you.” Sasuke said matter-of-factly, looking a mixture of relieved and annoyed at the same time.

“Help me?” Naruto repeated stupidly.

“Well, since my good ol’ pal Sasuke here knocked you out,” Suigetsu said rather casually whilst wrapping an arm around Sasuke’s shoulder, “I think he sorta panicked and came to me.”

“And you are?”

“Name’s Suigetsu. I’m doing one of the courses that Sasuke does, and I think I’m the only one who approached him more than once, cuz he is a ball of sunshine, ain’t he?” Suigetsu joked. “so I think after he knocked you out, he came to the only person who he could.”

Sasuke looked rather annoyed at Suigetsu’s rather blunt explanation, but it seemed to be accurate nonetheless.

“What course did you choose?” Naruto asked.

“Business studies,” he replied.

“So how were you gonna help me? You’re not even a medical major.”

“Yeah but I used to work in a pharmacy so same thing.”

“You were going to leave my life in the hands of him?!” Naruto questioned rather angrily.

“I didn’t really have a choice.”

“Sakura’s two floors down! She’s a medical major.”

“I don’t know who Sakura is.” Sasuke said.

“My name beings with ‘S’ and is followed *and* ends with a vowel so I don’t know why you’re complaining,” Suigetsu sighed. “We’re practically the same person.”

“I cannot believe this is happenin’ right now.” Naruto muttered to himself.
“Well, nobody’s hurt, and that’s the main thing.” Suigetsu announced, before turning to Naruto.
“Though, that bruise on your neck’s bad. Damn, what did you do to Sasuke.”

“Nothin’.” Naruto huffed, glaring at Sasuke.

“Hm, sure.” Suigetsu grunted, unconvinced.

“Anyway, since the trip over here was a waste of my time, I’m gonna go piss off Karin. So, I’ll see you later Sasuke,” Suigetsu said, before turning to Naruto. “Oh, and if Sasuke doesn’t kill ya, maybe I’ll see you around, too.”

I hope not.

Sauntering out of their apartment, Suigetsu left Naruto and Sasuke standing in a rather awkward silence. The fact that Sasuke was acting like nothing had happened was pissing him off, too. He almost killed him for fuck’s sake!

Grabbing Naruto’s arm rather hastily, making Naruto wince since Sasuke’s hands landed directly on his bruise that Sasuke had given him the previous night, Sasuke lifted Naruto’s arm up, making his jumper roll down, revealing the bruise underneath. It wasn’t as bad as the one on his neck, but it had turned into a rather grotesque colour of brown — the obvious shape of a hand.

“Did I do this to you, too?” Sasuke asked.

“Yeah.”

Avoiding Naruto’s eyes, Sasuke dragged Naruto into the kitchen before dragging him down on the stool and sitting him down, placing his hand on the counter so the side that his bruise was on was facing upwards. Sasuke wondered over to the fridge and took out an ice cube mould before dumping a few pieces of ice in a piece of kitchen roll and pressing it against Naruto’s arm softly, almost as if he was trying not to hurt Naruto (this time).

“I’m sorry — about the bruises.”

The words were very quiet, almost uttered guiltily underneath his breath. Naruto just sighed and stared at his arm. He wasn’t accepting the apology, but he acknowledged it.

“I don’t know much about healing bruises, but apparently ice helps.”

Naruto just grunted.

I’m not forgiving you. Not this time.

The two boys sat in silence, as Sasuke delicately pressed the ice against Naruto’s bruise on his arm. The clock ticked away in the background as Naruto could literally hear the time passing. Seconds turned to minutes, and those minutes eventually escalated into an hour.

“I think that’s fine.” Sasuke spoke.

His voice seemed softer. A lot less hostile. Perhaps it was his way of apologising. His own, silent way of doing it. It was his way of apologising without admitting his actions were wrong — without wounding his pride.

Sasuke stood up, without saying a word. Sure, he apologised about the bruises, but what about everything else. What about his actions yesterday? He didn’t even tell a serious doctor despite Naruto
being out cold for over twelve hours! His life could have been in danger, but just so Sasuke wouldn’t get into trouble?! What kind of sick joke was Sasuke playing on him?

On impulse, Naruto’s arm — the one that wasn’t covered in ice — shot out and grabbed Sasuke’s, making the boy flinch a little and wiggle his arm out of Naruto’s grip.

“What are you doing—” He barked before being cut off.

“No! What are you doing?” Naruto shouted, surprising even himself.

“What are you talki—”

“You almost killed me, Sasuke. This is serious.”

Sasuke instantly froze. His face tensed up upon hearing Naruto’s firm words, and his fists clenched once more. Naruto couldn’t help but remember his mannerisms from a few nights prior. He immediately regretted his choice of words. Solely looking at the expression of complete dread on Sasuke’s face, he wanted to take it all back.

Sasuke’s face, despite being pale beforehand, had grown into a very unhealthy, ghostly shade of white, as if he had just seen a ghost. His eyes grew wider and wider until Naruto couldn’t help but think that it had to be painful. He was shaking.

When they had first met, Naruto remembered Kakashi and Gai instantly growing worried about Sasuke’s shaking, but this was much more extreme.

Naruto was scared.

“I killed you.” He repeated numbly, his eyes transfixed on the floor.

“Sasuke—”

Sasuke couldn’t even see Naruto now. Even Naruto knew that much. All of Sasuke’s demons were latching themselves onto Sasuke’s back, haunting him. And Naruto just stood there, not knowing what to do. Helpless.

“I killed them all.” Sasuke muttered, collapsing to the floor. “It’s my fault. If only I didn’t move... everybody would be fine. It’s all my fault.”

Fingers started to rake themselves through his hair, painfully, and Naruto quickly dropped his body close to Sasuke’s, trying to grab his hands so he wouldn’t scrape his scalp. So he wouldn’t hurt himself—

“Don’t touch me.” He yelled.

Naruto watched helplessly as Sasuke reached out for nothing, but to Sasuke he seemed to be reaching out for everything — something that he could see was in his reach.

“Kakashi, tell the nurses to stop touching me! I want to see mother. Where’s Itachi? Are they okay?”

Sasuke’s hands were shaking. Naruto decided not to touch him again. Sasuke didn’t want that. So, alternatively, he settled for trying to talk to Sasuke. Erratic. His breathing was uneven as he tried to scrape his face with his fingernails that Naruto only recently noticed were so sharp.

“Sasuke, listen to me: it’s not real.”
“Shut up!” Sasuke yelled. “Mother... father...”

Sasuke muttered the same things underneath his breath. He cried for his mother. He called for Itachi. He screamed for Shisui. He yelled for his father. He told Kakashi to go away.

“Look around the room. What do you see?”

“... White. I hate hospitals.” He muttered, almost childishly.

“No, Sasuke. What do you really see?” Naruto repeated, calmly.

Sasuke glanced around the room, his breathing still uneven, and repeated the exact same words to Naruto as previous.

“You need to breathe. Calmly.” Naruto whispered, approaching Sasuke closely.

“Why was mother coloured in red? Kakashi is she okay?”

Desperate. Quick and desperate. That's how the frantic words came out out of Sasuke's mouth.

“Sasuke, it’s not real. Please, breathe.”


Naruto had to try his best not to panic. He had to keep calm, for Sasuke. He didn’t even know what was going on. A panic attack? No, it seemed too extreme — he knew panic attacks varied to different people, but this somehow felt different.

Tears cascaded down Sasuke’s cheeks and he didn’t even seem aware of it. Relentless tears. Tears holding back so much pent up sadness and melancholy.

*What do I do. I don’t know what to do.*

If he could, he would call Kakashi or Gai and ask them what to do, but he didn’t know how to contact them. Sasuke’s phone was probably as guarded as Buckingham Palace, and neither of the men had left a number. He even contemplated calling his mother since she was a nurse, but he didn’t know what was wrong. And even if he did, he wouldn’t be able to call her anyway, since his phone was in his bedroom and he wouldn’t dare leave Sasuke for an instant. Not in this state.

“C-can I touch you, Sasuke?” Naruto asked.

Shit. He wasn’t aware of how shaky his voice seemed.

Sasuke looked at Naruto, almost frenzied.

“I won’t hurt you. You can trust me.”

Reluctantly, but surely, Sasuke nodded. Naruto didn’t know why, but it reminded him of a child — is this how child Sasuke used to act? With such meek movements? Sasuke obviously wasn’t in his right frame of mind, or he would never let Naruto come remotely close to him — *hell*, Sasuke probably didn’t see *Naruto as Naruto* anymore, but instead as somebody else — but this wasn’t current Sasuke. For some reason, Naruto had a feeling that this Sasuke was younger. Much younger. His mannerisms and body language showed that.

Slowly, Naruto approached Sasuke and wrapped his arms *very* loosely around his frame. Naruto
remembered, despite him never admitting to it, that having physical comfort after having a panic attack — admittedly he never had them often — was always the best thing for him. Though, he tried his best to, at the same time, give Sasuke some space.

Naruto tried his best not to flinch when he felt Sasuke’s fast heartbeat beating rapidly against his own chest. Very fast heartbeat. Naruto made sure that his movements were slow and didn’t scare Sasuke whatsoever, so he couldn’t jump back. But, at the same time, he was very worried about Sasuke’s heart rate.

That wasn’t normal.

As if on cue, Sasuke suddenly went limp in Naruto’s arms, and Naruto felt Sasuke’s whole frame slacken significantly considering how tense he was before.

“Fuck! Sasuke!”

Naruto made sure that he gently placed Sasuke’s sinuous frame onto the ground before rushing into his room, grabbing his mobile, and running back into the kitchen, making sure that he stayed near Sasuke.

He called the ambulance, explained as much as he knew, and they said that they would be over in no less than six minutes. In the meantime, Naruto tried his best to carry Sasuke onto the couch, at least making it more comfortable for him. He wanted to laugh bitterly at the whole situation. Sasuke made him pass out and Naruto guessed that he said something that indirectly caused Sasuke to pass out. In the span of twenty-four hours. Unbelievable.

“Sasuke, you better be okay. If you wake up, I’ll forgive you. Hell, you can knock me out again. Just fuckin’ be okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Ah crap. I really didn’t want to end the chapter here, since the previous chapter ended with Naruto passing out, but if I did the chapter would go on f o r e v e r. Yeah, I’m sorry I’ve made both of them pass out in the span of two chapters, but this will be the last time (I think).

And I’ve tried my best to try and convey what happens with PTSD, and I have spoken to somebody whom I know suffers with it ((or used to, thanks to medication and therapy)) and I tried to write about how that person felt and what triggered them, etc, so I apologise if some people think I haven’t portrayed it properly since I know it can be different to everybody who experiences it.
Seven

Chapter Notes

I hate this chapter so so so so so so so so so so so so much. The ones after this are better. This chapter is very rushed and i’m not gonna lie. . . i just wanted to complete it. Sorry about it escalating quickly. I really could not wait to get this chapter out of the way. I’m quite unsatisfied with my writing style in this chapter. . . idk. . . sorry. Once again.

I'm happy that this chapter is done. Now I can commence with the main plot after this chapter.

((sorry for any mistakes. not beta'd))

((and i'm sorry that i keep failing with these chapters but the next chapters will be BETTER i promise))

and i am not going to lie i’m not an expert on the brain so i just had to research the neurotransmitters than can contribute to ptsd if it's wrong i apologise it was like 5 am when i was writing this chapter ((hence it being so crappy))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter VII:

Naruto didn’t know how long he had been sitting in the hospital for now. Five or six hours? He didn’t bother looking at the clock. He just wanted to make sure Sasuke was okay. Beforehand, too, Naruto had said something stupid that had caused a situation similar to this one, though not as badly. And now, he had done the same stupid thing again, but this time it was much, much worse.

Questions overloaded his brain as the medics in the ambulance pestered him, and he tried to give as much detail as he could. They also questioned him about the livid bruise on his neck, but he — despite being against it — tactfully lied to them and said he had a fight with some guy at the university.

Which, technically, wasn't a lie. He did have a fight with Sasuke. It was a little one-sided, but it was a fight.

He also remembered everybody surrounding the ambulance and watching as they carried an unconscious Sasuke to the ambulance, followed by an obviously-worried Naruto. Eyes looked in shock as murmurings asking what happened encircled him, though Naruto didn’t reply.

He also remembered seeing Ino and Sakura’s concerned faces among the crowd, but he didn’t speak to them. He didn’t have the time. Kiba had rushed out the moment the ambulance knocked on Naruto’s door, asking Naruto where he had been all day, but Naruto just said that he would tell him later. He didn’t manage to see Shikamaru, but the guy was never one for commotion. He probably just stayed in his apartment, trying to avoid the ruckus.

And now, he waited in the silent hospital as sick patients and running nurses ran past him. He could
see what Sasuke meant. He, too, hated hospitals; they were too white. It was almost sickening.

The nurses had stabilised Sasuke, but they just needed him to wake up. Apparently he had fainted from his high blood pressure, but his brain was in a comatose-like state for a while. Or something like that. He didn't really listen. At first, Naruto was worried but the nurses said he should wake up in the next five hours.

Four hours to go.

Disturbing the peace and quiet of the hospital, Kakashi and Gai ran through the door rather suddenly, much to the surprise of Naruto and a few nurses surrounding the area, before scolding the two men for being too loud and walking away, much to Kakashi’s embarrassment.

Kakashi’s head turned to see Naruto sitting down on one of the seats, and smiled before walking over to him.

"Yo, Naruto."

"Nice entrance." He joked, trying to lighten to mood.

"Well, as soon as the hospital called us, we hurried over here. Is Sasuke alright?"

"As alright as he could be, I suppose." He said bitterly. "He’s jus’ restin’ now. Doctor said it should be around four hours till he wakes up."

"Thank god." Gai said, collapsing on the seat next to Naruto, looking rather tired.

"Gai drove." Kakashi explained.

A few moments of silence past between the three before Kakashi decided to speak again.

"So, Naruto, do you know what happened?" Kakashi asked.

"Yeah. Was my fault." Naruto sighed, slumping down in his chair.

"How so?"

"Well, it started with him accusin’ me and stuff, sayin’ that I want somethin’ from him, or somethin’ like that. I dunno. And so, he kinda, sorta, strangles my neck and knocks me out," Naruto explained casually, lifting up his neck as proof. "So, today, I accuse him of nearly killin’ me, and he freaked out."

Naruto knew that he was very vague about it, but he didn’t feel like talking about it, either. After all, this was his fault. He did this. He wasn’t going to pin it on Sasuke suffocating him — though, he was never letting that go — since Naruto was the reason that Sasuke was lying in that hospital bed. In some morbid, warped way, they were equal.

Naruto smiled hollowly at his little thought. Equals. Was this a good way to be equal to one another? Clearly not, since they had both ended up unconscious in a bed, although Naruto at least called the damn hospital for Sasuke. All Sasuke did was put a damp rag on his bruises and brought a half-man half-shark hybrid over to their dorm to somehow help Naruto’s situation with questionable experience in the medical field.

But each to their own.
"Ah, so Sasuke had a relapse, huh?" Kakashi spoke, sitting down beside Naruto and resting his head against the plain white wall.

"A relapse...?" Naruto repeated.

Kakashi and Gai were silent for a moment as Naruto waited for them to give him an explanation.

"Naruto, does the name ‘Uchiha’ mean anything to you?" Gai asked.

"Uchiha?" Naruto pondered for a moment. "Nothin’ comes to mind."

"I see." Gai replied.

"Is it meant to mean somethin’?" Naruto asked.

"I’m sure Sasuke knows what Gai’s talking about." Kakashi interjected, looking at Gai pointedly.

Curiosity bubbled inside Naruto, but he tried his best to make it simmer down. Questioning Kakashi and Gai about it didn’t make him feel comfortable, and despite what other people thought, Naruto wasn’t that dense as to not get the hint that they obviously wanted Sasuke to tell him. Or they didn’t want him to know at all since Sasuke was practically a closed book. Asking Sasuke questions was practically a death sentence.

Between the quiet murmurs of the people in the background, and the shushed television background noise, Naruto couldn’t help but to close his eyes. Yes, he had had a long sleep, but did being knocked unconscious really count as sleep? Perhaps it was to arrange the jumbled thoughts in his head about Sasuke. His anxiety on the situation. His concern about Sasuke. Sleeping was a way to pass the time, too. He didn’t even have time to grab his phone on the way out of the house — something that he majorly regretted. Sitting in a quiet hospital by yourself — well, Kakashi and Gai were there, but the situation was slightly awkward — was quite boring, especially when you were Naruto, hence, it was impossible for you to sit still for a long period of time.

Why was he even making excuses? Surely closing his eyes for a few moments wouldn’t be so bad.

Right?

Naruto jerked awake. Something was touching his shoulder. A gloved hand.

A female, gloved hand.

A nurse’s hand.

She smiled at him sweetly. Brown hair was tied loosely in a ponytail, and soft chocolate eyes looked at him sympathetically. Almost comfortingly.

"Are you Naruto Uzumaki?" She asked.

"Ah, uhm, yeah." He answered, looking around the hallway.

Kakashi and Gai were nowhere to be seen.

Did they leave?

"You’ve been sleeping for quite a long time. Your friend’s awake, if you’d like to see him."
Normally, Naruto would interject and say something along the lines of ‘No, Sasuke’s not my friend’, but currently, he could care less about that. As soon as he heard that Sasuke was awake, nothing else seemed to matter. He practically jumped out of his seat and quickly opened the door that was facing him.

Upon entering, he saw a tired-looking Sasuke sitting in the hospital bed, adorned in hospital scrubs. For some reason, his eyes almost looked lighter, and he almost looked zoned out. He didn’t even notice Naruto walk into the room, or if he did he didn’t show any sign of it.

The perky nurse followed behind him, tapping him on the shoulder and gesturing him to join her outside. Wordlessly, Naruto followed her.

"Sasuke’s condition is stabilised, and the medication has seemed to taken into effect, however may I ask if you have had any previous experiences like this with Sasuke?" She asked, flipping through the papers on her clipboard.

"Uhm, no, sorry." Naruto answered awkwardly.

"Ah, I see. No harm, though. We will just ask him when his brain isn’t so . . . drugged up. He’ll have to make sure that his condition is stabilised, so he doesn’t have another relapse." She explained, clutching her clipboard.

"Relapse?" Naruto repeated.

"Ah, yes. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is one of the harder anxiety conditions to deal with."

*PTSD, huh?*

"Especially with Sasuke." She continued, "after all, he seemed to have low levels of both dopamine and serotonin, however they are very unstable, as of now. Sometimes, especially during a relapse, they can grow very high, therefore his brainwaves are very unstable. During this relapse, his hypertension seemed to be the cause of fainting. Luckily, we have stabilised his blood pressure and his dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine levels. Though, I would be very careful, since Sasuke seems to be rather unstable right now — try not to mention anything, as some would call it, ‘triggering’.

"Ah, I see. Thank you." Naruto said, pretending like he knew what she was talking about.

If only Sakura was here to explain it.

"Call me if you need anything." She chirped, excusing herself.

Naruto watched her walk away before quietly entering Sasuke’s hospital room. He wished that Kakashi and Gai were here — they just left Naruto there sleeping! — so he knew what to talk to Sasuke about. All Naruto could do is sit in an awkward silence.

Dragging a chair and placing it beside Sasuke’s bed, Naruto sat down on it. Sasuke was just staring straight ahead, as if he didn’t know Naruto was there. Was he really that pissed off with Naruto?

"Hi." Naruto said awkwardly.

Slowly, Sasuke’s head turned towards Naruto. Very, very slowly. Almost a delayed reaction. Maybe by stabilising his brainwaves, the hospital had given him some drug that delayed his reaction too? That would explain the most of it.
Or maybe he just didn’t want to talk to Naruto. That would explain a lot too.

Sasuke just stared at him. Sunken eyes stared at him. Not with any type of malice or anger. Just a hollow stare that made Naruto rather uncomfortable. It was almost like he was staring at a robot.

"You feelin’ better?" Naruto asked.

Sasuke’s eyes didn’t meet Naruto’s own. He chose to avoid them, if anything. As an alternative, Sasuke’s eyes stared at the hospital floor. Why wouldn’t he say anything?!

"I don’t know where Kakashi and Gai went. They were here, though." Naruto said.

No reply.

"Did the nurses say anythin’ to you ‘bout them?" Naruto inquired.

Naruto’s fist clenched on his jeans as he forced a grin. This was his fault. Sasuke was a guarded guy who didn’t let anybody too close, and now Naruto could see why. True, Naruto had said more than once that he wanted Sasuke’s emotions to not be so tense and angry all of the time, but he didn’t want this. This was the last thing he wanted.

Sasuke looked so... so—

Defeated.

Perhaps he didn’t want Naruto here. That was probably the reason. It was Naruto’s fault after all. Hell, everything was always his fault. He was always causing trouble for other people. This wasn’t the first time he had inconvenienced somebody. Why did he feel like he could do nothing for Sasuke?

Probably because he couldn’t.

This is your fault.

You can’t do anything right.

"I should go."

Naruto darted out of his chair. Looking at Sasuke in such a broken state was hard enough, especially knowing that it was his fault. Sasuke didn’t want him here. Kakashi and Gai were the ones that Sasuke needed. Sasuke didn’t need Naruto. All Naruto could do was continuously fuck up.

Sasuke didn’t say a word of protest as Naruto walked up to the door.

Until Naruto’s hand was directly on the handle.

"You don’t have to go." Sasuke said.

His voice was hoarse. Not weak, but gravelly.

"I think I do." Naruto said. "Every time I see you, I fuck up. All I ever do, is fuck up with you. I always say somethin’ inconsiderate, or stupid. Every time I’m around ya, you jus’ end up gettin’ hurt."

"I could say the same about myself around you."
Naruto turned around at Sasuke’s words. He didn’t know why, but they were comforting. Almost reassuring. But why was Sasuke reassuring him?

"You don’t want me to go?" Naruto asked, almost hopefully.

"If you need to go, then go. But if you want to stay, then stay."

I hate hospitals.

Naruto recalled Sasuke’s words. Or a younger Sasuke’s words, to be precise.

Sasuke didn’t want to be alone, but he wouldn’t admit that, especially to Naruto, either. So, instead of teasing him, Naruto walked back to the chair beside Sasuke.

"I don’t know if you heard me before, but Kakashi and Gai were here to see you."

"Yeah, they came in earlier, but Kakashi has work in the morning. He’s got this massive case, and they needed to leave."

"So why didn’t they wake me up?"

"I told them not to, since Kakashi and Gai told me that you fell asleep."

"I didn’t fall asleep! I was jus’ restin’ my eyes!" Naruto argued light-heartedly.

"Snoring?!"

"I could hear it from here." Sasuke said.

How embarrassing. How many patients saw that? Or nurses?

Whilst Naruto was in the middle of mentally chastising himself, Sasuke watched Naruto with cautious eyes. Unblinking.

"I guess we’re even, now." Sasuke sighed, breaking his stare.

"Even?" Naruto repeated, his gaze focusing on Sasuke.

"Yeah. We both made each other pass out, so none of us have the upper hand on each other."

"That’s a fucked up thing to be equal on, Sasuke. . ." Naruto mumbled, unconvinced.

"Maybe so." Sasuke replied.

Naruto couldn’t help but feel slightly uneasy about Sasuke’s words. ‘Upper hand on each other’; is that what he thought this was? About being equal to one another?

"Sasuke, can I ask you somethin’?" Naruto inquired.

"Ask me what you like. Whether I answer it or not is my decision."

So blunt. . .

"When you. . . ah — when you. . . y-y’know. . . strangled me. . ." He stumbled over his words, feeling more awkward by the second. Why didn’t he plan this?! "Why’d you do that? I mean, you
were actin’ as if I was gonna do somethin’. Did you think I was gonna hurt you, or somethin’ like that?”

Crimson washed over Naruto’s face at his own words. Planning on what to actually say without being so relentless with his wording would have been a good start.

"I made a mistake." Sasuke spoke, his candid words echoing throughout the hospital room, "I thought that you were a different sort of person, as you would say."

"What sort of person?"


"No offense, but what would a journalist want with you?" A pause, before Naruto’s eyes widened slightly before he jumped out of his chair on reflex. "You’re not a hitman, are you? I-I mean. . . I know we haven’t got along in some instances, but. . ."

"I’m not a hitman, idiot." Sasuke chastised.

"It’s something I wouldn’t put past you."

"Oh. Then why’d—"

"That wouldn’t really matter. I’m not dangerous, though."

"I’d beg to differ." Naruto scoffed.

"Thanks for telling Kakashi and Gai about that, too — the strangling thing — I got an earful from both of them."

Sasuke flashed him a weak glare. One holding little to no hostility in it. Naruto sat back down in the chair that resided beside Sasuke’s bed and refrained himself from talking about anything else on the topic that Sasuke obviously wasn’t up for sharing; instead, he decided to talk about trivial things, and Sasuke surprisingly replied instead of showing how mundane he found the conversation topic. Dare Naruto say, Sasuke almost looked normal — looking vaguely interested in their garrulous chat.

"Promise me something, Naruto." Sasuke said suddenly.

"What?"

"Don’t tell anybody about. . . this. Lie, if you have to. Please. . . just don’t."

"I won’t, Sasuke. I wasn’t plannin’ on doin’ so anyway." Naruto said truthfully.

The corners of Sasuke’s lips lifted up in what some would consider to be a smile. Naruto wouldn’t class it as that, but to Sasuke, the emotionally constipated bastard, it probably was intended to be a smile.

A+ for effort.

The two ended up talking until the nurse softly knocked on the door, informing Naruto that visiting hours would be ending soon, and Sasuke would be staying overnight until noon so the hospital could test his progress.

Naruto obliged. He said goodbye to Sasuke before excusing himself from the hospital. Naruto couldn’t help but release a shiver that washed over his entire spine at the biting cold weather. Puffing
out a cloud of smoke, Naruto looked around, before realising that he didn’t know the area that well.
Or, at all.

He slightly groaned to himself as he didn’t really recall the way home, knowing that the night would end with him calling a cab.

Well, that was the rest of his money for a while gone.

Hopefully there was an available phone booth somewhere.

Looking around, Naruto was able to find one, bathed in the most offensive, gaudy crimson he had ever seen. It was almost blinding. The dim amber glow from the street lamps did nothing but make it more noticeable. He quickly ran inside, placed a few pieces of spare change that he was able to fish out of his pocket into the machine, and called the cab company. Shivering slightly from the draft that was slowly emitting through the small gap in the door of the phone booth, Naruto couldn’t help but smile slightly to himself as he stood breezy photo booth. The obnoxious ringtone blaring in his left ear.

Sasuke seemed to have relaxed himself around Naruto a bit. His tense demeanour had changed into a calm, less guarded one, and for a reason that he couldn’t name, Naruto couldn’t help but feel slightly elated at the revelation.

Perhaps they could truly be friends.

Chapter End Notes

I promise that there will be no more stupid rollercoaster on 'Will Naruto and Sasuke become friends wtf?'. This chapter sorts that out.

I'm happy I got this chapter out of the way bc now I can finally *drum roll* proceed with the main plot!! Woo!! Fucking finally, right?

Anyway, thanks for the people who have stuck through these rather. . . slow chapters. Couldn't have done it with out you!

Tbh I can't wait to proceed with the plot because I can't wait to clear everything up since I know many people have lots of questions on things which can't be answered yet, but EVERYTHING has an explanation I assure you.

Well, until next time :D
Eight

Chapter Notes

i'm uploading this a little bit early to celebrate my Yours For An Hour shipping today!!
i'm so excited ahhhhhh! i heard it's like 100000% gay.

there's a small timeskip in this (about a month) and there's a little bit on.....things
involving..........people..................

((not beta'd, sorry for any mistakes))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter VIII:

Autumn was blustery this year. Burning leaves slowly fell down from mostly-bare trees and fell into small piles on the floor, resembling the colours of a sunset. Mist and fog had encircled the entire campus over the passing month until the school grounds were submerged in a thick layer of brume, making it hard for Naruto to see others from a distance — only nebulous silhouettes were able to be made out.

Fall came as quickly as it passed. Golden leaves slowly turned bare and cold, and the crisp air dragged it’s cold fingers through Naruto’s hair as he bundled himself up in heaps of layers, trying to protect himself from the relentless cold. Wintry weather was nigh, Naruto realised.

Misty Octobers were truly his favourite. Cold air with the mixture of the scent of pumpkin-spice from Ino and Sakura’s lattes was truly nostalgic. Kushina always made pumpkin-spice cookies around the time of Naruto's birthday — it was a true favourite of Naruto’s.

Wrapped up in their parkas, the three of them ambled back to campus, talking about the most trivial things; the conversation was relaxed and warm, as Sakura slowly drank her latte, cupping it in her hands. Over the passing month, Ino and Sakura had allegedly grown tired of the cafeteria, and had forced Naruto to walk all the way to a coffee shop that they had recently discovered by pure chance. Naruto had grown accustomed to walking down the same roads, laid out in cobblestones and autumn mist.

Ino and Sakura were wrapped up in their girly conversation — why they had invited Naruto was beyond him. When they had walked to Naruto’s dormitory to ask him if he wanted to come, they had also asked Sasuke if he wanted to come; Sasuke, being the astute person he was — probably knowing that the journey would be full of Ino and Sakura's garrulous chat — turned them down, claiming that he had coursework to focus on. Naruto's eyes didn't miss the contumelious tone he had said it in, nor the slightly narrowed slits that regarded Ino spitefully.

Grey skies shadowed overhead, and Naruto watched the clouds passing with vague fascination. Darkness cloaked the entire sky, and the autumn chill made it certain that not a stroke of heat was going to reach Naruto. October evenings were always chilly.

Being fascinated with the clouds; he somehow felt similar to Shikamaru.
Not that he was anywhere near as perspicacious as him, of course.

Over the past month, Sasuke had become much better. Socially and personality-wise. After their incidents, and picking Sasuke up from the hospital, Sasuke had become much more agreeable. Naruto had also seen Suigetsu and some other people popping up around the apartment once or twice — Sasuke had finally made — as much as Sasuke abhorred Naruto saying the word to reference them as — friends.

One girl and one boy. The girl was beautiful to say the least — she reminded him almost of his mother, and her personality matched Sakura’s to a tee. Fiery red hair, dyed obviously, matched her fiery personality; Naruto liked her. Her gregarious personality sucked him in. Though they had only conversed a few times, he could tell she was a laugh. Karin, her name was.

Jugo was nice, too. Silent, perhaps, but he was friendly. He also was an animal lover. Coincidentally, he was taking the same course as Kiba, but Kiba said he didn’t talk that much, which Naruto could see.

Between Karin and Suigetsu arguing all the time — it did get annoying after a while — Jugo was always the peacemaker, telling Suigetsu to be nicer to Karin and vice versa.

Not that they actually heeded Jugo’s advice. A guy could try, though.

Eventually, they reached campus. People wandered around the campus, shivering and wrapped up in their own coats, bracing themselves against the autumn chill; Naruto wondered why he accepted Ino and Sakura’s proposal. Sitting in his apartment sounded a much better alternative than going outside — why did he even say yes? He hated the cold!

Sakura and Ino followed him to his apartment. Trailing behind him, whispering amongst themselves and quiet little giggles escaped their mouths as they glanced at Naruto. Pumpkin spice drifted through the chilly autumn air and ensnared his nose in the nostalgic savour. Smiling slightly to himself, Naruto made a quick mental note to call his parents later, unless they called him first. At first, he was going to catch the train back home and spend his birthday with them, but between his studies and his quite low budget, he decided against it, despite his parents insisting that they would pay — they had spent too much money on him already, he had thought. Settling for a call and a card was enough for Naruto; he had new friends down here, namely Ino, and they were enough for him too.

Rattling his keys on the keychain slightly, Naruto scoured for the silver key on the left — putting it in an ideal place so he wouldn’t have to test every key on there — and placed it in the lock. Hushed, exuberant whispers were just audible through the other side of the door before it went deadly quiet.

Too quiet.

Hesitantly, he pushed the door open. Slightly. Just in case something — or someone — jumped out at him. Ino and Sakura’s expressions gave him a conjecture of doubt — a suspicion. Inside, peaking around the door, it was dim. Contours of shapes were just about noticeable — waiting for him.

"Sak, Ino, what’s goin’ o—"

Two pairs of hands pushed him through the door with a tremendous force. Most probably Sakura. She was awfully strong for her own good.

Practically tumbling through the door, he heard a loud bang, followed with an array of different coloured pieces of confetti showering down onto his head and into his hair.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!"
Wide-eyed, Naruto watched in complete bafflement as screams and shouts welcomed him home as the lights turned on, turning the dim apartment into a luminous bundle of Naruto’s friends. Gleeful smiles from Kiba, Choji, Karin and Suigetsu welcomed him; Shino holding the party popper in his hand, looking at Naruto (presumably) through those sunglasses — which honestly looked like they belonged to John Lennon but who was Naruto to judge — and Jugo had a soft, but quaint, smile on his face. Not as gleeful compared to Kiba’s, but he was a rather mellow person. Blatant grins wasn’t really Jugo’s style.

Sasuke looked rather neutral, simply holding a party popper in his hand. An infinitesimal, quiet smile graced his features. Barely noticeable, but it was there. Or it was a trick of the light.

Bundles of presents pressed up against one another on the coffee table. Some wrappings were scrappy, jumbled together (Naruto guessed that they were Kiba and Suigetsu’s presents) whilst some were done rather impressively.

He couldn’t help but smile to himself, seeing that everybody had made an effort of some sort. In spite of his parents not being there, his old friends — namely Gaara — not being there, he was happy that he had his new friends to spend the day with, especially since he had only known them for a month, if even that.

"Let’s open your presents!” Ino proposed, dragging Naruto over to the coffee table.

The squeal fell from the tip of Ino’s tongue. Naruto laughed slightly, since Ino seemed more excited than he actually was — in his defence, Naruto was still processing everything that was happening. One second ago, people were swamping him in confetti and yelling happy birthday, and now he was getting dragged over to the sofa, by an eager Ino, followed by a gushing Karin and an excited Sakura.

Kiba and Suigetsu had wondered into the kitchen, saying something along the lines that they were going to mix as much alcohol as they could or fill up all of the shot glasses — Naruto didn’t really listen. He was too busy being pushed by the girls over to the coffee table.

"Open this one first!” Ino exclaimed, pushing a present wrapped in lavender in his face with the words ‘FROM INO’ being written in a bold black marker in cursive handwriting.

Slowly, Naruto peeled the wrapping paper off. Opening presents had never been his strong point; it was always awkward trying not to rip the intricate wrappings to shreds, especially when that person was watching with such gleeful excitement. Eventually, he managed to get it off accordingly, unfolding all of the folds Ino had stuck down with sellotape.


"Ino, I can’t accept this—"

"Shut up. It’s from my parents, too. You’re practically family.” She dismissed, slapping the hand that tried to give her back the cologne lightly, "anyway, giving it back to me is pointless. I don’t need it."

"Thanks Ino,” he said, hugging her briefly.

"Well done for makin’ the rest of our presents look like horseshit.” Kiba sighed, placing an arm around Ino.

"Not in public. Don’t be gross.” Suigetsu moaned.

"Maybe I should just steal a kiss to lighten you guys up a little.” Kiba teased, his lips getting closer
and closer to Ino’s coral ones, coated in a soft gleam of lipstick.

Luckily, somebody — Suigetsu, probably — threw a pillow between the two whilst everybody else mock-heaved in disgust. Over the past month, it was safe to say that Kiba and Ino were dating. Sakura’s trips to Naruto’s dormitory whilst they were having their ‘alone time’ were sudden, but he let her in. Who wouldn’t? Naruto wouldn’t force Sakura to listen to that. It even sent shivers down his spine.

Perhaps they wouldn’t be considered so nauseating if they didn’t flaunt their little relationship every chance they got. Two little lovebirds, shitting on everyone.

Ino just breathed out a soft giggle against Kiba’s lips as their noses touched, and Ino’s hands ran through Kiba’s unruly brown hair.

Yep. They were definitely going through their lovey-dovey stage. Naruto couldn’t wait for that to blow over.

Clearing his throat, Shikamaru held out a rather messily wrapped together present, taking a seat next to Naruto on the couch as Choji stood next to him.

"It’s from me and Choji. If you don’t like it, I have a receipt."

Naruto laughed and patted Shikamaru’s shoulder reassuringly, "I’m sure it’ll be fine."

Naruto opened the present — not as carefully as he did Ino’s, since he knew Choji and Shikamaru didn’t give a rat’s ass — and it was a little figurine of R2D2.

"Ino told us about your Star Wars phase." Choji snickered.

"And I saw how much crumbs were on your desk the last time I came over." Shikamaru said, grabbing the figurine and showing Naruto the bottom of it, "so it’s a desktop vacuum too."

"That’s so cool!" Naruto beamed, his cerulean eyes sparkling.

Yes, he was still that twelve year old with the awkward voice break and the non-existent stubble who forced Ino to play Star Wars in their back garden and spoke to the air pretending it was Darth Vader.

Anyway.

Kiba held a present in his hands, as a tired-looking Shino stood behind him. A mischievous grin had crepted up onto Kiba’s face, and Naruto had a bad feeling about this present. Especially from Shino’s pensive look.

"Open mine next!" Kiba practically demanded, pushing it into Naruto’s face.

"I just want to say, for the record, I do not condone this present. Even though I put money towards it, I do not agree with it." Shino murmured.

"It was better than the stripper plan." Said Suigetsu offhandedly.

"S-stripper plan?!" Ino shouted, sounded scandalised.

"Stripper’s got nothin’ on you, babe." Kiba grinned, tightening the grip reassuringly his arm had around Ino.
"How... romantic." She replied sarcastically.

"Thanks for not gettin’ a stripper." Naruto laughed. "Sasuke’d kill me."

"Yeah. Ino and Sakura are too straight and if we even put a stripper near Sasuke’s apartment, he’d kill us." Karin sighed, sounding disappointed.

"That is correct." Sasuke confirmed from the other side of the room, sitting on a single chair writing an essay, or something along those lines.

Laughing, Naruto opened his present from Kiba whilst everyone was in their own conversation, but they still watched Naruto open the present. However, despite Naruto liking the idea he would be able to predict Kiba’s indeterminable personality, this was not what he was expecting.

Resting in his hands was a package with the words ‘BLOW UP LOVE DOLL SANDRA’ with the words ‘never be lonely again’ written directly underneath. Only now did he realise how creepy blow up dolls were when they were deflated. Sandra was a floating head with an open mouth.

Literally. She had no body. It was somewhere behind her head.

If he weren’t so speechless, Naruto would have burst into laughter.

Howls of cachinnation left Kiba’s mouth as tears rolled down his cheeks. Arms quickly wrapped around his stomach as he rolled around on the floor, his legs sprawling everywhere. Loud laughter ran throughout the apartment. Whether everybody else was laughing at the doll, or Kiba’s reaction, would probably forever be a mystery. For Naruto, it was a mixture of both.

"Thanks Kiba. I’ll keep Sandra for the lonely nights." Naruto chuckled, setting disfigured Sandra next to him, puffy red lips and all.

"Oooh! Open mine next!" Sakura laughed, practically flinging her present at him, still laughing from Kiba’s present.

"Thanks, Sakura." Naruto nodded, accepting her present.

Naruto opened Sakura’s present rather hastily. Inside, lay a gloss burnt orange scarf. Bright, but not too bright. Perfect for the weather, too. As Naruto’s hand grabbed it, he couldn’t help but think how soft it was. He wrapped it around his neck, grinning at Sakura.

"Thanks, Sak. I needed a new scarf."

"Yeah. There were blue and red ones, too. I didn’t think you would like the red ones. The blue one matched your eyes, but orange is your favourite colour, and it suits you. But if you’d prefer another colour, I could always take it back—"

"Don’t! I really like it. Honest." Naruto grinned, ruffling Sakura’s hair, much to her annoyance.

Sakura scowled at him before grinning, trying to sort out her pink hair back to the way it was. Boys would never understand how hard it was to get a parting back to the way it was once they had messed it up!

Karin, Suigetsu and Jugo had brought him a variety of different types of stationary. Gel pens, pens, pencils, rubbers, post-it-notes, and a list of other things that would all probably end up lost at the end of the school year. Or term. Possibly next week. But he was grateful, since he only had a pen and a pencil. Learning with colours was always easier for Naruto. When he had offhandedly mentioned he
needed new stationary, he barely expected to get any. Especially anything from Suigetsu, Karin, and Jugo. They were Sasuke’s 'friends' after all!

"Sasuke, aren’t you gonna give Naruto your gift?" Suigetsu asked.

"Sasuke got me somethin’?" Naruto asked.

"Of course he did." Karin shouted, patting Naruto’s back. "Despite what he says, he doesn’t mind you, y’know."

True, things between Naruto and Sasuke had grown immensely better, but he hardly expected Sasuke to get him anything for his birthday. For some unexplainable reason, he was unreasonably giddy with glee.

"Stop grinning like a moron, moron." Sasuke droned, placing a present in his hand.

"Lighten up, Sasuke." Suigetsu chortled, wrapping a hand around Sasuke and practically throwing him to the ground, much to Sasuke’s blatant annoyance. "We all know you like Naruto, whether you say you do or not."

"It’s not Naruto who I don’t like." Sasuke gritted out, glaring at Suigetsu through the headlock, obviously insinuating something. If Suigetsu noticed, he chose to ignore it, it seemed.

"Feisty." Suigetsu laughed.

Naruto grinned at Sasuke before opening his present. It was wrapped neatly in the same wrapping paper as Karin, Suigetsu and Jugo’s presents. Not even Naruto could deny how perfectly wrapped the present was; breaking into it was almost tragic, considering how flawless it was actually wrapped. Simply, and utterly, Sasuke.

After Naruto had carefully unfolded the corners, as he did with Ino’s wrapping, he soon realised that it was a book. A big, hefty book. As Naruto tore the front of the wrapping paper, the huge words printed out in bold jumping out at him: Volume III: Icha Icha Tactics. Naruto’s eyes twinkled with a mix of awe and recognition as soon as he saw the title of the book. The book that was sold out practically everywhere. The book that was hard to get your hands on.

"Sasuke! How did you get this?" Naruto asked, his eyes never looking away from the book for one second.

"Kakashi was able to pull some strings." He explained. "I didn’t know how much some people would do for a book of porn."

"I-i-it’s not p-porn!" Naruto squawked, flapping his arms around.

"Read the first line."

"N-no!" He stammered, embarrassed.

"Why not?" Sasuke asked.

"Because. . . I want to treasure this book."

"Sasuke just let him read it in his own time." Suigetsu interjected. "Maybe Sandra could even help him out—"

Naruto threw a pillow at Suigetsu’s face whilst his face had turned a very vibrant hue of red.
Blushing like a virgin. Not that Naruto was a virgin, but he was nowhere near as licentious as Kiba. Then again, was anyone?

The room burst into another fit of laughter, Suigetsu’s muffled by the pillow on his face. Even Sasuke, being the standoffish pissbaby he was, cracked a humoured grin at the whole situation.

"Well, now that all the formalities are out of the way — thanks for takin’ so long Naruto — let’s get fuckin’ pissed!!" Kiba chanted, running into the kitchen to bring out as much liquor as he could possibly carry, Suigetsu trailing behind with some large bottles and Karin holding the shots Suigetsu and Kiba had poured before. Thinking back, they probably should have poured them after they had settled them down.

"We’re gettin’ pissed first, then we’re goin’ out." Kiba told Naruto, necking down a shot of vodka. "S’always good to get pissed first. That way, we don’t have to pay for that much alcohol."

Kiba passed Naruto a shot as everybody — beside Shino, Jugo and Sasuke — hollered at him to down it. Cheers and catcalls rebounded in his ear as he drank a can of dark fruit cider in thirty seconds — he felt sick after, but at least he was feeling the buzz of being tipsy.

From then forth, things just got a little out of hand.

Sasuke had sworn off alcohol, commenting that ‘it wasn’t his thing’. Respectable. Jugo and Shino stood in the corner, sipping on their rum and cokes. Suigetsu and Karin were arguing with each other, whilst Sakura, Kiba and Naruto had a very. . . irrelevant drunken discussion on politics.

Ino had wandered off somewhere. Where. . . that was an excellent question. One that Naruto couldn’t really answer right now, but she was somewhere. Sasuke was gone too. Probably retreated back to his room like the bear-in-hibernation he was.

Somewhere between the alcohol, Donald Trump bashing, and the conversations with everybody, Naruto had wondered back to the kitchen. He wasn’t drunk. Tipsy, maybe. But drunk? Nope. The same couldn’t be said about Suigetsu and Kiba, but they were best known for handling their liquor well. The loud, fun-to-be-with drunks.

As Naruto reached the doorway — or beside it, in actuality — he could hear two voices. He recognised them immediately. Ino and Sasuke. Whispering among themselves. Sasuke’s whispers sounded a lot more angry whilst Ino’s sounded a lot more soft and patient.

Despite the door being in the way, Naruto could hear their whispers quite clearly, as a matter of fact. Naruto couldn't help it if the university dormitory walls were thin!

"Listen, Sasuke. My dad needs to know." Ino’s voice said.

"Your dad doesn’t need to know anything.” Sasuke snapped back. "Because then you’ll go and squeal to him, and I’ll be sent back home—"

"You won’t!"

"Yes I will!"

"I can always ask Naruto why you ended up in that ambulance. We are best friends, after all. I’m just trying to do this the easy way.”

"If this is how you’re going to talk to your patients, you’re shaping up to be a pretty shitty psychologist."
"I’m looking out for your welfare! My dad was — is — your psychologist! He still has a duty to protect you! He didn’t want to send you here anyway. But that crafty snake Kabuto—"

"Don’t say a bad word about Kabuto! He’s the best therapist I’ve ever had! He understands that I needed to get away from home. To get away from the town where everything happened. He visits me a lot — checking up on me even if he has to drive two hours."

"I wouldn’t trust him, Sasuke. He gives you what you want, but he’s not looking out for you." Ino hissed.

"Then what is he doing?!"

Silence. Silence followed Sasuke’s words almost hauntingly. Naruto didn’t hear another word from the other side of the door, until Ino eventually replied, sounding hesitant.

"I... I don’t know..."

"Exactly." Sasuke hissed.

"He’s not trustworthy, Sasuke. My dad’s looked into him! He’s—"

"Kabuto’s the only reason I was able to go to university! I need to study to take control of my company! Kabuto insisted that I get an education, and your father forced me to go here!" Sasuke spat. "You’re just like your father. Meddling in everything I do. I don’t even want your father as my shitty psychologist! But Kakashi forced me! Your dad... he only cares about the money, doesn’t he? He doesn’t care about my happiness. Only taking the easiest way for him. ‘Sasuke should stay here’ ‘Sasuke’s not mentally stable’ ‘Sasuke can’t handle it’ — what about my feelings? Why can’t he just fucking understand! Getting his daughter to watch over me? Pathetic. Forcing me to go to shitty Konoha University?! Maybe I didn’t want to go here! But I had to go to the same university as you! And I did want to go to university, but one that I chose! Kabuto was against this too, saying I should be able to make my own decisions—"

"Sasuke! Calm down!"

"Don’t touch me. I’m fucking fine. Well — if you stopped bothering me, anyway." Sasuke uttered. "When you first came here, you have no idea how pissed I was at Naruto, but you were pretty adamant on coming here, weren’t you! He doesn’t know anything, does he? I didn’t trust him at all, but it turns out, he didn’t know anything. It was dumb luck I was roomed with him! Do you know how many precautions I took so you wouldn’t find me in this university!"

"Leave Naruto out of this. He doesn’t know anything, and I intend to keep it that way. I am sworn to secrecy, Sasuke. Not even Naruto knows. I have a feeling if he knew about your condition, he would take it upon himself to help you — he’s always been like that. I don’t want him feeling bad. We’re just doing this to protect you, Sasuke. My dad is concerned—"

"I am not his concern!" Sasuke shouted, snapping out his whisper, making Naruto jump against the door. "Tell him Kabuto’s the only person whom I’ll trust."

"Sasuke. Please. At least be cautious around Kabuto. Please."

"Is that one of those psychological methods you use on people? Sprouting seeds of doubt in their mind so they’ll forever be brainwashed and pay people like your father for a lifetime? I bet that’s how your dad’s getting you through university." Sasuke snapped, his toxic words cutting like a blade.
"Sasuke—"

Ino’s voice sounded forced. Like she was trying to push past a lump in her throat. Scratchy and mellow. Sasuke’s horrible words breaking her.

"I guess you and your dad have something in common. You’re both manipulative."

Footsteps approached near the door, and Naruto quickly jogged to the end of the corridor, trying to pass off that he was casually wandering to the kitchen. He had almost forgot that he was actually there, getting lost in their conversation. Luckily for Naruto, he was only tipsy; if he were drunk he would have probably burst into the room before he could find anything out.

Out of many possibilities in the world, one of the last things he would have suspected was that Ino’s father was Sasuke’s psychologist. Though, it did fit a lot of pieces of the puzzle together.

Meeting Sasuke was something Ino was too eager about. Just to meet somebody? Especially when Naruto had made the big deal out of Sasuke being an asshole.

And Sasuke’s obvious contempt for Ino. Their introduction was full of hate and malice on Sasuke’s part, whilst Ino stayed calm and composed throughout their encounter. The way he spit out her last name when he spoke about her. Like it was deadly to even have the word on the tip of your tongue.

Sasuke not wanting anybody to find out — that was probably because he didn’t want Ino to know, either. Because then Ino would tell her father, and Sasuke didn’t want to go home. Making conclusions wasn’t liable at this point in time, however, and wasn’t really his business in all entirety. But he couldn’t help but feel curious at these revelations. What else didn’t he know that was right under his nose?

"What are you doing, you ignoramus?" Sasuke asked.

Naruto had only then realised that whilst he was in his train of thought, Sasuke had probably been walking from the kitchen to see Naruto lost in his own contemplation.

If he didn’t mind Sasuke knowing that he was — technically — spying on his and Ino’s conversation, he would have chastised Sasuke for his treatment towards Ino. Or would he? Since, whenever Naruto tried to interfere with Sasuke’s life without knowing every detail, it never ended up well. Ever.

And who the hell was he calling ignoramus?!

"Fancy words you’re usin’." Naruto stammered, swaying on his feet slightly.

"Are you drunk?"

"No." Naruto lied — well, tipsy really count as drunk?

"I think you are."

"Sasuke, I’m nineteen. Liven up a little."

"Naruto, no matter how old you are, you are, and always will be, an idiot. Alcohol and idiots equal the making of Jackass."

"They weren’t drunk!"

"Well, imagine if they were. A million more times painful."
"Y’know what, Sasuke? It’s my fuckin’ birthday! I’m takin’ the high road. Thanks for the fuckin’ book, it was the nicest thing I think you’ve ever done for me — the only nice thing actually — and I just wanna say thank you." Naruto explained, wrapping his arms around Sasuke.

An awkward hug was greeted by nothing but silence. Until he heard a steady breath breathe against his ear. Sasuke’s. Sasuke’s breath was surprisingly warm. Comforting, almost. Tickling the tip of his ear, and Naruto chuckled a bit, instinctively hugging Sasuke tighter.

Sasuke smelt nice. Peppermint and sandalwood. A peculiar, but oddly cooperative, scent. Somehow, it was nostalgic. He didn’t know why, or how, but it just felt familiar. He liked it. He wanted to immerse himself in it, as he drew Sasuke closer into his body, his nose directly on the nape of Sasuke’s neck.

"Naruto," breathed Sasuke, "you have exactly three seconds to stop hugging me. Or I will kill you."

"But it’s my birthday!" Naruto whined.

"So? Shakespeare died on his birthday."

"Is that confirmed? He died like 300 years ago . . . I’m pretty sure the record keepers coulda just lied for the sake of it. Fucked us over as a messed up prank, or somethin’.

"I am not having this discussion with you!" Sasuke shouted, struggling to get out of Naruto’s vice grip.

"Fine." Naruto huffed, releasing Sasuke from his hold. "Anyway, have you seen Ino?"

Smooth. Played that off real smooth, Uzumaki.

"I haven’t."

Liar. Lying son of a bitch. Lying is a sin, Sasuke, you piece of shit —

"Oh, I see." Naruto replied, tripping over his own two feet.

Tipsy. Only tipsy. He was only tipsy, for god’s sake!

If Naruto were sober, perhaps he would have realised the dark look on Sasuke’s face — the scowl. The way his facial expression tightened even more when Naruto mentioned Ino’s name. But, alas, his mind, and his vision, were compromised. Fuzzy. Blurry — whatever you wanted to call it.

Instead, he was too far gone. His brain was too immersed in alcohol for him to think straight — he was only tipsy, dammit — and he dismissed it, patting Sasuke’s shoulder. He wandered into the kitchen to see Ino’s back facing away from him, seemingly fiddling with the remaining alcohol bottles that were probably empty.

"Sup, Ino!" Naruto grinned.

Startled, Naruto sees Ino’s back straighten immensely, until she turns around and flashes him a watery smile. Tearful eyes closed slightly, probably attempting to hide her obvious lachrymose state. Even through his blurry vision, he could see her plain trepidation. Hiding that he actually knew why she was sad was harder than it seemed to be. All Naruto wanted to do was run and give her a sloppy hug. It wasn’t Ino’s fault if her dad was forcing her to do something — it wasn’t Sasuke’s fault for not agreeing with his psychologist’s opinion. Being recalcitrant towards his therapist was something Naruto knew all too well — Iruka being a notable example — and it was something that he could
understand on a personal level; on the other hand, however, he didn’t like Sasuke blaming Ino for this at all. But, with the whole ‘you went to Konoha University so I had to too’, Naruto could sympathise with Sasuke on that one; if he had to go to a university he didn’t really want to go to, Naruto would be pissed off too.

Too much thoughts for such an intoxicated mind!

"Naruto, are we going out now?" She asked, watery smile still on her face.

Getting shouted at by Sasuke was nerve wrecking, to say the least. Naruto knew that off by heart.

"No..." He said, "what’s wrong?"

Silence passed between them for a while; Naruto could hear the gears in Ino’s head grinding together as she tried to think of a viable excuse.

"I’m just upset because you’re nineteen now!" She lied. "I mean, remembering your awkward Star Wars phase when you were twelve. . . you’ve come such a long way! I’m happy that you’re happy."

Convincing lie. Not to mention how selfless it sounded. Well played, Yamanaka. Well played.

"I see," Naruto said, grabbing a stray shot from the corner of the kitchen, "but we’re not going out until you’ve got some alcohol into your system."

Even in his alcohol-induced mind, Naruto knew talking with Ino about what just happened wasn’t a good idea. When Naruto was drunk — tipsy — he was infamous with his blunt words. Very, very blunt words. Perhaps when he was sober he would be able to talk to Ino about it. Reassure her. Help her, if necessary. Drinking was always a solution to helping people with the blues, too. Temporary, albeit, but it still worked.

Well, unless you had too much daily. After that, alcohol just became a depressant.

Making Ino feel slightly better was his main priority. If Kiba found out that Sasuke made Ino cry, it would probably ruin his birthday. Kiba and Sasuke fighting. Then again, it wasn’t Kiba he was worried about. If Sakura found out that Sasuke made Ino cry, Naruto would probably lose a roommate. And he would have some explaining to do with Kakashi and Gai.

Chapter End Notes

*comforts ino b/c i love her so much*

((sorry for any grammatical mistakes once again))
Chapter IX:

Lurid lights flashed around the club, washing Naruto in a hue of cyan, fuchsia, and orange. The lights were blinding, and the booming music moved the whole club. If Naruto wasn’t too far gone (with the help of alcohol), he would probably find the music to be a tad too loud, since his ears were humming. But alas, he was drunk, so instead of finding the scene too obstreperous — as expected of a club Kiba and Suigetsu had both picked out — he found it funny. Everything was funny. Sitting down was funny.

His hiccups were funny.

Whilst drunk, Naruto found everything funny. That was the bottom line.

Sasuke and Jugo stayed at Sasuke and Naruto’s dormitory. Imagining Sasuke and Jugo in such a loud space was, if Naruto pondered on it, a rather bizarre thought. They obviously thought so too — therefore they settled for staying at on campus. Things such at this really wasn’t their scene.

Kiba was Missing In Action. At some point, Kiba had wondered into the crowd of swarming bodies brazenly humping each other as if their lives depending on it. Sweat mixed with the unmistakable tinge of alcohol festered around the club. Promiscuous women; licentious men. Creating a swell of heat as bodies drastically grinded on each other, and Naruto could feel the drops of perspiration slowly gather on his forehead. The alcohol wasn’t helping Naruto’s temperature cool down, either. Actually, it was just making him even more dehydrated.

Ino and Sakura stood in the corner, clutching onto each other for dear life, constantly tripping over in their high heels. High heels were probably not the best shoes to wear whilst drunk, but then again, what did Naruto know? They looked like they were going to keel over any moment now. Laughing boisterously amongst themselves. How they could hear each other over the thundering music was astounding. Probably some magic power girls possessed, or something like that.

Karin and Suigetsu — who had offered to buy the next round of alcohol — were sitting at the bar, bickering amongst themselves. Nothing new there. Though, Naruto couldn’t deny that he felt sorry
for the confused bartender who had been waiting there for at least five minutes, eyes flickering from fiery red hair to cyan-tinted white as they squabbled whilst he waited patiently for his order. Poor guy.

Naruto, in the meantime, sat in one of the booths with Shikamaru, Choji and Shino. Dancing wasn’t really his thing, since he didn’t want to make a fool out of himself; the same went for Choji and Shino, whilst Shikamaru was just too lazy to do anything else besides sit. Give Naruto enough alcohol, however, and he probably would end up getting dragged onto the dance floor by somebody. That somebody, most of the time, being Ino. Sometimes, she tried to convince Gaara to dance, and always, they were politely turned down, so Naruto was usually Ino’s target.

Just the mental image of Shikamaru, Choji, and Shino dancing — or attempt to, anyway — was enough to make the rest of his birthday fun.

When Naruto looked around, he managed to catch a glimpse of Kiba fighting his way through the crowd and softly grab Ino’s forearm, whispering something in her ear with a toothy grin on his face. Whatever Kiba whispered, Ino seemed to like the idea as a soft smile graced her features, her ruby-red lips (*since when did she put lipstick on?*) widening slightly. As Kiba grabbed Ino back onto the battlefield — or dance floor, whatever you wanted to call it — a wobbling Sakura (looking slightly annoyed) slowly made her way over to their booth — or tried to, anyway. Watching her to attempt to with her thin, shaky legs was downright pitiful.

"I think Sak’s trying to get over here." Choji yelled, trying to be heard over the music whilst taking a sip of his rum and coke.

"She looks annoyed, too." Shino pointed out.

"Probably because she just got ditched by her friend for her boyfriend." Shikamaru suggested.

"I'll go and get her before she falls." Naruto sighed, getting up from his seat.

Hearing a mutter from Shikamaru along the lines of ‘you’re not in a much better shape yourself’, Naruto dismissed it and scrambled up from his seat, walking over to Sakura with a slight stumble in his step. Limber, pale arms tangled themselves around Naruto’s tanned arm, a childish pout playing on her bottom lip coated in a sparkly layer of lip-gloss. Subtle yet sweet. Mascara varnished eyelashes looked up at him almost hopefully. Like she was wanted something. A hidden deviousness. Her body weight slowly hung onto Naruto’s, awkwardly pulling him down as he had apparently turned into Sakura’s walking stick so she didn't fall over.

"What’s wrong, Sak?” Naruto asked.

"Dance with me!" She demanded, a slur on the tip of her tongue. The way she pronounced ‘with’ almost sounded more like ‘which’, and Naruto couldn't help but realise how childish and demanding her request sounded.

"I don’t like dancin’." Naruto grinned, scratching the back of his head almost apologetically. "S’rry."

Dancing wasn’t really the problem. The *problem* was that Sakura could barely stand on her own, and Naruto didn’t feel like keeping Sakura upright in the throng of grinding bodies that would, undoubtedly, push both of them over with the way they were going at it so ferociously.

"Puh-lease, Narutooooo!" Sakura whined, pulling on his arm. "Ino left me and you’re my only hope! Don’t be a party pooper!"

"Can you even stand?" Naruto asked incredulously.
"Of course!" Sakura slurred, untangling herself from Naruto’s arms on wobbly feet, pointing an unsteady finger at Naruto. "I am a strong, independent woman!"

Between her stumbles and slurs, Naruto found it hard to believe that Sakura would be able to stand in the crowd of bodies bumping into each other. Hell, Naruto could barely stand himself as he realised the swaying of his feet. The chances of them not falling over, therefore not making fools out of themselves, was very low. Very, very low.

"Why don’t we jus’ sit down?" Naruto suggested, dragging her back to the booth where Shino, Shikamaru and Choji were.

"No!" Sakura snapped, grabbing onto Naruto’s arms and forcibly dragging him back into the crowd despite Naruto’s blatant unwillingness to. "Methinks thou dost protest too much."

"Have you ever read Hamlet?!" Naruto squawked.

"We’ve all been in tenth grade at some point, Naruto!" Sakura yelled back.

Fuck. Sakura’s freakishly strong tendencies had slipped from his mind. Why was this girl so strong? Especially with such slender arms! It just wasn’t natural! He was pretty sure that Sakura could take him in a fight — being as strong as he is — and that was something he felt like he would get into if he didn’t give into her demands. Getting punched by Sakura had to hurt.

Approaching the crowd of bodies on the dance floor, Naruto could feel the heat become more intense. The music grew louder, and it was the only thing that he could hear. Words left Sakura’s mouth — probably random nonsense — but he couldn’t hear them. Pulses of the music’s beat rippled through the dance floor and vibrated through Naruto’s body. The lurid lights grew more flashy — more gaudy. Colours flashed around the small space of, dyeing Sakura’s pale skin in an array of different, garish colours.

It was sweltering. He was very aware of the people surrounding him rubbing against his backside, and Naruto swore somebody groped his ass. But, he was too far gone to care. Too consumed with having fun with Sakura. The buzz of alcohol was letting his body do whatever it wanted. It was his birthday for god’s sake! His nineteenth, to be exact. Having fun and letting loose was something that was almost essential.

Did the music get faster? Louder? He didn’t exactly know, but it felt as if everybody surrounding him had started to move faster, and he followed suit, not wanting to be left behind.

He looked over at Sakura, with a toothy grin on his face, and was slightly taken back by the envious look twinkling in her eyes. Her face coloured the exact same as her eyes: green. Green with envy. Instead of having fun, or smiling like everybody else, a look of resentment flickered across her features. Following her fixed gaze, Naruto’s eyes turned around, and between the clusters of people dancing with each other, he was just able to make out Ino and Kiba. Only just.

Barely, actually. With all of the alcohol he had consumed, and the (rather far) distance he had to look to see Ino and Kiba, he wasn’t even sure it was them.

Why did Sakura look so spiteful?

Glancing behind himself once more, he saw Ino’s gaze slowly look at them. Probably sensing that somebody was looking at her — Ino had told him once that she had amazing intuition, which he had learned, she did.

After that, it all happened instantly.
Fingers clasped the back of his neck. Soft, delicate fingers, making him snap his head around.

And just so that you know, Naruto’s neck was a major erogenous zone. His weakness, so to speak. Whenever anybody came remotely close to his neck (not even directly touching it), it send shivers down his spine.

He was drunk and just a man. Give him a break.


And then, lips pressed against his own. It wasn’t frantic, and even by the first touch, it didn’t feel sexual at all. Chaste. Nibbling on Naruto’s bottom lip, Naruto tasted the subtle taste of cherry, Sakura’s lip gloss, mixed with the pungent taste of alcohol. Silky hands massaged the back of his neck almost reassuringly as her tongue lapped Naruto’s once more. Naruto accepted the touch, admittedly, but all of his thoughts were jumbled.

*Damn you, alcohol.*

Why was he doing this?

Sakura was just a friend, and her body language suggested the same.

Clutching her sinuous shoulders, Naruto slowly pushed Sakura away from his lips. It didn’t feel right. They were friends. Good friends. Nothing more. Both of them knew that, and there was no lust in the kiss. No want. No desire. It was like kissing his sister. Uncomfortable and gross.

He looked at Sakura, a remorseful smile on his face. An unspoken apology. Raising a hand, he caressed her cheek, whispering an apology directly in her ear that was shrouded by locks of pink hair.

Wet.

Her cheeks were wet.

Tears welled up in seafoam eyes as her bottom lip trembled. Remorse. Regret. Too much alcohol. All mixed into one.

Was Naruto that much of a terrible kisser?

Sakura clutched onto Naruto’s shirt, hiding her head in his chest. Her lithe form quaking slightly as her sniffling echoed throughout his body.

Handling crying girls was not Naruto’s speciality. Handling Ino was easy. He knew what she liked, what she disliked, what made her laugh, the boundaries. . . with Sakura he didn’t know how to comfort her. Seeing Sakura cry was rare. Actually, he had never seen her cry at all. Recently, however, her dolorous state of mind had been shining through. Melancholic smiles. Watery eyes. Hasty excuses. In a way, he was happy that she was finally letting it out. Watching Sakura walk around with so much pent up sadness was hard for him, but he didn’t want to keep asking her ‘what’s wrong?’ since it obviously irritated her. Not in the dismissive, rude way, but in ‘I don’t want you to worry so please stop asking me’ way.

He realised, now, that some people were staring at him. A lot of people, actually.
Nudging her slightly, Sakura looked up at Naruto with watery eyes. Smiling slightly, Naruto whispered in her ear something along the lines of ‘let’s go outside’, but his drunken murmur made it sound like a husky breath, almost. Then again, Naruto had (slightly) sobered up whilst kissing Sakura, and then more so at seeing Sakura crying.

Grasping Sakura’s wrist, he wormed his way around the meandering crowds of people. It was much harder getting in than out, he realised.

Outside, the air was chilly. Luckily, nobody was outside except the two of them; it probably had something to do with being allowed to smoke inside of the club; taking refuge from the biting autumn chill was probably an added bonus too. That’s probably why Kiba picked this place in the first place. Hollowed out music could be heard coming from inside of the club, but despite being as loud as it could be, it wasn’t able to break the brick walls.

All he could hear was Sakura’s discreet sobbing.

On second thought, it wasn’t that discreet at all, actually.

Blubbering with a runny-nose, Sakura shivered slightly and wrapped her arms around herself. Impulsively, Naruto wrapped his hoodie around her, not minding the cold that much. It was almost stifling in the club, so the contrast of cold air felt good. Giving up his hoodie wasn’t a big deal.

"Sak. . . I’m sorry, I just don’t feel that way about you. . ." He started, cutting himself off.

Rejection didn’t feel good. Rejecting somebody whilst they were crying was like. . . pulling the tail of an angry tiger. You just didn’t do it.

"No, no, no." She uttered sharply, "I don’t know why I did that — well I do. But. . . it’s not like that. What I feel for you is friendship. Platonicness."

"Oh." He replied. "I don’t think platonicness is a word."

"Ah, fuck you." She hissed jokily.

Well. Sakura was a bitchy drunk, it seemed. Drunk people always show their true colours, his mother had once said — whilst she was drunk, too.

"So, why’d. . . you do that?" Naruto asked.

"I’m drunk." She slurred.

Naruto saw the untruth flicker in her eyes for a moment. It was brief, but it was there. Sakura turned around, her eyes not meeting Naruto’s. She knew, as well as he, that her conflicting emotion was her flaw. Her giveaway. Lying to Naruto was something she didn’t want to do, she really, really liked him. Using him for her. . . own feelings, was wrong. But she was drunk. So fuck morals and principals.

Not looking at Naruto in the eyes made it easier for her to lie.

"No. Really — you’ve been sad for ages, I kinda noticed. I’m not gonna ask why, but I know you’re not happy. I’ve noticed, y’know. And, on the dancefloor. . . you were. . . jealous."

Way to be blunt about it, Naruto.

Hey, he had sobered up, but the liquor had still loosened his tongue slightly. Blurring things out
when he was drunk was a known speciality of Naruto’s, actually.

Sakura flinched slightly at Naruto’s words. Definitely when he dared say the word ‘jealous’. Naruto watched her shoulders jut and her back straighten. He knew, that she knew, that he knew there was something up. And Naruto had got the ball on the nose. Directly.

"So, be honest. Do you have a crush on Kiba? The guy’s good lookin’, sure, but he’s more of a one-night-stand guy, if I do say so myself. Believe me, Kiba is definitely not looking for a serious relationship. And thank god I don't think Ino is either." He bumbled.

"Oh, believe me, I know Kiba and Ino aren’t looking for a serious relationship." Sakura scoffed.

"So... why’re you so mad?" Naruto questioned. "You like Kiba, don’t you? If you know it’s not a serious relationship, then what’s the problem?"

"It’s not that."

"Yeah, well, I know it must be hard, but you and Ino are like this," Naruto said, crossing his middle and index fingers over one another, "I thought that you’d be happy for her, at least. Or you could at least try to be—"

"Naruto—"

"—supportive. I mean, chicks before dicks, right? And don’t get me started on—"

"—Naruto—"

"—the fact that Kiba’s just one guy. I mean, Kiba’s a cool guy but he’s really not the settlin’ down type. And—"

"Naruto!" Sakura shrieked, gritting her teeth, "Kiba's not the one I like!"

Instantly, Naruto snapped his mouth shut. That was not what he was expecting. Even though most people thought Naruto wasn't the smartest tool in the shed — ahem, his high school teachers, ahem — he was definitely able to notice the emphasis on Kiba's name, and got the hint.

"S-so... the one you like... is..."

"Ino." She breathed, looking away from Naruto's gaze.

Ah.

Fuck.

Naruto didn’t know how to handle this.

Understanding how a girl's heart functioned was something Naruto had given up on ages ago. Ino had tried to teach him when Naruto would wander after Gaara's older sister all starry-eyed. After a while, Ino said it was hopeless and Naruto should just give up on it. And so he did.

*He wasn’t prepared for this.*

Unaware of the storm brewing up inside of Naruto's mind, Sakura stared at him dubiously. Waiting for any type of response. A verbal response, if possible. Not a wide-eyed look of complete and utter horror.
"Ino told me that you . . . weren't a stranger to male-male relationships. . . pansexual, or something like that, right?"

"A-ah, she told you that?" He asked sheepishly.

"Well, it slipped." Sakura admitted, "but at least I know you're not some homophobic guy who will get uncomfortable, or sexual, about it."

Knowing that Sakura knew about his orientation made him slightly relieved. As of yet, the only people who really knew were Ino, Gaara, Haku, Iruka and his mother and father. If anybody asked him about his orientation, he wouldn’t lie about it. What was the point? He wasn’t ashamed. On the other hand, he didn’t go around shouting that he wasn’t straight. If it didn’t come up in conversation, why just openly say ‘oh yes, Sandra, I'm pansexual, by the way’, because then you have to explain what pansexual means. The amount of times he had to debunk the question 'but aren't there only two genders?' was unfathomable.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn’t tell Ino about it — this." Sakura pleaded. "About my," cue the awkward clearing throat moment, "feelings. I know you two are like. . . best friends, but perhaps. . . you could let this little thing slide?"

Ruffling Sakura's hair, much to her chagrin, he grinned at her reassuringly.

"We can let this little thing slide, I guess."

"And can you quit it with ruffling my hair?" She half-laughed, half-barked, trying to smooth her pink hair back to its original state. "It's already a mess! The brown roots are coming through!"

Quickly glancing to check Sakura's scalp, Naruto could see the brown clawing its way through Sakura's left parting, barely visible but it was still there.

"I like your hair. Smells like peaches an' cream."

Sakura smiled, leaning onto Naruto's shoulder, groaning slightly.

"I'm happy we can be like this without it being intimate." She whispered, "it's nicer, this way. No awkward sexual tension—"

"—no kissing each other drunkenly." Naruto laughed.

"Hey! I had to! Just so Kiba and Ino didn’t suspect anything!" Sakura snapped back, in a joking way.

"Yes, because they're obviously going to think you're gay if you don’t kiss me. I am that irresistible, aren’t I?"

"Shut up! I had other reasons!"

"Hm? Such as?"

"None of your business!" Sakura whined, almost reminding him of the same drunk as inside of the building.

"Don't go back to the annoyin' drunk, I beg you."

"I was sad!" She defended.
"That whole thing 'bout Karin sayin' you and Ino were too straight for a stripper. . . that's not entirely correct, is it?" He said mischievously.

"I take what I can get. Being a closeted-lesbian is hard. My parents weren’t happy with it and tried to force me into one of those camps. Something like 'pray the gay away'." Sakura laughed, but Naruto could sense the forced splutter. "Hence, my rebellious stage."

Naruto tugged on a lock of bubblegum hair, twirling it with his index finger, "and dyin' you hair pink. Was that part of it too?"

"I always wanted to do it. . . just never had the guts." She admitted.

For the rest of the night, Naruto and Sakura stayed outside. Feeling like old people, their ears ringing from the loud music in the club. So, they decided to sit on one of the brick walls outside, Sakura sprawling her legs on top of Naruto's, her head resting against Naruto's arm, wrapped up in Naruto's black hoodie.

It was around twelve-past-three in the morning when everybody came out of the club, more hammered than Naruto had ever seen them. Including Ino. And Naruto had seen Ino drunk many, many times.

Over the duration of time (Naruto hadn't kept track of how long they were outside for) Sakura and Naruto had slightly sobered up. But, they were obviously much more sober than the rest of them — Naruto didn’t think he would ever see Shikamaru look stupid, but there he was, with a lazy smile on his face, swaying on his feet slightly.

"Look!! We found Naruto and Sakura!!" Choji exclaimed, pointing at the brick wall that Sakura and Naruto were currently sitting on.

Heads turned in the direction Choji was pointing in. Drunken smiles all aimed in Naruto's direction — for a horde of drunk people to turn their heads at the exact same time, slowly, at three in the morning, Naruto couldn’t deny that it was a tiny bit creepy.

"Lil bit cosy there, aren’t we?" Ino squeaked, walking (wobbling) over to Sakura and Naruto.

Understanding what she meant, Sakura quickly removed her legs from Naruto's lap, jolting up.

"I was cold," said Sakura.

"Were you cold when you were lip lockin' in there?" Karin asked, giggling.

"We were drunk. It didn’t mean anything—"

"Naruto and Sakura sittin' in a tree, K-I-S-S—" Suigetsu chirped, more intoxicated that Karin, it seemed.

"Shut up! She fell on me!" Naruto lied, laughing, put Suigetsu in (a well-deserved) headlock.

"I wasn't expectin' you two to hook up, honestly. But whatever works, man. Sakura's hot." Kiba grinned.

"Yeah. I wasn't expecting them to either." Ino said, humourlessly.

Worriedly, Sakura flashed a look at Ino, and followed her gaze to Naruto who still had Suigetsu in a headlock, begging for mercy. Her cold, almost offended gaze. Sakura couldn’t help but clench her
fists.

The thought of Naruto being her rival was... strange.

Then again, Naruto only saw Ino as a sister. Or a best friend. He wasn’t particularly a threat.

But the pang in her chest that physically hurt couldn’t be denied as sky-blue eyes watched Naruto with the most sombre look she had ever seen grace Ino’s beautiful features.

And to think, Naruto had been oblivious for... how many years?

Whether the pang in Sakura’s chest was for her own feelings, or Ino's feelings, was unclear. Either way, she felt shitty. Especially because of what she did out of spite on the dance floor, being under the influence of alcohol, consumed by her jealousy.

Chapter End Notes

Is it really a true Naruto fic without some love drama with Sakura? Mostly it's her having a crush on Sasuke and Naruto being like ‘fuck what do I do?’ and 'Sasuke I can't love you b/c Sakura does sorry about that' but Sakura's gay in this sasusaku can't touch her in this fic she's gay HA.

Anyways... .

If you are confused ((since I didn’t explain it well)) here’s the situation: Sakura likes Ino. Ino likes Naruto — for like... ages. Ino's 'relationship' with Kiba is just a friends-with-benefits thing at the moment... and Kiba feels the same way b/c Kiba's the guy who would go crazy at college/uni... in my mind anyway. The reason Sakura kissed Naruto was out of spite bc she was jealous of Kiba and Ino dancing (sorta?) and the only way Ino would have second thoughts about it was if she saw Naruto with another girl. And so, she did it out of spite, really.

She was drunk we all do stupid things when we're drunk she'll regret it all in the morning probably.

And idk why I decided to put this love triangle here it's probably bc I just watched Your Lie In April and it ruined me and I loved the way that love triangle was handled ahhhhhhh but I hate love triangles and ino's gonna just have to get over naruto because naruto's ending up with somebody else (we can all guess who) so i’m srry I hate myself too goodbye.

And I just wanted to make Sakura gay tbh
Okay! So, I'm busy with my friends all weekend and then I have a heap load of revision to do so I decided to upload this now! *note* okay i meant to upload this on friday but i fell asleep and i was busy on Saturday so here it is now! Beware, there is, actually *drum roll* a plot. Yes. An actual feature to the main plot in this chapter. It's so exciting.

Also, many people didn't seem to like the Ino-liking-Naruto thing thank god. Platonic!NaruIno is great but I wasn't a big fan of romantic!NaruIno. Alas, the plot needed it :(

((not beta'd. Sorry for any mistakes))

((once again, I am not good at oneirology — I think that's what it's called — so I apologise if anything's wrong in this. I just had to use trusty ol' google))

Chapter X:

Yesterday was a mistake.

A blunder.

When Naruto was drunk, he could laugh everything off.

Ino was secretly Sasuke's psychologist's daughter? Ha. Sakura was gay and liked Ino? Fucking hilarious. Sasuke was being a son of a bitch to Ino? Not funny, however, whilst Naruto was drunk he was literally the laid-back version of Shikamaru (and that is the ultimate type of laid-back-ness) so he could at least not be too angry about it.

And now, Naruto was sober. Throbbing headache. Knowing a lot of things he could probably go without his life knowing. Being drunk cushioned these facts a bit when he was finding out about them — a lot actually — but now, since he was sober — therefore in his right mind — he had processed them rationally. And now, he could see the flaws in the plan.

Admittedly, Naruto's recollections of the previous night were a bit of a blur, but he remembered the gist of it: Ino's father thought Sasuke wasn't mentally capable enough of going to university but this 'Kabuto' guy insisted on it and so Sasuke was able to go to KU because of this guy's reference? From what he had gathered anyway. Who was this Kabuto guy, anyway? Ino and her father obviously didn’t trust him. Curiosity fuelled his mind. Questions floated around his head, begging to be answered.

But his head hurt too much to think.

To breathe.
Groaning to himself, Naruto turned over in his bed, squinting his eyes so he could look at the time on
his alarm clock. One-forty-one in the afternoon. Great. He had slept most of the day. He felt horrible.
His bone ached, his breath smelled — he could still taste the tang of alcohol on his breath and it
made him feel sick — and his head hurt. Elephants must have trampled on his head at some point in
the proceedings.

Sasuke probably let them loose, knowing that bastard.

If Naruto weren't so parched, he wouldn't have questioned the notion of staying in bed all day.
Sadly, the back of his throat was very dry — burning — and the alcohol plaguing his breath made
him feel nauseous. Apparently, alcohol made hangovers better — Naruto didn't know whether they
did or not — but all it was doing currently was making him feel sick. Something called the Hair Of
The Dog Theory. Well, that theory was most probably bullshit.

Heaving slightly at the after taste of alcohol on his tongue, he definitely called bullshit.

He contemplated calling Sasuke and making him carry him out of bed. Not that Sasuke would ever
do that in the lifetime, but the thought was always nice.

He was going to regret this. He regretted 98% of the decisions he had made in his life. One more
couldn't affect him that much, could it? Surely—

Fuck.

Moving hurt. He felt old. Like it wasn't even his body; the idea of him ageing a century crossed his
mind as the creak of his bones crossed his ears. How much dancing did he do that night? Bones
aching, ears ringing. . . next thing would be that he'll need somebody to help him peeing, or,
dragging Sasuke (or somebody more lenient) to bingo on Sundays. Bingo wasn’t that bad, though,
honestly—

The change was starting.

Draping his bed cover over his head, making it into a makeshift cocoon (almost), Naruto plodded
into the living room, barefooted, wearing just a pair of black boxer briefs with an orange elastic.
Chapped lips were morphed into a frown, as he squeezed his duvet inwards, protecting him from the
nippy air. He felt disgusting. And he swore he could feel dried saliva grace the right side of his face,
but he was too sore to even move his arms that far.

Naruto entered the living room, and Sasuke was sitting on the single chair, typing away at his laptop
quite furiously. That was some essay he was doing, it seemed. Naruto swore he saw the keyboard
spark.

"Good afternoon." Sasuke said sarcastically, his gaze never straying from his laptop.

Naruto just grunted in response. "I feel horrible." He moaned.

"Alcohol is poison." Sasuke stated matter-of-factly. "Did you enjoy your birthday?"

"I've had worse." Naruto replied, the groan still present in his voice.

"If it's any consolation, you look the worst I've ever seen you."

"How does that make it better?"

"I don’t know. I don’t comfort people. I just tell them the truth." Sasuke replied. "Oh, and you have
drool on your cheek.” He mentioned offhandedly.

How did he even know that? Naruto had been looking at Sasuke this entire time, and he hadn’t looked up from his laptop once. He couldn’t even see Naruto — how did he know that he had drool on his cheek?! Naruto wouldn’t be surprised in the least if Sasuke dabbled in black magic.

"Thanks.” Naruto grumbled, lazily wiping his hand across his face in an attempt to wipe the drool off.

"By the way, I’m having a guest today. I thought you’d be asleep when he came, but I’m sure you don’t mind, since you woke me up at half-past-three this morning, even though I had a lecture at nine-thirty."

Naruto mentally cringed. He could hear the bite — the irritation — in Sasuke’s voice. The passive-aggressiveness. Bringing his hands up to his face, covering his eyes from any source of light whatsoever, he groaned rather loudly, releasing all of his grogginess. Well, most of it.

"Sorry 'bout that.” He mumbled, his words muffled by his hands. "Who's comin' over, anyway?"

"Is that any of your business?” Sasuke asked passively.

"Not really. Just tryin’ to make conversation."

"His name's Kabuto. He's a... personal friend of mine."

Naruto’s breath stopped the second he heard that name.

Kabuto.

Memories from last night flickered across his mind briefly. Ino clearly didn’t trust him, trying to indicate he was either tricking or using Sasuke, and Sasuke (obviously) liked Kabuto, especially more than Ino’s father, it seemed. Trusted him.

Ino and her father had great intuition. It was something Naruto had learned over the years of living next door. Perhaps that's what made the Yamanakas such good psychologists — their intuition. Whenever something was wrong, Ino knew. Before, prior to Ino telling Naruto that her intuition had never failed her, Naruto had never noticed it. Sure, Ino was good at predicting outcomes on football games, and other things, but he had never really taken note; he just always thought that she had been really, really lucky when it came to guessing things. Only when Ino told him that a Yamanakas intuition never failed, did he really recognise Ino's almost psychic powers.

That's why it irked him that Ino didn’t take note of Sakura's infatuation with her.

Then again, maybe Ino did know, and actively chose to ignore it, not wanting to throw away what they had—

His brain pulsed as the possibilities running through his foggy head.

—way too much thinking there.

Naruto himself hadn’t met this Kabuto guy. Perhaps the reason Ino and her father didn’t like him was because he was their competition in Sasuke's affairs. Not that Naruto thought that it was a viable excuse, but he was always the one to give somebody the benefit of the doubt. After all, how could you not trust someone without having met them? He could think of a few famous people, sure, but a therapist? Loads of people thought their therapists or psychologists were evil — Naruto remembered
his pre-Iruka days.

"Hm, so who is he?" Naruto asked, before grinning, trying to make it sound like he had never heard the name Kabuto before in his life, leaning his body in the direction of Sasuke almost teasingly. "Your boyfriend?" The light teasing in his voice was ever present.

Naruto saw the way Sasuke's face scrunched up, his nose lifting up in utter disgust at the mere notion. Seeing Sasuke look so... weird was, admittedly, funny, however, Naruto bottled up his laughs, not wanting to annoy Sasuke, since he needed to get as much information out of him as he could.

"No." Sasuke said sharply. "I said he's a personal friend." Every syllable was snapped out of his mouth.

"Oh, your friend. . . did you two go to the same school or somethin'?" Naruto asked, fiddling with his fingers, trying not to look too eager.

"Hn. Something along those lines, yes."

*Something along those lines my ass.*

"Can I meet him?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Why?"

"Because you're half-naked."

"If I got changed?"

"You're hungover, and we'll probably go somewhere else if you want to stay here."

"Nah, I'll just go into my room and rot away."

"Your choice."

"No remorse, huh?"

Sasuke's blunt replies were strategic, to say the least. Avoiding as many questions as possible with clipped answers. Naruto wanted to meet this Kabuto — to see if what Ino was saying about him was true; to see if he could be trusted or not.

"What time will he be here?" Naruto inquired.

"Around two-thirty, depending on the traffic." Sasuke answered. "Why are you so interested anyway?"

"I'm not. M'just tryin' to make conversation with you, sheesh." Naruto said, practically ending the conversation. "I'm gonna go get myself a drink. Want anythin'?"

"Don't," Sasuke sighed, placing his laptop on the coffee table whilst standing up. "You're hungover, I'll get you a drink. What do you want?"

Naruto grinned like an idiot. Even when Sasuke gave him the cold shoulder, he was becoming nicer. Gradually. Old Sasuke would have never offered to get Naruto a drink. And even if Naruto was
getting too excited over the fact Sasuke was getting him a drink — or offered — he couldn’t help it. Watching Sasuke become gradually more pleasant over the passing month was... nice. Reassuring, almost.

Sure, Sasuke cooked him meals. But that was only because they were poor university students who really couldn’t afford to waste any food, and Naruto could set baked beans on fire if he wanted to.

He felt like he could truly become friends with Sasuke. No — they were friends. After all, you don’t buy pornographic books for someone whom you don’t give a rat's ass about, right? Well, Sasuke would probably never consider him as that. Or admit to it.

"Orange juice, please." Naruto grinned, "and maybe some toast."

Naruto heard Sasuke huff, and he probably flashed him a weak glare, but pushed it aside.

"Buttered?"

"B-buttered?! Y-yes! Of course! Who doesn’t butter their toast?!" Naruto exclaimed.

"Me." Sasuke answered plainly. "The person who's getting you your toast."

"O-oh... there's nothin' wrong with not havin' buttered toast. It's just not for me..."

Throwing a pillow at Naruto, muttering words that sounded a lot like 'idiot' and 'moron' — along with some other words that sounded Japanese — underneath his breath, Sasuke quickly walked into the kitchen, and Naruto heard the sound of a glass coming into contact with the marble, and the fridge squeaking open.

Good. That means if Sasuke attempted to spit in his drink — or in his butter — he would hear it.

Oh.

Getting Naruto some toast and a drink was leverage.

Threatening Naruto. Sasuke made it very clear that if Naruto didn’t get changed first he wouldn’t be able to have any toast or drink was Sasuke's diabolical plan. Dehydration was possible, but Sasuke obviously cared about Kabuto's opinion on him. Luckily for Naruto, Sasuke wasn’t as cruel as to make him brush his teeth before breakfast. The tang of mint and orange juice didn’t go well together.

Though, Sasuke said if he didn’t brush his teeth after, and wipe that drool off of his mouth, he would never cook for Naruto again.

Why was Sasuke so cruel?

Nevertheless, after getting changed, eating his toast and drinking his orange juice, and then brushing his teeth and washing his face, he felt refreshed. Not well. He still felt like death had stabbed him with that scary looking scythe. But, he didn’t feel as shitty as he did before.

For the meantime, they both sat in the living room.

Sasuke typing away on his laptop, and Naruto lay down on the couch, slowly decaying.

And it was twenty-two-past-two when they heard a firm knock echo on their front door. Instantly, both of them knew who it was — all of their friends were probably too hungover to move, and Jugo had a triple lecture from noon to two-thirty. And, as far as Naruto knew, they had no arrivals —
beside one — planned.

Sasuke closed his laptop lid and quickly shuffled over to the door, his socks making a sound against the carpet. Naruto felt the sound of a door unlocking, and then the slight creak the door that had always been there. Seeing Sasuke even look a little bit nervous was an occasion for Naruto.

"Ah. Sasuke-kun. I haven’t seen you in ages. It's nice to see you again." A voice said, and Naruto couldn't help but notice how robotic the voice sounded. "You're looking well."

"Kabuto, come in."

Naruto inconspicuously glanced over at the door, not wanting to look like he was trying so hard to see who this 'Kabuto' dude was. Sasuke would probably suspect that he knew something — which he did, but Sasuke didn’t need to know that.

Two pairs of feet made their way from the doorway into the living room, and Naruto looked up, hoping to see a glance of Kabuto.

The first word that echoed in his head was: creepy.

Beyond creepy.

Grey hair was tied up in a loose ponytail and gently lay down his back as grey bangs caressed his forehead. Thick-rimmed, black glasses — almost reminding Naruto of Harry Potter's glasses — matched with Kabuto's dark eyes. His skin was pale, but looked beyond healthy — glowing, even. He was carrying a suitcase, and adorned a white lab coat, which Naruto thought was rather peculiar. This wasn’t a lab. Was it a façade to make Sasuke believe they were in some professional environment, or something along those lines?

But, just by looking at him, Naruto couldn’t help but feel like something was off.

Kabuto's smile, his voice, was robotic. False. As if had been acted out. Practiced over hundreds of times. Rehearsed to be believable, but it just ends up getting bland, and the actor finds the play boring, and puts no enthusiasm into his performance. Untrustworthy. Sly as a snake — Naruto didn’t like him.

He couldn’t put his finger on it, but he just. . . couldn’t bring himself to trust him.

Dark eyes turned to lock with Naruto's cerulean ones, and Naruto wiped any look of disgust from his face and replaced it with a normal, almost pleasant, look. Steely eyes bored into him, and Naruto couldn't help but sink into the sofa slightly, feeling slightly intimidated by his cold gaze.

"And you must be Uzumaki-san, Sasuke-kun's roommate, correct?"

"Correct."

"I see. Perhaps I can speak to you later."

Sasuke sent Kabuto a quick look of warning, but if Kabuto noticed, he didn’t show it. That fake smile — rehearsed smile — was looking at him with twinkling dark eyes, looking almost triumphant.

Placing his briefcase down on the coffee table, Kabuto’s gaze didn’t remove itself from Naruto's. Waiting for an answer. Challenging him. Twinkling eyes, drowning in mirth, staring at him.
"Perhaps." said Naruto simply.
Naruto kept his replies to-the-point and curt.
This man gave him the creeps.
"Well, Sasuke-kun, shall we talk somewhere more private? Such as your bedroom?"
"I guess." Sasuke shrugged, in his usual nonchalant manner.
"It was nice to meet you, Uzumaki-san." Kabuto chimed.
"You too." Naruto lied.
Their exchanged words coated in false kindness.
Naruto's eyes trailed behind Kabuto and Sasuke, never, ever letting his guard down.
Ino's intuition was spot on.
Kabuto wasn’t to be trusted.

He trusted that guy and not Naruto?! Fucking crazy!

This was crazy.
Beyond crazy. It was suicide.

This went against all of Naruto's principals and morals. Spying on people's conversations was not something he would usually take part in, nor was it something he condoned, however the knot in his stomach kept getting bigger and tighter every time a second passed. Trepidation flooded his veins as he thought of all the poison Kabuto was feeding Sasuke to brainwash him. If what Ino said was true, and Sasuke wasn't one hundred percent ready for university, why did Kabuto seem so eager on Sasuke to go? Dismissing a professional opinion — though Kabuto was probably a professional himself, but Ino's dad was practically famous — and going against it. Especially when Kabuto gave off such ominous vibes.

Okay, so maybe he had spied on Sasuke and Ino's conversation, but in his defence they were talking really loudly, and Naruto was drunk!

So, here Naruto was, sitting on the floor outside of Sasuke's room, his ear pressed against the door. Going against all of his morals — and one of the few times that he was thankful the university dormitory walls were so thin.

Though Kabuto and Sasuke's voices were slightly muffled, Naruto could hear most of what they were saying.

"I see, so things have been better then. You have been to the hospital twice in the following month."

"No. I've been to the hospital once: Naruto helped me through my first relapse — no hospitals involved."

"But he caused it." Kabuto interjected.

"Well... the second time... he said a," a pause
"Carry on, Sasuke-kun." Kabuto said.

"... trigger word. He didn’t know, though."

Naruto could hear Sasuke's uneasy breathing. Why was Kabuto letting him continue when it was obviously making him uncomfortable!

"And the first time?"

"Well, he told me a story about his parents and grandparents, and about them owning a company. It brought up a lot of... memories. I realised, then, that I didn’t want to talk — since I didn’t trust him, I didn’t want to grow close to him, so for him to talk to me about something like that... I brushed him off. I didn’t mind him talking about it that much... but it just seemed to suspicious; after all, I did think he was spying for the Yamanakas, so if he told me something, perhaps he would think I would tell him something." Sasuke explained, "and then, that night, falling asleep thinking about everything — mother... father... Itachi... Shisui... I had a relapse and woke up; Naruto helped me, then."

"What is your relationship with Uzumaki-san?"

There was a brief pause, before Naruto could hear Sasuke talking again.

"At first, I hated him. I didn’t trust him in the slightest. When he brought Ino Yamanaka back, I suspected something. I mean, what are the chances? And I hated how he was so nice to me all of the time, especially because I thought it was fake kindness. It annoyed me; he was irritating — still is sometimes, always happy-go-lucky. No matter what I did, he wanted to be my friend. It was strange, as if he wanted something. And, after we went through an altercation, I realised that he was genuinely just worried about me. Because he’s just nice to everybody — sometimes it can get a bit annoying, but most of the time it’s nice."

Naruto heard the sound of a pen scraping against paper, or a board. It was probably Kabuto jotting down Sasuke's words. Taking observations. Naruto couldn’t help but grin.

So Sasuke didn’t hate him, huh?

Don’t get too cocky there, Uzumaki.

"Does Uzumaki-san make you anxious? Unsure?"

"No. Why would he?"

"Well, you said before that he did."

"Yes, because before I didn’t trust him. I do now."

"Well, if he were after something from you, he’s made a good deception."

Kabuto’s words were a murmur, but still loud. Uttered underneath his breath — no, they weren’t. Perhaps Kabuto wanted Sasuke to believe that they were said underneath his breath — the way they were slightly muffled, but at the same time remotely clear — but Naruto was able to hear them. Naruto, who was on the other side of the door. Despite them being said, admittedly, quieter, it wasn’t a whisper; far from it.

What the fuck was Kabuto playing at?! Wasn’t he supposed to reassure Sasuke? Not plant the seeds of doubt in Sasuke's head?
“What do you mean?” Sasuke’s voice spoke.

“Well, whilst I don’t believe Uzumaki-san would be up to anything, you can’t be sure, can you? Sometimes our best friend can be our demise. ‘Backstabbing’, or something like that. Perhaps you should be a little bit more cautious around him.” Kabuto said, “after all, he and the Yamanakas are very close.”

“Yes. He and Ino are best friends—”

“And neighbours.” Kabuto interjected.

There was a brief pause. Shallow breath exited between Naruto’s chapped lips. He didn’t realise how quiet it actually was, or how loud his breath probably was. He was nervous to hear Sasuke’s reaction. His fists clenched at his sides. Kabuto’s toxic words were subtle, yet effective. Playing with Sasuke’s mind.

“They’re neighbours?” Sasuke echoed.

“Didn’t Naruto tell you that?”

“It didn’t come up in conversation—”

“Oh, I see. I’m sure it’s nothing. I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you.” Kabuto ‘reassured’.

Naruto could feel the silence. Hesitance from Sasuke, mostly.

Why did it seem like Kabuto was trying to turn Sasuke against Naruto? Deem him as untrustworthy? Poison his mind by sowing the seeds of doubt? Nagging at the back of his head, constantly asking himself ‘can I trust Naruto?’

Kabuto was a formidable opponent. Naruto would hand that to him, at least.

But, he could see what Ino meant. Kabuto wasn’t trustworthy. Instead of helping Sasuke through his problems, he made them worse. Turning Sasuke against Naruto. Spouting nonsense about him to Sasuke.

Some therapist.

“Anyway, Sasuke-kun. Are you enjoying Konoha University?” Kabuto asked. "I know it wasn’t your first choice, but you know how Inoichi can get. Insistent, wasn’t he?”

“Anything for the money.” Sasuke laughed humourlessly.

“Yes. Poisoning people’s minds is something Inoichi does very well. I wouldn’t trust him if I were you. I feel like I get more results out of you than he does. Having a therapist and a psychologist must be a waste of money, especially when one of them doesn’t work well with you. Especially when Inoichi doesn’t make the effort to even come and visit you. Perhaps having one would be easier—”

“Believe me, I’ve asked Kakashi and Gai, but they’re stubborn with having Inoichi stick around. I’d push him away in an instant if I had the choice.” Sasuke said. “And it’s not like you would like me telling them that you don’t trust him.”

“Well. . . when I speak to you. . . I’m honest. My less-than-professional opinion towards Yamanaka. . . surely word would get around. I’m just being honest with you; that’s what you wanted from the start, right?”
Naruto grit his teeth. He was seething. It wasn’t Inoichi who was poisoning minds! It was Kabuto! Couldn’t Sasuke see that? The way Kabuto spoke, so boldly, was too unprofessional. Too out of line. Was it even allowed for Kabuto to badmouth Inoichi to Sasuke? Making Sasuke trust him less and less? Didn’t Sasuke find this questionable, in the very least? Perhaps Naruto not trusting Kabuto from the start may be why he had noticed Kabuto’s impassive demeanour. Fake smiles. Faker kindness. But, that didn’t explain Sasuke not noticing anything? Surely, Sasuke was a smart guy — of course he was. Intelligence oozed out of every pore in his body, for god's sake!

How much did Kabuto tamper with his mind?

"I believe you would. Just be careful who you trust, Sasuke-kun. I'm sure that many people will try to use you because of your future... inheritance. I'm sure Inoichi is very aware of your inheritance. That's why he claims that you're not ready for university. So you can pay for as many appointments as he wants, and doesn't lose any profit. As you know, to me, your condition is definitely better."

"Inoichi couldn't control what university I went to, but Kakashi and Gai really trust his judgement." Sasuke sighed.

"Hm, I see. Are those tablets I gave you about your nightmares any better?"

"...Less frequent." Sasuke answered after a moment's pause.

Naruto couldn’t take his ear away from the door. He wanted to. He was seething with anger. Gritted teeth. Clenched fists. His body was shaking with rage. How could Sasuke be so oblivious to this? What Kabuto was obviously doing? Did Kakashi and Gai ever hear Kabuto's words? Surely not. It was taking so much self-control — something Naruto barely had enough of already — not to slam the door open, punch Kabuto in the face (hopefully snapping his Harry Potter glasses in the process) and drag Sasuke out of the room, shaking all of those implausible theories out of his head.

"Hm, I see. So they are working, at least. Of course, you will call me if there are any changes?"

"Of course. Already, whenever I'm anxious, I call you."

"And you know I'll come. You are my dear patient, after all." Kabuto said. "This is all I really wanted to talk to you about, Sasuke-kun. You're doing so much better. Perhaps we could go outside and talk to this Uzumaki-san?"

Movement. Shuffling across a carpet. Footsteps. Footsteps approaching closer—

Crap.

Quickly, Naruto crawled away from Sasuke's door, trying to be as unobtrusive as humanly possible. If it weren’t such a serious situation, Naruto would find it almost comical. On all fours, crawling away from the danger. Almost like a cliché early 1990's movie. Unfortunately, however, he wasn’t in a movie, nor was the danger something like a dumb, 'comedic' villain. The danger was Sasuke, and after Kabuto sowing the seeds of doubt in his mind, he didn’t want Sasuke to find him spying on their 'private' conversation.

Naruto mentally sighed to himself. He would have to distinctly hint that he was not a threat to Sasuke, nor was he conspiring with Ino or her father to steal his money.

Okay, perhaps Naruto had eavesdropped on their conversation, but in his defence he was technically doing it for Sasuke's own benefit! At least now Naruto had an idea of Kabuto's deceiving ways.

And he had just about heard enough of this 'company'. What was this company Sasuke was entitled
Naruto, you've already meddled enough in Sasuke's life today.

Pushing the guilty feeling aside, Naruto had somehow managed to scramble his way onto the couch in the living room, trying to look as innocent as possible, despite the serious consternation panning in his chest. Hearing Kabuto play his words so easily to Sasuke, pulling the situation in his favour.

Deceptive little snake.

Two pairs of footsteps entered the room, and Naruto forced himself to grin at Kabuto and Sasuke.

"Have a nice talk?" Naruto said.

"It was... eventful." Kabuto replied easily.

"How much do I owe you?" Sasuke asked. "Extra money, I mean, considering you drove all the way up here—"

"Don't be so silly, Sasuke! Free of charge. I'm just concerned for you well-being, is all. It's my job." Kabuto laughed, sounding a bit forced.

The fucker was smooth with his words, wasn't he?

Naruto watched Kabuto's every movement like a hound. Checking to see if he slipped up, or a look of untruth flashed — something akin to the look that sometimes flashed in Sakura's eyes, though he knew why now — through his eyes. But no. Kabuto's expression was as calm and easy-going as ever. As if he hadn't been trying to subtly turn Sasuke against Naruto.

"Would you like something to drink, or eat, while you're here?"

Pellucid blue eyes watched, transfixed, as Kabuto pulled his phone out of his pocket, his eyes reading something that was on his screen. Swiping his finger across the screen, Kabuto tapped on the screen a few times before he started to, what Naruto presumed, type a message. Every movement made by Kabuto was watched with a stern eye.

Even just by looking at him, Naruto couldn't help but feel his sinister demeanour.

"Oh, my next appointment is in an hour. I'm so sorry, Sasuke-kun, I'm in a bit of a rush. Perhaps we can catch up next time when I'm not so swamped with my other appointments, yes?"

Sasuke nodded firmly before walking over to the door, opening it for him. "Thank you, for everything, Kabuto."

"Sasuke-kun, what am I here for?" Kabuto purred, placing a hand on Sasuke's shoulder before turning head around, his eyes meeting Naruto's directly. "And, Uzumaki-san, it was nice meeting you, too. Perhaps we could converse another time? When I'm not so busy. I would love to talk to you."

"Pity." Naruto murmured underneath his breath, before turning to face Kabuto. "Bye."

Naruto's eyes followed Kabuto before he walked out, out of Naruto's sight. He couldn't help but feel relieved. The negative air in the room suddenly dispersed and disappeared, much to Naruto's comfort.

He heard Sasuke sigh before closing the door, and walking over to sit next to him on the couch. The
two sat in silence for a few moments, until he felt Sasuke's weight on the couch turn toward him.

"What is it?"

Turning his head so his eyes met Sasuke's, Naruto flashed him a confused look.

"What?" Naruto said, confused.

"You obviously didn't like Kabuto. Why?" Sasuke asked.

"Where did you get that notion from?" Naruto inquired, sarcastic.

"Because I don't think you've ever sounded that spiteful to anyone." Sasuke explained. "That 'bye' was clipped, and the sarcasm in your tone isn't concealed very well either."

Naruto heard Sasuke take a shaky breath. It was barely noticeable, and Naruto almost missed it. *Almost. He could sense Sasuke's whole demeanour changing from sure to... uncertain. Hesitant. His usual, insouciant manner had disappeared, and a more direct one had taken over. Hearing the seriousness in his voice, Naruto decided to approach his next words to Sasuke more cautiously. So those seeds of doubt in his head didn't get their nutrients to grow.*

"Did—" Sasuke cut himself off, contemplating what words to use. Naruto was sure he was going to ask something along the lines of: 'did Ino say anything to you?', but then he stopped, pondering what would happen if Naruto replied with a 'no', which he would. It wouldn't be a lie. *Technically, Ino didn't tell him anything; he listened through a wall. Something he had been doing a lot, recently, actually. After this, Naruto really needed to reassess himself, always spying on Sasuke's conversations. What had he turned himself into?!*

Getting lost in his train of thought, he didn’t realise Sasuke's dubious stare pointed at him, waiting for an answer to the question Naruto didn’t hear.

When he did snap out of his thoughts, he almost jumped at the confused look on his face.

"What?"

"*What do you mean 'what'? I just asked you a question!*" Sasuke snapped.

"Oh, I wasn’t listenin'. Sorry, can you repeat that?" He grinned sheepishly.

"I said, has anyone said anything to you, about Kabuto?"

"No. Why? *Is he a drug dealer?*" Naruto gasped, "or a hitman?"

"What is your obsession with hitmen?" Sasuke asked.

"Personal kink of mine." Naruto joked. "But seriously, why do you think that I would have heard anythin' about Kabuto?"

"Because—" Sasuke stopped momentarily, trying to think of a good reply. "Because you just seemed hostile about him."

"Well, I'm sorry if I don't like seeing, what, twenty-nine year olds — or thirty-year-olds — cosplaying as Harry Potter. All he needed was a scar and I'm pretty sure Voldemort would be runnin' in here right now." Naruto replied. "S'rry if I sounded rude towards him; I'm hungover, y'know! It don't put ya in the best of mood!"
Lame excuse, yes, but most people thought Naruto was dumb, so maybe this was a viable excuse.

Well, at least Sasuke seemed to buy it. Smirking slightly, Sasuke grunted as his body relaxed itself, his rigid back disappearing, and settled against the back, content — for the time being — with Naruto's answer. Even if Naruto thought it was a shitty excuse, Sasuke seemed to believe it's what bugged Naruto, however, it probably wouldn’t last. Naruto had to completely eradicate any uncertainties out of Sasuke's mind.

He refused to let Sasuke's state of mind go back to the unstable state it was previously. When he didn’t trust Naruto. Over the past month, seeing the unsureness slowly seep off Sasuke's body was nice. Seeing Sasuke become happier — more trustful — made Naruto feel at ease.

"Kabuto left his briefcase here."

Breaking out of his train of thought, Naruto looked at Sasuke.

"Sorry, didn’t hear you. Was thinkin'." Naruto said.

"You do that a lot."

"Do what?"

"Get lost thinking. Half of the things I say you ask me to repeat." Sasuke said good-humouredly, picking up Kabuto's metallic briefcase from the coffee table. "Anyway, I'll go take this down to him —"

Sasuke alone with Kabuto. That thought alone made Naruto feel anxious. Quickly he sprang up from the couch and snatched the case right out of Sasuke's hands. Sasuke just raised a brow in response.

"And you're taking the case from me, why?" Sasuke inquired.

"Because..." Naruto pondered for a moment, "I need some fresh air, hangover an' all. So I might as well give it to him. While I'm outside. I'll apologise to him for my behaviour, too."

Dark eyes stared at Naruto uncertainly. Sceptically. One brow was cocked, and Naruto felt a bit uncomfortable underneath Sasuke's dubious gaze.

"Don't look at me like that!" Naruto squawked. "I'm just tryin' to be nice!"

"Whatever. If you want to." Sasuke shrugged, sitting down on the couch. "Less work for me."

"Lazy bastard." Naruto mumbled, making his way to the door.

Going outside in October wasn’t the best way to spend his time. The weather was cold and relentless, as per usual. The wind was harsh and chilly, as per usual. And Naruto was regretting his decision — but being the resolute guy he was, didn’t go back on what he was planning to do — as per usual.

Gusts of winds were persistent on him not seeing Kabuto. Invisible fingers clawed through his jacket, shaking the orange rag — Naruto wasn’t going to lie, with all he had been through with that hoodie, it was technically a rag — violently as it oscillated with the wind. Stray leaves flurried past him as they were swept off their feet by the billows of air, as a horde of leaves skidded past his shoes, scratching the scuffs of his feet.

Octobers were truly one of the worst months to have your birthday. Algid weather conditions, and
Halloween was always prioritised over your birth date!

Somehow, he had managed to push his way through the turbulent winds, and was in the carpark. Azure eyes looked over the perimeter, trying to spot a creepy Harry Potter cosplayer.

It was harder than Naruto thought it would be.

Overlooking the parking lot, Naruto's eyes scanned most areas; there was always the possibility that he left, and would come back momentarily, realising that he had forgotten it. Certainly nobody would be able to not notice this massive briefcase. The constant thuds Naruto heard as he walked around from all the objects clattering around in there must get annoying for Kabuto after a while. Naruto wouldn’t be surprised if he broke something. Not that he particularly cared, after all he was pretty sure Kabuto wasn’t a nice guy, so who cares if something got broken? Serves the prick right!

Out of spite, Naruto was tempted to shake it around a little more.

Until he heard a voice.

Naruto had scoured the area, trying to look for Kabuto, even walking to the furthest west side of the parking lot that was way out of his way. He kept his distance from the actual building and himself infinitesimal so if anymore torrents of harsh winds returned he would have something to grab onto.

Whilst heading over to the west, and reaching the end of the building, there seemed to be somebody standing behind the west wall of the building, concealing themselves from straying eyes — well, ears in this case — that would happen to see (hear) them. Despite only having two conversations — well, Naruto wouldn’t really class them as conversations, more like exchanges — Naruto would be able to recognise that slimy voice that reminded him of a cold, conniving purr anywhere. Though, Naruto had to admit, the tone of voice Kabuto was currently speaking in seemed more genuine. It had more emotion in it and it wasn’t just a rehearsed robotic drone that screamed that he couldn’t be trusted.

As Naruto came closer and closer, Kabuto's words became clearer and clearer until he was able to hear Kabuto quite comprehensibly.

He needed to stop spying on other peoples conversations.

"—seems his state has cleared up a bit, so I'm slightly worried." Kabuto said, his voice cold and stern.

An unintelligible voice could be heard, obviously speaking through the phone. Whatever he or she were saying, Naruto wasn’t able to decipher it.

"Yes, I understand, sir. Still, his mistrust in Inoichi can play to our advantage; it seems Sasuke doesn’t like, or trust his daughter, either. He hates both of them. Just the name Yamanaka can get a reaction out of him."

Naruto was sickened by the sadistic streak that was in Kabuto's voice; it was almost as if he enjoyed seeing Sasuke like this. Speaking like some evil villain.

"The Uzumaki boy? No, he's not really a problem. He didn’t seem to like me, though, but I doubt the Yamanaka girl has told him anything. The Yamanakas are too prideful for that." Kabuto chuckled humourlessly. "Though, I have made Sasuke unsure about Uzumaki-san, it seems, so if Uzumaki-san gets in the way, I'm sure I'll be able to handle it. After all, you can never be too certain. He seemed to take a disliking to me, after all."
Widened eyes stared at the ground in absolute shock. Was this some conspiracy he was currently listening to? Luckily, it seemed like nobody was behind him, ready to knock him out so he could be sent to a hideout and killed.

"The next batch of pills I subscribe to him will make sure of that. When the adenosine starts to break down in Sasuke-kun's body when he's about to sleep, the pills will paralyse the serotonin so his brainwaves will be active. This will increase his chance of having nightmares, therefore, flashbacks. Orochimaru made these pills himself; I have complete and utter faith in them. The people whom we experimented on assured us that they do work. We all know what Sasuke-kun will dream about, and if it's constant, then our plan will be in effect. It will definitely help."

All of these fancy neurotransmitters meant absolute squat to Naruto, but he did understand what Kabuto was trying to do: increase Sasuke's risk of having nightmares. That was barbaric! After seeing Sasuke that night... seeing how a nightmare could affect Sasuke so badly... he wanted to strangle Kabuto right there. Water gradually began to build up in his eyes as he kept his stubborn gaze on the floor. He was so angry.

Kabuto was plain cruel. Wanting to make Sasuke suffer like that. It was inhumane. Sasuke's screaming, Sasuke's crying, Sasuke begging for his family to come back. It was diabolical! What purpose would hurting Sasuke give him? Why did Sasuke have to suffer? What did he do to deserve that?!

Gritting his teeth, Naruto watched as salty tears slowly dropped onto the grass. Crying out of anger — frustration — was something he barely did. But he was just so mad! Kabuto's acrimonious tone when talking about Sasuke, the clear hate in his voice. What had Sasuke done? He didn't — whatever he may have done — deserve this! Couldn't Kabuto, the Orochimaru guy, and the person on the phone realise that Sasuke was already suffering.

Laughing bitterly to himself — mentally of course — Naruto's fists clenched. Of course they did know of Sasuke's suffering. That's why they were using it to their advantage.

Wiping his eyes, Naruto tried to level his breathing. He had to give this case back to Kabuto without coming off as suspicious. Something Kabuto had to train at too.

Slowly, he took a few steps back, being mindful not to step on any twigs in the process — he had watched enough spy movies to kind of know what to do — until he stood by the stairs of their university that welcomed people in, and let the students out. Starting from here would (hopefully) make it look natural enough. Calling Kabuto's name so Kabuto knew he was coming would probably be a good idea too. He didn't want Kabuto to get suspicious. He wanted to protect Sasuke, and Kabuto, if he found out that Naruto knew, would prevent that. Naruto didn't know what Kabuto was capable of, after all. He could be a gang-leader, or part of the mafia!

Okay, perhaps he watched too much spy movies.

"Kabuto! You still here?" He called, trying to make his voice sound steady despite the anger growing inside of him.

He kept shouting Kabuto's name as he walked around the parking lot, waiting for Kabuto to notice that Naruto was fucking fourteen foot away from him, approximately. Maths had never been Naruto's strong point, okay.

"I have your briefcase, if you're around!" He called once more.

To the pedestrians or onlookers, he probably looked like a right idiot.
"Uzumaki-san," a voice chimed behind him, "so you have my case."

Startled, Naruto quickly turned around, a small gasp escaping his lips. When did Kabuto walk behind him! He only turned around for seven seconds!

This guy was definitely a snake. Or had been one in a past life.

Naruto didn’t even notice Kabuto's footsteps sneaking up from behind him. Kabuto could have easily pulled out a knife and stabbed him! And Naruto wouldn’t even be aware of it until he was lying on the floor, blood oozing out of him.

"Oh, you're still here? I thought you left!" Naruto said, a forced grin stretching his lips painfully.

"I did, but then I realised I had forgotten my briefcase. Luckily you had it. It's a relief I didn’t have to walk all the way up those stairs again! You are a life saver, Uzumaki-kun."

Smooth with his words. Not even Naruto could deny that. Not a single trace of deception flickered in those charcoal eyes. No remorse. No regret. Only a cold, unfeeling steel cage. And the lie was pretty decent, too. If only Naruto didn’t know he had been on his phone all of that time, then the snake would probably be able to trick him.

"It's nothin'! Guess it's a thanks for lookin' after Sasuke." He laughed.

Forced, obviously.

"My pleasure. Sasuke is one of my more... important customers."

Naruto couldn’t help but repress a shiver hearing the emphasis Kabuto put on 'important', and the chilling purr in his voice.

"That's good, then. I'm glad you're lookin' after Sasuke. It's reassurin'."

"The same could be said about you, Uzumaki-san. I'll leave Sasuke in your care whilst I'm not here."

"Not that you have a choice." Naruto said, and he couldn't help the slight snap in his voice.

Naruto mentally punched himself. Acting like nothing was wrong was harder than it seemed, especially for Naruto who was, by nature, a very outspoken person, so he couldn’t help the bitter tone his comment was said in. And Kabuto seemed to notice it too, as he looked at Naruto with the smallest frown on his face, and the glint in his glasses was eerie, too. Black eyes stared at him. It felt like he was staring into the abyss. Cold and dark... just like Kabuto. Clenching his fists behind his back, Naruto tried his best to steady his voice once more.

He really, really, hated this guy’s guts. And Naruto didn’t hate a lot of people.

"Don't you have an appointment to be at?" Naruto asked. "It would be a pity to be late."

"Yes. A pity it would be."

"Well, then I'll be going, then." Naruto said.

Fuck apologising to the prick.

Kabuto's penetrating gaze was making him feel uncomfortable. He needed to escape it, and dismissing himself from the conversation was the only way he could do it. Wordlessly, Naruto scurried away from Kabuto's gaze and quickly walked out of the parking lot, mentally shouting at
himself knowing that he wasn’t that discreet about his resentment toward Kabuto at all. Now Kabuto would have his attention on him more.

Yes, Naruto was right. With his back turned, he didn’t see Kabuto's calm, calculating gaze assessing him as he left the parking lot, his eyes slightly narrowed; nor did he hear the quiet murmur muttered underneath Kabuto's breath.

"Yes. He is going to be a problem."

Chapter End Notes

Annnnnd that's it! This chapter's one of the longer ones, so please take that as an apology for (another) late upload! Tests are taking over my life!
Eleven

Chapter Notes

me: wow i hate naruto i’m never shipping anything in there again thank god i am free from that hetero hell and masashi kishimoto is done with writing naruto so i won't have to suffer anymore !!!!!

masashi kishimoto: *releases that naruto one-shot about mitsuki*

my weak ass: *reads it b/c i’m an emo who still loves naruto in 2016*

mitsuki one-shot: *references that boruto is the sun and mitsuki is the moon*

me: *punches myself in the face b/c i fucking weak when it comes to the sun/moon trope*

ANYWAYS.............sorry for replying late to everybody's comments!! Today was test week so i had no time!!! Also, as you can see, that Naruto one-shot messed me up...............pls stop making the gays sun/moon and then not pairing them together...........not again..................

IMPORTANT: Okay....I know Zootopia is old but when I wrote this it was new! And at first it was going to be Superman vs Batman but then I just thought of Sasuke watching Zootopia and the idea just settled with me since I could just imagine him sitting there done with life, and *awkwardly hides from the things that are going to be thrown at me* WHILST THE SPECIAL EFFECTS WERE A+ I DIDN'T REALLY LIKE THE FILM????? IDK?????

Also, in this Naruto is older than Sasuke. Since they're in the same year, in the UK system (I don't know how it is in America etc. sorry) Naruto would be older than Sasuke since September is the cut-off date. If I made Sasuke older than Naruto in this (before September) then he would be a grade above Naruto, so in this Naruto was born in 1997 and Sasuke was born in 1998 so they're in the same year group. I hope you understand, sort of, and if you don't (since I'm a bad explainer) it's not relevant to the plot but please don't be confused when Naruto says he's older than Sasuke!

Sorry for the extra long note onwards with the story!!!!

((not beta'd sorry for any mistakes))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XI:

Naruto abhorred Mondays.

Mondays were, by far, the worst day of the week. Saturdays were the best, and Sundays were nice and relaxing; sadly, however, Sundays were followed by Mondays and Mondays fucking sucked.

To add to his displeasure, Sakura had been ignoring Naruto like he was the bubonic plague. When
Naruto said 'ignored', he was referencing to the fact that yesterday, when he saw Sakura in the cafeteria, he waved at her, as she ran away. *Actual running.* Not walking at a fast pace, no, but she actually ran. Full speed. Leaving her pastel-pink strawberry smoothie on the side of the counter and everything.

Naruto could guess *why* she was ignoring him. If his suspicion was correct, her reason for avoiding him was unreasonable and quite offensive, actually. Why did she think he would act differently after her drunken confessions? Running away as soon as her green eyes looked upon him was slightly hurtful. At first, he thought he just looked *really* ugly, and then his mind started to evaluate the possible theories as to why she would run away, and it clicked.

Ignoring his texts was also something she had taken a fancy to, too, it seemed. Nothing like the cold, hard sting of rejection, especially from friends.

These thoughts had been bothering him all throughout his lecture — which he *honestly* didn’t really care about; if he had to analyse what Shakespeare was referring to once more time in his plays, he would explode. He got it. Beatrice was a woman far ahead of her times, Lady McBeth was a manipulative bitch, and he was very angry that Horatio didn’t just drink the poison just so he could follow Hamlet's wishes and ‘live on and tell the story'. It would be one less story to analyse after all. It was 2016, for god's sake! Hamlet said the rest was silence, and they were still talking about it! It just wasn’t practical!

Shikamaru had obviously noticed there was something off with Naruto, since he wasn’t being his usual ebullient self. His attention was somewhere out of the window.

"What was the point in going to a lecture if you're not even going to listen?" Shikamaru murmured, his voice muffled since it was pressed against the desk. "It's not like they're mandatory."

"I'm just thinkin' for a while. I am sorta listenin'." Naruto yawned. "Jus' tired, is all."

It wasn’t a lie. He was tired. Perhaps it wasn’t why he was in such a depressed mood, but it was probably contributing to it. Worrying about Kabuto’s conversation he had on the phone was usually the thought that struck him when he was in bed, just on the cusp of slumber. Worrying about Sasuke's well-being. He couldn’t sleep because of it. It wasn’t a problem, really, but it definitely took an hour or two from his sleeping schedule. Conjuring theories of how he could protect Sasuke from Kabuto’s wily clutches. Thinking about how he would be able to make Sasuke trust him without rousing suspicion from either parties. Especially Kabuto. Naruto knew that he would have to be very careful around him. After all, Naruto didn’t know how dangerous he was!

Shikamaru left it at that, much to Naruto’s relief. Shikamaru's priority was sleeping, after all, and the guy was smarter than he looked. Smart enough to know even if Naruto *did* admit to being annoyed, he probably wouldn’t say. After all, he didn’t want to involve Shikamaru into all of this; Naruto let an aggravated sigh free as it streamed off his tongue. Girls were complicated. Too complicated for Naruto to figure out, anyway.

His lecture slowly idled by. Watching birds fly and clouds stroll through the sky was surprisingly fascinating. More fascinating than Asuma's rambling.

Finding cloud watching fun? He was definitely spending *way* too much time with Shikamaru.

Walking home from his lecture was tedious, too. Winds battled against him, but Naruto just shrugged them off. He was kind of depressed. He and Sakura had a great time that night — beside her drunken confessions, but it was eventful, at least — so why was she giving him the cold shoulder?
This was Sasuke part two!

He refused to go through that again. One bruise — well, technically two — was enough!

Unlocking his door, Naruto felt comfort as the smell of Sasuke’s cooking welcomed him back. Lunches that Sasuke cooked were always the best. Exasperated, Naruto slumped in the doorway. Exhausted from the combination of the threat of Kabuto and the cold shoulder from Sakura. Mentally exhausted, not physically, though.

Sasuke's face popped around from the corner. Dark bangs framed his marmoreal features lightly as wisps of ebony hair caressed his face perfectly. Yes, that was probably the way to describe Sasuke’s appearance: perfect. Always looking immaculate, even on those days where you just lounge around the house, not doing anything. Something Sasuke did a lot. Nothing.

"Why are you lying in the doorway?" Sasuke asked.

"It's comfy." Naruto retorted sarcastically.

"Yeah, yeah, smartass." Sasuke droned, walking over to Naruto and offering him a hand, pulling him up. "It's your own fault. Rummaging around at three in the morning when you have a lecture at nine! You always wake me up, too."

"I can't help it that I can't sleep!" Naruto whined.

"I have some mild sleeping pills, if you want." Sasuke said. "They're there until Kabuto gives me my new ones."

"Kabuto's givin' you new pills?" Naruto repeated unsurely. "When?"

"In about a week. . . I think." said Sasuke. "Why?"

"Just wonderin'." Naruto grinned. "S'just. . . I was wonderin' if I could borrow some of them sleepin' pills — the ones you're usin' now I mean. The mild ones."

Naruto made a mental note to throw the pills Kabuto gave him out of the window. Or at Kabuto's car. Or at Kabuto's house, when Naruto found out where he lived. Then again, Kabuto probably lived in a cave. Or a desert.

That's where snakes lived, right?"

"Yeah, you can." Sasuke replied back.

"So, where you keep your pills? Bathroom? Bedroom?"

Naruto needed to find out the location of where Sasuke stored his pills so he could have easily access to the ones Kabuto gave him.

"Why?"

"So I know where I can get the sleepin' pills. Duh." Naruto huffed. "Thought you were some super smart guy!"

"Depends on their importance."

"So, you're sleepin' pills go where—"
"Can we stop talking about pills, please." Sasuke snapped slightly, Naruto sensing the slight clipped tone.

"Oh yeah, sorry." Naruto chuckled sheepishly. "Anyway, I'm starvin'!"

"Who said I made lunch for you?"

Naruto's head snapped around to Sasuke's. His blue eyes had widened a significant amount. Today hadn't been the best day. Realising that Sakura was ignoring him, it was a Monday, boring lecture, very, very tired because he didn't sleep due to the whole Kabuto situation were all pretty bad things; when Naruto came home to the smell of Sasuke's food, he found solace in that. And now, Sasuke was basically telling him, that there wasn't enough for two?!

"What?"

"I'm joking. Lighten up, idiot."

"Who are you and what have you done with Sasuke?" Naruto questioned seriously after a moment's pause.

"What are you getting at?"

"Sasuke does not tell jokes." Naruto said pointedly. "Sasuke tells me that I am the joke, sometimes, but never does he tell them! The probability that you're an imposter is more likely than Sasuke makin' a joke."

"Yeah. You're not getting food. Go out with Kiba or something."

"W-what?!" Naruto squawked.

"Have you ever heard of the phrase 'don't bite the hand that feeds you'?"

"I-I didn't bite you!" Naruto protested. "And isn't that phrase for dogs?!"

"No. You've ruined it. I'm eating by myself."

"S-Sasuke! Let's not be hasty here! I was only jokin'—"

"Well, Naruto, as you so graciously pointed out, I don't do jokes."

"You're cruel!" Naruto whined.

"It's cruel to be kind."

"Stop with these bullshit phrases, Sasuke!"

Naruto could hear the humour in Sasuke's voice. He felt happy, somewhat, that Sasuke was able to detect a humorous situation. Or at least humour. He felt bad that the guy was forced to come here. More than anything, he felt bad that there were people out to get him. Especially when it was obvious that Sasuke seemed to genuinely like Kabuto.

He wanted to tell Sasuke, so very badly, but Naruto could only imagine the backlash he would get off Sasuke if Naruto dared utter a word against Kabuto, especially when Kabuto had oh-so-kindly made Sasuke have a sliver of doubt against Naruto, once again. Did that bastard know how much shit he went through to get Sasuke to trust him! Or at least tolerate him! Now, if Naruto said anything bad against Kabuto, he would immediately suspect that Naruto was working with the
Yamanakas — not that the Yamanakas were bad, or Naruto was against them — and hate him. Once again.

He just wanted to scream out of frustration.

And hunger.

But mostly frustration.

"Fine! I'll just starve!"

Sasuke just shrugged, much to Naruto's disbelief. Didn’t this guy realise how crappy his day had been?! Collapsing in the doorway wasn’t a clue for Sasuke? A hint?

"I'm not here to coddle you, idiot." Sasuke snorted humouredly, pushing Naruto a tiny bit before proceeding into the kitchen.

"Really? Well, this is awkward." Naruto sighed, "all this time, I thought that you were here to coddle me and—"

"Shut up, or you actually won't get any food."

"You think I'm funny. Don't lie." Naruto grinned.

"Funny looking, maybe."

Naruto's grin quickly transformed into a pout. Deciding on not saying anything else — or he would he and his empty stomach would probably regret it for a while — Naruto strolled into the kitchen, noticing the bubbling pot on the stove that smelt exactly like soup. Chicken soup to be exact.

"Soup?"

"It's lunch. What do you expect? A grand-course dinner?"

"N-no! Just... was expectin' somethin' like... ramen..." He mumbled.

"My biggest regret: introducing you to ramen." Sasuke released a sigh full of sarcastic wistfulness.

"I object to that!"

Two pairs of white, china bowls appeared on the — questionably — marble surface of the kitchen countertop. Sasuke slid the two bowls over to Naruto, who, in turn, nearly dropped them. Luckily he didn’t. Or Sasuke would have his head. Sasuke looked at the table pointedly before saying:

"Can you set the table up? The soup's nearly done."

"Yes, ma'am." Naruto mumbled, making sure Sasuke didn’t hear it, even with those bat senses.

Sasuke served the soup. Lunches with Sasuke were always nice. Nice cooking, amiable chatter — since Sasuke had decided to become more loquacious over the past month — and talking pleasantly with Sasuke, even if it was just trivial things, was nice. Something Naruto enjoyed. Even though it may be brief, it was nice.

"So, since you were hinting me to ask, why are you in such down spirits?"

"I wasn't hinting!" Naruto objected.
"Hm," Sasuke grunted unbelievingly, "so, what caused your sleeping in the doorway?"

"Okay... have you ever had friends that ignored you?" Naruto inquired, lurching his body forward slightly.

Sasuke's charcoal eyes turned as wide as saucers as he stared at Naruto in mild shock; why Naruto was even sharing this — and hoping to get advice in the long run — was beyond him. His intelligence, perhaps? Sasuke was as discerning as Shikamaru, and perhaps Naruto was somewhat hoping to get some advice into the whole ordeal, but judging by the shock on Sasuke's face — probably a very rare sight — and why was he looking at Naruto like he had just asked him to help him hide a body, it probably wasn't the best idea; then again. Sasuke probably wouldn't even bat an eyelash at that request — hiding a body — but he probably wouldn't be that much of a help, either.

Hesitantly, Sasuke placed his spoon down, contemplating how to answer Naruto's question.

"Well, I'm usually the person ignoring someone." Sasuke said honestly. "I can't say I've ever had that problem—"

"Yeah, yeah, smug bastard." Naruto interrupted. "Let's say, hypothetically, a friend ignored you, what would you do?"

"Then they can ignore me. It's nothing off my back—"

"—Okay! Let's say you weren't so emotionally constipated, and your friend was ignorin' you after spilling. . . quite a heavy secret while they were drunk, what would you do?"

"Depends on the situation."

Naruto cocked a brow in confusion.

"Well, you were very vague," said Sasuke. "Did they confess to killing somebody? Did they kiss their brother? Are they a felon?"

"What the fuck goes on in your mind?" Naruto asked dubiously.

"Was it bad?"

"It's not bad, and I don't think it's bad, but they do, if you understand."

"Well then maybe they're just embarrassed."

"Yeah, I know that, but how would you deal with it?"

Sasuke shrugged. "I don't know. If you ignore somebody, you don't want them contacting you. You probably have to wait until they contact you. Having somebody cling to you is annoying."

Why was he even getting friendship advice from Sasuke?! Had Sasuke ever even had a proper friend in his life, ever?!

"And what if they never do?"

"I feel like I'm talking to a fifteen-year-old girl about the boy they like." Sasuke chastised.

"This is hypothetical."

"Okay then. Hypothetically, you'll have to wait."
Releasing a doleful sigh, Naruto stirred his soup around the bowl. Honestly, he was slightly annoyed — but mostly upset — about Sakura circumventing talking to him, or even looking at him. Why was she so reluctant about seeing Naruto? She knew about Naruto’s sexuality; she knew that he promised not to tell anybody, which he wouldn’t. Promises were something that Naruto would never break. Embarrassment on her part wasn’t surprising since Naruto did a lot of things he regretted when he was drunk, but surely Sakura knew that Naruto wasn’t going to treat her any differently. Regretting it wasn’t to be unexpected, but it couldn’t be that bad. Didn’t she trust him?

Normally he wouldn’t mind so much. Giving Sakura her own space was the best thing to do — he knew that. However, Naruto couldn’t help his feeling of consternation. Friendships that he had in the past were always frangible; always easily broken. Brittle and fragile. His only friendships that were honest were Gaara and Ino; they always had been beside him, and he couldn’t be more grateful for that. Feelings of trepidation wasn’t surprising. Naruto wouldn’t admit how much of an insecure person he was, especially when it came to friendships. When he was in high school, and all of his friends had ‘let him be’ — trying to mollify their actions — after his depressive stage. Making friends was always something he was reluctant about. He would be lying if he said he wasn’t still slightly bitter about it. So, when he was able to create a friendship with Sakura, seeing her run away from him hurt quite a bit. Seeing her not want to talk to him — whether it was because of herself or him — triggered relentless melancholy inside of him.

Perhaps that was subconsciously why he wanted to try and make it work with Sasuke. Pushing his old friends away unintentionally was something that he majorly regretted. They ended up hating him, after all. Making friends with Sasuke was his own way of atoning for his actions — justifying himself so he didn’t live every day regretting what could have been. It was his own, weird way of making himself feel better. Trying to make Sasuke feel better. That’s probably why he got so protective over Sasuke when it came to Kabuto; perhaps Kabuto was a mirror of his own friends (not as harshly albeit) betraying him. Naruto didn’t want Sasuke to feel the sting of somebody he trusted disloyalty toward him.

Fuck. Naruto was just contemplating his whole personality here.

He should have taken psychology. It was probably more interesting, too.

Lost in his own thoughts, he didn’t realise Sasuke’s pensive eyes staring at him. Considering him. Charcoal eyes were almost transfixed, following everything on Naruto’s face, from the slight frown to the blond, furrowed brow. Lost in total and utter contemplation. Seeing Naruto so dolorous was rare. Angry, yes. Frustrated, all of the time; but never had Sasuke seen Naruto in such a dismal mood.

"Your soup is going to go cold." said Sasuke.

Naruto’s eyes widened slightly at Sasuke’s words — Sasuke guessed that he was slightly startled from being interrupted from his thoughts and was effective pulled out of them. Startled, obviously.

"Sorry. I was jus' thinkin'!" Naruto said almost urgently, his voice releasing a nervous laugh.

"About?"

"What?"

"What were you thinking about?"

"I-Is that any of your business?!" Naruto retorted hotly.
"Not particularly, but seeing you sad is annoying." Sasuke admitted. "And it's not like things that aren't your business has ever stopped you before."

"Well excuse me! I guess I'll just bottle up my feelings and become an emotionally constipated bastard like you with a ten foot pole shoved up my ass! Sorry about actually havin' the ability to feel!"

"It's alright. Though, I'm quite sure that if you did put a ten foot pole up your ass, you would die from acute peritonitis."

"I don't know what that is."

"You should. It'll be the death of you. Literally."

"I hope you choke on your soup."

"I hope you get acute peritonitis." Sasuke retorted.

Huffing out a laugh at Sasuke's witty riposte, Naruto stirred his soup slightly before finishing the whole thing quite eagerly; Sasuke's cooking was truly sapid. Indirectly, Naruto guessed that Sasuke's witty retorts was his way of trying to make Naruto feel better, whilst not intentionally showing concern, either. The thought made him smile slightly; usually, Sasuke would just threaten to take away Naruto's food privileges (eating Sasuke's cooking, to be exact) whenever Naruto would (or attempt to) make a joke, but today he tried to humour him using his astute abilities.

Sasuke's good perception of other people's moods was rather surprising, actually, since he was quite the introvert. Disliking meeting new people and conversing with them — that summarised Sasuke's attitude towards social situations rather well, actually. However, he was very good at handling people when he wanted to, Naruto had to admit. Naruto suspected it was something to do with Sasuke's PTSD. Doing a bit of research on the illness in his spare time revealed to Naruto that PTSD was able to cause isolation and social withdrawal — from what he had read, anyway — and that explained most of Sasuke's antisocial tendencies, especially when they had first met. So, to his surprise, over the past month, Naruto was able to witness Sasuke meeting new people, or handling them, to be more precise. Main examples were Karin, Suigetsu and Jugo; he was able to assess Karin and Suigetsu's arguments precisely, and somehow simmer them down. Admittedly, he hadn't seen it happen a lot of times — two or three, maybe even four times, whenever Sasuke could be bothered to intervene — but even Naruto was able to pick out the way Sasuke handled people. Expertly, as a matter of fact.

Naruto watched Sasuke collect their bowls up through blue, limpid eyes, slightly cheered up. Letting things run their natural course was presumably the best way to handle it; Sakura would only talk to him if she were comfortable with it. Forcing her to converse with him wouldn't be fun for either of them.

Sighing, Naruto stood up from the table, thanked Sasuke for the food and started to make his way to his bedroom to languish in peace.

"Where are you going?" Sasuke asked.

"To my room where I can deteriorate in peace." He replied sarcastically.

"Since when were you such a drama queen?" Sasuke snorted.

"Let me be upset in peace!" Naruto whined. "hypothetically, of course," he added.
"Well, why don’t we hypothetically do something?" Sasuke suggested.

Well.

Naruto was not expecting that.

Sasuke, actual Sasuke, suggesting to go outside? Had Naruto gone mad? Most likely. There was no other reasonable explanation! Wide-eyed, Naruto couldn’t give a coherent answer. Blubbering out random words that had no real importance out of sheer shock, Sasuke looked at him as if he was possessed.

"Are y-you... like... askin' to go outside?" Naruto questioned. "You?! Askin' to go outside?!

Sasuke flashed him a dark look. Warning him that if he uttered another offensive word, Naruto would probably never be able to walk outside again, with or without Sasuke.

"It doesn’t matter." Sasuke grumbled dismissively.

That's when the realisation dawned on him. Grinning impertinently, Naruto slowly walked over to Sasuke — the same impudent, toothy grin on his tanned face — until Sasuke began to look a mixture of afraid, surprised, and slightly confused.

"Sasuke, are you tryin' to make me feel better by any chance?" Naruto inquired.

"As I said before, seeing you sad is annoying because you don’t eat my food. You seem much better now, though, so I see that there's no real need to—"

Eagerly, Naruto grabbed Sasuke's hand — making Sasuke curl his lip in dislike slightly at the contact — with a grin on his face. Crystalline blue eyes stared at Sasuke in absolute wonderment.

"I didn’t know you actually cared, Sasuke—"

"—I don’t—" Sasuke protested sharply.

"—but you actually do! First the book and now—"

"—don’t get any ideas, moron—"

"—this? You're the best! I was jokin' when I said you were an emotionally constipated bastard cuz you do have feelings! You just don’t like showing them! It all makes sense—"

"—Naruto stop right there—"

"—because you just act cool and indifferent but you're really human too!"

"What did you think I was before?"

"I dunno. Maybe a ghoul."

"Charming." Sasuke replied sarcastically.

"I try my best." Naruto replied innocently, flashing Sasuke a dazzling grin. "So, where we goin'?"

"We're not going anywhere." Sasuke said pointedly.

"Aw, c'mon! Don’t be such a buzzkill. I won't make a big deal out of it; I swear." Naruto promised.
"An' I really wanna go see a movie! Cravin' some popcorn too."

Sasuke raised a dubious brow at Naruto, questioning the legitimacy of his words; in return to Sasuke's doubt, Naruto flashed him a grin, which just seemed to make Sasuke even more hesitant to the idea.

"You can just buy popcorn—"

"Nope. You can't get me excited for a movie and then cancel on me! Not when I'm sad!" Naruto whimpered, though it was obvious that he was teasing, a faint smile hidden behind pouting lips. Releasing a disapproving sigh, Sasuke closed his eyes in irritation. "Fine. But we're watching a movie that we agree on or I'm going home."

"Your terms are harsh, but agreeable." Naruto said facetiously. "Grab a hoodie or somethin'. S'cold."

Grabbing a pale-navy hoodie from his room, Sasuke put it on over his plain black shirt, actually adding a splash of colour to his usual regime of wearing-black-everyday look; Naruto was slightly caught off-guard, since he didn’t even know that Sasuke had other clothes beside black ones. Naruto had just always thought that the reason Sasuke wore dark clothes was so there would be at least one piece of warmth since his cold heart and/or personality would eventually cause him to die of hypothermia. Luckily enough for Naruto, he was already wearing his (as Sasuke called it) appalling orange hoodie that was actually quite cosy, despite how old and battered it was.

"So, where's the movie theatre, anyways?"

"I don't know." Sasuke replied. "I thought you did."

"Well, this got off to a bad start."

Naruto and Sasuke, followed by a crowd of animated people, walked out of the movie theatre. Slurping on his blueberry slushie, Naruto regretted in tremendously when he walked outside to the unforgiving autumn weather — that had seemed to grow gradually worse whilst he and Sasuke were in the movie theatre — and realising how icy the tips of his fingers had grown.

"That film was great!" Naruto exclaimed. "Nothin' like a good Disney film."

"I regret the past two hours of my life—"

"I can't help it every other film was sold out, Sasuke. Zootopia was good!"


"I'm older than you!" Naruto protested. "I think, actually."

"Physically, perhaps, however, on mentality terms—"

"Wait, when's your birthday?"

"July 23rd."

"Aw, you're nine months younger than me." Naruto cooed. "Respect your elders. Be nicer to me." He demanded.
"In mental-capacity terms, I think I have the upper hand."

"I will throw my slushie on you." Naruto threatened.

A lie, of course. Naruto wouldn’t waste such a palatable (and expensive, as movie theatre food and beverages always are) drink on Sasuke. Throwing it at him was an empty threat — a bluff — but Sasuke didn’t know that. Tempestuous winds battled against both Sasuke and Naruto as they ran towards the bus stop that was, thankfully, very close to the movie theatre. Sadly, though, they were still victims to the turbulent winds. Turning his attention to Sasuke, Naruto found it quite amusing to see the wind pulling Sasuke's ebony locks in all different types of directions.

It took around eight minutes for the bus to arrive. Eight minutes of pure hell. Quickly running onto the — vacant — bus and depositing the change from his pocket into the machine, Naruto decided to sit at the back of the bus, with Sasuke following shortly behind him.

Bus seats were never comfortable. Decorated in random, colourful patterns with little to no padding, Naruto never did like bus seats. Then again, it might relate to a traumatic experience when he was little and his mother had forced him to go shopping with her; he was practically forced into taking the bus since his mother's car was in the shop and his dad had taken his own car to work. Whilst on the bus, Naruto being the naïve (and in his own humble opinion cute as hell) little boy he used to be, not yet filled in on life’s displeasures, he sat with his fingers on the edge of the seat. Little did he know that there was an enormous ball compiled from previous passenger's gum stuck together; said ball stuck to his hand and he wasn’t able to get it off. Shaking it off only caused further inconvenience, since it splattered his clothes in old chewing gum. Chewing gum never looked the same to him after that. Running off the bus in pure humiliation as his mother dragged him into the women's toilets, badgering at him about how disgusting it was that she was picking strangers gum from his new clothes, as if Naruto was enjoying the ordeal! Therefore, Naruto kept his hands in his lap, or anywhere else except near the underside of the seat every time he decided to travel by bus.

Shivering from the memory slightly, Naruto watched in hilarity as Sasuke trudged onto the bus. Raven locks were splayed everywhere, almost reminding Naruto of one of those emo kids hairstyles back in 2005 on myspace — something he wouldn't doubt Sasuke of being guilty of. His dark hair was almost combed across his pale face, covering most of his features besides his lips that were in the shape of a displeased frown. Covering his mouth to hide his twitching smile, Naruto tried his best not to turn it into a boisterous laugh, knowing Sasuke would have his head if he dared laugh.

He couldn't help it! The bastard looked so stupid!

"Lookin' cool, Sasuke." Naruto snickered, not looking Sasuke in the eye, his voice dripping with held-back laughter.

"Laugh Naruto, and I swear I will—"

Naruto spluttered.

He couldn’t help it. Seeing Sasuke look so doltish was just too good. Ebony hair splattered in so many different directions — spikes that were previously gelled up perfectly suddenly hanging lopsidedly... it was just... the hilarity of the situation was record-breaking. Tears fell from Naruto's eyes as he scrunched himself up in the corner of the bus, laughing like a lunatic. Clutching his gut, Naruto tried his best to stop laughing because it was beginning to hurt, but he just couldn’t! He could feel his face heating up, and it (despite his tan making the red-tinge less significant) was probably as red as a stop sign.

And, in spite of him just feeling Sasuke glaring holes into the back of his head, his howls didn’t
cease. His laughing didn’t cease. He was unable to stop laughing. It took so much willpower — and childhood memories — to not just slide off his seat and laugh there for all eternity.

He hadn’t laughed this much in ages.

Fortunately, nobody was on the bus. Nobody was there to look in Naruto in absolute disgust — except Sasuke, who was mortified — at his constant laughter. Nobody was there to judge him as his laughter echoed throughout the empty bus; just by being here alone with Sasuke, he could be his self.

The bus driver probably thought that there were a few loose screws in his head, though.

Eventually, his laughter subsided and forced himself to look at Sasuke, who was clearly nowhere near amused as Naruto was. In the meantime, he was able to — slightly — fix his hair, but it still needed combing down. Hidden in his eyes, was the slightest hint of mirth — amusement at the whole situation. Despite his pride, even Sasuke found it quite amusing. Or perhaps he found Naruto's reaction humoured him somewhat.

"You're finally done?"

"I think." Naruto said, almost apologetically. "Do you want help with your hair?"

"How bad is it?"

"Well... looks kinda like an angry bird that has just been mauled by a bear, or somethin'." Naruto answered honestly between a few more leftover chuckles.

Nodding, Sasuke gave Naruto permission to try and fix his hair — a once in a lifetime oppotunity. Slightly grinning to himself, Naruto elevated himself so he was able to sit on his knees on the bus chair so he had an easy view of Sasuke's hair. Flattening down the pieces that were somehow standing up with the minimal amount of gel, Naruto couldn't help but notice how soft Sasuke's hair was. It wasn't silky or anything — it was thick and had a texture, but it was... Naruto daresay, fluffy. Pleasant to the touch. For some reason, Naruto always thought that Sasuke's hair would feel rough and coarse, but instead it was... nice.

He pushed down any remaining strands of hair, smoothing it over until it finally obeyed Naruto's orders. Stubborn little bastards. It was unmistakably Sasuke's hair, he thought.

Tanned fingers slowly massaged its way through strands of inky hair, almost subconsciously; it was almost as he was in a trance. Running his fingers through Sasuke's hair, sorting out any stray wisps — even though Naruto may have known that there were no loose pieces of hair left — Naruto couldn’t help but become slowly addicted. An aromatic smell emitted from the ebony locks. A sweet, alluring smell. Addictive. He compulsively pressed his head against Sasuke's scalp. He was slowly feeling himself grow obsessed.

"What are you doing?" Sasuke asked.

Sasuke's voice was able to snap him out of his stupor. Out of his trance. Embarrassed and wide-eyed about being caught practically sniffing Sasuke's hair, he slowly — and painfully awkwardly — raised his head from Sasuke's hair.

"Tired."

Once again. Not a lie. He was tired.
"Can you not sleep on my hair?"

"I wouldn't give your hair — which I-so-graciously fixed — the satisfaction of bein' my pillow!"

Half-smiling, Sasuke leaned back against the bus seat. "At least you're back to your old self."

"Old self?" Naruto echoed.

"Not being depressed. Not moping. Obnoxious—"

"Obnoxious?!!"


"Yes, we get it, I annoy you." Naruto huffed.

"You're not that bad. Annoying, yes, but I can tolerate you — sometimes." Sasuke said casually, and Naruto realised he had closed his eyes as he spoke, his head rattling along with the bus. "But, at least I don't owe you now." He said almost tiredly.

"Owe me? Why?" Naruto laughed.

"You helped me once or twice when I needed it." Sasuke admitted, "so I helped you in return."

"You didn't need to help me—"

"I did." said Sasuke solemnly. "Now, I don't owe you — we're even."

"Is that really how you see your relationships with people?" Naruto asked. "A you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours type of scenario?"

"It's simpler that way," said Sasuke. "That way, you don't owe anybody anything."

"I never thought you owed me anythin'." Naruto confessed.

Opening one eye, Sasuke looked at Naruto. "Why did you help me then? A sense of satisfaction?"

Hollow laughter left Naruto's throat. How could Sasuke see his relationships with people like that? Did he really not trust people that much? He almost wanted to cry then and there as a horrible feeling formed in his gut; Naruto assumed there were only three people in Sasuke's life whom he trusted: Kakashi, Gai and Kabuto. Too bad one of them was seeking to destroy his life, it seemed. Wiping away the water that had somehow managed to find its way into Naruto's eyes — windy weather never helped — Naruto looked at Sasuke again, determined; that used to be his attitude towards people after his friends left him, holding back a sniff.

Sasuke didn't have people like Ino and Gaara to help him through it. Having friends — he was sure Kakashi and Gai were wonderful, but — who could help you through it was so much easier; Sasuke had people he could talk to, mainly Suigetsu, Jugo and Karin, but did he consider them friends? Most of the time, they came over unannounced, and Sasuke tolerated them — tolerated him. Hell, he even enjoyed their company sometimes — even Naruto was able to perceive that. But, the main question was: did he trust them? Genuinely trust them?

Sniffling up any excess snot that had (somehow) leaked from his nose, Naruto ran his battered sleeve across his eyes, trying to wipe any stray tears.

"Are you cr—"
"Why would I cry for you, arrogant bastard?! My eyes are waterin', is all..." He sniffed. "Hate the fuckin' wind, always messin' with my eyes..."

Silence passed between the two for a while, the rattle of the bus being the only thing that broke the quietude. It was quiet compared to the contrast of Naruto's howls of laughter from a few moments ago. Naruto couldn't look Sasuke in the eye. Memories of how he used to be exactly like that made him overwrought with anxiety. Crying in front of Sasuke wasn’t better, either — how embarrassing.

Naruto's gaze was kept sternly on the window. Watching Konoha flash before his eyes; children walking with their parents, teenagers walking around dressed up much older than they probably were, men walking slightly drunken out of the bar — it was five in the afternoon for god's sake — and he just watched life pass before his eyes. People's daily lives.

City lights brightened up the whole area, highlighting announcements and advertisements everywhere, and it had an uncanny resemblance to New York or Tokyo, just not as grand. Mesmerising all the same, though.

They walked off from the bus quietly, the only sound being Naruto thanking the bus driver. Over the time that has passed, it seemed, a lot more people had crowded the bus. Funny. Naruto hadn’t even noticed.

Sasuke walked slightly ahead of Naruto, and Naruto watched his retreating back. Naruto couldn’t help but think how far away Sasuke was. Whether he meant in distance or emotionally, Naruto didn’t know — no, he did, but he just didn’t want to face that right now.

Familiar roads buzzed animatedly with chatter from loads of people. Giggling girls walked past Sasuke, blushing and pointing at him and Naruto swore somebody comment how 'cute' Sasuke was. Naruto couldn’t help but laugh slightly; if Sasuke had heard them say that, he would have flashed them the dirtiest glare imaginable.

Luckily for those girls, he didn't hear them.

It wasn’t until the university dormitories were in sight was when Sasuke turned around, his eyes meeting Naruto's.

"...You're not so bad." He said firmly.

"What?" Naruto replied, stupefied.

"You. I don’t think you're so bad." He repeated.

"I heard... I jus' don't get what you mean."

Sasuke waited for Naruto to catch up to his pace before he elaborated on his words. Walking beside Sasuke, instead of behind him, Naruto stared at him, waiting for an answer.

"Trusting people is something that doesn’t come natural to me." Sasuke admitted. "My relationships — beside Kakashi and Gai, of course — have always been give-and-take. Friendship is a concept that I'm not too familiar with, but I don’t think you're that bad."

"Fuckin' better not think I'm bad. I've done a lot for you, y'know." Naruto scoffed, trying to add a bit of forced humour into his voice.

"That's why I tried to cheer you—"
"I don’t expect that, really. You didn’t owe me anythin’, anyway.” said Naruto. "I didn’t expect any type of payback when I helped you. Was I meant to leave you in the dormitory in the middle of a panic attack? S’just reassurin’ to see that you’re better. 'Specially over the past month."

"Everybody wants something, Naruto."

"I don’t." Naruto said honestly.

"Then you’re an idiot."

"Slightly hypocritical, don’t y’think? You criticise people for wantin’ somethin’, and then you go and say it’s idiotic to not want somethin’? That’s why I think you’re so. . . confusing."

"I never said I was a pleasant person, Naruto. Quite the contrary actu—"

"You are an asshole." agreed Naruto without a doubt. "A misunderstood asshole."

"'Misunderstood’?“ Sasuke repeated, a bitter laugh shortly following after.

"I think you show people a guarded, mean side when you meet them so they don’t get close to you. You don’t want to get close to people cuz you think you’re gonna end up disappointin’ them, or the other way around."

"Spoken like a true, narcissistic psychologist.” Sasuke mocked. "I thought you took English, not psychology?"

"I do."

"Then what makes you think you know me?" Sasuke asked, a wry smile on his features.

"Cuz . . . you remind me a lot of myself." Naruto laughed, looking at the twinkling stars overhead. "Kinda hurts to watch, actually."

"You have PTSD too?” Sasuke asked bitterly, blatantly knowing the answer. "Living in anxiety every fucking day? Not knowing when something’s going to. . . set you off?"

"No. Clinical depression.” said Naruto, "used to, anyway."

Sasuke's eyes widened slightly in surprise at Naruto's revelation. Especially when he revealed it so casually.

"I don’t know what it's like to live in anxiety every day, honestly, but I know what it's like to want to disappear everyday — I know what it's like to think that if I disappeared, nobody would care — I know what it's like to think how easier it would be to just give up and. . . " He halted his words, the last word slowly evaporating on his tongue. Taking a shuddering breath, he continued. "I know what it's like when all of your supposed friends leave you because you're too fuckin' depressin' to be around."

". . . I never thought that you—" Sasuke started hesitantly.

"—would have anythin' bad about me? Turns out that I'm not — or didn’t used to be — as happy-go-lucky as you probably think."

Sasuke was speechless for a moment. Only a moment. "Are you trying to make me feel sorry for you?"
"Fuck no." Naruto laughed, devoid of humour. "You're the last person I would want pity from, Sasuke."

"Then why are you telling me this?"

"Well, because I want you to get the message that facin' your problems alone ain't gonna help you that much. S'always easier to have friends helpin' you through it."

"I said you're not so bad, but I never said, nor implied, that I see you as a friend." He said rather bluntly. "And this isn't some book where 'love conquers evil' and 'friendships are the most important thing in the world'."

"Sorry Voldermort." Naruto scoffed.

Sasuke flashed him a disapproving glance.

"Would you do this for somebody who you think is not your friend?" Naruto questioned shortly after. "Try an' cheer them up?"

"I would do it for somebody whom I owe." Sasuke stated firmly, not once hesitating in his stride.

"Hm, so, as you put it, we're equal, now?" Naruto asked.

Sasuke gave a corroborative grunt.

"So... if we're equal, does that mean we could be friends? If I don't owe you anything—"

"I just said that I don't see you as a friend—"

"—feelings can change, Sasuke." Interrupted Naruto.

"Do you honestly believe that?"

"I do."

"You're an idiot."

"I know. You tell me that every day."

Sasuke didn't reply. He just assessed Naruto with a calculating stare. Trying to see if he had an ulterior motive.

"Why do you want to be friends so badly?" Sasuke questioned dubiously. "Are you not satisfied with the way things are now?"

They had entered the school grounds by now, and Naruto grinned at the people he knew — the people who waved at him — as he walked past them.

"I just want to help you."

"With what?"

*Kabuto.*

"Dunno. Everythin'. S'what friends are for."

"Very persistent, aren't you?"
"Only about the things I care about." Confessed Naruto. "I see myself in you. S'hard to explain."

"I refuse." Sasuke said dismissively, climbing up the stairs.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"You can. I necessarily won't answer, however."

"You always say that."

"Because it's true."

They had reached their floor now, rather quickly, actually. Quicker than usual. It was probably because Naruto was so preoccupied with trying to officially make friends with Sasuke that he didn’t notice his short breath as he normally did. Instead, he pushed through the arduous labour and carried on the conversation with Sasuke. Befriending Sasuke would make it a lot more easier for him to protect him against Kabuto — whatever that sly snake was planning; Naruto knew the next time he saw Ino he would have to talk to her about it since he obviously couldn’t just talk to Sasuke about it. Sasuke would kill him for one: listening in on his — private — conversation with Ino, and two: saying a word against Kabuto whom he obviously trusted with his life — unfortunately for Naruto.

At least with Ino, he would just get a scolding and perhaps a hit across the head; she was the lesser of two evils.

"What am I to you? A roommate? An acquaintance? Nothing?"

Naruto couldn't help the pang in his chest as the last word left his mouth.

Sasuke stopped at the top of the stairs. Naruto stood on a slightly-lower level than him, making it easier for Sasuke to look down on him with those tenebrous eyes that were so dark. Concealing so much bottled up emotions.

"You're. . . alright." Sasuke said finally.

"What does that even mean?" Naruto asked. "You keep sayin' you're alright, but I don't know what that fuckin' means, Sasuke!"

"It means what it means: you're alright." Sasuke said sharply, before adding: "idiot."

"Thanks for clearin' things up." He mumbled sardonically.

Furrowing his brow in complete and utter confusion at Sasuke's vague answer, Naruto watched as Sasuke started walking away from him, turning his back toward Naruto as he proceeded to their dormitory. Naruto followed shortly behind him, making sure to keep a few feet of distance between them for whatever reason. He felt slightly offended by Sasuke's answer, in all honestly. Then again, what was he expecting?

Both of the boys proceeded back into their dorm in silence.

Naruto's thoughts still lingered on Sasuke. The enigmatic, hard-to-predict teenager. Whilst Sasuke took him out today, he felt happy, like Sasuke actually cared about his feeling sorry for himself behaviour; instead, the conclusion was that Sasuke was just 'returning the favour'.

He didn’t know why he was so disappointed, but he was.

The two walked into their dormitory silently; Naruto, from sheer downheartedness, and Sasuke,
because he was a taciturn son-of-a-bitch.

"Are you going to watch the TV?" Sasuke asked. "Or can I?"

"Nah. I'm gonna read the book you got me." Naruto said, a tinge of resentfulness in his voice.

"Enjoy your porn." Sasuke said offhandedly.

"IT'S NOT PORN!!" Naruto shrieked, red-faced as Sasuke pushed the key into the lock.

Chapter End Notes

why's naruto so desperate???

&& thank you for reading!!!
hello everybody!

so... i have a confession...

Chapters may be a tad longer to update for a while since I've caught up with all my pre-written ones and school is just getting in my way... a lot. I tried to catch up this week, but it was my birthday week so I was really distracted... I apologise!! Updates are probably going to be biweekly for a while... I apologise. Seriously. Just until I catch up with chapters and then they'll be back to weekly. I REFUSE to EVER give up on this fic... ever. Incomplete fanfiction is the worst; I have suffered from it various times... ahh.

Anyway, I'm going to revise for my biology test, now (I always have tests it sucks).

(not beta'd. Sorry for any mistakes).

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**Chapter XII:**

Angry thudding.

Something — or someone — was knocking on their dormitory door.

Glancing at his alarm clock, Naruto grimaced at the time: nine o'clock. Today was his lie-in! Nine was too early! Perhaps if he ignored the sound, it would eventually go away; his sleep-induced mind went by that logic. Ignoring a problem until it went away. Usually, if you ignored something for long enough — for example, a knock at the door or somebody constantly calling your phone — it would go away.

However, it seemed after a very long ten minutes that the person who was at the door wasn’t planning on leaving. They were quite determined, actually. Naruto was pretty sure that Sasuke said something about having a lecture today, so he obviously wasn’t going to answer it.

Damn bastard with his convenient lecture times.

Sulkily, Naruto groaned as he somehow managed to motivate — force — himself out of bed, despite his body obviously trying its best to disobey Naruto’s orders. Orange bedcovers clung onto Naruto’s body, dragging him back into bed. Whining, Naruto threw them off, and was greeted to the chilly air in his dorm. Partly because he was only wearing a pair of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle boxer briefs, and partly because he realised that the heating wasn’t on! Sasuke, being the cold-blooded, non-human spawn of the devil he was, he always chastised Naruto for having the heating on; always complaining that it was a waste of money when they had blankets. Many times, Naruto had to sneakily turn the heating on whilst Sasuke was either out (at a lecture since he barely went outside after that) or locked up in his room. And now, Naruto had a perfectly good reason to complain at
Sasuke about the lack of heat in their dormitory. Goosebumps quickly formed up and down his arms, and he had only been out of his — very warm — bed for five seconds!

Wrapping his arms around himself to try and warm himself up, Naruto trotted over to the main door and unlocked it. When he opened it, however, he wasn’t expecting a guilty-looking Sakura to turn up on his doorstep. That definitely woke him up.

"S-Sakura!" Naruto exclaimed. "What're you doin' here?"

Flashing him a smile, Sakura looked slightly embarrassed. "Is it okay if I come in. . . and. . . talk to you?" The last words were said very slowly, as if trying to see any emotion flicker on Naruto's face, trying to predict his answer.

"Oh! Erm, yeah. . . course!" He said, quickly moving out of the doorway, letting Sakura inside. "I'll just go and get a shirt! Make yourself comfortable!"

Not even Naruto could deny his voice going up an octave or two. Nervousness and anxiety seeped into his body, and he felt his hands become slightly clammy. Fidgeting with his hands, Naruto's eyes scanned around the room for any type of presentable shirt — he really needed to start washing his shirts! Eventually, he found a navy hoodie on his floor with little to no stains on the floor that was odourless. Quickly spraying it with deodorant — just in case — he threw it on and jogged back to the living room to see Sakura sitting awkwardly on the couch, looking around the apartment with mild interest.

Sitting down beside her, Naruto couldn't help but notice how nice she looked. Pink hair — that had obviously been dyed recently since the brown roots were gone — was loosely tied up in a short ponytail that stuck out slightly. Gracing her shoulders was a grey, oversized jumper, sported with blue, ripped denim jeans and black ankle boots. Shiny lip gloss coated her lips, and whether the pink tinge on her cheeks was natural or not, Naruto didn’t know. Wisps of pink baby hair floated around her head since she had brushed her bangs back.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" He asked, a mix of nervous and curious.

Biting her lip gloss covered lip, Sakura looked nervously — guiltily — at Naruto, as her left hand circled her right hand's index finger. "Well. . . I just wanted to come over and apologise for my recent behaviour." She admitted. "And I came over to explain why I behaved like that."

Naruto blinked, giving her the affirmative to continue. "Well. . . I was embarrassed about what happened that night," she confessed. "Seeing you the next day in the cafeteria — well not the next day, but you know what I mean — I didn’t know what to do and I may have panicked. . ."

"Did you think I was gonna judge you or somethin'?" Naruto asked.

"No. . . not at all. Ino told me how much of a nice guy you were before I had even met you; meeting you in person proved her theories because you are, truly, one of the nicest males I have ever met." She laughed slightly. "I know that you wouldn’t judge me for something so trivial, especially because you're not entirely straight either, and. . . I don’t know, I just really couldn’t face you. I had second-hand embarrassment over kissing you and I just couldn’t face you Naruto. I'm so sorry!"

Naruto heard her voice become more hoarse throughout her explanation, and he was happy that she was talking to him about it; he could tell that she was genuinely sorry. Watery green eyes turned to him with a slightly trembling upper lip, and Naruto embraced her, much to Sakura's surprise.

"S'okay, Sak." He breathed. "I forgive you."
Pulling out of Naruto's grasp, Sakura flashed him a watery smile. "I wasn't even going to come over. . . honestly I was planning on hiding for another seven weeks to let it all blow over, until . . ."

She stopped speaking, and Naruto looked at her oddly. "Until?"

"Until I was walking to my biomed lecture today, and I accidentally bumped into Sasuke. I wasn’t expecting him to say anything. I just apologised and tried to walk off, but he told me if I had spoken to you recently. When I asked why, he said that you weren't being yourself and I — and the rest of us — should check on you." She explained.

Stunned. Naruto was absolutely and positively stunned. That was the only way that he could describe what he was feeling right now.

"I'll never understand that guy. . ." Naruto murmured underneath his breath.

"Pardon?" Said Sakura.

"Ah, n-nothin'!" Naruto grinned, "jus' talkin' to myself."

Looking upon Naruto with a dubious gaze, Sakura's wary look soon wavered until she was staring at the carpet once more, still looking guilty; she continued to speak. "I. . . I'm really sorry. I was selfish — I never considered how my actions would affect you. I only thought about my own feelings; in all honesty, I really don't want to lose your friendship."

Wrapping Sakura between his arm and his ribcage, he reassuringly softly jostled her, grinning at Sakura's obvious remorse. That was enough for him: he had made a friend beside Ino or Gaara that truly cared about his friendship. Truly cared about him.

"Forgive me?" She asked cautiously, her voice muffled since she had buried her — tearful, going by her uneasy voice — face into Naruto's hoodie.

"Sayin' hard to a cryin' girl is hard y'know." Naruto joked. "Guess I'm gonna have to say I forgive you."

Sakura breathed a laugh into his jumper. "Thanks."

"I dunno why you're cryin' 'bout it." Naruto laughed.

"S-shut up!" Sakura sniffled. "According to Sasuke, you weren't too far off yourself!"

"Sasuke has tendencies to over exaggerate some things."

"If I didn't feel so guilty about everything, I would argue! I hope you know that!" Sakura protested weakly.

Naruto hummed, very doubtful of Sakura's words. "Hey, Sak, d'you know where Ino is? Kinda need to talk to her."

Naruto felt Sakura stiffen at his side as soon as Ino's name slipped out of her mouth. Making sure not to look Naruto in the eye, Sakura slowly withdrew herself from Naruto's arms and kept her eyes transfixed on the floor. Curling herself into a ball, Sakura's legs found their way onto the sofa as she tucked her head inside of her legs. Poignant eyes looked at Naruto sorrowfully as Naruto watched tears permeate throughout her eyes; tears that stood shakily on her lower eyelid, almost making her eyes look shiny, in a sense.
"I..." she sniffed, using the heel of her hand to wipe any oncoming tears. "I haven’t spoken to her recently... she's... a tiny bit... annoyed... with me." Sakura confessed.

"Why?" Naruto asked, surprised.

Naruto heard Sakura swallow audibly as she purposely avoided his gaze. Astounded, Naruto's wide eyes looked at her with the utmost flummoxed expression. "You told her!!"

"What?" Shrieked Sakura. "No way!"

"Then... what's with the—"

"I did something to annoy her. She's angry at me — rightfully so."

"What'd you do?"

Flicking him on the forehead with a nail stained in a clear coat of nail varnish, Sakura smiled at Naruto's obvious annoyance at her gesture. "Don’t you worry your pretty little head." Coed Sakura, "it's nothing that concerns you. I wouldn’t worry." Then, after a few minutes of silence, she quickly added: "oh! Don't tell her that, please. I don’t want her to think I ran to you since we argued."

Naruto flashed her a sad smile; he loved Ino, he really did, but he wasn’t planning on running off and telling her what Sakura had just told him confidentially.

"I won't. Jus' need to talk to her for personal reasons." Naruto told her. "Whatever you tell me, s'private. Won't tell anyone. Promise — I never go back—"

"—on my word." Sakura finished. "Ino told me that about you."

"She talks about me a lot, doesn’t she?" He laughed, before looking at nothing in particular with narrowed eyes. "I'm always hearin' embarrassing stories 'bout myself from other people! Ino's the one who's tellin' 'em!"

"You have no idea..." Sakura mumbled; luckily enough, Naruto didn’t hear her words.

"Anyway, d'you think she would be at your dorm? S'kinda urgent."

"Hm, probably..." Sakura guessed, furrowing her brow. "She doesn’t have any lectures or anything."

"Great! D'you wanna come with me?" Naruto asked, standing up.

"No, I'm good. I'm going to meet up with Karin. She owes me a smoothie."

"Are you and Karin... y'know..."

Sakura looked appalled. "N-no way! Just because Karin's gay and I'm gay doesn’t mean that we're automatically an item!"

"Sorry, sorry." He laughed. "Sure you don’t wanna go back to your dorm with me?" He asked walking towards the door.

"Nah. It's fine." Sakura dismissed, before eyeing Naruto's attire warily. "Naruto..."

"What?"
"I hope you're not going out in," she paused, pointing at his Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle boxer briefs concealed poorly by his navy hoodie, and she couldn’t help at how badly the colours clashed together, "that."

Looking down, Naruto grinned, an embarrassed pink blush ghosting his cheeks. "Oh."

Naruto and Sakura parted ways two floors down. Unfortunately for Sakura, Karin's dormitory resided in the other building, meaning that she would have to walk across the school grounds in such inclement weather. Looking at the dark-grey colour of the clouds, it wasn’t going to be very pleasant. At least Sakura's pink hair was tied up so a field of pink would be blowing in her eyesight every few seconds.

Naruto stopped outside of Ino’s door and knocked firmly three times, waiting for a response. He hoped that she was actually home, and this trip wasn’t for nothing; he really didn't know how he was going to approach the subject of the whole Kabuto debacle. Walking into her dormitory and casually saying: hey Ino, sorry for dropping by. Just wanted to tell you I eavesdropped on your conversation with Sasuke — sorry about that — and so Kabuto came over three days after because Sasuke called him since your conversation with him, so I eavesdropped on their conversation too! Also, I then, after, eavesdropped on a conversation Kabuto had with somebody on the phone and they're messing with Sasuke's pills so he can have more nightmares for whatever reason. Thanks for the cologne by the way!

Shaking his head at the utter possibility of him saying something along those lines, Naruto couldn’t help but feel the impulse of turning around and back to his dorm. He refused, however. Even though Ino would probably kill him — rightfully so — he wanted to make sure Sasuke was safe, and Ino — well, her father, mostly — was the only person Naruto could turn to in this situation. At least it was Ino. They had been best friends for years. Even if she was annoyed at him for a few weeks — months, even — at least Sasuke would be safe. Perhaps he and Sakura could even start a club in the meantime.

Naruto heard a shuffling along the carpet, along with two muffled voices talking — bickering, to be precise — on the other side of the door, and Naruto hoped to god that whoever she was bickering with, it hadn’t put her in an irritable mood. That would destroy Naruto's chances of having a level-headed conversation with Ino about his wrongful doings — with good intentions, albeit — would be much, much slimmer.

Eventually, the door opened. Slightly surprised, Naruto came face-to-face with none other than Kiba Inuzuka, wearing nothing but a pair of tracksuit bottoms. Unblinkingly, Kiba stared back at him, before grinning.

"S'just Naruto." Kiba said, craning his neck to whoever was behind him.

Popping her head around Kiba's shoulder, Naruto saw Ino's long platinum hair swat the wall next to her as it swished in the direction of her head. Smiling apologetically at Naruto, Ino quickly ducked underneath Kiba's bare arm so they were face-to-face. Naruto noticed that her outfit — or lack thereof — was her favourite pyjamas — well, what she used for pyjamas anyway; a simple, white camisole and a pair of mint shorts, splattered in pandas. He felt quite guilty, hoping that he didn’t wake them up.

"S'just Naruto." Kiba said, craning his neck to whoever was behind him.

"Naruto, what are you doing here?" asked Ino.

Naruto couldn’t help but notice the missing words: sorry I didn’t answer the door, I thought you were someone else; that ‘someone else’ obviously being Sakura. Naruto kept the same neutral
expression on his face, however, as he pushed down the slightly bitter feeling that swarmed in his gut for Sakura, knowing that he had promised not to mention anything. Instead, he settled for a slight smile of his own.

"Sorry to bother. Was jus' hopin' that I could talk to you," Naruto glanced at Kiba for a moment before looking back at Ino, "privately." He added, hoping that Ino would understand the emphasis on 'private'.

Looking somewhat surprised, she looked at Kiba before nodding fervently. Smiling at Kiba, she softly spoke, "maybe you should go—"

"Yeah. Was jus' gonna. Shino's probably missin' me." Kiba grinned gregariously before quickly pecking a kiss on her forehead. Kiba nodded to Naruto on his way out, and Naruto gave him a resolute one back — the one thing he appreciated about Kiba was that he was an understanding, laidback guy who would never — purposely — inconvenience someone.

Waving Naruto into her apartment, Naruto could see the solicitous look on her face, genuinely concerned about what Naruto wanted to talk about — genuinely concerned about Naruto, hoping that he was alright. He couldn’t help but secretly grin. Having Ino dote on him was nice. Relaxing, even.

They sat down on one sofa each: one adjacent to the other. Ino slumped her whole body on it in a relaxed manner, using her hand, rested on the armrest, to support her head, therefore her worried stare on Naruto; Naruto, however, sat rather awkwardly on the sofa, squeezing himself into a protective huddle as if a long row of people on either side of him sat on the couch. Fidgeting with his hands, Naruto avoided Ino's eye contact for a while — how he was going to approach this was hard. He should have planned it first, admittedly, but there was no time to waste! He had already stalled long enough, even going to the cinema with Sasuke — a fruitless endeavour to try and strengthen his and Sasuke's (whatever they were, since Sasuke didn't consider them friends) — when he should have been talking to Ino about the whole situation so they could prepare themselves.

Looking up at Ino guiltily, he took a deep breath before he proceeded to talk. He knew how bad Ino's temper could get if she was really, really pissed, and that's what she would be after he explained the whole situation to her: really, really pissed. "Okay. . . don't get mad at me. . ." He started.

Raising a questioning brow at Naruto, Ino looked at him dubiously. "Why? What did you do?"

Naruto heard himself gulp very loudly out of nervousness as he watched — as he heard — Ino tapping a nail impatiently against the couch, waiting for his answer. "Well. . . I may. . ."

"If you need to borrow money—"

"—no. S'not that. . ." said Naruto. "It's somethin' that. . . I did. . . that you'll be really angry about." He confessed in a whisper, avoiding Ino's gaze. He didn’t want to see her darkening expression as he continued his sentence. Guilt filled up in him. Listening to their conversation was wrong — he was drunk! — but, it could save Sasuke and even, in the long run, contribute to Sasuke trusting the Yamanakas again. Something that blatantly wasn’t the case now.

"Naruto. What did you do?" Naruto heard her voice become more stern; he heard her voice that was, a few moments ago, laced with worry and sympathy to one of wariness and cautiousness. He knew: it was now or never. So, why couldn’t he bring himself to utter those words? Why couldn’t he look her in the eye? Why was it, that when he tried his best to convey what he was trying to tell her, it came out as a indecipherable murmur that almost sounded like a dying animal.
"What?" Ino said, her voice slightly snapping.

"I may have..." the rest was murmured so quietly she couldn’t hear it.

"What is it?" Ino asked, looking concerned. "I'm being serious, Naruto. You're starting to worry me." Naruto could sense the sternness in her voice as she spoke.

"Well... just remember, if you kill me, Kiba knows I was here." Said Naruto. Taking a deep breath, Naruto looked directly at Ino who's brow was raised a significant amount, looking a mixed between confused and suspicious. It was now or never. Kiba was a key witness — if she was going to kill Naruto, they would eventually trace it back to her. Haunting Ino from the grave — if she happened to kill him — was something that he had no qualms with in the slightest. "So, remember my birthday? That time you got me that amazin' cologne because, remember, you love me and I'm your best friend and nothin' — and I mean nothin' — could come in between us, riight?"

Kissing ass was option two, and he was just rolling with it now. Looking dubiously at him, Ino uttered out a very confused "yes..."

"Well, funny thing, actually. Seems that... erm... I may — in my drunken state, havin' no control over what I do or anythin', bear in mind — have overheard a bit of your conversation," by now Ino was glowering at him, and Naruto quickly looked down, avoiding all eye contact with her, "with... erm... what's his name..."

"Sasuke?"

"Ah! That's it! Sasuke! Ino you're so smart—"

"Please don’t tell me you mentioned anything to him." She pleaded.

"Course not! What do you take me for?!"

Snapping her head up to meet his, Naruto could see the crease in her eyebrows, along with the look of utmost irritation on her face. An audible gulp from Naruto echoed throughout the room, and he could feel his hands becoming more clammy each second those icy blue eyes — which had somehow looked even icier — stared at him in obvious disapproval; the only way he could describe Ino's facial expression was when your mother was disappointed in you — giving you the whole speech — but you could also tell that she was angry with you.

"Why would you eavesdrop?!" Ino questioned.

"Why wouldn’t you tell me?" He shot back.

"I'm under oath!" She retorted hotly.

"Oh!" Naruto fired back with the exact same vigour as Ino's statement, the only thing lacking was that he didn’t really have a point to defend himself.

"Yes, 'oh'!" She snapped. "You do not realise how shaky my father is with Sasuke, Naruto! If Sasuke knew that you knew... I don’t know what he'd do! He doesn’t trust people easily, and especially if they know about his situation—"

"—which I do not." He added.

Okay, he did know about the PTSD, but he didn’t know about other things. That company was brought up a lot — he knew squat about that... how Sasuke's family actually died... yeah, they
protected him, but from what? And, probably, there were a lot of things he hadn't even grazed on.

And Naruto almost wanted to scoff at Ino's statement; Naruto was perfectly aware of what Sasuke was capable of when he didn’t trust others. It landed him in bed since the bastard was too busy to call a fucking ambulance!

Ino sighed and slumped in her chair, looking exhausted. "I've already argued with one of my friends. I can't be bothered to argue with you, too." She admitted.

"There's also somethin' else I wanna tell you." Naruto said.

Ino opened her eyes, looking at him with a frown on her face. "What else did you do?"

"I didn't do anythin'! I'm helpin' you!" He squeaked. "S'about Kabuto!"

Ino's tired form didn't look so tired anymore. Instead, she quickly snapped out of her languor state and looked serious. Very serious. She jolted from the couch and walked over to him, placing her hands on her hips.

"What about Kabuto?"

"Well, the day after my birthday... he came to visit Sasuke—"

"—visit Sasuke?! He's... he's not allowed to do that! He has to at least notify my father, who would tell me... are you sure?"

"Why would I lie about somethin' like this?" Naruto asked, making Ino roll her eyes. "That's not the worst part."

"Then what is?"

"Well, I was kinda listenin' in on their conversation—"

"—oh so it's a habit now?"

"No! S'cause I didn't trust Kabuto! And you're damn lucky that I listened in! Kabuto's fuckin' evil!"

"Well I knew that five years ago—" Ino stated matter-of-factly.

"—did you know he wants to make Sasuke as unstable as he can?" Naruto interjected sharply.

Ino's blue eyes snapped open in alert as soon as the words left Naruto's mouth. Leaning against the table behind her, placed in between the two adjacent couches, she waited for Naruto to interpret. "Well... in Sasuke's dorm when they were talkin'... it was like he was tryin' to turn Sasuke against me... mentionin' that we were neighbours — somethin' Sasuke apparently didn't know — and actin' like I was workin' against him. Kabuto's somehow gotten into Sasuke's mind that the Yamanakas aren't trustworthy — specially your dad; sayin' that your dad — and other people — are just usin' him for his inheritance, or somethin' like that."

Naruto watched Ino physically deflate in front of him. Nails dug into the meticulous design on the coffee table, and Naruto swear he saw some wood chip at the strength of Ino's grip. Aggravated wasn't even the word. Never before had Naruto seen Ino filled up with so much ire; yes, he had seen Ino angry before, but never had he seen her look like she wanted to punch the living daylights out of anyone — okay, perhaps he had, but never this badly.

Not that Naruto could disagree. He wanted to punch Kabuto too.
"He's... such a fucking bastard..." Ino hissed with a watery voice.

"You can say that again." Naruto bitterly huffed.

"S-so... what exactly happened? How do you know this? Do you have any proof?"

"Wha—?! N-no! Course not! Jus' thought you'd believe me, is all!" Naruto exclaimed sarcastically, waving his hands around in the air as if it empathised his point.

"I believe you." Ino sighed, "but do you really think, if you claimed to a jury that Kabuto — a professional therapist who had been assigned from Sasuke since he was twelve — was practically brainwashing him, do you think that they would believe you without proof? You're going to sound crazy— no, forget a court! Imagine trying to explain it to Sasuke! Do you think Sasuke would believe you without any proof?!"

Naruto stiffened at Ino's words. Thoughts ran through his head, but the main one that jumped out was that Ino was right — just by seeing Kabuto and Sasuke interact, hearing (listening in on) their conversation, showed that Sasuke trusted Kabuto a great deal. Trust was something Sasuke didn’t experience often — even a dunce like Naruto knew that. If Naruto even brought up the possibility that Kabuto wasn't to be trusted — which was true — Sasuke would probably make sure that Naruto was unconscious again. Gritting his teeth in utter acquiescence, Naruto avoided Ino's gaze that screamed the truth right in his face that slightly hurt to accept: Sasuke trusted a snake like Kabuto way more that he would ever trust Naruto. Bringing up the notion of Kabuto betraying Sasuke was literal and total suicide!

"Fuck!" Naruto shouted in frustration, slumping into the couch. "You're right! You're fuckin' right! Fuckin' Kabuto... fuckin' bastard...!" Not even Naruto could hide the way his voice broke, nor the pang in his chest. He wondered how long Sasuke would be blinded by Kabuto's manipulative ways. ...he wondered how long it would be until he had a shred of proof.

Ino was right. Completely and utterly right.

Pulling on blond locks, Naruto tucked his head into his chest, and Ino looked slightly concerned at Naruto's less-than-subtle tugging on his blond spikes; she couldn't help but notice the aggressiveness in it. The frustration. Placing pale hands onto Naruto's rage-shaking ones, she slowly guided Naruto's hands away from his hair. Watching him pull his hair out wasn't something she wanted to see, nor did she want her couch covered in blond wisps of Naruto's hair.

Placing a soft kiss on his forehead, Ino spoke in a reassuring tone, despite not feeling reassured herself at all. "Don't worry... we'll sort this. We'll get Kabuto. I promise."

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Exhausted, Naruto returned back to his apartment. He was so fucking tired of everything. Talking to Ino about the whole situation made him even more exasperated, and an uneasy feeling settled in his gut about how, by telling Ino, he had just made everything worse. If Ino told her father, things would just escalate. Extremely.

Sunken eyes stared at the floor; why did he feel so... hesitant? Sakura had made up with him... surely he should be happy — he got the thing about Kabuto off his chest, right? So... why did his gut churn—

Steely, black eyes flashed in his mind.

Naruto subconsciously gulped down the extensive amount of bile that had steadily been rising in his
throat; his palms were sweaty, he had realised, and his whole body was tense.

He was worried about Sasuke, sure, but why did Kabuto make him so uneasy? Just the mere thought of him was enough to make Naruto want to spit out the remaining pieces of dinner that were lodged in his stomach; not even Ino’s words of comfort — promising him that everything was going to be alright — reassured him. Especially when Ino sounded just as unsure as Naruto felt.

Why did Kabuto affect him so much? His disgust towards Kabuto was astounding — much more than he had ever harboured for anybody. Ever.

Naruto didn’t hate people; that was a fact. Even those teachers who abhorred him in high school, Naruto didn’t blame them — even that one maths teacher whom suggested something along the lines that Naruto might suffer with dyslexia — or harbour any feelings of utter hatred. Admittedly, he harboured dislike for most of them, but never hatred; with Kabuto, it was different: Naruto hated his very existence — everything about him.

Naruto trudged towards his room. The best thing he could do was . . . well, anything to take his mind from the thought of Kabuto. Maybe he could start a new television show; he was sure if he asked his mother would give him their Netflix password since he forgot it, but he couldn’t help that since his mind had been preoccupied with other things. Those other things being the one and only: Kabuto.


Three solid knocks.

Confused, Naruto looked at his phone to see if any of his friends had text him to see if they could visit, but there were none. Only unread messages from a drunken Kiba that honestly looked like he had just randomly tapped the keyboard, hopefully getting the message that he wanted.

'Dudnro am so frunk' didn’t really make any sense, but Naruto guessed it was something about him being drunk.

Sasuke had a key, so he wouldn’t need to knock on the door, and his knocks would be more aggressive; also, he would be shouting obscenities right now about how if Naruto didn’t open the door in three seconds Sasuke would castrate him. And Naruto knew Sasuke wasn’t exaggerating. Looking at the table near the door, Naruto could see that Sasuke’s keys were missing, so he obviously had them.

Shrugging to himself, Naruto walked over to the door and unlocked it, seeing who the mysterious visitor was.

"Naruto, long time no see."
okay so before I start this like please just read this:
http://honey-vanilla.tumblr.com/mamoru
it sorta ruined my life and im crying to much i cant stop the tears im suffering

Well I'm back!! Sorry for not replying to your guys' comments on the previous chapter, I'm going to do that right now (well, after I've finished posting this!).

I feel like I haven't said this enough so: thank you so much to e v e r y b o d y who has given me a kudos, left a comment and even bookmarked. I understand authors say it a lot and it's a bit hackneyed to you guys now, but I honestly appreciate it! Thank you so much!

Without your guys' continued support, I definitely wouldn't be writing since. . . well who would want to continue a story if nobody liked it?! So. . . thank you!

((not beta'd, so sorry for any mistakes!!))
fast he was pushing a sort-of-afraid-looking-Gaara along with him, almost making the redhead trip over various times. Good thing that he was used to Naruto's irrepressible antics to sort of keep at Naruto's pace.

Only when they reached the main room did Naruto release Gaara from his unnecessarily tight grip.

"D'you want me to put your bag in my room?" Naruto asked.

"Yeah, if that's okay." Gaara replied, removing his backpack from his back and passing it over to Naruto.

"Jheez! This is so heavy!" Naruto groaned as Gaara passed him his backpack, his arm instantly being weighed down with the backpack. "How'd you carry this?!"

"Because I'm not weak."

Naruto narrowed his eyes. "Do you wanna fight?" He replied light-heartedly.

"Do you have hospital insurance?"

Rolling his eyes — probably because he didn't have a good comeback — Naruto carried — more like dragged across the carpet — Gaara's backpack to his room; Naruto couldn't help but titter at the notion of Gaara looking like a hitchhiker on the way here. Seriously, this backpack was too heavy and beyond the word massive! How long was Gaara planning on staying here?! Naruto didn't really mind — he had missed Gaara as much as Ino missed the old Disney Channel — if Gaara stayed here for as long as he wanted, but didn’t he have exams?! If you're going to lug a massive backpack, you surely weren't going to stay a couple of nights!!

Then again, Gaara had always been a complex puzzle.

Opening his bedroom door, Naruto cringed at the state of his bedroom. Gaara was surely going to sleep in Naruto's room — Naruto refused to let Gaara sleep on the couch! He deserved the very best! — so he guessed that he would have to clean his room up slightly so there was actually a place to put an air mattress or something. He was sure Ino had brought one with her when she was packing her various bags for Konoha University.

Placing the present that Gaara had given him for his birthday on his desk, between all the thoughts rushing around in his head about the state of the room, the present was long forgotten.

Clothes were haphazardly scattered around the floor, along with dirty underwear. He had only washed his clothes three times since he had been at university, and whilst that was disgusting, it wasn’t like he had time for it! Showering once a day kept his body clean, so that's all what really mattered, right? It wasn't as if he was some... dirty person. He was just too preoccupied (lazy) to try to clean his room. Too busy with studies, he claimed to himself.

Sighing to himself, Naruto came to the conclusion that Gaara would be less-than-thrilled to be sleeping in a 'dirty' (CHARACTERISED!!) room; Gaara had always been a neat freak — even rivalling Sasuke's 'everything has to be clean!' proclivities — and Ino had never approved of his, as she called it, 'too lazy to clean his room' mantra. Nor did his mother, or father. Or Sasuke. Shikamaru and Choji even got him a desk cleaner for his birthday, but that didn’t mean—

Okay. Nobody liked it.

And since Gaara had travelled all the way from Suna just to see him and give him his — belated — birthday present, Naruto was sort of obligated to clean his room for Gaara. Another reason being,
that if Ino caught wind of the state of his room — that Gaara would probably offhandedly mention — she would make him clean it properly.

The horror.

Sighing to himself, Naruto knew that he had to clean his room. Making Gaara sleep in a pig sty wouldn’t be the best way to greet his friend. Gaara was special to him, damn it, and as much as he didn’t like cleaning his room, he wanted his best friend — besides Ino of course — to live a life of luxury — well, as much as you could for a university student, let’s be honest — whilst he was staying at Naruto (and Sasuke’s) humble abode.

Ah, if only Sasuke was play-well with others; maybe Gaara could have slept in his immaculate room!

Picking up a crumpled, black shirt, Naruto began dumping his clothes in a pile, ready to push them underneath the bed. Sure, that wasn’t proper cleaning, but it was short notice! Perhaps, one day, he could attempt to wash all of his clothes again.

Once, he had went with Sakura (was forced by Sakura, more like) to the washing machines to try and clean their clothes. The results ended very badly. Abysmal. Somehow, despite Sakura specifically warning him against him, he had mixed a red sock in with his white clothes. White clothes were a rarity for Naruto, admittedly, since he wasn’t the most accident-prone person in the world, but the ones that he — thanks to his father's amazing talent of cleaning stains out of clothes — managed to keep spotless (mostly) he was quite proud of, so you could imagine the horror when all of his whites came out fully and grotesquely pink! It compared to the hue of rose of Sakura's own clothes, except, for when Naruto offered them to her and she had painfully rejected his (very kind) offer, along with a soft hit on the back of the head whilst spouting angry curses; something along the lines of her not wanting socks that have a hole in the big toe! The audacity!

Too consumed in his 'cleaning' his room (pushing everything underneath his bed, to be more accurate) he didn’t hear the sound of the keys being turned in the lock, or the more obtrusive noise such as the door being opened and closed. Missing the firm footsteps that made their way into the living room. Cleaning was truly a distraction. Humming to himself wasn’t helping either, even going as far as forgetting that Gaara was still waiting for him in their living room.

After he had finished — approximately fifteen minutes, give or take — Naruto used his foot to scrape his dirty clothes and his other offending objects underneath the bed. Sniffing his bed covers shortly after, he came to the assumption that they were clean, seeing no stains either. Good. It was safe for Gaara to sleep in, at least. Naruto would take the floor, or the couch — whatever Gaara preferred. If Gaara wanted his privacy, Naruto would happily oblige. And, to make things better, he wouldn’t see the contents of the miscellaneous items gathered underneath the bed.

Satisfied with his work, Naruto walked back to the living room to greet Gaara, who would probably murder him for taking too long to return from simply 'placing his bag in the bedroom'. Probably, though. Not certainly. And, if Gaara was so concerned, he could have checked on Naruto or simply joined him!

Upon walking into the living room, there was one thing that he hadn't been expecting: Sasuke.

Sasuke was sitting on the furthest away couch from the one Gaara was sitting on, sending a portentous glare towards Gaara, who, in turned, seemed rather unaffected by Sasuke's Death Warning™, or, hopefully, Gaara hadn’t noticed. He did seem pretty immersed in that game he was playing on his phone.
Feeling the tension in the room, Naruto walked in rather loudly, making his appearance known. Knowing that Sasuke felt uncomfortable around strangers — and unkind, too — made him feel bad, but how was he supposed to know that Sasuke was home if he wasn’t going to announce it! There was only one thing that he could do now: try and get Gaara as far away from Sasuke as he could, and then explain the situation to him.

He couldn’t help but take note of Sasuke's skewed-looking appearance. He looked like a cat whose tail had been trod on, and all of the bristles on its fur were standing up in disgust towards whatever had offended the feline. Looking closer, Naruto could swear that the spikes on the back of Sasuke's hair were slightly raised in agitation and blatant dislike.

Pfft.

"G-Gaara, d'you wanna see Ino?" Naruto asked, louder than usual out of nervousness. "I know she's been dyin' to see you!"

Gaara shrugged. "Sure." He answered simply, standing up from the couch.

Putting an unnatural, lopsided grin on his face, Naruto watched Gaara made his way over to him, before widening his eyes slightly — shit, don’t make this even more awkward, he chastised himself. "Oh yeah! Gaara, have you met my roommate, Sasuke?"

Dark eyes slowly turned themselves to Naruto, promising an extremely slow and painful death. Naruto inwardly shivered at the non-verbal threat but then repressed the feeling, deciding that Sasuke at least knowing Gaara would put him at ease.

"No, I haven’t." Gaara replied monotonously. Judging by the blank stare directed at Sasuke, Gaara knew something was up — Gaara was very observant, so he probably got the feeling that Sasuke didn’t like him from his declamatory stare that was watching Gaara carefully. "I'm Gaara," he said, reaching his hand out toward Sasuke. "Nice to meet you."

Good. Gaara was always proper and polite. After all, Gaara had always been very good when it came to social boundaries. Perhaps Sasuke would return the gesture, after all, he had become better over the passing month—

"Hn." Came the monotone reply, before dark spikes faced Gaara and Naruto, indicating that he had turned his back to both of them.

Before Gaara could even react, Naruto pushed him out of the room briskly. Avoiding any more awkward situations like that were best, and exiting the scene was probably the best way to do it; their dormitory was probably the closest thing to a haven Sasuke had here — his comfort zone — and Naruto didn’t want to go and ruin that for Sasuke. He guessed that Gaara and him would just have to stay in Naruto's room eighty-five percent of the time. Oh well. As long as Sasuke and Gaara were satisfied, then Naruto was fine with that.

"Sorry 'bout my roommate." Naruto apologised awkwardly, scratching the back of his head a few minutes after they were out of Naruto's dormitory. "He's nice — sometimes — but just a bit. . . disagreeable when it comes to meeting strangers—"

"—misanthropic, you mean?" Gaara finished.

Naruto sighed in defeat. "Well. . . I guess, but don’t judge him. He's been through a lot—"

"I'm not judging him." Gaara said in the same tone of voice. "Why would I? I remember my high school days weren’t so full of sunshine and rainbows either — neither were yours."
"You had it much worse than me..." Naruto said, straying from the subject. "Your dad—"

"—we won't talk about him." It wasn’t a request, it was a statement.

"Yeah, sorry." Naruto said sheepishly.

"No harm done." Gaara replied, clasping Naruto's shoulder slightly, almost saying 'it's not your fault'. "But no, I won't judge him — Sasuke, was it? — for his behaviour. I remember our first conversation. It almost makes what Sasuke did a compliment."

"Yeah... we really didn’t get along at the start, did we?" Naruto laughed, reminiscing the memories of high school.

Yes, despite Gaara and Naruto's strong, unbreakable friendship, they didn’t start off on the wrong foot.

At all.

Meeting through the school's counselling system, Gaara and Naruto were both hostile towards one another. They were the only ones who were regulars there. Girls would always come in sobbing, claiming that they had a fallout with their friends, and boys were always brought in when there was a fight — that was the norm, anyway. Yes, Gaara and Naruto were the only regular people whom attended — 'obligated' to go — and, for some reason, they despised each other for it. Threatened by each other since both of them thought that the other person's issue couldn't be that bad and they were a cry-baby. Both of the boys carried that mantra in their heads for the passing six months. What their 'problem' was, was confidential, and only the school's guidance councillor was allowed to know, so it wasn't exactly their faults for being so ignorant! They were only fourteen to fifteen at the time, for god's sake!

They had never spoken to each other, but there was one thing they knew: they hated one another.

The only thing Naruto could think of when he saw Gaara was when, in seventh grade, he got caught by him whilst stuffing a love letter in his older sister's locker; how was Naruto supposed to know that Gaara was Temari's little brother! They looked nothing alike! But even then, they didn't speak to each other; Naruto watched in horror as green eyes watched him stuffing the letter into the locker. Flushed with embarrassment that he had been caught confessing to his first crush, in a hasty getaway, left the letter to fall onto the floor. A week or so later, Naruto had found out who Gaara actually was, and felt his masculinity drop a few points; perhaps that one debacle was one of the underlying reasons why they held so much hostility towards each other.

Whenever they would be stuck together in a room, they would sit in silence whilst sending menacing glares towards one another, though, mostly it was Naruto who flashed the dirty looks; Gaara just looked over and raised his middle finger at him, much to Naruto's chagrin.

Until, one day, they were both sitting outside Iruka's office, since he had apparently scheduled both of his appointments with Gaara and Naruto at the same time — a mistake on his part — so they angrily waited outside, being the angst-filled teenagers they were, waiting for Iruka to tell them who had their meeting now, and who had their meeting later.

Whatever set them off — six months of building tension? Naruto's incessant tapping of his foot? Gaara's need to keep clicking his pen? — made sure that the argument was a big one. Fists collided with cheeks, feet collided with shins, elbows collided with stomachs, and Naruto could feel the coppery taste of blood swelling up at the back of his throat whilst the female receptionist screamed
for them to stop. Vile words — 'attention seeker!' 'scarface!' 'racoon!' 'whiskers!' — were shouted between the two, reverberating around the room. Desperate punches were thrown between the two; they needed to do this. Both Gaara and Naruto knew that they needed to do this to feel some sort of satisfaction, to release all of the tension.

Only when Iruka emerged out of his room, pulling those two apart — which was rather impressive, admittedly, since Naruto never thought Iruka looked like the macho sort of guy — did they finally look at each other as equals, but they never admitted it, of course. A feeling of acceptance mutually passed between the two, however, no words were spoken.

The next two months after that had passed without the two teenagers speaking at all. Harsh glares and raised middle fingers had diminished, but they still refused to look at each other, but it was out of something else. Embarrassment? Regret? An apology?

It was only until May 11th, at exactly one-thirty-two in the afternoon did they first speak to one another. Out of the corner of his eye, Naruto saw a bush of red hair walking towards him, and reluctantly, he reclined his head to face Gaara whom had taken a seat right next to him in the empty room — somewhere where they did their work sometimes if they were taken out of lesson or didn’t feel ‘well’ enough to go to lesson — despite them always sitting on tables that were polar opposites of each other.

Feeling a flush of embarrassment flushing onto his cheeks, Naruto covered them strategically, looking like he was leaning on his hand, when, in fact, he was covering the creeping crimson onto his cheeks. "What?" He mumbled, avoiding eye contact with Gaara.

"I’m sorry for calling you whiskers." He said bluntly. "And scarface."

Naruto stared at Gaara for a moment, slightly startled by his blunt apology. Clearing his throat, Naruto's eyes quickly strayed away from Gaara's. "I-I guess t-that I'm sorry too — for callin' you racoon and an attention-seeker." He replied.

And, from there, throughout their remaining two years of high school, Gaara and Naruto had grown to become best friends, helping each other through things that they would never dream of. Learning each other's own problems — Naruto's depression, Gaara's dad recently being found out to be physically abusive to him and his siblings whilst his mother was in hospital, so the school was taking legal action once they realised the amount of bruises that embellished his pale skin (and even though the amount was significantly less on Temari and Kankuro's bodies, purple contusions were still blatantly visible) in gym class looking like fingerprints — and, in some sort of way, bonding over each other's flaws.

Smiling at the memory to himself, Naruto couldn’t help but titter slightly. He was happy Gaara was so understanding of the situation, but then again, Gaara had always been an understanding, well-rounded type of guy who would never intentionally be mean to somebody unless they initiated it — Naruto may have initiated it in high school — even if his dry sense of humour could be on the slightly insulting side of times, but Naruto liked it that way. It was simply Gaara.

"What're you thinking about?" Gaara asked, non-existent eyebrow raised. He still couldn’t believe that he had let a drunken Ino try to tweeze his already-too-thin eyebrows, but Gaara was probably too drunk at the time to care. "Your smile's creeping me out."

"Nah, was just thinkin' of that fight we had." Naruto answered honestly.
Gaara gave a small smile. "Not the cleanest start the friendships, but your foot tapping was annoying."

"Says you! Clickin' your pen like it was fuckin' morse code!" Naruto rebuked.

Gaara grunted. "You know, Ino almost had my head for that." Gaara informed. "And that was before I even properly knew her. She just walked up to me and threatened to castrate me."

"And now here you two are! Best friends!" Naruto laughed.

"Can't say I'm still not scared of her, though."

"Yeah, she's not in the best mood. I went over to her earlier today."

"Hm. Why?"

Naruto almost hesitated in his step, but continued to walk. Shit. He didn’t really know if it was okay to be spreading the information about Kabuto and Sasuke around, even if it was Gaara. Keeping secrets from his friends was something that he hated doing, though, so he was in a dilemma.

"Jus' stuff about Sasuke. She's just... pissed. Probably simmered down by now, though."

"Good." Gaara said. "I can't deal with an angry Ino right off the bat."

Ino was elated to see Gaara. Beyond elated, even. Her corybantic demeanour emerged as soon as her eyes landed on Gaara — her periwinkle eyes widening a tiny bit — and definitely changed from the sombre mood that she was in the last time Naruto saw her — that being just under an hour ago.

Throwing herself onto Gaara's shoulders — Naruto couldn’t help but think how similar their reactions were — a wide grin made itself onto Ino's face as random words escaped her mouth, blubbering absolute nonsense. When she — gradually — released Gaara from her clutches, she practically pushed him inside, Naruto long forgotten; he couldn’t help but feel slightly bitter at the notion for a moment, until he realised that she (they) hadn’t seen him in about three months! How did they even last that long without Gaara.

"Your dormitory smells nicer than Naruto's." Gaara said.

"My dormitory doesn’t smell!" Naruto protested. "Y’know Sasuke wouldn’t allow that to happen!"

"Ino's smells nicer."

"Yeah, because she has like a gazillion candles!" Naruto protested. "S'like somebody died in here! It smells way too fruity—"

"You'd know all about being fruity." Ino interjected, raising a brow.

"If I were you," Gaara said quietly next to Naruto's ear, "I would mind what I say. Are you really going to insult her dorm to her face?"

Looking over at Ino, Naruto gulped at the warning glare she was sending him. Why was everybody picking on him today? He had received two glares from two different people today, promising death! And Gaara had been insulting him throughout the whole day! The only person who had decided to be kind was Sakura, who decided to have an argument with Ino so he couldn’t even speak to her!

"N-nah..." Naruto said. "Ino's dorm is better..."
"I thought so." Ino scoffed, her eyebrows raised.

Ino handed Gaara and Naruto a soda each, and they all sat on the couches that Naruto had occupied not too long ago; Ino's wide eyes stared at Gaara in amazement — in excitement — as she could barely keep herself still, squirming in her seat, trying not to bombard Gaara with a billion questions, even though they both knew she wanted to. Naruto smiled to himself, before him and Gaara sent a knowing look to one another: Ino was, despite her usual prissy personality, cute when she wanted to be.

Eventually, Ino couldn't hold herself in anymore. "So, Gaara, what're you doing at Konoha?"

Gaara shrugged nonchalantly. "I didn't say happy birthday to Naruto, and I just did one of my end of topic exams, so I have a few days off so I decided to come here."

"Yeah, he's stayin' with me."

"Where's he sleeping?" Ino asked.

"My bed." Said Naruto, "I'm sleepin' on the floor, or the couch. Whichever one Gaara wants."

"Good. I would hate to think of Gaara sleeping on the floor."

"But for me it's fine?!" Naruto exclaimed.

"You could sleep on molten lava and be comfortable." Ino giggled.

"That's beside the point..." Naruto pouted.

"So, did Gaara meet Sasuke?" Ino asked after a moment.

A pause, before Gaara decided to answer Ino's question. "Yeah. He doesn't like me."

"He doesn't dislike you, he's just uncomfortable with strangers—"

"—judging by the glare I was receiving, I'm definitely not his favourite person." Gaara said.

"But nobody's Sasuke's favourite person! Well, except for..."

The name Kabuto disappeared on the tip of his tongue. Naruto refused to utter the poisonous name that made his stomach churn with uneasiness and nausea. Ino and Gaara almost heard the way something — something Naruto was going to say — sizzled on his tongue. Whilst Gaara was almost oblivious to what Naruto's hesitating look was about, Ino squirmed in her seat slightly, but it wasn’t out of fervid curiosity about one of her other best friends whom she hadn’t seen in a long time returning, but it was out of a feeling that was a mix between uneasiness and awkwardness.

"Am I missing something here?" Gaara asked expectedly, feeling the mood of the room changing from jubilation to perturbed like a flick of a switch, watching how two pairs of blue eyes changed from animated to dull in a few seconds.

Ino’s serious eyes turned to Gaara before her mouth started speaking words. Words that correlated with the story of what was going on with Sasuke — not his personal information such as the 'company' that not even Naruto knew the full story about, or what had happened that triggered Sasuke having PTSD in the first place, something that Naruto's knowledge was also quite limited on — and what Kabuto was planning on doing with Sasuke. Naruto couldn't help but feel slightly insulted; Gaara was allowed to know as much as he wanted and Naruto wasn't allowed to know
anything until Naruto confronted Ino? It seemed slightly unfair!

Honestly, Naruto would prefer Sasuke to tell him in the first place, but he still couldn't help but feel slightly insulted.

Gaara watched with austere eyes as his nods followed Ino's story accordingly, and Naruto felt bad for bringing out the sombre mood in everybody, but the situation was — no matter how he looked at it — always pinned to the back of his mind; it also seemed that it was drilled into Ino's brain, too, since she recollected every single part of the story, without missing a detail, almost like she had memorised it. Almost as if it had been painstakingly carved into her memory — something Naruto could relate about.

Sodas long forgotten, Gaara and Naruto — despite Naruto knowing the story already — listened to Ino's recollection of things; things that Naruto had witnessed and learned. Unconsciously, Naruto's fists clenched on his knees, and Gaara placed a reassuring hand on Naruto's shoulder after Ino had finished her account.

"I'm sorry." Gaara said simply. "I didn't know you two were going through that. It should be the last thing on your mind, especially if you two guys are at university—"

"—why're you concerned about us? Me and Ino have it easy..." Naruto murmured, his words coated in a biting anger, "I mean... easier compared to what Sasuke is goin' through. Pityin' people has never been somethin' that I do — you guys know that — but I can't help but feel sympathy for the guy, y'know? Jus' knowin' what Kabuto's doin'... it makes me so angry."

"You seem pretty concerned over him." Gaara said knowingly.

"I am—"

"He's your friend, then?" Gaara asked.

Naruto didn't know how to answer Gaara's question. Slowly, Naruto realised words started to come out of his mouth almost robotically.

"I wouldn't say friends, since he doesn't think so—"

"Okay but would you consider him as a friend?"

Naruto was slightly taken aback by Gaara's question. Of course he considered Sasuke a friend, despite the other not thinking of him as one, but that didn't matter. If Naruto thought of Sasuke as a friend, then that was all that mattered.

So, why couldn't the words escape his mouth?

'Yes, I consider Sasuke a friend'.

It was as easy as that, and yet, Naruto's mouth hesitated and quivered, refusing to utter the words.

Understanding that Ino was staring at him with a dubious look, anticipating his answer, whilst Gaara waited patiently, he felt annoyance swell in his gut. Clicking his teeth, Naruto practically darted up from the couch, unable to look Ino or Gaara in the eye properly; he felt heat flush his face, and there was no question in his mind that his bronze face was most likely tinted a hue of brilliant red. Luckily for him, due to him spending so much time in the sun — an attempt to try and conceal the scars on his face that he was highly conscious of — the red wasn't as noticeable as it would be if his complexion was as fair as either Gaara's or Ino's.
"I'm gonna get a drink, does anyone want anythin'?" He asked, his hand covering his face as he refused to look his best friends in the eye.

Ino shook her head slightly, a pitiful smile on her face, as Gaara firmly declined. Green eyes looked at Naruto's soda that rested on the coffee table; a pretty shitty excuse to try and avoid the question. The two people in the sitting room watched as Naruto walked out of the room. As soon as Naruto left, Ino's slight smile was replaced by a puzzled look as her eyebrow furrowed inquisitively, and Gaara turned his attention to her, noticing the pout on her face.

"Geez! What's his problem?" Her voice was a hushed whisper.

"I think he likes Sasuke," Gaara said.

"Well, of course he does! The amount of Naruto does for him, there's no reason that he wouldn't think of Sasuke as a friend—"

"No, I mean I think Naruto might have feelings for Sasuke." Due to Ino's confused look, he decided to elaborate further: "romantic feelings."

Periwinkle eyes slowly turned from perplexed to flummoxed, and Gaara could see how Ino was slightly caught off guard from Gaara's observation. A few moments passed between the two, before Ino's lips cracked a smile and a laugh escaped from pale-pink lips.

"What're you talking about?" She laughed. "Naruto's just a nice guy whose trying to help Sasuke out—"

"I've only seen Naruto like that once before." Gaara interjected. "Ages ago, in seventh grade, I found him putting a note into my sister's locker, I forgot what it said but it was some sappy poem. Temari still has it."

"Yeah, I remember how embarrassed he was when he was telling me." Ino laughed, before she actually absorbed the information that Gaara had just given her. "B-but that's stupid! I mean, Sasuke isn't the nicest guy. Naruto would have to be a masochist to like him!"

"That's just Naruto, though, isn't it? He always forms bonds with the people whom he feels an inclination to 'protect', or something like that. Do you remember Haku? Naruto didn't feel anything for him until . . ."

Ino looked hesitant for a while, contemplating, before she started to defend her point again. "Yeah, okay, I see your point, but we can't be certain, can we? I mean, we're just jumping to conclusions."

"Maybe." Gaara sounded unconvinced.

As if on cue, Naruto walked back into the room a few moments later, carrying a glass of water with a lime-coloured straw, loudly slurping on his drink to blatantly avoid the previous conversation. Helping himself to a drink at Ino's and Sakura's dorm was a common practice now, and he found it quite natural, so it wasn’t like anyone saw it as him being rude, at least, or uncommon.

Silence filled the room. Eventually it was filled up with a loud, obstreperous slurping that was almost obnoxious. Gaara seemed unaffected — as he usually did — by the obvious awkward langour in the room as Ino's face was filled with consternation. Placing his glass on Ino's coffee table with an audible *clink*, Naruto stood up and Ino and Gaara watched him.

This isn't how he wanted their reunion to be.
Once again, Naruto had ruined something that was meant to be seen as fun.

"Listen, I better get goin'..."

"O-oh yeah, I have some course work to do, too..." Ino mumbled.

The awkward languor hung in the air for a moment before Ino awkwardly rushed her goodbyes, looking upset whilst Naruto was puzzled at her reaction for a moment, before remembering her concern over Sasuke from what Naruto had told her earlier — that's what Naruto thought it was anyway. Wrapping her arms around Gaara — even though Naruto wasn’t greeted by such an amiable gesture — Ino squeezed him slightly before he patted her back in return, almost reassuring her. Naruto smiled at the interaction between the two.

Ino waved to them from the doorway, leaning against it. Naruto hoped that she was alright. Comforting people had never been his forte — he thought it best to leave them alone when upset, but that usually made the situation worse — so he decided that anybody would be a better comfort than him. Seeing one of his friends — Ino, at that — looking so dolorous couldn't help but strike a chord of sadness within him, too.

It seemed like moments until they reached Naruto's dormitory again. Languidly, Naruto pushed his key into the lock and turned it, immersed in deep contemplation. Green eyes looked obliquely at Naruto, from the furrow in his blond brow, to the part of his lip that was hidden behind his teeth, looking almost nervously at the door.

Gaara decided to leave any questions — for now at least. Naruto looked like there was a war going on his mind, considering his uneasy expression, and Gaara let him be. Instead, he awaited Sasuke's spiteful welcome back as soon as he walked through the door; you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to know that Sasuke didn’t like Gaara, no matter how much Naruto tried to defend against that point. All you needed to do was be able to understand facial expressions that even a four-year-old would be able to understand.

When they walked inside, into the living room, they noticed that Sasuke hadn’t moved from his seat. Well, he now had his laptop equipped on him — Naruto remembered that Sasuke always kept his laptop in his room — so he had obviously moved at some point in the proceedings.

"Yo, Sasuke."

Sasuke just grunted in a greeting, almost sounding like disapproval. Light twinkled in the corner of his glasses, reflected from his laptop's screen. Angry typing, hysterical typing, was the only thing that filled up the room — Sasuke hadn’t even been bothered to turn on the television.

"We're goin' to go into my room. Call me if you need anythin'."

Sasuke just nodded slightly, his gaze never unwavering from his screen, but Gaara could see Sasuke's tense demeanour; his eyes then strolled over to Naruto, whose gaze was lingering on Sasuke a little too long, and Gaara's emerald eyes also noticed the small smile on Naruto's face.

But he said nothing.

Instead, he followed Naruto into his room.

They say opposites attract, Gaara thought idly to himself; perhaps Naruto and Sasuke were opposites in some aspects, but Gaara couldn't help but make one single observation:

They were similar in so many ways.
Well, he definitely saw aspects in Sasuke that he saw in high school Naruto. Maybe that was why Naruto felt such an insatiable need to protect Sasuke. Perhaps that's why Naruto felt attracted — a magnetic pull — towards Sasuke's personality; despite Sasuke's algid personality being the polar opposite of Naruto's, two years ago, Naruto was the mirror image of Sasuke. Pitifully smiling to himself in consideration for his friend, Gaara couldn't help but feel slightly sorry for Naruto.

Liking someone like Sasuke couldn't be easy.

Then again, Naruto had never gone down without a fight.

Chapter End Notes

have i ever mentioned how much i love gaara?

too bad i can't write his character to save my life; this is the first time that I ever tried to write him and it didn't turn out too well, so sorry!!

anyway, see you next time! I'm going to try and catch up with this fic so the updates can get normal again!!
Chapter XIV:

Fuck.

Fuck.

Naruto was screwed.

No, beyond screwed, even.

Naruto was doomed.

Completely and utterly doomed.

Recalling Gaara's words — Gaara's hints — towards his dormitory the whole way back, he realised that he had made a fatal mistake. One deadly misapprehension.

Somewhere along the line, Naruto realised that he had — unfortunately — developed some feelings for Sasuke. Perhaps. Maybe. There was an eight-five percent chance — no; there was an eighty-eight point five percent chance, maybe even ninety, or ninety-five — that he had developed some feelings for Sasuke.
Where they had come from, Naruto had no idea. Secretly being a masochist wasn't something that he was expecting — hell, Naruto hated pain, that's why he was always making sure about what he said to Ino or Sakura so he didn't receive a royal ass-kicking from them — but hey, at least he discovered a secret kink—

Nope.

Who was he kidding? Naruto hated pain.

And he didn’t want to have to kinkshame himself, so he was settling with he didn't have a pain kink.

So, why did he like Sasuke out of all people?!

What did he see in his stoic roommate? The disapproving glares that promised death? The disapproving grunts that barely answered anything? The dark eyes that always judged him no matter what he did?

Attracted to Sasuke's looks? Maybe. There was no reason in denying that Sasuke was an attractive individual. Lying to himself was pointless.

Ebony hair, that was silkier than it seemed, and tenebrous dark eyes, that Naruto sometimes felt himself get lost in when Sasuke wasn't looking. Admiring Sasuke's looks was one thing, but actually liking him in the non-platonic sense?! Naruto couldn't believe this bullshit. Yes, Sasuke was good-looking, but what else was there? Naruto chose personality over looks — that was common knowledge. He always did, and he always would; having a good-looking partner was nice, but what was the point if they didn't have the personality? Dating 'pretty people' was always hard since they were pretty much always too immersed with themselves; the one person who he could think of to battle that stereotype was his ex-boyfriend Haku, but that was because he had so much going on with himself. Actually, now that Naruto pondered on it, Haku's 'looks' were one of the biggest insecurities that Haku had about himself.

Too immersed in his own thoughts, Naruto wasn't even able to hear the ruffling on his papers that were laid out on his desk. Illegible chicken scratch covered pieces of paper that were branded in food stains — some more noticeable than others. Gaara's eyes tried his best to decipher Naruto's unkempt handwriting, holding the paper up at different angles, hoping that the change in light would help him read it at all.

Half an hour passed, and Naruto finally came to the conclusion that he (maybe) liked Sasuke a tiny bit. Only a tiny bit. A small crush that was probably made out of his hormones being all around the place; it may even fade in a few days or weeks.

Blue eyes zoomed in on his best friend who was reading the pieces of stained paper held in his hands; after a few moments, Naruto processed that Gaara was reading a draft on one of his stories that he had contemplated sending to Jiraiya in his daily letters than deemed no response, but he eventually scrapped the idea. Why would a famous author care about a fan's work? Naruto was one-hundred-and-one percent certain that Jiraiya had been sent much better pieces of work in his lifetime. Better vocabulary, improved grammar and a breath-taking plot that Naruto's works would never be able to live up to.

"This is good." Gaara said eventually, noticing Naruto's eyes on him.

Naruto laughed disbelievingly. "Sure."

"No, it actually is." Gaara said. "Well, except for the handwriting; that's chicken scratch.
"I'm sorry that my handwriting isn't calligraphy!"

"Far from it." Gaara jived. "Is this one of the drafts you've sent to Jiraiya?"

Naruto's eyes widened slightly as he grabbed the pieces of paper from Gaara's hands, his skin flushed with embarrassment at Gaara's implication. "N-no way!" He stammered. "I sent him two when I was younger, sure, but it's somethin' I regret! S'like one of those things that you have flashbacks of embarrassment about two years later! How obnoxious was it for me to think that he had the time to even look at my work?"

"I'm sure he'd like this," said Gaara. "I mean, I haven't read all of it, but it's a good idea. Just expand it a little—"

"—Nope! No freakin' way!" Naruto huffed, organising — to the best of his ability, anyway — his papers on the desk. "Jiraiya likin' one of my works is a dream but... I would feel like I'd be annoyin' him, y'know? If I didn't get a reply then, there's no chance I'd get one now."

"In Jiraiya's defence, he was beyond busy, juggling two books at the same time." Gaara told him. "He was on a deadline, too. If you had three months to complete two books, I doubt you'd even attempt to look at your fan mail. He's not thinking of writing any books anymore, right? Didn't he just finish that series you read? The porn one—"

"IT'S NOT PORN!!" Naruto screeched; he had caught himself saying that phrase too many times recently. "And anyway, sendin' my works to Jiraiya makes me feel sick with anticipation and nervousness; if I didn't send them, it'd be better. S'not like I have any time anyway."

"You do have time, you're just too lazy to arrange a specific time." Gaara chastised.

"Can we just drop it, please?" Naruto asked. "I'm not sendin' it. That's final."

Gaara didn't remember Naruto being so serious. Whenever something would inconvenience him, he would gradually make the other person drop it in a jokily way. Naruto's firm voice when he requested Gaara drop the subject was something Gaara had only heard a few times — enough times that he could count it on his fingers on one hand. He couldn't help but realise that, even though they had been apart for two and a half months, Naruto had matured in such a short time.

"I didn't remember you being so serious." He smiled, satisfied with Naruto's final verdict.

"I didn't remember you bein' so pushy." Naruto rebuked, a smile on his face.

The rest of the day consisted of Gaara and Naruto just talking. Fortunately, no awkward silences that usually occurred after you didn't see somebody for a long period of time drifted between them; Naruto's loquacious tongue didn't cease talking, and Gaara had a fitting reply that either coerced a laugh or a rejoinder from Naruto — all in good humour.

Naruto moaned onto Gaara about how he needed to meet the rest of his friends that he had made at KU, the main ones being Sakura, Shikamaru and Kiba. He told them stories about all of them, and even Gaara found Kiba's puerile trick at Naruto's birthday humorous. Gaara also told Naruto about some friends that he had made at Suna University. Somebody going by the name Rock Lee sounded like somebody Naruto wanted to meet, judging by his perfervid personality; a cousin duo — Neji and Hinata — that Gaara told him about sounded fun to be around too. Shy Hinata, trying to break out of her comfort zone, usually resulted in a comedic situation, or, if she got some attention from some other males — since, according to Gaara, she was quite attractive — Neji would jump in like an overprotective father that made Naruto burst out into a ball of chuckles. Lastly, Gaara told Naruto
about a girl called TenTen who was apparently a black belt in martial arts, Lee slowly following behind with a violet belt. Apparently, upon their first meeting, TenTen had slammed Neji and Gaara into the floor almost simultaneously, thinking that they were following her back to her dormitory, when, in fact, Neji — one of Gaara's roommates, along with Lee, since at Suna there were more than two people occupying a dorm — had forced said redhead to join him to visit Hinata's dormitory — due to his overprotective proclivities towards his cousin that were almost obsessive, and Lee hadn't turned up yet — that also happened to be TenTen's place of residence, too. Neji, despite having been flung to the floor, had allegedly been relieved to know that somebody skilled in self-defence was Hinata's roommate so he didn't have to worry so much. Gaara told Naruto that he found Neji's worries a bit excessive, anyway, since Suna, according to Gaara, had amazing security that some predators would never be able to get through, since you needed a student card to even try to get in. Naruto was amazed at such a complex system. Damn Gaara and his — well, his uncle's, who was his legal guardian now — richness. All Konoha had were a few security guards that looked like they were going to blow their brains out within the hour.

Tears pricked in the corner of Naruto's eyes as Gaara told him one anecdote concerning a bet made between Lee and Neji that ended up with Neji — being the pontifical person that Gaara had made him out to be — getting drunk out of his mind and doing some embarrassing things — since neither Neji or Hinata had been drunk before since they apparently came from an ancient, supercilious family that thought that things such as alcohol were beyond them — that Naruto knew that if he ever did them, he would never live them down.

Their conversation was interrupted by a large growl emitting from Naruto's stomach.

"I'm guessing that you're hungry?" Gaara smirked.

"Leave me alone! I haven't eaten all day!" Naruto argued. "I wonder if Sasuke'll make us anythin'. . ."

Gaara flashed Naruto a questioning look that said 'are you sure about that?', and Naruto quickly interpreted. "Basically, I go and get the ingredients, and Sasuke cooks. It's a fair deal since I can't cook to save my life."

"Yeah. I remember being in your home ec." Gaara recalled. "I still don't know how you managed to burn the icing on the stove."

"Hey! It ended up tastin' nice!"

"But not intentional."

Pulling a face at Gaara's reply — mainly because he couldn't think of a rebuke for himself — something caught Naruto's eye on the way out of his room, all wrapped up for him: Gaara's present. He had completely forgot.

"I forgot your present!" Naruto exclaimed, grabbing it from the side.

Gaara shrugged. "It's okay. I only put my time, effort and money into it, but it's okay. Forgetting about it was the right thing to do. Thank you so much for this honour—"

"Shut up! There's other things on my mind, alright?!" Naruto prodded back, poking Gaara's cheeks as a way of scolding him. "I'll open it after we've finished eatin'."

Gaara smiled as he followed Naruto out of the room. As soon as they walked into the living room, it was obvious that Sasuke hadn't moved from his spot in the slightest. He was still sitting there, angrily
typing on his laptop. Naruto couldn't help but feel slightly sorry for the keyboard.

"Yo, Sasuke, when're you makin' dinner?"

"I'm not. I've got an essay to finish."

"I bet you got that today, though!"

"That's beside the point. It's better to get it finished now."

Naruto sighed, before he turned around to Gaara and smiled at him apologetically. "Guess gettin' takeout. There's a really cheap Chinese place down the road."

"Sounds good."

"Do you want somethin' Sasuke?"

"No." The words were said so quickly Naruto wasn't even sure if it was possible.

Furrowing his blond brow, Naruto stared at Sasuke in a disbelieving way. He couldn't believe that Sasuke wasn't hungry, especially since he probably hadn't eaten anything at all; there were no dishes in the dishwasher beside his own — since Sasuke would slaughter him if he didn't tidy up the kitchen — so there was no evidence that Sasuke had eaten today. The idea of Sasuke being hungry but not admitting it due to some misplaced pride of not wanting to go out with him or Gaara sort of ticked him off, but what could you do? Naruto couldn't force Sasuke out of the dormitory — not when they had company anyway. Perhaps he would have a chance if Gaara wasn't here, but Gaara was here—

Until he heard it.

Victory.

A loud rumble emerged from Sasuke's stomach, making even Sasuke's eyes widen slightly, knowing that he had been caught red handed in his deliberate attempts to lie. If Naruto didn't really care for his life he would have laughed at Sasuke's failed attempt, but he did, unfortunately, care about keeping his head on his shoulders, so he decided to keep his comments about his sort-of victory to himself; despite Sasuke obviously being able to feign facial expressions — or lack thereof — pretty well, he couldn't control things such as his emotions, or his stomach.

"You sure you don't want to?" Naruto asked, a triumphant smirk playing on his features.

Yep. That was the Stare Of Death™ aimed directly at him.

Another stomach rumble.

Oh Sasuke looked so angry.

Naruto felt like a teacher was shouting at him, and he was trying his best not to laugh.

Then again, Gaara was a witness; Sasuke couldn't take on both of them at the same time, especially on an empty stomach. All he could do was angrily stare at Naruto as he felt the temperature in the room drop slightly — the temperature dropped most likely because Sasuke knew that Naruto was right.

Sasuke folded his arms and made sure not to look at Gaara or Naruto. "Fine." He muttered, making a grin of triumph crack on Naruto's whiskered cheeks. "But you're paying."

He said abruptly.
And now Sasuke was the one with the sardonic smirk on his face.

"B-but Sasuke—!"

"You call. I need to get something from my room." Sasuke said before getting up from his seat.

"Fuckin' Sasuke. . ." Naruto mumbled, grabbing his phone out of his pocket. "'M fuckin' broke too, y'know, you bastard . . ."

Drool was practically falling out of Naruto's mouth as soon as the Chinese food made its way through the door. Blue eyes twinkled in hunger as a massive grin made its way onto his face — Naruto couldn't really focus on his empty wallet when his eyes were set on something (that looked so utterly delicious) that could fill his empty stomach. He almost dived straight into the food, before he felt something tug on his shirt collar. Annoyed, Naruto's gaze settled on a stern-looking Sasuke who still had (a rather tight) grip on his shirt collar.

"What?"

"Don't start yet."

"What? Why?"

"Because we're not all ready, moron."

Seeing that Gaara was still absent, and Sasuke hadn't sat down in his chair yet — although he probably would have if he didn't have such a tight grip on his collar, damn it — Naruto sighed and settled back down in his seat.

"Fine. I'll wait."

Sasuke grunted, before sitting down in the seat that he usually occupied. They had put out an extra chair for Gaara to sit on — well, actually, they had put out an extra chair that was a tiny bit more lower down compared to the others, so Naruto decided to sit on that one; since Gaara was a guest, he deserved the best treatment in this household, even if he was taking too long to come into the kitchen!

Gradually, Gaara came out carrying the present he had gotten for Naruto. Grinning, Naruto ushered Gaara back to the table, ecstatic to open the birthday present that Gaara had gotten him. Gaara gave Naruto the lamented red bag, sitting down in Naruto's usual seat.

"Open it."

"Ah, o-okay." He said nervously.

Though, he didn't know why he was nervous, but he just felt uncertain. Knowing Gaara, it was probably something like a bag of sand — not that he would have any qualms about it, of course, since it was from Gaara — because Gaara had always had an unhealthy obsession with sand.

Reaching his hand into the bag, Naruto felt something hard — wooden — inside of it, and pulled it out. Honestly, he had no idea what it was. Guessing things had never been Naruto's forte at all; that's probably why he failed so many of his tests in high school. However, what Gaara had got him for his birthday he had never expected: it was a photo frame.

Looking back at him were three pairs of eyes: green, electric blue, and a paler blue.
Naruto smiled at the picture. He remembered when this photo was taken. Right before he and Ino went to Konoha — _well, a night before_, to be more exact. The reason that he remembered it so well was because making Gaara take a picture was harder than _rocket science_ — not that Naruto had ever attempted rocket science, but it was apparently difficult and Naruto had no doubts in his mind that it was — and to be entirely honest, Naruto wasn't big on taking pictures either. It wasn't because he didn't like taking them necessarily, but it was just because he was definitely the least photogenic person on the planet. Being told to 'smile for the camera' always made him feel self-conscious, and then the picture ended up with Naruto having two more chins than he had in the first place, and looking like somebody invisible was pulling his lips into a painful, forced smile.

So, the good thing about this one was that it was natural.

A girl who went to their high school — her name was Shion, if he remembered correctly — shouted at them to take 'one last final picture', and since all of them had alcohol on their lips, they just relaxed their faces into a natural smile. Well, it wasn't as if Ino wasn't an expert of taking pictures, since she took about two (at the minimum) daily, but Gaara and Naruto weren't used to it. Contrasting with the lights behind them, a wide grin (belonging to Naruto), a small smile (belonging to Gaara) and a toothy smile painted in red lipstick (belonging to Ino) welcomed him.

Ah, he really did miss those days.

Naruto wasn't even aware of how long he was staring at the picture until Gaara snapped him out of his stupor — his tender smile and soft eyes — by speaking.

"It took really long for me to find a nice picture of us, since we're not the most photogenic people on the planet." Gaara joked.

"Gaara, this is . . . I'm speechless. Thank you so much. . ." He whispered.

Bittersweet nostalgia panged in his chest almost painfully, missing his (later, _much later_) high school days. They hadn't really changed that much — none of them — but Naruto could notice the subtle differences. The biggest difference was probably how _mature_ they looked now, despite it only being three and a half months ago, if even that. Losing any baby fat they had on them — well, that was probably because of those few remaining days before you got your monthly student loan and you had to survive off water and any remaining food you had in your kitchen — and just looking more grown up.

"Sasuke, look at it. Do you think I look any different?" He asked, trying to include a silent Sasuke into the conversation, flipping the photo frame around.

"Not really." Came the indifferent reply.

Green eyes inspected Sasuke's reaction thoroughly, much to the obliviousness of both Sasuke and Naruto.

Naruto winced at the (way too much) nonchalant-ness of the reply, but mentally shrugged all the same. It was Sasuke — in the company of somebody he didn't really know, at that — so what did he really expect? Sure, he felt bad for Sasuke — and he would understand if Sasuke was in a mood with him — but what was he meant to do? Push Gaara, _his best friend_, away? Despite him travelling all the way here with him?! No fucking way! In his humble opinion, he did a lot for Sasuke. Surely Sasuke could push this one little thing out of his memory?

Before he could come up with a reply, he felt his phone vibrate against his leg. Pulling said phone out of his pocket, Naruto saw that it was somebody from his lecture class — Yukata, a girl whom he
had spoken to a few times, with dark brown hair and a side fringe, who in Naruto's opinion was very attractive — was calling him. Quickly sliding the green button he held it up to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Naruto. I was wondering if you've done the report?"

"The report? You mean, the one that's in for tomorrow?" Naruto asked dumbfounded, taking into account that Naruto had wrote twenty-five pages for it.

"Yeah! That one."

Naruto couldn’t help but think about how ditzy the girl could be at times, but he laughed at the same time. Despite the fact that she could, at times, be ditzy, she was really friendly. "Yeah, I have. Why? Have you?"

"Haha, funny story. Basically, I was at a party, and had no time to do it—"

"You were at a party for two weeks?" He replied jokingly.

"S-shut up! Various parties, I mean. And my friend came up, so it just slipped my mind and now I'm totally screwed! I was wondering if you could help me with it."

"Help you? Do y'know how long it's gonna take?"

"I mean, just guide me! It'll take five minutes, tops!"

Naruto sighed. Leaving Gaara and Sasuke alone to their own devices didn't sound like the best idea. He wasn't swayed at all until he heard the pathetic sounding plead on the other end of the phone. "Please. I'll owe you big time!" She almost whined.

"Five minutes?"

"Five minutes." She confirmed.

Running a hand through his blond hair, Naruto sighed. "Fine. What dorm?"

A squeal came from the other end of the line. "Thank you! I knew I could count on you! I live in the West building — room 313."

"Yeah, yeah. I'll come in five minutes."

"Thank you, Naruto! You won't regret it."

I have a feeling I will, he thought, but didn’t dare to utter out loud. Instead, he settled for a smile and huffed out a laugh. "Yeah. I'll see you in a minute. See ya in a bit."

His reply was met by a long beep of the dial tone, and he quickly scanned through the messages on his home screen before locking his phone. He was ignoring them, but they just weren’t the top of his priority list at the moment. Standing up from the table — forgetting the Chinese that he paid for — he apologetically looked at Gaara and Sasuke, whilst simultaneously putting his cell phone back into his pocket.

"Guys, I'm really sorry, but I've gotta run. Need to help my friend with her English essay; I'll be five minutes tops."
"Can't she do her essay by herself?" Gaara asked.

"Apparently not." Naruto sighed. "Honestly, I wouldn't help her, but she's a friend so what can y'do?"

Gaara gave a firm nod whilst Sasuke just continued eating his food, but he was obviously listening to Naruto's words since his gaze was fixed on him.

"Okay. See you in five minutes, I guess." Gaara nodded.

"Yeah, see ya." Naruto turned his attention to Sasuke. "Bye, Sasuke."

Sasuke just grunted in response.

Turning around, Naruto couldn't help but pout.

Why was Sasuke being so uncommunicating today?!

Asshole.

Things between Sasuke and Gaara weren't the best. Eating in a piercing silence — filled up by the discreet crunch of their food or the slurping of their noodles — wasn't the enjoyable thing to do. Actually, considering the situation he was in now, Gaara would describe it as purely painful.

"This food's nice, huh?" Gaara said awkwardly, trying to fill the silence.

"Hn." Sasuke grunted, playing around with his noodles.

Gaara leaned his face on the palm of his hand, dissecting all of the food on his plate so he would have at least something occupying his mind other than the silence. Comfortable silence was something Gaara wouldn't mind at least. Hell, even an awkward silence out of not knowing what to say would be something Gaara would be able to tolerate; it wasn't as if Gaara was the most garrulous of people. Extending his hand and able to start a conversation at the click of his fingers like a pair of gregarious blondes he knew wasn't as easy for him as it was for other people. How do you just talk to people who you don't know? Especially an unresponsive person like Sasuke?

Awkward silences: yeah okay; comfortable silences: they were good; however, there was something about this silence.

Hostile.

On the contrary, it wasn't like Gaara was the most subtle person in the world; he wasn't blunt in a rude way, but he wasn't scared to ask a question that he was honestly curious of asking.

"What's your problem with me?" He asked. Not in an angry way; he didn't really care enough to be angry. His voice was indifferent.

Well, at least Sasuke looked at him. "What?" And he spoke. What else could he do?

"I don't really care if you do or not, but it's not like you have a reason. Or is it just my personality you don't like?" He flicked on piece of lemon chicken around his plate with a chopstick, "or, is it because I'm friends with Naruto?"

Sasuke's eyes narrowed. "What are you getting at?"
"Well, I'm no psychology student, but you seemed pretty pissed off when Naruto was looking at that picture frame of me, him and Ino." He stated. "Could it be, perhaps whilst you don't act friendly towards him, you could consider Naruto as a friend?"

"You didn't need to tell me you didn't study psychology; it's pretty obvious you don't if you came up with that conclusion."

"Perhaps so." Gaara said. "Though, if you continue acting like that for too long, Naruto might stop caring about your wellbeing; every person has their limits. If you continue ignoring him, or treating like you have done, you'll lose him; I'm sure you know that."

"And you think I care because?"

"Because you seemed pretty put out when you realised that he had other friends." He said rather outspokenly. Honestly, he wasn't trying to be rude. The words just wouldn't stop coming out the way they were; he had planned to say them more subtly, but whatever works. At least Sasuke was responding.

"What are you implying?" He questioned with a cocked brow.

"He's my friend," Gaara said finally, "and he's trying his best, so . . . treat him well . . . I guess." Gaara slumped in his seat, slightly put off by Sasuke's attitude. From what Naruto told him, he didn't like strangers at all, but it wasn't like he was quiet or antisocial, but it just seemed he was all-out rude! Seriously, what did Naruto see in him? "I mean, I just don't want Naruto to get hurt again, since he has been before."

Then again, Naruto had always favoured people for strange reasons.

Sasuke looked away from Gaara, stirring his noodles. "Shut up." He grumbled underneath his breath, so closely that Gaara barely heard it; he did hear it though, but he decided not to reply. Sasuke's pride seemed hurt enough for the time being, judging by the embarrassed almost-flush — because of course, he was above things such as showing emotions — on his cheeks and his blatant avoiding of Gaara's gaze.

Naruto owes me big time, Gaara thought.

Five minutes tops had been a lie.

A dirty, fabricated lie that was the reason people were sent to the fiery pits of hell to suffer.

He was exhausted. Yukata said five minutes — five minutes tops! — and he had been there for at least two hours; that estimation was him being generous! Night was upon him. Stars glistened in the sky, coating the sky in twinkling freckles as the moon shadowed overhead, brightening up a few surrounding grey clouds. Fresh air rolled through his locks, cooling himself off a bit; a cold breeze was nice now and again.

He prayed to whatever was up there that Sasuke hadn’t slaughtered Gaara yet; then again, Gaara was more than capable than defending himself, but Sasuke wouldn’t lose. It was against his pride.

He opened the door. Guilt festered in his chest — he felt bad for leaving Gaara alone with Sasuke; being alone with the anti-social teen couldn’t have been much fun. Conversation must have been awkward too—
Oh fuck he felt bad.

At least, from when he opened the door, no grotesque scene varnished in Gaara (or Sasuke's) body parts and/or organs were able to be seen, nor no copper scent wafted through the apartment — only the faint smell of Chinese food — so it had to be a good sign. He couldn’t see any signs of resistance either, or marks on the wall — okay, so they (most probably) hadn’t fought. That was good. At least things had progressed better between Gaara and Sasuke than they had between Naruto and Sasuke.

Walking into the living room, Naruto could see that Sasuke was (unsurprisingly) sitting down on the couch in the living room, (unsurprisingly) typing angrily on his keyboard like his life depended on it. "I'm back," said Naruto.

"I heard the door open and close, so I figured." Sasuke replied, seeming uninterested.

"Why're you bein' extra-bastardy today?" Naruto asked, sounding slightly offended.

"What do you mean?" Sasuke asked, not looking up from his laptop.

Sighing, Naruto shook his head. "Doesn't matter. I'm gonna go find Gaara."

Whilst leaving the room, Naruto didn’t notice the pair of black eyes that stared at his retreating back, his gaze unwavering. Not until Naruto left the room did the pair of dark eyes turned back to the computer screen; in all honesty, he was taken back by the words he had subconsciously typed in on his essay, followed by the blinking cursor almost mockingly:

You'll lose him

With an audible slam, Sasuke closed his computer screen shut.
Fifteen

Chapter Notes

*crawls from the depths of exam hell to post another chapter*

hey guys remember me from like 10 years back well im back to post another chapter sorry it's been long just exams has destroyed me as a person and i dont really know who i am anymore so without further waiting here's chapter 15 (i feel like that one relative that you only ever see once every two years at a family gathering you know who i'm talking about)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XV:

"Naruto, I think you should."

"No fuckin' way." Came the resolute reply.

"Why are you so unsure about it?"

"Because I doubt he'd want some shitty draft for a book by some university kid!"

"You doubt yourself too much."

"You overestimate me, actually. I know my own capabilities."

Grabbing the ruffled draft from Naruto's bed — since it had been tugged between the two of them a substantial amount during the past half an hour — Gaara, once again, skimmed through the words, reading out his favourite lines as if they were Shakespeare's own.

"You're telling me this isn't good?" Gaara asked afterwards, his feet moving backwards to try and avoid Naruto's grabbing hands.

"Give it me back, god dammit!" Naruto ordered, stalking after Gaara at the same pace.

"Not until you send it to him; I'm sure he's missing your works." Gaara replied jokingly.

"He hasn't read any! Don't you understand?!"

"J.K Rowling got rejected many times, and now here she is — the first millionaire to make all of her money from her books."

"And Harry named his child fuckin' Albus Severus. I don't want my characters going out in such a demeaning fashion!" Came the light-hearted reply. "But seriously, give me my papers back!"

Without complaint, Gaara passed the manuscript to an almost blubbing Naruto. He found it funny. Despite Naruto's usually headstrong personality (well, that was something that the blond had
developed between the last year of high school and hitherto) whenever it came to subject of Jiraiya, he would suddenly get all embarrassed and weak-kneed. Looking a bit ruffled, Naruto straightened out the papers with an audible 'hmph'. Gaara couldn’t help but think that such an action was too pompous for Naruto, but he was looking like a kicked puppy.

"Do you really think I should send it to him?" Naruto asked in a hushed whisper after a moment of silence.

So now he was considering it.

"Yes." Came Gaara's firm reply.

"Hm. . . maybe. . ." He pondered. "I-I mean l-like. . . only if I think I should! L-later, if anythin'!"

"Whatever you say," Gaara mocked saluted, sitting on Naruto's bed.

"Like. . . just imagine how awesome it would be! Gettin' a letter back from Jiraiya about my work! Sayin' he liked it!" He exclaimed, blue eyes sparkling in awe. Grabbing Gaara's shoulders, he shook him lightly as if trying to somehow convince him, despite Gaara being on board before Naruto was. "Like, how amazin' would that be, Gaara?!"

"Pretty amazing, if you ask me."

"Fuck! I mean. . . I've got to send it now! You've convinced me!"

And in the span of three seconds, Gaara watched the exuberant grin fade to one of trepidation and worry. "B-but. . . what if he doesn’t like it?"

"He will."

"How do you know?"

"I just know."

Gaara was tired now. He just wanted to sleep; even though he probably wouldn't sleep, no matter how tired he was, the thought was still nice. Then again, his insomnia had been getting better over the years. It had started getting better ever since his father had been apprehended. Immersed in comfortable — though, admittedly a little too gaudy for his liking — orange covers and the university bed that was much more comfortable than his own, he noticed how weary his body actually was. Damn. He went to the wrong university it seemed. Then again, Suna did have a better geology course than Konoha.

But still. Damn.

"Gaara, you can't go to sleep!! You're leavin' tomorrow!!"

"Yeah but we'll still stay the whole day together." Gaara yawned, soaking himself in the bed sheets whilst Naruto tried to make himself comfortable on the floor. "I'm not leaving till later."

"Okay, then me, you and Ino have to spend the whole day together—" A pause, until Naruto started to speak again but more hesitant. "Hey, speakin' of Ino, d'you know why she seemed so. . . upset today?"

"No clue," Gaara said quickly.

Despite him being closer to Naruto than Ino — not like there was a significant difference between
who he liked better though, in all honesty — he wasn't going to reveal Ino's feelings on the spot like that. Either Naruto had to figure it out (unlikely, considering how dense he could be at times) or Ino could tell him about her feelings (which also seemed unlikely, considering how Ino thought — one time she had drunkenly and tearfully confessed to Gaara — that if she said anything about her feelings, things between Naruto and her would become awkward).

Thankfully, Gaara was happy that he had no romance drama in his life. Hearing it from other people was almost laughable, then again, his sister and brother had told him many times that he wasn't as empathetic as he should be towards other people's problems but then they coddled him about how it 'wasn't his fault, but his father's'. Their analysis was false, however. It wasn't like he wasn't empathetic, but he just wasn't empathetic towards stupid problems. Romantic attraction just seemed a lot more of a chore than anything else, no matter how many times movies tried to tell him differently. Friendship seemed much more entertaining.

"Yeah, guess you're right," replied Naruto, staring at the off-white ceiling above him. "Guess it was just about Sasuke."

"Probably." Gaara mumbled.

"You're sleepin' already? Pathetic." He joked, hearing the grogghiness in Gaara's voice.

"Not really. I'm tired, but it's not like I'm going to sleep."

"Oh yeah. Your insomnia and all that." Naruto remembered. "Damn, I bet your roommates get pissed off. It's been getting better though, I thought. Your insomnia, that is."

"Yeah, it has. Way better than it used to be." Gaara said. "Neji gets pissed off, but Lee doesn't really care. He has too much energy to fall asleep right away."

"I have to meet this Lee guy; he sounds fuckin' awesome." Naruto laughed.

"He has even more energy than you."

"Impossible. Might have to kill him."

"He's pretty good at martial arts. I don't think you stand a chance."

"Then I'd get Ino to destroy him."

"Yeah. She probably has a fair shot."

Naruto couldn't sleep.

Not in the slightest.

Making a conscious effort not to toss and turn had been on his mind, too, since Gaara was the lightest sleeper he had ever had the misfortune to sleep with. Taking Gaara's insomnia into account — luckily it had dithered significantly over the years — he didn’t really want to disturb his friend. Getting a good night of sleep was actually a big deal to Gaara, no matter how stupid it sounded, and Naruto wasn’t going to be the one to destroy that.

Damn, he should have slept in the living room as originally intended.

Perhaps he should attempt to make a break to the living room. Waking up Gaara was something that he really didn’t want to do, but then again, if he tried to go out and accidentally woke Gaara up in
the process, it wasn’t as if Gaara would magically fall back to sleep like Naruto would.

He remembered when they were sixteen, and it was the first time Gaara had ever slept over Naruto’s house. The following morning, he woke up to find Gaara playing a game on his phone, his sleeping bag had been draped over the top of his head, and dark pillows rested underneath his eyes. Baffled, Naruto just stared at Gaara, contemplating whether he had slept or not. Green eyes had met Naruto’s, the white of his eyes tinged red. That was the day Gaara had told Naruto about his insomnia, stemming from his past abuse, feigning that he had ‘forgotten to mention it’ and said that it ‘wasn’t worth mentioning’, much to Naruto’s outrage.

Luckily for Naruto, however, it wasn’t as if his floorboards were squeaky, but he just didn’t trust if there were any objects (especially sharp objects) lying down on the floor. Even know knew that his ‘tidying habits’ were lethal. Using his flashlight on his phone wasn’t really an option either, to see if anything was on the floor, since Gaara would wake up as soon as it turned on.

Life sucked.

After five minutes of contemplating whether he should get up, he decided he had to. Trying to control his breath wasn’t working for him, and he felt like he was going to suffocate any moment now from the lack of oxygen entering his lungs; trying to control his breathing was counterproductive anyway, since sooner or later, he was going to be panting for air. It was better to do that outside, so Gaara wouldn’t awake from sleep.

Noiselessly, Naruto slowly through the blanket from his figure, that was barely doing a good job in keeping him warm, anyway. He should have brought that woollen one from the living room to keep him warm, but unfortunately it belonged to Sasuke so it wasn’t like the bastard would let him use it anyway. Tossing the blanket aside, he crawled from the makeshift mattress — a bundle of anything comfortable he could find, since he forgot to ask Ino for the air mattress — and patted his hands softly on the floor, trying to detect any offended objects. Crawling out of the room seemed to be the best way to get out, and he was sure he could reach the handle despite him being in the crouched position he was currently in. Thankfully, he couldn’t feel anything on the floor that would hurt him, so getting out of his room was fairly easy. Reaching for the doorknob above as soon as he felt the door with his hands, he turned it, and winced when it made the smallest creak of noise; he looked over at Gaara, who was as still as a corpse; a telltale sign that he was still asleep.

Eventually, Naruto was able to make it out of his bedroom undetected. Getting out his room quietly was quite an amazing accomplishment for Naruto, considering he wasn’t the most patient person in the world, and he was surprised he didn’t rush it. He didn’t want to wake Gaara up, and he was feeling lucky that he didn’t — well, he assumed — wake him up.

Scratching the back of his blond spikes, Naruto walked into the living room and was stupefied by the sight.

Sitting in the same armchair that he was sitting in previously — when Naruto arrived back from helping Yukata — Sasuke, it seemed, had fallen asleep.

He was surprised that Sasuke had left himself so vulnerable. Naruto approached the sleeping male with caution; at least he was having a peaceful — well, Naruto wouldn’t say peaceful since he knew what Sasuke's dreams consisted of, but at least he wasn't tossing and turning or breaking out in a panicked sweat — sleep. Naruto inspected Sasuke closely just to check if he was still breathing.

Thankfully, he was.

Soft breaths emerged out of slightly-chapped lips; in, out, in out. Mimicking the path of his breathing,
his chest slowly rose and fell — Naruto couldn’t help how different he seemed. How much calmer his demeanour was—

A movement.

Sasuke moved.

Naruto couldn’t help how much his heart had sped up. He thought Sasuke had woken up. Sasuke would kill him if Naruto ever saw him asleep — he just knew.

Naruto heard a noise escape Sasuke's mouth.

A shiver.

The bastard was cold.

(Well, the bastard was always cold).

But, temperature-wise, he was cold.

Naruto released a shuddering breath, unaware that he was even holding one in. Looking around the room, he saw the woollen black blanket, belonging to Sasuke, resting on the backbone of the couch. Removing the laptop from Sasuke's lap — how the fuck did that not fall whilst Sasuke was asleep? — he rested it on the coffee table and went to grab said blanket from the back of the couch. He almost moaned at how soft it was; Sasuke must've spent a fortune on this!

Small pieces of lint could be seen on the fringes on the ebony blanket, embellished with stitching of different colours. He couldn't help but take note of how beautiful the blanket was; he was surprised that Sasuke would even leave it out. Sometimes, Sasuke would lay the blanket on top of him when he was doing essays and he was having 'one of those days' where he just sat around the house, however, he would never forget to put it back into his room afterwards.

Walking over to Sasuke's sleeping form, Naruto slowly unfolded the blanket so he could place it over Sasuke's entire body.

Just when he was about to place it on top of Sasuke, ebony eyes darted open as soon as Naruto's hands came anywhere close to him, and Sasuke sprung off the couch, pinned Naruto to the floor, and placed his forearm around his neck. Staring back into Sasuke's alerted, narrowed eyes utterly dumbfounded, Naruto released a single breath just before Sasuke's pressure on Naruto's neck increased.

"Bastard! It's me!" Naruto hissed in a hushed whisper, trying not to wake Gaara.

Eyes widening with acknowledgement, Sasuke's pressure on Naruto's neck decreased significantly, and he slowly withdrew his hand from Naruto's neck all together. "Idiot! What were you doing?"

"Tryin' to warm you up! You were shiverin' in your sleep, y'know!"

Rolling off Naruto, Sasuke leaned his back against the couch, drawing one of his knees into his chest, whilst leaving the other one straightened. Huffing out a breath, Naruto watched Sasuke's form noticeably slacken. Leaning his head back, Sasuke placed it onto the couch and stared at the ceiling, immersed in deep contemplation. Whilst Naruto didn’t know what Sasuke was thinking about, he was sure it was something important judging by his facial expression, looking very cautious.

"I didn’t mean to startle you." Naruto said after a few moments of silence.
"I didn’t mean to attack you." Came the reply, echoing into the silence of the room.

Judging by his voice, Sasuke seemed lost in his own thoughts to give a half-assed reply.

"Well, I'm definitely not tired anymore," Naruto grunted, standing up. "Wanna watch somethin' with me?"

"Like what?"

"I dunno. Let's see what films are on." Naruto said, turning on the television. "We got any food?"

"The rest of your Chinese is in the fridge."

"Sweet!" Naruto grinned, standing up from the floor.

"Can you get me a glass of water?" Sasuke said after a few moments.

"Anythin' for you, your majesty." He replied mockingly from the doorway.

Ten minutes later, Naruto returned with some heated up Chinese food, and a glass of water for Sasuke. Joining Sasuke on the couch — collapsing right next to him — Naruto placed his Chinese food on the coffee table in front of him and wrapped the woollen blanket — that had ended up on the floor — around Sasuke's shoulders.

"What are you doing?" Sasuke demanded, looking slightly alarmed.

"You're cold. Duh."

"Idiot." He mumbled, staring back at the television. "What are we watching anyway?"

"Horror movie, if you're not too chicken." He answered smugly.

"I watched The Exorcist when I was six." Sasuke stated bluntly.

Naruto almost jumped out of his chair. "No way!" He squawked. "H-how? That's like the scariest movie ever!"

"I found it in my cousin's room when I was younger and heard my. . ." a reluctant pause, " . . .
brother talking about it, so I wanted to watch it and—"

"Don't." Naruto said.

"Don't what?"

"Don't talk about things you don't want to." Naruto replied, having noticed Sasuke have to force out the word 'brother'. His stern gaze was transfixed on the television screen. "Just don't. . ."

Flicking through the television channels, he was finally able to get onto the section with all of the films; at home, he had Netflix on his television but this television was too cheap to get Netflix on it. If it wasn't, he would have went on Netflix at the start, but alas. He had to settle for horror channels — it wasn't like they were appallingly bad, but just not the best.

Eventually, he found a suitable film after what seemed like a millennium of searching: The Omen.

It wasn't the scariest film, admittedly, however it was the only somewhat decent horror movies that were on; the rest consisted entirely on horror films with shitty synopsis' and looked like they had a
maximum one thousand pound budget. At best.

Then again, it wasn't like Naruto had ever watched The Omen all the way through, but it couldn't be *that* scary. When he was eleven, he had gotten too scared and ran out of the room crying; somehow, Ino managed to sit all the way through it unflinchingly. Fuck, it was only about a little demon child — he handled Sasuke every day!

So, how bad could it really be?

"You cool with this?" Naruto asked.

"Yeah. The first one's good. The rest are shitty, though."

"Never watched them," admitted Naruto.

Sasuke turned around to look at Naruto, right brow raised. "Really?"

"Really." Naruto confirmed. "I haven't watched a lot of horror movies; I always like stickin' with comedy ones. S'always safe, y'know?"

"I bet you're an Adam Sandler fan?" Sasuke mocked. "Seems like your type of humour."

"His old films were good!" Naruto argued, "his new ones... they aren't the best."

Sasuke snorted. "Of course you thought they were good. It was your type of humour."

"Are you tryin' to insult me?!"

"Sh. I'm trying to watch the movie." Sasuke chastised.

Pouting, Naruto folded his arms and decided not to reward Sasuke's words with a reply. Damn he was so infuriating! Why did he even like hi—

_Nope. Take all of those thoughts out of your mind, Naruto. It's just your hormones acting up, god dammit!_

Forgetting completely about his Chinese food on the coffee table — something he had done twice in the span of one day, and Naruto *never* forgot about food! — Naruto kept his eyes on the movie. It was his first time watching it, and he was going to enjoy it!

Darkness covered his sight.

Well, except for the three gaps between his fingers that shone some light through.

Luckily, he still couldn't see the movie, that was always a plus. Covering his eyes from the television didn't phase out the creepy choir singing in the background, however.

Shaky hands covered his eyes. He couldn't help but feel slightly stupid. Half an hour ago, he was teasing Sasuke about being *scared* of horror films — even though The Bastard™ was most probably in a cult himself — and here he was, shaking in his seat! Horror movies had always spooked him, but never this much! Supernatural entities were his weakness, dammit! Sadly, he had only found that out *after* he had watched this movie.

Seriously, could that creepy music just _stop_?
Why was Damien such a dick?

Seriously, Naruto hated this trait about himself! Always needing to prove something! Why couldn't he have just left Sasuke to his own affairs — why did he even offer to watch a horror movie and then bait Sasuke about it?!

Great, now those Rottweilers were barking.

Naruto shook his head, hands still covering his eyes, whilst muttering incoherent, silent 'no's underneath his breath. Watching a horror movie concerning satanic themes was definitely a bad idea! He could just imagine the condescending look Sasuke was shooting him right now, saturated in self-righteousness that it wasn’t Sasuke who was the chicken, but it was, in fact, Naruto himself.

Suggesting to watch a horror movie was stupid! Sure, he hadn’t watched one for like, what, two years? He would have thought now that he was older — therefore classed as more mature — that he wouldn’t be frightened of things — as Sasuke would say — as puerile as a measly horror movie that was made thirty years ago! Determination ran through his veins. He was Naruto fucking Uzumaki. Watching a horror film was nothing! All he had to do was remember that it was just a movie; it wasn’t real. Damien wasn’t real. The end of the film would conclude with a roll of credits, displaying the actors (note the emphasis on actors) names.

Opening his fingers slightly — letting more shreds of light make their way through — the screen was in plain sight. Ominous music played in the background, suiting the eerie theme of the film. Naruto could see that they were in a graveyard — why would you go in a Graveyard, for fuck’s sake, when the devil was fucking after you!! — walking around. Fog encircled the characters, and Naruto could hear the suspense building up in the music. Looking away wasn’t an option now. He would have to bear through the pain. If he could make it through one of Ino’s (many, many) rants when they were in high school, he could make his way through thi—

Suddenly, the sound blared out of the speaker, and Naruto's stomach did a leap. Before he even knew it, he had hidden his face on Sasuke's shoulder unthinkingly. Instinctively. Even afterwards, it didn't even come to mind that he was hiding his face on Sasuke's shoulder. Well, technically, Sasuke's blanket.

"Why did you even suggest a horror movie if you're scared of them?" Sasuke's voice asked.

"Because. . . I forgot they were scary." He answered dumbly, but it almost sounded like a pathetic sob. "I'm not scared of all horror movies. Only ones about demons and shit like that. . ."

"Do you want me to turn it off?"

Nodding, Naruto corroborated. Head still tucked in on Sasuke's shoulder, he felt Sasuke's arm move over to Naruto's side of the couch to retrieve the remote control. Creepy music — matching with the scene in the film, probably — played in the background, and Naruto refused to look up.

Soon, he heard the abrupt cut-off from channels as Sasuke changed them, ranging from people talking, to explosions — films nowadays — to a car driving.

Once again, Naruto was immersed in Sasuke's scent; the familiar (but not enough) combination of peppermint and sandalwood, mixed in with a tiny bit of aftershave that Naruto wouldn't mind borrowing — it smelt nice. Comforting. Naruto decided that he was weird; whenever he was near Sasuke, he couldn't help but think that he smelt nice. Sniffing people every time you got the chance to was weird. He wasn't a dog. Naruto was weird. That was the conclusion that he had come to. Soft
cotton pressed against his cheek, accommodation of the black, woollen blanket that was wrapped around Sasuke's shoulders; Naruto liked this blanket, he realised. Naruto liked everything about Sasuke, even his annoying, captious traits that would never really get him anywhere in life. Then again, Sasuke as a stubborn bastard who didn't know when to give up — well, perhaps he didn't like the arguments and the stubbornness that much. He didn't mind them, but it wasn't like he would miss them if they went away.

On the other hand, Naruto was just as stubborn as Sasuke.

However, despite all of that — despite everything — Naruto had (finally) admitted to himself that he perhaps had the smallest bit of feelings for Sasuke. Not like feeling feelings, but more like if Sasuke had a girlfriend — unlikely situation — he would maybe feel a little bitch jealous. Or if Naruto thought that Sasuke preferred somebody else to him, he wouldn't necessarily like it. Things like that. Surely that didn't mean romance, but just... protectiveness? Well, Naruto didn't even want to know what it was.

For now, he was fine with things like this.

However, a feeling in his gut warned him that things weren't going to stay like this forever.

He felt like something was going to change.

When the thought first popped into his mind — thanks to Gaara — he was slightly afraid at the implication. The idea of him liking Sasuke was preposterous! Liking a bastard such as Sasuke! Even Naruto had a little more respect for himself than that. Surmising that he was attracted to Sasuke's appearance was something he had tried to trick himself into — since the bastard was sort of hot — but deep down Naruto knew that that wasn't the case. Liking somebody for their looks was something Naruto frowned upon. Whenever Ino had a relationship based off 'how hot she had found a guy' it always ended in a tub of icecream and mascara-stained pillows.

And now, he didn't want to put his head back up because he was positive that he was beet red.

Anyway, Naruto slowly felt his body falling asleep. Sasuke hadn't made a great deal about him getting up, and Naruto was happy that not once, did he feel Sasuke tense up at the first sign of contact. Forgetting about other thoughts — other people — such as Gaara, Kabuto, Ino, Sakura... anything or anybody else... they weren't important right now. Letting himself have a peaceful, euphoric sleep was something that he needed, and immersed in Sasuke's scent that he found so comforting, he couldn't help but lull himself to sleep. Eyes fluttering closed (after not trying that hard to keep them open in the first place) he left himself relax against Sasuke's shoulder.

Sasuke could kill him in the morning.

Right now, he just wanted to sleep.

Dried drool rested on the outskirts of Naruto's mouth. His half-asleep mind decided to wipe it away with his tongue — he would have time to question why he did that later. Probably something to do with his hands — most of his body, more like — was still asleep.

Nuzzling into whatever object he was lying on, Naruto couldn't help but think that he wasn't sleeping on his pillow. Why wasn't he sleeping on his pillow?

Being half asleep had left his mind and thoughts in a complete disarray.

However, despite the surface that he wasn't lying on being as comfortable as his pillow, he couldn't
help how much warmer the object was; it wasn't a scintillating, electronic heat, no, on the contrary, it was a tender, soft heat. The only way Naruto could describe it was the same as being wrapped in his mother's arms when he was a child, bored out of his mind and joining her in watching murder mystery television shows, worming his way in between his arms and making himself at home, surrounded by the comforting body heat from his mother.

Whilst his half-asleep mind was wondering what he was lying on, he was too tired — too lazy — to open his eyes to answer his question. Curiosity pushed aside, Naruto's eyes fluttered closed once more. Getting as much sleep was his top priority right now. Nothing else mattered.

Until said object that he was lying on decided to move slightly too.

Sleep induced mind and all, Naruto was slightly confused. Why was his pillow — well, he had established that he wasn’t lying on his pillow, but it was a pillow, he had thought — moving?

"Shtop iyt. . . ." He mumbled, his voice having a slight slur in it due to sleep, nuzzling into his pillow more.

"Idiot. . . ." Came the tired reply.

Pillows didn’t talk. Well, from what Naruto knew anyway. Eyes opening, Naruto looked up to see two black eyes, resting underneath dark eye bags, staring back at him.

One blink. Two blinks. Three dumbfounded blinks.

Noting the obvious, disinterested demeanour he carried with him like an omen, Naruto knew, sleep induced mind or not, who was staring at him.

Sasuke.

And, to make matters worse, it wasn't just Sasuke staring at him. . . no, that would be too easy. Instead, to make his life that much more painful, it seemed that in his sleep, Naruto had decided to wrap both his arms around Sasuke and cuddle into the nape of his neck, almost having tucked himself into Sasuke's body.

What could he say? Naruto was a cuddler.

Sue him.

Actually, no. Don't. He was a university student — he couldn't afford it.

Considering how bright the room was, Naruto guessed that they had slept in this position till morning. Even Sasuke had eventually fallen asleep, judging by his position. Arm rested on the arm of the couch, and his head lying on it; somehow, even in that position, Sasuke was able to turn his attention to Naruto.

The low buzz of the television played in the background — one of those television shows that were put on early in the morning that nobody really watched — was a telltale sign that Sasuke had also dozed off, forgetting to turn the television off in the first place. That was probably going to rack up a hell of an electricity bill, he thought. Even Sasuke — who was the definition of the word 'careful' — the most careful person on the planet, managed to make one slip up. That was a bonus for Naruto though, since Sasuke would be paying for most of it. After last night — buying a fucking Chinese for Sasuke — Naruto really couldn’t afford to pay a heightened electricity bill.

"Mornin' . . ." He grumbled, his voice still husky from sleep; Naruto had no idea what to say. He was
surprised Sasuke didn't castrate him in his sleep, since he did fall asleep — and cuddled him, how embarrassing! — on him; then again, Sasuke probably fell asleep before he had the chance to realise that Naruto was asleep, so he had to be wary. Punishment — inflicted by Sasuke, that you could tell was going to be painful — was probably just around the corner.

"Get off me, moron." He grumbled, shifting slightly. "You're squishing me."

"Right. Sorry, sorry." Naruto apologised, awkwardly unwrapping his hands around Sasuke. "D'you know what the time is?"

Reaching out his left arm, Sasuke looked at the watch, embellished in way too much gold. "Nine-thirty-five."

"Fuck," groaned Naruto. "Hate wakin' up this early. I can never get back to sleep, and I'm tired for the rest of the day." He was silent for a moment, before he huffed again. "And I have a lecture today. Fuck."

"Why's that such a bad thing?"

"I'm tired and Gaara's leavin' today. Might skip this one. . . s'only a single. I'll just ask Shikamaru to catch me up to date; I've gone to all my lectures so far anyway. Missin' one ain't gonna affect my life that much."

"You're going to miss a lecture because you're friend's here? Sound a bit stupid to me."

"No it's not!" Argued Naruto. "Gaara's like. . . my best friend — along with Ino — and I wanna spend the whole day with him! It's not like I'm gonna see him often, anyway. . ." he sulked.

"You're shouting way too much considering that you just woke up." Sasuke rebuked lightly.

"I'm not shoutin'!" Naruto shouted.

Chapter End Notes

*bows* thanks for reading fellow readers :)
Chapter XVI:

The rest of the day went smoothly. After Gaara had woken up — having been woken up by Naruto's constant yelling — they had breakfast (breakfast bars still counted as breakfast, right?) got ready, and Naruto said that he would show Gaara the grounds more, and introduce him to his new friends.

Naruto asked Sasuke if we wanted to come, which he politely declined. Well, 'politely' may have been a stretch, but he didn't just grunt which was considered progress. Sasuke declining wasn't a big surprise anyway, but it was worth a shot to ask him.

Naruto and Gaara walked across the school grounds, surrounded by the mellifluous harmonies of chirping birds, and the idle chatter of people walking past them. Some people waved at Naruto, and he even walked past Yukata and her friend, Matsuri (who Naruto had never really had a conversation with in his life) whose perfervid attempts of trying to get themselves introduced to Gaara — Naruto could see the absolute awe that twinkled in Matsuri's eyes as she examined Gaara, obviously approving — eventually worked. Before Matsuri could attempt to ask Gaara for his phone
number — something both boys knew was coming — they quickly made a smooth getaway, making up an excuse that they really had to meet Sakura — whom in mention seemed to have made a reputation for herself as unnaturally strong, since both of the girls nodded and let them escape — and they elegantly glided out of the conversation, much to the disappointment of Matsuri whose eyes dithered quite a bit. Naruto couldn't help but feel slightly bad for her, but they had things to do! Naruto didn't want his last day with Gaara being swamped by girls who thought Gaara was — as Yukata whispered not-so-subtly — hot.

"You have to meet Sakura." Naruto exclaimed, once they were out of earshot from the disappointed Matsuri and Yukata. "And Kiba — fuck, I think he's with Ino. You need to meet Shikamaru too, but he's in his lecture. . . I'll catch him later."

"Why can't we meet Kiba, Ino and Sakura?"

"Sakura and Ino had a . . . fallings out," Naruto said sheepishly. "They'll probably make up in a day or two; you know how girls are."

Sending Sakura a quick text, asking where she was, Naruto quickly slid his phone back into his pocket. He really wanted Gaara to meet Sakura, since she was so alike to Ino; he also wanted to introduce him to Kiba and Shikamaru, but Shika was in a double lecture, and Kiba was, if he remembered correctly, spending the night with Ino.

That's what was on their group chat, anyway.

"I feel bad that you're missing your lec—"

"Shut up, Gaara! I wanna spend today with you!" Naruto yelled determinedly, lightly shaking his friends shoulders.

In response, Gaara flicked Naruto's hands of his shoulder, one-by-one, "so, who is Sakura, exactly? I heard about her, but that's really it."

"Sakura is Ino's roommate."

"Really? Why wasn't she there yesterday — in Ino's dormitory? Was she at a lecture?"

"Nah. Her and Ino had an argument over somethin', like I said. Seems pretty bad, but I dunno. Both of them are drama queens when they need to be."

"Why don't you ask Ino?"

"I told Sakura I wouldn't mention it to her."

"Girls are so weird."

"Tell me about it!" Naruto sighed. "But, Sakura is really nice, though, sometimes she has some violent tendencies. She's really strong! And you wouldn't expect it either, cuz she's dainty as hell! But yeah, don't piss her off."

"Definitely won't. Especially if she's anything like Ino."

Naruto chuckled.

A quiet buzz reverberated in his pocket, and Naruto quickly took his phone out of it.

From: Sak
hey, i actually just got out of my lecture :) why?

From: Naruto
Where's ur lecture? And I want u 2 meet my friend, Gaara bcuz hes going home 2day.

From: Sak
is that the guy you're always telling me about?! ahhhhhhh i really want to meet him! o(*≥□≤)o where are you? i'll come to meet you

From: Naruto
Yh it is. I'm in the centre of the campus. Do u want 2 meet me near the statue or somethin?

From: Sak
yeah, that would be great :) i'll be there in five minutes; wait for me! (•̀•́)

Naruto smiled, sliding his phone back into his pocket. "Sakura's gonna meet us at that statue." Naruto said, pointing to a statue just in their eye view. "She'll be like five minutes."

"Okay." Gaara replied, following Naruto's movements towards the statue.

Eventually, Sakura arrived.

Please, notice the emphasis on 'eventually'.

Panting, Sakura ran over to them and hastily apologised, supporting herself on her knees. Wisps of pink hair were sticking out everywhere, and her cheeks were slightly flushed; at least she had tried to make it on time, Naruto assumed. Naruto didn’t really understand why she took so long, considering the buildings where she had her lectures was only three minutes away. He didn’t dare question it though, since it would probably result in him getting a not-so-friendly hit on the back of the head.

"Sorry I'm so late." She apologised, standing upright and walking over to Gaara and Naruto, a hop in her step. "I had to quickly go back to my dorm for a moment."

"Wouldn't've killed you to text me you were gonna be late. . ." Naruto mumbled.

"Yeah, I guess I could've; the thought never occurred to me." She giggled, before turning her attention to Gaara. "Sorry, guess I made a bad impression, huh?"

"Not really. Being friends with Naruto and Ino made me prone to lateness."

Sakura gasped. "I know! Naruto's never on time!" She exclaimed. "I might be bad, but he. . . he's much worse!"

"Yesterday, he went to his friend's house to helped her with her project," said Gaara, "guess how long he took?"

"How long?"

"Two hours, give or take."

"Two hours?!" Sakura gasped, scandalised, before turning to Naruto. "Are you sure you guys were just studying?" She laughed audaciously, raising her hand to her mouth whilst flashing him a sly smile.
"I also had my suspicions—"

"Can you guys stop pickin' on me!"

"But it's just so fun!" Sakura rebuked, squeezing Naruto's cheek.

"Getsh off!" Naruto demanded, slapping Sakura's hand away, rubbing the place where she had squeezed his cheek. Luckily, Naruto was tanned so a patch of crimson wouldn't be that noticeable, but that didn't take the pain away!

"Do you want to hear some stories about Naruto?" Gaara asked.

"Embarrassing ones?" She asked hopefully.

"Ones that even Ino probably doesn't know about."

Clinging onto Gaara's arm, Sakura practically dragged him, too intrigued about hearing embarrassing stories about Naruto that she could use to taunt him forever. Meanwhile, Naruto just stood there, gawking, as he watched Sakura and Gaara walk off from him, too immersed in their conversation — that probably involved embarrassing anecdotes about Naruto himself, because Gaara knew a lot — to realise that they had left Naruto by himself.

Swarming through the crowds of people that were leaving, or attending, their lectures, Naruto called both of their names.

"Don't leave me behind!" He whined pathetically, chasing after them.

Somehow, they ended up in that diner that Sakura loved so much.

Nothing had really changed, Naruto had realised, as he glanced around. Black and white tiled floors, varnished in a light coating of glitter, were still the same: scrubbed to be immaculate. Red diner seats were scattered throughout the commodious diner, and light 70 or 80s music played in the background — the only one Naruto knew being Bohemian Rhapsody. Lights, encased in matching red lampshades, hung down from the ceiling like vines. It wasn't like the faint flicker from the lights made any difference, though, since the large windows erected around the room — that were all placed next to the booths — allowed a lot of light into the diner.

"Nothing's really changed." Sakura smiled, stretching her arms up. "Gaara, have you ever been here before?"

"Not really; I was only here for yesterday and today." He said.

"Only two days? Have you seen Ino?" Sakura asked. "She'll be mad if you didn't see her, y'know."

"Yeah, I saw her yesterday." Gaara said. "She wasn't in the best mood, however—"

"Probably my fault," Sakura cut in abruptly, "sorry about that."

"Have you two made up yet?" Naruto asked.

"No... she's pretty pissed off with me." Sakura chuckled nervously, stirring her strawberry milkshake with a bubblegum-pink straw, almost matching the shade of her own hair. "Though, let's not talk about that. I don't want to talk about it when Gaara's here. As his best friend, Naruto, you
should want him to have the bestest time ever."

"Bestest? That's not a word." Naruto told her jokingly.

"Naruto, when you can tell me the function of the arteries, then I shall listen to you."

"Not everyone wants to be a nurse!" He argued.

Sakura laughed. "Maybe so. Anyway, what are you guys ordering?"

"I can't. I brought everyone Chinese last night. I'm poor."

"I'll pay for Naruto, since he did buy me a Chinese last night—"

"I'll pay for half too." Sakura chimed in.

"It's fine," Gaara said. "After all, he has a voracious appetite. I wouldn't want your bank account to suffer too."

"H-hey!" Naruto said in protest, however, he couldn't really argue with Gaara's statement. He was a growing boy! "We should've invited Kiba. He wouldn't've ganged up on me like you two are!"

"Kiba's with Ino, so he's busy anyway." Sakura said. "I didn't really listen, but they seemed to be having a pretty serious talk."

"What do you think it's about?" Naruto asked.

"I don't know; she might be ending things with him."

"Ending things with him?" Gaara repeated, confused.

"Oh yeah, I forget to tell you! Basically, Ino and Kiba are goin' out—" he quickly cut himself off, "well, their relationship. . . I wouldn't really call it goin' out. . . more like. . ."

"Oh." Gaara said, realising the implication. "I guess that makes sense — well, more sense."

"What d'you mean?" Naruto asked, eyebrow raised.

"Never mind." Gaara said, patting Naruto's head mockingly, much to his chagrin.

"Stop pattin' my head!" Naruto grumbled.

"You do it all the time to me!" Sakura argued from across the table. "Now you know how annoying it is!"

"You know what!" Naruto exclaimed, grabbing the menu. "I'm havin' the most expensive things on here! Gaara, you already said you'd pay, so you're screwed! And Sakura—" A pause, thinking what to say " . . . I'm gonna get you back later. . . " He finished anticlimactically, his voice losing the force it had in previously.

"I think you've hurt Naruto's feelings." Gaara teased.

"I know. . . he's so fragile." Sakura sighed wistfully.

"S-seriously, guys!"
Walking out of the diner, Naruto realised how much the temperature dropped; it was truly October. Tucked in behind hoary clouds, the radiance from the sun could slightly been seen, but was mostly concealed. It was quite the contrast from the warm, well-lit, diner. Chilly gusts of winds made their way past the three of them on the way back to the Konoha University campus, and Sakura and Naruto shivered slightly at the nips of biting air, whilst Gaara didn’t even flinch — sometimes Naruto wondered if Gaara was a robot. Temperature had never affected Gaara; cold or warm.

Reaching back to the campus, Naruto and Gaara offered to walk Sakura back to her dormitory, and she politely refused. Saying her goodbyes to Gaara and Naruto — her goodbye to Gaara was much more prolix, giving him a speech about how nice it was to meet him and how she wish she could meet him again, etcetera — she waved to them before trotting off, her long cardigan trailing behind her elegantly.

Gaara and Naruto walked back to Naruto's dormitory, too. When Gaara asked if they were going to meet any of Naruto's friends — that he was slightly wary about since his train arrived at five-thirty, and it was quarter-to-five already — Naruto simply said that he thought it would be best to leave it. Meeting Kiba and Shikamaru would probably be just a hindrance, just in case Kiba and Ino 'break up' — but was it really breaking up considering what their relationship was? — and Shikamaru was probably tired from having a lecture since it didn't take too much to drain Shikamaru's energy; said teen was probably somewhere on the roof, observing the clouds — or falling asleep because of watching the clouds — with his phone either off, in his dormitory, or the only source of his music.

"I don't want you to go, Gaara!" Naruto whined.

"Well that's life, Naruto."

Staring at Naruto's shocked facial expression — utterly stupefied by the cold response warranted from Gaara — he eventually turned his icy stare turn into a smile. "I'm just joking; don't look so worried. I'll miss you too. I really enjoyed my time here; it was nice meeting Sakura, and Sasuke wasn't that bad. Less rude than what he was to you, at least."

"Well, he's changin'." Naruto grinned, proud of Sasuke.

Gaara's facial expression turned from one of contentment to seriousness; Naruto picked up on the quick change right away.

"What?" He chuckled nervously. "Why'd your face change like that?"

"Liking somebody like Sasuke is dangerous, Naruto." Gaara said eventually.

*Liking Sasuke?*

"You mean... as a friend?" He said unsurely.

In response, Gaara had just flashed him an expression that obviously meant 'no'.

Naruto was astonished by the implication Gaara's words, but he wasn’t going to lie. Watching Gaara's retreating back, he bit his lip cautiously, trying to think what to the best way to phrase it would be. Lying to Gaara (and Ino, of course) was something that he never wanted to do; the closest thing he could think of was the Kabuto situation, but he didn't exactly lie, but more or less kept the truth from her for a while. However, lying to Gaara was actually pointless, since Gaara (and Ino, once again) were able to pick up on lies quickly; whenever Naruto tried to deny something to either of them — well, more accurately, move his words around the problem that they had both confronted
him with — they would just know.

Eventually, he just decided to upfront ask him. "What'd'you mean by dangerous?"

"I'm just saying I can't see it ending up well for you — either of you." Gaara advised. "I don't think Sasuke's ready — I don't think he's even considered the possibility — for a kind of relationship like that with anybody. I think you've been a rock to him, Naruto, throughout his time here, no matter how much he would never admit it; if he found out you had... romantic feelings for him, I feel like he wouldn't be happy about it."

Naruto contemplated Gaara's words.

They were true.

Remembering his conversation with Sasuke that one day he had tried to cheer Naruto up by taking him to a movie theatre, and how Sasuke said that people always wanted something from him. He recalled how Sasuke said he saw relationships with people as give-and-take. Naruto remembered giving him a speech about how he didn't want anything from Sasuke, but what if, if Sasuke ever found out, Sasuke thought that he was lying to try and get the advantage with him?

"Well, just lookin' after him is enough—"

"Really? Is that really enough for you, Naruto?" Gaara was much closer now. Emeralds soaked in the agonising pain of truth stared right into his own. Since when had Gaara's eyes been so green?

"Would you be okay with just being there for Sasuke? Nothing more? Nothing less?"

"O-of course it is!" Naruto said, his voice having more determination. "I'm fine with that. My feelings for Sasuke aren't even that much... it's just a minor thing that'll be gone in a day or two. Y'know how I can get with things; my emotions are all over the place!"

"I just want you to be okay, Naruto. You're my best friend, and I don't want you getting hurt — not by anybody."

"I won't get hurt. Stop worryin' so much!" He grinned.

Exhaling deeply, Gaara finally gave in; he would just have to take Naruto's word for it. Overworrying about Naruto was almost a second nature to him (and Ino) so he couldn't really help it; he had to make sure that Naruto was okay. He remembered how bad he felt when Ino told him about Naruto's 'friends' gradually turning their backs on him in eighth grade, and escalating in the whole group eventually picking on him subtly afterwards; he couldn't help the gratification he felt when he had found out that Ino had shouted at them all and put them in their place. The implication of a girl — especially, according to the rest of the boys, the hottest girl in the grade — turning on them wasn't good for their hormones.

When they reached Naruto's dormitory, they both couldn't help but notice that the door was slightly ajar.

"Why's your door open?" Gaara asked.

"Dunno. Maybe Sasuke left it open on accident?"

Naruto couldn't help but feel unsettled. He didn't even believe his own words; in what kind of world would Sasuke — fucking Sasuke! — be careless enough to leave the door open?! Nevertheless, he hoped his assumption was correct. He wasn't going to jump to conclusions.
Making his way inside, hearing an audible groan from the door as Naruto opened it, he stalked through the corridor to see that the television had been left on.

Sasuke was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Sasuke?" Gaara asked, his voice in a hushed whisper.

Naruto shrugged, trying to be unobtrusive as possible. Hopefully Sasuke was in his bedroom; he had mentioned that he had no lectures, today, if Naruto recalled correctly.

Making his way to Sasuke's bedroom, he pressed his ear against it. Knocking was something that he couldn't bring himself to do. Something seemed off.

Listening through the door, he could hear a voice — a voice that didn't belong to Sasuke — talking on the other side; the voice was all too familiar, and Naruto inwardly shivered at the mere whisper of His voice. The voice that made him so anxious for Sasuke's wellbeing; perhaps knocking on the door was the best way to get it.

Bringing his finger to his lips, he signalled Gaara to 'sh', who nodded firmly. Three firm knocks echoed from Sasuke's door, and Naruto waited a moment until he saw the door opening, and Sasuke standing in the doorway.

"When did you get back?" Sasuke asked, leaning his body against the doorframe, not allowing Naruto to see what — or who — was inside of his room; whether it was intentional or not, Naruto didn't know.

"Just now; the door was left open and the television was left on, so I was kinda spooked." He said honestly.

"Is that Naruto-kun?" A voice — His voice — chimed from inside. As cold as ever.

Appearing from over Sasuke's shoulder, Naruto was greeted by the same unfeeling, cold eyes that hadn't changed since last time; nothing about Kabuto had really changed. The same white labcoat, the same white hair tied in a ponytail, the same Harry Potter rip-off glasses; it was His eyes what Naruto couldn't stand — something that he couldn't comprehend. Not even a flicker of emotion flashed in his eyes. Fake smiles paired up with even faker kindness — that was the embodiment of Kabuto. Naruto had to make a conscious effort not to clench his fists upon seeing the bastard. Callous to the very bone.

Breaking Naruto out of his stupor, Kabuto began to speak again. "Why, it is Naruto-kun. Very nice to meet you again; we didn't get to speak last time. What a pity." He paused for a moment, before a soft 'ah' was breathed out between his lips, and he turned back to Naruto who didn't like the way his glasses blocked Kabuto's eyes. "Once again, thank you for bringing my briefcase to me. I don't know what I would have done if I didn't remember it; my employer would not be pleased."

"It's fine." Naruto grunted out, trying his best to keep a neutral façade. "What're you doin' here anyway? Checkin' up on Sasuke again?"

"Actually, I arrived to deliver him some tablets that I have subscribed to him; they're very unique — not something that you would find in your everyday store. My employer also dabbles in creating medicine; it's been clinically proven to help cases such as Sasuke's, and since he seemed quite eager to try them, how could I refuse—" he cut himself off. "But, what am I saying! Surely tedious things like this bore you; after all, Sasuke's business isn't really any of your concern, is it, Naruto-kun? I'm sure that I'm just boring you—"
"Well, whatever Sasuke wants me to be concerned in, I will be. He's my friend, after all, and I'm concerned about his wellbein'." Naruto said abruptly, an edge in his voice. "So what sorta things are in those tablets then?"

"Well, since my employer is a very private man, I'm not allowed to disclose things such as that — I'm sure you understand. However, I can assure you that it contains things such as melatonin that will help Sasuke-kun have a better night sleep."

"I'm pretty sure that you're not allowed to supply him with medication — not when you're just his therapist." Naruto said, his words sharp. Somehow, Kabuto's eyes had turned even more cold. The temperature of the room had lowered even more, and Naruto had to suppress the shiver running down his spine. Adrenaline built up in his veins, and he felt a smirk making its way onto his face. It wasn't his fault, but getting one over Kabuto felt quite good. "I've been through the system once myself, after all, and I recall that you're not allowed to give him medication—"

"Can you not tell these sort of things to Naruto?" Sasuke cut in. "What happened to things such as patient confidentiality? He gets himself too involved sometimes."

Naruto was mortified at Sasuke's words. Why did they sound so gelid?

"Of course, Sasuke-kun. I apologise." Kabuto bowed, his eyes flicking over to Naruto's in triumph, and Naruto noticed it. "Anyway, once again, I must take my leave. Goodbye Sasuke-kun, Naruto-kun," his eyes strayed over to Gaara, who was standing behind Naruto, "and Naruto-kun's friend."

Kabuto let himself out of the dormitory, Sasuke following shortly behind him. Such a brief conversation — Naruto wanted to talk to Kabuto more; he wanted to catch him out right in front of Sasuke. But, with Kabuto making their meetings so brief, how could he do that? If worse came to worse, then Naruto would have to tell Sasuke about everything.

First things first, though.

Naruto had to dispose of those pills.

Sleeping had not been a major concern of Sasuke's for a while. There was no screaming in the night, nor Sasuke waking up in a fever; actually, it seemed, that Sasuke had a pleasant night's sleep most of the time. He was fine. Pills should be the last thing on his mind.

Hearing the door slam — a tell-tale sign that Kabuto had left — Naruto watched Sasuke stalk through the halls and back towards his bedroom door without saying a word to Naruto. Before Sasuke could isolate himself in his room — a habit Naruto thought had dithered over the passing month — he quickly grabbed Sasuke's arm, preventing him from taking another step unless he shook Naruto's hand away.

Leaden eyes, seeming as uninterested as they usually did, bored into Naruto's cerulean ones, varnished in a serious expression that he hardly ever made. "What?" Sasuke's bored voice droned.

"Sasuke... those pills—"

"Are you going to give me some lecture about how becoming dependant on things such as tablets is a waste of time, or something like you usually say? If you are, then I don't need to hear it." His words were as sharp as a dagger, cutting through the tense silence.

"No! Of course not! I know pills can help, I've been through the same fuckin' thing! I'm just sayin' that—"
An audible slap reverberated throughout the room as Sasuke slapped Naruto's reaching hand away from his own. Away from the pills. "I don't need your concerns. I'm not depending on you." His voice was clipped.

"D-dependin' on me?! What're you talkin' about?!" He exploded as Sasuke made his way into his bedroom, not looking back at either Gaara or Naruto. Realising that Sasuke was inside his room — taking a few moments to process it due to his utter bewilderment at Sasuke's words — Naruto banged on Sasuke's door, anger flowing through his veins. "Sasuke! Come back out here you fuckin' bastard! I don't know what you mean by dependin' on me, dammit! I never thought you were! You bastard! Open the fuckin' door, or I swear I will—"

"Naruto." Gaara's firm voice cut through the banging, making Naruto stop almost immediately. "He doesn't want to talk."

"It's fuckin' bullshit!" Naruto yelled.

"Naruto, calm down." Gaara said.

"Kabuto could get in a lot of fuckin' trouble, y'know! So could you! Don't be fuckin stupid Sasuke!"


Punch after punch, Naruto wouldn't stop banging on Sasuke's door. Never before had he seen Naruto display so much raw power. Without a doubt, if this continued, the door would be off its hinges.

Frustration coated words were the only thing that left Naruto's mouth. His voice hoarse — dry — with the constant yelling. "And you're a fuckin' bastard! Leavin' the television on... we have an electricity bill y'know! Not everybody's fuckin' loaded like you—"

Gaara had only been speechless a few times in his life. Once, when his father first hit him after his mother had died — it had come as a shock, if anything. Secondly, when Temari brought home her first boyfriend; his brotherly instincts had told him to have stern words with the boy, but then his more responsible side told him that Temari's boyfriend was four years older — he was eight, and Temari's boyfriend was twelve — so he was rendered speechless when Temari's boyfriend asked him what his name was and settled for hiding behind his elder brother Kankuro. Thirdly, was when he saw an eleven-year-old Naruto, a boy who he didn't really interact that much with, in his year — who, at the time, had quite a lot of friends — stuffing a love letter into his older sister's locker. And now, fourthly, was now. Never, in his whole five year friendship with Naruto had he seen him in such an irate state, almost beyond reason. Desperately banging on Sasuke's door as he yelled obscenities; whether they were directed toward Sasuke, Gaara didn't know.

However, Gaara knew what was the sole reason for Naruto's irascible behaviour: Kabuto's presence. Just the notion of the man whom Naruto hated so much — as he described his hatred and consternation he had towards Kabuto to Gaara when they were talking yesterday — being their dormitory had made something snap in him. Anger.

Dragging Naruto into his own bedroom, Gaara pushed him on the bed and kneeled in front of him, and flashed him a serious look. "Naruto, calm down. Seriously, calm down. I don't think Sasuke appreciates you shouting at him through his bedroom door—"

"I don't care!" Naruto's voice was hoarse, and his eyes were hidden behind his blond hair so Gaara wasn't able to see the expression on his face, but judging that Naruto's voice sounded like he was pushing past a lump in his throat, he had a pretty good idea what those azure eyes were hiding. His
next words were spoken in a hushed whisper, obviously not wanting Sasuke to hear them. "I know Kabuto said somethin' to him. It pisses me off so much! I can't do even do anything in retaliation, because one step out of line and I would lose everythin' with him. . ." 

Gaara's voice was hesitant; cautious. ". . . While I don't know nowhere near the extent that you do about the whole situation, I'm sure that you won't lose everything—"

"Gaara, you don't understand. Sasuke likes Kabuto. . . he likes Kabuto much more than he likes — *trusts* — me. How do you think it would go down if I tried to talk badly about Kabuto? 'Hey Sasuke, just stopped by for a quick chat; basically I listened to your and Kabuto's private conversation — sorry 'bout that — and then I also listened in on Kabuto's conversation and he's tryin' to basically ruin your life. Please believe me — I know he's been your therapist forever but believe me, a person who you've known for two months', sounds totally fuckin' believable."

"Get some proof?"

"Proof? What proof? The only proof would be the fuckin' medication that I don't know where Sasuke's put—"

"—you said that he's not allowed to supply Sasuke with medication," said Gaara. "If you tell someone—"

"—and completely lose the littlest bit of trust Sasuke has for me, whilst simultaneously taking away the only person who he trusts outside of his family? That would destroy him. Completely fuckin' destroy him. . ." Every word Naruto spoke got quieter and quieter, until Gaara had to get closer so he could hear the faint whisper that was coming out of his friends mouth. Fingers dug their way into ruffled hair, and Gaara couldn't help but notice how painful it looked. Tears fell out cerulean eyes which were hidden by blond hair. "Sometimes I wonder if I'm doin' the right thing or the complete opposite. Sometimes I wonder if I'm going at this the completely wrong way, y'know?"

"Naruto—"

He darted his head back up to meet Gaara's eyes. "D'you think I'm goin' about this the right way."

Carefully, Gaara threaded Naruto's fingers out of his blond hair and held them tightly, making sure they didn’t worm their way back. Green eyes looked deeply into blue eyes as Gaara tried his best to convey whatever he was feeling — *anxiousness? Sadness? Frustration?* Emotions had never been his strong suit after all. "I can't say what you're doing is right, and I can't say what you're doing is wrong. It's your way of handling it—"

"Could I handle it better?" He asked.

"Banging on his door doesn't seem like the best thing to do."

Looking sullenly at the floor, Naruto flashed a watery smile. "Guess you're right. I need to keep a bottle on my emotions, right? Instead of lettin' them all pour out."

Before Gaara could interject, Naruto stood up, flashing Gaara a dazzlingly bright grin which contrasted greatly with the pitiful smile that was just on his features. "Y'know what Gaara, thanks! You've really cheered me up."

"I haven't really said anything—"

"Now's not the time to be modest!" Naruto chasisted, comically patting his friend's shoulder. "Now, what's the time? We can't have you missin' your train. Temari would kill me."
Checking his watch, Gaara showed Naruto the time. On the dot: five o'clock.

"You need to say bye to Ino, of course."

Gaara gave a firm nod. "Yeah. I need to say goodbye to her."

Naruto flashed a sad smile at Gaara. "Y'know, next time you come down, y'need to stay for longer. Ino's gonna kill you for leavin' so soon."

"Next time? The next time is going to be you two coming down to see me. It was effort getting to KU, bear in mind."

"Next time things won't be so... hectic."

"I don't think they could get any more hectic, so that's not saying a lot." Gaara joked, before his face looked more serious. "But, take it easy, or at least easier."

"What do you mean?"

"Seeing you... snap like that... it wasn't you." Gaara said, a whimsical sigh making its way in after the words had left Gaara's lips. "I understand what you get like when you're passionate about something — or someone — but I think you need to go a bit easier on yourself. You've got exams, coursework and essays to worry about. I know you won't like me saying this — and I know it sounds like me being an asshole — but I think not concerning yourself with Sasuke is the best thing to do. You need to think about yourself. You shouldn't be getting dragged into this."

"What am I supposed to do?" Naruto asked. "Watch him fall apart right in front of me? Know he's takin' some botched pills and just sip on my water not sayin' a thing? No fuckin' way. I can't do that to him."

"I'm not saying that, Naruto!"

"I don't owe him anythin'... s'just the way my brain is programmed to think." Naruto sighed. "I know it's all a bit fucked right now, but maybe things'll get better—"

"Stop with that wishful thinking, Naruto. Both you and I know that things won't get better if they're in this situation. Sasuke will get worse. Things will get worse. You need to act before it's too late."

"What am I fuckin' meant to do—"

"If you got proof against Kabuto—"

"How? How could I do that?" He asked desperately.

"Those pills... maybe you could prove something if you attained some of them..." Gaara suggested.

"How could I get any? Sasuke obviously don't trust me anymore... he's probably kept them under lock and key. Pissin' Sasuke off it somethin' I want to avoid doin' if possible."

Gaara glanced at the clock. His train was going to be here in no less than twenty minutes. He had to go. Sighing, he placed a reassuring hand on Naruto's shoulder. "Go back to how you were a few moments ago: happy. Worrying over things too much — to the point that you're angry — isn't you. It's sad to watch. I'm not going to give you some speech on how you should be acting, you're my best friend no matter what, but remember, you have friends here. You have Ino. If you need help,
"But, I'd feel like I'm betrayin' Sasuke—"

"The only betrayal you could commit against Sasuke is not doing anything." Gaara said. "You've
done more than enough for him. When this has all blown over, he'll be grateful. But you need help.
Don't forget you have friends Naruto — that's something that you taught me."

Taking in a shuddering breath, Naruto let the corners of his mouth turn upwards. "What did I do to
get a friend as good as you?"

"I don't know. Maybe you were a good person in a past life."

"Perhaps," he forced a laugh

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Gaara had ordered himself a cab, since he deemed it impossible to make a half-an-hour walk to the
train station in twenty minutes. Said cab picked him up in front of the university, dyed in the gaudy
shade of yellow that was hard to miss. Ino and Naruto stood in front of the cab — Ino was more
tearful than Naruto, but Naruto guessed it wasn't just Gaara leaving that had made her teary-eyed.
He refused to comment on it. Sure, he was outspoken and usually stepped out of line unknowingly,
but he wasn't insensitive. He knew when to keep his mouth shut, and seeing an angry Kiba stalk
across campus on the way to Ino's, not even acknowledging Naruto or Gaara (actually looking
pissed off at them, if anything) and — presumably — storm back to his dormitory. Afterwards, a
teary-eyed Ino opened the door, a wry smile painted on her face. Due to popular belief, Naruto
wasn't dumb. He was very aware of reading social situations, and you didn't need to be a rocket
scientist to put the pieces together.

And now, here they were, standing underneath a setting sun. At five o'clock.

Naruto loved autumn.

"I can't believe you're going." Ino sulked. "We've only seen each other like two times!! It's unfair!"

"Next time, I'll stay longer." Gaara smiled.

Ino pouted. "I can't help but feel left out."

Placing an arm around Ino's shoulder, Naruto squeezed an emotional Ino tightly. "Don't think like
that! It's always you savin' our asses." He laughed.

"Not really Gaara's..." She mumbled.

"I can't help but agree." Gaara said immediately after.

Before Naruto could reply — he was tired of getting tag-teamed in these matters! He felt targeted! —
the blare of a cab horn made Naruto and Ino jump, and Gaara looked slightly startled. An irritable
looking cab driver leaned over the seat, sending Gaara a warning glare. Unaffected by the stare, but
also getting the point, Gaara nodded before quickly turning to Naruto and Ino, saying one last
goodbye.

"I don't want you to go!" Ino whined, running into Gaara's arms. "I'll miss you. . ." She muttered
pathetically into Gaara's shirt.

"I'll miss you too." Gaara replied, putting one arm around Ino's supple shoulder, the other occupied
with his suitcase. Leaning in closer to her ear, Gaara tried his best to hush his voice. "You need to
tell him soon, okay?"

Feeling a reluctant nod against his shoulder, Gaara released her from his arms. "Good luck."

"You're makin' me feel left out. Stop bein' so touchy with each other!!"

"Jealous?" Ino cooed.

Naruto huffed. "You wish! Just feelin' a bit left out."

"It's not a nice feeling, is it?" Ino replied pointedly.

Naruto grinned sheepishly. "You just seemed a bit busy... that's all. Next time we'll spend more
time together. Promise." Turning his attention to Gaara, he flashed him a smile. "I'm gonna miss you,
y'know."

"You better. I didn't come all this way for nothing."

Naruto grinned. He couldn't help but not to conceal the slight tinge of bitterness in it; he was going
to miss Gaara so fucking much. If Gaara wasn't here — there, in the dormitory just — he didn't
know what he would have done! Going off the rails was always a possibility, and that was
something he didn't want to do, especially in front of Sasuke. Sasuke didn't deserve that; he was
going through a lot at the moment.

But, this wasn't about Sasuke. This was about Gaara; this was about Gaara leaving.

So, he pushed the thoughts of Sasuke into the back of his mind; he could sort them out another day,
another hour, another time. Whenever he wanted. Saying goodbye to Gaara wasn't something he
could do too often. It wasn't like he was going to do this a lot; both he and Gaara had studies they
had to focus on, and visiting each other frequently was a luxury neither of them could afford.
Literally.

Watching Gaara drive away in the cab was sort of bitter to watch; it especially didn't help Ino's
sullen mood in the slightest. Asking Ino questions about what happened was a big nope. Knowing
that Ino looked like she was about to burst into tears at any given moment made it hard to speak. He
didn't want to mess up, or, even worse, make her even more overwrought with sadness. The only
comfort he could offer her was a soft, reassuring shake of her shoulder, and slowly wrap his arm
around her lithe frame, drawing her body into his. Soon after, as the taxi cab Gaara had just gotten in
was out of sight, Naruto felt her shoulders tremble and soft sobs escaping her lips.

Comforting people was not his strong suit.

Comforting crying people was the exact same as maths: he couldn't do it.

So, instead, he offered a quiet comfort. One that was relaxing and calm. Faint whimpers filled up the
silence between them. No university students were present at the current time, which was something
Naruto was quite surprised about. No low rumble of traffic, or that one asshole on a motorbike that
revved the engine way too loud to try and be a douche.

After a moment or two passed, Naruto came to a conclusion: he wasn't a good person.

Sure, most people had told him once or twice that he was a good person. Many people had told him
that his jocose personality was fun to be around and entertaining, and Naruto wouldn't lie and say
that he wasn't proud of that fact; his fun-to-be-with personality was something that he had shaped
and formed throughout the years so people wouldn’t get annoyed if he moped around all of the time. In a way, it was a defence mechanism.

In conclusion, however, Naruto surmised that he wasn’t the best person. He didn’t know anything that was going on with Ino currently, including her fight with Sakura, what she had spoken to Kiba about, or her life at all. Drifting apart from friends was a natural — but painful — truth of life, but the idea of even not speaking to Ino sent chills down Naruto's spine. Nowadays, he didn’t know anything that was going on with her, and he couldn’t help but feel slightly resentful at that fact. She never told him, and he never asked; it was that simple. Instead, he had to settle for a crying Ino in his arms, unable to do anything since he didn’t know what the fuck was going on!

"What're you thinking about?" Ino's muffled voice interrupted his thoughts, and he felt the vibration of her voice ripple throughout his chest where she was currently laying her head.

"Nothin'." Naruto lied.

"Liar." She said bitterly. "I know when you're lying; your nose twitches."

"It does not!" Naruto protested.

"It twitched again!" She giggled, poking said nose with her index finger.

Naruto smiled. Seeing Ino smile — he hated seeing her cry — was enough to make him in a good mood.

Said good mood was thwarted by Ino's face quickly growing sour with sadness, and Naruto subconsciously tightened his grip around her shoulders.

"You know, Naruto, I can't say I haven’t been lonely." She admitted, cheeks flushed with a pastel red. "You haven't come to see me on your own accord within weeks; whenever you come, it somehow concerns Sasuke!"

"Could say the same t'you. . ." He mumbled into her hair. He couldn’t help but realise just how small Ino was.

"I come to you with problems about Sasuke?"

"You know what I mean." He scoffed, laughing slightly.

"Well. . . I haven’t had any friends at all; me and Sakura argued y'know." She reminded, "and me and Kiba are officially over, so I guess I'm alone again."

Bitterness slowly started to flow through Naruto's veins at Ino's words: alone again. When was she ever alone? She had always had Naruto by her side; if she was truly alone, he and Gaara must have been killed because neither of them would ever let it happen! "What'd you mean 'alone again'? You've never been alone."

"Well, I'm in a fight with Sakura, so I can't speak to her about anything to her anymore; she'd probably use it to get a one-up on me." Ino sighed with a jaundiced edge in her voice.

"Then make up with her." Naruto answered simply.

"It's not that easy! What she did really pissed me off!" Ino snapped back, struggling away from Naruto's grip that suddenly felt too close for comfort. "I don't know why you're always taking her side! I'm meant to be your best friend!"
"I'm not taking her side! I'm just askin'! Sheesh!" He defended, holding his hands up in the air. "And you are my best friend! I don't know where you're gettin' these ideas from—"

"Just forget it." Ino hissed, pushing Naruto away all together. "You and Gaara barely visited me anyway. I'm only important when Gaara's not here, or Sasuke's not around, or Sakura, or Kiba, or Shikamaru—"

His breath hitched. Surely, Ino couldn't think that, could she? That she was only relevant to Naruto because of convenience? No — *he didn't mean for it to come across like that.*

*You're a horrible person. You did this. Youyouyouyououyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyououyouyouyouyouyou.*

Wherever she got those ideas from, she was wrong. To him, Ino was one of the most important things, and where all these negative thoughts had emerged from, he had no idea. If she ever had any qualms previously, she would talk to him about it, but not it seemed like she had bottled them up and just exploded at him. Realisation struck him.

Whenever Ino was angry, or fighting with somebody, the most *vile* and *putrid* words oozed out of her mouth like a deadly toxin. Underneath the sky, blushed in a violent orange, a tell-tale sign that the sun was setting, he walked towards a retreating Ino who had sank into herself, withdrawing her arms into her chest as tight as she could, and lowering her head so no pedestrians (not like there were any, anyway) could see the tears that Naruto knew were forming in her eyes as her supple form was trembling slightly. Guilt settled in the pit of his stomach, however, since some of her harsh words did have a distant truth in them; Ino's statement about him and Gaara not visiting her as much was, admittedly, true. Only now, did he ultimately realise it. For her sudden (literally, *out of the blue*) outburst that he had *not* been expecting, it must have been weighing on her mind.

Slipping his arms around her neck, he rested his head on the crook of Ino's neck. To any onlookers, the act could be perceived as intimate; if it was anybody else — beside Gaara, Sakura and Ino — perhaps even Naruto would think off it as too close, but he just couldn't see it like that. Not with *her.*

Once again, he was submerged by her subtle scent. It wasn't like Sasuke's; it was completely different. Ino smelled of sweetness: that was the only way he could describe it. A mixture of scented candles, a slight floral aroma, and a spritz of saccharine perfume.

_Sugar, spice, and all things nice; this is what girls are made from._

Funnily enough, Naruto understood that phrase now.

"Don't." She mumbled, pleadingly. "Please..."

"Don't what?" He asked, his voice a hushed murmur.

"Hug me." She answered. "I'm annoyed at you at the moment."

Pondering on her words for a moment, he couldn't help how childish she sounded; he could just _imagine_ the silly pout that was playing on her lips. Whenever Ino got mad, or angry, with Naruto and Gaara, her demeanour changed from irate to sulky. Almost like she was having a tantrum. Why she did it, Naruto had no clue, but he guessed it was because — as Ino always claimed — she could never stay mad at either of them.

He didn't listen to her request either. Instead, he hugged her harder until he was sure he was crushing her. Crushing her with kindness and bitter regret. Suffocating her with whatever he had to give.

On the contrary, he could sense that that wasn't the only thing bothering her. There was something
else on her mind. What, however, he didn’t know. Instead of bothering her about, Naruto just decided to slightly sway on his feet, Ino mimicking his movements.

Perhaps all of the university work was weighing on her mind. Bills alongside grades and coursework was beyond stressful. Naruto was also on the verge of a major tantrum. The only thing keeping the tantrum in was the thought of Sasuke scolding him for it. . . not that he was scared of what Sasuke thought of him, of course.

"D'you wanna come back to my place and we can watch a movie? Just me an' you." He offered.

"I don’t want to watch a crappy film. . ." Ino said relunctantly.

Sighing, Naruto scratched his forehead, staring down at the field of platinum blonde hair tucked into his chest. "Fuck, I'm gonna regret this. . ." he murmured to himself, "if you want, we can watch Pretty Woman. I know that's your favourite film. . ."

Slowly, Naruto watched the tuft of platinum blonde hair shift slightly. Eventually, his gaze was met with another pair of blue eyes, much paler than his own, staring innocently at him. "Pretty Woman? Promise?"

"Promise. We can have a film night. I have some snacks that me and Gaara didn’t eat."

"Hm, I guess it's an offer I can't refuse." She chirped.

Leather seats and the mixed smell of smoke and alcohol. Gaara was sure that this wasn’t the first time this cab had been to Konoha University. The stench had bored university kids all over it. The floor wasn’t the cleanest either. Littered cigarettes and specs of dirt and plaster and plastic and fluff and dust—

He could go on forever.

The moody cab driver wasn’t the most loquacious of people either. Sitting in the front seat, glass shutter drawn, making sure he didn’t have to make conversation with the passenger. Not that Gaara minded, of course. Conversations with strangers — especially forced conversation — wasn’t something he enjoyed to take part in. Silence was better than clipped replies, before Gaara bluntly told him that he didn’t want to partake in conversation. It saved both of them from the awkwardness.

Resting his head on the back of the seat, however, Gaara couldn’t help but wish the cab driver had said something to keep his mind off what Naruto had said:

"Guess you're right. I need to keep a bottle on my emotions, right? Instead of lettin' them all pour out."

That look of melancholy in Naruto’s eyes, and watching the way he swallowed it down and flashed that stunning grin on his face — who knew Naruto was that good of an actor? Perhaps even Ino would be fooled. For once, he hoped that he was overreacting to the conversation. Surely Naruto would be fine.

Right?

The crisp evening air soon settled in as Naruto and Ino walked toward Naruto’s dormitory. Soft breaths of air tickled the back of Naruto’s neck, sending a shiver down his spine. Indigo had washed over the soft orange sky within minutes, noting that the evening had truly settled in despite it not
even being six o'clock yet.

Stars dotted the sky as lights planted in the grass illuminated Naruto's surroundings. He couldn't help but take note of how peaceful it was — the silence was therapeutic, Naruto concluded. Invisible fingers filtered through his hair before disappearing, following the direction of the slight breeze that tiptoed past both him and Ino.

Leaving Ino up their dormitory stairs, they walked up. Idle chatter slipped out of their mouths. Nothing significant. Casual words such as the weather, exams, their families; it was the sort of conversations that you would have with a vague relative. For some reason unknown to Naruto, he felt slightly awkward to speak. Perhaps it was because of what Ino had said, how she claimed that he only wanted her when he had nobody else. Her words were false, yes; Naruto would never treat somebody with that much disrespect, however, if that was how Ino felt, who was he to go against that? Somebody's feelings couldn't be helped. Even Naruto knew that much. If she felt like that, he would abide by how close they were in high school — joint by the hip. With university by their side, he would have thought that Ino wanted more freedom; to make more friends and expand her phonebook even more. Between her, Gaara and Naruto, she had always been the most sociable one. Most times, Naruto stayed in the back, conversing with Gaara or any drunk girls — or on the rare occasion, guy — who approached him.

The idea that she didn't want that — that she didn't want change — made him a mixture of nostalgic and sad. Contrary to how much she had grown over the past years, she was still the timid girl hiding underneath her bed at night, crying for her mother and father who were — most of the time — in a different country. Oftenly, Minato and Kushina, and when he was old enough to comprehend, Naruto, usually had to console her. Eventually, she grew more independent over the years, only letting her guard down (sometimes) in front of Naruto and Gaara.

To think — despite her massive variety of friends — that she wanted to keep Naruto and Gaara as her best friends made his heart feel all fuzzy and warm. To Naruto, it was a type of validation that he was good enough for her. Validation that made him able to wear the biggest shit-eating grin on his face.

They reached Naruto's floor eventually. At this point, Ino was panting slightly. Luckily, Naruto had grown used to the arduous walk that he didn't get out of breath so easily; that was the only upside.

"How do you do that every day?" Ino panted, her grip on Naruto's arm growing more tight as she tried her best not to fall to her knees. "It's exhausting!"

"Lots of practice." He replied.

On cue, next to his own dormitory door, the door opens, revealing a tense looking Kiba, wobbling out of his dormitory door. Never before had he seen Kiba looking so pissed. Usually, he was a pretty laidback type of guy without a care in the world. Now, however, his face was contorted into one of rage and malice, something Naruto had never expected from Kiba. Next to him, he also felt Ino visibly tense by his side, and the realisation dawned on him suddenly.

Quickly, Ino released Naruto's arm and took a few steps away from him.

Slitted eyes turned towards both Naruto and Ino, burning into them like a hot iron. Tumbling slightly towards them, Kiba hobbled down the hallway, and Naruto felt himself and Ino take a few steps back hesitantly. Their slow pace was no match against Kiba's fast scramble towards both of them. Naruto wondered what had happened between those two? What could have made Kiba the epitome of rage?
Cigarettes and alcohol soon enwrapped his senses. The pungent tang of alcohol was mockingly breathed against his face, and it didn’t take a genius to perceive that Kiba was drunk. Rage and alcohol didn’t mix at all, so Naruto couldn’t help but feel slightly intimidated. Naruto was a bit taller than Kiba, and he wasn’t weak by all means, however, that didn’t stop the fact that Naruto would refuse to intentionally hurt Kiba. By nature, he was a pacifist. Especially towards his friends. It seemed, that Ino also seemed intimidated, judging by the absolute look of dismay and shock on her face. Slowly, Naruto withdrew Ino behind himself, using himself between a wall between the two of them. Never, would he expect Kiba to grow violent — especially with a girl — but it was better safe than sorry.

"Sup—"

Slam.

Steel fists slammed against Naruto's chest, making Naruto falter slightly. Before Ino could intervene between the two of them, Naruto pushed her backwards lightly. He didn’t want Kiba to do anything he would regret. Judging by the hazy look in Kiba's eyes, Naruto knew that he was just about as far away from being sober as the earth was from the sun.

"Shhhut it . . y'bastard . . ." He slurred, wobbling on his feet slightly.

Chapter End Notes

wyd kiba..........................wyd.........................

let's play a game called 'how far apart from each other did i write these paragraphs?

(btw anybody watched assassination classroom here? if u have pls lament w me)
**Seventeen**

Chapter Summary

*punches myself in the fuckin face* that nar ep..............................destroyed me..................................................

Chapter Notes

question of the day: what's harder to find? a mewtwo on pokemon go, my will to live, or a chapter update from this story?
answer: none of them exist

sorry for the VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY VERY long update. I've been drowned in coursework, normal work, essays, revision and so much more. I could sit here and rant about how much the last episode destroyed any piece of happiness I had in me? I could tell you how my emo phase came running back as soon as Naruto and Sasuke started throwing punches???? i could tell you how many tears ran down my face as there was that flashback where older!sasuke+naruto were watching their younger selves? I could tell you that I watched it 6 times and made my friend [who hates naruto because of me, since none of my friends like anime or anythign like that........once again bc of me] facetime me and how much i cried to her?? like i really could write an essay on how much emotions i have because of that episode but alas, physics revision is calling me.

NOT BETA'D! SORRY FOR ANY MISTAKES!! pROBABLY IS A LOT I JUST SKIMMED THIS. I WILL CHECK LATER IM JUST SO TIRED AND NEED TO DRY AND STRAIGHTEN MY HAIR FOR TOMORROW D;

WARNING: VIOLENCE AND BLOOD IN THIS CHAPTER.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XVII:

"Kiba, are you oka—"

Before Naruto could finish his sentence, a crashing force pelted against his tanned cheek, and Naruto felt himself stumble slightly backwards, his hand placed on his reddening cheek. Astonishment was the first feeling Naruto had registered. Confusion shortly followed. To say that Naruto had felt pain would be a lie; it was easily forced down as bewilderment clawed its way to the top of things Naruto was currently feeling. Pain wasn't even on Naruto's mind.

A high-pitched yelp from beside Naruto rang in his ears as two arms cradled him defensively. Sweet
perfume entrapped his senses — *Ino's perfume*. The only one Naruto had ever really liked on her. The smell was pleasant yet not overbearing. Armani something?

"*What are you doing?!*" Ino's voice demanded from beside Naruto, snapping Naruto out of his muddled thoughts.

*Punch.*

Sharpened knuckles crashed against Naruto's cheek once more, making Naruto stumble into Ino's arms once more. Naruto didn’t like how close Kiba (and his violent punches) were getting to Ino. Not one bit.

Promptly, Naruto jumped out of Ino's grasp and pulled her to the side, evading Kiba's following punch. Luckily, Naruto noted, he wasn't aiming for Ino. Of course Kiba would never intentionally aim for Ino, no matter how intoxicated he would be, taking into account how besotted he seemed to be with her.

Despite not really wanting to get punched by Kiba himself — especially since Kiba had made it clear he had a mean left hook — Naruto’s main priority was keeping Ino safe and away from the crossfire. Nevertheless, he couldn’t help but be angry at Kiba's actions since Naruto was getting punched for no reason.

"What are you fuckin' doin' Kiba?" Naruto demanded angrily, his wounded cheek — which was throbbing slightly — cradled in his hands. "Why're you punchin' me for?"

Naruto registered Kiba's movements. He was aiming for another punch, but Naruto was able to block Kiba's fists by raising both of his forearms to protect his face. Whilst he wasn't the best at fighting or anything, he wasn't completely clueless in that field. When he was younger, Naruto had a few karate lessons — invoked by his mother who was a black belt — before he became bored and was stubborn on committing. Of course, Kushina didn't let go that easily since she was as stubborn as Naruto was. Eventually, when Naruto refused to take part and started to disrupt the class, Kushina and Minato had no choice but to withdraw Naruto from the class.

Then again, his karate class for ages 12 and under didn't really come in useful in a fight like this.

Throughout his life, Naruto had never been involved in a physical fight; the only *truly* violent thing he had ever been involved in (including somebody else) had been his and Sasuke's altercations. Through that, Naruto would say he had grown quite accustomed to blocking powerful blows. Fighting back, however, was a different story. Not that Naruto *wasn't* strong, but he wasn’t one to engage himself in violence, especially with other people. By nature, he considered himself a pacifist. Violence wasn’t something he condoned. Blocking punches, however, was something Naruto could stand to do. Better than getting punched in the face.

Struggling against each other's strengths, Naruto could feel the relentless force of Kiba's knuckles against his arms. Soon, Naruto realised that his arms were going to buckle. One of them had to yield eventually.

Just to be on the safe side, Naruto quickly diverged the course of Kiba's wrist by mustering enough strength to push it back and avoid any retaliation by swooping to the side as gracefully as he could. Since Naruto had the grace of a pig, it was more of a rocky tumble, but Naruto took what he could get. A dodge was a dodge.

"I'm not going to fight you, Kiba," Naruto said firmly. "And I don't want you to do somethin' you're gonna end up regrettin' cuz you decided to get drunk off your ass."
Okay, perhaps Naruto knew Kiba could get a tad bit aggressive when more than a little alcohol had been consumed into his system. Many times Naruto, Ino or Shikamaru had needed to hold Kiba back from a random person at a nightclub who had bumped into him or something. They were drunk, so nobody really ever saw it as a problem. Nothing ever ended up in a fight, so where was the need for concern? Never had Naruto thought that Kiba would grow violent towards Naruto or anybody whom he knew.

Roaring an undecipherable slur — something along the lines of 'stop being a hero' — Kiba stumbled towards Naruto, his fist clenched and raised by his side. Naruto glided towards the side, once more avoiding Kiba's fist. One good thing about being sober was that Naruto's movements were much more polished than Kiba's movements which were much more messy.

Before Naruto could even register his next course of action, Kiba came charging at him again. Fist raised at the same level of Naruto's face, Naruto braced himself for another powerful blow, clenching his eyes shut.

However, no punch came.

Opening his eyes hesitantly, Naruto was able to see a struggling Shino holding back Kiba's unrelenting fist.

One good thing about Shino was that nobody really noticed his entry. Perhaps that was leaning in Naruto's favour tonight.

Stunned by Kiba's frenzied anger, Naruto unconsciously took a few steps back, concerned with not choking on his own mere disbelief about how violent Kiba was being towards him. Never would he have expected this. No wonder Ino had decided to end things—

Was Kiba ever violent towards Ino?

Adrenaline built up in his stomach. Not the good kind, like when the rollercoaster goes down that *one colossal dip*, no — it was more than that. Something Naruto couldn't even describe.

No second later, Ino had rushed to Naruto's side. Thoughts of Kiba being *violent towards Ino* flashed in his mind, and he wanted to be *sick*. Bile rose in his throat as his lost cerulean eyes looked into Ino's perturbed ones. Anger had settled in his stomach. Yes, Naruto was a pacifist, but if Kiba had ever laid a finger on Ino, Naruto would surely *kill him*.

Cold, soft hands touched his face worriedly as muffled words came out of her mouth: 'are you alright?' or 'Naruto, speak to me — are you okay?'. He took no heed to her inquiries. Currently, there was only one, single thing weighing on his mind.

"W-was—" he didn’t even want to say the words. Naruto's voice was hoarse. He didn’t want them to be true. He didn’t even want to hear it. "Was Kiba ever. . . *towards you*—"

"—Never," Ino finished, resolutely. "Never, in his life, was Kiba ever violent towards me. I want to make that clear," she whispered, stroking the slight colouring on Naruto's cheek where Kiba's compelling fist had been able to land. "I've never seen him like this in my life. I'm just as surprised as you are. Usually, he's so kind; I would never expect him to act like this. Not around us."

Relief settled in, subsiding Naruto's rage

Alcohol had never been a man's friend. Admittedly, it could have a good short-term effect — or it would be nice to have some whilst going out with your friends — but in conclusion, it was a depressant or enhanced negative emotions, such as violence. Especially in Kiba. He wasn't trying to
make excuses for Kiba's actions, but he wasn't angry at him. For some reason, Naruto couldn't bring himself to be. He couldn't help but feel slightly bitter at his own analogy: his old friends in high school had really lowered Naruto's standards for friendship. If he didn't stop being such a pushover, Sasuke and Kiba might think that they would be able to get away with things like this frequently; he really had to put his foot down.

Laughing at his own shitty joke to try and make himself feel better — though it didn't really work — Naruto scrambled up from his squatting position where Ino had knelt beside him. "He must care about you a lot," Naruto said finally.

Watching Ino's facial expression change from concerned to lugubrious in a matter of moments, Naruto could see that Ino had silently agreed with Naruto's statement. Even she knew. Naruto guessed that their 'friends-with-benefits' relationship that everybody had observed was probably one-sided on Ino's part. To Kiba, it was probably something more, and Naruto couldn't help but pity the guy.

By the look of things, it didn't look like Shino could restrain him any further.

Walking towards Kiba and Shino, Naruto smiled at Shino. "Thanks for restrainin' him for a bit, Shino. If you want, you can let him go."

"I'm not sure about that. He's pretty angry — with you of all people."

"Ask her!" Kiba spat through his teeth, gesturing his head towards Ino. "Then again, you probably already know."

"Know what?! I don't know jack shit! All I fuckin' know is that, for some fuckin' reason, I'm your punchin' bag."

"Kiba, don't involve Naruto in this," Ino suddenly said, emerging from behind Naruto. "He hasn't done anything wrong!" Her voice had grown louder. Demanding that Kiba followed her instructions. Ino had never been one to back away from a fight; if she did, it would wound her pride. Whether they were male or female, she didn’t really care. She never had.

Once more, a frenzied Kiba was struggling out of Shino's grip that was growing weaker by the second. It all happened in the blink of an eye: Kiba's had darted towards Naruto like a feral dog, Ino had jumped in between the two of them before Naruto could even comprehend what was going on, and Kiba shoved Ino out of the way, causing Ino to stumble onto the floor.

Regret soon dawned on Kiba and he halted his movements immediately, staring at Ino whom he had just pushed on the ground. Judging by his facial expression, Naruto was able to deduce that Kiba hadn’t meant to push her onto the floor, nonetheless, he had.

Quickly, Naruto ran over to Ino, letting her fall into Naruto's arms. Checking her head, and the rest of her body for any injuries, but she seemed to be fine. It seemed that she wasn't even phased about being pushed onto the floor. Instead, she just shot a glare at Kiba, which backed up her previous statement.

"What the fuck, Kiba!" Naruto said suddenly, helping Ino up from her position on the ground. "I get it. You're mad at me for no good fuckin' reason — okay. There's no fuckin' need to push her onto the floor! If you're mad at me, then fuckin' punch me! Don't involve Ino, or anybody else!"
His words betrayed him. Naruto had figured out that Kiba was mad with Naruto because of something Ino had said to him prior. The glare he had received from Kiba whilst he and Gaara were walking to her dormitory was a tell-tale sign; at first, Naruto had figured that Kiba was in a general bad mood, and there were no hard feelings. Now, however, Naruto was able to understand that that glare was, in fact, directed at him.

"Y'two seem pretty cosy. What a surprise," Kiba scoffed, his stance faltering slightly. His tongue, bathed in alcohol, stumbled over his wording.

An acrid taste had eventually found its way into Naruto's mouth; the taste had a strong tang that Naruto wouldn't mistake for anything else. Metallic and strong. Wiping away any blood that had made its way onto Naruto's lip, he was left with a crimson smudge that leaned onto his left side of his face.

Ever since That Time, Naruto had always felt nauseous around blood. Especially his own.

"Kiba, it's not worth it," came Shino's sharp whisper. "Come back in the dorm. You're going to regret this when you're sober. Naruto's your friend."

Thoughts of Kiba and Shino aside, Naruto turned his firm gaze towards Ino. Surely, she would reward him with an answer. "Ino, what's goin' on? Why's Kiba tellin' me to ask you? What d'you know?"

Hesitant steps.

Avoiding eye contact.

Teeth scraping her bottom lip, taking away a layer of scarlet lipstick.

Those antsy actions were the only thing Ino did.

No words came out of her mouth.

She had the appearance of a seven year old girl about to confess her love. Shuffling feet made their way towards him, and she held her hands behind her back.

Instead of an answer, however, he felt a silken cloth being pressed to the corner of his mouth. "You're bleeding," She stated matter-of-factly. Her movements were graceful and attentive. Elegant movements made sure that she didn’t hurt Naruto (or his lip) in the slightest.

"Since when did you become so attentive?"

"Sakura taught me a few things." Ino murmured. "I really wished I pursued a medical course. It sounds much more interesting to me."

"Ino... why's he tellin' me to ask you?" He asked hesitantly, hoping that she would acknowledge his question with an answer.

Anxiety clouded her eyes. Manicured fingertips suddenly became extremely jittery, and eventually Ino had to remove the handkerchief from Naruto's face just in case she caused more damage. It was obvious she didn’t want to answer Naruto's question, and usually, he would let it slide. This time, however, he wasn’t going to be passive. He deserved to know why he was getting punched, right? So, he tried once more.

"Ino—"
Bam.

Well, Naruto wasn't expecting that. From behind, a bone-crushing fist came across his cheek. Somewhere between Ino and Naruto's conversation, Kiba had broken free from Shino's clutches and had darted toward Naruto. Unluckily for Naruto, he wasn't able to notice the running male until said male's sturdy fist had made it across his face. Stumbling backwards, Naruto tried his best not to fall onto his knees, and a horrified Ino had rushed to his side, supporting his stance.

Slurring something incomprehensible, Kiba went for another swing. Blood poured out of Naruto's nose as his eyes watered due to the pain shooting through his nose; the metallic tang of blood had become more apparent on his tongue, too. If things kept running the course they were, Naruto didn't have a doubt in his mind that he would be in need of a blood donor by the end of the night. Staggering sideways, Naruto was able to miss Kiba's fist by a centimetre, however, he couldn't say the same thing for the next one.

Knuckles scraped against his temple, just missing it. Instead, the blow ended up landing directly on his forehead.

And soon after, Naruto was seeing stars clouding his vision. Sounds became muffled; the only thing he could really register was Ino's frantic screams merging with Shino's shouts.

Fuck.

That hurt.

Blurs of people stood above Naruto. His vision became clear one moment, and fuzzy the next. The only thing that he had come to realise was that Shikamaru and Choji had arrived onto the scene. Choji — being the bulky guy he was, and obviously the most brawny out of all of them — was easily holding Kiba back from attacking Naruto once more; it seemed that Kiba had lost most of his ire that was fuelling his violence the previous time. Surrounding them, also, was a crowd of people whom he had seen around campus once or twice before — some even a few times. Looking above him, he also was able to see a worried Sakura patting a cool rag on his forehead. When did she — when did everyone — get there?

He must have blacked out or something.

"Naruto! You're awake!" Sakura's voice chimed, relief filling every syllable. Anxiety still filled her face to the brim though, and just as Sakura always tried to do, she tried to hide it behind a smile.

"S—Sak. . . ura. . ." Naruto mumbled, trying to elevate his head but flinching at the pain that stung through his forehead. He felt like shit. Probably looked like it too.

"Don't move! Please don't move!" Sakura pleaded, softly forcing Naruto's head back onto her lap. "As soon as Ino phoned me I rushed here! The idea of you unconscious on a floor—"

So I was unconscious, huh?

"—and you're covered in blood! I'll kill him!"

"S'not his fault. . . drunk—"

"That's no excuse! He shouldn't be hitting you for no good reason!" Sakura's shrill voice exclaimed, sounding exasperated. "After I'm through with him, he won't be able to swallow another drink — or anything — again! Who let him drink alcohol anyway! Damn Shino! He knows what Kiba gets like
after a drink! I'll kill both of 'em! And all of Shino's bugs!"

Naruto couldn't help but smile at Sakura's fiery temper. Oh, how it reminded him so much of his own mother. "Y'know, Sak... y'really remind me of my mother," Naruto mumbled, his words still slightly slurred. "Y'both have the same, hot temper." Why was Naruto saying this? He was sure Sakura didn't care.

"Then I'd hate for your mother to find out! If anybody ever did this to my kid I'd kill 'em!" Sakura announced, patting Naruto's head softly with a freshly dampened rag. "Maybe I can call your mum down here and we can crush them together. Two verse two."

Naruto laughed. Said laugh then turned into a splutter. Perhaps he should refrain from laughing — or moving at all, in that matter. Closing his eyes was probably the best option. Letting Sakura pamper him for a while couldn't be so bad. He had just got such a horrible, rough treatment from Kiba that maybe he needed a little spoiling.

"Sure, when we went out, I thought Kiba's drinking was a bit excessive, but never would I have thought he'd be in this state." Shikamaru's voice came from Naruto's left observed as a rough mumble. "He may have a problem."

"Most likely. Mild alcoholism usually starts in university," Sakura agreed, sounding professional. "Sure, I've noticed his body language: shaky hands, sweats a bit too much considering how cold it is and easily agitated—"

"The side effects that alcohol can do, yeah?"

"Somebody listened in their biology class," Sakura teased, "anyway, how's Choji holding up?"

"He's pretty good. Kiba's half-passed out, so Choji's having an easier time." Shikamaru sighed. "How's Naruto?"

"Y'don't seem that worried about me!" Naruto slurred. "I've been punched in the head, y'know!"

"Stop being a baby. I'm sure you're fine," Shikamaru droned calmly, patting Naruto's head. "There: compassion."

"Shikamaru cares in his own way. When you were lying there unconscious, he was really worried," Sakura chimed. "I've never seen him that anxious before!"

"He's slurring his speech!" Ino's voice shouted. "Shouldn't we call an ambulance?"

"Ino, I doubt he's having a stroke," Sakura replied. "He's probably just dizzy from waking up. If he got punched in the temple however, it would be a different story. I'm sure he's fine."

"You can never be sure! He took quite a beating!"

Sakura sighed, and held up two fingers. "Naruto, how many fingers am I holding up?"

"Two." He answered groggily.

"See! I'm sure he's fine," Sakura reassured. "I'm angry about Kiba's behaviour, but Naruto — besides the bloody nose and a few bruises — is fine, besides that. And, if you noticed, his slur's gone — not that it was strong in the first place. Probably just a natural reflex of him waking up."

"You're not taking this seriously!!"
"The human body's quite amazing. I'm sure he's fine, Ino. Trust me." Sakura's voice was as smooth as butter; the type of butter that could be cut with a knife smoothly — despite the weird analogy, it was the only way he could describe it. Grinning slightly, he couldn't help but recall how Sakura felt about Ino, so the affection in her voice was sort of cute. Naruto had always thought that Sakura was cute, actually. Whomever ended up with Sakura was a lucky girl.

"What are you grinning about?" Ino asked, sounding quite annoyed. "You're on the floor, a bloody mess!"

"Just thinkin'," Naruto replied. "Don't go into Mother Hen mode. S'annoyin'. Go back to bein' worried about me."

"You're fine. You don't need to lay in my lap anymore," Sakura chastised, pushing him off her lap slightly.

"Don't be so mean! I'm sensitive!"

"Aren't we all?" Came Sakura's riposte.

Many people had noticed Naruto getting up, since swarms of people had rushed over to him, all with their mobiles clutched in their hands. Some of the rowdy boys from down the hallway he recognised were the first to overload his head with loads of questions; since they all asked them at once, it was hard to register them. After all, his brain was still a little bit scrambled from the blow he had received. Questions along the lines of 'what the fuck did you do to Kiba to get him so angry?' and 'I thought you and Kiba were best friends; what the fuck happened?' were the main ones that registered. Their questions weren't said maliciously. Actually, they seemed to be enjoying the scenery with their smug grins.

"I'm surprised security ain't come yet. Heard that they've loosened security up recently cuz of budget cuts, but I call bullshit! This university's loaded! Something fishy's probably going on. There's barely any guards around here, but I'm still surprised that the few left ain't caught wind on this fight."

"D'you think Kiba'll get kicked out?" One of the boys said to another.

"Dunno. Maybe," the other shrugged, before turning to Naruto. "D'you think you're gonna press charges?"

"Press charges?" Naruto repeated. "Can I even do that?"

"Sure. An act of violence from an adult — Kiba's eighteen, right?"

"I'd never press charges against him cuz—"

Before Naruto could finish what he was going to say — though honestly, he didn't know where he was going with it — a herd of worried looking girls pushed the boys aside, two of them being Yukata and Matsuri.

"Naruto, are you alright?" Yukata asked, her long black hair accidentally hitting Naruto in the face. "I heard there was a fight in your building, but I have never expected it to be you! And out of all people, with Kiba?! What happened?!"

"I don't even know myself," Naruto answered honestly. He had made a mental note to pry whatever information he needed from Ino.

"Where's Gaara?" Matsuri asked, looking around hopefully. "Is he still here? Did he defend you?"
"Gaara went home," Naruto answered, his voice sounded tired.

Naruto watched the wonder that was in her eyes slowly seep out to be replaced with disappointment. Naruto couldn’t help to be slightly bitter at that — he was on the floor, bleeding, and she could only think of Gaara, a guy she’s seen only once?! Where was his sympathy! Nobody had shown him any! He was starting to feel quite unimportant.

"I'm fine, by the way," Naruto grumbled.

Matsuri didn’t hear his grumble, or if she did, she didn’t show it. Instead, the dreamy look in her eyes was diverted by another presence that had made itself known in the corridor that Naruto realised was slightly cramped due to the hoard of university students that had circled around Naruto and Kiba, chatting and recording on their mobile phones. Watching Matsuri's brown eyes fill with wonderment, Naruto also watched her pale cheeks flush a rose pink and her jaw dropped slightly.

Following her gaze, it lead Naruto's vision to what — or who — was standing right in front of him: Sasuke.

"You've seen better days," Sasuke said casually, squatting down onto the floor next to Naruto, hands tucked securely in his pockets.

"I'm sure you've done worse," Naruto replied brashly. Usually, Naruto would be cautious about what to say in front of Sasuke, especially because they had an argument an hour or two ago. Especially one where Naruto didn’t know what was really going on in Sasuke's head. However, Naruto couldn’t simply forget how angry he had been today; how pissed off Sasuke had made him due to his vague reason for starting, yet again, another quarrel. Also, his head wasn't functioning properly either/ Whether he was annoyed at Sasuke or the whole situation was a mystery, but for now, he settled for being angry at Sasuke.

Sure, he would probably regret speaking to Sasuke with such an insouciant demeanour later, however, between the throbbing of his head, and his stuffed nose, filled with blood, he couldn’t really care at this moment in time.

"What happened?" Sasuke inquired.

*I can't understand you. One minute you're shouting at me, saying you don't need me, and the next you're talking to me when I'm bloodied and bruised!* 

Between his bitter thoughts and resolute mind to stay slightly pissed at Sasuke, you can imagine how much it grated on Naruto’s nerves that he wanted to grin because of the tiny sound of concern — for once! — that had laced itself in Sasuke’s voice, and the way his stomach was doing summersaults because Sasuke just seemed worried. About him!

Naruto's giddiness was short-lived, however. One Sasuke had quickly turned into three just when he was about to answer Sasuke's question. Bile — or something else — was rising in the back of his throat once more. It was sticky and thick, and felt grotesque, being lodged in his throat. Instinctively, he allowed his body to cough and hack — quite unattractively — until whatever substance was lodged in his throat was out. His throat felt like sandpaper. Rough and scratchy, making it harder for Naruto to cough it out. Clutching onto his chest that was beginning to ache, Naruto realised that he couldn’t stop. Hands soon were on his face, shoulders and back, fussing over him, but Naruto wanted them all to go away. Tears fell from his eyes; he wasn’t crying, but his eyes were so watery.

Eventually, the liquid that had been lodged in his throat made itself known and Naruto was able to
cough it out onto his hand: blood. Crimson blood that looked quite frothy.

He slowly felt his eyes closing. Surrounding him, everyone was making a fuss. Kiba was half-conscious, but too drunk to realise what was going on. The voices surrounded him sounded drowned out. Incomprehensible. Fire surged at the back of his throat as it burned and stung; that was the only thing he was able to focus on — not the voices surrounding him.

"Who...—this?" Sasuke's drowned out voice asked.

He didn't hear Sasuke receive a reply. There was something in Sasuke's voice that gave Naruto a bad feeling. Something twisted painfully in his gut; whether it was a gut feeling or an effect of just getting beaten up, Naruto didn’t really know. He was too dizzy to really pay attention. One moment Sasuke had been crouched in front of him, and the next time his eyes had come into focus, Sasuke was making his way towards an unconscious — or conscious? — Kiba.

Don't go.

Naruto's silent scream reverberated in his head.

Naruto's hand had reached out to Sasuke, but Sasuke didn’t notice. Just by a millimetre, Naruto had missed. Whilst his senses were slightly askew, he felt the slight brush of his fingertips on Sasuke's grey jumper. Something that had been able to bring him back to reality — to keep him grounded. Only for a second, however.

The thudding of his heart didn’t slow down.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Once, he was taught in biology class that the proper sound of the heart was 'lub-dub', and that was the sound every two beats made. He was going to die — why? Because his heart was hammering in his chest. It wasn't peaceful, like what he had been taught in biology. Thunder. Loud beats. Faster and faster.

His life was moving in pictures.

Looking over to Sasuke with what little consciousness he had left, Naruto was able to see Sasuke right opposite Kiba, contemplating him for two seconds. Yes, two seconds — the third, Sasuke had raised his fist up high; the fourth, Sasuke had forcefully punched Kiba across the face, knocking him down even more. The fifth, people quickly had rushed towards Sasuke in attempt to restrain him.

The drowned out voices had suddenly grown more louder.

They sounded like they were drowning.

With the last few moments of consciousness, Naruto's blinking gaze watched the people trying to restrain Sasuke from the body lying on the floor — Kiba.

Did Sasuke kill him?

Don’t touch Sasuke. He doesn't like it.

Naruto's mouth moved, but the words didn’t come out.

Sakura was yelling the same thing over and over: 'Infirmary!' 'Somebody help me!'

Shaking the people who were trying to restrain him off from his arms, Sasuke swiftly moved towards
Naruto — *why's he moving towards me?* — and suddenly he felt himself being lifted up from the ground.

*Thank you.*

He wasn't able to say it verbally. Naruto didn’t hear himself say it, but he felt his mouth move.

Dark fog clouded his vision, accompanied by flashing stars.

He was gone.

Chapter End Notes

i can't believe kiba is Scott Disick? like he's been hiding his identity for so long........................kiba truly is a ninja............................
Eighteen

Chapter Notes

I can't believe how long it's been, guys...

I don't even have an excuse. As usual, I've been plagued with coursework which I have now completed for the most part. Sadly, due to my counseling sessions, I have to go back at lunchtimes and after school to finish it so it's dragged on longer. Luckily I booked them at another time so I don't miss any important lessons!
Alongside that, a very close relative of mine has just recently passed and there have been some other family issues, so my chapter was delayed even longer. For that, I apologise.

ALSO KNOWN AS: I fuCKing REGRET USIng ROMAN NUMERALS.
(why does that look like one of zayn's songs on his album lmao)

NOT BETA'D!! SORRY FOR ANY MISTAKES!!

NOTE:
To my American readers,
I am so sorry about the presidency results. I am disgusted that they let such a racist, xenophobic, ableist, sexist, homophobic, misogynistic person into power who has been accused of multiple rape accusations AND the tapes that were released of him. It baffles me that any women were able to bring themselves to vote for such a vile creature despite what he stands for. It disgusts me that people are able to support his ideologies. It disgusts me that ANYBODY would vote for him. I truly have no words.
That in mind, I want all of you to stay safe. I urge you to stay out of harm's way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XVIII:

Pain throbbed all across his forehead. Opening his eyes slowly, Naruto was easily able to realise that he wasn’t in his dormitory. The ceiling looked much cleaner than the one in his bedroom; for some reason, his ceiling was stained in brown blotches that oddly reminded him of coffee rings.

Why were there coffee stains on his dormitory ceiling anyway?

How did they get there?

A low rumble growled in his stomach, and Naruto quickly brought his arm to press against it, trying to restrain the sound. "So hungry..." he mumbled quietly to himself.

"Well, at least you're okay," came a bored voice from his side.

Looking up slightly, making sure not to strain his neck whilst doing so, Naruto saw a very bored-looking Shikamaru, sitting on a stool with his head propped on his hand. His lids were half closed and he was holding a book in his hand. Observing said book more closely, Naruto saw the title of it: Howl's Moving Castle.
"Why don't I feel like I've just been beaten up?" Naruto asked, feeling his face subconsciously. He guessed it. Loads and loads of bandages. And swelling.

"Probably because you're on a shit ton of painkillers," Shikamaru answered, placing the book on the bedside table next to a cheap-looking lamp.

"Didn't think you were one for children's books," Naruto laughed, his voice sounding hoarse. He wasn't in any pain, though. On the contrary, he felt quite euphoric.

"Don't force yourself, old man," Shikamaru retorted, patting Naruto's blond spikes before switching his attention to the book in his hand. "And it wasn't really my choice. There wasn't a big selection in the waiting room; it was either this or some old magazine that's covered in very questionable white stains."

"So... how long have I been out?" Naruto asked reluctantly, shivering at Shikamaru's 'questionable white stains' comment.

"Just a bit longer than a day," Shikamaru revealed rather anticlimactically. "Everyone's been pretty worried about you, though. You were out way longer than Kiba was; he woke up like eight hours later with a killing hangover. All he needed was a good rest. Of course, he feels like a dick and told any of us to tell you he's sorry."

"Then why'd he start punchin' me in the first place..." Naruto grumbled.

"Not really my place to tell you." Shikamaru pressed his fingertips against his forehead and sighed, "but he does feel bad. Whatever he was pissed off about, that's long forgotten. He just feels bad."

"Can't he tell me that himself. \textit{In person.}\"

"There's a slight problem getting in the way of that happening."

"Which is?"

"Kiba's been suspended until further notice. Two weeks minimum. The dean came in and was spouting stuff about 'violent acts' and how 'alcohol consumption is trying to be dispirited'. Shit like that. That old coot may look frail, but he's got a lot of bite. I felt sort of bad for Kiba. He looked like a kicked puppy when the dean started showing him the pictures of you, all bloody and stuff."

"\textit{They took pictures of me when I was sleeping?!}" Naruto squawked, completely forgetting about the whole 'Kiba might have been expelled' situation.

"No. The dean was demanding everybody hand over their evidence of the situation. Naturally, not that many people fessed up, but some did. Some of the pictures are pretty bad. Some people are saying you're dead," he revealed, a tad bit of amusement in his tone.

Naruto looked utterly mortified at Shikamaru's words. A small part of him hoped that people didn't think he was weak. Hopefully, he had got the message across that he had \textit{refused} to fight. Another part of him, however, was slightly angry at Kiba's punishment. Irrational as Kiba's anger may have been, Kiba had worked hard to be here. Naruto was a pretty forgiving guy — \textit{too} forgiving, according to Gaara — so the idea of somebody getting kicked out involving him sort of irked him. Yes, Kiba was a dick, and his actions were wrong, but an unexplainable feeling of guilt nestled it's way into Naruto's stomach. Deep in his mind, Naruto knew Konoha had standards to uphold since it was viewed as a top-notch university in the district with their students producing top-notch grades. Having Konoha on your job application was basically a certain yes in receiving the job. So, Naruto could see how students fighting was a big \textit{no} and not tolerated in Konoha, hell, it wasn't accepted in
any high schools or middle schools either! But *two weeks* was a little absurd, if not damaging to Kiba's education. After all, Kiba had a pretty big assignment due in for three days, and if he missed the deadline for that, surely it would affect his overall grade.

"They can't just suspend Kiba for two weeks!! Like, for a few days, fair enough, but they can't make his parents pick him up and say two weeks of definite suspension!"

"Two weeks is minimum. Naruto, there are other reasons too. I don't know if you've noticed but Kiba has definitely *indulged* himself in alcohol a lot since he's been here," Shikamaru explained. "More than what's healthy."

"So you guys snitched him up?!"

"Troublesome..." Shikamaru muttered underneath his breath, lightly slapping himself on the forehead. Explaining situations to other people — especially when those people refused to accept the truth — was a choir. "We aren't the only people who have been out with him, I hope you do realise."

"But—" his weak protest was nothing compared to Shikamaru's words.

"And, I don't know if you've noticed, but his behaviour is showing symptoms of mild alcoholism. Sakura pointed it out to me, and Tsunade said he consumed *way* more than what is considered healthy." Shikamaru lifted up a hand to scratch the back of his head, clicking his teeth in the process. "I'm not saying he's an alcoholic or nothing like that. None of us are. All I'm saying is that he's going down a bad path at the rate he's going. Too much freedom may have been bad for him."

"He's not some addict! He's a teenager! S'what we do!" Naruto argued. "He likes going out and gettin' drunk! Who doesn't?"

"Naruto, it's not about him *drinking* the alcohol. It's how he *acts* when he's drunk!"

"Okay, yesterday was pretty bad, fair enough, but I've done stupid things when I'm drunk too, y'know!"

Shikamaru released a frustrated sigh. Raising his voice was below Shikamaru, so he refrained from doing so but was so fucking close. He hadn't slept since Naruto had been out, too worried about his closest friend he had made at the campus. And Shikamaru wasn't used to not having at least twelve-hour intervals of sleep per day. "Naruto, when he was drunk at your birthday, he flirted with *every* girl, despite Ino being there—"

"—Ino didn't see their relationship as serious—"

—well, Kiba did." Shikamaru finished, "so, what does *that* tell you? And Shino said that he was drinking around their dorm a lot. At three in the afternoon he would have had at least two beers, and me and Sakura followed Shino to his dorm and Kiba's room was *covered* in cans and bottles. If Shino — his roommate — had a worry about it, then you don't think that's a bit fishy? I don't like jumping to conclusions as much as the next guy, it's troublesome, but we should at least acknowledge the possibility that he was getting slightly addicted to it." Shikamaru stood up from the stool, his gaze looking a lot more firm than beforehand. "Long story short, Kiba couldn't handle the stress from his studies. He comes from a pretty uptight family, believe it or not, and failure wasn't something they would accept. He used alcohol as a coping mechanism. It's textbook, really."

Begrudgingly, Naruto accepted the possibility that perhaps Kiba had something that *could* turn into a problem. Naruto wasn't following the crowd, agreeing that Kiba had an alcohol 'problem', but
perhaps there were elements that he was forming one. Recently, if Naruto was being honest, he had noticed that Kiba's behaviour had been more erratic than usual. Fidgety fingers, obvious signs of nervousness when he spoke; at the time, Naruto thought that Kiba was just impatiently waiting to, in all brutal honesty, fuck Ino. Never would he have thought people were thinking he might be going down the path of an alcoholic or anything like that! "... It could just be a phase, though, right? You know how some students get in their first months at university."

"Maybe," Shikamaru said, sounding unconvinced. Then again, cynicism had always been one of Shikamaru's most apparent traits. Arguing with Shikamaru, however, was fruitless. Not even Naruto would use his fake-arrogance to con himself into thinking that he could ever outsmart Shikamaru. Despite the fact that Shikamaru came off as indolent — which he was — Naruto was being honest whenever he said Shikamaru was one of the smartest people Naruto had ever had the pleasure of meeting. Most times, people looked at Shikamaru and two words popped into their head: 'lazy' and 'slacker'. Those words were also the first things that Naruto thought of Shikamaru too, and Naruto was right. Shikamaru was a slacker, and the laziest person he had ever met! All the time, Naruto would end up sitting next to Yukata because Shikamaru couldn't be bothered to attend the lecture; next thing Naruto knew, Shikamaru would get a 98 on his essay which the pineapple-head didn't start till about two days before the due date! Surely Shikamaru's grades were gifts from whatever force was up there.

"Sakura and Tsunade have been checking on you a lot," Shikamaru said offhandedly. "That woman is scary. I'd hate to be the man to try and push her about."

In all honesty, Naruto didn't know if Shikamaru was talking about Sakura or Tsunade. They were both very formidable women who Naruto would never want to exchange fists with. Having never met Tsunade, he couldn't be sure of her tough nature, but he had heard a lot of things; most of those things had been from Sakura, since the girl idolised the woman. That was probably where she received her harsh temper — which Naruto was always on the receiving end of, for some reason (but she claimed it was 'with affection'). "I'm gettin' treated by the Tsunade? In the flesh? What an honour."

Would've been better if it was Jiraiya, though, came his bitter thought. Out of the two of the geniuses that worked at KU, it was just Naruto's shitty luck that it wasn't Jiraiya! He attended KU, so why couldn't he come back?

"I'd keep that wit to yourself," Shikamaru reprimanded, "or I'm sure she'll put you in a worse state that you're already in."

"I'm alright now! Just a little sore."

"Because of Tsunade's handiwork."

"That I'm sore?" He grinned, wiggling his eyebrows.

Shikamaru rolled his eyes. "You're missing a tooth."

"W-what?!" Naruto shrieked, his hands instantly aiming for his mouth, feeling every tooth. "Where?" his voice sounded weird, distorted, due to his hands being stuffed in his mouth. Lifted up lips revealed gums and pearly white teeth, however, Shikamaru couldn't help but notice the slight misalignment in Naruto's front bottom teeth that wasn't that noticeable up close. He had always been observant of the most trivial of things — that's what his father had always told him anyway. Asuma had also told him the same thing, but instead of seeing it as a fault, Asuma said that it made his drafts and essays more structured.
He really liked Asuma.

"You look stupid." Shikamaru huffed, a lopsided grin making its way onto his face. "I was just joking."

"You bastard!"

"Stop shrieking. You'll wake up the whole infirmary!" came Shikamaru's scolding.

"I don't care!"

"...Troublesome."

Over the past hour, Shikamaru and Naruto had spoken quite a lot. By now, Naruto guessed that his companion was slightly tired, considering how lethargic he was. Perhaps it was for Naruto's benefit that Shikamaru hadn't yawned; perhaps he was trying to restrain himself so Naruto didn't think Shikamaru was bored. Even if Shikamaru did yawn, Naruto wouldn't have minded. It was Shikamaru, for fuck's sake. It was expected.

Instead, Naruto noticed the drooping of his eyes. His answers had become more monotonous, and by that he meant that it had turned into grunts of disagreements and hums of agreement. Moving his mouth had probably become a choir after such a long time. An hour to a normal person would be considered a lifetime to Shikamaru, so Naruto greatly appreciated with Shikamaru sticking for him this long.

"You can go, y'know. I won't mind." Naruto laughed, patting Shikamaru's shoulder.

"Nah, I'll wait..." Shikamaru yawned. "Ino was meant to be here ten minutes ago... but you know how girls can be."

"I can't really judge; I'm never on time myself," Naruto said sheepishly.

Soon enough, three soft raps were heard at the door which caught Naruto and Shikamaru's attention. "You can come in," Naruto chimed, trying to speak loud enough so whomever at the door could hear him. After getting scolded by one of the nurses for being too loud — the nurse was intimidating, and her brown eyes burned into his own, threatening death or more injuries — Naruto had tried his best to keep quiet.

The door opened, and popping their heads around were Sakura and Ino. Ino looked slightly embarrassed whilst Sakura looked a mix of apologetic and humoured at the same time. "Sorry, we're so late! We got preoccupied!"

"Doing what?" Shikamaru groaned, shooting Ino a disapproving look. "I'm tired."

"You're always tired," Sakura replied, her eyes thinning slightly.

"Whatever, whatever," Shikamaru sighed, lifting himself from Naruto's bed. At some point in the proceedings, the stool had grown far too uncomfortable for him to sit on, and Naruto offered Shikamaru to sit on the bed. Who was Shikamaru to refuse somebody laying in a hospital bed? "Looking after him was okay, but make sure he's not too loud, the other nurses don't like it," he yawned.

"Thanks for the company, Shikamaru," Naruto said called in a hushed voice. "Have a nice nap, wherever you're off too!" Usually, Shikamaru napped in the library. Yes, it was a little strange since...
Shikamaru did have a dorm, but apparently, Choji's Xbox was too loud and so was his constant crunching off chips, so most of the time he opted to sleep in the library during the day. Nobody really had a problem with it; they all just thought — well the people who didn’t know Shikamaru personally — he had studied too hard. Sometimes he got woken up from his naps, so he usually napped in the corner the furthest away from the librarian who was usually the one waking him up.

"Don’t mention it." Once more, flashing Naruto a sluggish, lopsided grin and gave him an unenthusiastic wave before dismissing himself from the room.

"So, are you two my company?" Naruto said a sly grin on his face. "Gettin' babied by two hot girls don't sound too bad. At least the other people in the infirmary will be jealous."

Sakura and Ino turned to one another, their eyes blinking and their facial expressions looking blank for a while, but Sakura cracked another apologetic grin. "Sorry Naruto, I have stuff to do."

"Stuff?" Naruto replied, blond brow raised (and ready to fire).

"Stuff," Sakura confirmed. "Ino's going to be the one looking after you," she chimed, her hands gripping Ino's shoulders before giving said blonde a gentle push forward into the room.

"Sakura—" came Ino's panicked voice, quickly turning around to face the girl who had just pushed her into the room.

Flashing her a wave of her fingers, Naruto watched Sakura give Ino a reassuring wink and a thumbs up sign. "Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!" She sang whilst closing the infirmary door.

"H-hey! What're you implyin'?!" Naruto squawked to the closing — now closed — door. Whether Sakura heard him or not was a mystery; if she did, she certainly didn’t come back to reply to Naruto's (un)manly squawk. For a while, Naruto's cheeks burned with the implication, before the flush died down and Naruto looked at Ino, gesturing to the stool. "Your humble abode, m'lady." He said mockingly.

"Please, never say that again," she snorted, sounding slightly defeated. Ino flashed a wry smile before trotting over to the stool and dumping herself on it; Naruto watched with steady eyes at how much Ino had deflated. That one question had been burnt into the back of his mind — the question that only she (and Kiba, perhaps even Shino) knew. Why she was blatantly trying to hide it, Naruto had no clue. The only thing he had an idea of was that it had something to do with something Ino had said about him when Ino was ending things with Kiba. Squeezing his fists on the bedsheets, Naruto readied himself to ask the question. There was no escaping from it now. He had his prey trapped. Cornered. And he was ready to go in for the kill. "So, Ino, why'd Kiba attack me? I know that you know."

With his own two eyes, Naruto watched Ino visibly tense. Her shoulders had become more square, and her face went from relaxed to rigid in a moment of seconds. Quickly, to conceal her uneasiness, Naruto watched with steady eyes at how much Ino had deflated. That one question had been burnt into the back of his mind — the question that only she (and Kiba, perhaps even Shino) knew. Why she was blatantly trying to hide it, Naruto had no clue. The only thing he had an idea of was that it had something to do with something Ino had said about him when Ino was ending things with Kiba. Squeezing his fists on the bedsheets, Naruto readied himself to ask the question. There was no escaping from it now. He had his prey trapped. Cornered. And he was ready to go in for the kill. "So, Ino, why'd Kiba attack me? I know that you know."

Fuck. He deserved to know!

Powdered blue eyes turned from Naruto's intense facial expression to the bedside table nestled right
next to him. On top of the wooden mahogany surface, varnished in a fine coat, was a vase of flowers filled with a kaleidoscope of different coloured flowers that, though might come off as mismatched to some, Ino found it beautiful. "Who gave you those flowers? They're very beautiful," she said blatantly.

"Dunno. I've been unconscious — tell me, why was I unconscious, Ino?"

"I think that girl — Yukata? Is that her name? — got them for you. She was really worried. We all were."

Naruto couldn't believe this!

*Just answer the question, dammit!*

"Ino," Naruto states calmly; firmly. "I don’t know why you're avoidin' the question so badly, I mean. . . I need to know why he was punchin' me for no reason. I know it was something to do with you — somethin' you must've said to him — so I just want to know. . . I won't be mad."

Ideas popped into Naruto's head about what she could have said. Naruto reckoned that Ino must have told Kiba about her feeling left out or something, hence the unwarranted anger. Sure, they weren't going out, but despite how perverse Kiba could be at times, Naruto *did* know that he *did* care for Ino in a romantic sense, despite it coming off that he just 'loved her jugs' or her ass; Naruto had to remind him that him and Ino had been friends for as long as he had been alive, so hearing him talk about Ino like that wasn’t the easiest thing to swallow.

Naruto's eyes followed every movement Ino made: the way her body tensed slightly at Naruto's words; the way the stray wisps of blonde hair had cut free from her bobble and shone in the light coming from the window. Turning around, back faced towards Naruto now, Ino took a deep breath and looked at the scenery from the window. She could feel the beating of her chest.


She could feel her palms grow sweaty as she tried her best not to clench them. Looking at the scenery calmed her somewhat. Waiting for nearly a day for Naruto to wake up, she was worried — *really worried*. More worried than she was now, actually, and her mind was focusing on that fact alone. Sakura had spoken it out with her. Sakura had spoken reason into her. Liking a boy for half of her life and never telling him — *pathetic*. Sometimes, she had feelings for others as well, the most noticeable one being Sai whom she was definitely attracted to. However, he turned out to be an asshole, and despite Ino acting like she didn't notice it, she saw the way Sai looked at Naruto. People said that Sai had done stuff with guys, but it was just rumours. Not that she really minded, but it pissed her off when he would blatantly tease Naruto in front of her.

Yes. Most boys were assholes. Sooner or later, they showed their true colours. Sadly, the boys who wound up being assholes were always her ex-boyfriends or the people who tried to chat her up in a club. Truly, she did have the worst taste in men. The only nice guy who Ino had ever felt attracted to in her life was Naruto, who was denser than a pile of bricks when it came to girls feelings! How could she let herself have done something so stupid like falling for Naruto! Everything would have been so much easier if it wasn’t for that one slight detail.

She had made a resolve to herself — and Sakura and Gaara — that she would, indeed, tell Naruto her . . . feelings. She couldn’t help but slightly cringe at that analogy — it made her sound like a fourteen-year-old girl! Nevertheless, she had to do it now. The stage was set; the perfect reason; the perfect promises she made to Gaara and Sakura; the perfect friendship that was hers and Naruto's ruined by one measly thing—
Her breath caught.

No. Naruto wasn't the type of guy to ruin a friendship because of something like that. He may not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but he wasn't insensitive to others feelings. As a matter of fact, Sakura had said that herself; those were her words to encourage Ino.

"You won't be able to move on if you don't tell him," Sakura sighed, tucking a pink lock behind her ear. "I know it's hard, but Naruto's not the type of guy to make it awkward, especially with how long you two have known each other."

"I would be able to move on if I never told him! People always move on—"

"Yes, people move on from liking people because nothing happens. You and Naruto are together every day, and you probably will be for the rest of your lives, if you've been from kindergarten to university together. I think, if you tell him, it would just be a weight off your shoulders."

"Or you could be trying to steal him from me and this is your tactic," Ino said sharply, her eyes narrowing significantly.

Ino watched Sakura's face looking bored and watched a sigh escape her lips. "That was a mistake, and I'm sorry. I really don't have feelings for Naruto. It was just in the heat of the moment—"

"—right in front of me."

Once more, Sakura sighed. "I feel bad, I really do, but we're not discussing that now. You can hate me all you want after this, but you have to do this, for your sake and Naruto's. He's probably so confused right now."

Ino was angry with Sakura. Really, really, angry — or so she thought. Hearing the tone of Sakura's voice made Ino feel obligated to believe her. There was an edge in it. Not a sharp one, but one that was telling the truth. One that was brutal honesty, though there was nothing brutal about it.

"I shouldn't have told Kiba that I liked Naruto—"

Ino couldn't reply. All of the words were taken out of her mouth when Sakura took her hand into her own. Gentle fingers rubbed the back of Ino's hand slowly, and Ino felt the warmth of Sakura's hand warm her own which was slightly cold. Ino's hands were always cold.

Ino was speechless; never in her life, not even from her ex-boyfriends, had they done something so... caring. Flashbacks of her childhood slowly seeped into her memory: hiding underneath the bed, wailing, begging for her mother and father to come back. Minato and Kushina had always ended up comforting her; when they got slightly older, it was Naruto who had ended up comforting her. Kushina would rub her hand too. In the exact same motion. For some odd reason, Ino's chest felt warm and fuzzy. Nostalgia?

Raising Ino's hand to her own parted lips, Sakura's lips — painted in a pink lipgloss, because that was simply Sakura — dusted Ino's knuckles lightly. Keeping Ino's hand intertwined with hers, Sakura looked up at Ino reassuringly. Seafoam green met with powdered blue, and Ino saw Sakura crack a light smile from behind her hand.

"Stop worrying. What's happened has happened. It wasn't like you asked Kiba to do anything. You were just truthful about your feelings, which was the right thing to do," she said softly. Ino could feel Sakura's soft puffs of breath feather her knuckles as she spoke. "I promise you, it'll be fine."

Ino couldn't help but smile, thinking back to twenty minutes ago. Sakura was truly the only reason
she didn’t chicken out when she was coming here. Sure, Sakura may have had to drag her across campus, but if it was anybody else, Ino was sure she would have refused to come entirely. Running away seemed like the easier option.

But now, she was face to face with the dilemma she had tried to avoid all of her life. Ino's plan was to tell Naruto when they were forty, married to different people — unless they had married each other, of course, but a bitter feeling in her chest told her that for some reason, that would never be the outcome — and Ino could jokingly reminisce that she used to like Naruto. Perhaps she wouldn’t have gone into detail for how long, but that was how Ino had planned it out. That was how things were meant to be.

"Did you say somethin' bad about me to Kiba?" Naruto's voice cut through her thoughts. "Somethin’ that made me out to be an asshole?"

Ino forced a laugh. "You really think I'd do that?"

"No but... it must've been bad," Naruto said, "and until you tell me, I'm just gonna be assumin' the worst."

"You have little faith in me, don’t you?" She laughed, though the laugh that left her lips wasn't joyous at all.

"I could say the same to you," he rebuked. "You obviously don’t wanna tell me, d’ya?"

Ino sighed, a smile playing on her features. She couldn’t have Naruto thinking badly of her, could she? Every single piece of bravery in her body had clustered into her chest as she slowly made her way towards Naruto. Her brain wasn’t thinking properly — how could it? Years of perfect deception foiled in one night? Years of hiding her true feelings thwarted by Kiba's eager alcoholic proclivities? Surely not.

And yet, it was true. One hundred percent true. This was real.

Naruto was staring at her cautiously as soon as she was standing overhead. Sunlight bounced off Ino's skin and hair, painting a very beautiful picture; blue eyes held life and a childish mirth in them — something he hadn’t seen for a while.

Of course, her childishness was going to show; it was a childish crush. Something that should have been gone in a week or two.

Fate, however, had different plans. That's what Ino told herself.

Cautiousness suddenly turned into confusion as tears dripped onto Naruto's face — tears that weren't his own. Still, she was wearing that amiable smile, so how was she smiling? She genuinely seemed happy, so why was she crying?

"Ino—"

He was cut off.

By a pair of lips.

A pair of soft lips.

He didn’t kiss back.
He was too surprised at what was happening. It wasn’t a frantic kiss, nor was it one that Naruto had seen Ino and Kiba display publically too many times. The kiss was chaste; caring. It was slightly wet, however, Naruto knew that was the tears which were falling on his cheeks. Not once did he close his eyes. He didn’t push her away, however. Whether it was due to him being stunned, or out courtesy, he just didn’t know.

Eventually, Ino's hands slackened their grip on Naruto's shirt, and now Naruto had to iron his clothes.

With a soft breath, Ino withdrew herself from Naruto. One shuddering breath was the only thing in between them. He heard Ino swallow, and he saw the way she played with her bottom lip. Ino had noticed Naruto's habit when he was ‘avoiding the truth’ (petty lies) with his nose twitch; he had picked up that when Ino was nervous, she played with her bottom lip.

She didn't meet his eyes. She couldn’t.

So, she rested her nose on Naruto's forehead.

Naruto wasn't going to make this awkward. Not for her. Never.

Instead, he opted to listen.

"You see," she breathed, her voice sounding shaky, "I may have told Kiba about the guy I liked — I told Kiba that I had liked this guy for most of my life, and I just wasn't going to lead him on when I wasn't romantically attracted to him. I don't think he appreciated that."

"Do you think they'll be alright?" Sakura asked Shikamaru as they walked across campus, her fingers playing with one another.

"I guess. I think they needed this; both Naruto and Ino."

"Why?" Sakura asked, but she had a feeling that she knew the answer.

"They've been friends forever, so you would have thought their communication skills would have been slightly better than this," Shikamaru said.

Sakura looked ahead for a moment, contemplating Shikamaru's words before humming in agreement, a small smile making it's way onto her face. "I guess you're right. Ino can probably move on after this."

Shikamaru let a smirk make its way onto his face. "And I'm sure you would have no objection to Ino moving on, correct?"

Sakura stopped midstep whilst Shikamaru continued walking ahead, glancing behind him in an almost teasing manner as Sakura's face puffed up into a violent hue of red. "What're you trying to imply?!"

Shikamaru merely didn't answer.
OKay but i've finally got naruino out of the way finALLY IM FREE

next update will probably be 2030
Chapter Notes

you know you haven't updated in a long time when you log in and you get a message saying: "Hi! It looks like you've just logged into the archive for the first time."

well i'm back after a harrowing month of exams and pre-three months of revision but i'm stress free for like.....a whole week. wow. what a concept.

thank you guys so much with bearing with my inconsistency, and for the tremendous support with everything. Your comments fuel me to write. i've got to complete some chapters because i wrote a bit every time i got a cute comment from you guys, so thank you!

NOT BETA'D AND IM LIVING OFF 4 HOURS SLEEP AND IM EXHAUSTED SO DONT JUDGE ME FOR ANY GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IM GOING TO RE-READ IT TOMORROW WHEN I HAVE A REST

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XIX

Ino had decided to sit at the foot of Naruto's bed. Squeezed in the corner, hunched into the smallest ball she could try and convince herself to be. Her eyes were transfixed on her clenched fists that were placed on her lap; she refused to look at Naruto. She was adamant on that matter.

The room had turned into a hushed silence. The only sound which could be heard in the room was from the open window; the caw of birds could be faintly heard in the distance and the leaves rustled every time a breeze passed by, making the white curtains shiver slightly every time.

Naruto was trying his best to keep his surprise hidden. Freaking out would only terrify Ino even more, and she already looked mortified enough at the whole situation.

Was he expecting that?

No.

No he wasn't.

Was he surprised?

Yes.

Yes he was.

Some part of him wanted to think that Ino was just joking. Trying to get out of the matter.

Accusing her of joking, however, would probably be a dick move, considering the possibility of her statement being true. He didn’t know what to say. What was the appropriate thing to say in a
situation like this? The two of them had been wrapped up in an awkward silence for a while now, so was speaking really the best thing to do? Perhaps if he stayed silent, things would eventually disperse —

*But what if Ino wanted him to speak?*

Surely if you tell somebody your feelings — especially a long-time friend — you would want a response, wouldn’t you? Would Naruto — most probably.

Outright rejecting her seemed harsh, but the truth of the matter was that Naruto didn’t have any romantic feelings for her whatsoever. Perhaps, in the past, he may have had a schoolboy crush on her when they were five, because he didn’t know what the difference between loving his mother and loving another girl was. It was expected. Spending time with a girl (which was forbidden, since when you were that age, stories of girls having diseases spread around the playground, and stories about boys eating worms circled around the classrooms) must have been weird for a five-year-old Naruto, so he played it off as puppy dog love.

When he, Ino and a few other people were playing truth and dare, and one of the boys dared Naruto to kiss Ino on the cheek — because nobody expected that he would actually do it; those were adult things after all — Naruto remembered that everybody squealed in disbelief in the playground. That day, something triggered itself in Naruto. Something that he had dubbed as a 'crush'. After all, when he was younger, he did love Ino. Love for somebody who wasn't his mother and father confused him. Therefore, it was a default crush. Naruto was nine. He didn’t know the depth of relationships — especially ones with a girl.

*’When a man and woman love each other, they get married.’*

*That had been drilled into his young brain, after all.*

Within the span of a week or two, Naruto's 'love' for Ino had been replaced with a love of Pokémon, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and any other cartoons that made their way onto the television; it seemed however, Ino’s did not.

And now she had just confessed out of the blue.

It was surreal.

In a moment, he expected Sakura and Kiba to burst into the room, saying *everything* was all a massive joke, and Kiba would profusely apologise for ‘going a bit too far’ on punching him.

The yells and screams of laughter from Kiba and Sakura never came, however. Only the slight rustle of leaves and the cry of birds.

"... I don’t know what to say," Naruto said dumbly. His throat was so dry; it felt like he hadn't had a drink in days.

Hesitantly, Ino's face turned towards Naruto’s, and Naruto hadn’t seen Ino wearing such a glum expression on her face since Sai had broken up with her rather harshly. It wasn't *Sai breaking up with her*, which had upset Ino, but it was the choice of words that he decided to use. Bluntness was Sai's forte, after all, but that didn't give him an excuse to be such an ass.

"I guessed," she said quietly, a wry smile playing on her features.

Naruto swallowed loudly, and the sound was disgusting. Nevertheless, he continued speaking. "I—I can't..." he mumbled, his voice sounding slightly scratchy, however that may have been a tinge of
nervousness too. "I can't return your feelings, Ino—"

"—I know," she interjected, sounding slightly bitter. "I don't want to hear that speech either. I get it. I was expecting it, and I don't want you to feel awkward or anything about it. . . I don't want. . ."

*I don't want to lose you.*

His bones ached. The bruise on his cheek felt like it was trying to break free from his skin. It wouldn't stop pounding. His head hurt. A lot. His legs were numb with lying in the hospital for too long, and his arms were sore. Nevertheless, with a grunt, he leaned forward and reached out his sore arms, pressing an aching hand on a wet cheek. Said hand then moved to the back of her Ino's head and pulled her forward so they were both lying down.

"You'd never lose me," he whispered into her ear. "Never in a million years. And nothin' would ever replace our friendship. I know you expect me to get all weirded out until we inevitably drift apart, but that's not happenin'." He lifted her head up to meet her eyes, blue on blue, and wiped away the onslaught of tears that were probably going to flood out of her eyes at any time soon. "Stop cryin', too! This isn't the Ino I know, and between you and me, if I make you cry, Sakura would skin me alive."

"You've already been beaten up because of me," came Ino's sulky reply.

"That wasn't your fault. Stop bein' so hard on yourself."

"But if I didn't tell Kiba—"

"I don't blame you. Nobody does," Naruto said. "Stop feelin' bad about it! What's done is done. Don't blame yourself for other people's actions."

Naruto's words didn't seem to offer any comfort of any sort. As a matter of fact, Naruto felt her tremble more violently against his shoulder as the sobs manifested into forlorn cries.

Well, fuck.

Comforting people wasn’t his strong suit, for fuck's sake!

So, instead, he settled for patting her back, cooing her. "It's okay. Let it all out. . ." he mumbled into her ear, trying to soothe her cries.

Eventually, the tears had stopped.

Now, Naruto was just lying down in the hospital bed, his arm spread across Ino's back who was, in turn, tucked in between his arm and torso. Both of them knew it wasn't romantic. How could it be romantic when Ino had just been crying over — which they both knew — inevitable rejection?

What they were doing now was something that they would do usually after Ino got rejected or recovering from a break up. They would be shrouded by blankets whilst watching some film which they had both (somehow?) compromised on, and eating a tub of ice cream, and Naruto wouldn’t be in hospital, beaten up by some guy who knew that Ino had feelings for him.

"Are you okay now?" Naruto asked.

Ino corroborated with a weak nod against Naruto's rib. She refused to look up. Her mascara had probably gone everywhere, foundation streaks would be apparent, her concealer would have
vanished and her powder must have looked blotchy — no matter how much high-end makeup she brought, tears were always there to thwart Ino's plans of her makeup staying in place. Waterproof her ass.

"Good," he said softly, staring off into nothing.

"So... are you going to get all weird on me?" Ino asked.

"... Weird on you?" Naruto repeated, not knowing what Ino was trying to reply.

"Y'know the whole 'oh there's Ino — oh fuck she confessed to me! This is going to be awkward! Guess I'll have to cancel my plans with Sakura since Ino's going. We can talk in a week or two! Oh, Ino just texted me? Still a bit awkward; guess I'll have to ignore it!' until eventually we just stop contacting completely and then we grow apart and the only time you'll see me is when our parents arrange get-togethers when we're like forty and have kids and when they ask us why we aren't talking you'll say something like 'oh something a bit awkward happened and we stopped talking' and then we'll eventually forget about each other and—"

"Woah," Naruto gasped, a chuckle in his voice. "There's no reason to think like that."

Ino lifted her head up, a childish pout on her features. One that Naruto wanted to laugh at, but somehow held it in, figuring that laughing at her obvious distress wasn't the best thing to do. "Yes there is!" She shrieked, banging her fist on the bed. "I know what you get like, Naruto! What was that girls name? Oh yes, I remember! Shion."

"Why're you bringin' her up for?" Naruto asked, brow raised at her dubious statement.

"When she told you she liked you, you avoided her for months! Not days, not weeks, but months! You really hurt her feelings y'know! And why? Because you felt slightly awkward!"

"That's different! I was immature back then, and I'd only sat next to her in chem for like, what, two weeks? She was actin' like we'd known each other for like years! And yeah, it was a dick move, but when you're eleven and surrounded by a group of guys, it's embarrassin' to have deep, sentimental talks with people!"

"You had them with me."

"Because you're Ino!" Naruto retaliated. "You mean so much to me, and the idea that you're comparin' yourself to Shion is upsettin' me! Do you really think I would treat you the same way I treated a girl in seventh grade who I barely knew! Fat chance! The idea of losin' you — after everythin' you've done for me — is hard to swallow! Hell, I don't even like thinkin' about it! Losin' you or Gaara would be a hell to me!" Ino's eyes had widened slightly at Naruto's words, as she was listening intently, not being able to get a word in edgewise; even after Ino gasped out a blurted-out reply (that was a jumble of letters, not even able to be classes at words by her mere disbelief at Naruto's ardent refusal of ever throwing away their friendship, which she was so relieved about)

Naruto didn't waver in his words. "I don't know what I did to deserve you — you or Gaara — because you two have been there for me through thick and thin. I don't know why you — look how beautiful you are — like a dunce like me. You could do so much better than me Ino. So much better. I dunno what I've even done to deserve friends like you two—"

Two hands came thundering down on both of Naruto's cheeks, effectively cutting off his ability to speak, however, Naruto didn't really appreciate the stinging pain that was ringing in both of his cheek, which were most likely a strong crimson by now. Sure, Sakura was the strongest girl he knew, but Ino wasn't far off. Especially her slaps — fuck they hurt. And she probably wasn't even
trying to make it hurt. To make things worse Naruto couldn’t even holler in protest since if he tried to speak it would just come ramble that made so sense because when Ino's hands were contorting his face like this he couldn’t speak.

"Fot are yuh doin'?" he spat out, his voice sounding muffled and very, very stupid.

"Stop berating yourself like that! Me and Gaara get really upset when you say things like that, y'know! Stuff like you don’t deserve us, or you're not worthy of us, or something! Especially when you're drunk, you always say really upsetting shit like that and it pisses me off! When I was five and crying underneath the bed because my mother and father had left me yet again, and they didn’t even have the time to hire a nanny because that was how they just went in-and-out of the house to different countries in a heartbeat, you were always there for me! Ever since I was seven! You would always cheer me up by letting me watch your cartoons which I wasn’t allowed to watch otherwise, or you would bring out your 'chocolate stash' and let me have my pick, even though you let nobody near it! And you’ve helped Gaara through so much! Always letting him sleep over when his uncle was working lates and Kankuro and Temari were at some party because he hated sleeping alone! Your family welcomed him y'know! And I know he loves his uncle, Temari and Kankuro, but he loves your family too! When he first came round to your house, you should have seen the way his eyes lit up slightly when your mother started babying him, or Minato was giving him so much attention until it was crushing! And he was so thankful for that. He even did that little smile which he only does on rare occasions! So don’t say that you aren't worthy of us, because you've always been there for us! Every single time... " Ino began to trail off, realising she was slightly out of breath by practically yelling those words in his face. She sent him a soft smile before removing one of her hands from his cheeks whilst leaving the other one on, caressing his face slightly. "You're an amazing guy Naruto, and I know you've had some problems, but it sucks so bad that you can't see how great you are, and how much me and Gaara love you."

"Gaara likes me too? Damn I'm popular!" Naruto grins, because that is simply Naruto. Cheeky, exuberant around others, slightly nerdy, sloppy, messy, not a morning person and able to say the bluntest of things which shouldn’t really be said in some situations — that was simply Naruto.

"You wish," Ino sighed. "Gaara hasn't been attracted to anything in his life besides rocks and sand."

"A bit like your ex-boyfriends. . . well, their intelligence levels anyway."

"I can't argue with that." Ino laughed, flopping back down on the cramped bed. "By the way, I text Gaara beforehand. He wanted to know if you're okay. I'm going to tell him you think he's gay for you."

"He's always known I'm fine, if you get what I mean—"

Whack.

"Please don't talk about Gaara like that. Not even jokingly," Ino pleads. "I see him as my younger brother."

Clasping his arm where Ino had 'lightly' hit it, he sent her a light glare. He didn't want to ruin the moment. Luckily, it seemed that Ino had cheered up, which was always a plus. "You do realise that Gaara's older than you."

Ino scoffed at Naruto's reminder. "Oh, by the way, Gaara told me about you're little sending a draft to Jiraiya scenario."

"Why'd he tell you that? I'm probably not gonna do it anyways," Naruto said passively, relaxing
himself on the bed. "Just said it in the heat of the moment. Probably just t'make Gaara feel better."

Ino quickly looked away from Naruto, her eyes widening a fraction in disbelief. They were on a single mattress bed, so *any* type of movement Ino made, Naruto could quickly notice. "Why're you lookin' so guilty?" he asked dubiously, blue eyes narrowing somewhat.

"W-well... I may have given you a *get better soon* present... ."

"Really?" Naruto quickly darted up in the bed despite his bones yelling at him to stop moving and screaming in agony. Naruto could ignore that for the time being however. Presents were presents. "So, where is it?" he asked excitedly.

"Well... it's in an envelope." She said, and Naruto realised she was twiddling her thumbs nervously now. "And it's being sent to Jiraiya... ."

"Why would you send my present to Jirai—"

Naruto halted mid-sentence.

Realisation dawned upon him.

*Oh fuck.*

"You didn’t." It was a statement. Not a question. Naruto didn’t *want* it to be a question.

"I—I did... ." she admitted guiltily. "I thought you would've liked it—"

Naruto shot up out of his bed. *"YOU SENT MY WORK TO JIRAIYA! I WAS JUST BLUFFING TO GET GAARA OFF MY CASE!"

Okay. Perhaps that was a twist of the truth, but *Ino* didn’t have to know that. It was just he was thinking more clearly now and not distracted by the euphoria of Gaara being here. Like at KU. With him!

Ino hid her face behind her hands to hide her shame. "I'm so sorry!"

"I didn’t fully inspect it for spelling mistakes! I didn’t read it out sound to see if it sounded dodgy! I didn’t *check* it... . *INO!* I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU SENT MY WORK TO JIRAIYA WITHOUT ASKING ME!"

"Neither can I. I can't believe you'd want that old pervert to read your works," a female voice boomed. The voice reverberated around the room, demanding respect and asserting dominance. Instantaneously, Naruto froze up. He felt like another voice was going to scream something like 'ARE YOU A MAN OR A MOUSE, CADET?' into his face. Bringing a whole new level of superiority into the room just by her presence alone, Naruto *dared* to look at her.

Blonde hair framed a marmoreal face that gave off a natural healthy glow, screaming that she looked after her skin with the utmost care and Naruto was jealous, but he was A MAN, and men didn’t moisturise unless his mother forced him to, god dammit! Amber eyes looked at Naruto firmly. The stare wasn’t cold or unwelcoming but it was stern and clear, and Naruto flinched slightly underneath those beautiful amber eyes. Her hair was long, he had realised as the woman walked over to him and flowed behind her beautifully as if she was one of those models on those fancy magazine covers.

The most prominent feature was her bust. Now, Naruto didn’t want to be *That Guy* but you couldn’t help but look (more like gawk) at it! Her voluptuous figure, clearly shaped out by her tight tunic —
which probably wouldn’t be tight in certain areas around anybody else, Naruto was sure — was something most women would die for, and Naruto was slightly scared that was the case. Had Kiba killed him? Was he saying his final goodbyes — last regrets and all that drabble — to Ino whilst this beautiful Goddess collected his soul? It was the only reasonable explanation.

Every step she took, the echo of her heels could clearly be heard. *Clink, clink, clink.*

Following behind her, Naruto realised, was an old man who looked too gleeful considering that he was visiting (well, he assumed) a beaten up teen lying in bed, but he was old so Naruto would let it slide. Compared to the woman, the man looked slightly pathetic. Naruto knew that his analogy sounded harsh, but comparing a dominating woman to a hobbling old man wasn’t really the norm since they didn’t compare at all!

Ino quickly jumped off the bed as if she had been shocked.

"Dean Sarutobi, Miss Tsunade," she quickly bowed.

*Tsunade*?!

*Where was Sakura when you needed her?*

*Sakura sees her every day, you idiot.*

*Fuck off voice in my head that sounds slightly like Sasuke.*

*And that guy was the dean*?!

"You must be Ino," Tsunade smiled, which Naruto didn’t expect. "Sakura’s told me a lot about you, you’re studying psychology, yes?"

"Ah, uhm. . . yes. . ." she mumbled, losing some of the force in her voice; she almost sounded disappointed.

"What a shame you didn’t take a medical course. Sakura told me you helped out a lot."

"Not really! I—I mean. . .Sakura’s really great at that sort of stuff! I just followed orders."

"Stop being so modest!" Tsunade pressed a hand against her shoulder and regarded her warmly. "If you wouldn’t mind and sit on the chair over there? The dean and I have some things to discuss with Naruto."

"O-of course!"

Naruto watched Ino scamper over to one of the chairs resided by the window and suddenly felt very nervous. If the *dean* was here, along with Tsunade who Naruto could just *guess* was high up in the university, could this mean suspension for *him* too? Kiba got excluded, and whilst Naruto didn’t punch back, he could still be punished. That’s how he would have been punished in his old school anyway, but they just hated him.

Warm amber eyes turned their attention to Naruto, who snapped his back straight after meeting his gaze. Nervousness filled every pore in his body! Was he going to get shouted at? Kicked out? Getting shouted at wasn’t a bad thing, Naruto could take it usually, but the *idea* of *this* woman shouting at him gave him the chills! And the only person other than Tsunade who could do that was his own mother! Kushina’s fiery personality was relentless, and that didn’t just count for her avid optimism too!
"You're Naruto, right?"

_Formalities._

"Uhm. . . yeah. . ."

"Well I'm sure you've heard of the dean, Hiruzen Sarutobi, but if you're wondering, _I'm_ Tsunade and —"

"I know a lot about you! Sakura's told me loads." Naruto said. "She's a massive fan, y'know. I know she was buzzin' to meet you for lectures."

"I'm flattered. Sakura's one of my best students."

"Not surprised. She has a knack for all that medical stuff, right?"

The conversation flowed smoothly. Easily, without Naruto even noticing how it just naturally flowed. No wonder everybody raved about this woman! Despite her intimidating aura she carried around, she was very amiable. "Yes, she does. So does your friend, Ino, it seems. Learning the art of becoming a doctor, nurse, surgeon or anything has a natural skill; that's my motto."

"Place a dyin' person in front of me. I doubt I'd be able to patch 'em up." He foxily grinned.

He felt a light flick on his forehead. "Maybe because you don't have a natural knack for it. Especially if you're talking about somebody like Jiraiya."

"Jiraiya's awesome!" Naruto would be dragged to the pits of hell, and he would defend Jiraiya's name.

"He's a pervert who writes porn." Ino reprimanded from the corner.

"I must admit, his old works are better." The dean chortled from behind Tsunade. "But I'm the one who trained him, of course, so whatever steps my pupil decided to take, I must respect and adhere to them."

Naruto instantly jolted up in his bed, but quickly hid his wince at the sting of his bones. Eagerness had always gotten the better of him. "You trained Jiraiya?"

"Brat, sit down," Tsunade chided, easily pushing Naruto back down into a lying down position. "You'll hurt yourself even more."

Once more, the elderly dean let out an amiable chortle. "Of course! I pride myself on students like Tsunade and Jiraiya! Truly two of my three top students I had the pleasure of personally training!"

"Who's the other one? Out of the top three?!" Naruto asked eagerly, his eyes glittering with curiosity. He felt like a kid at a candy store, but he couldn't help it. That was when the realisation sunk in that he was attending a university that _legends_ had once attended like Tsunade and Jiraiya, who were respectively famous in their line of work.

"We'll tell you after you answer _our_ questions," Tsunade smirked at the look of dismay on Naruto's face; something about this boy reminded her of Jiraiya when _he_ attended this university. Full of life and eager to know _everything_; his sense of curiosity fuelling his outspoken mouth. Not to mention getting beaten up. That happened a lot, too — it was mostly Tsunade who did the beating up, too. "Don't think you were getting out of it _that_ easily."
Naruto noticeably deflated. "Am I getting suspended too?"

"If Kiba Inuzuka was in the same state you were, then you probably would, however his only real damage were his knuckles and his alcohol intake," Tsunade sighed. "What a shame, too."

"He'll be able to come back though. . . right?" Naruto asked. He didn’t want Kiba to get kicked out. Sure, the guy made a mistake, and Naruto wasn’t happy or fine with getting punched, but there was an explanation. And this was Kiba's future, they were talking about. The guy was here because his family wanted him to be! Overall, Kiba was a good guy, and Naruto didn’t want Kiba's life to plummet because of this simple miscalculation of how much liquor he should have inhaled (because, admittedly, Kiba inhaled that shit) before he confronted Naruto. Whilst Naruto wouldn’t freak out over it, he would be pretty pissed off too if somebody he liked called things off because they liked his friend, and then saw his friend and the person he liked interlocking limbs. Alcohol threw him off. Maybe Kiba jumped to some horrible conclusion he wouldn’t have made if he was sober.

But the idea of Kiba being an alcoholic — or shy of one, as Shikamaru stated it to be — was preposterous.

Drinking alcohol in copious amounts in college was expected. Movies always portrayed college/university kids getting stoned and/or drunk off their asses, even if sometimes it did end up with one of them getting killed by a serial killer with a mask on. Naruto was 95% sure that wasn’t going to happen, but you never knew, especially with the shit storm he had been through so far and it wasn’t even winter! Okay, so maybe Kiba loved alcohol, but that didn’t mean he was an addict. Naruto liked TMNT, but that didn't mean he was an addict, did it?

Tsunade and Hiruzen looked at each other anxiously before looking at Naruto once again. "It depends on what you say," Tsunade said as she sat down on the side of Naruto's bed. "In high school, fights are tolerated. A small suspension, and then they're back. That's how most high schools function, but Naruto, we’re a university. We don’t tolerate that kind of behaviour, especially when it's happening on our property. We are a very respected university Naruto, and seeing you in such a bad state is not good. We don’t know if Kiba is a danger to others—"

"He's not a danger to others!"

"How would you know? Two days ago, I'm sure you would say 'Kiba's not a danger to me' too," she stated, her gaze on Naruto unwavering.

Naruto couldn’t wrap his head around it. Alcoholic tendencies? Expulsion? Wasn't everybody being a bit rash? "Okay, so Kiba made a mistake, but everybody does! I think you're being a bit rash! I mean, I'm sure loads of university kids drink as much as Kiba! Implyn' he's an alcoholic is so. . ."

Tsunade sighed. "We're not saying he's an alcoholic; he's only been here for a few months! Every student here is an adult, and most of us have been here for twenty years or so, and we know how our students can get. It's not the amount of alcohol he had consumed — though, he did have a lot in his system, and from what his roommate had told me, he was very reliant on it — it's how he gets when he's under its influence," she explained. "I understand Kiba's your friend, Naruto, but I can't have him putting you or any other pupils in danger. Especially when, from the video evidence there was on some people's phones, you obviously told him numerous times you didn’t want to fight, but that didn’t stop him in the least."

"He was angry!" He blurted.

"And what if he's angry again, Naruto? We can't hire somebody to alcohol watch for one student."
'I know that!' Naruto said back, louder than he intended it to be. "But... we could help him get through it! It's not like he's gonna sneak alcohol in or anythin'! He's not obsessed with the stuff!"

Tsunade and the dean contemplated his words thoughtfully. Naruto could see the inquisitive looks on their faces as they glanced at each other. Even Naruto knew that Kiba was on thin ice and he thought suspension was the right thing, but the idea of Kiba being kicked out, especially when he was here so he and his sister could take over the family business was so heart wrenching! He was probably getting it bad from his mother and sister if what Kiba had told Naruto about his family were true. "Please, give Kiba another chance. You can take my statements if you want—"

"—we don’t need that. We have video evidence," the dean cut in, sounding serious despite his face beaming beforehand. "I understand you're passionate about your friend not getting kicked out, but we have to look at the bigger picture here."

"I know where you're coming from, I really, really do! But Kiba's here for his family. What he wants to do... it's something his family wants as well! Imagine him havin' to tell them that he can't go here anymore!"

"That's his own mistake," Tsunade interjected.

"Everybody makes mistakes! I make mistakes. You two probably made mistakes in your school days! I know this is gonna sound corny, but everybody deserves a second chance. That's what all teachers and professors teach about! I know this university is prestige and all that stuff, but not giving your pupil a second chance after one mistake sounds a bit harsh!"

"You seem to be very fond of that boy."

He felt his cheeks flush slightly at Tsunade's words. Well, that caught him off guard. "Y...yeah, I guess I am..."

Tsunade considered Naruto for a moment, her gaze unwavering. Naruto stared back, but he knew his stare was nowhere near as domineering as hers, nor did he want it to be. Naruto didn’t even think Tsunade's was meant to be as obtrusive as it was, but that was merely the air she carried around with her. Not even the dean could surpass Tsunade's powerful presence; he had only spoken twice!

Wordlessly, Tsunade stood up from Naruto's bed and walked over to him. Naruto watched in awed silence as she approached him even closer; in no less that a second after Tsunade's hand was making its way towards Naruto's face. Frightened thoughts ran through his head; one sentence per millisecond. They were a jumble.

Oh no, is she gonna hit me?

She's a professor; she can't do that.

Yeah but she probably would. Look at her!

Naruto visibly flinched as he felt her hand in his personal space. Not even Sakura or Ino's hits could probably prepare him for this, he thought. Sakura and Ino were strong, and did carry that dominant vibe, but Tsunade's aura was on a whole different level all together.

So, you can imagine Naruto's surprise — after mentally preparing himself for a hit from Tsunade — when he felt a hand on his head. Slightly confused, Naruto looked up to see Tsunade smile at him, ruffling his spiky hair a bit before speaking. "There's something I like about you, Naruto Uzumaki," she said. "I can't make any promises, but I'll see if me, Sarutobi and Kiba can come up with some sort of compromise. You're right — everybody deserves a second chance. And if you, the only
person who can press charges, vouch for him, then it's out of our hands."

Naruto grinned at her. He was genuinely relieved Kiba might have a chance of staying. "Thanks," he hummed, before subconsciously touching his face. "Thanks for bandagin' me up, by the way. S'pretty comfy."

"Hm, I'm sure you'll be fine enough to be discharged tomorrow, but we'll keep you overnight just in case," Tsunade chided before regarding Sarutobi once again. "Shall we go? You've got papers to sign and I have a lecture."

"Those papers can wait! I feel like contacting Jiraiya. I haven’t spoken to him in a long time."

Sarutobi's voice sounded reminiscent.

"We spoke to him two weeks ago!" Tsunade reminded him.

"Yes, but that's so long," Hiruzen sighed as they were making their way out of the dormant infirmary.

Tsunade sighed, but Naruto's ears had perked up. He couldn’t believe that he was speaking to people who were on pretty good terms with Jiraiya! All he wanted to do was yell that he wanted to speak to Jiraiya too, but he restrained himself, thinking that there was a boundary.

However, there was one question on his mind.

"Hey," he called from his bed making Tsunade and Hiruzen turn around.

"Yes?" Tsunade asked.

"You said after I answered some questions I get to know who else you trained, professor Sarutobi." He grinned gleefully, bouncing in the bed slightly. He was genuinely curious, after all, he had only heard of Tsunade and Jiraiya who were trained underneath somebody — he had never really looked into Sarutobi, but to think they were trained underneath the dean of the university himself was incredible — but he didn’t know who the third one was. He had never even heard of them. Perhaps they liked to stay anonymous.

"Ah, that brings back the memories," Hiruzen sighed as he gleefully looked into nothing. Naruto was slightly surprised that this man trained Tsunade and Jiraiya, considering he looked so... dopey. That was probably his old age though. "His name was Orochimaru, but I haven’t spoken to him in so long. He never made the effort with me like Tsunade and Jiraiya did."

*Orochimaru made these pills himself; I have complete and utter faith in them.*

No. It couldn't be.

Granted, Orochimaru wasn't a common name, but surely it couldn't be.

"What did he specialise in?" Naruto asked, his voice losing the avid optimism it had from his previous question.

"He specialised in the same field as Tsunade, but he went off into developing medicines rather than being a doctor. More of a chemistry-based degree. Maybe that's why he doesn’t contact us anymore. Developing medicines is quite tough; that's why you never pursued it, isn’t that right Tsunade?" The last two sentences were probably directed at Tsunade rather than Naruto, it seemed.

Naruto felt like had just been stabbed.
Surely not.

A sharp intake of breath escaped his lips as he Hiruzen babbling on about Orochimaru to Tsunade sounding quite whimsical. Eventually he heard the door slam, signalling that Tsunade and Hiruzen had left the infirmary. Naruto didn’t really care to listen. His hands clenched the thin bed sheets that were covering his body subconsciously and his teeth were grit together as hard as he could manage to try and keep his breathing even. No. There was no way. No fucking way—

"Naruto, are you feeling sick?" Ino asked. Naruto didn’t even know when she had approached his bed, but the worried expression on her face told Naruto that his nervousness was showing.

At that moment, Gaara’s words had echoed in his head:

_You have friends here. You have Ino. If you need help, ask them._

you're going to betray sasuke like that? you're going to burden ino? you're horrible.

Guilt filled up in his abdomen as he grinned at Ino. Regret filled up in his gut as he stared at Ino's light blue eyes. Her eyes were much more beautiful than his. His eyes weren't beautiful. Not like Ino's.

He didn’t want to bring her down. She didn’t deserve that. Nobody deserved to be roped into this.

Remorse was laced into every single word he spoke, "nah, my cheek just hurts a bit though."

youliaryou'relyingyoudirtyliar

"I think I just need some sleep." He sighed, laying down in the infirmary's bed and turning his back towards her. He couldn’t look at her. Not when he was lying right through his bare teeth. But Ino wouldn’t want to get involved; he had already upset her enough last time and he didn’t even tell her the full details! One thing Naruto didn’t want to do was make Ino worry any more than she already was. He would have to do this alone and go against Gaara's advice.

"Are you sure?" Her voice sounded hesitant.

No.

"Yeah."

She hummed to herself, "okay, but if you need anything I'll be here in five minutes tops!"

"Thanks, Ino."

Behind him he heard a door slam a few seconds later indicating that Ino was gone.

He was alone.

Chapter End Notes

actual sasunaru development in the next chapter?

it's more likely than you think
i hope everybody had a nice christmas and new years eve, by the way!
Chapter XX

Hello, everyone! I'm back after a long... 3 months? woah. It's been ages! How's everybody been? So, I did my minor tweaks to the story but then realised if I changed it too much, it would be completely different, and I am determined to follow this original story until the end!

I think exams had messed up my mind! But, I'm back with more regular-ish updates now. I deleted that author's note and then realised I didn't reply to anybody's comments, so I'm really sorry! Hate me all you want, since I'm so unreliable.

Without further ado, enjoy the actual chapter!

(sorry for any mistakes; i'm so tired lol)

Gradually, Naruto had been able to lull himself to sleep despite the onslaught of anxieties that had entered his head. Overthinking everything was going to do him no good, especially since he wasn't allowed to leave the infirmary yet. Furthermore, even if Orochimaru did go here, what would that even prove? Nothing.

So, somehow between his thoughts, he had fallen asleep, deciding whether or not he should tell Ino. One thing which was clear was that Naruto couldn't do this alone, but he already felt guilt for sharing Sasuke's business with Gaara, but contemplating his words, Naruto had surmised that he would have to tell Ino eventually. Perhaps not straight away since Ino was obviously upset about the whole Kiba fiasco, but eventually. That's the best he could do.

When Naruto woke up again, the room was dark. Unfortunately Naruto didn't have a phone or anything to pass the time with and he couldn't see the clock hanging on the wall through the thick gloom of night to see what the time was. Feeling around the bedside table beside him, Naruto checked for a lamp because he was sure he had seen one last time.

Eventually his fingers felt something that felt like a lamp, and he searched around said object to try and find a switch. If the infirmary wasn't empty, then maybe he would have second thoughts but since it was just him—

Ping.
Light immediately flooded the room, and Naruto couldn’t help but think how bright the lamp was. For a moment his eyes needed to adjust.

Looking around the room, Naruto realised that his conclusion was false. He wasn’t the only person in the room. Laying with their head rested on the bed was a bundle of black, oddly-styled hair — his hair was always oddly-styled, but Naruto liked it despite the number of jokes he made about it — was none other than Sasuke. Gripped in his hands was a book that Naruto recognised in a heartbeat: The Tale of a Gutsy Ninja.

I don’t need your concerns. I’m not depending on you.

Huffing out an annoyed breath, Naruto cocked his head high and started to speak in a mocking voice. "I'm Sasuke and I look like an emo from 2007 but I still have the guts to be mean to Naruto even though my haircut looks like a duck."

Damn he was still pissed.

A muffled voice groaned from the bed, making Naruto visibly tense up. "2007? What are you on about?"

"You're... awake?" he asked hesitantly.

"I guess you could say that," Sasuke groaned, raising his head from his laying position and sending Naruto a half-hearted glare, or that was the look Sasuke had when he had been woken up. Naruto couldn’t really decipher the difference between the two. Sluggishly, Sasuke reached to the book that was clutched in his hand and passed it to Naruto. "For you. I found it in your room after Ino told me it was your favourite book; I thought you might be bored."

"Oh, uhm... thanks..." Naruto took the book without hesitation. Waking up at night sucked for him because he could never get back to sleep, so at least he had something to pass the time with. "What're you doin' here anyways?"

"Hn?" Sasuke grunted, and Naruto restrained his laugh because Sasuke's hair looked like a disaster. Seriously. It looked like he had been caught up in a tornado or something. Naruto figured Sasuke probably took quite a while trying to get it right in the morning. "What do you mean?"

"I thought you weren't relyin' on me anymore, or somethin' like that..." Naruto grumbled, his lips falling into a small pout.

Sasuke noticeably stiffened at Naruto's words. "I'm not," Sasuke stated. "I'm just checking to see if you're alive."

"Oh. Well I am." Naruto repressed the urge to say that Sasuke had probably had him in worse shape from the past, but refrained from doing so. Eventually, after a few moments of silence between the two, Naruto decided to speak. "Why'd you say that?"

"People are saying that you are dead—"

"No! Not that!" Naruto cried, shaking his head and gesturing his hands outwards. "I meant, what we were discussing before, duh," Naruto said as if it was obvious. He was usually careful with what he said to Sasuke, but for some reason he didn't really care how harsh his tone sounded or the choice of words. How much pain medication did they put him on, exactly?

Sasuke shrugged, looking to the side of his vision. "You're always meddling with my business even though it doesn't really concern you," he said rather bluntly.
"S'just how I am," Naruto admitted, shrugging to himself.

"I don’t want you getting wrapped up in my matters," Sasuke said. "You’ve got your own concerns. Worrying over me isn’t going to get you anywhere."

"Maybe I wanna worry about you." Naruto admitted, leaning forward slightly.

Sasuke avoided Naruto’s gaze, gritting his teeth slightly. "You’re just saying that out of some non-existent obligation to me. You're too caring Naruto. It’s... abnormal."

Sasuke said it with a wrinkled lip, almost as if he meant it as an insult.

"Says you! You're in here at night, fallin' asleep next to my bed, bringin' me my favourite book! To me, it sounds like you're—" Naruto’s last words were a whisper, trying to bait Sasuke out in some childish way because Naruto couldn’t help it, "—worried."

Naruto watched in enjoyment — why was he enjoying teasing Sasuke so much? — as Sasuke’s eyes narrowed slightly at the implication of Naruto’s words. "I wasn't worried. There are rumours going around that you're dead; Suigetsu mentioned it in our business lecture, and I needed to see if I was getting a new roommate."

"Sounds convincin' to me," Naruto hummed, sarcasm dripping from every word. "I totally believe you."

For a moment, the two boys sat in silence. Both obviously didn’t know what to say. Naruto’s words being a silent echo that had reverberated throughout the room. Their argument didn’t go past forgotten by either of them, either; the rage, the shouting, the banging on the door, Sasuke's blunt honesty — everything. Even Sasuke was slightly shocked by Naruto’s rash behaviour at that time.

Never had he seen Naruto erupt that badly. Nobody had. Even Naruto was slightly perturbed by his own actions.

"I don’t want you turning like that again," Sasuke finally said after a few moments of silence.

"Turnin' like what?" Naruto knew what Sasuke was referring to, but he didn’t want to know.

"You know perfectly well what!" Sasuke snapped. "Shouting through the door, banging on it... screaming — that's just not you, Naruto."

"Maybe if you didn’t shut me out every ten seconds—"

"Well, maybe if you kept in your own business—"

"I care about you, Sasuke."

Naruto's voice was raucous and firm as it rung throughout the room, bouncing off the walls. It was only them in the room, after all, so the way Naruto’s voice reverberated made the room feel even more empty.

Sasuke looked away, his relent wavering slightly. He wasn’t a coward, but he couldn’t bring himself to look at Naruto for some reason. Slight embarrassment? Remorse? Sasuke couldn’t quite pin the emotion. Despite the emotions that were very apparent in his chest, Sasuke kept a calm façade throughout his words. "Naruto, to you, I'm only an obligation," he stated matter-of-factly. "I don’t want to be an obligation, and I hate feeling like it. It makes me feel like a hindrance. I just want you to enjoy university, and it's obvious that while you're worrying about me — even though I'm fine — you're not going to be able to enjoy university as much as you probably would be otherwise."

Even though I'm fine.
Naruto's fists clenched on the flimsy sheets that did nothing to keep him warm. Chilly air tickled his legs, making him shuffle them slightly. Naruto hated the cold. He had to admit, Sasuke's confession made him feel torn. On one hand, he was happy that Sasuke had finally admitted something to him (and that he didn't have to find something out by listening through one of Sasuke's conversations through a door) but on the other hand he was conflicted. Okay, yes, admittedly he did worry about Sasuke, and that sometimes did put him down but he couldn't just leave it. He cared about Sasuke a lot, and the idea of Sasuke being hurt was just not something he could settle for. Naruto wanted to be Sasuke's rock. Call him selfish, but he wanted Sasuke to be able to rely on him whenever he needed to.

"Sasuke, I don't think you're a hindrance."

He understood where Sasuke was coming from, not wanting to be a hindrance and all — since Naruto had been through the same thing in high school — but Sasuke himself wasn't a hindrance. Naruto would never think of Sasuke as a hindrance.

"But I think I am Naruto." Sasuke's words weren't coy or nervous, because that simply wasn't Sasuke. Instead, his words were sharp and direct as his eyes examined Naruto thoroughly. Onyx stared into his and Naruto found himself staring back, the same relentlessness in Naruto's blue eyes. Naruto refused to waver.

"I understand that you think that, Sasuke, but you're honestly not—"

"You've never been that angry before," Sasuke stated.

Naruto inhaled a sharp intake of breath. He just wanted to scream that he wasn't angry at Sasuke, but he was angry about the words that were being implanted into Sasuke's head. Contemplating the words he was going to use next, Naruto withdrew his lip into his mouth and played his teeth along it lightly. Naruto knew he had to be careful. Naruto knew what he wanted to say, but he didn't want it to blow up in his face. "What did Kabuto say to you that day? I know it was somethin' he said that made you think that you can't rely on me, or that I think you a hindrance. We were fine before he came to visit the second time."

"What Kabuto says is none of your business," Sasuke said, his gaze on Naruto firm. "It's called patient confidentiality."

Naruto laughed, but there was not one of mirth and humour. Only bitterness. "Was he the one who told you that I probably found you a hindrance?"

"I don't need people to make those decisions for me, Naruto. If you think that I let others make decisions for me, then you don't know me at all."

No, you're wrong. Kabuto's brainwashed you. You came to this university only because he said it was a good idea. Otherwise, if Kabuto went against it, you wouldn't have come. Inoichi's words aren't enough to sway you, and you didn't want to be stuck here with Ino. Your opinion on yourself and others is a twisted form of what Kabuto tells you.

Those thoughts were what was running through his head, but Naruto didn't dare say them allowed. He wasn't meant to know as much as he did. Saying his thoughts aloud would probably cause Sasuke to have suspicions on how much Naruto actually knew. Even the slightest chance of Sasuke having suspicions of Naruto knowing things — probably thinking that the rooms were set up and thinking that Naruto was working for Ino and Inoichi — would definitely compromise any type of
trust Sasuke regards for Naruto.

"I wasn’t sayin’ that!" Naruto says in an orotund voice. "All I’m sayin’ is that Kabuto doesn’t know me, so whatever observations he’s made about me are probably wrong."

"I didn’t come here to talk about Kabuto with you."

"Then why did you come?" Naruto dare asks, his hands splaying out in the utmost confusion because sometimes he just wanted Sasuke to be upfront with him instead of being vague.

Naruto waited for a response. Just a word, or a sentence or an explanation, but Sasuke's eyes weren’t even on him anymore, and instead his eyes were directly transfixed on Naruto's arm where his a-bit-too-big top (it was previously Minato’s, and Naruto was a growing boy, so it was slightly big) had rolled up slightly due to the flurry of movements Naruto's arms had just did.

"What are you lookin' at?" Naruto asked.

Sasuke's monotone stare had quickly dispersed, leaving one of nonchalant disbelief. To anybody who did not know Sasuke, they may have seen it as another nonplussed look, but Naruto could see the slight way Sasuke's eyes had widened, and Naruto noticed the way Sasuke's mouth had opened slightly.

Without hesitation, Naruto's eyes flew to his arm. A feeling of nausea built up in his chest. Surely it wasn’t—

But it was.

Naruto took a breath he was holding as he saw what Sasuke's eyes were fixed on.

Directly vertical on Naruto's wrist was a fleshy, pink scar that was a good 15 centimeters at least. The scar was light pink, a different shade from the rest of Naruto's golden skin that was a nice tan. It stuck out like a sore thumb, so Naruto always tried his best to hide it with long sleeves or a jacket. Most of the time when Naruto's arm was on show, people didn’t see the inner part, and Naruto tried to keep it that way. The stigma on his arm represented how close he was to death; it represented how lucky Naruto was to be alive. If only it was closer to his wrist, or deeper, then he probably wouldn’t be lying in the infirmary bed right now.

"What happened?" Sasuke asked, his voice cutting Naruto out of his thoughts.

"Arm operation," Naruto lied, his finger quickly rubbing the bottom of his nose before it returned back to the bed.

"How old were you?"

"Fifteen." At least that was true.

Sasuke seemed to be satisfied with Naruto's answer since he didn’t pry any further. The 'Arm Operation' excuse was one Gaara came up with when somebody had asked Naruto at a party what had happened when the room had become too crowded and he had decided to take his jacket off. Gaara had been quick to join his side, making up some excuse that Naruto had an arm operation when he was younger. Drunk and giddy, the person had accepted to answer and hobbled off, merging with the rest of the crowd on the dance floor. After saying a quick thanks to Gaara, Naruto had decided that that was the excuse he was going to use from then forth.

"Anyway, are you gonna answer my question?" Naruto asked.
Sasuke sighed before rolling his eyes and leaning back in his chair slightly. "Because I may have been a bit worried, idiot," Sasuke admitted, seemingly more confident in his answer which was oddly suspicious since he wasn’t willing to admit it a few moments ago. So, you could probably understand Naruto’s suspicions about why Sasuke was admitting it so easily. However, you could probably imagine the glee that welled up in Naruto's chest at Sasuke admitting that he was worried about Naruto.

Flushed Sasuke the biggest shit-eating grin he could, he leaned forward slightly, determined to get more information out of Sasuke. "So... you're admittin' that you were worried 'bout me."

"Honestly I was more worried about the prospect of getting a new roommate," Sasuke admitted. "They might have been more annoying than you."

The grin on Naruto's face was wiped off immediately, replaced by a sulking pout. Victory soon changed into a loss. "You don't have to be so mean about it, y'know," Naruto grumbled, sinking back onto the headrest and crossing his arms after placing the book Sasuke had oh-so-graciously given to him beforehand.

"So... I'm not annoying you?" Sasuke asked, looking anywhere in the room but Naruto.

Naruto was stunned by Sasuke's question. Why was he being so... open? Normally, Sasuke wouldn’t ask Naruto a question that would make Sasuke seem vulnerable because Sasuke, for some reason, liked to be depicted as an omniscient (like he was a god?) figure who didn't need to ask questions because Sasuke just knew. Probably something to do with his inferiority complex that Naruto knew he had, but never commented on it. Sometimes, however, Naruto couldn’t help but think that he couldn’t understand Sasuke's caprices since they were so often but didn’t dare question it. After all, Naruto knew how it was.

Naruto huffed out a laugh, adjusting himself in the bed slightly before a small girl made its way on his face. "No fuckin' way. We're friends, aren't we?" Naruto's movements came to a halt before he eyed Sasuke cautiously, "and before you go off sayin' some stuff like 'we're not friends' or 'I don't have those relationships with people'. . . don't. We're friends — and roommates — whether you like it or not. So you're stuck with me." After his speech, Naruto flashed Sasuke a toothy grin whilst rocking back and forth on the bed like an effervescent child.

"Just like an STD."

"I give you a valiant speech and you compare me an STD? " Naruto bleated.

"After that bad imitation of my voice, I say it's justified," Sasuke stated. "My voice isn't that petulant."

"I will throw this book at you," Naruto threatened, raising his book and aiming it at Sasuke. Naruto's arm wavered slightly as he did a second check on his book before placing it on his lap. "Never mind. He's not worth being thrown at you."

"He?" Sasuke repeated incredulously.

"O-of course! He's special to me!" Naruto claimed, cradling his book in his arms as a sign of protection. In response, Sasuke merely rolls his eyes. How moronic could Naruto get? Naruto obviously noticed the odd way Sasuke was looking at him, causing Naruto to withdraw the book even tighter into his chest. "Don't look at me like that!"

"Looking at you like what?"
"Don't play dumb with me, Sasuke! I will kick your ass as soon as I'm outta here!" Naruto threatened, a grin in his voice.

"You're sounding very confident considering the reason you're here because you couldn't kick someone's ass," Sasuke rebuked.

Naruto frowned at Sasuke's quipped reply, slumping in the infirmary bed even further. Just like a sulking child not getting their way, Sasuke thought for a moment. "I could have kicked Kiba's ass just fine," Naruto claimed. "S'just I chose not to." Naruto looks around the room for a moment, before he quickly adds, "you did more damage to Kiba than I did, punchin' him and all."

"He was being too loud," Sasuke said. "In my defence, I thought you had blacked out."

"Don't worry, that was shortly after," Naruto reassured mockingly.

"What did you do to piss him off anyway?" Sasuke asked with a raised brow.

"Nothin'," Naruto answered casually. It was true; Naruto didn't do anything.

"I hardly believe that," Sasuke scoffed.

"It's true!" Naruto argued. "I didn’t do anythin'! He was mad with me for somethin' that wasn’t under my control!"

Before Sasuke could reply, his mouth ready to come back with another remark (insult), his eyes managed to brush against his watch, noticing the time instantly. Releasing a frustrated huff, he threw his head back in irritation, Sasuke quickly stood up from the wooden stool — that wasn’t the most comfortable; for an so-called elite academy, they didn’t have the best utilities, Sasuke couldn’t help but think — and brushed off an imaginary piece of lint from his grey sweater. "I didn’t realise it was this late; I must have lost track of time when I dozed off."

Naruto looked out of the window on the far wall. The curtain wasn’t drawn, blatantly showing how inky the night autumn sky was but somebody had closed it in between Naruto's sleep. Dark clouds moved sluggishly across the moon that was already hidden by the bulky tree outside of Naruto's window, seeing the branches rustle slightly; the night was clear since Naruto couldn't see one in sight. Hung in the dark sky, the only thing able to illuminate the endless abyss was a crescent moon shining brightly. Just how late was it, exactly? Before Naruto closed his eyes, the sky was a soft twilight.

"What's the time?" Naruto asked, turning his gaze back to Sasuke.

"Three forty-two," Sasuke replied, staring at Naruto from his standing position, making himself look much taller.

"Fuck," Naruto cursed. "S'that late already? Pretty sure that's past visitin' times. Surprised they didn’t wake you, those bastards."

Sasuke shrugged, his hands slipping into the front pockets of his dark jeans, his thumbs sticking out. "What can you do? Anyway, I guess I better go. I've got a report to do."

"When's it in for?"

Once again, Sasuke shrugged. "Soon."

"Bet you've got two weeks to hand it in. You always finish stuff like that early." Naruto grinned
teasingly at Sasuke after his smart remark, rocking slightly in the bed once more.

Sasuke raised a brow at Naruto's taunt. "Is there something wrong with finishing my work early?"

"No fuckin' way! S'just I know you're the type of guy to finish all of his projects as soon as you get 'em. In all honesty, I'm probably a little jealous." Naruto laughs at his own statement, probably just to fill the silence. "I'm gettin' discharged tomorrow anyways and walkin' around at three in the mornin' gives me the creeps, so go back to the dorm. I'd hate to keep you."

Sasuke grabbed a dark coat that was placed on the empty bed behind him, wrapping it up on his arm. "Why does walking around at three in the morning creep you out?"

"Well... y'know..." Naruto looked around, as if somebody was listening to his conversation, but Sasuke just looked slightly baffled at Naruto's mannerisms. Leaning closer to Sasuke, Naruto looked around once more before answering Sasuke's question, his voice a low whisper. "Three is the time of the devil and stuff."

Sasuke withdrew himself away from Naruto, feeling slightly stupid that he thought Naruto might have an interesting reason and not one made up of a childish fear of 80s horror films. Then again, Sasuke did know how frightened Naruto was of horror films if his reaction to The Omen — one of the least scary horror films Sasuke had ever had the misfortune of watching — was anything to go by. Rolling his eyes, Sasuke headed towards the door. "Moron."

"Hey! Don't judge me! I'm just careful! Better safe than sorry!" Naruto yelled at Sasuke's retreating figure.

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