Can Your Friends Do This?

by Watermelonsmellinfellon

Summary

Tsume Yuki’s, ‘Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me' prompt.

Master of Death Hari is sealed inside a genie bottle and tossed into the Veil. Only the interference of Death stops her from being enslaved. When Naruto comes into possession of the bottle and frees Hari from her prison, she gets attached and decides to help him, changing everything we know.

A/N: Hari/Kakashi Naruto/Sasuke.

Notes

-THIS IS A PROMPT BY TSUME YUKI. FOR ANYONE WHO MAY WONDER
WHY THIS SOUNDS SIMILAR, I KNOW OF TWO OTHERS WHO TOOK UP THE PROMPT AND THEIR STORIES ARE 'AIN'T NEVER HAD A FRIEND LIKE ME' AND 'THE GENIE'. I'M GOING TO TRY TO PUT MY OWN SPIN ON THIS IDEA.

-PROMPT: FEM-HARRY IS THE MoD, SHE AGES(THOUGH I MADE IT SLOWLY AT THIS POINT) BUT CAN DIE FROM GRAVE INJURY. SHE GETS SEALED INTO A LAMP(OR BOTTLE IN MY CASE) AND TOSSED INTO THE VEIL OF DEATH WHERE SHE MEETS NARUTO AND HELPS HIM OUT.

-I HOPE I'M TAKING THIS IN ANOTHER DIRECTION THAN THE OTHER TWO FICS. HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL! THIS IS A FEM-HARRY/KAKASHI BUT ROMANCE ISN'T THE CENTERPIECE.

The original prompt is in Italics below. When you come across it in the fic later, I changed some words and added a few to make it lean toward my purposes. I have some of this posted on FF.net already.

See the end of the work for more notes.
A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

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PROMPT:

Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me, by Tsume Yuki.

"So, So you're like a genie?"

Staring back at the figure before him, Uzumaki Naruto took a moment to look back on the last ten minutes.

He'd been in the streets of Konoha, not the main street because that's where all the glares came from. Well, not all of them, just most. And then, and then someone had thrown a lamp at him! An old, scratched up tin thing that Naruto honestly hadn't thought existed outside of the story books.

He scampered home, not really logging the fact that he was clutching at the tin decoration until he was sat up to his kitchen table and staring at the dirty surface. The idea had teased him, half remembered from a story long ago, but the more he stared at his newest, useless item, the more the thought had refused to leave.

While the vast majority of his mind insisted that this was a stupid thing to do, a small, hesitantly hopeful part sent his heart throbbing for reasons unknown.

So it was a great surprise when a form of mystic smoke began to gather from the top of the lamp when he'd actually given it a little rub. Staring up at the figure with all of the wonderment a twelve year old orphan could possibly possess, Naruto didn't even bother to fight the grin that split across his lips. A young woman stared back at him, a bemused little smile on her face.

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THERE WILL BE HETEROSEXUAL AND HOMOSEXUAL PAIRINGS IN THIS. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

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Hari glared at the people before her. If it wasn't one thing it was another. She was always the one people needed to be their sacrifice and the moment things went wrong, suddenly she was found wanting in the eyes of the British Ministry and made into the most undesirable being on the planet.
Since the end of the war, Hari had been targeted three times and this time - if she ever managed to make it out of this situation unscathed - she was not going to forgive. There was a saying about forgiving and never forgetting and she never forgot. This time, she wasn't going to forgive either.

The prior times this occurred, she'd been exonerated rather quickly and everyone kissed her arse, trying to make up for thinking so badly of her, but the sheeple never learned their lessons! The Ministry came up with some sort of reason as to why she was an evil or bad person, everyone lapped it up like the sheep they were, and then when she was proved to have not been guilty for whatever treason they accused her of, she was their number one hero once again! Honestly, she was going to get whiplash from all this back and forth business.

"I could take care of them at any moment you wish me to."

She rolled her eyes, resolutely not looking in the direction of the omniscient being standing ten paces to her right. They inhabited a dark corner of the atrium, just waiting for her to get fed up with everything and simply order them to murder everyone before her.

Hari was not the sort to stoop to another's level unless given just provocation in her own eyes. Death did not always have to be the answer to everything and no matter how much she really wanted the Minister - dodgy codger that he was - to drop dead at any moment, she knew her sudden death would not mean anything pleasant for her. Also, she was trying to wait it out, to see how long she could go before she finally ordered Death to murder someone outright.

So far it had been forty-three years since she became the Mistress of Death. She had yet to make use of their abilities in regards to killing people and was on a roll. She was sure that nothing could convince her to use Death's powers for her own personal gain. But then again, never say never and all that tripe.

"I could easily make them suffer," Death continues, a smirk lacing their tone.

These nitwits knew not who was standing before them. They didn't fully understand that meaning of Hari being the Mistress of Death. The most they knew was that Voldemort had made himself immortal with the darkest of magics and since Hari hadn't aged much since she turned twenty-one, it was a little suspicious.

Not to say that wizards didn't age at a much slower rate than muggles did, because a normal, healthy witch could make it to one hundred and fifty without a problem and old age began showing around ninety to magical humans. Ninety was like the midlife crisis stage. Hell, one hundred year olds who were in good health could still birth or sire children!

So it wasn't shocking that Hari still looked relatively young at the age of sixty. It was just… no wrinkles, no growing or shrinking in height or body mass, her health with exception of terrible upbringing, was good, and every check up she had showed her to be twenty-one years old. Almost as if she was frozen in time like a vampire, but she was still obviously human and still aged, just two times slower than a magical human did.

Doctor/patient confidentiality wasn't such an important thing in the magical world, it seemed. Or at least, not important in Britain.

Word got out and the first assumption was that she sold her soul to a demon for eternal youth. Since she still has her soul, that idea was shot to bits rather quickly. Another was that she had become a Dark Witch, but she could still do a Patronus - though that shouldn't matter since Snape had been a Dark Wizard and could produce a perfectly corporeal one without issue - so obviously that couldn't be it either. Someone suggested that since she had once had a piece of Voldemort's soul inside her -
how the bloody hell did that bit get out into public knowledge? - maybe it altered her mind and soul. That was the first time she was incarcerated without a trial.

Of course a routine check of her tiny flat showed that she barely had any possessions for them to go through and since she wasn't parting with information on ancestral homes, they could not conduct a raid of her manors.

Death held onto the Deathly Hallows while she sat in a cell. They whispered to her through the bars, from above her, even sat on the cot beside her, telling her she didn't need to put up with the injustice. She however had a multitude of patience back then and refused their words.

When nothing was forthcoming and several scans showed that she was still a Light Witch and there was no taint of Darkness within her, she was released. She then proceeded to sue every single person that didn't give her a trial and by law, they ended up owing her a lot of money if they didn't want to go to prison. Frustrations were high those few weeks.

Hari was quick to end her connection with the Goblins after her Goblin lawyer was gravely insulted by the current Minister of the time. She removed everything from the bank because she knew that anger was kindled and refused to have anything of hers within Gringotts when the Goblins decided on another war.

Her riches and possessions went into several trunks, which then went into a large trunk, which was then given to Death to hold into. Great Britain deserved the oncoming war if they continued to treat hard working beings like that and she would not help them.

Of course during the first attack of the Goblin Nation, in which several people died, including Ron and Percy Weasley and Neville Longbottom, people looked to her to save them and while Hari felt deeply for the loss of her friends, she wasn't going to fight in another war. She was sick and tired of wars and battles and having to fight people. She just wanted to sit back and relax. Maybe finally start a relationship that would last. Finally get a family after all the years of waiting. She had no time for wars!

That was the second time she was accused of being Dark. Because she wouldn't fight the Goblins, she must have sided with them. They tried to imprison her unjustly again but she simply disappeared, leaving them with the words, 'Maybe if you treated them as they should be treated, this wouldn't have happened. Stop expecting me to fight your battles, you're all adults, save yourselves.'

Magical Britain survived the attack of the Goblins but much was lost. The doors of Gringotts were sealed, leaving thousands upon thousands without any money and nearly no way of supporting themselves. Public outcry was assured and people began placing blame. Who else to blame, but the one who refused to fight for them again.

Hari was so sick of their whining that she finally returned to the 'real world', facing all of them right in the center of the Ministry atrium and tearing them down for being so lazy.

"You have magic!" she had screamed. "You don't even need money to live, but you're so codependent on gold and status that you can't see that!"

She raised the Elder Wand and called out, "Aguamenti!" drenching the conglomeration of people with the string of water that burst from her wand. "You have fresh water should you need it! There are people among us who know how to magically clean and cook and sew! Who can create houses magically or even Transfigure and Charm objects. You are only as hopeless as you let yourselves be!"
Hari was quick to take her leave then, because while she had said her peace, she knew that only a few of them would take her up on it. The magical world was in for it because it was Magical Britain that forced the Goblins into a war state and now that every other magical community could not access their wealth, magic was all they had left. People from all over the world were sending Howlers to the British Ministry, complaining over what they did.

But it was magic! Magic that could do all sorts of things! Why did they choose to limit themselves when they could do so much! Hari had planted and tended to her own garden, leaving her with enough vegetables to last her awhile. With preservation charms, food lasted much longer.

So the lazy bastards might actually have to learn to do some things on their own, like planting gardens for example. So what? It was either living in poverty or living comfortably. Already, several muggleborns and halfbloods raised muggleborn had retreated to the muggle world because obviously the magical one was in shambles. What sane person still wanted to be a part of that?

People broke the rule against underage sorcery all the time now because they needed all the help they could get. The moment the law was repealed, things changed even more.

Hari finally decided to venture into the public eye, so many things had changed. Of all the people to win the newest election, it was a Parkinson and he was not pleasant.

He immediately put a hit out for her head and just like the sheeple they were, Magical Britain fell for it again.

His mother Pansy had filled his head with a load of rubbish from the former wizarding war and he wanted to avenge her for 'what Hari did to their great and noble family'. He spun some good tales, she'd give him that. But as a Slytherin, she really wasn't surprised. Cunning and Manipulation were some of the key traits of Slytherin House so the fact that he could utilize both wasn't a shock. Of course his ability when used on great Britain really wasn't a shock either. The sheeple were too easy to manipulate.

Hari had been 'on the run' for the past nine years and only recently let herself be caught because she was curious as to what would happen this time. Death stood by, offering to kill every single person before her and she denied their request because it wasn't a good enough excuse yet.

Parkinson read off the list of 'charges' as well as calling several people to witness against her. Her Parseltongue ability was mentioned, her connection to Voldemort was thrown in there, her use of a dark curse throughout the war, how she nearly killed a fellow student with Dark Magic, the list went on and on.

"Just one word and all of them will be dead," cooed Death, most likely hoping she'd acquiesce to their plans.

"Miss Potter, how do you plead?"

"I'm sorry, I can't hear you," she said calmly, hoping to rile Parkinson up.

"How do you plead?" Parkinson repeated, already looking ready to blow. She'd seen similar looks on Vernon when his blood pressure rose too much.

"Sorry, my brain isn't wired to translate Stupid, you'll have to use a language I understand."

There was a snorted laugh from somewhere in the back of the room. No one else found her cheek funny though. Parkinson looked ready to explode though.
The man growled and without even a word, he raised his wanted and shouted, "Avada Kedavra!"

Screams erupted and Hari blinked in the light of the curse that hit her squarely in the chest but had no effect. She looked up, waiting for the next round of whatever Parkinson was going to throw her way.

The sheeple were looking at Parkinson in horror and Hari couldn't help but capitalize on their fear.

"This is your leader!" she announced. "He condemned me for using an Unforgivable during war time - *which is actually legal when protecting others, mind you* - but he used it right now even though I hadn't been found guilty yet. Congratulations, you've chosen well! Who will he try to kill next?!"

The Aurors were already approaching and Parkinson cast a wild look around, before his beady eyes landed on Hari. He glared, pulling something from one of his many pockets and hissing, "*Servitudo, Hari Jamiel Potter!*"

The object, a large, magenta colored bottle, opened with a *pop* and a smattering of pink and purple smoke erupted from within, quickly spreading and thickening, covering Hari's frame from toe to head.

Death's enraged shout told Hari that whatever this was, it wasn't good. Still, she could feel her body tingling, as if this unknown magic was changing her. When she opened her eyes, she was stuck in a small, circular room, decorated with lavish, purple pillows that formed a circle. In the empty center was a clear tube that lead up to where the opening must be. There was no ladder though so she didn't know how to get up there when she couldn't actually see and opening.

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Parkinson ran for all he was worth, dodging all the curses and hexes the Aurors were trying to down him with. He'd promised that he'd get rid of Potter once and for all. His mother had made him Vow to do it! He just needed to get to the Veil. Once the bottle was inside, Potter would be lost to them forever and his Vow would be complete!

The Death Chamber was cold and eerie and voices called from the Veil, beckoning him closer, trying to trick him into entering as well.

One of the curses managed to hit him in the shoulder and he cursed, feeling all the bones shatter at the same time. They honestly weren't holding back. And to think they were just wishing for Potter's destruction for using the same type of magic! And they would dare call him a hypocrite!

Rearing back, Parkinson flung the bottle forward with his good hand and smirked in triumph as it passed through the Veil. The wispy, smoke like insides turned a bright shade of red and a chorus of unearthly howls rang through the chamber.

Though he was currently surrounded by Aurors and would no doubt face Azkaban, he and the people of Britain's magical law enforcement watched in trepidation as the Veil began to shake and the wisps of fog within in, swirled more fiercely. The light withdrew inward and the stone of the arch itself turned crimson.

The ground shook and the gathered wizards and witches were blown off their feet when the arch imploded, leaving nothing behind but dust and grains. The backlash spread through the room, leaving the gathered party breathless.

Parkinson grinned maniacally, knowing that his Vow had been completed. Hari Potter was no more. Popping off the stopper on the small vial in his good hand, he raised the vial to his lips.
Parkinson drew his last breath with pride, because he'd done what not even the Dark Lord could do!

"Where am I?" Harry demanded, fixing Death with a glare.

The being stood there, taking up the small amount of space she was able to make by levitating the heavy pillows on top of each other.

"You are in a bottle, Mistress. You have been confined here until someone rubs it."

Her jaw dropped, "Like a genie?!" Were those even real? She'd never read anything about them.

Death nodded, "I was able to interfere enough to stop you from being enslaved, but I cannot remove you from the bottle. Someone else must do that. This is magic that was created by a goddess after all."

"So I'm basically stuck in this tiny room until someone rubs the bottle?" she asked, already feeling the horror.

"Basically."

"Do you think I can use the Elder Wand to blast my way out of this?" she asked, rapping her knuckles against the curved wall, testing its strength.

Death produced the Death Stick easily, handing it over and allowing her to unleash every blasting curse she knew.

"Bombarda Maxima!"

Nothing.

"Confringo!"

Nada.

"Expulso!"

Nope.

"Reducto!"

No.

Holding the wand aloft, the witch took a deep breath and began channeling an enormous amount of magic, the white light building at the tip of the wood.

"BOMBARDA MAXIMA!"

The blast was enough to send her reeling, smashing into the other side of the room and landing on the gathered pillows with a loud, 'umf!'

"Bloody hell!"

Death simply stood by, allowing her to curse to her heart's content.

"So I can only get out if someone conveniently rubs the damn thing?"
"Yes," they clarified. "You won't be bound to them though. You could leave the moment you are free."

Hari sighed, rolling over on the surprisingly comfortable pillows. "So genies are real?"

"Yes. Real ones are rather terrible though, because they play innocent and trick you into wishing for their freedom. If you wish them free, you take their place."

Her jaw dropped at the thought of eternal servitude to someone and shuddered. At least Death had managed to stop that from happening to her. Wait…

"Why did you stop me from being enslaved?"

"You are my Mistress," shrugged the being. "If you are enslaved to someone then I too am at their mercy and unlike you, I highly doubt there are many people as selfless."

So it was a self serving kind of reason. She could live with that.

"So… where are we?"

Death’s cloak ruffled just a little and a skeletal hand rose, mimicking people who checked their watches for the time. "Another universe."

"As in… with it's own planets and stuff or like another dimension of the same planets and stuff?"

"First, there are more than one dimension and more than one universe. Foolish mortals are the only ones to assume they are the only forms of intelligent life in their respective universes. This Earth we are on, resides in a different universe altogether and consists of nations of people who possess affinity with the elements. Some are born as mixes of two and use chakra to create new elemental affinities or abilities. This planet Earth parallels another planet Earth in another dimension of this universe, where there are only four large nations and each represents either fire, water, earth, or air, and with beings able to bend their own element to their advantage."

Hari whistled in amazement, because this was suddenly sounding much more interesting than the drama she had been forced to leave behind.

"So you're just Death, right? There are no other Deaths out there?"

"Correct," Death nodded. "I have servants who collect souls for me, but essentially, I am the only Death in existence."

"Good," she nodded. "Just making sure there is no competition when I get the hell out of here."

She really didn’t want to be trapped for years in a tiny bottle with barely any entertainment. It was pretty and all, with jeweled walls and silk pillows and a really comfortable carpet, but it was just too small and too plain for her tastes. Not even a book to be seen!

Hey, wait a minute!

"You have my trunks still?"

Death raised a hand and from their cloak sleeve, dropped a large, black trunk with the initials HJP on the lid, in green script.
She had stuff in there! Of course that didn't mean she wanted to be in the damn bottle forever, but it would pass the time.

"Can you possibly manipulate someone into letting me out of here?" she asked the being who was silently regarding everything she did.

"I'll see what I can do."

They were gone seconds later.

"I found someone," Death announced, popping into the bottle while Hari was sprawled out on a pillow, reading.

She glanced up with interest.

"You need to aim a water spell up the chute and the water will come out of the top. The boy will want to wipe it off I'm sure."

"Boy?" Hari asked, already putting the book away. It took Death barely any time at all to find someone. She'd only gotten to chapter ten after all.

"An orphan," the being explained. "He was walking through town and was assaulted with the bottle. He decided to keep it because he liked the colors."

Orphan?

"What's he like?" she asked, hoping this wasn't another case of Tom Riddle.

"In this universe, this dimension in particular, there are creatures that possess near godlike ability and in order to control them so they don't rampage and destroy the world, they are sealed into people. This boy was sacrificed on the day of his birth to protect his village from the greatest of these beasts, which had attacked a wrought much destruction upon the land. The current leader forbade anyone from discussing it and the boy doesn't know that there is the equivalent of a demon sealed within him.

Just because the mortals can't talk about it, doesn't mean they can't hate or mistreat him. The boy has no friends, he is hated by nearly everyone for no reason that he can see, his parents died to protect him, the children were told to ignore him or bully him. He has no one and he lives alone. Yet he is nothing like Tom Riddle."

To go through all of that and not be like Tom? Really?

"I think you'll find… him to be rather interesting company," Death said, vanishing from her view and leaving her to her thoughts.

'Nothing like Tom' meant that he couldn't be so bad, right? Hari could acknowledge that Tom did not get the way he did all on his own. Other people and their lack of help in his young life helped shape such a terrible person. So if the boy went through worse than Tom ever had and yet managed to come out as nothing like him, he had to okay, right?

Knowing that she wanted to get the hell out of the bottle, she drew the Elder Wand and shrunk her belongings, deciding to take the monstrous pillows with her. They were nice enough and it wasn't
like anyone else would be using the damn bottle once she left. It was going to be destroyed.

But… the boy was an orphan. Orphans clung to what little they owned. She would know from experience. Maybe she could duplicate it or something. Then he wouldn't lose his new possession.

Nodding to herself and liking where her planning was leading her, she pointed the wand up the clear chute and said calmly, "Aguamenti."

The water did go up and thankfully it did not heed gravity because it was actually escaping through something above her head. She popped herself into the chute, trying to see where the opening was.

"AHHHH!" came a loud, muffled yell.

Hari was moving them, her entire body exploding in a rush of purple smoke and shooting upward. She could feel herself being squeezed through a tiny hole and decided that this had to be the most atrocious form of magical travel ever. She was never doing it again! Never. Again.

"Ahh!"

Hari found herself laying unceremoniously on a cold, wooden floor that was incredibly dusty.

"You-You came out of the fancy bottle, -ttebayo!" a voice yelled, a little rough almost as if from overuse.

She shook herself and stood, only stumbling twice which was saying something considering how she had been all over the place after her first Floo Travel and her first Portkey. And then of course was the time she first Apparated. Bad times. Very, very bad times.

"A pretty lady came out of my pretty bottle!" the voice cheered.

Hari looked up, meeting bright, ocean blue eyes. And the rest of her senses were assaulted by the hideous amount of orange the blond before her was garbed in.

"What the bloody hell are you wearing?" she couldn't help but ask as she stood.

Uzumaki Naruto didn't really know what was going on but he wasn't about to ignore this new awesomeness! There was a pretty lady in his kitchen! And she had yet to run away too!

"What the bloody hell are you wearing?"

That was the first thing she said.

Naruto looked down at his jumpsuit. He could hear the faint disgust in her tone and he wondered what was so wrong with it. He thought it was great!

"It's the best jumpsuit ever, pretty lady!" he answered. "And it's orange!"

"My name is Hari," she said, still staring like his awesome jumpsuit was the ugliest thing she had ever seen.

Why could no one appreciate the amazingness that came with the color orange? Not only was it the best but Jiji had been the one to get it for him so obviously it was cooler than anything else the stores of Konoha had to offer!

"I'm Uzumaki Naruto and I'm gonna be the Hokage! -ttebayo! Nice to meet you, Hari-nee-chan!"
They were not speaking English. What the bloody hell were they speaking if they were not speaking English?

"I forgot to mention, everyone in this world only speaks Japanese and now you do as well," came Death's voice from a corner behind Naruto. Death materialized out of the small shadow there, hands spread out as if in apology or a gesture meaning that no insult was offered.

What kind of world only had one language?!

"This world actually has dozens of forms of sign language," the deathly being asserted, backing away slightly when she glared.

"I was just saying," they mumbled. "I made it so you comprehend and speak the language, Mistress. You are welcome."

And with those snarky words, Death was gone and the small chill in the air disappeared.

Okay, so only Japanese. That was great and all, but what the hell was a 'Hokage'? Fire Shadow? What kind of fire had a shadow?

Back onto other matters, this was the orphan boy whom Death claimed was nothing like Tom despite living a worse life. He looked too happy and cheerful to have the kind of life she heard of.

But…

She looked around, noting how bare the room was beside the table and the fridge. Both looked worse for wear too. There were no dishes, but there were a lot of plastic cups lying about the floor and on the table was a pair of chopsticks. The glass cover for the lightbulb overhead was broken and the bulb itself was only half lit, the other half dark from burning out no doubt.

There was a lot of dust and she could honestly believe that he lived alone. What child liked cleaning anyway? Of course he would let his house get messy since he wouldn't want to clean it! Cleaning was really boring!

"You came from my bottle, and… only genies come from bottles so, so you're like a genie?"

"So, so you're like a genie?"

Staring back at the figure before him, Uzumaki Naruto took a moment to look back on the last ten minutes.

He'd been in the streets of Konoha, not the main street because that's where all the glares came from. Well, not all of them, just most of them. And then... and then someone had thrown a bottle at him! Nothing new there, but it was the bottle itself that caught his eye. An old, scratched up thing that Naruto honestly hadn't thought existed outside of the story books. Genies rarely lived in bottles, right? Mostly lamps.

He scampered home, not really logging the fact that he was clutching at the magenta decoration until he was sat up to his kitchen table and staring at the bejeweled surface. The idea had teased him, half remembered from a story long ago, but the more he stared at his newest, not so useless item, the more the thought had refused to leave.

While the vast majority of his mind insisted that this was a stupid thing to do, a small, hesitantly
hopeful part sent his heart throbbing for reasons unknown. And if it didn't work, he could always pawn it.

So it was a great surprise when water began spouting from the top and a form of mystic smoke began to gather from the tip when he'd hastily began wiping it off. Staring up at the figure with all of the wonderment a twelve year old orphan could possibly possess, Naruto didn't even bother to fight the grin that split across his lips. A young woman stared back at him, a bemused little smile on her face.

And she was suddenly on the receiving end of the most fiendish pair of puppy dog eyes that totally put Fred and George's eyes to shame! This boy was one of the ones to look out for, that was for certain.

"So if you're a genie, do I get wishes?!!"

He was bouncing up and down now, obviously excited at getting wishes.

Hari winced, biting her lip and wondering why she didn't just haul her arse out of there.

Because he's just as alone as you are, a voice in her mind whispered. The similarities between you are endless. He needs someone and you have no one. Why not help him out a little? the voice suggested, sounding oh so sugary and sultry.

Feeling a little guilty for thinking of just abandoning a child who quite obviously needed all the help he could get, she gave a slow nod, trying to think of that one Disney movie she'd seen. Aladdin. What were Genie's stipulations?

"There are some… rules that I can't get around though," she told the boy, who was suddenly all serious. It didn't look right on such a bright and happy face. She resolved to not have him be sad, fearing that perhaps the sun would go out otherwise.

"I can't kill anybody… so don't ask."

He looked horrified at the suggestion. Good. A good head on his shoulders.

"I can't make anyone fall in love with anyone else," she kept on, thinking of Tom Riddle Sr. and Merope Gaunt. She refused to be the reason someone was raped. That kind of thing was terrible and now that she was older and had more time to understand, she could look at their situation objectively and realize that both were in the wrong and Merope was a creep.

Forcing someone to love you and marry you and have sex and a child with you… no. That was terrible. She would have no part in something like that.

Finally, she finished with, "I can't bring people back from the dead."

"Yes you can!" Death interjected, earning themself a glare. "What? I'm just saying that you actually can."

They were gone the next second.

"That's it?!" Naruto asked, looking excited once more.

"Yes," she nodded. "Those are the laws I cannot break," she lied. "Other than those, some things would be a bit difficult to do since I can't just create something from nothing, but we'll get to that later."
"Okay, nee-chan!"

"So… where am I?"

The bubbly blond proceeded to proudly inform her that she was in Hi no Kuni in the great village of Konohagakure. Why anyone would want to hide a village in some leaves, she'd never know, but that was where she was and at least knowing about her surroundings would benefit her some.

A 'Hokage' was the village leader and in this case, Naruto dearly wanted to be the village leader so people would look up to him and respect him. From what Death told her and what little she gleaned from the boy, next to no one liked him, so he figured that if he was the leader, then everyone would have to like him.

It was sad.

Hari had hoped for something similar when she lived with the Dursleys. She thought that if she did everything they wanted to the exact mark that they demanded, they would eventually love her. Eventually, she realized that nothing she did would ever be good in their eyes and she resolved to give up ever trying to please them. They weren't worth it anymore.

Naruto had the same goal and she really didn't want to be the one to burst his bubble, but people didn't just suddenly like you simply because you come into a position of power. She would know. Her people had come to resent her existence and she wouldn't wish the drama she survived, on anyone. Especially someone as sweet and innocent as Naruto.

"So what do you learn in school, Naruto?" she asked, wanting to get a good picture of his life. If his house was in shambles, he ate instant noodles all the times, and wore really old, ratty clothing, then his life was probably really low. Did he even go to school?

"How to be a ninja! -ttebayo!"

Ninja? As in, those people that dressed in all black and sneaked around at night with their shuriken and masks and stuff? The ones who assassinated people?

"What does being a ninja entail?"

"En-what?" he asked, head tilting to the side, eyes closing to a near squint.

"What are the demands for being a ninja?" she re-worded the sentence, hoping that it helped.

"OH! We learn Taijutsu, Ninjutsu, and Genjutsu. Taijutsu is hand to hand, Ninjutsu is where we use our chakra to do cool stuff, and Genjutsu is like illusions… I think. I'm not smart so I might mess up."

She frowned, "You are pretty smart to me. I don't know any of this stuff but you've been able to tell me so much."

She had been told she wasn't smart all because she was a more hands on learner. She didn't want him to think so negatively about himself. He was too young and impressionable for that. All that negativity now could be detrimental to his health later on in life.

The boy flushed and rubbed the back of his head, "Thanks, nee-chan, but I'm really not smart. I don't like reading 'cause it's boring and I can't pay attention for too long 'cause it gets boring. I have the worst grades in the class and half the time I miss lessons for always having detention and
punishments. I'm not that great."

"Wait, you have detention during class?"

"Uh… yeah."

She shook her head insistently, "You're not supposed to have detention during class, it's supposed to happen after school. They shouldn't make you miss class at all. Don't you get make up work?"

"Um… no?" he said, looking unsure.

Her teeth ground together in annoyance. Of course the people hated him so much that they even went so far as to sabotage him! It was like Vernon lying to the chairman of her primary school about her being a delinquent. Trying to ruin her before she could truly begin.

She'll have to see what could be done about that.

"When do you graduate?"

Naruto confused expression drooped into complete devastation. "I've failed the Genin graduation exam twice already."

_Twice!_

"How old are you?"

"I turned twelve in October! -ttebayo! And I really want to graduate this time because I'll be the same age as everyone in my class this year!"

Twelve! Twelve year olds graduating?

"So then, if you had chances to graduate before, that must mean you're better than your classmates, right? Did you start early or late or something?"

Naruto's head tilted again, "Ehh… I started the same time as everyone else. I got lots of chakra so got most of the Ninjutsu down and my Taijutsu is okay. So long as I get the passing grade on the written test, I can try for the graduation exam. The only problem I've had is the Bunshin. I can't make clones for some reason! It's why I fail every time."

The boy looked dejected as if resigned to his fate and Hari felt for him.

"Do you know why you can't do it? Is there a method that you have to use, or words or something?"

"No, I know my hand signs really good and I know the steps it's just… watch this!"

He stood and backed up a few feet before putting his hands together and closing his eyes. A deep look of concentration passed over his features making her believe that he was really trying to get it right.

"Bunshin no Jutsu!"

There was a poof of smoke beside him and for a second and near perfect replica of Naruto stood to his right. But then… it was like a balloon that lost its air, deflating until is was almost cloth like, just laying on the floor. More 2D than anything else. Like a colored sketch.

"I finally got the coloring right, but they keep doing that. They blow away in the wind too."
"Are you putting enough power into it?" Hari asked, knowing that sometimes certain high level spells didn't work for younger wizards and witches because their magical cores weren't large enough to hold the necessary amount of power required for certain spells.

"Uhh... I was given detention that day so I don't know. Iruka-sensei never said my form was wrong so I'm sure it's not that. He's always making sure my hand signs are good and he yells when I do pranks and buys me ramen when I do something right."

So he didn't even know how much power was supposed to go into the technique because conveniently he missed that class due to being in trouble. She was really beginning to wonder what was going on if even the administrators allowed such a thing to go down. Weren't teachers supposed to be trustworthy? Mind... Hari had never had any worth her trust so she really couldn't complain, but come on! It was the principle of the thing.

How was he ever going to get anywhere in life if he could only trust one or two people?

"Well, we can go to the library and see if they have books on it."

The blond groaned and sank into his chair. "I hate reading!"

She cast him a curious glance, feeling something familiar ringing in her ear. "Is that because it doesn't have pictures, because it's boring, or because you can't actually read?"

A dark flush crawled up his cheek and he looked away, muttering about how everything was in 'Kanji' and he wasn't that great at reading 'Hiragana' because some of the 'characters' were too similar.

So he couldn't even read! She wanted so badly to bash her head off something. Something metallic. All she had was a wooden table with unsturdy legs. It would have to do.

"Nee-chan, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, Naruto."

He'd need to improve. In order to gain and retain knowledge, he'd need some help.

She was not a Potions Master, but she was pretty good and if she could get her hands on the ingredients necessary, she could brew him a Wit Sharpening Potion. Being able to think more clearly would allow him to pay attention, especially if he was having trouble concentrating in class and during schoolwork.

It was a fourth year potion so she shouldn't have any trouble with it. Never say never though.

"First order of business is to get to the library and get the books we'll need. If you're going to be a ninja, you need to be well rounded, right?"

"Huh?"

"You know, lots of different skills, right?"

"What kind of skills, nee-chan?!" he asked, bouncing in his seat.

"Cooking, hunting, foraging, sneaking-"

"I'm a great sneak!"
"-reading, writing-

"Aw, man!"

"-manipulating, I guess fighting, whatever that clone thing was, and probably other stuff too. I don't know much about ninjas."

"Nee-chan, I don't go to the library 'cause the mean lady at the front won't let me in," he said, pouting to the max.

Hari sniffed, "Well I'll make her let you in."

He threw his hands up and gave a loud cheer! "Banzai! -ttebayo!"

He was out the door in a second and Hari grabbed the genie bottle, doubling it and then shrinking it and slipping it into her pocket quickly, before following him out and casting a small locking spell on the door and an Impenetrable Charm over it and the visible windows. It wasn't enough to keep out a witch or wizard, and probably a ninja too, but civilians and muggles weren't able to break through and she considered that good enough protection until she could think up something better.

Following the blond to the main street was an experience and a half. For a second, she had a flashback of walking in Diagon Alley for the first time. All of the buildings were weirdly shaped and seemed to defy the laws of gravity at every turn. Some leaned over much like Gringotts had and she wondered over how they were structurally sound.

One was uneven, reminding her of The Burrow. It was so… very strange.

"Are you coming nee-chan?"

She blinked, returning to the present and sending Naruto a kind smile, "Yes. Lead the way, squirt."

The woman at the front desk was probably the most annoying person Hari had ever had the displeasure of meeting. The insidious glare she sent Naruto’s way was enough to make the poor child cower behind Hari who actually wasn't that much taller than him. She had even opened her mouth, no doubt to say something terribly vitriol, when Hari raised her hand and said, "Confundo."

The woman's entire body shuddered as she proceeded to blink away the immediate effects.

"You were about to let us pass," Hari said in a stern tone.

"I… I… right," the woman blinked slowly. "Right, go on ahead."

Hari pulled Naruto along before the woman's head cleared and rolled her eyes at the reverently whispered, 'awesome, -ttebayo' coming from the blond she was tugging along.

"Wait here," she ordered, slipping off deeper into what was labeled as the ‘Genin Section’ and covering herself in a Notice Me Not Charm so no one would see her taking anything. She grabbed all the books that caught her eye. She slipped off her left earring and transfigured it into a small bag the size of a coin purse. Adding an Undetectable Extension Charm, she made it capable of fitting the chosen books and proceeded to dump her wares inside. They'd be returned when they were no longer needed.

Once she was sure she had everything, she slipped the bag in her pouch and went to get Naruto, canceling the Notice Me Not along the way..
The boy brightened upon seeing her round the corner, but it turned to confusion when he noticed that she had no books with her.

"Did they not have anything?" he asked.

"I got what we need," she assured him, flashing a dazzling smile to calm him down.

"Oh. Okay."

The two took their leave quickly, Hari not wishing to draw unnecessary attention to themselves.

"Is there a trading station or a pawn shop around here?" she asked, certain that he actually wouldn't know the answer but it would be foolish not to ask anyway.

"Uh… there's a pawn shop in the center of the village. I was going to take your bottle there to get some money," the boy admitted, another flush covering the bridge of his nose.

She knew the struggle for food and money. No child should go through that.

"Well, lead the way then."

He did so gladly, jabbering away as he told her all about the shops they passed and what exactly each of them sold or at least, what he thought they sold. As they walked, she could see the looks of hatred and disdain the villagers sent the boy's way and she sent more than a dozen stinging hexes in different directions, hoping that some people would learn their bloody lessons!

In the pawn shop, Hari removed her other earring and proceeded to haggle its worth with the man behind the desk, who tried to claim it wasn't worth much.

"This is a real ruby you fool. I'm certain you'd like to have it, wouldn't you? Confundo!"

The man shivered and blinked, nodding along with her suggestion. "Yes. Yes, I would."

Hair cut Naruto a quick look and asked, "How much do you think it's worth, squirt?"

"Five thousand Ryo!" he stuttered suddenly and Hari grinned, repeating the number to the man, who nodded vacantly and opened his register, doling out the strange currency of the land.

Hari handed over the ruby and silver earring and bade the man farewell, thanking him for his business. They departed hastily, for the same reason they left the library the same way.

"What are you gonna do with it, nee-chan?" Naruto asked once a safe distance away.

Hari knew all about struggling for money and worrying about when she'd next eat. With a deep breath, she answered lowly, "I'm going to make more money with it."

Naruto led them back to his flat, where she spread the notes out on the table, layering all the ones of a certain number together.

Casting Naruto a look she said, "I'm about to double our money. Gemino!"

The notes glowed for a second, before returning to normal. Hari pointed to the smallest note and ordered, "Poke it."

The boy did so slowly, gaping when the note glowed and seemed to pop, making a second appear right beside it. Looking over, he began poking all the other notes, giggling with glee as they too
popped and exploded into more and more notes. By the time he finished, the table and a good part of the floor was covered in the strange currency of this Earth and Hari canceled the curse.

She felt no guilt whatsoever in duplicating the money because they boy needed it and if she was going to be staying with him, she intended to fix his home up. Besides, they were perfect replicas and no one would be able to tell the difference.

Counterfeiting was illegal but as no one would ever find a difference between the originals and the newer ones at least in this universe, she felt no guilt.

However…

"Naruto, I would like to inform you that any other way of doing this is illegal and therefore you should never replicate and print money illegally, okay?"

He nodded seriously, "Okay, nee-chan."

"And you can't tell anyone about this or they might try to take me from you and demand I do it for them," she added for extra incentive.

"Never!" he swore, little chest puffing out importantly. He was so cute!

"Good, now let's gather this all up and we can look at those books."

An annoyed groan was like music to her ears.

"So you plan to stay here?" came Death's crackling voice from behind her.

Flipping her dark hair over her shoulder, she sent them a stern look.

"I'll take that as an affirmative."

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**A/N: The first is done!**

**How was it? Let me know!**

**Check out my other fics.**

**See ya! :D**

**CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON, I FOLLOW BACK.**
"Nee-chan, why are we doing this?" Naruto whined, yes, whined. Hari was making him clean. As in getting on hands and knees and scrubbing the floor and stuff! He didn't want to be touching all the sticky stuff stuck to the floor! It was gross! He was sure he didn't put it there.

She took him to the store and for once, no one looked at him oddly. When he asked, she said she had made him invisible so they couldn't see him! He could totally use that in his pranks but he'd wait a bit before mentioning those because he didn't know how she'd take it. None of the adults he knew liked it when he played pranks on people.

She bought lots and lots of cleaning stuff that made his nose itch and she told him they couldn't get food in the fridge until the 'flat' was spotless. The fridge needed to be cleaned too after all.

So here he was, kneeling on the swept floor, scrubbing off green stuff that had gotten stuck over the years. He didn't know what it was and he didn't want to know what it was. Hari was standing on one of his old, rickety chairs, cleaning the walls of the kitchen. He didn't know that the walls were originally white! He'd always assumed they were a dark yellow. But there the far wall was, all clean and white and smelling of lemons.

"We're making this place inhabitable. You could get sick living like this," she said, waving her white stick and making herself float again. After the first four times, Naruto was finally able to get over it. Nee-chan could fly, but she was a genie so he expected it.

"I've been living here for nearly nine years, nee-chan!" he insisted as he chiseled the sticky stuff off with the pointed edge of his brush. "I have never gotten sick either!"
"Really?"

"Yeah, I don't get sick. -ttebayo!" he cheered, scraping the green stuff off with a pleased grin. He'd finally conquered that square inch of the floor! Now all he had to do was clean the rest of the floor!

He looked around and sighed because this was going to take forever!

"Ne, nee-chan, can't I just wish the house clean?" he asked, hoping to just get out of doing it.

"You could, but magic doesn't clean as thoroughly as hard labor does."

Meh. Hari-nee-chan was a neat freak and she'd prefer if they did everything by hand. With a reluctant sigh - because he certainly wasn't doing this 'cause it was fun! - he continued onto another square inch of the floor. He'd get this done! He'd defeat all the gross, sticky stuff! -ttebayo!

"What would you like for dinner, Naruto?"

"Ramen!"

Hari sniffed as she finally finished the wall and turned to see Naruto slaving over the floor. He'd finished about half already and was really putting all of his strength into it. She was so proud, she decided that they could have whatever his favorite dish was for dinner.

But… she'd never heard of ramen before. What was it?

"I… don't know what that is," she admitted, watching as he stiffened and fixed her with a look of abject horror.

"How could you not know the food of the great Ramen Kami?!" the blond yelled getting to his feet as he sputtered incoherently over her apparently shocking revelation. "It's only the very best food in the world, that's what! -ttebayo!" he screamed, hands throw open wide to explain just how important this 'ramen' was to him.

"Do you know how to make it?"

"Heh heh, I have some instant ramen in the cupboards but nothing beats Teuchi-Jiji's ramen. He owns Ichiraku Ramen and he makes the best ever!" the boy nodded to himself, looking off as he delved into a good memory that left him grinning. "I haven't been there in awhile though," he pouted.

Hari nodded slowly, "And you like it there?"

"Oh yeah!" the blond cheered. "Teuchi-Jiji and Ayame-nee-chan are the best, just like Iruka-sensei! -ttebayo! They sometimes let me have free ramen when I don't have enough money and they let me help take out the trash to pay them back. Sometimes Ayame-nee-chan needs help delivering stuff and I take her to get her there faster!"

So it seemed that Naruto had at least a few people in his life who weren't complete arses. That was good. The more people he had to care for, the more he'd focus on them and his happiness than on the negativity in his life.

Tom had no one so he'd always focused on himself and had too much time to his own mind. If she could prevent Naruto from becoming too lonely or bored, he wouldn't be tempted into darker paths.

"So you want to go and get ramen from this place?"
"Please, nee-chan?!

The puppy pout was brought out again. That was a pure evil method and she was feeling something akin to pride, welling up inside of her at the realization. She could always appreciate some good manipulation so long as it wasn't done with bad intentions in mind.

With glimmering blue eyes, Naruto was certainly working her over, though she had already decided to take him to this place that he seemed to love so much. Still, the effort was appreciated and she intended to teach him how to perfect it so he could get away with more stuff in the future.

"Come here," she beckoned, waving him forward quickly.

Once he was close enough, she began casting various freshening charms over his person so he looked presentable. His clothes now clean, his hair combed though it still defied gravity, and his skin free of all the dust from their workings in the kitchen all afternoon.

She repeated the process on herself and smiled at the awestruck child.

"Ready to go?"

"Am I ever! Come on nee-chan!"

He grabbed her hand and began towing her out the door, barely giving her a chance to lock everything up again. Still though, she found his enthusiasm adorable and let him do the leading because this was important to him and she wanted the first impression these new people had of her to be a pleasant one at least.

Ichiraku Ramen was a small noodle shop with a large bar with stools for people to sit at. The entrance was simply blocked off by several flaps with the name of the shop written across them. 'Ramen Ichiraku'. It was a cute little shop and the warmth upon entering made her feel right at home despite never being there before.

Naruto boisterously greeted the man and young woman behind the bar and gestured to Hari with a wide grin. "Teuchi-Jiji, Ayame-nee-chan, this is Hari-nee-chan! She's awesome but she's making me clean because my house is a mess and she thinks I'll get sick, but she's really nice! -ttebayo!"

The young woman whom Hari was going to assume was named Ayame, smiled at the blond and reached across the counter to pat his head in greeting. She then sent Hari a smile, "It's nice to meet any of Naruto's friends. We've been trying to get him to clean for ages!"

"Hey!" protested the boy, deadly pout already working its way into his features.

The girl giggled, "See?"

Hari nodded because she could see it very well how convincing him hadn't gone as they planned.

"What can we get for you?"

"Lots of ramen, Ayame-nee-chan! Three large servings of Miso Ramen with roasted pork fillet, extra Narutomaki, and extra Menma for me, please?!"

Hari's jaw dropped and she moved to caution him on portion sizes, but Ayame's hand on her shoulder stopped her. The girl's brown eyes twinkled with hidden knowledge and mirth as she said, "He's packed away fourteen bowls in one sitting before. He'll be eating a lot."
Well damn, the kid was a bottomless pit!

Turning her attention to the menu hanging above her head, she decided on, "One large serving of Miso, please? Same as Naruto's."

She had never eaten ramen before and hoped that Naruto hadn't lead her astray. He spoke as if it was the most gloriously amazing thing in the world so it had to be good, right?

"So how long have you been in Konoha?" Ayame asked as she wiped down the counter.

"I'm relatively new and this little squirt found me while I was lost and helped me get around. Showed me the pawn shop and the library and a few other stores," she said, not technically lying since he did find her and he had been helping her out. One thing she learned was to never volunteer information if not directly asked for it. The bare minimum was always the best course to go with.

Ayame smiled at Naruto, who flushed and looked away, mumbling about it 'not being a big deal'.

"So how's school been going, Naruto?"

The boy was back to his exuberant self, regaling Ayame with all the details of his week. He went on and on about some boy named Sasuke who was a teme and a girl named Sakura who was 'the most beautiful girl in the world' and how she hit him all the time, which didn't make her sound all too beautiful to Hari. A look at Ayame showed that she agreed with the idea, a small frown in place.

"I had to clean the classroom because I stuck Iruka-sensei's desk and chair to the ceiling with special glue and he ended up teaching the class from upside down!" the boy gushed. "I don't know how but he just walked up the wall and sat in the chair like there was no problem! It was so awesome! -ttebayo!"

Walking up walls? As in, ninja could walk up walls?

At her gaping expression, Naruto nodded, "Yeah, that was how most of us reacted! He acted like nothing was wrong and then… well… I couldn't help but demand why he wasn't angry and then he knew it was me."

She'd have to work on that with him. While she was in this universe and having no idea on how to return home - or even knowing if she wanted to go back to such a place - she might as well make the most of her time. Learning the way of the ninja and all that tripe.

"Four large servings of Miso!" announced the old man as he and Ayame both set down the bowls. Naruto grinned and grabbed a pair of chopsticks from the small cup between he and Hari. Ripping them apart, he cheered, "Itadakimasu!"

Mimicking him, Hari repeated his thankful message and gaped as Naruto very loudly slurped his noodles up. A glance over showed that neither Teuchi or Ayame minded in the least. In fact, they were both looking at her as if waiting for something.

"Um, I've never used these before," she admitted, trying to copy the way Naruto was holding his chopsticks. "Used to eating finger foods, you know?"

Naruto had already started his second bowl of food, sending Ayame a pitying look, making the girl lean over the counter to help Hari with her chopsticks.

"Hold the first like a pen and then the second is like a guide. Use your middle and fourth fingers to keep the bottom one in place and move the top up and down with your index finger."
After a few tries, Hari felt that she could do a passable hold and nodded her appreciation. Now all she had to do was pick stuff up.

The pork slices were easy enough, followed by the little toppings. The noodles were really slippery and kept slipping away. While she fiddled with her sticks, Naruto ordered three more bowls of Miso.

Finally getting fed up, Hari lifted the bowl and starting to sip the soup from the edge, carefully taking in the noodles and the flavors mixed together to create Miso Ramen. She liked it! Now if only she could make the chopsticks work.

"Just bring a fork next time."

Hari also refused to look in the direction of the omniscient being who seemed to like making fun of her struggles.

"Because they are easy to make fun of."

Naruto threw himself on his bed, belly filled with lots of ramen. He felt all warm and cozy and it seemed like things were finally looking up! He hadn't been able to eat that much in months! Hari-need-chan was so nice to take him for ramen and not get angry when he ate nine bowls!

She said she was taking over his kitchen and that he shouldn't worry about food anymore because she was going to teach him how to cook for himself. No more going hungry. She was going to help him plant a garden because she was good at 'tending to them' and it would save them money.

Naruto didn't get such positive attention all the time and it was nice that for once, someone wasn't expecting something in return for their kindness.

He cuddled his frog to his chest and yawned. Hopefully when he woke up tomorrow, this wouldn't have been an awesome dream.

The next morning, he was awoken for school by Hari. He blinked several times in a row, just make sure that he wasn't dreaming all of last night and that there was indeed a pretty lady in his house who was making him clean and who took him for ramen.

"Come on, squirt, it's time to get up!" she cheered, clapping her hands.

The blond sat up, feeling his sleeping cap slip off his head and hearing it hit the floor. He yawned and scrunched his eyes up, wiping away the few tears and crust gathered there during his period of unconsciousness.

"I made breakfast, squirt, come on!" she urged, pulling the curtains aside and assaulting his eyes with the sun.

Blinking once again, Naruto's brain finally processed the words and he shot out of bed with excitement, running to the dresser only to find that his clothes were nowhere to be seen. A warm hand on his shoulder stopped his panic attack before it could even begin.

"Calm down. I washed all of your clothes and laid today's outfit out at the edge of your bed."

Looking over he did indeed find his jumpsuit and shirt folded at the end of his bed. Was the orange always that bright?

"You've got ten minutes to shower, ten minutes to eat and twenty minutes to get to school, so get
moving, squirt!"

She pushed the clothes into his arms and slapped a towel over her head, directing him toward the dilapidated bathroom.

When inside, he muttered to himself about the strangeness of genies and prepared himself for a quick, cold shower, only to find that the water came out really warm. The water was never warm! Looking up, he squinted, trying to find out what was so different about today, but there was nothing visible to him.

He wasn't going to pass up the chance for a good shower though!

When he made it to the kitchen, he stopped dead in his tracks because things had changed and he hadn't even realized it. The floor was shiny and slippery, making squeaking noises under his sandals as he walked. The table too was completely different. A more rich shade of brown and all the legs were even too! There were two chairs that matched, with purple cushions on the seats. The fern on the floor by the window was looking healthy and the cactus on the shelf by the fridge just seemed more lively.

The fridge was also different, lacking all the scratches and tape repairs he'd made on it over the years. It was also bigger and had a freezer door too. The whole room smelled like lemons and something else he couldn't place. This was not the kitchen he'd left when he went to bed last night!

"Come, sit and eat," Hari-nee-chan ordered, placing a plate that he knew wasn't his, down. "It's an omelette."

"I don't have eggs," he pointed out, knowing that he never bought them because they were expensive.

"I went shopping."

He slipped on over to the fridge, finding it stocked with all kinds of foods that he didn't even know what some of them were for. The cupboards were filled too. And - he lamented tearfully - not a cup of instant ramen in sight! It was all healthy stuff.

"Don't make that face," Hari said, frowning. "I'm going to teach you how to eat healthy so you have more energy, and then we're going to experiment on how to make something that looks gross, taste good. Okay?"

"Alright," he grumbled, plopping down on the chair and blinking in shock at how comfortable the cushion was. He wiggled down a little bit more and grabbed the fork she set down for him. A second later, a glass of milk appeared to the right of his plate and he ate carefully, marveling at how things had changed so quickly.

And the omelette was so good and fluffy too!

"Eat slower," she chastised. "You might get a stomach ache otherwise."

He slowed a bit, looking up at the clock, which had not been there before, hanging over the doorway. He had four minutes to finish his food.

"Also, I bought you a bento thing at the store while I was out. Once I learn how to make them I won't have to buy them anymore, okay?"

Naruto sat there as she bustled about the kitchen, cleaning the stove which was actually working for
once. No one had ever given him lunch before. He sometimes was able to con Iruka-sensei into taking him for some Ichiraku Ramen at lunch time but more often than not, Naruto did not eat lunch.

"Thanks nee-chan," he said softly, filled with too much emotion.

She sent him a smile and he felt all warm inside.

He really wouldn't mind if this happened every day.

Hari chewed her bottom lip as she tried to determine what to do while Naruto was at school. She wasn't actually a member of this village and didn't really know what would happen if she were found out to be living there without being registered, if they even did things like that here.

Also, did Naruto have to pay rent or something? Was he the only person living in the building or were there others he had to deal with? Where were they going to put the garden?

There was a small kitchen, a bathroom with a small cupboard, and a bedroom. It wasn't a flat meant for more than one person but Hari had simply pushed the table in the kitchen aside and removed those huge cushions from her trunk and use them for bedding.

The books from the library were on the shelf above the fridge which was only a few inches taller than Hari. She'd illegally split her money again in order to go shopping. Confounding the people was easy enough and she was able to shrink and transport things without a problem. She kept the receipts in the drawer beside the fridge just in case someone came with questions.

She needed to teach Naruto how to actually care for himself. Mind, she didn't actually learn to do so for herself until she met Hermione but she had to learn eventually.

Living at the Dursleys meant being deprived of a lot of things. Like a toothbrush. She didn't have any knowledge on how to make Skelegro so if Naruto's teeth rotted out because he didn't have a toothbrush either, he was fucked.

She stocked the bathroom with toothbrushes and toothpaste and mouthwash. There were new towels that weren't threadbare and a toilet seat cover simply because it brightened the plain white of the room. She got a matching bath mat to save the trouble of dirtying more towels. It simply saved them money on washing things too soon.

"Because we all know how short on money you are," came a sarcastic snort of the most annoying being she had ever met.

"I'm offended, truly I am," Death whimpered, their skeletal hand pressed to their chest.

Hari looked over and sneered in Death's direction. "I need to know more about this place before I do anything like that. How would they react to seeing all of my gold and jewels? I can't predict that. I also don't know where I'd go to do that and I'm sure I'd actually have to be a member of the village first and foremost."

"You have magic, just slink your way in and they'll never know."

"I'm not exposing myself until I have a good enough grasp on everything!"

Death sighed, "As you wish."

Now, back to Naruto. He had his lunch with him, though he hadn't brought a bag with him. Either
he didn't have one or he didn't need one. She hoped it was the latter case, but if not, she'd get him a new bag because kids needed stuff like that to hold books and homework.

Children had things they needed. She had babysat enough of her nieces and nephews and her godson to know that. Warmth, happiness, good hygiene, love and care, fitting clothes, good food, positive attention, encouragement, help with schoolwork, lessons on proper function as a person of society.

Hari had to either figure these things out on her own or go to Hermione for help because Hermione knew everything about everything, even if she knew too much sometimes.

She'd be damned to limbo before she'd let another orphan who was so familiar to her, go through that kind of thing. He'd made it on his own thus far - which was impressive considering the state of his life before she popped out of the bottle - but enough was enough. No longer was a twelve year old going to raise himself. It didn't matter if the book said that once someone reached Genin status they were considered an adult, that only meant legally. He was still a child and he needed a helping hand.

Clearing off the table, Hari fetched a large piece of parchment from one of her trunks and spread it out over the wooden surface. Raising the Elder Wand, she placed the tip in the center and intoned, "Uzumaki Naruto, Point Me, Revelus. Hari Jamiel Potter."

Instantly, color and lines bled into the sheet, forming little buildings and feet. It wasn't exactly like the Marauder's Map, because she hadn't see all of the village in order to create it. What it was was a homing beacon of sorts, trained on Naruto's soul. A little trick she picked up from being Mistress of Death. If she knew a person's soul signature, she'd be able to find them if they were within range.

Everything within a mile radius of him was mapped out and as he moved through the village, the map would change as well, showing where he was in conjunction to her location.

Presently, he was passing Ichiraku, his little footsteps moving past it quickly. He was fine. That was good.

With a flick of the wand, the map attached itself to the clear space on the wall beside the doorway of the kitchen. She'd be able to keep track of him if she needed to find him at all. That was good.

She'd been out in the village four times already and could at least pinpoint some landmarks to make her own way back. Since Naruto wasn't in the flat right now, she couldn't use the four points spell to get to him. She was on her own now.

She was a grown woman for Merlin's sake!

Ah, he'd just made it to the Academy. Good! Time to go.

She locked the door and reapplied the charms. With a deep breath, she gave herself a nod and continued down the stairs. This was it.

Not even forty seconds outside and she was already being groped by some creep. Said creep also got a first hand taste of a stinging hex to the face accompanied by a harsh slap. Said creep screamed and shuffled away, trying to get as far from her as possible.

Good choice.

She made note of several shops and restaurants along the main strip and nodded to herself. She could either disillusion Naruto or confund the waitstaff into letting him in. People literally forbade him entrance to places simply because they didn't like him! That couldn't be legal!
And how could anyone turn away those whiskered cheeks and those beautiful eyes? Had they no hearts?!

With an annoyed huff, she carried on her way, stopping by a bake shop to sample the sweets these people ate. All of them looked like normal food to her and certainly not something to snack on.

Mitarashi Dango filled with Anko. It was lightly sweetened but not something she would consider to be a snack. Now, if the filling was just it, then she'd call it a treat, but as it stood, there was not enough Anko inside the Dango to make it a sweet in her eyes.

"Eating Dango, my kind of woman!"

Hari was suddenly pulled into a very warm and bone crushing embrace. A woman who was about two inches taller than her, was rubbing her breasts all along Hari's front, arms wrapped around the witch as she cooed over her love of Dango.

Hari tried to pull away but the woman was deceptively strong and when she got a good look at her attire, from what she could see of it at least, she could understand why she was so warm! She was wearing mesh! A mesh shirt that exposed a hell of a lot of skin. Skin that was rubbing against Hari.

"Aw, now you're all flushed!" the woman crooned.

"Anko, stop harassing civilians! You can't handle another restraining order!" someone called out.

The woman holding Hari pouted but did not relent in her groping of the witch. "But Nai-chan, she's totally my type! And she likes it, see?" Suddenly, the woman leaned in and trailed her saliva covered tongue over Hari's face from chin to brow.

The witch stared for a few seconds, realizing she had a few reactions she could go through. Scream and throw a hissy fit, politely ask the woman to extricate herself, threaten her with harassment charges, or…

Turning her head to the side, Hari mimicked the action, licking the woman's face in the same manner and trying not to think about the fact that she tasted like blood. Hari went to school with Fred and George Weasley for Merlin's sake! Something like saliva wasn't going to scare her off, no way! She was a Gryffindor!

Judging by the woman's shocked expression, she hadn't been expecting Hari to retaliate in such a manner.

She was pulled away roughly, leaving Hari to stand there in confusion for a moment, before larger but softer hands were patting her down and straightening her clothing out. "I'm so sorry for her, she doesn't really understand the meaning of personal space, you know?"

Hari grinned as the woman apologized so profusely for her friend, feeling a little shock as how her eyes were a bright shade of crimson. There was no magic in her gaze nor could Hari sense magic on her anywhere. Her eyes were just naturally red. Cool.

"It's fine," the older brunette insisted, because she really was fine. It wasn't like someone broke her arm or something.

"See, Nai-chan, she's perfectly okay with it!" the other woman said, throwing an arm around 'Nai-chan's' shoulder and forcing her grin upon Hari.

"I'm Mitarashi Anko, Tokubetsu Jonin!" she said, closing her eyes probably habitually as she
laughed for whatever reason she could think of. The other woman rolled her eyes, "I'm Yuhi Kurenai, a Jonin. I wish we could have met on better terms."

Hari waved her concerns off because everything was fine, even if her tongue tasted faintly of blood and copper at the moment. "It's all okay, no damage done. I'm Potta Hari, nice to meet you both."

Anko detached herself from Kurenai and latched into Hari, bringing them both back to the booth Hari had occupied before being interrupted. "So what do you do for a living, Hari-chan?"

Hari didn't miss how one of her sticks of Dango went missing, but decided not to say anything because what good would it do? These women were ninja. Not like Naruto who was a child and still training. Both were grown and from what the book said, Jonin was a high ranking, elite position and a specialist was pretty important as well so starting something with these two wouldn't be in her best interest.

"I take care of my brother."

Naruto called her nee-chan after all so it fit. He was like the little sibling that Hari had always wanted to have. Kind of like Colin Creevey, but not as annoying or stalker like.

"So, you new to Konoha? I've never seen someone with eyes like yours before and your bone structure isn't familiar. You part of a clan or something?" Anko asked as Kurenai sighed and took a seat on the other side of the table.

"Huh?"

Other than the fact that some people here had purple hair like Anko and crimson eyes like Kurenai, Hari wouldn't think that she stood out all too much considering how usual her hair color was and how she was pretty short like the rest of the women she had seen.

"I do have a long family history I guess," she mumbled, "-but my mother had the same color eyes and she married into my father's family. The messy hair is a predominant trait in the family too apparently, but I break a lot of the traditional births because I'm the first female to be born of the line. It used to only ever be males with women marrying in and then I came along."

"And do you got yourself a man to continue this line of people?" Anko asked as another stick of Dango disappeared.

"Haven't had much time you know, with growing up and moving on. More important things in my childhood to worry about than marriage."

Like surviving.

"Like...?"

"Well what about you?" the witch asked, changing topics. "Where are your roots planted?"

Anko frowned for a moment. "Hmm… I'm an orphan. I was found young and brought back here where I entered the Academy and graduated. Nothing much to know about me. Though if you're interested in dinner and a date, I'm open to anything!" she grinned, winking suggestively.

Kurenai sighed once more.

Hari nibbled on a piece of Dango and shrugged, "I didn't know about my family until I was eleven. Before then I was raised to believe that my parents were ingrates and wastes of space. Drunkards
who didn't want me. And then friends of my parents came and took me away from my aunt and uncle, who got in trouble for their less than pleasant rearing methods.” Hari shifted uncomfortably, unhappy to be thinking of the Dursleys so much these past few days.

Kurenai and Anko shared a very telling look that they probably thought Hari couldn't see, but the witch was very good at picking up other's emotions and discreet movements. It wasn't pity that they shared for her either. More like a silent conversation verifying her unspoken admission that she had been neglected.

"Going to repopulate your family any time soon?" Anko asked, getting things back on track.

Hari shrugged, "I don't know. I'm the last so it's not like I have anyone to pressure me. I don't need to be married to be happy." Though I would really like a family of my own, she added silently. Someone to love and care for her would be great. Friends were different. Family was just… something she never got to have.

The two kunoichi nodded along and Kurenai was the one to speak next.

"How has your brother handled it all?"

Hari panicked for like maybe four seconds, before she calmed herself down, remembering her cover story and saying, "I live next door to him and take care of him so when he started calling me nee-chan, I just went with it. He's an orphan too so we mesh pretty well."

Anko huffed, "The orphanage isn't the biggest. They've been trying to get funds to expand it but no one wants to give up the time or energy. I hated that place because of how rickety it was. It's dangerous and there aren't enough supplies."

"Don't ninja have missions for things like that?" Hari asked, remembering a section of the book that stated that ninja had ranks of missions and that D-Ranks were usually menial labor and stuff. Everyday things to build experience and patience in the Genin.

Anko blinked owlishly for a second, before grinning fiendishly. "While that is an idea I haven't heard before, but no one has the willing heart to pay for the tools the orphanage needs and since the orphanage is insolvent at the moment, they couldn't pay the shinobi who do the work, so I don't think it'll happen." She openly grabbed the last stick of Dango and added before taking a bite, "Besides, the matron's an absolute bitch and no one wants to deal with her. She's nothing like Nono-san was."

"Anko!" Kurenai hissed, glaring at her friend. Said friend just shrugged.

"You can't blame me. She has terrible nicknames for all the children but seeing as no one else wants to watch fifty some odd gakis, she's all they've got."

Hari frowned, not liking the sound of the place. It was reminding her a bit of what she witnessed from Mrs. Cole of Wool's Orphanage. Did Naruto ever live in that place? Merlin she hoped he didn't because an attitude like that was detrimental to a child's health. One reason why Tom ended up so jilted was because none of the adults in his life stuck up for him, because he was obviously different than everyone else was.

For once she wished there would be a world where being different actually made you better and not worse than others. Where people actually celebrated those who were different, with selfless joy and encouragement.

"Still, you shouldn't talk about her like that. She's helping th-" "HA!" interrupted Anko.
The mesh wearing kunoichi was shaking her head, "She isn't doing it because she's being nice, Nai-chan. She gets paid by the village to do it. No one celebrates birthdays or holidays. None has any toys or new clothes. The clothes are recycled and unlike Nono-san, she doesn't alter them to fit the individual kids. She eat the same food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She drinks sake constantly and is barely sober."

Obviously realizing that she was losing the conversation, Kurenai dropped it while Anko was ahead and instead, moved onto other matters.

"So, Potta-san, is your brother in the Academy?"

"Yeah. He's psyched to graduate. He just wants to get out of there and 'save princesses'," she explained. "I'm trying to come up with a way of explaining to him that those kind of jobs probably aren't going to happen immediately. I don't want to break his heart though."

Anko's shoulders were shaking as she tried to suppress her laughter. Instead, a mild wheeze slipped past her lips. "That's rich! Oh I haven't heard anything like that in awhile! Usually most of the civilian kids in the Academy are under the impression that being a ninja means being a superhero all the time when really it's just about death. It's cute to see their innocence but if they aren't prepared before graduation like most of the clan children are, their first kill is going to be hell. Make sure you get him to understand that before he graduates, you'll be doing him a great, big favor."

Surprisingly, Kurenai was nodding right along with Anko. She looked grave of course, but apparently it was a big deal.

Hari knew all about first kills being terrifying. The realization of Quirrell took too long to hit her and when it did, she had cried and cried over it. She was an eleven year old who was forced to defend herself against a grown man who was more powerful than she was. And in the end she ended up killing someone. Even if it was just by using her mother's protective magic, it was still death.

With a morose nod, Hari said, "I know. I just wish it wasn't so difficult."

"Do it quick," advised Anko. "That way it's over and done with."

"And he is only a child. Maybe you can bribe him with his favorite food or snack? Something he really likes," added Kurenai with a soft smile.

Hari grinned in response.

It felt nice to talk to some women who didn't know anything about her. Who formed their own opinions just from speaking with her and not from some news rag or gossip column.

She could easily see herself doing this again.

Naruto's day had been a little different. He'd sat in class like every other day but he'd been so caught up in the changes of the last day and a half that he didn't really pay attention to anything else happening.

He forgot to greet Sakura-chan when she walked in the room. He forgot to prank Iruka-sensei and ended up getting shifty glances all day. He even took great care during lunch, sitting in the classroom for once and eating delicately, as if the bento box would disappear on him.

"Naruto, are you okay?"
The blond looked up, seeing Iruka-sensei standing there, looking concerned.

Why? It wasn't like there was anything wrong. He was feeling great!

"I'm fine, sensei."

"You haven't grinned once today and I haven't gotten pranked and you haven't even spoken," the scarred Chunin remarked. "You're even eating slowly."

"Well sensei, I can't eat too fast otherwise I'll get a stomach ache," Naruto said, remembering what Hari-nee-chan had told him this morning.

"Oh really?" the man grinned.

"Yeah. Besides, this is my first bento and I want to- to… savor it. Yeah, savor it!" Ha! New word!

With a grin and a nod, Iruka waved him on and said, "Savor away then!"

"-ttebayo!"

When class started up again, Naruto actually found himself listening partially to what Iruka-sensei was saying.

"Naruto, can you tell me what Genjutsu is?"

Naruto blinked at the sudden address and answered, "Illusions." He'd just told Hari-nee-chan about them last night! He would totally remember that!

At Iruka's jaw drop, Naruto realized that maybe he did something weird. He looked around, seeing everyone in the class - whose face was visible at least - staring at him in some form of shock or awe. What was the big deal about it? He answered a question. He was known to do that from time to time!

"That's… that's correct! Good job, Naruto!"

Why all the shock?

He was vaguely insulted.

How rude.

"You know you could just use you magic to make this easier."

Yes, but unlike some people, she wasn't a lazy bag of decrepit bones! She grew up without magic and wasn't going to become lazy simply because she could do almost everything with it!

"Just saying, it would save you a lot of time. You could expand this room with your Runic knowledge, you could-"

"I get it, I can use magic to do a lot of things. I'm working on it. I just have to added layers of spells over the fixed portions because he's bound to get company who've seen the inside before and would wonder why it's suddenly so much larger."

"Just making certain that you know the avenues available to you. As you told the magicals, there is much you can do and you are only as hopeless as you let yourself be."
Hari was busy opening the little packets of seeds for the garden, when Naruto scared the shite out of her!

"Hey, nee-chan!"

She jumped about a foot in the air, having not heard him come in at all. He was doing that slinky ninja thing where they walked fast and quietly. Kurenai walked like that. Hari had noticed when she and Anko had taken their leave from the shop. Hari had learned to walk similar so that the Dursleys couldn't hear her and Dudley couldn't find her.

"Woah, nee-chan, you okay?"

She rounded on the blond, finding him just standing there, blinking at her in confusion.

Pressing a hand to her chest in a poor attempt to calm her pounding heart, Hari nodded once and took a deep breath. "You just scared the hell out of me."

He beamed, "Sorry, nee-chan! I can be really quiet when I need to be. I just forgot! -ttebayo!"

"It's fine, it's fine," she assured him, rolling her eyes at herself.

"Ne, nee-chan, I don't think it's safe for you be here all day, I've had break ins."

"I've got magic, squirt, I'm not scared of burglars," said Hari, completely not phased by the thought of a threat. They'd get a nice stinging hex if they tried anything.

Blue eyes became suspiciously wet and heart breaking. "B-but nee-chan, sometimes they're shinobi! They could hurt you!"

Aw! He was such a protective little bundle of joy, wasn't he! Hari couldn't help but hug him. The kid was an angel and it just made it all the harder for her to choose when to crush his dreams about saving princesses and rescuing beautiful maidens.

"Not if I get them first, squirt."

"What if you don't have your stick?" the boy challenged. "Most ninja are too fast for civilian eyes to see. Having magic is all great and stuff but if you can't see your enemy what's the point, nee-chan? You'll still get hurt somehow."

He made… an alarming amount of sense. They'd only known each other for a day and he'd picked up on the fact that a lot of her magic had to do with visual connection to the target of choice. Well damn.

"Well, what do you think I should do, Naruto?"

The boy's face screwed up in concentration and his stared at the floor for a moment, before brightening and flashing her the brightest grin she'd ever seen. "I'm going to teach you Taijutsu, nee-chan!"

Her jaw dropped. "As in, as in fighting? With fists and feet?"

"Yep!" the boy nodded.

"Um…"

"Come on, nee-chan!" he said, grabbing her hand and yanking her away from the would be garden.
She was going to hate this. She just knew it. Hate every last bit of it.

With a wave of the wand, Hari transfigured her black robes into a pair of stretchy, yoga trousers and a half shirt with thin straps. Her shoes became a pair of non ratty, white trainers. If only they were real.

"Stretch first nee-chan. Iruka-sensei says that we have to be all stretched out so we don't pull anything later. I don't know what it means but he says it's important so I just do it."

Hari was then made witness to the alarming realization that Naruto was more limber than she was. He was doing a split! A bloody split! As in, one leg all the way in front and the other all the way in the back and he didn't look to be in any pain at all.

She gulped uncomfortably. She could barely touch her toes and yet he wanted her to do that?

"Come on, nee-chan! Start small and work your way up. Or at least, that's how Iruka-sensei says to do it!"

With the world's most irritated scowl, Hari stood straight and proceeded to bend over carefully, glaring when the tips of her fingers did not reach the laces of her trainers. She pushed a little more, feeling the burn in her hamstrings and she hissed in displeasure. She held for ten seconds and then released.

Spreading her legs until they were shoulder length apart, she repeated the motion. This way, she was actually able to grab her ankles. She held for ten seconds.

Naruto began doing less complicated stretches and Hari moved to copy him, wincing as something in her leg popped.

For several minutes, they stretched and wiggled until Naruto deemed them ready to begin.

"We're going to do some running, nee-chan. Iruka-sensei usually has us do laps around the Academy building, but this open space is a little bigger. We'll do five laps. Usually he has us do ten but I'm not sure you could handle it."

Hari felt her Gryffindor competitiveness rear its ugly head. He didn't think she could handle a little bit of running? He didn't think that she could run ten laps around this dinky little clearing in Training Ground Three? Well she'd show him!

They slotted into position and Naruto counted down from three. They stared off at more of a jog than an all out run, which was actually smarter as it would save energy.

Naruto kept easy pace with her the entire time, tapping the three stumps every time they passed them. By the time they reached five laps, Hari hadn't become winded yet so she kept on and Naruto only faulted once before catching up easily.

They passed the stumps once more.

Twice more.

Thrice more.

By the ninth lap, Hari could feel her lungs beginning to rebel. It wasn't that her body hurt. In fact, if she could breath normally, she'd probably be able to run for a lot longer than she already had. But
Hari pushed on until she reached that tenth lap, where she collapsed by the middle stump and wheezed for air in order to make the burning in her lungs stop.

Naruto whistled, "That's pretty good, nee-chan! Civilians can barely ever do a lap! Or so Iruka-sensei says. He also says that you shouldn't sit immediately after a hard workout."

"Why?" she coughed, allowing the blond the pull her off the ground.

"I don't know but he was very serious when he said it so it must be important."

While internally dying, Hari reflected on how much stock Naruto put in his Iruka-sensei's words. It was kind of cute. She wondered if the man knew just how high Naruto held him in regard.

"Now I'm going to show you how to punch!"

"I can punch!" she protested. Hermione had taught her after she broke Malfoy's nose in third year! She said it was important for every girl to know just in case. Her father had taught her so she could protect herself if she ever lost her wand.

Naruto held up his hands, palms outward. "Show me."

She showed him, hitting his left palm dead center. He shook it off for a seconds, before nodding. "Not bad. That would probably down a civilian. But we need to get you used to shinobi speed, nee-chan."

A sudden, loud smacking noise jolted her and she looked around, finding Naruto standing right in front of her and his arm stretched behind her, pressed firmly against the stump. She hadn't even seen him move!

"If you think I'm fast nee-chan, you should see Iruka-sensei!"

Okay, so with Kurenai, Anko, and Naruto as examples, she was severely outmatched in terms of physical strength and awareness against a shinobi. So on top of all of the things she had planned for Naruto, she would need to brew herself a Girding Potion for endurance purposes. Depending on the quality, the effects could last weeks at a time if need be.

"Alright squirt, since you treated me to a workout from hell today, I'm going to treat you to a gardening lesson!"

Naruto ended up being really good at paying attention to things that interested him. Also, she hadn't made him read a book, which made it all the better.

So while Naruto fiddled with the seeds, Hari rubbed her sore arms and thighs.

"I ache in places I didn't know I had. And places I didn't even know could ache!" she whined.

"It'll get better the more you do it, nee-chan! -ttebayo!"


No. No, no, no, no, no!

"But my hair hurts!" protested the witch.

He sent her a dubious look, "I don't even think that's possible, nee-chan!"
She didn't know if it was either but she would totally milk this for all she was worth.

With a flick of the wand, Hari covered the now planted seeds and soil with some clean water. She didn't trust the water that came from the pipes. Would not drink it nor feed an animal or plant with it.

"Put them on the windowsill so they get a lot of sunlight," she instructed, already reaching for some ingredients in the cupboard and wincing as her body punished her for daring to exercise.

Naruto placed the little pots in the dimming sunlight and returned to her side for instructions.

"Alright squirt, you need to wash up if you want to learn how to cook dinner."

He flitted into the hall and she could hear the tap in the bathroom going. He was back seconds later, "I'm ready nee-chan!"

"Have you ever held a knife before?"

He snapped open one of the little pouch things on his right leg and pulled out a sharp object.

"What is that?"

"It's a kunai! We learn to throw them and shuriken! -ttebayo!"

"Have you ever cut yourself?"

He flushed and sniffed, "In the beginning, but everyone did that in the beginning. I'm really good now!" He then flipped it upward and caught it by the handle as if he wasn't holding something that could very well pierce through his palm or cut him open.

"In enclosed spaces, do not wave weaponry about, okay? It could be dangerous to anyone." She raised hand, halting his assurance that he was good at it. "Listen, what if you tossed it up and then someone bumped into you from behind and you can't catch it in time? What if someone got hurt that way?"

The pout returned in all its evil glory. "Okay nee-chan."

She ruffled his surprisingly soft hair. "I just don't want you to get hurt or get in trouble, okay squirt?"

"Alright!"

"Now, this is a knife with a serrated edge. It's best used on frozen products, bread, or really stiff food. We're going to have a salad with our meal - yes, I know it's not fair, but it is healthy - and I want to see how well you do in cutting up the vegetables."

She gestured to the table where her cutting board and the ingredients rested. She carefully handed him the knife while saying, "Always pass on knives, scissors, or anything sharp really, handle first. That way you don't risk stabbing someone's hand on accident."

He nodded dutifully and approached the table like a man on a mission.

He was such a cute kid!

"Prepare for mutilated vegetables."

Shut up you!
"Now you just keep hitting the stump!"

"Without protection?" she asked in horror.

"Yep! That's how we do it!"

"Yeah, but I'm not feeling any motivation to hit the stump, you know what I mean?"

"Come on, nee-chan! I'll do it with you!"

Naruto took the other stump and began pounding it with his fists that were used to this sort of work out.

Hari grumbled, knowing that she couldn't set a bad example for the kid. She punched once, wincing only slightly. And then again, but with the other hand this time. Naruto wanted her to improve her left arm's strength because it would help her or something like that.

While Naruto assaulted his stump like it had done him some grave injustice, Hari took her time. Hit. Wait. Hit. Wait. Over and over. Her knuckles were hurting and she could already see blood. A glance over showed that Naruto's were also bleeding but he wasn't paying it any mind. Like it didn't hurt. Or maybe he was used to it.

It was decided. Hari would never be a ninja.

"Are we even doing this right?"

…

…

…

"I'm not sure."

"What?!" she panicked.

"Well, Iruka-sensei said this was what to do and he's never lied before!"

Dear Merlin above, she needed patience.

And Naruto really needed some friends to hang out with.

"What is that?"

Naruto looked up to find none other than Yamanaka Ino staring down at his unbento-like bento. He looked down too because Hari-nee-chan had made it for him but put stuff in it that usually wasn't put in bentos.

"Nee-chan called it a 'toriniku kesadija (chicken quesadilla)'. I know it's got chicken, cheese, peppers, and some other stuff. It's good!"

His fellow blonde - who never showed him any kind of attention ever - leaned a bit closer and sniffed. "It smells okay, but it looks fried."

"Nee-chan put it in the pan with some oil and flipped it when it got brown."
Ino’s nose wrinkled, "That would ruin my diet."

"Why are you on a diet anyway? You’re so thin!"

She blinked for a second, frowning. "I was dieting to stay thin for Sasuke-kun… I guess I just got used to it." She looked down at her obviously flat stomach and shrugged.

"But nee-chan says it's not smart for kids to miss meals or eat less portions when they are growing," said Naruto, hoping she’d take the hint and stop wasting away for the teme. It wasn’t like the teme appreciated it! He barely gave anyone the time of day!

"I'm sorry, but who is this 'nee-chan' you're talking about? I was told you were an orph- uh… I mean that you live alone!" she said, flush working across her cheeks as she looked away.

"Hari-nee-chan came out of nowhere one day and stayed. She makes me clean my room and she's teaching me how to cook and garden. She's really smart and nice, but she's kind of tiny and I'm scared someone will try to hurt her so I've been teaching her Taijutsu so she can kick some butt if I'm not there!"

"You?!" Ino laughed. "You are teaching someone Taijutsu?!!"

"Hey! She's doing really good!" protested Naruto. "She can run ten laps around the clearing in Training Ground Three and she can thrown a punch that would break a civilian's nose! She's learning the stretches good too!" How dare Ino laugh at his nee-chan! Nee-chan was doing awesome!

"It's not that, Naruto! You're teaching her the boy's stuff! You don't know anything about what the girls are taught," Ino said, raising a hand in surrender.

"Hari-nee-chan can do anything a boy can do, she's awesome! -ttebayo!" he insisted vehemently.

"That's a good mindset to have," Ino nodded, smiling at him for the first time ever. "While it's nice that you have faith in her ability, you don't know the tricks kunoichi are taught. You can't fully teach her everything because you weren't in on those lessons, Naruto."

He deflated instantly, "Oh."

"That's it! I'm coming over to meet this nee-chan of yours and I'm going to teach her how to handle her opponents like a kunoichi!"

Ino gave a sharp nod and turned away, "I'm going with you after class, so don't leave without me!" She then walked away, her steps solid and sure, leaving Naruto to gape in her direction.

"H-hey!" he protested, but she simply ignored him and continued on.

What was he going to tell nee-chan?

---

Hari stared at the two children in the middle of the kitchen. Naruto was twitching and the admittedly pretty, young girl was looking sure of herself. Her hands were fisted at her hips and she stood strong. She minutely reminded Hari of Daphne Greengrass.

"I am Yamanaka Ino and I hold the best scores out of the girls for Taijutsu in our class! According to Naruto, you need some help and as he doesn't know the tricks kunoichi are taught, I have decided to help you."
With a glance in Naruto's direction, Hari could tell that he wasn't a willing participant in this. But… if it would put him in close quarters with his classmate, then maybe she could get them to like each other. It would take some talking and probably a tonne of biscuits, but Hari was confident in her ability. She'd been pretty good with kids after all and she knew how to hit them where it mattered most.

With a small bow and a smile, Hari introduced herself.

"I'm Potta Hari and it's a pleasure to meet you, Yamanaka-san."

A/N: Another is done!

- Kurenai and Anko are good people. No nefarious purposes in mind!
- Next chapter, people start noticing things changing around Naruto!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics.

See ya! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.
Can Your Friends Do That?

Chapter Summary

Stuff happens.

Chapter Notes

-WARNING: We are delving into some of Hari here. With Death's help, Hari cheats her way into the paperwork for citizenship. She has tests to pass and Death rearranges her memories to better fit the Elemental Nations. Facts are twisted around because Harry and Death are omitting(lying) details and changing things! The latter half of the chapter is seriously almost all about Hari, so please don't get offended. I found out that becoming a citizen in another country takes a lot of fucking - useless - work and as I wanted this to be as realistic as possible with the struggle and all, about 5,000 words are all about Hari and passing her evals.

-CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT!

-WE DO SEE SOME, NARUTO, DEATH, INO, SASUKE, ANKO, HIRUZEN, INOICHI, AND A LITTLE BIT OF KAKASHI IN HERE THOUGH. THAT'S GOTTA COUNT FOR SOMETHING!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLO. I FOLLOW BACK.

Yamanaka Ino didn't really know what she expected when she decided to teach Naruto's older sister how to defend herself, but when she got her first look at the woman, she knew that what she saw, wasn't what she thought she'd see. Not this beautiful woman before her!

Her black hair reached at least halfway down her back, but it was kind of messy. In a stylish way though. There were waves and slight curls to it that she'd never seen naturally on someone before. It looked really soft too. Ino wanted to play with it.
Her face was a little long with just a touch of cheekbone to make soft angles. Her chin was more of an oval shape compared to the more pointed chins Ino was used to seeing. Still, it looked very good on her. If her facial structure wasn't enough to tell that she was foreign, her eyes certainly spoke wonders.

They were an unearthly shade of green. There was just no way that Ino had ever seen a color like that before. Not in the grass, not in her Jade earrings that she received from her mother last year, not even in Billboard Brow's eyes! They'd look really good with some eyeliner, she found herself thinking.

Hari-san smiled and Ino felt like she just did something amazing. Like she was special.

"You don't have to waste your time on me," Hari-san proceeded to say, smiling sheepishly.

Ino shook herself off, "Nonsense! I could never leave a fellow woman defenseless!"

"Okay. Let me go change."

Hari didn't really know what to expect from this training but she hoped that whatever happened, it was helpful. The young girl seemed very serious about this and Hari didn't want to disrespect her by messing whatever they were going to be doing, up.

"Sometimes we need to use our feminine charms to confuse our attackers. Or just charm in general. Moving a certain way to accentuate a body part will confuse or arouse your opponent. Boys tend to go right in for the kill, but we are taught to draw attention away from our main weapons."

The girl held up a kunai in her left hand and in an extremely graceful movement, moved her arm to the side. Like flowing water, it looked effortless and beautiful.

"See? You followed my arm the entire time, because it held the only weapon you could see and it was a flashy sort of movement!"

Ino straightened up from her crouch. "You have to be careful in fighting. All of your attention was on my left hand but the truth is that I'm right handed and could have grabbed and flung a kunai at you and you would have never known. You need to watch body language from the shoulders and the knees. They can tell you a lot about where your opponent intends to strike first."

Ino flipped the kunai and placed it back in its case with the other weapons she had. "Do you have any training in weaponry?"

Hari shrugged, "I took some lessons on swordsmanship when I realized I was stuck using a sword too often. Better to know how to use it than to keep swinging it around like an idiot."

Sky blue eyes widened, but Ino did nod.

"Not many ninja learn to use swords. We have smaller, more easily concealed weapons. Swords are more samurai style, but that does give us hope! You have prior experience in a sharp weapon and that means you would know about safety protocols, right?"

"Yes. Sword handling is difficult but rewarding."

Ino came over and began shifting Hari around until she was in a fighting stance, feet apart and one arm a little in front of the other.
"It's best to keep your arms like this when fighting civilians. They aren't fast enough so you can actually dodge or block their attacks. If someone tries to punch you in the face, your arms are already high enough for you to block, like so."

Ino mimicked the stance and crossed her forearms together, making an X shape.

"You guard your face and head this way. Head injuries can cause blackouts and health issues so it's always best to protect your head at all times."

Hari nodded to show that she was indeed paying attention. It seemed kind of obvious.

"Now, what has Naruto been having you doing during your training?"

"We stretch, run, and punch logs."

The blonde's head fell into her hand and she sighed. "While building speed and endurance is great, it's not just everything. Stretching is good, but Yoga is better. You need to do more. Can you do a flip or a cartwheel?"

At Hari's bland look, Ino shrugged, "You never know."

The blonde circled the witch, looking her over. "I don't think strength training will do you much. In terms of fighting, I think it would be best that you learn to redirect your opponent instead of expending energy like they are. You won't have to harm anyone and you'll be able to stop any advancement quickly. Goken is out."

She was shaking her head, flipping her long bangs as she did so.

"We need to build your speed so you can learn to intercept an attacker and use their own strength and momentum against them! Naruto said that you can do ten laps around here before you tire out."

"Yeah, the lungs begin hurting by then."

"Well we need to buy you some weights and you're going to learn to work out with at least twenty extra pounds on your body! It'll help everything, trust me! Builds muscle in all the right places without being too overdone."

Hari groaned, "I'm going to be hurting, aren't I?"

Ino giggled, giving Hari a sweet, innocent look that was so fake, Hari could taste the artificial sweetener in it! "Not at all!"

She was such a liar!

Such a liar!

It hurt!

It hurt worse than her first time having sex!

Damn those devious little children!

Hot water was a blessing on her sore muscles.
"You know, you're sister can really handle it," Ino commented in amazement as she sat at the table, waiting for the woman to change. "I wasn't expecting her to finish the entire workout but I'm impressed!"

Naruto beamed, "Yeah, nee-chan is the best!"

The blonde nodded, sipping the juice she'd been given.

"Listen, Naruto, while I was helping her, I noticed that your stances are a off."

"Aw man! Really?!"

Ino nodded, "Yes. You need to get out of that habit and soon. Not that I'm saying you'll ever beat Sasuke-kun, but the reason he always beats you is because your stances are all wrong and he slips into your defenses. If you were using proper stances, you'd be able to react faster and most likely wouldn't get as soundly thrashed as you usually do."

While Naruto pouted and thought about how he was going to fix his stances, Hari had managed to make her way back to the kitchen, sore body and all.

"Would you like to join us for dinner, Ino-san?"

Ino hummed. "I should be getting home. I never told my parents where I was going and while they'll probably assume that I was with Shikamaru and Choji, it'd be best that they know that I plan to come here more often to help you."

Hair smiled, "Thank you for this, it's very sweet of you."

Ino felt herself become flushed and she shook her head. "No, it's all fine, honestly!"

The blonde finished her juice and quickly washed the cup, before bowing to the woman and waving to her classmate.

"See you soon!"

---

Her parents had decided to go over Shikamaru's house for dinner, leaving her a note. Ino tossed it in the trash and hopped out her bedroom window, taking the rooftops as opposed to the streets. It was best if she wanted to get there faster.

Yoshino-oba greeted her at the door and directed her to the kitchen where the adults were talking. Her father was laughing at something Shikaku-oji said and her mother was leaning over a pot on the stove, stirring the contents.

"Ino! Where'd you go?"

"I talked to Naruto today."

Silence suddenly reigned in the kitchen and everyone was looking at her. She didn't know why it always got like this when Naruto came up in conversation, but it was beginning to get annoying! They never acted like that when she talked about Sasuke-kun!

"Did something happen?" Yoshino asked, sounding a mite worried.

"Oh no, he's fine!" the youngest blonde assured her. "It's just that his food was weird today and I'd
never seen it before. Apparently there's a lady who he calls nee-chan. She makes him clean his house and teaches him how to cook and garden. She made him lunch today and bought him lunch yesterday."

The adults exchanged looks, but Ino was still recounting her evening to them.

"He mentioned her while we were talking and when I asked about her, 'cause, you know he's an orphan and all, he said she helps him a lot, but that he's worried about when he's not there. She's kind of small. About a head taller than Naruto and he's the shortest in the class. But she's an adult! Just suspiciously small," Ino frowned, remembering how the grown woman wasn't that much bigger than she was.

She didn't like it.

"Anyway, she's a civilian and can't defend herself so he's worried that someone might try something because she has no training, is super pretty, and a bit naive."

Yes, Yamanaka Ino admitted that someone was 'super pretty'. Sue her why don't you!

"He said he was teaching her Taijutsu, but as he's a boy and not the best at it in class, he wasn't doing a very good job."

Shikaku-oji rolled his eyes as he leaned further into the table, "Mendokusei."

"So I decided to come and help her and..." Ino shook her head sadly. "She needs a lot of help. Though I did learn that she can use a sword pretty well. Other than that and the fact that she can lap the clearing in Training Ground Three ten times before tiring out, she needs a lot of work, so I've decided to be her guide!"

When Yamanaka Ino took on a project, it never failed! She refused to accept failure! It wouldn't happen!

"So you met her?" her father asked. "What was she like?"

Ahh... as Yamanaka, they were trained to pick up nuances and signals in speech and actions. They wanted to know if she could possibly be dangerous to Naruto's health.

In terms of hurting him, Ino didn't think she would ever do such a thing. She looked at Naruto like Ino's parents looked at Ino. It was all very sweet and focused, as if nothing could make her happier. It made Ino happy for some reason. Happy that Naruto - who had been alone for his whole life - had someone to look at him the way Ino's parents looked at her.

"She wore yoga pants and a half shirt. I was able to see some scars that don't look like they were made while she practiced the sword. There's a huge scar on her upper right arm. Something pierced it. Something big. There's a scar on her left hand that seems to be written in some odd language or code. It looked like it was carved in. There's a large mark in the center of her chest with an odd symbol on it, almost like she was branded. A few slash marks on her lower back that I'm not too sure what to make of. I would say abuse... though I don't really know anything of her past.

She flinched when I touched her back while positioning her, but I'm not sure if it was because she couldn't see me doing it or because she doesn't like physical touch. She and Naruto only touch each other when the other is paying attention and the movements are very slow and very deliberate so intent can't be confused."

Shikaku-oji was frowning just as hard as her father was. The two were staring at each other, a silent
"Anything else?" her mother asked. Ino could feel her pity from across the room. She wasn't sure pity would go over well.

"Hari-san is not very loud and walks on the balls of her feet. I could barely hear her move and from what I saw, she's used to it. Everything she did involved walking, training, or running like that. She's used to being quiet. There are a lot of books in the apartment and as Naruto hates reading, I'm sure they're hers. All of them are about being a Genin and expectations of shinobi life, so I think she plans to help him train or something."

"She's safe to be around Naruto though?" Inoichi asked in conformation, getting a nod in response.

"He adores her and she worries about him just as much. He trains so hard his hands bleed and she nearly fainted with terror at him hurting himself." Ino didn't miss the shared look again, but dismissed it because she was done regaling them with her story.

"How often do you plan to visit?" her mother asked.

"Every other, other day at least, so can I change my store hours?"

"See you, nee-chan!"

"Wait a second, Naruto!"

The blond halted halfway out the door, waiting for Hari. She turned around, presenting him with two small bags filled with cookies! Oooh.

"Make sure to give one bag to Ino as my thanks, okay? They're sugar free, make sure to mention that."

Naruto took the bags and gave a salute, puffing his chest out with pride. "You can count on me, nee-chan! -ttebayo!"

She smiled and pecked his cheek, making him flush.

"Have a good day."

"Right!"

Naruto ran off, feeling light headed and happy. Things were looking up.

When he handed the bag over to Ino before they entered the Academy, she had stared at him like he'd grown a second head or something!

"Nee-chan wanted to thank you for helping her so she made these! Since everything she makes is good, they'll be great. She also said they're sugar free, if that means something."

Ino's eyes brightened instantly. "She knows I'm on a diet and wouldn't want me to break my commitments even though she doesn't agree! Your sister is awesome!"

"I know, right!"
The next time Hari met Ino, the young girl was positively bouncing, telling her how great the biscuits had been and how she wondered if she could get some more. She'd shared them with some friends and found that they were a big hit.

Hari began scheming then. Ino was chatting with Naruto and while it was obvious they weren't friends or even too close, if it could get him in good with some of his classmates - as Ino seemed to be connected with the important people - she'd play on their taste buds. Knowing that Naruto was the only thing standing between them and more sweets would no doubt prompt some of them into asking for more.

They'd have to socialize and Hari was sure that since Naruto's burden was a secret, none of the children actually knew what was wrong with him and why people avoided him. According to the blond, Ino had never gone out of her way to degrade him and she didn't really ignore him because they weren't friends or anything. She was simply there. She didn't join in on teasing him, she just focused on the things important to her and that was it.

There had to be others like that at least.

If people gave him a chance, Naruto could charm them to bits.

"Anyone in your class you'd like to share some sweets with?" she asked him, trying to get more about his school life out into the open.

"Iruka-sensei!" Naruto insisted first. "Um… Choji and Shikamaru. Kiba too I guess, though you may have to get his ninken Akamaru, some dog treats so he's not left out. Sakura-chan definitely! Though I think they'd have to be sugar free like Ino's. Hinata and Shino are kind of quiet so I don't know how they'd take to either."

Ino scoffed, "You need to pay more attention in class then. Shino is the third best boy in Taijutsu class and he answers more questions than you do. Shino also loves melon flavors and hates anything too pungent. Hinata likes flowers and anything to do with them. She loves cinnamon rolls and hates seafood. She's second best kunoichi in Taijutsu by the way."

"Oh," Naruto nodded. "Okay, that's what I got, nee-chan! Out of everyone, they're the ones who are the best!"

"What about Sasuke-kun?" Ino demanded, folding her arms across her purple garbed chest.

Naruto's whiskered face wrinkled in distaste. "I don't like him though and he doesn't like me. I like the rest of you just fine but not him. There's one thing to be the best in class. There's another to act like an ass all the time."

Ino's offended look showed Hari that they were treading into dangerous waters and she attempted to salvage whatever was left of the peace by asking, "Why do you think Sasuke is amazing, Ino?"

The blonde fixed her with a look that perfectly screamed, 'what about him isn't likable?'. "He's cute, he's got great hair, he's strong and silent, he's the best in class!"

Hari frowned, "Is that it?"

"Well… yeah. Isn't that enough?" the young girl asked, looking confused.

Naruto scoffed, but stayed silent when Hari sent a quelling look in his direction.

"Well, what are his hobbies? What are his favorite foods? Does he like children at all or is he even
good with children? Does he have friends? Does he talk to anyone in particular? Is he what you would call a nice person? Do you know where he lives? Do you know about his family? Does he have a reliable character? Have you made any attempts at getting to know him or have you sat by and fawned? These are things you need to know. If he's cute, he's cute, but being dateable requires more than looks. And if you're looking for marriage and fidelity, you need to make sure he's the real deal."

Ino blinked once and then again. She looked down at the table, frowning. "I… I don't know the answers to any of those questions."

"Well then, go to school tomorrow and see if you can get the answers," Hari advised, pouring some tea and placing the two cups beside the children. Naruto was quiet as he observed Ino who was looking morose now.

The boy sighed, "I don't hate the teme, it's just that he needs to open up, you know? I'm happy and I try to stay positive but it's a two way street. He needs to accept it for it to work on him and he's got that dark cloud that hangs over his head all the time, talking about 'getting stronger' and 'nothing else matters'. He has no friends or family. He's an orphan like I am, but his family was taken from him suddenly and he became a recluse. I got that word from Iruka-sensei by the way."

Hari felt a stab of pity for the boy and sighed. All these children having to go through such life changing situations so early on in life. It wasn't fair.

She grabbed a mit and opened the oven, pulling out the sheet of biscuits and seeing both children perk up at the sight of them. Chocolate, chocolate chip this time. Sugar free of course.

"Maybe it's because of these reasons that you need to open up to him. Remind him that he isn't alone and that people do notice things about him. Offer to train with him or something. Give him his favorite food. What's his favorite food?" she asked, sending the boy a sly look.

"Onigiri with Okaka, and ripe tomatoes," he said as if the answer was obvious.

Not completely if Ino's hanging jaw was anything to go by.

"Extend ye olive branch," she advised, using the spatula to get the biscuits off the sheet so they could cool. The kids would want some in a few minutes to even out the depressive cloud hanging over the kitchen.

"Huh?" the two asked, head tilting simultaneously in their joint confusion.

"Like a white flag. A petition for mutual peace."

"Oh."

Naruto accepted his glass of milk while Ino declined respectfully, though she did take the plate of sweets eagerly, enjoying how the chocolate melted when she pulled the biscuit apart.

"Well if it isn't Hari!"

The witch was yanked away from the shelves and into a pair of strong and familiar arms, her back cushioned on a pair of breasts that put her own to shame, sadly enough.

"Hello, Anko-san."
"Meh, it's just Anko. I'm not stuffy like Nai-chan is!"

Hari grinned, "Okay then… Anko."

"That's it! Now, what kind of book you looking for?"

Hari had come to the shop in hopes of finding some actual good reading material only to find most of the shop consisted of trashy romance novels with repetitive scenarios. It was a shame because reading books on magic got boring after awhile and all she wanted was to read something interesting!

"Looking for literature that isn't corny."
Anko snorted, "You won't find that in this shop. Let's go elsewhere. I know of a better place."

"If this place is so bad, why are you here?" Hari asked as she was towed from the building, allowing Anko to lead her through the village.

"I was passing by and I thought your hair looked familiar, so I decided to say high and grace you with the presence of my awesome, sexy self!"

Hair never got to see the name of the place they walked into, but she did notice the smirk Anko sent to the man at the register.

"This is the hotspot for good porn."

"What?!

"Well, fine. Books with good sex in them. Some are so raunchy, I consider them to be just porn. Of course that small bookcase in the back has the boring stuff like adventure and comedy if you're interested in that kind of thing. The rest is sex heaven. Or hell, depending on how you view it."

Hari immediately made it for that bookcase that Anko seemed to dislike and she ignored the grumble of 'no smut appreciation' in favor of checking out the wares.

Her eyes alighted upon the only plain book there. Everything else had bright photographs and letters that popped, and then there was this one. It was a brown hardback with an off-white front. In fancy script were the words, Tale of the Utterly Gutsy Shinobi.

Grinning, she picked it up, looking in the front - which to her people would actually be the back - of the book for a possible summary.

Naruto, the utterly gutsy shinobi, vows to never give up

and promises to break the curse of hatred shrouding

the world. Through his many adventures and trials,

Naruto changes the world around him, one miracle at a time.

Oh she was getting this book! If the name wasn't enough for her to nab it, the plot line was! Naruto would love it too!

"No one liked that book," Anko explained as she read the name of the author over her shoulder. "His other book, now that one has sold," she added, giggling a bit.
"He has another book?" Hari asked, interested already.

With a smirk, Anko looped arms with the witch and proceeded to drag her on over to a far wall covered in orange books.

"Icha Icha Paradaisu?"

"He went on to be a real perv master! These books are only sold in three shops in Konoha and you get carded upon buying them!"

Well Hari didn't have an ID of any sort so she wasn't going to get the book while Anko was around.

"I'm not really interested in that kind of thing, sorry," she lied.

Hari did grab a large book on sewing on her way to the register. She could learn to do it on her own and once she was done, she could influence her will over the needle and thread and have them do it for her!

A moment after she paid, Anko was slapping the orange book down and giving her a grin. "A little welcome to Konoha present for your troubles! Make sure you read chapter ten."

Hari flushed, having an idea of what was inside said chapter, but nodded nonetheless.

"And we should go for some sake sometime! Nai-chan can hold her liquor pretty well and it'd be nice to have new competition!"

Hari couldn't withhold her smirk at that, "I warn you, I'm the kind of person who takes my alcohol well, Anko."

"I'll hold you to it!"

Naruto got to class early that morning because he knew that Sasuke-teme got there early every morning and he didn't want to give the teme Hari-nee-chan's gift in front of everyone else.

He plopped the bento onto the jerk's table, glaring right back at those mysteriously dark eyes.

"What do you want, dobe?"

Sasuke rarely spoke to anyone. He didn't even answer Iruka-sensei when asked to answer questions in class. He was like a board, just as bland and just as stiff.

"Nee-chan wants me to be nice to you. Something about mutual peace or something. I got confused when she mentioned olives."

Sasuke obviously didn't get where he was going and to be honest, neither did Naruto.

"Look, she asked what you liked, I told her. She made it for you! So cheer up already, your stupid cloud is ruining my vibes!"

Naruto then plopped down in the available space beside the brunet, ignoring the Uchiha Glare being sent in his direction. He promised nee-chan he would do this and he never went back on his promises!

It took nearly five minutes for the teme to give in and finally open the bento box his nee-chan had made. There was no great exclamation. Nothing to show that he hated it. Naruto looked closely
though, seeing a small twitch at the side of his mouth and as the twitch came from the upper lip, he'd say it was an almost smile.

The teme put the lid back in place and put the box on the seat between them, next to Naruto's which was in the small wrap his nee-chan chose.

Naruto accomplished what he had meant to and that was all that mattered.

"Nee-chan, the graduation exam is in a month and I really wanna pass!"

Hari winced because no matter what, Naruto was probably the loudest kid she'd ever met. He made Dudley's whining sound tame. Judging by Ino's frown, she didn't appreciate it much either.

"Well, you said the only problem you have is the Bunshin thing, right? So just work on that."

"I have worked on it!" the blond insisted with a pout. "It never works!"

"Oh for the love of the Kami, do a Bunshin, Naruto!" Ino yelled, looking ready to blow.

The boy's eyes went wide and gave a very uncomfortable laugh that was so forced it could have been a cough. Nevertheless, he put his hands together and a second later, a perfect copy of him stood to his right. And then it slid to the floor in a literal, boneless heap.

"Your chakra control is terrible," the blonde commented, reaching down and grabbing the failed clone like it was a shirt and flipping it around a bit. Like Hari did when she shook out the rugs in Aunt Petunia's living room.

"You put too much chakra in it, that's why."

"Huh?"

"Honestly, how do you even get by in class if you don't pay attention?"

"I had detention that day, I missed the lesson so I just copied what I saw everyone else doing!"

Hari saw the very moment Ino placed it together. She could tell that something about it wasn't right and just as Hari expected, she said something about it.

"Detentions happen during lunch and after school, Naruto. Not during class."

The boy's face scrunched up, eyes becoming thin and whiskers twitching. "I've always had detention during class."

"Wait! Woah, woah, woah!" Ino waved her hands frantically. "Are you telling me that you didn't skip class all those times Iruka-sensei said you were off pranking somewhere?!

Naruto scratched at the back of his head and shrugged, "Shikamaru, Choji, Kiba, and I stopped skipping during our second year. Sometimes I have to skip for pranks but usually I do pranks after school because set up time at night means less witnesses and more time to plan. I haven't skipped class in months."

"That's… not good. There's something fishy going on there and you're telling sensei because he wouldn't want you to miss class and he always makes us stay after for detention and write lines."

"Um… okay."
Ino yanked on his arm and pulled him a little further away from Hari who was still doing the stretches that Ino had taught her. Hari listened quietly and she tried to center herself and not whimper at the pain of her legs being spread much too far apart.

"Back at the Bunshin, you put too much chakra in it. Observe!"

Ino mimicked Naruto's movements from a few minutes prior and a clone of herself appeared, only…it was extremely overweight. Ino winced at the visual and nodded. "This is what happens when your clones don't have enough chakra."

She repeated the process again, coming up with a clone that deflated like Naruto's had. "This is what happens when you have too much chakra."

One more time came out with a perfect clone that joined Ino in staring at Naruto with expectant eyes.

"I'm not good and chakra control 'cause I can't tell how much I'm using."

"That's what the exercises are for!"

"I got the leaf thing down and it still didn't help."

Hari snorted when Ino slapped a hand to her face. While it was sad to see how uneducated Naruto was, it was funny to see Ino's exasperation over it all. The girl was going to permanently look like an eggplant if she kept her face that way.

"Did you get detention during the other classes on chakra control?"

"Yeah."

"Someone is sabotaging you! There are more then one type of chakra control exercise! Get a shuriken!"

She fumbled in her supply pouch, pulling out her own weapon.

"Hari-san I want you to begin your laps!" the blonde called over, making Hari groan. Because of course she couldn't listen in on their conversation now, could she?

"Okay," she grumbled.

---

Ino held the shuriken in the palm of her hand and gestured for Naruto to watch carefully. Slowly, ever so slowly, it began to float off the blonde's palm. Then, it began to spin clockwise.

"See?" she asked. "You have to use your chakra to levitate it and to spin it. It divides attention and the longer you do it, the stronger your control gets."

She put the weapon away and grabbed Naruto by the collar of his jacket, dragging him over to the river while yelling a compliment out to his nee-chan as she passed them during her fourth lap.

"Here's another."

Ino placed her hand in the cold water and closed her eyes. Ever so carefully, she withdrew, showing that five little bubbles of water were surrounding her fingertips. One on each.

"Now we make them move."
Naruto's jaw was on the ground because Ino was making the water roll up and down her fingers. They still remained as perfect little bubbles of liquid, but moved as if skating along her flesh. Even with her hand upside down they kept at their pace!

"I wanna learn that!"

"You have to envision the chakra and then you practice until you get the right amount. This helps you pinpoint where your chakra is and how to draw upon it. I'm not a Sensor Ninja but even I can tell that you have a lot of chakra for an almost Genin. Chakra control might be a little harder on you but practice makes perfect, so get working!"

Ino left him there in order to help his nee-chan with her training.

Naruto took off his jacket, goggles, and pouches. If he was doing this, he'd do it right!

He cannonballed into the water.

Hari took her time as she replaced all of the books she'd taken from the library. She'd read all of them as quickly as possible and now understood what Naruto was going to be getting into and Merlin dammit she did not like most of it! It was dangerous no matter which division he decided he wanted to join. But... she knew that he wanted to be a ninja and he wanted to be Hokage with everything in his being completely set on the goal, so she wouldn't try to deter him. Covering him in protective runes however, that was a done deal.

Naruto was out training for the evening, saying that Hari earned some rest. How generous of him.

Hari stopped by the dango shop because she knew she'd see Anko there and was wondering if that offer for liquor was still up.

The moment the woman saw her, she abandoned her plate - though did take all of her dango with her - and slung an arm around Hari's shoulders, saying, "I know a great bar."

"I hope they have good alcohol, I need some."

Anko's brows wiggled, "Rough week?"

"He's teaching me Taijutsu so I can defend myself when I'm alone. And one of his classmates found out and she thought he wouldn't do a good enough job so I've been given a schedule and it sucks a lot."

Anko lead her through the doors of a dimly lit building and tugged her straight to the bar.

"Your best bottle of Sake, Jun. We got a newbie and she's a civvy!" Anko crowed.

The brunet behind the bar winked at Hari and nodded to Anko, "Coming on up."

"So about your Taijutsu, I could give you some pointers," Anko said, accepting her saucer and downing its contents quickly.

Hari took her time, savoring the flavor first before lugging it back. There was a small burn but it had nothing on Firewhiskey. Firewhiskey sometimes made people breathe fire for Merlin's sake!

"I do work at T&I after all."

"Huh?"
"Konoha's Torture and Interrogation Force," said the younger woman. "I extract information from the less than willing participants."

Hari stared for a few seconds, before something hit her. "Is that why you tasted like blood when I licked you back?"

Anko blinked and for a second, Hari wondered if maybe she broke the kunoichi, but then she was laughing uproariously, slamming her fist on the bar.

"That's perfect! Yes. It's why I generally smell like blood. Didn't know I tasted that way but it's good to know!"

Hari grabbed the bottle of alcohol, because she knew that this was going to be a long two hours. She still had to go and cook dinner after all.

Naruto slammed his head off the table. "Nee-chan, I don't see what's so great about Sasuke-teme! All the girls love him but he doesn't give them the time of day! -ttebayo!"

Hari was stirring the pasta, a thoughtful look on her face. "Who does he pay attention to?"

"No one!" the boy hissed. "Iruka-sensei asks him questions, he's ignores him. Sakura-chan asks him on a date or compliments him, he says nothing! The girls scream and coo about how great he is, he makes no sound! It's frustrating, nee-chan!"

"What about you?"

"Huh?"

"Does he respond when you talk to him?"

There was a hybrid sort of snort/cackle - a snackle perhaps - the came from Naruto. "That bastard doesn't."

There was a pause as Naruto cut himself off.

Hari waited patiently, plating the pasta and ladling the meat sauce over the top of it.

"We taunt each other during Taijutsu," the blond finally said lowly. "He likes to pin me."

"Does he taunt and pin anyone else?" Hari asked, already getting an idea in her mind and wondering if she was right. If so, she'd need to invite Uchiha Sasuke over somehow.

"Uh... no?" said the blond. "No, he just takes them and flings them to the ground! Then he walks off, like he's hot stuff!"

"I see," she giggled gleefully. Sasuke was totally crushing on Naruto! Whether he understood his actions or not didn't matter. Sometimes one could crush and not know it. She'd crushed on Cedric, Viktor, and Fleur and hadn't realized until she saw their dates for the Yule Ball. Sometimes, things didn't hit you until it was too late.

Hopefully she'd help Sasuke before it was too late.

"'See' what, Hari-nee-chan?" the boy demanded, too oblivious to understand.

"Nothing, Naruto. Now eat your dinner."
"But nee-chan! I wanna know! -ttebayo!"

Sasuke liked rice balls, right? She could learn how to make those so she wouldn't have buy prepared ones again.

"Nee-chan!"

Hari was reading her gifted Icha Icha Paradaisu as she walked through the village. As she had learned from visiting the library, there were records for everyone who entered the village because they were logged in at one of the gates. The reports were then handed in at the end of every twelve hour period.

As she had been in the village for two weeks, she needed to break into the administrative office of the Citizen Support Building and log her name in so her story and her reason for coming to Konoha, matched on paper.

So she was lightly following the directions of Death as they led her through the village. No one saw either of them actually, because Hari was disillusioned and covered in high level Notice-Me-Not Charms and Death couldn't be seen by mortal people.

Death had that tricky ability to know everything and anything. They could also be everywhere at once if needed. Death however, decided to follow their Mistress around because her life was 'always the most interesting' or so they claimed.

Death was going to freeze time - in return for a song sung by Hari - and Hari would get in and get out.

The building was one of the more plain ones. Two stories high and it reminded her of a white box. The most boring building in Konoha without nothing to make it stand out.

She waited by the entrance and sneaked in behind a well dressed man carrying a briefcase. The lobby wasn't decorated or the kind of room that popped and since no one could see her, she was safe from having to go through the secretary at the reception desk.

The chart on the wall told her the floor she needed was the one she was on, but down the hall to her right. She went quickly, ignoring Death's snickering. She was a good sneak when pitted up against muggles. But since this as a ninja village and she was no doubt going to be up against ninja who were faster and stronger, she had to use her head.

It was the fifth door on the right and she knocked once, hearing someone tell her to enter. She didn't move for a few seconds, before knocking again. An irritated answer came through the door and when she didn't knock or open the door, it opened and she came face to face with an irate looking ninja of mediocre height. Not that her height was anything to gawk at either, but still, he was dinky.

"Confundo," she whispered.

The man turned right around and walked back into the office and Hari follow quickly. Once the man sat down, he froze in place and the room became chilly.

"Accio audio recorders."

Nothing happened.

"Accio video recorders."
Nothing again.

"Accio cameras."

Nothing.

It should be fine then.

There were stacks upon stacks of files and Hari sighed, resigning herself to manual search.

The paper on the desk was from the last twelve hour swap. She snooped a bit, going through the drawers and finding the list of the twelve hour swap before this one. Under it was the one before that. She flipped down the line until she found the one for 4 May P-TSWW 15, 12:00 AM-12:00 PM.

Grabbing the pencil on the desk, she signed her name in on the bottom of the paper in the last free space available.

**Name:** Potta Hari

**Born Gender:** Female

**Chosen Gender:** Female

**Age:** 21

**Home Village:** I have none.

**Reason For Visit:** Considering citizenship and visiting to explore possibility of settling down.

**Expected Visiting Time (Limited to Twenty Days if a non mission, non political, non bureaucratic, or non Chunin Exams):** 20 days.

With a nod of approval, Hari slipped the paper back in with the others and carefully closed the drawer. She planted a small suggestion in the ninja's mind that he had read her name on the paper before and it wasn't knew to him.

She then Apparated back to the lobby, where no one noticed her or Death's presence. Carefully, she sat down in a waiting chair and removed one charm. Ten minutes later, she removed the second. A few moments after that, the last Notice-Me-Not faded away, leaving her merely disillusioned. If there were cameras at all, they wouldn't be able to pick up the details of her face.

Standing and plastering a smile on her face, she calmly walked over to the secretary, receiving a smile in return.

"How can I help you, dear?"

"I'm looking to gain citizenship, ma'am."

"Ah... I thought so."

She rummaged around in her desk for a moment, before pulling out a large packet of papers, held together by a paperclip. She handed it and a pencil over. "You need to correctly answer 80% of this test. Once all answers are filled out, you will go to the second floor. The first door on your left is the admittance room. Hisoka is on duty for the moment. He has red hair, you can't miss him. He will
review your test. If you pass, he will then tell you what other tests you'll have to pass, such as physical and mental evaluations to make certain you're fit to be in social company, okay dear?"

Hari nodded, accepting the packet with a grin and thanking the woman kindly.

*I'm going to need your help with this, aren't I?*

Death materialized next to the chair she chose to sit at. "Yes."

**Name: Potta Jamiel Hari**

**Age: 21**

**DOB: 31 July**

**HI NO KUNI'S GOVERNMENT**

**A: Principles of Hi no Kuni's Democracy**

1. **What is the supreme law of the land?**

Hari went right down the list, whistling lowly as the questions just got harder and harder. Did people who were born and raised in Hi no Kuni even know the answers to 80% of these questions?

"No," Death answered her. "A lot don't bother with their history. I am all-knowing however, so you are lucky to have me. Now open yourself, for I am about to take over."

She didn't even have a chance to prepare for it, Death had simply merged themselves with her being and she could feel the disturbing chill of sharing her body with someone else. Her hands moving without her consent and all this knowledge filling her.

Death was actually *inundating* her with the knowledge to all the questions as they answered them in a rapid pace.

Hari sat back in her mind as visions and images played before her at unnaturally fast paces, but she was still able to keep up with them. Names flashing in front of her, faces repeating over and over.

She learned of how Konohagakure was created. She learned about the Hokage and the Biju and their involvement with the village. She learned about the wars and how they changed laws from more brutal times to that more peaceful times of now.

Flashes of light and visions of people with strange eyes, doing strange things.

A blond man fighting a masked man. A woman with red hair clutching a blond baby with whiskered cheeks to her chest. A very creepy looking figure with a sword in it's mouth. A large, orange fox with crimson eyes.

She was being *overwhelmed*.

All she wanted to for Death to give her the answers, not force all of this information into her brain! One doesn't just *absorb* so much information at once because it lead to mental instability. The reason she didn't just transfer knowledge from a book to her brain was because she had a killer migraine the first and last time she did it. She wouldn't *willingly* do that to herself again!

Death was totally paying her back for all the lying and cheating she was doing! She knew their
"Yes. I intend to make you suffer all this knowledge that will no doubt help you in rearing the
Jinchuuriki, not because it'll help you at all. I'm just doing it to annoy you."

You could be, I know your type.

"True."

Are you almost done? I'm dying and my head is already pounding!

"Patience," Death purred.

Finish up already!

Death tsked condescendingly but did as she demanded and slowly split themselves from her
consciousness and body until they were once more two beings. Hari bent over her packet of paper,
eyes throbbing with the beginning of a strong, tension headache. Her veins and throat felt like liquid
ice and she wanted to bath in hot cocoa forever.

Not fair.

"Life isn't fair. Death however, Death is very fair."

Har, bloody har.

"You're welcome by the way. Eighty-three percent of the test is correct. Anyone who correctly
answered over ninety percent would have to be a high ranking ninja of this village. The last
twenty questions are designed to be next to impossible for civilians outside of Hi no Kuni to
answer. The last ten are impossible to answer for anyone who isn't a Konoha Anbu. It's a
hidden test to look for spies."

Oh. Thanks.

"One through eighty are correct, then eighty-two, eighty-four, and eighty-nine are correct.
The rest are left blank with only small question marks in place. If Mioru Hisoka lies about
your results, you'll have to Confund or Imperius him."

I don't really want to but...

"But your plan is more important that your morals."

Yeah.

Hari stood, shifting a bit to catch her footing when the world decided to go in circles instead of
having the common decency to stay put. Never again. She was never going through that hell ever
again.

Just talk to me next time, will you?

"Perhaps."

Death was an evil git. A helpful git, but evil all the same.
"Thank you."

Sod off!

Hari followed the woman's instructions up to the second floor, meeting the man named Hisoka in the directed room. The man had bright blue eyes and near fire colored hair. Not Weasley red, a bit darker if truth must be told.

"Another would-be citizen?" he smirked, accepting the packet and flipping through it quickly, reading her slightly messy scrawl. Death was good at even mimicking writing. Who knew? When did they get time to perfect such a skill?

"Time," the being answered. "I am time."

A moment of sitting in the blue speckled, brown chair had Hari just staring at the man as his face comically became more shocked by the second. Her head throbbed in sync with the loud, impressed whistle he emitted when he scored the test in the 83rd percentile.

"It's been nearly two years since someone from outside the village who wasn't a ninja, successfully passed the percent necessary, congratulations!"

Hair smiled and bowed, "Thank you. The woman downstairs said there were more evaluations to be done though."

"Ah… yeah."

He shuffled some papers around and pulled out a clipboard, attaching some papers to it.

"Personal history. I will be the one to administer this. I will ask you questions and you give me answers. I am a Chunin, Sensor Ninja and I can tell that you don't have enough chakra to be a ninja, but what little you do have will flare up if you lie. It is an inescapable outcome and lying would not be prudent."

She nodded. She was supposed to be in Slytherin, she could get through this!

"If you pass this test with an 80% at least, you can move on to mental and physical evaluation at the hospital, okay?"

"Yes, sir."

"Call me Hisoka, Potta-san."

"Okay."

"Are you ready or would you like a glass of water to calm yourself? Some questions can be invasive and I will detail what I must know so you don't have to get too personal."

Hari accepted the water with Death's confirmation that it wasn't laced with anything. It was just iced water. She was grateful because it was hot in the building and it was hot outside. Death's cool presence by her side was enough to keep her at a rather level temperature though.

"Alright. Family members, living and deceased, please?"

Hair cleared her throat. "Potta Jemuzu and Potta Yuri. Deceased. Yuri had a sister, Pechunia. She married Chocho Va-nun and had a son, Dadori. All deceased. Kuro Siri, my godfather. He had no
offspring. Deceased. Rupin Tedi, my godson, also deceased."

Hisoka quirked a brow, but went on to the next question.

"Circumstances of the deaths. You don't need great detail either."

Hari took a deep breath, "My parents were murdered by a man with designs on immortality and thought they had information they wanted. He was interrupted before he could hurt me much." She lifted her fringe, revealing the scar that was once a beacon of her fame. "He did get a bit in though."

She sipped her water and continued on. "I was taken and placed with my aunt and her husband and son. They didn't want me and made sure I knew it. I was taken away from them when I was nearly fifteen and I never went back. My godfather was displeased with how they treated me and a group of bad men with questionable morals heard of my living conditions with them and sought to teach them a lesson. They were murdered in their home."

Hisoka's pen scratched away, his look of interest never dimming.

"Siri took a death blow meant for me. I was arguing with his cousin who didn't like to be told 'no' and she reacted. Siri was caught between us and she killed him. When she continued to try to kill me, Siri's friend stepped in and had to fight her off because she was so deranged. She was killed. My godson died of sickness because he hadn't gotten his immunizations."

Teddy did actually die after his child had been born, but it was of Cancer, not immunization problems. Not even magics could find a cure for Cancer.

"Okay then," Hisoka whistled, making her head throb again. "Schooling?"

"I wasn't allowed to go to school. My aunt didn't want me to go. She didn't want anyone to know about me. I got some tutoring from my godfather before he died. As the last in the family, there were expectations of me, whether I grew up believing I was a poor, orphaned nobody, or not."

"Family or clan?"

With brows furrowed, Harry tried to think of an answer to that.

"The Potta family goes back almost a thousand years," she said, ignoring the man's surprise. "The Kuro family about two hundred years. While my godfather made me his heiress, I am actually related by blood because my father's mother was his aunt. I'm the last of both families. The others were casualties in the war."

She didn't specify which war, but at the look of understanding on his face, he assumed it was their last shinobi world war.

"You mentioned being an heiress. Anything to go with that?"

"What?"

"Do you have wealth? Depending upon your amount and your status as a Lady of two very old families, you could be eligible for Hime status, which prioritizes you."

It was Hari's turn to whistle in shock. Being a Lady and a Baroness was one thing, being a princess was other.

"I received help from a shinobi in order to seal away my riches. I wouldn't be able to tell you how
much, just that there is a lot of gold, silver, and jewels. Thousands of pounds worth."

She lied just a bit, but it wasn't a super big lie. There were *several* tonnes in her chests.

"All homes were destroyed in the war and my parents' home was wrecked during their murder. I want to start somewhere new."

"I think it's safe to say you fit the requirement, Hime-sama."

Oh Merlin, now he was going to be calling her that!

"Shut up and let it happen. That kind of status will benefit you immensely in the future. The wealthy are known to get more favors than others and as a princess of noble birth and much wealth, they will not seek to annoy you."

Death did have a point.

"Past relationships that could cause problems?"

"Nothing."

She'd had some one night stands with muggles and hadn't ever had sex with a wizard or witch. She could just imagine the headlines the next morning as her personal life was aired to Great Britain's magical society. Muggles had been the best bet and indeed, they were the best.

The dubious look sent her way didn't make her feel guilty in the least.

"I didn't date."

True, she never dated.

"Not for the sake of no suitors, but because they only wanted the money or because I'd be a nice trophy on their arm. I'm not into shallow people."

"Ahh," came the noise of understanding.

"Alright, you seem good in this department and you didn't lie once."

No, she omitted and changed details, and whatever lie she told, Death probably helped keep whatever chakra she had, calm so nothing slipped.

"Some of your answers raise concerns however. I must insist on the mental evaluation first and this is where it gets tricky."

He placed the clipboard down and made direct eye contact with her. His fingers laced together in front of his mouth and he suddenly looked years older. It wasn't a good look on him. She was too familiar with eyes like that.

"We get trauma and abuse victims a lot. You wouldn't believe the amount of orphans that suffer such things. A psyche eval will be administered by one of our very own Yamanaka. Probably the Head of the Clan as you are now a high priority possible-citizen."

Yamanaka. As in Ino's family?

"The Yamanaka are known as mind walkers."
"The chosen one will enter your mind and view some of your memories and your mindscape. They will determine if you are well mentally, or if you need therapy. There is a scale made in pyramid form. The tip is bright green for perfect health. Rarely anyone makes that, so don't worry. The middle two are dark green and dark brown. The green is acceptable to be in society, the brown warrants study, therapy, and shinobi watch until you pass into the green. The last level is pure black and it means solitary confinement in our own asylum, if you manage to pass the medical test to become a citizen of course."

Hari did not like the sound of this. She wasn't good at Occlumency. She couldn't keep intruders out of her mind. She at best, could rearrange stuff but never hide it all. She'd need Death's help for this… which meant more merging. Merlin dammit!

"Where is this done?"

"It could take place in the hospital room you will use for your medical evaluation. I will give you a paper with my signature on it. You will take it to the hospital and give it to the secretary at the front desk. It'll either be Miri or Yue. Miri is a blonde, Yue is a brunette. The one available will then direct you to a private eval room immediately. Your new status allows this. The examiner will come as quickly as able. The paper will need to be filled out and approved of by the examiner. Once done, you will take your medical eval, accept the result paper, and then return here at your earliest convenience.

Any attempts to change answers will be spotted easily. There is special ink that is used in these cases only and cannot be easily replicated, so don't try it."

Hari sighed and nodded. Becoming a citizen of a shinobi village was tough.

Hisoka handed over some papers and smiled, "I'm going to check your log and add it to what we have so far. If you manage to pass, I will then bring this to Hokage-sama's attention. Admittance of a Hime into his village is something he must be notified of."

Merlin this was a long process!

When Yamanaka Inoichi was told that a high priority case that was a possible citizen required his expertise, he hadn't expected this.

His daughter had only just told him about the young woman nearly a week ago! Potta Hari had earned his daughter's respect despite being a civilian with no training.

She was as exotic as Ino had gushed, eyes an unnatural shade of green. Her face was lovely, though not too angular. More soft, but not pampered like he'd expect from a Hime. She exuded calm and serenity, which was strange for someone about to undergo mental evaluation. Like she was used to it by now.

"Potta-hime, I am Yamanaka Inoichi and I will be your examiner this afternoon."

Green eyes followed his every move, taking note of where his hands resided. Those same eyes flickered to the window and the door quickly, before returning to his form. A little skittish and used to searching for exits as quickly as she could.

"I'm just Hari, Yamanaka-sama," she murmured, meeting his eyes head on and granting him with her slightly annoyed stare. Brave, to look a mind walker in the eye. No fear in her. She wasn't worried
about him reading her, she was worried over what he'd find.

It was a common fear during psyche evals.

"I am going to painlessly enter your mindscape. You may or may not join me, depending on how centered you are. I will view the form your scape takes and judge your current health on that alone. I will then view some of your worst and best memories to get a better feel of the life you have lived so far. My judgement will be passed when I have assimilated enough."

The young woman gave a slow nod.

"Tell me when you are ready."

"Okay," she said softly, waving him on.

Making a hand sign, Inoichi placed his hands on either side of her head and delved within.

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

Inoichi found himself standing in darkness, with shelves upon shelves of little, glass orbs that seemed to emit silvery/white light, as the only source of lighting. The shelves appeared to go on forever in every direction. There was no ceiling, only a black sky that was filled with stars, some much more pronounced than others. The floor was actually grass that was as green as the young woman's eyes had been with White and Red Tiger Lilies growing in little patches here and there.

"Sssssssssss"

Inoichi whipped around, seeing a snake as large as him, slithering out of the darkness. Its' scales were illuminated by the orbs, revealed to be a dark, green shade. Either it didn't have eyes or the eyes were covered. It moved past him, tongue flickering out for only a second, before it continue on, disappearing once more into the dark.

"Hoo!"

The sound of flapping wings drew his attention to one of the shelves where two birds sat. An owl and... he didn't really know what the second one was. The owl was white as snow with small speckles of black covering it's feathers and plumage and had intelligent, golden eyes. The other bird though, had a very long tail with various shades of gold and red entwined within it. It's eyes were black and beady.

They watched him carefully.

"Grrrrrrrr!"

A black dog that was at least as high as his hip, morphed from the shadows and beside it, was a large stag with enormous antlers. They too watched him.

This had to be one of the most strange mindscape he had ever seen.

In the mindscape, everything was symbolic. Everything had a meaning. The animals held importance to the young woman. They represented important moments or people or pets in her life. The white flowers showed her purity of heart and the red signified death. More like purification in death. At some point in time, the young woman's heart had stopped long enough for her to be considered dead.
Flatlining wasn't shocking, it was a usual thing. The human brain could work for several minutes after the blood ceased pumping, which gave the body and the medics chances to restart the heart. Several people managed to come back.

Both flowers were of a non-toxic breed though, meaning good mental health.

A sky showed desire for freedom, but the darkness it caused showed comfort in perceived small spaces and a perpetual bout of loneliness.

Her memories were the orbs and were pretty well organized. He was used to finding rooms and doors, but everything was out in the open and all he had to do was choose.

"You will take the memory you wish to view and you will take the orb and place it in the Pensieve."

His heart leapt in his throat because he hadn't sensed another being, but before him, stood a cloaked figure, wielding a scythe. The figure's face was covered with a hood, leaving only darkness. A skeletal hand lifted from the confines of the cloak and pointed to one of the orbs.

"Take it."

"Who are you?" Inoichi asked, already getting a feeling just from the appearance of this creature.

"I am Death."

An apparition of Death walked her mind freely, but was not attacking him or the animals. In fact, it was instructing him on how to view the memories. This Death wasn't his enemy.

"Why do you reside here?"

"Death is never unfair. It is Life that persists with horror and suffering. Death is not to be feared, for in death all things lie. She realizes that death is not the worst outcome and fears it not."

Only seasoned warriors would understand that death can actually be considered a reprieve. Only those who have suffered would make the connection. Death wasn't what was feared by most shinobi, it was the pain before death.

A lot of suicidal people didn't really want to die, they simply wanted the pain to cease so that living once again seemed worthwhile.

With careful movements, Inoichi picked up the orb Death pointed to. The being then pointed behind him, where he found a large, stone basin standing, filled with clear liquid. It hadn't been there before.

"Place the orb in the water and dip your head inside. The rest will come naturally."

Death faded from view, until all Inoichi could see was the darkness from whence it came.

Taking a deep breath, Inoichi dropped the orb into the water and watched in awe as it melted, colors and sights flashing before him. He leaned in closer to take a look and felt as if he were falling into the basin.

A curious glance around showed that he was actually inside the memory, but no one seemed to notice his presence. There was a small girl with eyes like Hari-sama's, standing at a stove, cooking. There was a hideous woman with light blonde hair, standing behind her, holding a spatula.
"You're burning the food, you stupid girl!"

The woman proceeded to hit the girl with the spatula.

"Sorry Pechunia-oba-sama," the child mumbled, receiving another hit across the back of the head.

A few moments of this repeating, was making Inoichi annoyed. When another person entered the room, he thought for certain they'd put a stop to the undeserved beating, but the large man with a purple shaded face simply glanced at them and nodded.

"Bring my coffee, girl!"

"Yes, Va-non-oji-sama!"

Inoichi extricated himself from the memory quickly.

Despite her high status, her aunt and uncle treated her like a slave. Not good.

He moved onto another orb, one that was several yards away from the last one. He brought it back to the basin and repeated the process.

This time, he was hunched over in a small room and sitting at his feet, was the same young girl from before. The door opened and Inoichi stepped out quickly, following the young girl to the kitchen.

She was being told that she was finally getting her cousin's second bedroom because someone had sent a letter to their home, addressed to the girl's current bedroom, which was a small closet under the stairs. The aunt and uncle looked worried, but the child simply demanded that she get her letter. They admitted to burning it.

The memory ended quickly, leaving him to fetch another.

This time the girl was much older, standing beside a dark haired man. In front of them was a large tapestry, covered in faces and the man, Siri as she called him, was telling her about the people who were his ancestors.

Young Hari-sama confessed to feeling angry all the time and wondering if she was becoming a bad person. Siri drew her into a tight hug, telling her that she wasn't a bad person. That she was a very good person that bad things always happened to.

The memory ended quickly.

Another memory showed Hari-sama sitting in a small room, a corpulent women bedecked in atrociously pink clothing, circled her. Hari-sama was writing with a quill, but there was no ink, yet something was still coming out of the quill.

She winced and clenched her left hand as the quill pressed against her skin, gouging deeply. Blood pooled beneath, but Hari-sama did not shed a tear or cry out once, as she cared something into her hand.

The woman behind her was smiling darkly.

"How long do I have to do this?" the child demanded.

"Until the message sinks in. You know, don't you? You know, deep down, that you deserve to be punished."
Inoichi stared at the bleeding hand in horror. How could someone inflict such a thing on a child?

He was grateful when that memory ceased.

The next was a more happy one. Hari-sama was sitting with a young girl with tanned skin and large, bushy hair. The two were giggling as they ate out of cartons, clinking their cutlery together every now and then. A red haired teen entered the room, plopping down on the bed with them, only to be shoved off by the other girl. The three laughed together.

Another memory was of a pair of twins boys with red hair. They had their arms over Hari-sama's shoulders and were smirking down at her. She gave a playful eye roll and proceeded to call both by name and explain how they were easy to tell apart. She then sauntered away, leaving both boys to stare after her, flushed to the tips of their ears.

Hari-sama was fighting a large snake in the next memory and she was much smaller. More Ino's size. It was the same snake that had slithered past Inoichi in the mindscape. Hari-sama thrust the silver sword in her hand, up into the snake's palate and through it's brain. She retracted her weapon, revealing a large fang had gotten stuck in her arm.

The snake wailed and hissed frightfully, collapsing to the ground and becoming still in death.

Hari-sama stumbled, ripping the fang from her body and blinking rapidly. She sank to her knees, body heaving for air as she folded herself in half, sweat pouring from her brow.

Inoichi could tell that she was dying of snake venom. One of the worst ways to die.

A soft, soothing croon rang through the memory and both Inoichi and Hari-sama looked up to see the red and gold bird from earlier, descending. The bird landed near the girl and trilled for her attention.

"You were brilliant, Fawkes," the girl mumbled. "I just wasn't quick enough."

In her dying moments she congratulates the bird and tries to alleviate it's worries. What an extraordinary person she was.

The bird bent over her arm and when it pulled away, the gaping wound was gone, with only a scar left behind.

"Of course!" Hari-sama gasped. "Phoenix Tears have healing powers. Thanks!" she beamed.

Fawkes crooned again and rubbed it's head against hers.

Inoichi smiled and withdrew from the basin, thinking that he'd had enough memories.

"One more," a deep voice called out.

Another orb was dropped into the basin and Inoichi's head was forcefully shoved inside this time.

He was standing in a dark forest, surrounded by darkly dressed people. There was a body at his feet. It was Hari-sama and she wasn't moving. A large sword protruded from her chest.

His breath hitched as a woman from the group was ordered to verify if the young girl was dead or not. She stumbled across the gnarled roots underfoot and bent down to the girl's level. A hand touched her pulse and the woman whispered lowly, "Is he alive? Draco. Is he alive?"

And Hari-sama actually nodded! Even with the blade in her chest, she was still alive!
The blonde woman drew a deep breath and stood slowly, a familiar sort of attitude overcame her. Inoichi had seen it often enough in his wife. A sense of egotism and the posture of a high class, well bred lady.

The woman turned and in a deep, no nonsense tone said, "Dead."

She lied. For whoever the Draco person was, she lied.

A man who was wrapped in chains was forced to carry the 'dead girl'. His eyes were filled with tears as he slowly pulled the sword from the young woman's body and laid it across her stomach, placing her hands on the handle in the usual 'rest in peace' position used at funerals. He lifted her then, not noticing how those hands slowly moved around the blade, one clutching it and the other gripping her wrist.

The chained man followed behind the leader of these people, who smirked in triumph at his perceived victory. His guard was down and with his gloating, he never saw the girl leap out of the man's hands and brandish the sword while behind him.

The man's head rolled across the forest floor before anyone else took notice of her living state.

There were screams of horror and shouts of, 'my lord!' and several turned on Hari-sama but with a sneer, she raised her hand and the collected people went flying in different directions, leaving only the woman who lied for her, standing in peace.

"Your son is alive and well," Hari-sama said to the blonde and gave a small bow. "Thank you, Malfoy-san."

Inoichi was pulled from the memory abruptly, the basin having disappeared and Death standing in its place.

"You have all that you need. Now go."

Inoichi nodded and quickly pulled out of the girl's mind.

~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~

When he came to, both he and Potta-hime were in the same positions they had been in before the mind walk began. He stepped back to give her space and she clutched her head, blinking rapidly.

"It's disorienting the first time but you're mindscape is very detailed and I think you'll be spared of the vomiting that usually occurs."

"Good… to know."

Inoichi picked up the paper for the eval and began answering all the questions in great detail. Once finished, he smiled. "You pass the Mental Evaluation. Your health resides in the Dark Green section of the pyramid. You can be trusted around others and you have a good head on your shoulders. Congratulations."

"Thank you."

"I must ask…"

"About the hand waving?"

"Yes."
"It's something I inherited from my father through his mother. His mother was my godfather's aunt and my godfather's family could move objects with their minds. I can do it too and that's why my aunt and uncle hated me, because I wasn't normal like them. They didn't like shinobi and samurai, and people who couldn't be normal.

Hisoka-san didn't ask if I had talents though, so I wasn't sure of how to say it."

Inoichi's brow raised, "Is this an ability passed down in the family?"

"Yes. Everyone had it."

"It could be considered a Kekkei Genkai. Gifts passed through bloodlines. Hisoka-san and I will have to discuss with you and Hokage-sama after you've passed all the evaluations."

"Okay," she nodded.

"Now, on the side, my daughter has made mention of you and am I to assume that you are staying with Naruto-san?"

"You're Ino's father? Um... yes, I'm with Naruto. He offered me a place to stay since I didn't know where to go. We help each other."

Inoichi held her gaze, "Naruto-san is important to Hokage-sama. He's like a grandson. Hokage-sama will want to make certain that you aren't a danger to him, so be prepared."

"Okay."

"I shall leave you to your Medical. Will you be going directly back to Hisoka-san after this?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall make my way to Hokage-sama's office in preparation for our meeting."

Inoichi departed, so many thoughts in his mind.

Hari-hime however, was a very interesting character and he didn't mind if Ino spent time with her. Maybe she'd mature under the young woman's influence.

He could only hope.

Hari was walking out of the hospital when she walked by someone who was coming in. He was much taller than her and from his clothing, she could tell that he was a ninja. His face was mostly covered by a mask with his headband covering his one eye. His hair was silver, standing almost straight up. It was actually what was in his hands that intrigued her most.

"Is chapter ten any good?" she asked, staring at the orange book he held which was the same as her own.

The man looked up from his book then, his coal colored eyes landing on her short self. "Hm?"

"Is chapter ten of Icha Icha as good as my friend said it is?"

He glanced down and then back up, "You read this?" He sounded incredulous, almost as if the thought was improbable.
Hari pulled her copy from her pocket, bookmark stuck in chapter eight. "Yes."

"Ahhhhhh…"

Hari was witness to what little skin was exposed of the man's face, turning bright red. He was reading the book openly in public but was embarrassed to actually talk about the contents of it?

"You know what, don't strain yourself. I'll find out in like fifty pages."

She patted his arm twice and continued on her way, rolling her eyes.

Men.

Naruto knew that his nee-chan was getting her citizenship papers done today, but he was still sad that she couldn't be there to greet he and Ino. It meant that he had to be the one doing all the nice stuff.

He remembered to offer Ino a drink, she accepted nee-chan's homemade juice, with no added sweetener.

The two sat at the table, drinking their drinks and just talking about stuff.

"I'm going to talk to my dad about your detentions because if there are people deliberately sabotaging students, he'll take them into T&I and they'll be questioned!"

Naruto flushed, "Thanks."

"I've given much more thought to how wrong your Taijutsu stances are too, by the way. So today we're going to work on drilling the right stances into your head. I've brought a straight edge with me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to hit you with it every time you mess up. Eventually, you'll get the hang of it."

Oh, great! Not!

"Hokage-sama, I was on watch today and found a young woman leaving Uzumaki's residence moments after he did."

Hiruzen's eyes went wide. Naruto was only twelve!

"I asked the other watchers and they too had seen her but didn't think to mention her existence as she hasn't harmed Uzumaki in any way."

Hiruzen frowned, not liking that. He'd need to speak with the guards about what 'alert me if anything happens' means.

"What about her?"

"She's been in the village for a little over two weeks and today she went to seek citizenship. She has furnished Uzumaki's apartment with new merchandise and together, they cleaned the entire place from ceiling to floor. She cooks for him from what I saw. She made his bento while he ate breakfast."
An unknown woman had managed to come into his village and find the Jinchuuriki of the Kyubi somehow? That seemed a little suspicious.

Perhaps he should call Naruto in and see what happened.

**Knock Knock.**

"Enter!" he called, grateful for a topic change.

In walked Inoichi and Hisoka, followed by a young woman.

"Hokage-sama, Potta-hime has passed the four evaluations for Konoha citizenship," Hisoka stated with a bow.

Inoichi nodded, "She has also earned my approval, Hokage-sama."

The young woman, whom his Anbu gasped at when he saw her, gave a deep bow.

"Hokage-sama, I am Potta Hari and It's a pleasure to meet Naruto-kun's favorite Jiji."

Well damn.

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**A/N: Another is done!**

**How was it? Let me know!**

**Check out my other fics!**

**See ya! :D**

**CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.**

Chapter End Notes

-Hisoka is a made up character. I did make him a Sensor because it seemed to be the fitting thing. As Inoichi is also a Sensor and is put in charge of high priority evals, I thought it would make sense.

-Anko is coolest when she's a member of T&I.

-About Death. I read a SPN/HP fic and it was a Death/Harry pairing and I was curious. What does the Death of SPN look like (as I've never watched the show)? I looked him up and found that he has all these fucking amazing ass powers and IDGAF what anyone says, Death is an amortal being that isn't living or dead, Death just is. As such, Death is allowed to kick ass. Death is not a Mary Sue and I do not want to hear how Death seems overpowered. Death is on par with the Kami/gods in this fic in terms of power and I will not tolerate bashing of a character that can kill someone just by poking them! My Death has all the powers the SPN Death has and more, so there! If you don't
like them, take it up with SPN for going all out on Death!
I'm A Genie for Your Wish

Chapter Summary

Shit happens.

Chapter Notes

-1 RYO EQUALS 10 YEN. 10 YEN EQUALS .0901 US DOLLARS AND .06 BRITISH POUNDS STERLING. Some moron on FF.net actually argued with me about conversions and told me that 10 ¥ is worth £.10. Like, the stupidity was strong with this one.

-Some more lying but only a little. Lots of loophole abuse here.

-Special thanks to the people who have recommended this fic to people on Tumblr!

-I have been posting here because I need space in my FF Doc because I am a part of the QLFC this season and need available fic space for typing on the fly. When I find mistakes, I will try to fix them here and then copy and paste it and re-update it on FF.net.

-WE SEE TEAM GAI, HIRUZEN, INO, NARUTO, ANKO, HARI, INOICHI, IRUKA, KURENAI, MIZUKI, A BITCH, SOME ORPHANS, AND KAKASHI!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta. I EDITED THIS CHAPTER 5 TIMES! I'M SURE THERE ARE STILL MISTAKES.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK!

Hari seated herself in the chair opposite the Hokage's. Four guards stood on all sides of the room, along with Hisoka and Inoichi behind her. She wasn't too worried because no one was within two feet of her, leaving her the illusion of personal space. In all reality, she had been boxed in like an animal.
"Potta-hime I am Sarutobi Hiruzen, the Sandaime Hokage. I'm surprised that Naruto-kun hasn't come up to tell me about you yet," the man said, a small smile on his face, most like at the thought of the exuberant blond.

"A lot of things have been happening recently, Hokage-sama. He hasn't even pulled any pranks," she commented, hoping to alleviate the man's worries. If he truly considered Naruto as a grandson he'd probably be paranoid about her presence in the boy's life. Especially if Naruto hadn't bothered to come to him to tell him about her. It could be seen as her forcing her will on the boy and that wouldn't do.

"That is strange," the man agreed. "Usually, Naruto-kun pulls multiple pranks a day."

"We've been busy helping each other, Hokage-sama."

She was trying to maintain an air or peace and calm and for the most part, she was okay. There was only slight worry and it wasn't even for herself.

The man leaned on his elbows, fingers laced together beneath his bearded chin, eyes alight with curiosity. "Tell me, Potta-hime, what have you both been getting up to in the last couple of weeks?"

"Naruto found me walking through the marketplace, asking for directions to Kikyo Castle. You don't have a map for civilian visitors so I was lead in several confusing directions and was getting very frustrated when a little, blond ball of energy bumped into me. He apologized and I asked for his help before he could run off. He took me to the castle and I decided not to stay when they were very rude to him when they saw him," she frowned. It never actually happened but seeing as everyone was rude to Naruto it would be easily believed.

The Hokage's frown was even deeper than her own. He looked much older suddenly and she could understand why. The ramifications of his decision to keep the information from Naruto were probably constantly being shoved in his face and for a boy whom he viewed so paternally, it no doubt hurt.

"He offered to let me stay with him during my visit, so I offered to buy him dinner. He took me to his home, where I found out that he too is an orphan, and that he really needed to clean. So we began with the kitchen as I would kip there. Growing kids need their beds after all. He helped me finish the kitchen and then we went for ramen when he found out that I didn't know what it was."

I met Teuchi-san and Ayame-san. I had my first bowl of ramen and Naruto ate nine bowls."

Seriously, where did he pack it away? A black hole existed somewhere in that boy's stomach. It sucked up everything in its path and always left him hungry. She distinctly recalled that Ron had been capable of consuming vast amounts of food at once. Must be a teen boy thing... though the twins never ate like that.

The old man finally cracked a smile, nodding his head, "Yes, Naruto-kun will take advantage of every opportunity to get as much ramen as possible. I apologize for his enthusiasm."

"It's fine," she assured him, a fond smile of her own overcoming her. "He told me he hadn't eaten that day and as I was a stranger that he had offered to help, it seemed only fair. Of course returning to his home had me a little displeased at how run down it was so while he was sleeping, I went out and purchased some things. Not everything is fixed as I don't know anything about plumbing or electricity, but I was able to clean everything else and I replaced his table and chairs, his fridge, his microwave, and a few decorations and such to make it more habitable."
"Why?" the old man demanded. "Why would you willingly purchase new items for a little boy that you would probably not know for very long?"

Hari swallowed, knowing that her past would come into the conversation now.

"I was orphaned at a young age. I grew up with my mother's sister and her husband and son. Because I could do odd things, they didn't like me. They didn't like anything abnormal. Ninja, samurai, chakra, magic, the thought of people out there being born with abilities. They hated all of it.

I lived in a small, broom cupboard beneath the stairs for the first ten years of my life. I had one outfit that belonged to my overweight cousin. I ate one meal a day. I never celebrated a holiday or a birthday. I never had toys. I was told horrible things about my parents. I was called a 'freak' and an 'abomination'. Sometimes they wondered why they didn't just kill me when I was found on their doorstep. They encouraged their son to bully me. Fighting back got me locked in my 'bedroom' for days without food. I was not allowed outside for fear of the neighbors seeing me. I was forced to cook and clean for them to 'earn my right to live there'. I had no friends. I had no hope of living a good life. It was terrible and I wouldn't wish that on anyone."

She shook her head, always hating having to recount her time with the Dursleys. They ruined every single situation whenever mentioned.

"So this sweet, little boy helps me out and I noticed that everywhere we go, people are glaring at him. I hear some unpleasant words being thrown around. 'Freak' was in there, by the way. Someone threw a tomato at him and got angry when he caught it and lobbed it back at them. He lives in a rundown building, with no food in the fridge other than spoiled milk. He has no family. Everyone seems to hate him, so no friends. He has two changes of clothes and both are a wreck. No hygiene products. Often enough he doesn't have enough money for normal food. I don't even know if he has rent to pay. I can't just leave him. I am capable of helping him and he's twelve. He's three years younger than I was when I was rescued. Despite his wish to be Hokage and to be a hero, I realized that someone needed to rescue him first for that to happen. And so I took the job."

Hari was very firm on her decision. She'd always been the one rescuing people and never once realized that maybe she should have been rescued. Hermione had reprimanded her for her 'saving people thing' and forced her to realize that her health was important too and that sometimes she had to sit back and leave someone else do the saving. Sometimes she had to let herself be saved.

She and the old village leader stared each other down and after a moment of silence, he waved a hand and the four guards disappeared from view. She could still feel them, but it meant that the man didn't consider her too big of a threat any longer if immediate protection was not required.

"You said you are helping each other?" the man asked, sitting back in his chair, hands now folded on the desk. His calm was much more believable and he seemed to relax the slightest but, shoulders not as tense.

"Every shop we went to either kicked us out or charged more than necessary for certain items. I gave up food shopping with him beside me and decided that I'd teach him to garden so he'd get his vegetables. I've been cooking and he's helped me clean. He decided that I need to know how to defend myself because ninja are faster than civilians and just because I can move things with my mind, doesn't mean I'd be able to fight a ninja. He realized my ability only extends visually and if I can't see my target, I can't really do anything. So he's teaching me Taijutsu and Yamanaka-sama's daughter found out and decided that I needed to learn more than what he was teaching me.

I don't like exercising. I'm not meant for it."
She wasn't the kind to sit on her arse all bloody day but at the same time, she didn't go out for runs or do workouts because she *needed* to stay in shape. She was far from lazy and had no problem getting down and dirty if the situation called for it. It was just boring to have to learn katas and stuff. And losing in a fist fight to a twelve year old was a bit embarrassing and her poor ego took some rough damage when Ino handed her her arse on a silver, bejeweled platter.

Some stifled laughter reached her ears and she flushed. She wasn't good at working out. that was all! Running was one thing, but kicks and punches and being thrown to the ground by a twelve year old girl/boy was not fun! Or those stupid weights! No. Just, no. Her ankles were going to kill her.

"Have you learned anything?" Inoichi asked from behind her.

"Yes," she nodded firmly. "Your daughter hits hard."

Ino did not hold back. While very feminine and into girly things, she did not believe that a kunoichi was to be weak or docile or pretty all the time. Kunoichi were just as good as ninja were and therefore she did not pull her punches when she sparred Naruto and did not hold back much against Hari either. Ino was a force of nature. A hurricane looking to make up to the peace and quiet of those around her.

"She's bossy too."


The blond man stepped forward a little more, drawing the Hokage's attention. "Hokage-sama, Potta-hime is concerned over her possible Kekkei Genkai and we wished to discuss it with you in more detail."

Sarutobi sat up straighter, "The moving objects part of your discussion, correct?"

Hari nodded. "So long as I can see it, I can levitate it, move it around, or summon it from across an expanse that I can at least see from. The heaviest person I was ever able to move was almost five hundred pounds. I cannot lift more than that yet."

"You can move people with your *mind*?"

"Yes. Yamanaka-sama, may I use you as an example?"

The man's dark blue eyes flitted about for a second, before he nodded once, stepping back so she could get a full view of him.

Hari took a deep breath. As she wasn't doing this with her wand, she needed to pay more attention so she didn't accidentally crush Inoichi with her magic. The broom she had practiced on the first time she did wandless and nonverbal levitation, shrivelled violently until it was a tenth of its original size. She didn't want to end up doing the same to Inoichi, so she erred on the side of caution. Hari wrapped her magic around his body and gently lifted him slowly so as not to scare him. She moved him from side to side a few times, before setting him down carefully and smiling at him.

"Thank you!" the witch beamed brightly.

Returning her attention to the village leader she was attempting to woo, Hari smiled. "I'm still perfecting it but the more I do, I'll get better at it."

"How many of your family members would you say had this ability?" the Hokage asked as he looked over the papers Hisoka had handed him concerning her evaluations.
"All of them."

He paused in his reading and looked up. "All?"

"Yes. Since the very first. All records profess the ability with random bursts of an extra ability in there somewhere."

He didn't specify which family so technically she wasn't lying. Ha ha! Loopholes were a wondrous thing to behold!

Sarutobi returned to reading the papers and nodded a few times.

"There is a certain requirement beyond the evaluations. You passed those just fine, but with your status as a hime, you would have to pay a fine, you realize? Are you okay with that?"

"Yes."

"The fine for nobility is a bit more steeply priced compared to normal civilians, just as new shinobi who are making the change pay more than all of the above. Are you still certain you wish to follow through with this?"

"Yes."

"Finally, as you have a Kekkei Genkai, you must follow the law. Either you allow Potta to become a clan of Konoha and allow yourself to be added to the Clan Restoration Act where up to three husbands will be shoved on your shoulders, marry into a clan already in existence, or sire one or two children from a member of a clan without a Kekkei Genkai. These are to ensure that your Kekkei Genkai passes on. Would you still be okay with this? It is a big decision."

Hari nodded. She wanted a family, though the CRA thing was out of the question. She didn't want polygamy because she was selfish and if she married, it was because she and her significant other wanted each other and none else. After decades of being relatively alone, she deserved to be selfish. The last choice seemed the best at the moment. It would mean she would at least give birth to a child and not have to marry a man. Should she decide to settle with someone other than a man, that option would be the best choice.

"I'm certain, Hokage-sama."

The man rummaged through his desk, pulling out a small, silver case. "You will dip your hand in this and place it over the blank space on this side of the paper," he explained, showing which paper he meant. "We will be able to analyze your hand print this way. You will then pay ten thousand Ryo for your Citizenship, which comes with an ID, a law book, and a bottle of Midoriyama Sake, and then take an oath to swear fealty to Hi no Kuni and Konohagakure no Sato."

Hari nodded, standing in order to lean over the desk. She had the funds necessary right on her person. She never left her money anywhere except on herself or with Death. That way no one would be able to steal it. There was nothing wrong with taking protective measures.

"We'll need the photographer, Hisoka-san," the old man said, casting a glance the Chunin's way.

"Right away, Hokage-sama!"

Hari left her ink print on the paper, wrinkling her nose at the greenish tint left on her skin afterwards. She ruffled through her purse, pulling out note after note after note. She'd finally bought an actual purse for her money and sold the other earring to the pawn shop owner, giving her a bit more to
work with until the time was right.

She placed ten sets of ten 100 Ryo notes on the desk and beamed in pride at the astonished look on the man's face.

"Very well then. The Oath of Fealty is as follows…"

"Hari-nee-chan!"

Naruto bounded into the kitchen, throwing his arms around the young woman and staring up at her with happiness unmatched. "I missed you today! Ino took training really seriously and she hit me in a lot of places and they hurt a lot and then they just stopped! I did manage to remember some of the stances she taught me though! -ttebayo!

"Why was Ino-san hitting you?" Hair asked as she patted his back soothingly.

"Ino got a ruler and every time I messed up on one of the stances, she'd hit me with it. She said I'd quickly learn not to mess up anymore and she was right! But my butt and hands hurt for awhile," he grumbled.

Hari grabbed his hands, turning them every which way but not finding any damage on them.

He shrugged, "I always heal fast. That's why it stopped hurting pretty quick, you know?"

"Sounds like you had an interesting day. Did you remember to-"

"I offered her drinks and a snack, nee-chan!" the boy insisted with a pout. "I wanted to make you proud."

Hari-nee-chan was smiling again and she ruffled his blond spikes. "I am proud of you! You're a breath of fresh air, squirt. Are you hungry?"

"Yes!"

"Well, seeing as I was able to get my citizenship today," she murmured, flashing a thick card with her photo and name and a small amount of information on it, "I was thinking maybe we could go get some ramen to celebrate. What do you think?"

"Yeah!"

"Get dressed then."

Naruto scampered back to his room where he threw on his jacket and fixed his goggles - which he had to wash after sweating so much earlier - after glancing at the mirror.

He was getting ramen!

"Someone's been teaching Naruto the wrong stances."

That was the statement that started this whole problem.

Sarutobi Hiruzen had been reading his copy of Icha Icha, giggling over Mebuki's impressive talents, when Yamanaka Inoichi came to speak with him on an important matter.
"My daughter has been training Potta-hime for the last three weeks, Hokage-sama and she's taken notice of Naruto-san's training. They've talked quite a lot and Naruto-san revealed that he was given detentions during primary classes. That he wasn't skipping class, he was serving detention during class. He doesn't know the chakra control exercises, he wasn't there for the lesson on Bunshin and has been copying what everyone else is doing, and the reason his Taijutsu stances are so horrendous are because he was taught incorrect stances. He only wins most of his mock battles because he's far stronger than his opponents."

Couldn't he just get a break for once? One time would be lovely.

"Ino has been correcting his form, but he's going to need a lot of help and the graduation exam is in two weeks. So far, she was able to explain the Bunshin to him and he understand it, but he has so much chakra that even though his control is good enough to surpass the Shuriken Wheel Exercise, he still can't focus a small enough amount. I fear he will never learn that jutsu."

No, Naruto probably wouldn't. Perhaps they could replace it with something else?

"Hokage-sama, do we really need him to know it?" Inoichi asked. "You allowed Rock Lee to pass last year due to determination and hard work and he can't use jutsu at all. It just wouldn't seem fair as Naruto-san can do the other required Ninjutsu and can at least break himself of a Genjutsu."

That was true and Naruto probably would have graduated two years early had they just nixed it and taught him something different.

With a sign, Hiruzen pulled out two pieces of paper and set to writing the small letters. One for Genin Exam Practitioner Mizuki and one for Potta Hari.

He was getting too old for this.

Uchiha Sasuke didn't really know what to say when the dobe continued to bring him lunch every day. Inside though, was his favorite food in the whole world. Only the people who owned the shop he usually frequented knew what he liked, so he wondered how the dobe knew.

The dobe hand changed a lot in the last month. His gross jumpsuit was cleaner and looked almost brand new. He actually had a lunch everyday. He was paying more attention and hadn't skipped or played a prank in weeks. Sasuke had even seen he and Yamanaka Ino conversing the other day and after following behind them for a few minutes, he learned that they were going somewhere together.

Sasuke severely doubted that it was Ino's influence that changed the blond so much. She wasn't that much more mature than Haruno was. No, Naruto was getting help from an outsider.

He'd paid attention more to the dobe in these past few weeks and was shocked to realize that his Taijutsu was improving slowly but surely. He had lasted fifteen seconds longer in his spar against Sasuke and trumped every other boy far quicker than usual.

Not many people had taken notice. He noticed that Ino seemed to recognize it and she even looked proud of the dobe. The Hyuga heiress who always watched the dobe also took notice. Sasuke wasn't sure if their sensei had caught on yet, but if he didn't, it would only be a matter of time. Iruka-sensei seemed to like Naruto the most despite him always getting into trouble and being a general disturbance.

Usually.

In the last month, the dobe hadn't caused a ruckus and he actually answered questions in class and
was even insulted when accused of being someone else. He proceeded to rant that he paid attention
to all the stuff Iruka-sensei talked about but that every other teacher they ever had was boring and he
didn't like them so they weren't worth his time.

Sasuke watched as the dobe placed the daily bento on his table and then sat beside him, taking the
free space that had most of the girls in the class angry with him. Sasuke was actually relieved that the
dobe felt the need to inflict his presence on him. Though he was doing it to make sure that Sasuke
accepted the bentos, it kept the fan-girls at an acceptable distance. It was why Sasuke sat on the side,
because he didn't want to be boxed in by girls on both sides. It would be terrible.

"Dobe, who is this sister of yours that keeps making me food?"

The blond stiffened for a second, before fixing Sasuke with a deep, penetrating stare. Whatever he
found was enough to make him answer. "Hari-nee-chan is awesome. She cooks great food and buys
me ramen. She read a bunch of book and instead of making me read them too, she explained the
stuff! She likes to garden and she's letting Ino and I teach her Taijutsu because she's a civilian and
since Ino's a girl, she knows kunoichi Taijutsu tricks."

Naruto was teaching someone Taijutsu? It was laughable at best, though he didn't actually laugh.
That would ruin his image as the strong and silent loner. He couldn't afford for people to think he
was nice or anything.

Still…

The dobe was getting better in Taijutsu too so Sasuke had a feeling that Ino had something to do
with that. She usually took Taijutsu really seriously and wouldn't allow her fellow blond to remain so
terrible at something she was good at. Also, she liked to boss people around, which made her
annoying. A chance to tell the dobe what to do had to be too good to pass up.

"Nee-chan wants to make cookies for the class but she wanted to know what everyone likes," the
dobe continued after a while. "Ino likes her's sugar free so nee-chan is making some like that but you
don't like sweet things so I don't know what you'd prefer. Her ginger ones are good if a little strong."

How did the dobe know that he didn't like sweets?

He must have accidentally let some emotion slip because Naruto was laughing, eyes sparkling with
mirth, "Teme, you trash all the chocolate you get every February! You never eat anything with sugar
in it. You always eat earthy flavors. It's obvious! -ttebayo!"

It most certainly was not!

Sasuke huffed and faced the board again, because he was getting annoyed.

Nothing about Uchiha Sasuke was 'obvious'.

"Oh Naruto, guess what I just found?!!"

Hari smirked as the excitable blond bounced his way into the kitchen. "Nee-chan?"

"I just got a letter from the Hokage explaining that last year a student was allowed to graduate even
though he cannot perform jutsu. His hard work and determination are what allowed him to pass and
on this day, he is a budding, Taijutsu specialist.

So… you've been given a boon. If you get passing marks on your test and do good on your Taijutsu
and Genjustu, plus perfectly ace your Henge and Kawarimi, you'll pass the exam this year."

He stared at her for maybe ten seconds. She could see the moment it all clicked because his blank stare went wide and disbelieving for a second. Then her arms were full of blabbering blond, who was hugging her as hard as he could and crying his little, frustrated heart out.

"I'm going to be a ninja now," he mumbled into her collar.

"Yep. You have to go out there and make your precious people proud, okay squirt?"

"I will," he sniffed, wiping his eyes furiously. "I'll be the best, nee-chan! -ttebayo!"

"Good. Now… we need to talk," she said, leading him to the table and seating him on one of the cushion covered chairs.

While he watched on in confusion, Hari set up two cups of tea and some biscuits and took the seat across from him, all serious now.

"Hari-nee-chan?"

"Naruto, you rescued me from an unknown future, stuck in a bottle. I was sealed in there by a bad man. I am not actually a genie, I am a witch."

The boy frowned, "But you're not ugly."

She snorted, unable to help herself because that was hilarious and not what she had been expecting upon revelation.

"Some of us aren't ugly, Naruto. Some of us aren't evil either. Some can be really pretty or really nice. I'm nice or at least I like to think so. Haven't you realized that you haven't made any wishes because I distract you from them? I can't grant a wish, but I can use my magic to influence outcomes."

At the pawnshop and the library… I was confusing those people so they couldn't remember the line of conversation. I transfigured an earring into a small bag and enchanted it to hold the books I took. The cleaning the ceiling, I was levitating myself. I can even turn into a feline if I want. Not a genie, I'm a witch who was imprisoned like a genie, but a friend of mine ruined the full incantation before I was fully sealed within, making it so I wasn't enslaved to the person who freed me."

"So… so a bad man wanted to make you a slave by putting you in the bottle and your friend ruined his plans?"

"Yes," she nodded. "I was still locked inside, but not made a slave."

"Well good! I don't want a slave, I like my nee-chan!"

"I like you too, Naruto."

He nibbled on a biscuit and took a sip of tea. "So what is a real genie like then?"

"Spiteful. The first genie - according to my friend - was a bad man who was sealed away by a Kami as punishment for his crimes. He tricked the young woman who rubbed his lamp, into freeing him with one of her wishes. In doing so though, she was to take his place. To wish for a genie's freedom means you take their place in servitude and become the genie instead, leaving them free. Obviously, those who are tricked into it become angry and spiteful and blame others for their misfortune, leading to them tricking others as well. My friend stopped that from happening to me and I am grateful to
"Who's your friend?" Naruto asked, obviously not the kind to remain on one topic for long. He'd already consumed four biscuits as she talked, leaving her the final two.

"You wouldn't be able to see them. They can only be seen by immortals or people who have died. I died for a bit, but awoke again because they didn't want me to die."

"Like a Shinigami?"

Merlin this kid was much smarter than people gave him credit for!

"The Death Gods are like Reapers, Naruto. They're sent to collect souls on behalf of another being. Can you think of who?"

"Death?"

"This one is rather bright. I wasn't expecting that?"

Hari glared at the kitchen corner where Death formed out of the shadows. They stood there, watching the conversation between the witch and the Jinchuuriki, with visible humor, despite their face being hidden behind the cowl of their cloak.

Naruto shivered and caught her eyes, looking over to the corner too. "Is he here?"

Too bloody smart!

"They, Naruto. Death is they. No gender."

"Oh, okay. Are they going to hurt us?"

"No," she said sternly, casting a fierce look in the being's direction to make certain her point made it across. "Death will not harm anyone unless I order them to."

"Why? Are you really that good of friends that they'd not kill anyone if you didn't want it?"

"Yes."

She didn't really want to drop the 'I'm immortal and the Mistress of death' card any time soon. It was seriously be too much at once.

"Well, so long as they don't hurt anyone I'm okay with it, though I wish I could see them too," he grumbled, looking askance at the corner where Death stood, even if he couldn't see them.

"You don't want to," insisted the brunet. "Black cloak covering a skeleton. Not much to see. And they're downright snarky too. Not a good conversationalist."

"Hey!"

"It's true," she murmured in the direction of the corner.

"Nee-chan are you going to be talking to random corners from now on, 'cause people are gonna think you're crazy if you do."

"I usually answer them in my head, squirt."
"Okay."

Naruto wasn't dumb. He'd known some things were off but he hadn't thought them to be super important and the fact that Hari-nee-chan decided to tell him anything made him feel special.

His nee-chan was friends with Death. Weird, but she didn't seem worried or anything so he wasn't worried either. And Death made sure she wasn't a slave so they had to be okay at least.

"Now Naruto, now that you know the truth, I wanted to tell you about my parents' deaths. I'm an orphan too. I was a baby when a strange man with magic like me, came to my home and murdered my parents for opposing him and his ideals. He tried to kill me too but failed, leaving me with my mother's sister, who hated me much like the village seems to hate you. Only difference in our pasts is that I was forced to clean and cook as well. I can relate to you and I wanted to help you understand something important about Life."

Hair-nee-chan was really pretty all the time, but he didn't like how the sadness in her eyes seemed to make her shine a lot less. Like someone had torn something important form her and she was suffering still for it. She looked so much older now.

"Naruto, I have seen people being murdered. I have had to kill to protect others. I am not proud of it because I try to maintain the belief that death isn't always the answer, but sometimes we cannot let our feelings rule our heads. There will come a day where someone you know will die. A teammate, a friend, a family member. There will come a day where you will witness death for the first time. I don't like shinobi life because I don't want you to go through that, but you will have to… one day."

He didn't understand. And Hari-nee-chan knew he didn't without him having to say anything. She was smart like that.

"Reading about the former wars is nothing like living in a war. The terror in your last moment as you're so sure you'll die. The pain usually accompanying said terror. Watching as your precious ones are taken from you and being unable to save them. I know you want to rescue princesses and be the greatest ninja ever… but I can't on my good conscience allow you to go out into the world, not knowing about these things."

"But nee-chan-"

"Hush, please," she whispered, voice having gone rough, eyes watering.

He stayed quiet.

"Ninja became known for their assassination. Death is a constant figure in shinobi life. I want to prepare you for it because it will hurt to see the first time. You will feel ill and cold. You'll want to curl up in a ball and cry forever. You'll need to realize that some people are beyond saving. Sometimes you'll even be saving them by killing them. I don't want you to be naive. The clan children know what will happen eventually and it's why clan kids end up graduating more than civilians do. They know the risks and the expectations.

I can fervently hope all I want that you don't bare witness to the atrocities I have seen, but I know it's a false hope. I simply wish to prepare you so that you may handle it better than I did."

The bright green eyes his nee-chan possessed were dull and filled with tears and Naruto - while not fully understanding - did his best to take it seriously.

Nee-chan didn't lie. She was always very serious and didn't like lying so Naruto knew that this was
"You will meet terrible people. They will do things you can't comprehend the reasons for. You'll meet people who were once innocent and sweet and suffered tragedy that turned them into cold-hearted killers. You'll meet people who seem terrible at first glance but who are actually pretty okay beneath their gruff attitudes. You must learn to discern between someone who deserves mercy and someone - despite how much you wish to help them repent - who needs to die.

I had to kill someone who murdered hundreds alongside his followers. My parents were among the numbers lost. And yet I still tried to get him to repent for his actions. Remorse and Repentance would have saved him from being locked in Limbo for all eternity, but he chose to ignore my words and on Death's assurance, he is weak and alone in Limbo, unable to return to Life nor go forth to the AfterLife.

I didn't want to be the one who had to do it, but sometimes we're the only one's who can and the lives of the many compared to the lives of the few, are more important. I saved thousands in the process and that is the only positive thing I can think of that came from the whole debacle."

Nee-chan was crying. Naruto didn't know much about wars and he didn't really know about bad people who killed people. The villagers were mean to him but they never tried to kill him as far as he was aware. Hari-nee-chan looked so depressed and Naruto didn't know what to do.

He wasn't smart! He could tell this was important, he just didn't really understand why it was. He felt bad because nee-chan was trying to teach him something and he didn't really get it.

Maybe he could ask Ino!

Ino sighed when Naruto finished talking. So the bomb had finally been dropped over his head. Why did she have to be the one to do this?

But… Yamanaka Ino wasn't going to let a fellow Konoha shinobi - he was going to pass one way or another, dammit! - continue on.

"Come on, I'm going to show you something."

Instead of going straight to Naruto's house, Ino lead him to Training Ground Three. The Memorial Stone had never been a part of their training before, so he probably didn't know what it was for. Still, he had to learn one way or another.

"This stone is an important marker to the village," she explained, placing a hand on the warm surface. "Every ninja who has ever died for our village, has been carved on this stone. We remember them and their sacrifice for us. Some of my family are on this. My grandfather was killed in the last war, before I could even meet him. Iwa shinobi attacked his team and they destroyed each other until there was nothing left."

She reached out, grabbing the blond's hand and placing it beside her own. "The Yondaime is here. The Nidai and Shodai are here as well. Great people who did great things for us and in turn, we thank them by remembering them this way.

As someone who doesn't have many loved ones, you may not understand, but consider this. Hari-chan is attacked by a shinobi and you aren't able to save her or yourself no matter how hard you tried. You would be inscribed on the stone. If Ichiraku Teuchi or his daughter were being attacked and Iruka-sensei saved them, but died in the process, he'd be put on this stone. Ninja die all the time, Naruto. Hokage-sama being alive is a testament to his strength and determination. But I know that he
would do everything to protect us, even give his life. That's what it means to be a shinobi of Konoha.

I know I don't seem so mature because of my crush on Sasuke-kun, but I still can acknowledge shinobi life. I know what could happen at any time and while I'm scared that I'll lose my dad, or Shikamaru and Choji, or other people I care about, I can only support them so I don't lose them. We must do our best to be the foundation they need to rest on."

She traced the Yondaime's name twice and sniffed back her tears. Here she was, getting all emotional at her own words! Damn Naruto for turning her into this mush ball.

"Think of it this way, Naruto. Can you stand the thought of losing Iruka-Sensei or Hokage-sama? One day, you will. We can only hope that it's not in battle, but in peaceful rest."

Hari was on a mission. Ever since Anko had mentioned the Konoha Orphanage, she'd been wondering just what was going on over there. It all sounded terrible but she wanted to be sure before doing anything. Anko was extremely angry when talking about it so she could have embellished a bit, though Hari was certain she hadn't.

She was carrying a large bag and Anko was carrying the other bag. Inside both were biscuits that she had baked for the children. She was going to talk to the kids and Anko was going to keep the matron busy with fear and a well twirled kunai.

Threatening civilians apparently wasn't legal, but since Anko was known for messing with her weapons all the time, no one could say she was threatening anyone, even if secretly she was.

To play up the part, Hari had Transfigured her plain outfit into a smashing kimono of crisp lavender and trimmed with a golden dragon with shimmering scales. Her obi was black silk and was expertly tied around her waist by Anko herself, which was a shock. Hari clipped some of her hair back and clutched a black parasol overhead to shield from the sun's Merlin awful rays. Luckily, she had placed cooling charms on the inside of her clothing and wasn't sweating like a stuck pig.

"What exactly is the game plan today?" Anko asked as she twirled her kunai around her index finger.

"I'm going to bribe the children with sweets and talk to them about the orphanage. If enough of them agree on replacing the matron, we'll take our findings to Hokage-sama and I will request permission to take over. I am considerably wealthy and I can't leave children to be stuck living as I did."

"You're too nice."

"Not really," she argued. "I can be extremely spiteful toward people I hate. I have tortured people I hate and yes, they were murderers and terrible people, it doesn't mean that my actions were okay. I sank to their level and let my emotions rule my head and in turn, that doesn't make me good or even all that moral, because I know that I'd do it again if someone were to touch my little brother."

Hari sneered, unable to help herself. "Death is easy. It's not the worst. Death is mercy. Death ends the suffering, and ending my victim's suffering isn't what my aim is."

Anko cocked a stunned brow, probably shocked at how dark Hari's attitude had gotten, but the witch felt no remorse. She wasn't exactly a good person because she had done things to break the law all the time. For 'greater good' or not didn't matter. To help others, didn't make it okay. If not hard pressed for time, she could have found better ways to handle her problems, but she just did what came naturally. Rule breaking.
Hari was a bundle of contradictions. After sixty years of living, she'd gained her own opinions and in a new world where she was not bound by the restrictions of her home, she could do what she wanted in terms of using Dark Magic.

Hari preferred using the Imperius Curse and the Killing Curse as opposed to the Cruciatius Curse. But just because she disliked the last didn't mean she wouldn't do it. She was a Light witch still and would always remain one because it was the affinity she was born to resonate with. She could still use the Dark Arts just fine however. So long as she stayed away from Soul Magick, she was safe.

So Hari was not overly concerned that her appearance as a sweet and innocent civilian was being torn down piece by piece. She was only sweet to the people she cared for and liked. Having fought and bled in a war, Hari had perfected her inner fighter. She wasn't super good but didn't believe her willingness to use what Britain considered illegal, made her bad. She was just Hari and she'd fight for what she believed in, no matter the dirty tricks she had to pull to get there.

She wasn't going to hide or back down simply because she didn't want people to think badly of her. And judging by Anko's response, she thought it was awesome.

"Okay, so I'm going to go first and you're going to sneak past me. You're pretty quiet so I don't think anyone will notice you. Upon entering the building, you'll go to the stairs on your right. They lead to the Bunk Floor. It's just one huge room separated into age groups. Some kids have to share beds and some of the older ones don't have any. They tend to really behave when there are visitors because it could mean possible adoption."

Hari felt her heart go out to the poor dears. Always waiting for someone to come and take them away.

The building was rather large, which was shocking, but Hari could see the wear and tear the moment they stepped inside. It needed repairs badly.

She took the second bag from Anko and crept over to the stairs, waving the kunoichi onward before sneaking up them.

The room was large with windows on either side going all the way down. She didn't like the fact that basically anyone could just walk up the stairs and into their bedroom and if they were quiet enough the kids would never hear. At least with a door or a creaking stair, they'd be able to prepare for either evacuation or hiding.

This would have to be rectified. She cast a silencing charm on the room for good measure so as not to draw the attention of the matron.

One little boy saw her and gasped, drawing the attention of some others, who then looked to her. A moment later, there was a stampede of children as they all rushed from their beds or from the floor to stand in four single file lines, smallest in the front and oldest in the back. The eldest were about Naruto's age, which was a bit confusing for a second, but she chalked it up to ninja things.

"Hello everyone, I'm Potta Hari."

"Hello, Potta-sama!" the children chorused.

Hari smiled, "Do you have a table in here?"

One of the order boys pointed to some small work tables in the center of the room. Hari smiled and moved toward them, emptying her bags and opening the containers filled with chocolate, chocolate chip biscuits and chocolate fudge.
"I brought some sweets today because I wasn't to get to know you all."

The children hesitated for a moment, but the second she waved them on, they charged the table of sweets, each taking something for their own and clutching their chosen treat to their chests.

"It has been brought to my attention that your matron isn't the kindest person in the world."

Some of the children stiffened, ceasing their eating in order to stare at her with fright filled eyes. She hated that the woman seemed to makes them so sacred.

"A friend and I are going to approach Hokage-sama with our findings in hopes of convincing him that a new matron is necessary. My friend already has a low opinion of the woman, but I'd like some of your opinions on what you think you need here that she has denied you. Important things."

Hari waited calmly because you couldn't just expect orphans to suddenly trust you. They had to take the next step in faith and she would wait however long she had to.

"I wanted a garden," a soft voice murmured.

Hari found herself confronted with wide, blue eyes deeply set in a thin, angular face. The little girl had striking orange/red hair and seemed to be fidgeting in embarrassment.

"Why a garden?"

"We don't have enough money so if we grew our own vegetables, we could still have food and be able to conserve our resources."

"Why did she disagree?" Hari asked, already expecting the answer.

One of the older boys snorted, "'Cause she's a useless drunk and needed more Sake."

"She won't get us blankets," another girl said, seeming much braver than the others. "She hasn't bought any in ten years and after the Kyubi attacked and there were more orphans coming in, she still refused to get new clothes and blankets. Mimi doesn't even have clothes and we each gave her something of ours," the girl said, pointing to a smaller girl with mismatched clothing and two different shoes. She probably reached Hari's hip.

The forty-four children before her weren't clean. Their hair looked terrible. Their clothes were even worse. She could see thirty-two beds altogether, but barely any blankets on them. No toys. Some of them didn't have shoes. It made Tom's orphanage seemed like paradise. Tom at least wore a uniform and had his own room. These kids didn't even get that much.

"If you could have another matron, would you want one?"

"YES!" the children chorused.

"Okay. I'll see what I can do."

Sarutobi Hiruzen knew that he would be seeing Potta Hari soon but never expected for it to be for this reason. But she and Mitarashi Anko stood before his desk looking determined.

"Hokage-sama," Anko began, "Hari and I have brought you a report we wrote on our concerns for the Konoha Orphanage. For years it has needed a new matron and we finally have someone willing to replace her and who will actually help the children."
Potta-hime stepped up then, frown firmly set in place. "I spoke with the children while Anko distracted Manami-san. There are forty-four of them, but only thirty-two beds. Fifteen of those beds have blankets and the children swap every night, taking turns on who gets to use a blanket. Four of them don't have any clothes at all and the others have given over a piece of their clothing so they're not walking around naked. Their bath time is limited to twice a week each, set on different days. They haven't had new clothes in ten years. Some don't even have shoes.

According to a few of them, they asked for a vegetable garden so they'd still have some food when money was tight, but she took the money and spent it on Sake instead. Another asked for soap for when they bathe but she denied them in favor of Sake. Sometimes there isn't enough food for all of them and then end up cutting their meals in half so the young children can eat, leaving the older ones to go without. It's terrible over there."

Anko nodded stiffly, "And her office is covered in Sake bottles. The building is falling apart and there is mold growing in the bathroom. I checked before leaving. It's unsanitary and disgusting."

The Hokage sat back. "Who would take over as the new matron?"

Anko stared intently at Potta-hime who squared her shoulders and said, "Me."

He blinked. "You'd be willing to take over the orphanage?"

"Yes. They're living like I had to and I cannot tolerate it. It needs to change and I think I can get the village to participate in funding the repairs of the building."

"How so?"

"Hokage-sama, Hari makes the best food I've ever tasted!" Anko practically gushed, her excitement almost palpable.

"I'm going to do a bake sale."

"And I'm going to sit over a dunk tank at let the civvies try to knock me into the water!" Anko added with a bright grin.

"For every five treats someone buys, they'll get a chance to knock her into the water. Civilians getting a chance to knock a ninja down is rare and it'd be a big hit."

"Also, kunoichi wearing white, getting wet should totally bring in some hungry fellas!"

Potta-hime had the decency to flush at Anko’s proclamation. Anko didn't seem fazed in the least. But then again, she wouldn't be Anko if she wasn't challenging rules and braking social cues.

He had to think about this. It could be a test to see how hard Potta-hime would work for the sake of the children. He could see how she handled the pressure of it all.

"Anko-san, Potta-hime, I am willing to give you both a chance for this. If you can raise half a million Ryo in this fundraiser, I will have Manami-san removed from her station and have Potta-hime take her place."

The two young women grinned maniacally and Hiruzen wondered if perhaps he'd just walked into something bad.

Only time would tell.
"So then Madara-teme thought the village was a waste of space when people didn't starting liking him and he left for a few years only to come back and attack?"

"Exactly," Hari beamed. "He and Hashirama-sama were known to butt heads a lot, but pride often changes even the best of men and Madara fell prey to jealousy. Not that Hashirama-sama's brother made it any better of course."

Naruto nodded. "So even though he was a teme, they still kept his statue in the Valley of the End?"

"Yep! He was the leader of one of the founding families you know. Even if he was a bad egg, lumping all Uchiha into the same pot isn't kind. And after their past and what happened to them, it wouldn't be right to view them so terribly. Just because one person is bad doesn't mean all of them are. Of course no one will ever truly know since the Massacre occurred, but I'd like to think that not all Uchiha were bad."

"History is so dramatic! -ttebayo!"

Nee-chan snorted but did nod along anyway. "You're right."

Naruto could now understand where the teme got his moodiness from! It was a family trait! That whole stick up the butt thing was something every one of them were taught from the cradle!

Naruto was psyched! Today was the day that he was going to finally become a Genin! After suffering for far longer than he should have, he was going to finally become a ninja!

It was also the day of Hari-nee-chan's bake sale thing! So while Naruto was getting ready to become a ninja, nee-chan was baking a bunch of food. She had rented out a large hall near the village center and with the help of some of her kunoichi friends - honestly, the purple one was scary! - they were going to raise money for the orphanage.

Naruto beamed brightly because everything was going great today and nothing was going to take him down!

He was wrong. He was so terribly wrong and it wasn't fair! Hokage-Jiji said that Naruto didn't have to do the clone why did he fail? Iruka-sensei said he didn't know about any of it and now Naruto had failed for the third time!

"Don't blame, Iruka, Naruto. He's just doing his job."

The blond ignored Mizuki because he wasn't in the mood to talk. He wanted to go home and talk to his nee-chan. Nee-chan knew everything so she should know what was wrong with this problem. She could fix it with her magic.

"Naruto, there is another graduation exam you could take… but it isn't used unless in war times. Though you could probably do it I'm sure."

Naruto's attention snapped to the Chunin. There was another way to pass?

He'd pass it! -ttebayo!

Hari would freely admit to casting a very large compulsion charm on the village as a whole, urging people to want to come to the bake sale. Anko and Kurenai offered to help her and she couldn't be
more grateful. There were thousands upon thousands of sweets she'd kept under preservation charms in order to prepare for this day. She needed all the help she could get and hired out four Genin teams to carry the large amounts of sweets to the hall.

She paid for helpers and helpers were what she got.

"Come my most youthful Genin! We are going to aid in this justly cause and let everyone see our flames of youth!"

Even if some of them were a bit on the odd side.

The man had introduced himself as Maito Gai. He was an elite Jonin of Konoha and he and his team - comprised of Rock Lee, the mini clone of Gai, TenTen the weapon lover, and Hyuga Neji, the boy with an ice stick up his arse - were of the few available to help her. They were also going to be manning stalls with the three other teams. She was worried about the Hyuga but was certain he could fake being nice for the sake of his mission and if he failed to, she'd write a bad report on him.

"The most youthful Anko and Kurenai!"

The two women turned around from where they had been situating the sweets in what they thought was the most attractive order - all the colorful stuff up front to draw children - and grinned at the man.

Gai's bowl hair cut and strange manner of speech made him stand out compared to the other ninja Hari had the privilege of meeting. His need to proclaim the strength of youth was also very odd.

TenTen and Neji seemed horrified at his actions while Lee rushed to mimic him exactly, eagerly taking notes. If Hari recalled correctly, he was the boy who passed the Academy the former year through hard work and determination because he couldn't use chakra. She had high hopes for her Naruto if Lee managed to come so far in only a year.

"Hello Gai, is this your team?" Kurenai asked, smiling down at the Genin.

Gai grinned and made the introductions again and proceeded to ask Hari what else she needed help with.

"Potta-hime what can I and my youthful team do to aid you in your most youthful venture?!!"

"I have thirteen stalls to work and four Genin teams. Each Genin will take a stall with their Jonin instructors chaperoning to make certain there are no problems and no drama started. I know this may seem like a pointless mission but think of it like this. You get to practice emotional control because some people will no doubt be difficult to handle. You get to strengthen your manipulation tactics by seeing how much you can get someone to buy. You will practice diplomacy.

This is a very serious cause and we need confident, willing helpers. As added incentive, the Genin team that rings up the most earned Ryo will get a paid mission to Konoha's Onsen where you will spend the day for free and also get paid money for a C-Rank mission. The other teams have already been appraised of these facts."

That seemed to catch their interest. The secret, was that each of the teams was getting the reward in turn for all their help. Hari simply thought it would be fun for them to battle it out first and foremost.

At four on the dot - because the students got out of school half an hour earlier - the fundraiser began and the people came in droves thanks to Hari's compulsion for them to come. It also doubled to make them hungry and have them craving something sweet. It was the Genin who were in charge of
convincing people to buy more, but they had to do it subtly. Manipulation was a well known shinobi tactic and as most of the Genin teams were still young, they could use the experience.

Hari plastered a friendly smile on her face and batted her lashes, using her beauty - yes, she knew she had nice eyes and had done her best to outline them to make them pop - to sway the people to her way of thinking.

Four hours. Four long hours of raising funds and the hall closed, with a great big thanks to the people who participated.

The poor Genin looked run ragged and Hari beamed at them, pulling several bentos from her extra bags and handed them out. They pushed two large tables together and while the teams relaxed and ate, Hari, Kurenai and Anko counted up the money they'd managed to accumulate. Each basket from the different stalls was quickly worked through.

Stall 7 had sold the least at four hundred and seventy biscuits - that were each the size of a tortilla - for 20 Ryo each, and had raised 9,400 Ryo.

Stall 13, which has hers, had earned the most because she'd manipulated people with her magic. The cupcakes went for 50 Ryo a piece as they were creme filled. The fudge was 45 Ryo each. She sold three hundred and eighty cupcakes and seven hundred and thirty-nine pieces of fudge. That was 19,000 plus 33,255 coming out to 52,255 Ryo.

Team Gai made the most out of the gathered teams, coming in at 139,930 Ryo.

Team Ansu came in with 128,990 Ryo.

Team Ue had 106,750 Ryo.

Team Li had 69,810 Ryo.

In total they raised 497,735 Ryo. Reaching into her purse, Hari took out three thousand Ryo and tossed the notes into her stall's pile, making it 500,735 Ryo altogether!

"And there's still some left over if anybody wants one," Anko said, grabbing some fudge and moaning eroticly around it.

"Time to announce the winners of the Onsen freebie!"

Hari stopped by the house on her way to the Hokage's office, hoping to catch Naruto. He was nowhere to be found, but she did see a note left on the table for her.

Nee-chan,

_I failed my graduation test because I couldn't do a Bunshin and I thought I didn't have to but they made me do it and when it wasn't good enough they failed me! But Mizuki-sensei said that I can take another chance at becoming a Genin so I have to go find an important scroll and learn a jutsu from it by sunrise tomorrow and then I'll pass. Some kind of quick exam given during war times or something! I'm off to become a ninja, nee-chan, so don't wait up!_

Hari frowned. The Hokage had written two letters about Naruto's exam. She still had the one she got. Naruto shouldn't have failed at all.
It was a good thing she was going to the Hokage's office already, she could just ask him what the bloody hell was going on!

It was turmoil in the Academy building and Hari had to wonder who decided to keep the village leader's office three floors above the classrooms. Not the brightest idea and she wanted to give the creator a piece of her mind.

She was prodded and bumped into as the ninja seemed to be in a wide panic, running about as if someone had cut their heads off and they couldn't find them.

She found that the Hokage was not in his office and sighed in frustration.

"Hokage-sama is on the roof, Potta-hime," a woman who usually sat as secretary outside the office, called as she hurried past, leaving the brunet to wonder where the door to the roof was.

Death.

"Yes?"

Help me find the old man!

"What do we say first?"

She sent the being a sneer worthy of Snape. Please?

"Good girl," they simpered much to her chagrin. Still though, she followed their lead down the corridor and through a black door.

She ended up walking in on some sort of meeting apparently. The Hokage was standing in front of a group of shinobi who seemed to be going mad. The gathered men and women turned to her, all of them staring at her with wonder and confusion.

"Hokage-sama, I have the results of the fundraiser for you. And I wanted to talk about Naruto failing his graduation exam despite you saying he didn't need to do the Bunshin so long as he aced his other Ninjutsu requirements and passed all other areas of study."

There was a beat of silence, before the man turned to give her his full attention.

"He shouldn't have been graded on it, I sent a letter to the Academy Administration Desk. My secretary handed it to Mizuki-san and he read it and agreed to the terms."

Hari froze, because if it was the same guy, then someone was acting fishy.

"Mizuki-sensei?" she asked, staring down at Naruto's note to her.

"Yes."

"If he knew about it then he wouldn't be with Naruto right now."

She swore she would be able to hear a pin drop.

"You know where Naruto is?" the Hokage asked, looking shocked.

"He went training somewhere. He left me a note telling how and why he failed and that Mizuki-sensei was giving him a special exam usually given during war times. He has to find a special scroll
and learn a jutsu from it by sunrise tomorrow, else he'll stay in the Academy another year. He said
not to wait for him."

She stepped closer, mindful of all the eyes on her person as she handed the note over. The old man
read if and blinked twice, before disappearing.

Moving that fast at his age! She hadn't even seen him go. He was there one second and gone the
next. She hadn't even blinked either!

She cast a glance around as the shinobi began to panic again and when she looked to her right, she
flinched away because the old man was back and she hadn't even noticed him return! Soddin' ninja
and their fucking quick movements!

"Iruka-kun has found Naruto."

The collective shinobi all sighed.

"Mizuki has also found Naruto and he's broken the law."

Hari was left in confusion as every person in front of her, paled to a deathly shade of white and
proceeded to panic even harder.

What law?

There was a reason for everything the villagers did. Naruto always knew that much but he had never
known the extent. But he knew now. He understood… and it hurt.

He'd been used just so Mizuki could get his hands on whatever the scroll was. He should have seen
it. He should have wondered why he had to break into Jiji's house to get a scroll. Ah! He was such
an idiot!

The blond sniffed. They hated him because he was a monster.

What would Hari-nee-chan think? She was friends with Death and they were known for killing.
Maybe she'd be okay with him. Maybe she'd stay.

But everyone else… not a chance.

"You were foolish Iruka. Foolish to think that the demon brat could ever be anything. He's run away
and left you here to face me. What's that say about him? That I'm right to hate him! That's he is the
demon that murdered your parents!"

"Do you ever not get tired of hearing your own voice?"

Naruto blinked. Iruka-sensei was hurt but he was being rude to someone who planned to kill him?
Was he crazy?

"Yes, the fox did kill my parents, but Naruto and the Kyubi are completely different beings and as I
would know more about Fuuinjutsu than you do, I'd say I know what I'm talking about. Naruto is a
sweet kid and he is nothing like the Kyubi! How dare you attempt to ruin what little happiness he
has!"

Naruto's emotions whined in desperation. Iruka-sensei always invoked such strong feelings and
Naruto could fear hot tears sliding down his cheeks. Iruka-sensei didn't hate him. It was almost… too
good to be true.
"The demon brat is a nobody!" screamed Mizuki-teme.

"Uzumaki Naruto is an amazing person and an excellent student! He may not be naturally talented like Sasuke or as smart as Sakura, but he has empathy for the suffering. He has determination. He has what it takes to realize his dreams! He was never the fox and you'll be sorry for ever thinking such a thing about him!"

Naruto sniffed again. Of course Iruka-sensei would stand by him. His sensei had known about the Kyubi the entire time and he never once was unfair to Naruto, even when he was a little wary in the beginning. Iruka-sensei was better than Mizuki-teme so of course he wouldn't stoop to the jerk's level!

"You're incapacitated, Iruka, and I'm going to finish you off right now!"

The hell he is!

Naruto took hold of the scroll in his right arm and charged from his hiding spot, nailing Mizuki-teme right in the jaw with a forceful dropkick, knocking the Chunin away from his favorite instructor and plucking the fuma shuriken from midair. The blond landed with more grace than he had believed he possessed and glared at the fallen man, whose lips were bleeding from the impact of Naruto's shinobi sandal.

"You brat," the fallen ninja hissed, flipping to his feet and taking a fighting stance. Naruto didn't recognize it, but he already knew how he was going to defeat this moron who dared hurt his sensei, so it didn't matter.

"Naruto, take the scroll and give it to Hokage-sama now!"

The blond ignored Iruka-sensei's words, because his attention was firmly on Mizuki-teme. He'd only gotten the jutsu four times before he'd been found, but he knew that if he concentrated enough, he'd get it again.

"Brat, I can kill you with my eyes closed!"

"Bring it, jerk! I'll send it back to you times a thousand!"

With hands in position and Mizuki taking the chance to attack, Naruto poured as much chakra as he could into the jutsu. "Taju Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

Hari hadn't had to wait long while in the Hokage's office. The man hovered over a crystal ball as they spoke of the orphanage and how Hari was taking up the control of it.

The man leaned back, smiling. "Naruto-kun and Iruka-kun are coming and they've taken a prisoner who attempted to use Naruto to steal the Sacred Scroll from the village."

"I'm guessing it's important if it's sacred and if that's the case, how did he get to it? Wouldn't it have guards?"

The man flushed suddenly and looked away, "Naruto-kun has always been good at avoiding my Anbu. The only person in the village who can capture him when he's on the run, is Iruka-kun, though I think it's more because Naruto-kun allows himself to be caught. He knows Iruka-kun would never hurt him or make him do unnecessary punishments.

He disappears and they can't keep up. So he got past the guards of my home and then when I caught
him, he unleashed a… surprise on me and I fell prey to it."

"A twelve year old managed to surprise you and get away?" Hari asked dubiously, completely baffled that the leader of the village who was considered the Shinobi no Kami, was taken down by a twelve year old boy.

"I was unconscious!"

"A twelve year old managed to knock you unconscious and get away?" she amended, still astounded.

"Naruto has created an advanced form of his Henge and it was simply too much at once. I will not fall for it a second time, but I am ashamed to admit that I even fell for it once."

"It's not like he flashed a naked woman in front of your face or anything."

Silence.

...

...

...

"He did?!" she gasped, completely gobsmacked!

Where did he see a naked woman enough that he could Henge into one?! He hadn't seen her, she was sure of it!

"Naruto has a history of breaking into shops in the red district and rifling through their... adult sections."

He read porn magazines! He was twelve! Did twelve years olds get into that kind of thing so early on in life? She didn't remember being interested in that kind of thing until she was in the Triwizard Tournament and even then it was because of all the new meat - ugh, men, yeah men! - that showed up, demonstrating their skills for the ladies. And then Hari was noticing everybody!

Dean was suddenly the hottest boy Gryffindor had to offer, Cedric was the hottest Hufflepuff, and Blaise was the sexiest Slytherin. She didn't know enough Ravenclaws to really choose a favorite. And then there was Greengrass the elder, Luna, Angelina, and many more. Fourteen was a tough year of life for Hari Potter.

So to learn that her ward/little brother figure was actually further ahead in puberty than she had been was quite the shock that she hadn't expected. He'd never done or said anything that could lead to sex talk while she had been living with him.

"Naruto-kun has made me realize that I need to put my Anbu through some extra training. Naruto-kun's potential has shown this night. That scroll is filled with high level, forbidden jutsu. Kinjutsu that usually take astronomical amounts of chakra in order to pull off. In about two hours, he managed to teach himself a jutsu from that scroll. Kage Bunshin are solid, flesh and blood clones and only four of my Jonin can use it and certainly not to the extent he is able. It's dangerous if one doesn't have large enough chakra reserves."

"Is he okay using it?"
The man smiled, "Yes. Naruto-kun has more chakra than I. His heritage as an Uzumaki is part of the reason. Uzumaki are known for high chakra reserves and longevity, which brings me to a special point that I have chosen to impart upon you. It is an S-Rank secret but as Naruto has been told, he's needs all reassurances and I don't think you will hold it against him."

The man looked off toward the left hand wall, where photographs of the former Hokage rested.

"I trust you know of the Biju?"

"Yes. Masses of chakra with deadly abilities."

"You know more than I thought. Most civilians assume they are demons and leave it at that. But yes, in essence they are chakra and therefore cannot be destroyed. The Yondaime knew this and as a Fuuinjutsu expert - a ninja who was skilled in the art of sealing - he came up with an alternative way to deal with the Kyubi when it attacked.

To seal a Biju, one needs a child with a freshly cut umbilical cord. The chakra core and network haven't fully formed yet, making the host accepting to the foreign amount of chakra entering the system. And what better host, then one born from a long line of people who played host to the Kyubi before?"

Hari was staring at the photo of the Yondaime. She'd seen him in those memories that Death had forced upon her a couple weeks ago. She'd seen some of that night. Primarily both Minato and Kushina protecting Naruto from a large fox. She knew they were his parents, but she had to make it look like she was just putting the pieces together.

"Isn't it odd that the Kyubi would attack on the night an Uzumaki is born? Did it know or was there another reason? And furthermore," she paused dramatically, pointing at the photo of the Yondaime, "-how has no one seen the resemblance! It's kind of obvious now that I think about it. If Naruto ends up being that pretty I'll be beating off boys and girls with sticks!"

It was so quiet one could probably hear a pin dropping from a thousand feet away. She wondered if maybe she'd gone too far for a second, but when the man started to howl uproariously, she knew he was just in disbelief. She tended to do that to people.

"You are… exceptional, Potta-hime. Are you truly not bothered by the fact that Naruto is host to the Kyubi?"

She shrugged, "No. It also explains your villages' horrible attitude in regards to him. I'm not happy about that by the way and if another person attempts to throw something at me just because I'm walking beside him, I hold no compunction over picking them up and tossing them in a rubbish bin."

"People have attacked you?"

"Naruto handles it by throwing everything back at them. It's unprofessional and don't even get me started on how many people overprice the food he buys, or won't even let him enter their shops. I stopped bringing him along with shopping when I was being charged five times the amount for beef because of 'sudden inflation'."

Her unimpressed look drilled holes into the old man's head. She had promptly gotten all those people back in a very petty manner. Hari was not averse to admitting that she believed in karma and that one bad turn deserved another.

People who messed with her ended up losing valuable things. Charging someone nearly the equivalent to thirty quid, for a pound of ground beef, was ridiculous.
"We'll need to discuss that in more detail later. As for Naruto-kun, are you really okay with it? This secret is very important and I want to be certain that you will not seek to harm him in any way."

She was touched by his concern for Naruto. It was really sweet.

"My relatives treated me terribly for not being normal. I've been through what he has, though not to the extent he has. So long as being the host of a Bijū doesn't hurt him, I'm fine. Does he need training for this or do we just leave it?"

"He may eventually have to train to use the being's chakra but hopefully that won't be any time soon. As for training, to make up for years of not noticing his plight in the Academy, I am going to relinquish some sensitive information about his new jutsu.

As Naruto is bad at reading kanji, he most likely skipped all important facts about the Kage Bunshin. It is a memory technique. You make a clone and send it off to the shop to buy ramen. It returns and you dispel it. You will receive the memories of the trip to the shop and back, even if you weren't there personally. Naruto is behind on a lot of subjects and I think using the clones will help him improve. If he has ten clones working on his Taijutsu stances, he'll have ten times the amount of memory in regards to perfecting his technique. While he can't receive bodily advancement such as having ten clones lift weights - as in he wouldn't suddenly get stronger, it doesn't work that way - he would retain muscle memory and it would help him learn faster."

"Wait! Could a clone read a book for him and then when it goes poof, he'll remember what the book was about?"

The man smiled and nodded.

Hari giggled, "Ino will love this! She'll get to hit ten times the amount of Naruto's now! She hits him with a straight edge when he messes up on his kata things."

"So you don't think I'm a monster?"

"No, squirt. I mean, I'm friends with Death and can use magic and you aren't scared of me, are you?"

Naruto shook his head, unable to actually get the words out. It had been an overwhelming day and he just wanted to cuddle up with his nee-chan and sleep for ten hours.

"The Hokage gave me some info about your new jutsu that will help your training too, so we're going to be working really hard from now on, alright?"

"Okay," he nodded, shifting closer into her arms and sighing. "How was the fundraiser?"

"We raised the money needed for the orphanage and now I'm deciding on whether to fix the old building or get a newer, bigger building."

Something stuck Naruto and he gasped, shooting up on the bed. "You can use my home, nee-chan!"

Hari-nee-chan winced and looked around, "It's sweet of you to offer, squirt, but forty plus children aren't going to fit in here when you and I barely fit."

The blond couldn't help but giggle. "No, nee-chan! I own the building! Hokage-Jiji gave it to me when I moved in! There are over one hundred efficiency rooms beneath us!"

"Are you... sure you want to give up your home?"
"Living here alone is boring nee-chan! And you wouldn't have to move away if the orphanage was here!"

It all worked out in the end!

Hari-ne-chan pulled him into another hug that he willingly accepted.

"Thanks, squirt."

"Why are you in a tree?"

Hari had gone out to the Ninja Mission Assignment Desk because she had to get a Genin team to help the men she had hired to fix up Naruto's building. The men were not from Konoha, so she didn't have to put up with insults about Naruto. They were a highly recommended father-son-son-son-cousin group who were really good at what they did. They would be remodeling the inside of the building quickly, removing each personal bathroom in order to create a large bath on the first floor. All toilets and sinks would go there, along with individual tubs and one large bath for those who preferred to share.

Bathing hours would be 7-9 o'clock and girls had the first hour.

She had been on her way back to the flat when she noticed a familiar face. Or mask... as it were. The man who had the same book she did, was sitting in a tree. Just laying across the branches as if there weren't leaves, twigs, and bumps in the way to muck up his comfort.

He looked up and blinked.

"Down here," she said, certain that it wasn't actually necessary.

"Why shouldn't I be in a tree?" he rejoined, looking back to his book.

"Well, when I read porn, I don't sit in hard trees. They don't do much in terms of setting the mood."

She received a wide, coal eye in response.

"Why are you so shocked? Women read porn all the time. I'm sure you know Anko."

Judging by the shiver that visibly shook his shoulders, he did.

Her eyes trailed over his long limbs sprawled out, giving off an air of laziness. His chakra felt like it was doing jumping jacks though. He was anything but calm and lazy at the moment. Maybe it was an act to seem less interesting?

"Have you finished your book yet?"

She blinked, coming face to mask with the man. She hadn't seen him move and his sudden entrance into her personal space shocked her for a moment, stomach and heart leaping to her throat, trying to fight over who got the chance to choke her first.

"Two chapters left," mumbled the witch.

The lone eye blinked slowly and the silver head nodded once. "Impressive. What do you think of it?"
"The porn is great! The plot not so much. Anko said good porn, nothing about a shabby plot."

"Anko suggested it?!" the man flushed, all visible skin becoming pink.

Hari grinned deviously, "Oh, yeah! She even described how she used the one move from chapter 15 in her-"

The brunette never got a chance to continue, for the man was gone in a flash of silver, the words, 'no thank you!' ringing in the air.

She giggled. Shinobi were so weird!

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A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know.

Check out my other fics.

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

-Gai's team made $11,800.98 = £8,077.05.
-Team Ansu made $10,896.98 = £7,458.32.
-Team Ue made $9005.52 = £6,160.31.
-Team Li made $5,220.58 = £3,573.17.

Altogether... 500,735 Ryo = $42,325.78 = £28,969.43.

All numbers are up to date as of April 26th, 2016. Remember that conversion rates change all the time.
There was a week intermission between graduation and Genin Placement which left Naruto with a lot of time to catch up. He'd been doing really well on his own in the past two months and now he was finally going to advance faster.

Hokage-Jiji had told his nee-chan about the Kage Bunshin no Jutsu and she told him. Naruto could not learn without having to read! Or… personally he didn't have to do it. It was up to his Kage Bunshin to do all the reading for him and when they poofed away, he'd get their memories! It was so awesome, that he started right away.

Nee-chan had gone to the library - having finally gotten a card now that she had an ID - and took out five books. Naruto had to use ten Kage Bunshin, stationing two each to a book so that if twice the amount read a book, he'd have twice the chance at remembering what he read. While learning from his Nee-chan about village history was cool and all, this was a better way.

They did the reading, and he could continue training!

When Naruto told Ino about his new jutsu and all the awesome things he could do with it, she merely blinked twice and told him to make as many as he could. He had to concentrate then, because he had to evenly split his chakra among the clones and that meant some quick counting.
He managed five hundred even, the clearing filling with loud pops and puffs of white smoke that blew away in the wind.

Ino had looked around, a low whistle escaping her.

"You get their memories from this, meaning I can teach groups a move or a stance and they'll practice for hours and hours. Then when you dispel them all, you'll remember everything better and will do better next time! Alright Narutos, split off into five groups of one hundred!"

The blond waited patiently as Ino instructed each group in a different attack, before coming to him and forcing him into his katas.

The training started off pretty good, with Ino walking through lines of Narutos, ruler firmly in hand as she swatted someone every two seconds that passed.

"Straighten out your posture!"

"We are not supposed to resemble frogs, Naruto!"

"What part of 'handstand' do you not understand?"

"Tighten your abdominal muscles while you're at it!"

On and on it went. Naruto was still trying to do his thing when a loud yell of his name right in his ear, made him jump, forget about what he was doing, and fall into the river.

"AAAAH!"

From beneath the chilly water, he could hear a whole crowd of laughter and he glared at the riverbed.

It wasn't that funny.

Uchiha Sasuke glared at the box overhead. He was one of the taller students in his class but he was still short. Being twelve years old was a nuisance! He had to reach that box of wraps but he wasn't the kind to ask for help.

A hand reached past him and he jerked back in shock, having not heard anyone come up behind him. Turning, so he could watch them out of the corner of his eye, he was met with startling green. They made Haruno's eyes look bland in comparison.

They belonged to a young woman with extremely pale skin and blacker than black hair, with no highlights. She wasn't that much taller than he was, but she was able to reach the wraps just fine and grabbed a box.

The box she chose, bumped into another beside it. She uttered a low curse, but didn't even bother to pick it up. She simply flashed Sasuke a smile and continued down the aisle, grabbing a few things to put in her basket as she went.

Sasuke stared at the box of wraps that he had needed, and his mind put it all together then. She'd deliberately knocked over the box he needed so he wouldn't have to ask for help!

His head jerked back, looking for the woman but he found she'd gone.

Her intuition had to be excellent if she managed to understand him without even speaking to him at
all. Without even seeing his face.

Casting a look in every direction to make sure he wasn't being watched, Sasuke slipped the box into his own basket and trotted off to the front of the store before anyone could call him out on it.

The woman was in front of him in the line and he shifted the basket behind himself a bit so she couldn't see what was in it. Sasuke was not in the habit of being embarrassed but he really didn't want to admit that his height made it difficult to get shopping done.

Sometimes he went without certain items just so he didn't have to ask for help. He wouldn't have asked for help. Sasuke wasn't going to either.

"Thank you for your patronage, Potta-hime," the old clerk smiled at the young woman.

Hime. A princess was out shopping for herself? Without guards? Or attendants?

"I'll be back soon, not to worry, Momiji-san."

Potta-hime smiled and took her bags, slipping from the shop without a backwards glance.

"Good afternoon Sasuke-sama."

The Uchiha blinked and placed his basket on the counter.

She was a strange woman.

Hatake Kakashi didn't really know what to think. He'd somehow come into contact with the same civilian three times. Well… about to be three times from what he could see about it.

Rarely did shinobi mingle with civilians because they just lived in such wide circles so far apart from each other. There was no way a civilian could understand the jobs shinobi were put through. As such, frequent consorting with civilians wasn't the norm in his line of work.

But this civilian… she was different.

He'd taken note of how quiet she was when she walked. She never dragged her feet. A lot of civilians did that, but not her. She walked right on the balls of her feet, making her silent. A mere whisper in the wind.

There was a quiet strength about her. Her hair wasn't done up. In fact, it looked like she never bothered to brush it. It smelled clean. He'd know, they'd been in close proximity two times already. He'd scented light Sakura in her hair and some on her neck, but there was nothing else. No perfume, no hairspray, no acetone or nail varnish.

She had worn a black dress the first time they'd bumped into each other, and a violet, billowing, one piece with a built in black wrap around her midriff, the second time they met.

This time, she was attired much more elegantly, in a silken, high collared cheongsam of dark green, that made her eyes stand out all the more. It was ankle length, with two slits on either side, reaching to mid-thigh. On her feet were a pair of black, kunoichi heels that matched the embellishments and trimming on her dress.

She was dressed like this… while in a less than savory shop. One in which erotic literature was acquired. She didn't seem to have any sort of compunction about it either as she pulled books from the shelves and read their summaries, before wrinkling her nose in distaste and placing them back.
Still, she was right beside the bookcase for the new Icha Icha novel and he knew that their confrontation was inescapable, so he girded his loins and went on over.

"You know, watching people from a distance can equate to stalking," her voice came, soft and soothing over the rapidly closing distance between them.

"How long did you know I was there?"

"Since you walked into the aisle. I have good peripheral vision."

She plopped a second book into the crook of her left arm, the first being the bright yellow of Jiraiy-sama's newest Icha Icha book, *Icha Icha Arashi*. He still couldn't believe that she willingly read the book. Kurenai had frowned heavily upon it. None of the other women he knew from either Anbu or elsewhere had liked it. He hadn't even *known* Anko liked it and apparently emulated some scenes from the books as well.

*Women read porn.*

It was a bit difficult to believe considering every other reaction he'd ever gotten, but there she was, buying it.

"So how did you find the book?"

"Overall, three out of five stars," she sighed. "The writer is one of those men who really enjoys his women. But he likes only a particular kind of woman. The women in this are all very unrealistic. Not every woman has quadruple E breasts with such tiny waists. Twenty-two inches isn't enough to properly hold a bust that large and could cause health problems."

"Oh?"

"All it is is fat. Every inch is more weight pulling on the torso. These women are civilians and do not exercise ever. They do not have strong enough muscles in their backs and abdominals to properly hold a bust so large. And even with women who *do* have the musculature required, they will still experience pain. It's not all romantic like the book describes it, trust me. Women with natural breasts that large don't let them bounce everywhere. They hold them down while running or walking down or up a flight of stairs, because it hurts them. Why do you think some women bind their breasts so tightly? It's so they don't move."

Kakashi just learned more about Tsunade-sama than he ever wished to. It was common knowledge that the Icha Icha females were modeled after the female Sannin and now that he knew all this, it was just too much at once.

He shouldn't have asked.

"What would *you* write if you could?" he asked instead, hoping to trail into a different discussion.

"I like adventure most. Excitement. Romance is great and all but I hate it when it's all a book focuses on. There's just enough action from the ninja in this to make it good, besides the porn after all."

He grabbed the blindingly yellow book and looked it over. The woman on the cover was a blonde as expected. She was dressed in a blue kimono with mesh armor underneath it. Under her was a ninja she was standing on, high heeled feet digging into his back. Her endowments practically popped from the confines of her clothing and her waist was indeed on the small side.

"I admire people who can walk in heels," said the woman at his left.
He looked down at her feet, which were covered in kunoichi sandals complete with a thick, one inch heel.

"These don't count! They're a little something extra to boost kunoichi up and give their legs some more strength. The heels are chunky in order to keep them stable. I mean those five inch death traps that make you look like you'll break your neck the moment you take a step."

She shivered and shook her head. "No, not for me."

Kakashi watched as she added another book to her collection and waved, heading for the register.

Like all other encounters, this one was pretty interesting as well.

His ear twitched at the ding of the register and the pleasantries passed between the clerk and the young woman. No names were exchanged though.

Pity.

Naruto had woken up three hours early today in order to prepare for his ninja registration ID. Nee-chan said that it wouldn't help him but he had to try, didn't he? He hadn't been able to pull a prank in a while and this was going to be the best of the best!

The sun was just coming up and that gave him time. The light was really bright and he could use the glare from it to hide while he covered the Hokage Monument in his art.

He'd slipped one of his nee-chan's books the other night and found a bunch of posters included on the back. So after sending his Kage Bunshin out under Henge to get the paint necessary, they tackled the monument at six that morning, leaving a nice gift behind. And the best thing was, no one but his nee-chan knew that he was going to do it!

He was able to get home by seven and wash up.

Hari-nee-chan was setting breakfast on the table and she shook her head. "They'll know you did it."

"Yeah, but knowing I did it and having proof that I did it are completely different, nee-chan!"

He plopped down in the comfy chair and took a long drink of his juice and started on his eggs.

"That is true."

After breakfast, Naruto kissed his nee-chan's cheek and ran for the Hokage Tower, because he had to get his ID done and he wanted to get the ball rolling. He was a ninja now!

The old man doing the IDs was really grumpy and he sounded the bored as he said, "Next."

"This looks very good, Naruto-kun. I admit I thought you were going to do something with war paint," Hokage-Jiji said, smiling down at his ID papers.

"I was going to do it but nee-chan said that it wouldn't get me clients or something," he grinned sheepishly. Was he really that predictable? He'd have to work on switching up. He couldn't have people thinking that they knew what he'd do all the time!

The old man suddenly looked toward the door and Naruto did as well, seeing it slide open and a
small head poke its way though the crack.

"On your guard, old man!" the little head yelled, slamming the screen open further and leaping into the room. Naruto would have jumped in defense if the kid hadn't tripped over his own scarf and face planted right in the doorway.

A moment of silence passed, before the kid looked up and around, eyes landing on the blond and pointing accusingly. "It was you! You tripped me!"

"You tripped over your own scarf, you klutz!" Naruto yelled, getting annoyed with the brat.

"No! You're just trying to fix it so I can't beat the old man!"

Though nee-chan always said that violence wasn't always the answer, Naruto couldn't help himself. He was annoyed and he wasn't going to let the little punk blame him for his problems! He already got blamed enough for other people's problems and he wasn't going to let this little brat get away with it!

He grabbed the brat by the collar and lifted him right off the ground so his tiny feet dangled.

"Go ahead. I dare ya!"

"AHHH! Uzumaki, unhand the Honorable Grandson!"

The girly squeal of fear came from the doorway where a man dressed in the standard shinobi gear, stood, though no vest was to be seen. His black glasses glinted from the light, but Naruto could tell just by the sneer on his lips that just made him more ugly, that this man knew about his problem and unlike Iruka-sensei who was smart and understood Fuinjutsu, he still believed Naruto was the fox.

"'Honorable Grandson?'"

"Yeah!" the twerp in his hand yelled. "Not so tough, are ya? Scared to hit me because the Sandaime Hokage is my Jiji!" he taunted.

Naruto - never one to let a challenge go - grinned evilly. "I wouldn't care if he was your baa-chan! -ttebayo!" he cheered, fist connecting with the crown of the kid's head, dropping him to the floor.

"Anyway, see you Jiji!" the blond waved, ignoring the protestations of the ninja who didn't like that he had 'hurt the Honorable Grandson'. Seriously, the kid had a name. He should be using it.

'Honorable Grandson' was a mouthful.

It was about a minute later that he became aware of someone following him. A small someone in fact.

With a sigh, Naruto turned and tore the poorly placed disguise from the fence, revealing the same kid from only a moment ago.

"You found me, boss!"

Boss?

"Why are you stalking me, brat?"

A finger nearly poked his eyes out as the kid loudly proclaimed, "You're my new boss! Ebisu-sensei sucks at everything and is boring but if I follow you, I'll become a ninja! You have presence and you don't care that I'm related to the Hokage!"
Naruto couldn't help the blank look because he was really confused and he really didn't like thinking if he didn't have to.

"Why would I care if the old man is your Jiji?"

The boy practically deflated. "He named me Konohamaru, for the village, but everywhere I go, no one knows my name. It's always, 'great, Honorable Grandson' and 'Hokage-sama's grandson!' and the worst of all, 'Hokage-sama's grandson has a lot to live up to!' and I hate it! Not even Ebisu knows my name and he's supposed to be super smart!"

Ah… Naruto had been right. Four eyes should have been using the kid's name.

"What is your name?"

"Sarutobi Konohamaru!"

Step one complete. Though that name was actually more of a mouthful than the alternative.

"And why do you want to be my underling, Konohamaru?"

There was a moment where all the kid did was blink, before throwing himself at Naruto, wrapping his skinny arms around the blond. "Best boss ever!"

It was official. Naruto needed nee-chan because he had no idea how to handle this!

"Come with me. We're going to see my nee-chan. She has cookies."

"Cool!"

Hari-nee-chan took to Konohamaru quickly. She sat him at the table and got some cups of milk out. The cookie tin was placed in the center of the table, and she started talking to him, asking him questions.

"I love ramen!"

Naruto was liking him better already!

"The old man sometimes takes me for some. It's nice. These are good!"

"What do you want to do when you grow up?" Hari-nee-chan asked.

"I wanna be Hokage so then people will know my name finally. They'll look at me and see Konohamaru, not the Honorable Grandson."

Hari-nee-chan cut a look to Naruto, who was looking right back. It brought up a memory of Nee-chan telling him that he couldn't make people respect him. That sometimes when people get a high position like Hokage, it didn't mean people would like him. He had to get people to like him in order to become Hokage.

Konohamaru didn't understand that yet.

Naruto huffed, "No one is going to respect a dinky little runt who still falls over his own scarf."

"HEY-"
"You gotta get strong! -ttebayo!"

Konohamaru blinked when Naruto cut him off.

"I'm gonna be the Hokage one day and I'm prepared to go through whatever it takes to get there. We're not going to make our dreams come true in a day, gaki. It's gonna take a lot of work and a lot of effort!"

Naruto stood suddenly, feeling all these emotions demanding his attention. He felt inspirational and he sorely hoped that he sounded as much.

"There are no shortcuts to becoming the best of the best, Konohamaru! You gotta work for it! Tell me, are you ready to work for it?!"

Naruto never had someone look at him the way Konohamaru was. It made him think of how he looked at Iruka-sensei or nee-chan. Like they were the most amazing people in the world and no one was better.

The kid jumped to his feet as well, fist pumped toward the ceiling. "Yes, boss!"

"Then let's go start training! -ttebayo!"

"Yeah!"

"Thanks, nee-chan!"

"Alright! I'm really good at doing the Henge, and I like to mix it up a bit. I've started using one of my new jutsu and have created an even better one when I mix it with Henge. Observe!"

Naruto's hands came together, "Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

When the smoke cleared, he was standing in a line of Narutos, who had already taken the initiative and begun their Henge.

"Harem!"

Naruto always loved doing the Henge because it gave him so much freedom. He was also able turn himself into other things. When the Anbu chased him because he pulled a prank, he'd ditch them by turning into cans, or books, or even a log that one time.

He was going to pass on his newly created technique to Konohamaru.

"Woah!"

"That's right! This is how we see who the closet pervs are! It worked on Hokage-Jiji by the way."

"Teach me, boss!"

It was good to be the boss.

Naruto had never been so proud in his whole life! Konohamaru and he had been working on the Sexy Jutsu for almost three hours. Naruto had constantly demonstrated the technique and together they ironed our Konohamaru's control.
The chakra was to wrap around the body in different areas and it couldn't be the same amount each time. Depending on what you wanted, your chakra had to change.

Naruto wasn't super good at the Academy taught Henge. Those were fake. Henges were illusions basically, but Naruto's version actually turned him into things. He once Henge'd into a rolling pin and was nauseated when someone picked him up and used him to roll out dough. He had felt all of it and the flour and dough tasted gross.

Konohamaru had gotten it too. He'd actually gotten the Henge!

His girl wasn't completely perfect but after working only three hours, he'd done fantastic! And Konohamaru was only starting his third year at the Academy, so it was a big deal.

"Honorable Grandson, get away from that riff raff at once!"

Ugh. How four eyes even got the privilege of teaching a kid like Konohamaru, Naruto would never know. The guy was as washed out as a used cloth and just as boring.

Making another hand sign, Naruto created more Kage Bunshin while telling the man to, "Get lost!"

"Hmph! I'm not like Mizuki. I won't fall prey to you, I'm a Tokubetsu Jonin after all," boasted the man.

"All I heard out of that was the fact that you're not good enough to be a Jonin," rejoined Naruto, twisting a finger in his ear to clean it out.

Ebisu sputtered in response, obviously not used to being ignored. Well Naruto could certainly oblige him more if need be.

Konohamaru, whom had been sitting quietly until then, burst! He pointed his little finger and yelled for all he was worth about how Ebisu was boring, how he never taught anything new, how he was not as good as Naruto - which was the absolute truth really - and how Konohamaru didn't want anything to do with him anymore.

"Honorable grand-

"SEXY JUTSU!"

Konohamaru was enveloped in a cloud of white smoke that mostly dissipated, leaving only the essential bits covered.

He'd done it perfectly! The curves, the body, the definition in the proper measurements. If the closet pervert wasn't so tightly in control of himself, he'd have fainted from the assault.

As it was… Naruto knew something that would break him.

"How dare you commit such vulgar acts! You are far above these sort of things!"

"Harem Jutsu!"

It seemed that burying a pervert in a mountain of mostly naked women with generous endowments was the best way to defeat them.

He was right!
Hari was the new matron of the orphanage and until the building was finished, the children had to remain in their old building under Genin guard. The new building was being fixed up to inhabit a large amount of people. Nothing too resplendent, but comfortable and delightful were a must.

She had to interview assistants for the children. Gender didn't really matter as it was about ability to watch the children, not what people assumed came with being female.

As a witch, Hari could ensure that every single person she hired would do their job well and wouldn't think to ever hurt the children in any way. Hari would use compulsion, would use the Imperius Curse, she'd brew a bloody potion, so long as the kids were safe!

There was nothing that would hold her back from keeping the orphanage a safe place.

As such, there were extra protections that had to be put in order. In times of war, the orphanage was used as a shelter and a medical station. The Fuinjutsu Team was going to be putting seals on the building and when they were gone, Hari would be adding some Runes she had learned, to the pot.

The children would have to learn basic first aid. In a ninja village, these types of things were expected. In Hogwarts, no one would think to make an eleven year old learn how to clear someone's airway so they could breath. This however, was an entirely new world in a new dimension that had different expectations of their children. As such, it wasn't strange to put eight year olds through First Aid courses.

There was so much work to do which was why she needed helpers. Mrs. Cole had one or two from what she could recall. For forty children of varying ages, she may need three or four at the very least.

She was just so beleaguered at the moment and snarky bitches who couldn't keep their opinions of Naruto to themselves were really working to drive her spare. Hari however, was going to maintain her pleasant facade and if some of them left with stinging backsides, she was unsurprisingly insouciant about it.

She found their attitudes regarding a sweet, little boy, to be repugnant, and she dealt them a nice bit of karma in return for such shoddy treatment.

Karma was such a lovely thing.

She poured herself another cup of tea. She'd managed to acquire a young woman who wasn't originally from Konoha, and a young man who was a nurse's aid at the hospital. She'd checked their intentions with light truth serums in their tea and found both to be acceptable. She only needed one more person.

One more who wasn't a douche.

Her eyes flickered over to the ensorcelled map, noting that Naruto was in the company of Ino presently. It was a good thing she'd disillusioned it so no one but she could see it. It would raise some unwanted questions and she didn't feel like being interrogated any time soon.

She dropped her head to the desk, allowing herself to groan in displeasure.

This was taking forever! People were annoying.

Sarutobi Hiruzen always hated the forming of the Genin teams. It was one of those elements that were required in being Hokage, and he really didn't like it. It was almost as bad as paperwork.
This year there were eight clan children in the graduating class. Yes, he considered Naruto part of a clan. He had several ninja who were the sole survivors of their clans and Naruto counted.

These children varied in their scores from the best - where the Uchiha stood - to the very last in which last was occupied by both Naruto and the Nara heir. It was a bit difficult this year because Naruto's final grades in his last two months at the Academy had risen and his graduation exam was in the eighty-seventh percentile.

Nara Shikamaru wasn't unintelligent or anything, just unmotivated.

Also, Hiruzen wanted to change it up a bit this year, but he knew that some people wouldn't appreciate what he was thinking of doing.

He'd heard from several people that Yamanaka Ino had become a friend of Naruto's and she trained he and Potta-hime. Ino wasn't Top Kunoichi - which had confused him seeing as she had only been beaten by Haruno Sakura in the written exam by five points but had beaten the other girl in everything else - and therefore wouldn't be placed with Uchiha Sasuke, usually.

But Hiruzen didn't just sit back and allow life to go on around him. He paid attention.

Naruto really liked Haruno Sakura, who did not like him in the least. Haruno adored the ground Uchiha Sasuke walked on. She was a fan-girl and didn't have much hope at the moment, besides joining the archivers.

Ino was a good influence on Naruto. She'd gotten him to fix his mistakes and while it was taking time to wean him out of years of improper work, they were getting there. Ino wasn't as focused on Sasuke as Sakura was. Naruto also seemed to be treating Sasuke better and in return, the boy was less confrontational or rude.

The Ino-Shika-Cho trio were part of a clan alliance that had been around for the last century. The clans were like family to each other and Yamanaka Ino, Nara Shikamaru, and Akimichi Choji had been friends for years already. They'd still be trained in the combinations of the trio whether they were on a team together or not, which lead the Hokage into other thoughts.

He wanted to shake things up.

Hyuga Hinata was a shy girl and she needed to be influenced by a strong woman, which was why Hiruzen felt that Yuhi Kurenai was the best choice to teach her. Hinata needed guidance in order to lead her from the shadow her family placed on her.

Aburame Shino needed to be on a team with someone who would look out for him and not mind his clan's special jutsu. A fellow analytical mind. Shikamaru would be good with him and the two would do well under Asuma's tutelage.

Sasuke would no doubt get a Sharingan and would need Kakashi's expertise in that area. Sasuke worked best alongside Naruto, who needed Ino's influence. Basically, he'd just created the new Team Seven.

That still left others.

Akimichi Choji was a kind soul and he was of a clan who were often ridiculed for their weight. Hinata wouldn't ever think to hurt him with such vitriol and he would do well to be around someone so nice. Haruno… she needed a wake up call and Kurenai had a particularly sharp mind and was an even sharper ninja. Like a blade.
She'd train the foolish idea of dieting right out of Sakura's head. Potta-hime had already begun her movement to get Ino to accept more food, even if it was catering to her diet. Sakura could use the same thing. That meant that Sakura would be the final person on the team.

Lastly, there was Inuzuka Kiba, a rambunctious boy who liked to exercise with his ninken Akamaru. He'd keep Shikamaru and Shino on their feet. Perhaps his energy would motivate Shikamaru and Hiruzen was certain that the intellect of the other two would grow to affect the boy just the same.

One more point was the amount of shinobi they passed each year. The supply of the village was down a bit because last year only two teams managed to stay Genin. He'd been playing with the idea for a while but perhaps this year and onward they could allow four teams to continue on? That would mean 40% would pass this time around.

The results would determine if it continued.

"Well, look at who's here!"

Hari couldn't help but playfully bump the ninja, because it just seemed like they were meeting anywhere and everywhere these days. His eye rolled in her direction and she could hear a small sigh.

"Four times and we still don't know each other's names," he remarked, sounding bored, but she wasn't fooled. He was trying to fish for information and she was feeling playful.

"Name exchanging is boring! I've likened you to a dog and that is how I see you. Call me whatever you like."

She'd come to Training Ground Three to follow Ino's mad schedule, only to find the cyclopean ninja sitting in front of the Memorial Stone.

He hummed lightly. "Neko."

... "Why?"

Her Animagus form was a feline but he couldn't possibly know that so why did he call her 'neko'? "You walk like a cat. So silent even trained ninja would have a troublesome time in making a distinction between you and the wind. If you weren't breathing and I couldn't smell your shampoo, I'd have thought you were some leaves in the wind."

Cool.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, looking at her bag with interest.

Well she had originally come to practice but she didn't feel too comfortable with him watching.

"I was going to do some Genin imposed training."

"Genin imposed?" he asked while standing and dusting himself off.

"Yeah, I'm being forced to learn Taijutsu so I can protect myself if any civilians try something. My brother and his friend demanded I learn."

She loved them but they expected a lot out of her. Fifteen laps!
"Don't let me get in your way."

"Well, don't laugh at me, and we'll be good!"

When the man seated himself on one of the logs instead of leaving, Hari resigned herself to having to work out with an audience.

It wouldn't be so bad. It couldn't be.

"I don't think you can run another lap."

That dick had somehow gotten her to run five more laps than she should have, all because she felt her strength being questioned. There were just those moments where she needed to prove somebody wrong, you know?

Naturally - at least in her home world - people assumed that she was weak or incapable simply because of her gender. Hari had grown up feeling that she had to put herself out there to get noticed for the things she did. Voldemort the first time didn't count. She wanted acknowledgement for her own deeds, not her mum's.

So when this tall bastard challenged her, she did not back down despite the fact that her lungs were rebelling. She did five more than normal and decided to cross squat thrusts from her list because her legs felt like jello. Like she would fall over at any moment.

She glared at the silver haired ninja.

"You!" she glared, breathing haggard. "Evil!"

It's often hard to speak when one can't breathe.

"Hm? Did you say something?"

That twat!

The witch clutched the log for support to keep herself from falling to the ground in a useless heap. She'd get him back. Somehow he would pay for this.

"You will suffer!" she promised.

"Sure."

He was infuriating!

"But you allowed him to goad you into doing more work so obviously you don't find him that annoying."

She resolutely ignored Death, because they weren't helping with their snark at the moment.

"How rude!"

Umino Iruka paused in his trek to the classroom, because there was a woman, not dressed in shinobi clothing, coming toward him. In her hand was a large, two tiered bento. In her other hand were two smaller bentos.
"Are you Iruka-sensei?" she asked, voice just slightly hoarse. As if she'd been doing a lot of yelling.

"Uh… yes. I'm Umino Iruka, how can I help you?"

"Naruto forgot his lunch this morning," she answered, shaking the two smaller bentos. "He also brings Sasuke-san some lunch too, but he was rambunctious and eager for Genin placement, so he rushed off without either."

Iruka blinked for a moment, processing those words. 'Naruto forgot his lunch this morning'. As in, she and Naruto lived close enough that she made him lunch every morning. Who was she?

"Oh! I'm sorry, I'm Potta Hari, I watch over Naruto," she smiled.

It was calming, he realized. Though her features were obviously foreign because she did not resemble anyone he'd ever seen, she didn't seem to be that bad.

"And you…"

"Hokage-sama knows."

Oh.

"How can I help you, Potta-san?"

"I was wondering if you could give these to the boys for me? Naruto's is orange, Sasuke-san's is red. Sasuke-san's has different food in it, and I don't want them mixed."

"Um… certainly."

"Also, since I felt the kids would need a little something to tie them over and perhaps something to prep them for later, I have some sweets," she held up the large bento. "The bottom tier has normal sweets. The top tier is all sugar free. I know Ino-chan is on a diet, and I'm sure some others are as well."

Iruka wasn't prepared for this.

"Naruto will know to bring the bentos home, so you don't have to worry about that."

She smiled again, "Thank you."

She handed over the dual tiered storage bento and bowed from the waist, before turning and walking off confidently.

Iruka simply stared until she was gone.

"Naruto, you failed. Why are you here?"

The blond looked up, meeting Shikamaru's confused gaze. He proudly pointed to his forehead where Iruka-sensei's hitai-ate rested. "See this? This is regulation! I passed!"

"Mendokusei."

Shikamaru slouched off, probably to go sleep until Iruka-sensei came. Shikamaru was so lazy Naruto wondered how he got up the energy to even wake up in the morning.
The teme was quiet like fan-girls were fawning over him. He was ignoring them like usual. Everything was as it should be.

"LAY OFF, BILLBOARD BROW!"

"SHOVE IT, INO YOU PORKER!"

He winced, because when Ino and Sakura-chan got into their competitions, it was dangerous to be around either until one of them lost. And then - he shivered at the memory - then the loser was the one everyone avoided.

The two girls were so loud he could hear them, their raging footsteps sounding more like a stampede than anything else. Running wasn't allowed in the Academy, he'd know, he broke that rule hundreds of times! Because both were kind of goody two shoes, they wouldn't break the rules when someone could see them. In fact, Naruto was certain Sakura-chan couldn't break a rule if she tried.

Seriously, rules were created to be broken!

The attention of the class was caught on the door where two kunoichi with big tempers were literally stuck because the doorway wasn't built for two people.

"You need to lose some weight, Ino-pig!"

"Me? It's obviously that huge forehead of yours that's taking up all the space!"

Technically, both were equally taking up the space, but he wasn't sure his input would be appreciated during their squabble, so Naruto kept silent.

Naruto chanced a glance at Sasuke, seeing him sitting like normal, hands folded under his chin. While he played the game of ignoring them pretty well, Naruto could see the tension.

He snorted.

"Shut it, dobe."

*It speaks!*

Naruto snorted again, unable to help himself!

This day was supposed to be better than all those other days. He'd finally become a ninja, and he was one step closer to becoming stronger. Strong enough to defeat him. But as it was, he was stuck in the Academy, waiting for his sensei to come and end his suffering.

That one time Iruka-sensei had to be late, huh?

And the dobe was laughing!

Sasuke wasn't an idiot, he knew that dobe was laughing at him!

He twitched to the side to level his penetrating glare at the blond who didn't so much as flinch. Instead, he smirked and leaned in, a challenge sparked in his eyes.

Sasuke was very good at staring contests. He wasn't about to lose this to the dobe of all people!

Amidst the yelling of the fan-girls and the chattering of the other students, Sasuke and Naruto stared
at each other. Neither moved a muscle. Neither breathed. This was important. He couldn't exactly tell why, but it was and that was all that mattered.

"Naruto, get away from Sasuke-kun!"

Not even that harsh voice could break them apart. In fact, it was because of the owner of said voice that pushed them even closer. Much too close actually.

The annoyance known as Haruno Sakura had just hit the dobe. Said dobe, being only two inches from Sasuke, ended up falling forward. On who, you may ask? On Sasuke.

He'd never really imagine his first kiss, but he was sure a boy wasn't the expectation. Nor did he think it would occur because of a fan-girl.

The irony was not lost on him.

Still…

He and the dobe wrenches themselves away from each other. The dobe was dramatically coughing and whining about how he'd been poisoned and how he wasn't long for this earth - seriously, where did he come up with that? - and Sasuke simply wiped his mouth clean and re-assumed his brooding position that he didn't actually brood in. He just sat like that, but it was not to brood!

The dobe dramatically collapsed on the desk, one hand outstretched, twitching ever so slightly, mouth open obscenely.

"NARUTO!"

The blond ducked into the seat and Haruno went flying over his head and their desk, crashing into the floor on the other side of Sasuke's seat. Normally the dobe would have let her hit him. Impressive.

"Alright everyone, time to settle down!" called Iruka-sensei as he walked into the room. In his hands were three bento boxes.

"Naruto, come and fetch these two please, Potta-san said you forgot them!"

Naruto sat up suddenly, face brightening as he leapt over the desk and ran to take the two small bentos with a loud, "Thanks!"

When he returned, he handed the one usually made for Sasuke over, and plopped back into his seat.

Iruka-sensei then placed the large bento on his own desk. "Potta-san made some snacks for the class as a congratulations for graduating. The bottom tier is normal, and the top tier is sugar free."

Yamanaka Ino gave a loud cheer, abandoning her argument with the other kunoichi in order to rummage through the bento and collect the snacks she wanted. "Hari-chan makes the best food ever!" she gushed.

"Now be seated for Genin Placement!"

Iruka-sensei gave a long speech about pride and the meaning of being a shinobi. Then he went down the line of students, announcing teams.

Teams of three didn't sound appealing in the least. But if he was stuck with someone, don't let it be a fan-girl!
"Team Seven is Uzumaki Naruto, Uchiha Sasuke, and Yamanaka Ino!"

Dammit!

Yamanaka's pleased squeal could be heard by a deaf man.

Ino wiggled in her seat, pleased at the outcome! She was placed on Sasuke-kun's team! And since she'd gotten to know Naruto, she knew that he wasn't an idiot. That he was actually really nice and hardworking, and she was so thankful to not be on a team with idiots or lazy people!

*Whatever Kami that is out there, that is looking upon me so favorably, thank you!*

And to think, they had all managed to sit in the same row together. What a coincidence!

She sent a smug grin in Sakura's direction, enjoying the other girl's fuming.

Team Seven sat in the classroom while the other teams went off to get to know each other.

Sasuke was eating his onigiri slowly, savoring every bite. Naruto plowed through his kesadijas like he was a starving man. Ino sipped her water as she ate her salad.

"So who's in charge for our team?" Ino asked after they finished.

Naruto shrugged and Sasuke didn't even react.

"Well then, I'll be the leader! And as everyone knows that I can be persistent, it's best you don't fight me on this! I have a ruler! I'm not afraid to use it!"

Naruto flinched away, ignoring the urge to rub his rump. He knew quite well how much she liked her ruler.

"Hn."

Ino withheld her squeal, because she had to be level headed. She needed to be mature. Hari-chan said that in order to win his heart she had to prove that she was someone worthy of respect! She couldn't be like Billboard Brow!

To pass the time, Naruto fetched the ultra bento that still had some cookies in it and began snacking on whatever his hand landed on.

After a while, the rest of the newly graduated Genin returned and as the hour went by, Jonin came to fetch their teams, eventually leaving Team Seven alone.

They waited.

And waited.

Ino looked at the clock. It had been an hour.

They waited some more.

Naruto began twitching after another half hour elapsed.

The blond began stacking his cookies on top of each other, trying to see how high of a tower he
could create. Ino was sketching poisonous plants and labeling the dangerous parts of them and what they did to the body. Sasuke sat there, staring at the board.

Another hour went by.

"This is ridiculous!" Naruto finally exploded. Considering who it was, the other two were shocked that he'd made it nearly two and a half hours without making a complaint. He really was maturing.

"I'm doing something about it!"

The blond leapt off his desk, because Kami forbid he sit like a normal person, and stretched himself out.

"Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

Three other Narutos appeared and two proceeded to Henge into someone. One turned into Sasuke and the other into Ino.

"I'm bored here, and I wanna do some training so we leave them here and go use the ring out back for some sparring!"

"And when our sensei finally gets here, they'll dispel and you'll get their information!" Ino realized, smiling. "Good thinking!"

"Hee hee!" he beamed, scratching his head sheepishly.

"And now I can use my ruler!"

The blond paled and dove for the door, Ino running after him.

Sasuke stared at the empty space for a moment, before deciding that sitting there was boring and at least he'd be doing something productive by using the small training ring the Academy had to offer.

He was now encumbered with two obstreperous blonds.

Life wasn't fair.

"This is Naruto-kun's house. I admit, I haven't been here in awhile so I don't know how much has changed since then. He has a housemate now."

Hiruzen knocked on the door and when no answer was forthcoming, he used the back up key, entering with care in case Naruto planted a prank anywhere. The coast was clear however, and he strode in, leading Kakashi along.

The kitchen was clean for once and the entire room looked good. There was new furniture and appliances, several pots of plants sitting on the window sill, an enormous cushion on the floor in the corner with a blanket folded on top of it.

It looked warm and comfortable.

"I hadn't expected it to be this nice," Kakashi remarked, looking through the fridge. "There's a lot of food in here and it's all up to date. It's clean. Who's his housemate?"

The Hokage smiled, "Potta-hime in an interesting character. She's relatively new to the village, gaining her citizenship about a month ago. Naruto found her wandering the streets, looking for an
inn, and helped her. She didn't like the attitudes of the people at the inn when they saw Naruto and decided not to stay. He offered her a place to stay, she accepted, and this happened."

"Is she a threat?" Kakashi asked, because how could it not sound suspicious that a woman suddenly moves in with the Jinchuuriki?

"She has watchers of her own that cycle every twelve hours. In their reports, she never does anything suspicious. She doesn't sense them at all and can barely keep up with ninja speed. I don't know how many times I've caused her to jump or flinch. She described it as 'empty air' and then 'air that is not so empty anymore'."

"Is she really a princess?"

"Last descendant of two families with more than two hundred years of history. One of them going on a thousand. The other had a Kekkei Genkai that was passed to all members, in which she possess. Her status and wealth qualify her as one."

Kakashi gave an interested hum.

"How has she affected him?"

"He stopped pranking every day. He trains more often and studies. He's done really well in the last two months, and it's because she's sat him down and taught him."

"Then I look forward to seeing the changes in him."

When Hatake Kakashi resigned himself to meeting his Genin, he didn't expect to walk in on… whatever he'd walked in on.

He knew he had his sensei's son, the last Uchiha, and a fan-girl, but he hadn't really though they'd be so odd.

Naruto was sitting still and reading, which wasn't normal. Sasuke was doing something with his hips while he was standing. Ino was staring off into space.

The moment they took note of his presence, the three stared for a moment, before all stood at attention.

"Meh… you're all boring. Meet me on the roof."

He Shunshined away.

Naruto blinked. "Hey! Our sensei finally showed up and he looks like a weirdo!"

The team shared a look.

"Meeting is on the roof," Naruto added.

Ino smirked suddenly and Naruto shifted away, knowing that it usually meant trouble. "Last one to the roof is a loser!"

She jumped into the tree above them and launched herself toward the school building.

"Hey!" Naruto yelled, tearing off after her, using his momentum to scale most of the wall before
A blue and white blur sped past him, showing that Sasuke was apparently joining in and he was already further ahead than either blond was.

Naruto pushed himself to move faster because there was no way he was going to allow the teme to beat him in a race! No way! No how!

"Losers!"

Ino!

She'd somehow passed the teme which meant Naruto was all the way in the back!

As he ran along the edge, Naruto created a bunch of Kage Bunshin that appeared ahead of him. He was gripped by the jacket as the long line of Narutos clung to each other, the one on the far end hurling the rest like a whip, sending the real Naruto flying through the air.

He soared past the Uchiha and the Yamanaka, with an exultant cheer as he managed to fly another story higher than them, and several yards ahead too! He was soaring free!

Until he slammed face first into a pole.

"HA!" came Ino's jubilant shout as she passed by him, patting his head condescendingly.

"Good going, dobe."

By the time Naruto made it to the roof, Ino and Sasuke were sitting apart, with a space between them big enough for him to fit in. He grumbled and stomped on over, plopping between them. It wasn't fair! He'd come up with such a good idea on the fly too!

"You actually did really good with that whip thing, Naruto," Ino smiled. "If you'd had more time to think it out, it probably would have gone better."

His bad mood evaporated instantly at the recognition and he grinned, "I was just going with it! I didn't know if it would work but it was worth a shot and it went well until the pole got in the way!"

Ino snorted and Sasuke let out a small, 'keh'.

"Mah! It's time to introduce yourselves to your Jonin instructor, so let's get to it!" said the silver haired man who was leaning against the railing, looking like he wanted to be anywhere else but there with them.

"What should we say?" Naruto asked. How do you introduce yourself? Just give a name. An age? Favorite food... like ramen?

"Likes, dislikes, hobbies, dreams for the future. That sort of thing," the man shrugged.

"You first."

It was low and relatively masculine. Both Ino and Naruto gaped because Sasuke had spoken, and he rarely ever spoke.

"Mah! I'm Hatake Kakashi. I like and dislike things. I have no dreams I feel like discussing. My
hobbies are… hobbies.”

Kakashi stared at the three pre-teens who were staring at him as if he was the most boring person they had ever met. He didn't expect them to actually pass the exam he had planned and as such, he felt no need to relinquish information about himself. Why build a bond that would go nowhere?

"Young lady… your turn."

Her chest puffed out, "I'm Yamanaka Ino! I'm not up to revealing my life right now."

She looked over to the Uchiha, who only hummed in response.

"Uchiha Sasuke."

Naruto looked between them, his confusion obvious. "Eh?"

"Hey, Naruto, do you feel like wasting your time talking about yourself or should we just get on with it?" Ino asked, smiling with false cheer.

"Oh, yeah! I'm Uzumaki Naruto and I want to get to it, sensei! Let's do ninja things!"

Kakashi sighed because these ones were already annoying… but they didn't give away all of their secrets to a foreign shinobi so that had to count for something. Though he was certain it was done to spite him for being late and not because they were thinking ahead.

"Well then, we're going to begin our tenure as a team!"

"What are we gonna do, sensei! Awesome training or awesome missions?!"

It was good to know that Naruto was still hyperactive and that his mind was only focused on so much at once.

"We're going to be doing…"

Naruto and Ino leaned in, listening intensely, while Sasuke tried look as if he didn't care. Pssht! Genin.

"Survival training," Kakashi relented.

"We did that in the Academy! -ttebayo!"

Kakashi felt a pang of sadness strike his heart. He even had Kushina-nee's verbal tick. How ironic and sad.

Still, to keep up appearances, Kakashi allowed a creepy laugh to pass his lips, setting all three on edge instantly.

"What?!" demanded the blonds.

"You've never done this kind of survival, because you'll be going up against me."

Silence.

Ah, how he loved to terrify the fresh meat!

"This is where it gets serious, because this is your real graduation exam. Out of the thirty students
who graduate only, 40% have the chance of passing. The rest return for another school year or… quit."

Some actually received sponsorships or apprenticeships, but that rarely happened and only because the village couldn't afford to leave certain talents to rot in the Academy simply because teamwork didn't fly. A few shinobi never went out on missions or teams because they had to sit in dark rooms overseeing certain assignments.

He didn't think one of the ones from this bunch of Genin would actually earn such an honor though.

From his flak jacket, he pulled three pieces of paper. Meaningless really, but like everyone else had, they'd memorize the contents and take them too literally.

"Memorize these. You'll need them tomorrow. We'll be meeting in Training Ground Three at five AM. I suggest you don't eat, because this will be so intense, you'll vomit. Your vomit will vomit."

Sasuke immediately crushed his paper in hand and carelessly lobbed the ball behind him. Naruto looked at his confusedly for a moment before looking at Ino who was staring at her own paper in confusion. Naruto gave a small shrug and folded his paper into a small triangle and held it by the lengthy side, flicking it away from himself. It went right over the railing.

At Kakashi's blank look, he shrugged.

"I can't read Kanji," said the blond.

Ino gaped at him in horror. Still, she folded her own paper and slipped it into her pouch.

Maybe they were a little different.

Kakashi clapped his hands together once and sat up. "Well, this will be interesting. See you tomorrow!"

He Shunshined away.

"We can't skip food," Naruto said the moment sensei was gone. "Nee-chan says that it's unhealthy and whenever we went training, we still ate. And yeah, I did throw up a few times, but so what? I'd rather be awake and ready than tired and unable to move!"

"Huh?" Ino mumbled.

"Food gives us energy. If we have no energy, we won't be able to function tomorrow. That's what nee-chan said!"

Sasuke stood, "She's right about that."

"So we're eating?"

"But he told us not to!" Ino whispered frantically, looking around to make sure they were indeed alone.

"Actually..." began Naruto, devious grin already working its way into his face. "-he only 'suggested' it. It's a total loophole! Nee-chan has been teaching me about them!"

Ino couldn't refute that. "I-I guess. If Sasuke-kun does it I will too."
"Hm."

"Cool!"

Naruto got to the training ground at five on the dot, where both Ino and Sasuke already were waiting. Naruto had brought four lunches made by Hari-nee-chan and placed them on the stump closest to him.

"It's five, and he isn't here," Ino mumbled, looking rough. Her hair wasn't as smooth looking as it usually was. Her eyes had dark rings of purple under them.

"Maybe he'll be late again," suggested Naruto, already pulling a pillow from his pack and laying down.

"Naruto, what are you doing?"

"Napping. Wake me when he finally shows up."

The blond was snoring a moment later, leaving Ino and Sasuke to just stand there in silence.

Ino was twitching, because she had woken up extra early this morning and hadn't even had time to brush her hair thoroughly! She was still doing up her bandages and arm guards! And she'd come early after eating a full breakfast like she said she would. A full breakfast of five grapefruit but still… she ate!

And now their sensei didn't even bother to be on time!

She tossed her bag aside and sank to the grass, taking Naruto's lead in this because why not? If the man wasn't going to bother to show up, there was no point wasting time and energy.

Sasuke sighed lightly and chose to rest up against a tree. He was suddenly sure they'd be there for hours.

Get the bells!

Naruto had just been soundly thrashed by Kakashi-sensei - who had arrived late by six hours! - and then he'd fallen for an obvious trap! Twice!

Stupid bell!

'You have to get these bells from me. That's all you need to pass. If you don't get one, you'll be tied to stump and go without lunch. You'll watch as the rest eat in front of you.'

Deciding to eat breakfast had been smart, but he was still hungry!

Dangling from his tree, Naruto could see the bento boxes for their lunch, resting on the Memorial Stone. He could sneak his lunch first… but would he have time to get a bell then? Kakashi-sensei had set it for noon and he'd shown up at 11:06, and started the test five minutes after that.

The alarm clock showed that it was 11:34 which was too close to noon. He needed more time.

'When the timer goes off, the test is over.'

A devious idea appeared in his mind then, and he laughed at his own genius.
Using his kunai to cut himself loose, the Genin flipped around and landed perfectly on his feet. He crept over to the stump holding the clock and carefully turned it around, finding the screws on the back.

With quick efficiency, he unscrewed all four and lifted the back, revealing a small dial. Turning the face of the clock toward himself, he experimented with it, accidentally making the time shoot up to 11:58! He reversed the direction several times, until the clock once again said 5:00. He set the clock bad as it was, screws perfectly in place.

With a giggle and a whispered, '-ttebayo!' he headed off for the forest.

He was brilliant!

Naruto stumbled across Ino - literally - and ended up being dragged into a bush with her.

"We don't have much time left and I can't find sensei anywhere!" she hissed, looking through the gaps in the foliage.

Naruto's mischievous laughter caught her attention. "I turned the the clock back about six hours. It's about 5:10, Ino. All the time in the world!"

"That... was a smart idea Naruto. Good on you. This gives us time to plan. And I'm just a little confused over it all because there are no teams with only two Genin. Konoha operates best on teamwork which is why we send out platoons of three plus a leader. There's no point in getting rid of one of us."

Naruto began bouncing because it hit him like one of Ino's ruler swats. "Teamwork, Ino! Two bells, three people! He wants us to fight each other and not use teamwork!"

"Ugh!" she groaned, hand slapping her own forehead. "How did I not get that? I even said it just now. But how are we going to do this if we can't find Sasuke-kun?"

The younger Genin pondered that for a moment. "I'm... going to flood the training ground with Kage Bunshin. They'll find him."

A few seconds later a swarm of Narutos, forming an orange sea of Genin, began a rampage through the forest, loudly drawing attention and generally being nuisances.

"Let's go get teme now!" he cheered, running off.

"His name is, 'Sasuke!'" the Yamanaka heiress hissed, reluctantly following after him.

Sasuke would refuse to admit his fear. Because fear was illogical and he knew logically that he was stronger than Ino was, but, she had this thing about her at the moment.

She was a fan-girl but she was also bossy and being in charge was more important than fawning over him. She all but bullied her way into his personal space and demanded that he work with she and Naruto in order to get the bells. She explained the point of the test and how Naruto had bought them more time to plan their assault.

He was not happy. He didn't want to be on a team with anyone. Teammates slowed him down. But of all the people, he believed he had the best of the worst, so he'd have to deal with it. And if he didn't want to go back to fan-girl hell for another year, acquiescing to her demands was his best bet.
So with all the dignity he had been bred with, Uchiha Sasuke accepted her proposal and even allowed her to do the planning because arguing with her wouldn't get him anywhere.

Also, the dobe didn't really seem to know what to do at the moment and Sasuke was admittedly, out of ideas. Why not let her have a go? She was intelligent.

"We're gonna take sensei down!" she cheered, flames burning in her eyes. A challenge accepted.

"I can probably hold him for a few seconds. My Mind Transfer Jutsu isn't strong like my dad's is and I'm sure as a Jonin, our sensei would be able to detect a presence in his mind. Taking full control of his body will be difficult but with the two of us warring for control, it'll be harder for him to divvy up his attention and fight back.

Naruto, you can crowd him in with as many Kage Bunshin as you can make! Sasuke-kun, you were the best in shurikenjutsu and I know you like wires so I need you to help box him in. You're also the fastest in Taijutsu and you should be able to grab the bells from him."

Kakashi stiffened, a familiar sensation of the Yamanaka Clan's jutsu overcoming him. So… Ino was finally trying her hand at getting a bell.

He grunted when his arms refused to move and his legs locked in place. She had pretty good control of the jutsu but as Kakashi had been through this dozens of times before, he could but up quote the fight if he wanted.

And Kakashi fought with everything he had.

But…

Ino wasn't the only one doing this. A whole group of Naruto burst from the trees of the clearing, surrounding him in an instant and attacking one and a time.

Moving while fighting for control of his body was like someone decided to weigh him down with an extra hundred pounds, forcing him to push chakra into his limbs in order to keep up, but that wasted energy. His deflections and movements were much slower than they should be and while Naruto and his Kage Bunshin weren't landing any hits, he still couldn't fully escape them all. Not when he was surrounded by them and more just kept coming.

The fact that the kid could spam so many was amazing in and of itself. And Ino was tightening her control even more, putting stronger pressure on his joints.

Kakashi found himself suddenly wrapped up in a long string of ninja wire with a bunch of blonds climbing him like a tree and keeping him still.

A blue flash went past and the Bunshin all dispelled. Ino's presence withdrew, lightening him up and making him sway just slightly as the weight disappeared, and all of his extra chakra which he had been channeling in hopes of remaining normal, was released freely.

He used the Kawarimi to get away from the mess and situated himself by the alarm clock, glancing at it to check the time. Six thirty-seven?

"HA HA!" came Naruto's boisterous laughter. "I rewound the dial and set the clock back six hours, sensei!"

That little brat. Kakashi hadn't even considered that a possibility. No one ever dared to touch the
clock itself. That was pretty genius of him.

Sasuke was holding into the bells, which he then handed to Ino. Ino nodded firmly and held her hand out. Naruto slapped his hand on her's immediately and the two stared at the Uchiha until he sighed and did the same.

Ino beamed, "We kick ass!"

"Mah! But you still have to decide who gets a bell," Kakashi sang, feeling himself lighten up a bit. They had used teamwork to get the bells, which no one had ever done before. This left him a little unsure.

"Naruto found out your real test and told us. I came up with the plan to get you. We are a team and your subterfuge failed!"

Naruto was the one to figure it out?

*Color me impressed.*

"Well, congratulations! You're the only team I've ever had that actually managed to pass the test! So we're a team now."

The three Genin slumped, the blonds looking relieved.

"Everyone else took everything I said to heart. They didn't eat, they waited for me for hours, fighting to stay awake, they read the instructions, and memorized them. They never thought for themselves. It's refreshing to see such young minds willing to work things out."

Naruto and Ino seemed appreciate that the most, though Sasuke's upturned lip gave him away.

"As a side note, I'd like to make sure you all know that teamwork is extremely important. I was not a team player in my youth and because of it, I pushed away important people. My first friend, whom I'd only been friends with for a few hours, was buried under rubble while saving me and our teammate. I had been horrible to him up until that day. We were in the middle of a war and my bad attitude didn't make it better.

If I hadn't been a loner who thought that everyone else wasn't important and that rules and power was all that mattered, I would have built better memories with him. We would have gotten on great. He probably would have made Chunin faster had I helped him train instead of degrading him at every chance."

Kakashi placed a hand on the Memorial stone. "Being alone will not help you excel. Coming from someone who had to learn the hard way, please don't abandon your comrades. In the words of Uchiha Obito, 'Those who break the rules are trash, but those who abandon their comrades are worse than trash.' Don't let yourselves fall in with the sheep. Your team matters very much."

At the mention of Obito, Sasuke actually showed some interest, eyes sharp and intense as he took in the words.

Sasuke no doubt planned to fight Itachi and Kakashi was hoping to head off murderous avenging before it got too strong. The boy had been left to his own devices for nearly five years and stewing in that type of mindset wasn't good for children. Sasuke needed a firm hand to lead him away from the darkness. Hopefully, Kakashi could be that hand.

"I'm very proud of your three, and I shall meet you at the Mission Assignment Room tomorrow at
eight in the morning."

"Wait! Is that actually at eight or more like noon?!” Naruto yelled, stopping him from using the Shunshin to give the Hokage his report.

"You'll just have to see."

He was gone a second later.

The rooms had been finished in the building! All that was left was fixing up the bath hall. There was an extra floor that was a wide open space. On rainy days, it would be an indoor play area. And Merlin forbid there was another war, it would double and a shelter/medic station.

Hari, with Naruto's Kage Bunshin, managed to leading the children from the old building and into this new one. She'd already drawn up the charts necessary for where the children were going.

Five floors plus Naruto's little flat at the top. One bath floor and one play floor, leaving three floors free for the children. Ages 1-6 resided on Floor 3. Children, ages 7-12 resided on Floor 4. Children, ages 13-18 had Floor 5 all to themselves.

Each room had a bed, a desk, a lamp, a small dresser, and a carpet. She'd gotten the favorite colors of each child, allowing the rooms to color coordinate and make them welcoming for the kids.

She was feeling good about this. Being closer to the center of the village had them closer to the Academy and the civilian school. Less walking for the individual students of either to do.

The kids were excited to finally be somewhere new. Somewhere where they had clothes and beds and blankets. Where they weren't going to have to worry about a drunkard abusing them or starving to death.

Hari was going to keep them safe and sound.

Now if only that ninja with the blank mask would stop following her around. Else she'll be forced to deal with him.

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics.

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes
-Who is the ninja in the blank mask? Can you guess?

-Anyone have any idea what Hari’s Animagus form is. I’ve mentioned that it’s a feline, but I’d like to see if anyone thinks like I do.
Hari nodded to herself, liking how her planning was going.

From what she remembered of Mrs. Cole's and Dumbledore's conversation, the orphanage took the children on a trip to the shore every year. The idea itself was a good one and Hari decided that she'd like to implement one of her own, but have it for once every month instead of once a year.

Her orphanage was much better off. There was no war going on, there were only forty-four children at present. There was enough money now that it was being regulated and stored away. The children's needs were met and the only things she had to pay for so far, had been food, toiletries, and some more clothing. Everything else was going well and the children were so grateful to finally have their own things, they could find fault.

Monitoring Charms were placed on every room just in case her Runes failed. She'd only dabbled slightly at the insistence of Luna and Hermione. She found the subject to be quote boring and beside protective Runes, she never learned anything else. It was hard to put effort into things you didn't enjoy.

Hari was not infallible. Against one of these shinobi, she was useless if not behind a solid barrier
where they couldn't enter. But she could still do things. She was a witch and had already passed Voldemort's level in knowledge and she'd equaled him in power decades ago. She had surprises if need be and her wandless, non-verbal magic wasn't so bad.

All in all, she could cast wards to prevent someone from entering a place. She could cast spells to slow opponents down if they entered her field of vision. Certain spells like the variations of the Lumos Charm could blind opponents. Fiendfyre would decimate everything around her. She didn't have to see her opponent to land a hit after all, but her victory would be best assured if she could see them.

Unlike Voldemort, she wasn't willing to perform rituals to strengthen herself or empower her senses. For the most part, she was untainted and preferred to remain that way. It kept her sane and with Voldemort as a prime example of what happens when one becomes too obsessed with power, she wasn't planning on slipping any time soon.

And she really hoped that she wasn't tempted either.

Back onto the subject of the orphanage, she was planning on monthly visits to the cinema. There was already a park down the street so it wasn't as if the children didn't have a place to play, but a change in scenery once in awhile would be nice. Merlin knows she had desperately wished for a break in her childhood.

She also had to delegate work to her employees. Two of them were hired and the other, being older and living off a sizeable fortune, was a volunteer. She did not wish for payment because she missed the days when there were children roaming around and now she could spoil her new grandchildren as much as she wanted.

Still though, Hari wanted to find a way to repay the old woman and would come up with something. Perhaps Naruto could help her decide. He had an extraordinary imagination.

The witch sighed, it was time for lunch. It was a good thing she had Mamoru-san ready to help and he had cooking experience. Also, Hari could cheat a bit when the man had his back turned. Magic was so helpful when trying to raise over forty children of varying ages.

"Kakashi-sensei, what's your favorite food?"

The silver haired Jonin looked up from his book, over to where his blond Genin was sitting. Naruto was munching on some kind of food that Kakashi had never seen before, he seemed to be enjoying it, so Kakashi never asked.

"Why do you need to know?"

"Nee-chan wants to make you the lunch you like. She's been making teme's lunch for a while and she knows Ino's preferences, but she didn't like not knowing yours."

Kakashi would assume that this 'nee-chan' was the houseguest of Naruto's. The hime. A hime that actually cooked and cleaned. It was a rare thing to be heard.

While skeptical over accepting food from a stranger, he could see the Genin all enjoyed their meals and he couldn't scent anything wrong with them. Perhaps… he could have faith in Naruto's joy and cave a bit.

"Salt broiled saury is the best. I do not like sweet food."
After lunch, the three Genin did their usual, twenty-minute stretch as they waited for their food to digest. Once the time was up, they'd begin training for the day.

Their mission from earlier in the day… Capture Tora.

Kakashi had been all prepared to watch his cute, little Genin struggle as they chased the deranged feline around the village, but Naruto was the one who shockingly got to it first and while holding the cat in a death grip, he gave Ino the chance to transfer her mind into the cat's body, making it go limp.

Kakashi carried Ino's still form back to the Mission Assignment Room, where they handed the cat off and Ino returned to herself, smiling smugly at their success.

While not what he had expected form them, he was still surprised and a little proud when informed that they had the fastest record for capturing the cat from hell. Thirty minutes and seventeen seconds. The second best came in at four hours.

Of course, with their morning free once again, Kakashi decided for another mission. It would build up tolerance, patience, work ethic, probably other things as well but as he didn't have to do most of those missions as a child, he wasn't sure.

His team then learned how to paint fences… and that was where Naruto came in. With a unanimous vote of the Genin, it was perfectly alright for Naruto to create several Kage Bunshin that would help get the painting done.

By noon, the three had finished two D-Rank missions, which had their entire afternoon free for training. Kakashi had at first felt like things were going to fast, but decided that it was better this way.

His team hadn't been what he thought they would be, which was cause for a different teaching style than what he'd originally planned. One month together had him knowing certain things about them and their learning capabilities and he scrapped his old plan of building teamwork when it was obvious they could work as a team just fine.

Ino was a fan-girl, true, but she could switch her button off when the situation called for it. Also, as the self proclaimed leader of Team Seven's Genin, she needed to be level headed and mature.

Sasuke wasn't as much of a loner as Kakashi had assumed. He had quip wars with Naruto and didn't belittle either of his teammates. Also, the fact that his fan-girl could keep her sanity during the important moments, must have had a pleasant effect on his attitude.

Naruto was open and cheerful, but much smarter than Kakashi had assumed.

During their first team training session, he'd had the Genin demonstrate their training regimes and the first thing Naruto did was create five hundred Kage Bunshin (he'd answered easily when Kakashi asked) and Ino pulled out a straight edge.

She proceeded to give orders, causing the Bunshin to separate and begin their Taijutsu training while the real Naruto started pushups. Ino cartwheeled between the rows of orange, only stopping when she saw a mistake. She'd then hit the Bunshin with her weapon and rail into them until they perfected their technique.

Ino was practicing her equilibrium by constantly moving - flipping, cartwheeling, somersaults, and handstands - because she wanted to train herself to notice and intercept attacks when she wasn't right side up.
Sasuke began with meditation exercises, before unleashing his Taijutsu on a tree and actually
knocking it over.

Kakashi was amazed at how far the children had come on their own, considering the deterioration of
the Academy's requirements.

He began with 'the magic ball' where he blindfolded the three and placed them in a triangle where
they had to pass the ball to each other. Kakashi would then pull each of them back a bit as the game
continued, so that they had to use their senses to determine how strong they should throw the ball.
The also couldn't let it hit the ground.

The ball dropped a lot.

They did learn to memorize how many steps they'd been forced to move back so that they could
mentally calculate the distance and after that, the ball fell less and less. The game still wasn't perfect,
but considering how it could have gone, he had been impressed.

So Kakashi started them chakra levitation.

Sasuke had shown the most proficiency which had spurned Naruto to try harder and in turn, made
Ino feel competitive.

Sometimes the hands wouldn't be available to hold weaponry, so Kakashi was teaching them how to
use their chakra to levitate things and move them over their skin.

They did pretty well, until he demanded they use only their feet. Because the feet held most of the
weight of the body, the soles were much tougher than other skin on the body and the nerves and
Tenketsu not as easy to access. As such… it was more difficult for them to use their chakra there.

After a month together, they'd managed to mostly get it, but with time would come understanding.

"Sensei, we're done!"

He closed his book and nodded.

Time to begin Tree Climbing.

Yuhi Kurenai sighed because she hadn't expected her first Genin team to be like this. Not that there
was necessarily anything wrong with the kids, just that she had a lot of work cut out for her and she
couldn't see it being easy.

Where to start.

She had the first team in the past ten years, that had two kunoichi on it. That was a rarity and the
Hokage had never given a reason why. But after maybe ten minutes in their presence, she could
understand perfectly.

Hyuga Hinata needed so much work. She was brilliant, kind hearted, and skilled, but she lacked in
courage, force, and pride.

Hinata was the heiress of her clan and had a lot of expectations placed on her shoulder. Within a
moment of speaking to the young girl, Kurenai could tell immediately that she was not up to Hyuga
standards and was most likely pushed aside in favor of her sister.

Hinata was a gentle spirit and did not like using her hidden strength. Some would probably say that
shinobi life would be too difficult for her and that she should just give up, but Kurenai saw her strength.

She had determination and that was what mattered. She wanted to be better and while she didn't take it head on like many others did, she still had her own style.

Then there was Choji. He too was a sweet boy who suffered ridicule for his appearance. It was simply a clan trait but others didn't understand that. Choji suffered body dysphoria and wasn't proud enough of his heritage to understand that there was nothing wrong with him.

Choji needed positive attention and Hinata would be the perfect person for that. She was so kind and sweet and considerate of others before herself that she'd make sure that Choji was doing well and that he wasn't allowing his diffidence to rule his life.

Then there was Sakura. Admittedly, out of the Genin, she needed the most work. Sakura was a fan-girl and had forgot her reason for becoming a kunoichi. Instead, every answer had to do with Uchiha Sasuke.

She had intelligence on her side and good chakra control, but she was lacking in chakra, in experience, in practical knowledge, in common sense, in many other things as well.

Kurenai's first order of business was to take them on a camping trip where they would have to forage for their own food and pitch their own tents. Sakura would need this the most because she had screamed over breaking a nail and that would not do when one is a shinobi. Kunoichi rarely ever had long nails and the sooner Sakura learned, the better.

Sarutobi Asuma sighed because he wasn't too sure about becoming a Jonin sensei. He now had three twelve year olds to mind and instruct and they were all so strange.

Shikamaru had tied for lowest grades in the Academy all his cadet life. But there was a sort of intuition within him that called for something else. So Asuma set up several strategy games and even gave him an IQ test with the promise of him being able to skip team training the next day if he did his best.

And so Asuma learned that like his fellow Nara clan members, Shikamaru was incredibly intelligent. More so, than any Nara whom had been born in the last fifty years. This gave him a lot of potential, but he had no drive to see any of it through.

Still, an IQ well over 200 was impressive especially for a twelve year old.

Kiba was a ball of energy and he and his ninen Akamaru kept things interesting always. Akamaru liked to sprawl out beside Shikamaru while he napped and Kiba liked to rile Shino up into battles.

Kiba was a braggart and needed some harsh training and lessons to bring him out of the clouds he's somehow floated into.

Shino was the most quiet and Asuma knew it because of his clan. Generally, the Aburame were soft spoken observers who waited until everything was revealed before passing judgement. Shino had sat and watched during their first team meeting. He did not volunteer information and only gave the bare minimum when asked.

Over the time, he did show to have a competitive side as he allowed Kiba to rile him up - as much as an Aburame can be riled anyway - and draw him into spars.
Shino also provided Shikamaru with the intellectual conversation he needed, able to keep him on his toes. Shino was also of a higher intelligence than normally found in young teens and he was the perfect teammate for one such as Shikamaru, only making comments when needed and not being loud.

Also, after Asuma got Shikamaru interested in Shogi, he was a good substitute for Asuma when he couldn't play any longer, despite neither of them winning against Shikamaru. Even tag teaming didn't work.

Asuma needed to find a way make this team into one to watch out for. How to incorporate their strengths together.

He smiled, sure that his struggle wouldn't be as hard as some others.

"What is this?!"

Naruto glared at Kakashi because for some reason, he decided to tie their hands behind their backs and Naruto had to scratch his nose really bad!

"A new training exercise. I want you to manipulate your chakra as I have been teaching you. You will have an all out spar against each other, but you may only use your feet, weapons, and any jutsu you can possibly perform without handsigns. Hands and arms are off limits. This is to challenge you but also to help you learn to fight when tied up. You never know when you'll get captured and a common mistake is that the enemy forgets to tie the feet."

Kakashi proceeded to dump and unholy amount of weapons all over the training ground's clearing as he ordered them into their different positions.

Ino was looking a bit worried and Sasuke seemed to be perfectly okay with the plan.

"Oh! And if two of you aren't unable to fight within five minutes, all of your training will be without hands until you learn. That means you will learn to flip and cartwheel and use Taijutsu, all without hands!" Kakashi asked with false cheer.

"On the count of three. One, two, three!"

Sasuke ran his right foot over the kunai on the ground beside him and with his chakra, he levitated it. Since his eyes were trained on Naruto, the blond focused really hard and - utilizing one of the skills he developed from running from the Anbu for so many years - he used a signless Kawarimi to trade places with one of the fuma shuriken a few feet away.

He managed to avoid getting stabbed.

Sasuke's frustrated look was enough to cheer him up, but the Uchiha was dodging to his left, which was dangerously close to Naruto's right, when Ino managed to fling a volley of shuriken in her crush's direction with her head. How the weapons even go on her head was a mystery, but it also meant that Naruto really needed to pay more attention.

The blond dove for Sasuke, one leg extended in hopes of landing a dropkick, but the brunet easily turned and allowed Naruto to fly right past him.

"Nice try, dobe."

Naruto bunched himself up, managing to roll upon landing and bounce right back to his feet in time
to dodge Sasuke's counterattack which was a menacing looking sword thing that was kind of small but still very sharp. Sasuke was holding the handle between his teeth and making pecking like motions in order to try to stab Naruto.

Sasuke went still suddenly and his eyes turned blank, mouth losing control of the weapon.

"Huh?"

Naruto looked to Ino for confirmation, but found her body completely lax on the ground.

She'd used her mind jutsu thing on the teme!

Taking his chance, Naruto whirled around and kicked Sasuke in the ribs, knocking him back.

"Ha, teme!" bragged the blond.

Cold metal slid against his neck and he gulped, turning slightly and seeing a blue shinobi sandal an inch away from his face and held about an inch from it, was a kunai, which was being controlled but a thick stripe of blue chakra.

Looking further, he could see Ino, smirking victoriously at him, leg extended in what would be a perfect high kick with her right leg.

"You lose."

"And just in time too!" said Kakashi, clapping.

"Well done, Ino."

The kunoichi smiled and lowered her threatening stance, allowing the man to untie her. "Thanks, sensei!"

Sasuke sat up, glaring at both blonds as he rolled himself over in order to push himself to his feet. Kakashi removed his ties as well and Ino helped Naruto out of his.

"You three did pretty well, but we're going to be repeating this kind of training more often because you boys completely forgot about Ino as if she wasn't a threat and she used that against you."

Ino lifted her nose in a superior fashion. "Just wait until I tell Hari-chan," she said with menacing sweetness, obviously enjoying Naruto's whimper of fear.

Hari stared at it.

It stared back.

Feline.

Possibly deranged if the expression on its face was anything to go by.

Ugly too. Made Crookshanks look beautiful.

There was an ugly cat sitting outside her office window, staring at her with imploring eyes.

Said eyes went unnaturally wide and one second, Hari was staring at a cat and the next, she was staring at a completely different whiskered face, grinning impishly.
Naruto was now in the window, the cat in his arms, struggling like a maniac.

Naruto waved twice and she could hear the muffled greeting he gave. She waved back and watched as Naruto dropped from the sill.

She already knew about ninja balance and knew that fifteen feet wouldn't kill him. She no longer worried about those things. It had been three months after all.

She went back to her work, ignoring Death's snickering at her expense.

Twat.

Kurenai was new to being a Jonin sensei and as such, she didn't know the normal procedure, but she did remember her days as a Genin and sometimes her sensei had brought in his friends to help teach them important lessons or just help them in general.

So… Kurenai had two people in mind.

She'd known Anko for years and their friendship was strong. Most likely unbreakable. A few months ago, they met Hari and she'd become a point of interest. Kurenai liked Hari and liked her mindset and how she was easily accepting of ninja, even if she didn't understand their duty sometimes or flinched at their speed.

So the Genjutsu Mistress decided that she'd bring in her fellow women to help out. Anko would take one look at Sakura and whip her into shape. Hari would see Hinata and Choji's shyness and immediately see to helping them.

It would be good.

Also, Hari's workers were capable of watching the orphanage while she was away, leaving her with some amount of free time to herself.

"Alright team, some friends of mine are going to be helping us today and may regularly make appearances now and then. Be kind and respectful. Anko-chan is a Tokubetsu Jonin who specialises in Information Extraction, so angering her wouldn't be in your best interests."

Both Choji and Hinata understood her meaning instantly, but Sakura seemed puzzled. Well… she wouldn't be puzzled for too long.

"Hari-chan however, is a civilian. A hime actually. She is very kind and very caring but as I've heard from Anko-chan, has fought battles, has had to defend her loved ones, and knows intimately about danger and loss. As a civilian of notable heritage, she will provide good practice in your political relations. How to handle high priority clients. Seeing what such clients are looking for in their protection detail. Hari-chan will also be teaching you some other skills that I and Anko-chan do not possess."

The three Genin nodded and within a few moments, the two women could be spotted entering Training Ground Five. Anko was walking with her hands folded behind her head and Hari was carrying a large, five tiered Bento.

"Yo, gakis!" Anko greeted.

Hari set the bento down and smiled calmly, "It's a pleasure."
"I am Mitarashi Anko and I'm here to run you little brats into the ground!

"I'm Potta Hari, here to improve your social skills and home economic skills."

Kurenai beamed, "Today, these two ladies are going to be in charge, so pay attention and listen to what they have to say."

"Hai, sensei!"

Anko waved Hari on and the green eyed woman nodded, clapping her hands together.

"What I had been able to glean from your former classmate, Ino, is that a lot of the kunoichi in training had disillusioned themselves into thinking that dieting was going to help them. My first order of business is to dash that belief right now."

The horror dawned on Sakura's face and Kurenai could only hope she'd take what she heard to heart.

"A lot of people don't know that your metabolism is based on your weight and muscle mass. Thinner people usually have slow metabolisms, because there is less for them to burn off. Bigger people have faster metabolisms and the more muscle they have, the faster it gets.

Now, it is also unhealthy and potentially dangerous to your health to skip meals. Whether you think yourself to be overweight or not. Especially at your age, skipping your only sources of sustenance can hinder your growth."

Hari opened her arms wide, "Take a look at me. I grew up in an environment where I was forced to skip meals as punishment. This is the body of a malnourished, twenty-one year old woman. I've been informed that both sides of my family had extremely tall people, so genetically, I would have been tall as well. However, lack of proper eating and constant starvation, has stunted my growth."

Kurenai felt a pang of sadness. No wonder Hari was so small. Kurenai had actually assumed that she was a bit younger. The Genin seemed to take her words seriously, though Sakura was still frightened.

"Ino-chan is still on a diet, but instead of skipping meals now, she has substituted foods at my suggestion. I make sugar free and fat free foods and sweets that allow her to enjoy treats without suffering for it. As ninja, you all exercise every day, or at least should be. You don't even need to diet if you're working off your calories so much. However, I do know that some are a bit worried and want to continue their dieting, but you can diet and not starve yourself!"

Hari removed the lid on the first tier of her bento.

"This is all sweets. But they are sugar free sweets. There are foods you can eat that will give you the energy you need without having a negative effect on your body. Bananas are a good snack. Watermelon, lettuce, leafy green veggies, they all have a lot of water in them. They fill you up quickly, can keep you hydrated, and because most are made of water, you aren't consuming fats and oils. Though do not replace every meal with these things unless you take vitamins and supplements on a daily basis. While there is nothing wrong with being vegan, a lot of vegans forget to take their supplements and vitamins. They especially need those because they keep so many important foods from their eating schedule."

The Genin each grabbed something from the box and took a bite, Sakura was most reluctant, but did so anyway.

There was a simultaneous hum of appreciation and Choji immediately went for another. Hinata was
a bit more discreet about retrieving her second and Sakura hadn't even finished hers.

Kurenai sighed.

Perhaps she should have Anko train them into the ground first to work up an appetite?

Haruno Sakura felt like her body was on fire and that someone was taking a cheese grater to the inside of her lungs! Her legs wobbled as she struggled to stay upright and her dress - custom made by the way - was soaked with sweat, making it stick to her rail thin frame.

Anko-sensei made them run! It was terrible!

Out of the three Genin, Hinata was the only one not winded after twenty laps! And Sakura had only managed twelve! The embarrassing thing was that Choji - oh he who eats everything in sight - managed the required amount of laps, even if he was breathing just as heavily as she was!

That wasn't fair! Sakura was thinner so she should have been able to do more work!

"Well, we haven't even gotten to the sparring and yet I managed to gain an opinion of each of you really quickly!" said the purple haired kunoichi.

Facing Hinata, she said, "You have determination and I like that, but you need some force! Don't worry, a few training sessions with me and you'll lose your inhibitions and shy attitude real fast! Much potential in you!"

Hinata bowed, face flushed like a tomato.

Onto Choji, who was already eating a bag of chips. "You're actually pretty good from what I've seen, but you need to stop worrying over your weight. You're an Akimichi and the people of your family are bigger boned and heavily muscular. Three years and you'll be built like a brick house and be just as sturdy! If people can't understand your genes, fuck 'em!"

Choji's genes? What did genetics have to do with him being obese? He ate everything he laid his eyes on! Family had nothing to do with it!

"And finally, the Pink Wonder."

Anko-sensei was frowning. Not smiling encouragingly like she had with the other two. She seemed annoyed and a little resentful.

"How the hell did you graduate as Top Kunoichi?" came the demand, harsh and unfriendly.

"Anko!" Kurenai-sensei hissed warningly, only to be brushed off.

"There is nothing to you but book knowledge. You only managed twelve laps because your stamina is weak. So let me guess… you diet constantly and skip meals to stay thin. You also neglect your training in order to focus on your looks, which is vain and deadly to you."

Sakura flinched, though was unable to move from where she had collapsed. She was just so exhausted!

"The reason the other two beat you is because they train while at home. They are part of prestigious clans that require them to follow training regimes every day. They're used to this sort of thing, but you neglected it and this puts you and your whole team at risk!"
Hari-sensei placed a hand on the woman's shoulder, halting what Sakura was sure would have been a long and tiresome rant.

"Sakura-san, I happen to know that you are a fan of Sasuke-san's. I also know that you and Ino and several other girls in your class pine after him, despite knowing nothing about him."

Sakura gasped, offense being taken immediately.

The brunette held up a quelling hand and the pinkette went silent.

"What do you know about Sasuke-san? Really know about him. His favorite food, programme, color? His hobbies? What do you know of his family? How about his goals for his future? Is he really someone you wish to marry when he doesn't give you the time of day? Or how about the fact that according to some rumor, most of you girls decided to change everything about yourselves just to get his attention. The attention he gives to no one.

You don't know him. You became a kunoichi to get his attention and you have lost some good chances at greatness. Because of this, you don't have his attention, you are physically behind on everything, and you're a liability to your team. You needed to step up and realize that life doesn't revolve around cute boys. Ino thankfully listened and is curbing her decisions a bit at a time and I'd much rather you did as well, because it would be less painful now than later, when you're on a mission where your life is on the line and you can't defend yourself."

Anko-sensei snorted, "This one isn't like the Yamanaka brat, Hari. They only way she'll learn this lesson, is by weathering extreme conditions!"

The look on Anko-sensei's face sent Sakura into a panic.

"Nee-chan, I want to do better missions! -ttebayo!"

Naruto was alright with their team training because they actually seemed to learn cool things and some of them he could totally pull off later when he was doing pranks and stuff. It was the missions that killed him!

Taking two a day because he cheated with his Kage Bunshin, wasn't the problem. It was the fact that each mission was so boring. He didn't like babysitting, or picking potatoes, or painting fences. And the cat! Tora the Terrible was the worst mission ever, despite Team Seven having the record at catching it!

"Don't these missions work in a sort of hierarchy?" his nee-chan asked as she pulled a pan from the oven. "I was under the impression that Genin did the lowest ranked ones until their Jonin sensei deemed they were fit for a higher duty."

The blond deflated and grumbled, knowing she was right. Kakashi-sensei had explained it to them on their second day as a team.

But his team was totally doing awesome! Ino was still helping him train and sometimes the teme had something to say that actually helped Naruto out. Kakashi was actually preparing them for different scenarios that could occur in shinobi life and they'd been taking their training like good, behaved Genin.

But Naruto wanted more! He wanted to test out his growing skills in real life battles!

Hari-nee-chan placed a large bowl in front of him and a glass of water to his right. "This has spice to
it, so be careful."

"What is it, nee-chan?"

It was all red and golden and had lots of pretty colors! It smelled good too.

"Taco Bake. You'll like it, don't worry."

Shrugging, Naruto inhaled his food, thinking about his team whilst he did so.

"So Naruto, I met some of your classmates," Hari said as she sat in the other chair, her own bowl before her.

"Who?"

"Well, Anko, Kurenai, and I are helping Kurenai's Genin a bit, because they need some help in different areas of emotional progression and maturity. They each have their strengths and weaknesses and it'll be interesting to see them grow as shinobi as well as people.

Hinata-chan is kind. She needs strong support in order to flourish. Choji-kun is sweet and he's a lot better than people would think. Sakura-san is… on her way to understanding… over her issue with Sasuke-san."

Naruto perked up, because on one hand he still really liked Sakura but on the other hand, she was mean and brutal and she hit him for no reason most of the time. Just because someone does something you don't like, doesn't mean you have the right to lay your hands on them. Whatever self-confidence issues she was suffering from, weren't a good enough excuse to take her anger and frustration at herself, out on someone else.

Naruto looked away most of the time, but he just finally got fed up.

Ino may have insulted him in the past, but she never moved to hit him. She would simply whine about Sasuke, cross her arms, and walk away in a fit. Ino was different. If Ino could be mature about it all even with disliking him at the time, then Sakura, her 'rival for love', should be able to as well.

Still, a crush of five years is still hard to get over 'cause while her attitude was terrible, she was still pretty.

"Is Anko the purple lady who likes to lick kunai and eat dango?" he asked, changing the subject because thoughts of unnecessary abuse were getting him down.

Hari snorted her water, choking it down as she laughed. "Yes. That was Anko."

He shivered because her tongue did weird things that weren't normal. Normal tongues should not be able to touch noses! Or eyeballs for that matter!

"She's creepy."

"Yes," agreed Hari. "But she's great, so it's okay."

He shrugged. Whatever nee-chan liked. So long as the kunai licker stayed away from him, he was okay with their friendship.

Kakashi lounged in the Jonin Standby Station, because his team had a day off today and he was incredibly bored, so why not sit by in comfort?
Anko and Kurenai were two feet away, seated on the best sofa the station had to offer, chatting away. Gai was doing pushups in the far corner. Asuma was out by the balcony, smoking to his heart's content. Genma was using the various bottles around the room as target practice.

Everything was good.

Every head in the room snapped to the door where they could hear footsteps approaching. Relatively silent even though the person was wearing heels. Kakashi already had an idea of who it was but when she walked in the room, he was momentarily stunned.

And of course… everyone noticed her as well.

"Hari!" Anko yelled, leaping over the back of the sofa in order to throw her arms around the smaller woman. Kurenai smiled from where she was seated, giving a friendly wave.

Kakashi was witness to the nearly unthinkable as Anko licked the woman's cheek and the woman - whom he'd been mentally referring to as Neko - licked her back.

"Hey, Anko," she grinned.

While she had made mention of Anko in the past, he didn't know that they were on such good terms. In fact, Anko was considered no better than Naruto among the villagers - due to who she had formerly been apprenticed to - and the fact that a civilian woman accepted her quirks just fine, was astounding.

Good enough friends to recommend porn to each other. He really needed to forget that little bit of information.

Anko had called her Hari, which was probably her name. Bummer. He'd been looking forward to simply calling her by nickname and leaving it at that.

Hari noticed him and smiled brightly, "Hi, Inu-kun!"

The head of every Jonin and Tokubetsu Jonin snapped in his direction, looking worried. Kakashi had been one of those Anbu you couldn't mistake because his hair was a dead giveaway. Everyone knew that he had once been a member of Anbu - technically still was as you never really get to leave once you've been inducted - and that his alias was Inu. They probably thought she knew his secrets.

In fact, he didn't even know why she had chosen that particular nickname because he didn't feel that he acted like a dog at all. But whatever.

"Neko-chan," he said calmly, nodding to her.

"You know Kakashi, Hari-chan?" Kurenai asked.

Hari groaned, "Now we know each other's names! That takes away the mystery!"

"Mah, mah, Neko-chan, we simply don't use each other's names," said Kakashi, flipping a page.

"Cool!" she nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh beauteous flower!"

And there went Gai.

"It is a pleasure to see your youthfulness again! Have you succeeded in your venture?!" the green
spandex wearing shinobi asked as he continued to exercise.

"Yes, Gai-san. The orphanage is up and running, the children are clothed and fed every day, and they're all doing much better," Hari smiled.

Interesting.

Anko slipped an arm about Hari's waist and sighed. "Thank Kami you did something about it-"

"I had your help!"

"-because that bitch was so annoying!"

"Anko!" hissed Kurenai.

"But Nai-chan, she was an abusive bitch! We found the proof! We handled the situation. She's in prison for the rest of her life!"

While the two women began to argue, Hari made her way to Kakashi's side, setting her bento down on the table beside him. Her eyes landed on the book and she cracked a mischievous smirk.

"You're still reading that? I already finished mine."

Silence prevailed over everything then, leaving the entire room to watch the two of them as they were about to no doubt discuss porn in public. There was some disbelief at her words and Kakashi couldn't blame them, because he'd felt much the same in the beginning.

"Mah, Neko-chan. This is my third time through it."

Her smug grin dropped and she sent him a glare as she unwrapped the bento.

"Show off."

"It's okay, Neko-chan. Not everyone can read as fast as I can, no need to beat yourself up over it," he teased, feeling something pleasant filling him. It was nice to have a verbal spar that was done just for fun. Just because he could.

He was surprised at how much he enjoyed riling her up.

Her right brow twitched, bright green orbs darkening, pupils blowing wide as she focused on him. "I may not be a ninja but I am capable of mass acts of defenestration, so heed your words carefully, Inu-chan," she said, voice sweet and airy and so fake it could give him cavities.

"Oh really now?" he challenged, enjoying how annoyed she was. "Please, do demonstrate, Neko-chan."

"With my Kekkei Genkai, sure."

One second, Kakashi was seated in the best chair in the room and the next, he was dangling over said chair with Hari looking up at him, face screwed up in concentration. Her eyes trialed to the open window on the other side of the room and Kakashi found himself soaring right through it and whatever control that was on his body, disappeared the moment he began to fall.

What was that?!
Hari breathed deeply. It was one thing to lift something without her wand or spells, but to move it around so much took effort. That was tiring.

She took the man's discarded seat and did some breathing exercises to calm herself down. He was much heavier than he looked. Maybe it was all the ninja equipment.

She really needed to practice her wandless magic more often. But it was so boring though!

"Tsk. Tsk. To think, my Mistress has become so lazy."

You're an all-knowing, all-powerful being. You don't have to sit there for hours upon hours practicing something that is really boring!

"We could always meld together and I can instruct you that way."

No, I'm good with being lazy.

Seriously, melding was cheating - "You don't care about that!" - and it hurt and was uncomfortable and she wasn't going through it unless absolutely necessary!

"Lazy," Death repeated.

Piss off!

"What was that?!

She blinked herself into the present, finding Anko towering over her, eyes wide with excitement and a manic grin stretching across her lips.

"A Kekkei Genkai passed down through one of my families. It only works if I can see the object in question," she lied easily. To an extent, her words were truth, so she knew that finding the lie would be difficult even on a lie detector or even those Sensor Ninja who could feel the shift in chakra when someone lied.

"What else can you do?"

Hari glanced at Kurenai, who was looking on with a curious gaze. In her hands was a pillow.

Hari held out her palm and summoned the pillow from across the room. It lifted for a second and she have to give a little magical nudge to get it to move faster. Except…

It was too fast!

Crash!

She hadn't been fast enough to stop it and ended up with a face full of pillow, surrounded by laughter as the shinobi took pleasure in her misfortune.

She'd probably have to practice that one as well.

"Cool!" Anko barked, plopping into the brunette's lap. "What else you got?"

"I'd like to know as well."

Sitting on the windowsill was Kakashi, looking a little ruffled but altogether fine. In his hands was his trusty book and he didn't seem to be holding a grudge, but these ninja were tricky little buggers.
She'd watch her back around him just to be sure.

"I got some interesting stuff, Koino-chan!" she winked, making Anko snort and Kurenai bite her lips to stop herself from smiling.

"Well Koneko-chan, don't forget that I am a ninja," Kakashi said in an equally 'kind' voice, his visible eye curling upward in an almost eye smile.

Hari wrapped her arm's around Anko's waist and tugged her closer, a wicked grin stealing across her lips. "But I have an Anko, so I dare you to try anything."

"OOOOOHNNNN!" one of the ninja she didn't know, whistled, looking between she and the silver haired ninja.

The challenge had been set.

Now all she had to do was wait.

And watch.

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"I want a C-Rank!"

Naruto was adamant about this. Two months of being a team and all they did was stay in the village. Ino had to concede to his point that they needed experience outside the village because the chances of them being attacked while at home were almost impossible.

She could see that Sasuke-kun agreed, even if he would never say anything about it. The boys were so hard headed and instead of just admitting that they didn't hate each other, they walked around it. Like nobody knew!

Kakashi-sensei was just staring at them.

"I'm not so sure you're ready for that though."

"We're totally ready!" Ino yelled, acting as spokesperson since she was team leader. "Billboard Brow's team has already gone on their first C-Rank mission and their teamwork is worse than ours! And Shikamaru's team has already done two C-Ranks! We are behind!"

"Yeah, sensei! We can't let them be better than us!" Naruto added with a firm nod.

"Exactly," agreed Ino, nodding. "Even though they actually aren't better than us," she added after a second. Team Seven was the best, no arguments could stand against them.

"We need the experience."

"Yeah, what the teme said! -ttebayo!"

Ino elbowed her fellow blond in the gut, "His name is 'Sasuke'!"

"Umf!" grunted the blond. "What Sasuke-teme, said!" he amended.

She sighed, knowing it was pointless. His insulting nickname didn't seem to annoy Sasuke-kun at all so it had to be okay with him. That or he didn't care at all. Also, Sasuke-kun had been calling Naruto dobe for years and Naruto didn't really seem too bothered by it.
Her boys were idiots, she realized.

Kakashi-sensei closed his hideously yellow book and sighed. "If you can possibly give me a good reason that explains why you should do a C-Rank now when you have months ahead of you, perhaps I'll relent."

The Genin all shared a look and Ino reached out, bringing the boys into a huddle.

"Why do we deserve this mission?" she asked in hushed tones.

"It's gotta be more fun than the D-Ranks," Naruto said.

"We've done every available D-Rank at least five times and have no other skills or tips to learn from them. Our teamwork is better than Team Eight's is so we'd be more safe out there," Sasuke added, thinking more seriously.

"We need to begin evaluating ourselves against other opponents," said Ino. "Kakashi-sensei is a Jonin so our skill level against him is nonexistent. We need people who aren't as strong as him to compare to. We need experience."

"What we need, is to up our training," Sasuke huffed, looking annoyed for once and not constipated. She withheld a snort at the thought. It was improper for a lady to think such things! What would her mother say?

"I wanna see what life is like outside the village. I've never left and I'd prefer to find out sooner rather than later," the blond commented. "Like, what sort of plants are out there and do they have different foods? Do people outside the village expect different social interaction?"

Wow. Hari-chan was really making a good influence on him if he was seriously considering these things.

"We also don't whine or get into fights," the Uchiha pointed out.

True.

"Our reputation among the Genin Teams is 'most helpful'. We have a good amount of records under our belt. We need a new challenge," Naruto nodded to himself. "Team training is getting predictable and C-Ranks could throw new experiences at us! -ttebayo!"

"Well, it's seems my cute little Genin are taking this rather seriously!"

The three jumped away with a shout of fright when Kakashi appeared in the middle of their huddle, the smoke from his Shunshin flickering away in the wind.

"I guess you're all ready for a C-Rank!"

They gaped for a moment, before Naruto jumped to his feet. "Yes!"

That was all it took?

Wait! He could hear them when they spoke?! From over there?

Woah.

"Nee-chan, I have a C-Rank mission!"
"See? All you needed was to exercise a little patience and you'd finally get what you wanted," said the woman, stepping from the bathroom, rags thrown over her shoulders.

He laughed sheepishly, knowing she was right.

"So what's the mission or am I not to be privy to such information?"

She tossed the rags into the sink and turned on the hot water. Nee-chan insisted on washing clothes by hand for some reason. There was a laundromat down the street but she liked to scrub with her hands instead. Weird.

"We're protecting some bridge builder until he finishes the bridge that connects his country with Hi no Kuni. He's an old drunk and he called me short!"

Naruto did not like Old Man Tazuna.

"Naruto, you are short. I'm short. There is nothing wrong with being short. Though I'm sure you'll grow to be bigger than me, so don't take it to heart."

Naruto latched himself onto the woman, squeezing tightly, "Thanks, nee-chan! I have to pack my stuff now!"

They could be gone for up to three months, so he needed to pack the stuff he'd need. Rations - which came in a kit you could buy in the local shinobi shop - ramen, because he couldn't go without for too long, more weapons, extra underwear, that book on chakra natures, some money 'cause you never know what could happen, a sleeping bag, and a flashlight. Yeah, he was good to go.

"Nee-chan, can you walk me to the gates?"

"Sure."

She was wringing out the rags by the time he made it to the door, draping them over the back of the kitchen chairs.

"I wish you could come with me."

"I can't go on your mission with you. I have to stay here to help the kids, and I wouldn't want to give your team any more work by having to defend me alongside your client."

He pouted, nudging the door with the toe of his sandal, grumbling, "You'd be a better client than the old drunk."

"Give him a chance, squirt," she said, looping her arm around his shoulders. "Now, let me fix you up before you go."

Naruto was pushed toward the wall, where Hari proceeded to wave her wand several times, mumbling things.

"Your jumpsuit will stay warm even if it gets cold. The charm may break after a few weeks though, sorry. They aren't meant to be permanent."

She paused in her inspection. "Would you like me to make you lunch before you go?"

"Sure!"

Another wave of the wand had the fridge opening and ingredients flying around the room. While his
food fixed itself together with the help of Hari-nee-chan's magic, Hari was going over his weapons, making them more sharp. Her nose wrinkled at seeing his undergarments, but she said nothing about them.

"You're all set!"

She slipped the bento into the pack and smiled. "Let's go."

After a few minutes of walking through the village, Naruto couldn't help but talk more. "So Ino was able to con sensei into agreeing to teach us Water Walking during our trip. Especially since Nami no Kuni is an island and we'd be useless if we can't fight on the water, you know?"

"You're not useless. I'm sure you'll do fine. And even if you can't learn it fast, you're imagination more than makes up for it, squirt."

He beamed. It was nice to have someone who believed in him.

"You won't be lonely when I'm gone, right Nee-chan?"

"I'll miss you, but don't worry about me. Focus on doing your mission to the best of your ability. Think of me when you eat your ramen."

They were coming upon the North Gate, where Kakashi-sensei said to meet. Up ahead, Naruto could already see the old drunk standing off to the side, with Ino and Sasuke glaring at him.

"Hey guys!" Naruto hollered, waving his hand frantically.

"Lower, Naruto," Hari chastised. "My ear is right here."

"Sorry, nee-chan," he grinned, not feeling bad at all.

"Hari-chan!" Ino called. "You've come to see us off?!"

It wasn't Ino that grabbed Naruto's attention. It was Sasuke. The duck butt haired Uchiha was staring at Hari-nee-chan with a weird look on his face.

"Hello, Ino. Sasuke-san," Hair said, nodding in the teme's direction.

Sasuke's face went red and he turned away. "Nothing," he mumbled.

"Mah, Koneko-chan, what are you doing here?"

Naruto looked at Ino, who shrugged.

Hari smiled, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"What about a box?" Naruto asked.

Sasuke's face went red and he turned away. "Nothing," he mumbled.

"Mah, Koneko-chan, what are you doing here?"

Naruto whipped around, pointing an accusing finger in his sensei's direction as he yelled, "YOU'RE LATE!"

"Koinu-chan," Hari purred, a creepy smile on her face. "May I ask what you're up to?"

"Going on a mission with my team," he said. "You?"
"Seeing Naruto off for his mission," she answered.

There was a moment of silence as everyone took some time to stare at each other. But then…

"You're his sensei?!!"

"You're his nee-chan?!!"

"With the way Naruto talks, I thought you were an old, perverted man who was too lazy to do anything but sit by and read bad porn!!"

Naruto flushed, backing up until he was safely hidden behind Hari, because Kakashi-sensei was giving him the Look. Yes, L.O.O.K..

"Oh really?" the Jonin said, eye curving upward.

His aura was not as pleasant as his voice would have one believe. Naruto whimpered, knowing that his training was going to be hell because of that.

"Well…" his nee-chan began, "-you do have old man hair, and you do read porn, though the quality is better than Naruto believes."

Kakashi-sensei directed the smile toward Hari, "Koneko-hime, we wouldn't want my revenge to be too drastic, right?"

Hari snorted, "Bring it, Koinu-chan!"

"Wait!" Ino demanded. "You know each other already?"

Hari smirked, "Yes, Koinu-chan. Do tell your Genin of our last encounter."

"But Koneko-chan, I don't think they're mature enough to understand it," the Jonin said, shoulders slumping, but his eye seemed to sparkle.

Eh?

Naruto leapt out from behind Hari, pointing accusingly and saying, "You better not have attempted to defile Hari-nee-chan or else Ino and I will kick your ass, sensei!"

"Yeah!" the blonde yelled. "Hari-chan is a sweet flower and is to be protected from perverts like you!"

The two protectively stood in front of the brunette, attempting to block their sensei's view of her. Though… both were shorter than either adult so the attempt was moot.

"Calm down you two, I've simply been unnerving him over the past few months. Everything is fine. Anyway, he's embarrassed that I threw him out a window."

Sasuke broke the tense silence with a snort/cackle, covering his mouth in an attempt to muffle the sound. But it was out there and both Naruto and Ino couldn't help but join in. Their tough, Jonin sensei, one of the elite and a legend of the village, was thrown out a window by a civilian woman. It was beautiful.

Kakashi sighed, knowing he wasn't going to get out of this.
Although he had been surprised to learn that Potta-hime, Hari-nee-chan, and Koneko-chan were the same person. He'd been speaking to Naruto's guardian for months and never even knew it.

What kind of ninja was he? Wasn't he supposed to be good at gathering information and putting things together? Ino had said her name several times. He should have noticed when Anko addressed her at the station!

If news of this ever got out…

No. No one else need know of this.

"Well, look at the time, we have a mission to get on! Let's go team!"

"You aren't getting out of this, sensei!"

"Mah, Naruto, would you like some extra training?" he asked, kindness pouring off of him in buckets.

"I'll tell nee-chan!" the boy threatened.

"And I'll get Anko!" the woman added with a smirk that dripped satisfaction. She knew Anko was a threat and she'd proudly wield that fact as a weapon. Devious.

For the first time in his life, Kakashi wished his mask wasn't in the way just so he could childishly stick his tongue out.

"Am I really safe with you people?" Tazuna-san asked, looking even more down about his situation than before.

"Completely!" Kakashi cheerfully replied. "Let's go!"

"Bye, nee-chan!"

"Bye, Hari-chan!"

"Hn."

"See you all when you get back!" she said. "And you will… come back. Or else."

Kakashi pretended that the last part wasn't directed at him and ushered the Genin out the gate, waving to the guards as they signed out.

Now… on with the mission that was sure to be less embarrassing than this.

Hari inhaled another spoonful of ice cream. When Naruto excitedly told her that his team had finally gotten a C-Rank mission, she'd been really happy for him. But he was gone now and she was sad!

Anko, being the 'kind and generous'(evil) soul that she was, decided that Hari could use some help with her personal training.

So after hours upon hours of painful working out, Hari sat back in her office, eating as many sweets as she could. She deserved to be spoiled after the day she had.

Anko sat her in a chair and then hooked really heavy weights to her ankles and told her to lift her legs over her head while remaining seated. Her thighs hurt so much! The apex between them also
ached. It was simply pain everywhere.

To make it worse… she’d gotten her monthly visit from TOM. She named it TOM in memory of a certain arse who caused her a lot of pain and grief. Her Time of the Month, TOM, liked to mock her for at least five days out of every month and this month was terrible.

Overall, she was miserable.

"Potta-sama! Potta-sama! Miyuki-chan has the pox!"

Fuck!

"WOAH!"

Ino dodged to her left as a long chain whipped past her head and wrapped around her sensei. She blinked, mouth dropping when Kakashi-sensei exploded in a mess of red.

"You're next, blondie!" a guttural voice yelled.

"Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

The road was covered in smoke as Naruto intervened. Ino felt warm, small hands hauling her off the ground and she struggled against their hold.

"Sssh, Ino!" hissed the voice.

It was only Naruto! What a relief!

"Protect the drunk!" he ordered as the smoke blew away in the wind, leaving three Genin guarding one bridge builder, as several orange clones circled their adversaries. Said enemies who had just killed their sensei!

"You little gakis are just playing at being ninja!" one of the ruffians laughed.

"We'll kill you all nice and slow like."

"Bring it!" the mass of Naruto chorused loudly, lunging at their attackers.

Ino gripped the kunai she had armed herself with, feeling cold and unsure. If they had managed to kill Kakashi-sensei, they had to be strong. Team Seven was comprised of only Genin! They couldn't handle foes like these!

"Ino, calm down."

She glanced at Sasuke-kun, who was going through hand signs at a ridiculous speed. He looked firm and resolute. Not worried in the slightest.

"Look at Kakashi's body again and tell me what you see."

With that, he drew a deep breath and unleashed a large fireball on the group in front of them, catching all the clones and the two enemy shinobi inside it.

Ino gulped, but looked over anyway, because she couldn't be weak at a time like this.

Kakashi-sensei's body… wasn't there. It was just a log wrapped in chains.
Kawarimi.

Kakashi-sensei was alive!

Her relief was short lived as she saw a black blur from the corner of her eye. Time seemed to slow as she flipped over, left hand balancing her body in a hand stand. She managed to dodge the clawed hand that had been aiming for her throat.

Her own hand moved without her permission, bringing the kunai upward.

She'd been practicing these sort of maneuvers for a few weeks, in order to acclimate herself to the idea. She hadn't thought she'd actually use the skill so soon.

But her hand had moved outward like she'd practiced hundreds of times, and warm redness covered her hand and wrist.

"Urk!"

Ino's world righted itself once more as she returned to her feet, staring down at the felled shinobi, lying on the ground. In her hand, was a bloodied kunai and covering her forearm and shirt was the same tacky, red substance.

Blood.

"You Konoha trash! I'll kill you for that!" the other ninja bellowed, charging.

Ino couldn't react. Her body just wasn't moving. The other ninja was on full attack mode but she couldn't find it in herself to move. She was so cold. So very cold.

The fallen shinobi coughed all over her sandals, covering her feet in blood as well.

"Ino!" came a loud yell as the sound of steel crashing against steel was heard.

"Mah, I think it's enough now."

Ino didn't move willingly. Not when the body was moved and placed in a storage seal. Not when Naruto and Sasuke tried to calm her down. Not even when Kakashi-sensei pulled her a ways away and sat her down.

"Ino, I know that you're in shock and I know that this probably isn't what you want to hear right now, but I'm very proud of you."

Proud?

"You and your teammates acted to protect the client even when you thought I had been killed. You defended him and yourself. You did a very good job."

"But I-" she swallowed, her voice was shaky.

Kakashi sighed. "This is the way of the shinobi, Ino. Things like this will happen every now and then. It's best that it happened to you now, so you can fully understand what you're getting yourself into in this profession."

"I didn't even think about it though!" she gasped. "I just moved and…"

"And you did you job," he finished firmly. "They had been following us for about two days and I
was trying to determine who their target was. They aren't our comrades, they are enemy shinobi. Nukenin of Kirigakure who are wanted into the Bingo Book. They were also after our client, which means you were completely justified."

But that didn't make her feel better.

"Come on, there's a stream about a kilometer south of here. We'll take our team and prisoner there and handle the situation."

Kakashi patted her shoulder and led her back to the group, where she left her with her teammates so that he could begin questioning the bridge builder.

"Ino," Naruto called softly. "You were awesome."

"Hn," Sasuke nodded.

The blonde sighed and gave them a shaky smile, still not feeling okay about it.

"Thanks, guys."

"Hari! Hari!"

Hari knew the littlest children didn't know much about decorum yet, so she didn't hold it against them for not addressing her properly. Besides, people could be so stuffy and boring and she didn't want them to grow up to be boring and moody.

"What's wrong Ichigo?" she asked, kneeling to make herself eye level with the little boy.

"The Man has come!" he whispered, eyes filled with terror.

"Who?" she asked, feeling his worry begin to affect her cheer.

"Every few months, a Man and his ninja guard comes," the boy said. "He and the old lady had some kind of deal where He would come and take a child who was bad."

He looked around a bit, placing a hand to his mouth as he leaned in closer to whisper, "He said He was taking them because they were bad and had to be punished, but they never come back! Sometimes He has His ninja hurt them just so they can leave quick! He's back again! He's gonna to take someone away!"

Hari didn't like the sound of this. Placing her hands on the child's rigid shoulders, she forced some calm into his aura.

"Ichigo, I want you to go to your room and lock the door. Tell any child you see on the way, to pass along the message, okay?"

He nodded sharply. "He won't take us away?"

"Never," she promised, standing.

"Obaa-chan sent him to your office."

And then the boy was running down the corridor, leaving Hari to wonder at who was waiting for her and why he took children from the orphanage.
She had a plan.

Stopping by the kitchen, Hari fixed two cups of tea in some fanciful china and dropped some sleeping potion and truth serum into the one cup.

With a nod, she gathered up the tray and the utensils and walked calmly to her office.

*Death, who is this man I am to meet?*

"A very dangerous foe. He will not accept your invitation for tea easily, so you must use compulsions."

She worried her bottom lip, really not liking the sound of this guy.

She waved her hand over his cup, casting a strong compulsion over it, basically demanding that her drink it.

Hari opened the door to her office, coming face to mask with a familiar shinobi. The one who had been watching her these past couple of weeks.

"Good afternoon, I am Potta Hari. I was informed that you wished to speak with me."

The man seated before her desk was old, well past his prime. He carried a walking stick. His right arm was wrapped in plasters, as well as half of his face.

"I am Shimura Danzo," the man said as she placed the tea tray down and took her seat.

The young witch added a lump of sugar to her cup and stirred thrice, before sipping it carefully.

"In days past, Manami-san and I had an agreement that I would remove the more unruly children from her care and train them up to become self-sufficient shinobi of Konoha."

So he was running some kind of training camp?

Danzo's hand twitched toward his cup a few times, but he seemed to be holding back extremely well.

Well then.

Focusing all of her attention on the man, she forced everything she had into the Imperius Curse, hoping that it would work on him.

His eyes went blank and she knew she'd succeeded.

*Drink your tea, she mentally ordered.*

He did so slowly, until the entire cup was empty. She dropped her control and sat back, feeling satisfied.

"Now, why should I allow you to take any of my children when they are so well behaved? What do you need them for?"

"I am going to train the children who show skill. I will make them a part of my forces."

Danzo blinked, confusion overcoming his features.

"And how would you train them?"
"I will force them into a difficult training regiment where they will grow and train with a partner of my choosing. When it comes time for recruitment, I will send both on a mission, telling both that their comrade is a deceiver and that they must be eliminated. The winner will receive a position among my ranks and be branded into my service."

The ninja guard stiffened, their faceless mask fixed on Danzo, who was looking sleepy.

Hari smirked, "You're not taking any more children from this orphanage."

"What did you do?!" the old man demanded as his guard went on the defensive, kunai in hand.

*Imperio*, she thought clearly, forcing the guard under her will power.

"I'm a little worried about a man who comes into an orphanage and takes children and never brings them back. So we'll be taking this matter to Hokage-sama. Have a nice nap."

The man slumped in his chair and Hari Stupefied the guard, waiting until his body went slack before releasing her hold on him.

Slipping her wand from her hair, she intoned, "Carpe Retractum!"

The two were immediately bound in ropes and she smiled to herself. Lifting both wandlessly and wordlessly, she slammed the guard into the wall a few times just so she could lie and say she did it to knock him out. She then left the office, two bodies floating behind her.

"Good heavens!" Ibana-san gasped, clutching at her haori as Hari went past her.

"Could you watch the orphanage for me?"

"Hai, Potta-hime," the old woman bowed, casting a wary look at Hari's prisoners.

"Thank you!"

Hari stepped outside the building and looked around.

*Death, where at the guards the Hokage usually has stationed to watch me?*

"*They switch every twelve hours and all of them circle the building. Your current guard is rounding the corner as we speak.*"

Hari didn't have to wait long because she was scared out of her wits with the figure that appeared before her.

"Potta-sama, may I ask why you are holding one of Hokage-sama's elder councilors hostage?" the guard asked in a monotone voice.

"They were trying to take some of my children and force them into some kind of odd training to join his group or something. Half of what he said didn't make sense but he didn't like that I denied him."

There was a moment of silence, before the masked man held out his hand. "Accusations such as these must be bought before Hokage-sama. We shall Shunshin there."

The man took her hand and made her hold onto his hood. He then touched both floating bodies and Hari felt her body… unravel in a sense. Like she'd disappeared from corporeal form for a few seconds. When she opened her eyes - which she hadn't realized she had closed - she was standing in the Hokage's office, among five other guards who all had drawn their weapons and seemed to be
ready for a fight.

"Stand down," the Hokage ordered. "Buta, report."

"Potta-sama claims that Danzo-sama attempted to take some of the orphans and she refused him."

The old man cocked a brow, looking at the levitated bodies.

"How did you possibly manage this, Hari-hime?"

Hari shrugged, "I drugged his tea after one of the children informed me that 'The Man' had returned and that he was going to take someone else away again. Apparently, he comes by every few months and takes a child who is deemed to be a handful, and gives them some punishment. However, he never brings them back according to the child who told me. He was in hysterics because all the children taken before, had been good children who didn't deserve punishment. I have an orphanage of children terrified of this man for some reason."

She cast a glance at the ninja who was dressed a lot like the Hokage's ninja were. "I simply levitated him and slammed him against the wall until he stopped moving. I've also noticed that he had been following me around a lot lately."

The Hokage blinked in surprise. "How do you know that?"

"I could see him," she answered simply. "I knew you had people watching me but I can't feel or see them. This one though, wasn't so good at hiding."

She took the proffered seat and crossed her legs primly. "Hokage-sama, what sort of training regiment is he putting the children through? Why on earth would he be allowed to send children who grew up together, out to kill one another just so they could join his 'service'?" she asked, bunny marking the last word. "It's sounds barbaric."

The noticeable chill that ran through the office could have frozen hell over.

The genial Hokage was suddenly very serious and whatever his hand movements meant, had his guards blocking every window and the door. Weird lines that reminded her of Runes, bled from beneath their feet, covering the room.

Sarutobi Hiruzen leaned forward, eyes glinting like steel as he demanded in a very strong tone, "Expound."

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A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics.

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON, I FOLLOW BACK.
I worked my ass off on this chapter to edit it. SO MANY MISTAKES! UGH!

-We see a shit ton of people. I'm changing things around. Some stuff isn't specified in the manga so I took liberties. Don't tell me I wasn't thinking things through, I already have several chapters ahead planned and what I want to happen. I know what I'm doing. Besides, more of this story is posted on FF.net.

-ALSO, I HAVE A LARGE VOCABULARY NATURALLY. I WILL NOT BE DUMBING MY WORKS DOWN JUST SO PEOPLE CAN COMPREHEND MY MEANINGS. IF YOU ARE READING THIS, THEN YOU HAVE INTERNET ACCESS. YOU CAN LOOK UP DEFINITIONS IF YOU AREN'T SURE. I HAVE USED THE INTERNET ON VARIOUS TABLETS, CELLPHONES, AN LAPTOPS, SO DON'T GIVE ME EXCUSES ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE.

-Valerian is used in Sleeping Draughts and a few other sleep related potions! That's my excuse.

-lucife56 made fanart for this chapter! Links below.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON, I FOLLOW BACK.

The amazing @lucife56 on Tumblr made THIS FANART of the end scene!

The Cold Never Bothered Her Anyway on AO3 by lucife56.

Hari blinked because the gentle old man persona that the Hokage usually affected, was shattered seconds after she spoke. Suddenly, he seemed to be so much more threatening than his calm, perceived frailty belied.

His eyes were like liquid steel, beseeching her to lay out all of her secrets on his desk.

She crossed her legs and sniffed, much like Lady Malfoy did on occasion. "Ichigo is a seven year old boy. I was checking on the children on the fifth floor, when he came out of nowhere, warning me that 'The Man' had returned. Apparently, this man," she gestured to Danzo, "-comes by every few
months with his guard. He had some sort of agreement with the old witch before me, where he would take the troublesome children off her hands and train them up to be ‘self-sufficient shinobi’.

"He said that. Exactly that?"

"Yes," nodded the young witch.

"Are you positive?" the old ninja asked.

"Yes. When I asked why he'd need children at all, he said he trains those who 'show skill' and help them enter his 'forces'."

The man groaned, sitting back. He lost all of his threatening appearance then, eyes straying to the two unconscious forms.

"How did you possibly drug Danzo?" he inquired, brow cocked in interest.

"Valerian Root," the witch answered. Technically, the potion used quite a bit of Valerian Root and sprigs among other things, but that was one of the main ingredients.

"Some children have trouble sleeping and sometimes you cannot give them medication because they aren't old enough. My godfather used to give me tea laced with Valerian Root, Passion Flower, and Chamomile. Valerian Root when smoked can be a strong sedative. As such, I've been purchasing it from the Yamanaka Flower Shop, along with the Passion Flower, in order to make the tea. I simply added an abnormal amount to his cup."

She smiled, proud that she actually was able to make a feasible excuse. Valerian Root _was_ used in a lot of Sleeping Potions. Valerian was also a home remedy sort of medicine. Any medic of experience would know about it. And she did buy her plants from Ino's shop!

"My abilities mostly rely on visual link to my subject." Which was actually very true. "Protecting myself against ninja is bloody difficult because you all move so fast!" she griped. Seriously, it wasn't fair. "As such, a man who inspires such trepidation within children, isn't good in my book. So I drugged him. The sluggishness to his movements would aid me in capturing him if he didn't accept my refusal. I would have drugged the other one, but his mask never moved."

"Hari-hime, Shimura Danzo is a rather important man to the village and what you are saying would mean he has committed treason. I will need to bring in Inoichi to verify your words. Are you prepared for an evaluation?"

"Sure," she agreed, not scared in the least. She didn't have anything to hide about this because compulsions weren't visible to the human eyes and the memory viewing technique that Inoichi used, which Death had shaped as a Pensieve in her mind, actually worked the same way. It was like falling into the memory, so they wouldn't be able to hear her thoughts at all.

"Get me Yamanaka Inoichi!"

Iinochi sighed as he regaled the final details of the memory to the sovereign of his village. Hokage-sama was looking pissed.

Ne was supposed to have been disbanded years ago and while there had been doubts that Danzo had actually done as ordered, his foolish reveal to Potta-hime had just gotten him in loads of trouble. Treason of the highest degree even.
Danzo was still unconscious and with this proof against him, T&I were now going to have to check everything about him. And his 'guard' was also going to be put through rigorous testing because this kind of situation was not in any way, good.

There could be hundreds of shinobi who could add to the strength of their village and instead, they were hiding in the shadows, doing nothing useful until Danzo felt the need to interfere with something vital.

The Ne operative had a seal on his tongue, strengthening the belief of his affiliation.

Not only did this put Danzo into question, but every action he'd taken in the past fifteen years would also have to be recalled. Anything he'd been involved in must be studied. This also put the other councilors in a negative light because they tended to side with him too much. What did they know? What were they keeping secret from their Hokage?

He cast an apologetic look in the young princess' direction. She seemed to be caught up in all the drama these days. Perhaps she had been cursed with bad luck. It would at least make some sense as to why she was being dragged into everything.

At least her life was interesting!

Kakashi was feeling all sorts of annoyed at the moment. His Genin finally earned their first C-Rank mission and what happens? Their client ends up lying about the details, getting them all into a big quandary.

Gozu and Meizu were the Demon Brothers of Kirigakure. They were partners with Momochi Zabuza. They had attacked Team Seven, with the intent of doing away with Tazuna, the bridge builder. Meaning, their target hadn't been the ninja at all. Now why would a lonely, old bridge builder have assassins after his head?

So if the two were after the old man, then it was safe to assume their boss would be as well, if they didn't return with the man's head any time soon. Team Seven was currently four days from Konoha, at ninja speed. Returning to the village would take almost eight to ten days if they went at civilian speed.

Zabuza could be out there at this very moment, so the chances of them getting back to safety were very slim.

So… they might as well continue on. Zabuza and Kakashi were both Jonin level shinobi. His Genin could protect Tazuna if they were confronted by the traitorous ninja. He should be able to handle the man with minimal injury attained.

Still, the preponderance of the confrontation had yet to come, and Kakashi could not relax from here on out.

Ino was taking everything much better than he thought she would. She was much quieter than normal but it wasn't like he didn't expect this kind of reaction. Ino's clan would have no doubt mentally prepared her for this sort of happenstance, so she was handling it much better than anyone else Kakashi had ever encountered.

The blonde was seated before their small campfire, looking up at Naruto as he practiced the katas she'd forced him into, while clinging to a tree.

Yes, Tree Climbing had only begun the week before their mission had been given to them. Ino was
the only one who knew it. Given the fact that she wasn't an orphan and actually had a clan of people to aid her in her training, it really wasn't that shocking. She'd been able to explain it to her teammates and ordered them to learn it within a day.

Sasuke - with his better chakra control - obviously got the hang of it fairly quickly. Naruto ended up using almost one hundred Kage Bunshin to get the same amount of experience that Sasuke had got. Still, both boys managed it within the three hours it took for them to wait for Kakashi to show his face that morning.

Kakashi had been watching the entire time and decided that since his Genin were pretty good at picking up skills - Naruto's Kage Bunshin may be cheating but it at least worked for him - he'd teach them even further. So, he made it mandatory training for them to spar while keeping themselves connected to the tree.

Naruto took it very seriously, while Sasuke was practicing other skills, such as using only his hands, or his head. Ino was allowed to skive off for a while in order for her emotions to right themselves.

Perhaps… they should start Water Walking to get their minds centered.

"Alright, my kawaii little Genin, we're going to start water training!"

"Cool! -ttebayo!"

Naruto cackled to himself. His plan was genius! No one ever thought to do stuff like this with their Kage Bunshin - probably because most people couldn't do the Kage Bunshin - but still, he was awesome!

Kakashi-sensei said that they would most likely be approached by some more ninja on their mission that managed to get better as time passed. Naruto liked to Henge his Bunshin and carry them around. He'd been working with them and how to use the Henge'd materials in a fight.

Naruto rubbed his hands together gleefully, distributing his large hoard of fake weapons to his teammates.

"How do these work exactly?" Sasuke-teme asked, flipping a shuriken over. He tested the edge of one, only to come away with a small cut that released a tiny drop of blood. "They're like real weapons. Henge is mostly an illusion though because it takes a lot of concentration for someone to maintain the form they've chosen while still interacting with the world around them. If I transformed into a squirrel, I'd be exhausted within seconds because the mental strain from forcing my chakra to maintain the same coating over my body, would be disastrous. Chakra fades after awhile, which is why Henge can be difficult to use for those with poor control and lousy reserves."

Naruto grinned, "Hee hee! I have a hell of a lot of chakra! It's why I can't make a normal Bunshin. I don't really know about your Henge, but I've turned myself into all kinds of things before. The rolling pin was the hardest because I was nearly suffocated by the dough I was being used to roll out."

"Wait!" Ino interjected, hand raised. "You can turn into a rolling pin and still breathe? Like, you don't hold your breath until the transformation ends?"

"No, I breathe just fine," the blond shrugged. "I can see, smell, hear, taste, and feel stuff. Of course if the area where my mouth or nose is, is blocked, I won't be able to breathe."

Naruto stared for a moment as Ino and Sasuke shared a look. Kakashi-sensei's head was tilted in their
"That can be a really useful skill," Sasuke finally said, brow furrowed.

"Indeed, my kawaii little Genin. Perhaps we should do some training with Naruto's spammed Kage Bunshin," the Jonin said cheerfully, snapping his book shut.

The three Genin shivered, because when their sensei actually closed his book and put it away, it meant that he was taking whatever training they were about to do, seriously. The look in his eye was enough to frighten them.

"So if I were to use one of these shuriken, they'd be able to tell when it was time to dispel their Henge because they can see what is going on?" the older ninja continued, grabbing a weapon from the pile Naruto had dumped in the center of their formation.

"Yeah."

"Alright then. Let's get to training. This will be good for team combinations."

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Hari looked at the map on the wall. Naruto was currently in the company of Uchiha Sasuke, Yamanaka Ino, Hatake Kakashi (twat), Tazuna, Yuki Haku, and Momochi Zabuza. The little blurbs and feet were moving at intense speeds.

Naruto's little bubble charged at the Zabuza one, only to be thrown away. Ino and Sasuke were standing in front of the Tazuna fellow, while two blurs of Zabuza stood in different places. One was on some water, right beside Kakashi, and the other was the one that deflected Naruto's attack.

Placing the Elder Wand to the parchment, she inhaled deeply and forced her magic into the already magical item.

Crystal Balls or Orbs, usually required an amount of Seer skill to use. The map was of similar creation to an Orb, meaning if she wanted to See what was going on around the focal of the map - in this case, Naruto - she'd need to be a Seer.

Fortunately, she could skip around that particular requirement by having tied her aura to Naruto's soul. All she needed to do was…

"Death."

"I thought you didn't want to merge."

She sighed, knowing that she hated it but also knowing that it was important.

She, as the Mistress of Death, could utilize Death at any time. A merge would allow her to access Death's abilities for the time frame of their merging. Death was omniscient. As such, she could tap into their ability with her magic and make use of the 'All-Seeing-Eye'. Death could be anywhere and everywhere at once. Death could also see anywhere and everywhere at once.

Hari was going to use Death's strange sort of Vision to See through the map, using her link to Naruto's soul for forge the full connection.

"Just please merge with me?"

"As you wish."
As a being without any life, Death was always so cold. She despised the unearthly chill that accompanied a merge, which was one of the reasons why she hated doing it so much. Goose-flesh peppered along her arms and the back of her neck, making her uncomfortable.

She cracked her neck and breathed deeply, feeling the air seem to freeze as it entered her body.

The map shifted, all the colors of the landscape blending together and becoming foggy. With a small tinkle of a bell, the scene was revealed to the witch.

Naruto was in the middle of creating an arse load of clones, some of which surrounded their client. Ino broke away from her protective stance and pocketed her kunai. She then focused on the man standing on the water beside Kakashi, who seemed to be trapped in a swirling bubble of water that was connected to the foreign man.

Her hands formed an odd sign as she yelled, "Shintenshin no Jutsu!"

"Good job, Ino!" one of the Narutos yelled, whipping his arm out and unleashing a barrage of weapons on the clone of the unknown ninja.

Said ninja twirled his large sword around, knocking everything away. The weapons landed in the water, floating at the feet of the Zabuza man.

Kakashi pounded against the water prison he was trapped in. The man who held him prisoner, was twitching and shaking his head, his arm jerking in an out of the water ball.

"Get the Yamanaka brat!" he yelled, voice hoarse. "She's trying to take over my body!"

"And she succeeded!" yelled an army of Narutos that popped out of the water and latched into the man. They began pulling on him and one even landed a good hit in the gut with a kunai.

"Damn!"

The enemy disappeared in a puff of smoke, causing the Narutos to fall into the water and the ball keeping Kakashi hostage, to sink into the lake.

"Well done, Naruto, Sasuke, Ino. Your teamwork is something to behold. I'm impressed. Now let me handle this."

The three Genin all returned to their guarding positions around Tazuna as Kakashi faced off against the man and his clone.

"Kage Bunshin no Jutsu."

The Kakashi clone ran off to purse the other man's clone, leaving the original men to fight. Kakashi disappeared from view, only to reappear beside the other man, kunai pressed against a large sword.

"I'm not scared of your Sharingan, Kakashi."

"You should be," the Konoha shinobi said, voice deep and threatening.

The two broke away from each other, already moving their hands in complex patterns too fast for her to keep up with.

"Suiton: Suiryuuudan no Jutsu!"

The water surrounding both rose into the shape of two dragons. The dragons let out a simultaneous
roar as they clashed. The resulting backlash knocked the Genin and their client off their feet, the water of the lake dispersing among the area, revealing two shinobi in a deadlock, weapon to weapon.

"Heh, you're pretty good," growled the eyebrowless shinobi.

"I know," Kakashi said simply, making the other and twitch in obvious annoyance.

They jumped apart, standing in mirroring positions, hands pointed to the sky in preparation for their next attack.

"Stop copying me!" the man yelled, sounding like an irate toddler who was about to throw a right tantr.

"It's not copying if I already know what you're going to do!" Kakashi said, hands flying at a speed she once again couldn't see. "Suiton: Daibakufu no Jutsu!"

The water - which had been swirling almost harmlessly around the silver haired man's feet - leapt at his shout and in a spinning vortex parallel to the ground, attacked the enemy shinobi. The man was taken by surprise at the speed of the undertaking, which was a mere three seconds altogether. He was batted away like an insignificant insect, crushed against a tree as the water pounded against him relentlessly.

Hari couldn't stop the impressed whistle from slipping between her lips. Kakashi was pretty cool. She'd simply thought of him as a socially stunted dweeb who was all brawn. One had to be strong to make it to Jonin level after all.

No, he seemed to know how to play the game very well. Not only were his quips good, but his fighting and teaching were well.

Also… her eyes lingered on his soaked trousers, which were sticking to his body. He had a nice arse.

"Please don't do this while we're merged."

"Shut up!" she hissed, watching as another ninja came out of nowhere and Naruto got huffy with them, only to be held back by Kakashi. The ninja bowed, spoke a few words, then collected the fallen shinobi and disappeared from sight.

"Zabuza is no longer our problem, team," Kakashi said, shifting his hitai-ate over his eye, which she had only just noticed was red. Not Voldemort red either. More like blood. The weird design had her curious, but she was more interested in the fact that he kept said eye covered all the time.

She'd wondered about that. She'd assumed he'd lost his eyes by being careless. He seemed pretty young after all. But something was special about that eye, requiring him to hide it and make people think he was weaker.

It was a sound strategy.

"Alright team, we still need to escort Tazuna-san home and watch as he finishes the bridge!"

"Right!" the Genin nodded.

Hari gaped when Kakashi collapsed, ceasing all movement. The three mini-ninjas began to panic, Ino at the forefront as she started slapping the unconscious man.

"Death, what happened?"
"The Sharingan implanted in his left eye wasn't originally his. His body wasn't born to inhabit it and as such, he is missing certain requirements in his chakra network. Because it is a foreign object in his body, it drains him of his energy quickly."

"Why use it then?"

Seriously, it seemed kind of stupid if it conked him out so quickly.

"Hatake would have been able to handle Zabuza without issue if they were the only two in the area. He wouldn't have needed the Sharingan, but he was trying to finish the battle off quickly to avoid damage to his team and their client.

Before our merging, he'd just told his Genin that he would never let his comrades die, and so he unleashed his greatest weapon in hopes of ending it all quickly."

Hari frowned. Team Seven was continuing on, with two Naruto Bunshin carrying the fallen team leader.

She pulled away from the map and released the magic, allowing Death to split away from her, leaving her to sway in place at the suddenness of being torn in two. It was unpleasant. Especially since her head was now swimming with new information and visions she didn't want to see.

Kakashi, a girl, and a both in a cave. A boulder.

She shook herself.

"This isn't a C-Rank mission, is it?" she asked, already dreading the answer.

"Not at all."

She sighed, almost reluctant to hear more, but knowing that she needed to know.

"Why did they get attacked by that man?"

"He's been hired to kill the client."

"He's been?" Hari repeated. Her eyes bugged out in realization, "He's still alive?! Even after the needles in the neck thing?!"

"Indeed. The man who hired him has placed all of Nami no Kuni in fear, over taxing the people, allowing his men to beat and humiliate them, and generally being a nuisance. Your little brother figure has just basically waltzed into a mini civil war that has almost been won."

Hari was speechless. Naruto's new mission was supposed to be easy. She'd read the mission log. The entire board described what kind of mission went in what ranking. This kind of mission was for journeyman ninja (Chunin) and up.

"The bridge builder lied about the mission details because the country is so poor they can't afford a higher ranked mission."

Ugh!

"Who is this tyrant that is terrorizing a whole nation of people?"

"Gato."
Sasuke sighed as he and Ino returned to the house, swapping places with Naruto, who was actually creating dozens of Kage Bunshin in order to watch the house from every direction.

Upon Ino's order - as team leader when sensei was incapacitated, she made the moves - they were to swap out every six hours.

Tsunami and Tazuna had been rather welcoming and thankful, though the little brat of their's could use a mouth full of soap. Generally, Sasuke did not like people, and children he despised most. So loud and irritating, demanding any and all attention.

Much like the dobe, but he knew the dobe personally. He could understand the loneliness of being an orphan. Naruto was loud and brash in an attempt to gain the attention he never got from a family. Naruto had a reason. Naruto was annoying, but Sasuke didn't hate him.

Naruto wasn't like Inari, thank the Kami. Naruto didn't let his bad experiences and the results in the terrible hand he'd been dealt, turn him into a little brat. Hell, Sasuke wasn't social at all, nor was he kind or positive, but he didn't shove such negativity down people's' throats. He didn't talk, period!

"Sensei awake yet?" Ino asked, nervously looking at the Jonin who had shocked all of them with his performance the day prior.

The blond shook his head. "Nah, sensei is out cold."

The girl groaned, glaring at the hard wood flooring of the small house they were currently occupying.

Ino had changed since the beginning of the mission. Ino had always been boisterous and a bit of a nag, but when she wasn't focusing all of that on Sasuke in terms of her annoying crush, she was a very useful teammate. So much so, that Sasuke had no problem with allowing her to lead.

She simply had more training than he or Naruto. It was because she had living family to learn from, whereas Sasuke had only scrolls and Naruto had no one.

Also, Sasuke had noticed Ino becoming more subtle in her crush toward him. It was around the time that the dobe began changing too. So he'd chalk it up to 'Hari-chan', the dobe's sister. Gone were the requests for a date. No more love notes. He still caught the doe eyes and the fluttered eyelashes, but Ino had resolutely kept her fangirl tendencies to herself, thankfully.

So while she seemed to have matured over the past few months, nothing beat this mission.

She'd killed. Of all the people to kill first in their team, he didn't think it would be her.

She'd been different after it too. And now the same look was on her face from after she'd stabbed the enemy.

"I-" she looked away, taking a deep breath. "I think I should learn some medical Ninjutsu," she finally said.

"Why?" Naruto asked, frowning.

"I have the best chakra control out of all of us," she reasoned. "No offense, but I wouldn't trust you to heal me. And Sasuke-kun, well, he'd be better, but only if he had his Sharingan."

Sasuke's grip on his pants tightened at the mention of his clan's revered Doujutsu. He hadn't
managed to activate it yet which was setting him behind.

"He could gauge the amount necessary for it, but even when he gets it, he can't use it all the time. I'm the best option. What if one of us gets hurt? Someone needs medical training."

"Well yeah, but what if you get hurt? Who will do it then?" came a very logical question from Naruto, who had folded his arms as he pondered her words.

Surprisingly very profound for the dobe.

"Perhaps," began the Uchiha, "-we could all take a few courses in Ninja First Aid, and if Ino pursues that path further, than so be it."

The other two nodded thoughtfully at his suggestion and he tried not to preen. It was very un-Uchiha-like to do so.

"How sweet!" a gruff voice crooned. "My kawaii little Genin are all working together. But we have training to do, so chop chop."

Hari couldn't really get it in her to pay much attention to the proceeding despite the fact that every single one of her kids were being brought before the gathered councils one at a time - and not even within hearing distance of the others to prove their experiences with Danzo to be true - in order to give testimony of their interaction with the man.

They'd gone from youngest to eldest and finally, Mikoko was the last. She was a thirteen year old in her last year at the Academy.

Hari had to attend the trial because she'd brought the situation into light and it was her charges that were affected by Danzo's actions.

She'd been too busy worrying about Naruto and what was happening on his mission to think of other things, but…

"Mikoko, orphan of unknown origin, please state your experience with Shimura Danzo," said Yamanaka Inoichi, who was the 'questioner' for the trial. The Hokage presided over everything, but it was best for the kids not to be confronted with the Hokage for fear of awe and hero worship clouding their minds.

Mikoko was a no nonsense sort of girl. She wasn't the nicest, but it wasn't because she was trying to be mean. She was simply… a lot like Sasuke was. She didn't go out of her way to be near anyone and simply stared when people got too close.

She drew a deep breath and gave a long suffering sigh.

"Yamanaka-sama, The Man has come to the orphanage a total of thirty-three times during my time as an orphan, making a trip every three months. Each time, he has taken someone whom the former matron claimed was a terrible child. In case anyone is not yet aware, the woman was found to be a liar, a thief, a fraud, a child abuser, and an all around deviant. Her words were full of falsity."

The girl pushed a stray lock of brown hair behind her ear.

"She would bring him and his guard to the room and point out the child that has 'misbehaved most'. None of us are bad children. In fact, there has never been an incident warranting punishment since I've lived in the orphanage. No stealing food, or back talk, no rule breaking. She simply allowed him
to take innocent children away. In return, he would give her an envelope that was filled with Ryo notes."

She sniffed, jaw tightening. "Often times, the children knew they had not misbehaved and fought the guard. We have been witness to alarming actions such as electrocuting the children with low level Raiton Jutsu, and tying some up with ninja wire."

Hari growled and looked around, finding many eyes filled with sympathy. The civilian side looked horrified, the shinobi side were furious.

Good. She didn't want this tosspot to continue on and she thanked Merlin and Morgana that Mikoko was so anal retentive about memorization.

"He always takes children between the ages of four and six and he never brings them back. We'd all been told that they were to receive 'punishment' for bad behavior, but it became apparent that they weren't going to return. The Man has become a sort of scary story told to new children in hopes of making them behave. I managed to avoid his interest three times in my earlier days at the orphanage. Once those of us reach the age he doesn't want, we are free of him."

One of the Hokage's personal councilors spoke up then. Hari didn't remember her name and didn't really care to. She was simply an unpleasant, old woman.

"Why is it that none of you spoke out against him then? Why did you not go for help?"

Mikoko shrugged, "Because no one in the village cared about us. We were left in the hands of a woman who abused us and instead of looking into our problems, the ninja who came by for yearly inspections would simply greet her at the door, take her lies as face value, and leave. We weren't allowed outside and she was obsessive over counting us to make sure we were all there. I said that no one ever broke a rule and it's truth. Why risk ourselves when it was obvious no one actually thought we mattered? Who cares about nameless, little orphans after all?"

Hari had been severely displeased with the amount of neglect her kids had received. And the fact that the problems at the orphanage had gone on for so long without anyone taking notice had been a hard point for her. She could have had a bunch of Tom Riddles on her hands! No one should grow up like he had to.

It was pleasing to see Mikoko's candor and how she was willing to point out the village's mistakes, in front of the assembled councils and the Hokage. Danzo's conniving ways being bared for the world to see was simply breathtaking. The village had been indolent in regards to their orphans and it was time someone besides an outsider, stood up for them.

The myriad of emotions that passed over the woman's face were priceless! Mikoko was going to get her favorite food for this!

"Is there anything else you can remember?" Inoichi asked, getting the trial back on course.

"I've heard he and the former matron discuss something called Ne. Other than that, I've got nothing more to add."

Ne?

Just because Konohagakure was the 'village hidden in the leaves' didn't mean they needed all the tree based puns.

Merlin these people needed originality.
"So, have you heard about the trial against Danzo?"

Asuma blew a puff of smoke, smirking good naturedly. "Who hasn't heard about it?"

Genma shrugged. "I wouldn't know, seeing as it's been going on for the last two weeks and I've only just heard about it."

Kurenai tsked, shaking her head in disappointment. "You need to train your info gathering skills then."

The senbon lover glowered, "You're friends with the woman who started all this shit, of course you would know ahead of time."

Kurenai's unabashed smile was enough for him to spit a senbon at her head. She deflected it with a well placed kunai.

The kunoichi sighed though, revealing her tense frame and hard lines. "I'm a bit perturbed because the advisers have been too obsequious throughout the current duration of the trial."

They nodded their understanding.

"I just can't help but feel that Danzo will get off despite all the evidence, testimonies, and corroborations accrued."

"The civilian council are rife with money grabbers and panhandlers. It wouldn't surprise me if he buys them out," groused Asuma.

No one with a brain they bothered to use, really liked Danzo. The man viewed the world with pedantic rapacity, only seeing the worth people could have in accordance to his plans. It was an archaic way of thinking that was meant to stay in the warring states era.

Danzo was trying too hard.

"Kakashi is going to be so shocked when he returns."

True.

Naruto glanced up from where he was guarding the bridge - he and his plethora of Kage Bunshin were totally being the best guards there ever were! - to see Kakashi-sensei hobbling on over.

A look at his watch showed that the man was an hour late for switch off.

"You're late, sensei," he said calmly, knowing the man already knew but feeling the need to vent his frustration through his words. He had training to do. Teme had finally consented to a one on one spar and Naruto wasn't going to miss that for the world!

"Mah, there was a sea turtle drowning and I couldn't just let it suffer."

It was so quiet, Naruto could still hear the crickets.

"That was the worst excuse you've ever told, sensei. Even I know it would take hours for a sea turtle to lose it's breath and even then it would just swim up for air."

"You cannot ignore the plights of the fallen, Naruto. Now… I was under the impression that you and
a certain Uchiha are going to be sparring today."

The blond launched himself off the tower he'd been sitting on. "On it, sensei! See ya later!"

Nami no Kuni wasn't too large. It was just an island after all. Thankfully, Tazuna didn't live too far away from the bridge which let Naruto get back to the house quicker.

Sasuke was sitting on the veranda, leg pulled up to his chest as his arm rested atop it. He spared a smirk for Naruto and taunted, "You have trouble remembering the way, dobe?"

"Nah, teme. Though I'm surprised you managed get the energy to wake up in your advanced age."

Onyx eyes narrowed in challenge.

"Come, dobe."

The brunet vanished in a flash of blue and white, a large blur of orange taking after him.

Haku didn't really know what to expect from Gato, but it wasn't going to be anything pleasant. He wasn't naive. He knew the kind of business the 'man' - and he used that term lightly - involved himself in and Haku didn't want he or Zabuza-sama to be a part of any of it.

But he had the money that Haku's master needed in order to see his dreams realized. So much money for one life. Haku did not agree with the idea of it and did not wish to kill anyone, but he would do anything for the man who gave him a purpose once again.

"Damn, those Konoha brats are more shocking than I gave them credit for," the rogue Jonin hissed as he twitched impatiently on his bed.

His lack of patience wasn't anything new. Haku had gotten used to it over the years.

"They had a Yamanaka, an Uchiha, and whoever that blond brat was. His chakra levels were ridiculous for a Genin! Fucking Kage Bunshin like they were candy!"

Haku dutifully nodded along with his master's complaints. Rarely was he shown up in battle if ever. He needed a sympathetic ear in these moments.

"This has become personal. Kakashi and his brats have signed up for the hell I'm going to give them!"

Zabuza-sama was a bit rambunctious at the moment, but everything would work out in the end. Haku had faith.

Asuma whistled as Kurenai's friend Potta Hari ran through a long list of skills and abilities that she was going to teach his Genin because one day they'd get some kind of mission that would need the requirements and it would be best to learn now instead of 'cramming' later.

"Honestly, how bad could it really get?!" Kiba asked loudly, his carefree attitude seeming to get on the young hime's nerves.

"It can get pretty bad when you're confronted with a spider the size of a house!" she growled, making two of the three boys blanch instantly. "Or how about when you find out said spider is only a baby and the adult is much bigger? Or maybe a snake large enough to wrap around your house a few times. It can get pretty damn bad, kids."
She had them seated on the ground while she herself, was using a large bean bag that she had lugged there. Her legs were folded and she was lecturing the three boys on how to handle certain creatures if they ever run into them.

Asuma had to admit, she had a pretty deep knowledge of animals.

"Kiba-san, as a person who handles canines on a daily basis, would you say you know a lot of them and their habits?"

"Yeah?"

"Shino-san, you would know quite a lot about insects and their habits, yes?"

"Indeed," came the monotone response.

"And Shikamaru-san, your family deals with deer, so you should be aware of their needs."

"...Yes."

"So it's great you all know individual information, but sharing with your teammates is crucial. What if one of you is put on a different team for a while or maybe gets a different mission when you move up in rank and you could have known something like this had you only communicated with your teammates."

She had a point and judging by all of their faces, they'd picked up on it too.

"So I know about a lot of this stuff and it's only right that I pass this information into all of you. I've already lectured Kurenai's team in this and when Koinu-kun and his team return, I'll be talking to them as well."

The young Sarutobi snorted because her calling Kakashi 'Koinu-kun' was gold.

"Mendokusei," Shikamaru groaned, falling back until he could watch the sky at his leisure.

"You know, if you aren't going to take this info gathering seriously, you can always go catch Tora to learn how to handle felines."

The three boys sat upright in alarm because no one wanted to do that mission. Potta-hime was smiling evilly at them.

"That's more like it."

Kakashi rummaged through his pouch, hunting for his new Icha Icha. His team had been doing really well in their training and he'd been a little bored, sitting back and watching them spar so much.

The bridge was nearing its completion and he knew that any day now, Zabuza and his little friend would be attacking them in revenge. He just had to remain alert at all times.

"Hey, I just met a really pretty boy!"

Ino, Sasuke, and Kakashi all looked over to see Naruto appearing from the bushes. He was covered in leaves and was yawning something fierce.

"A.. pretty… boy?" Ino repeated, casting a glance at Sasuke before returning her attention to her fellow blond.
"Yeah, I actually thought he was a girl at first and I called him 'nee-chan' like five times before he told me he was a boy. He was almost prettier than Hari-nee-chan," said Naruto, voice full of wonder and confusion.

The Yamanaka heiress gasped in horror, "How could you say such a terrible thing?!"

Naruto paled "N-no! He wasn't prettier than her. I only said 'almost prettier' so it's not the same thing!"

"Hari-chan is one of a kind and I have never seen anyone who resembled her brand of beauty," Ino huffed. "She is more gorgeous than I am and I refuse to believe that this random boy beat her or me!"

Kakashi flipped a page as he had to slightly concur. Neko-chan was beautiful in a not too obvious way. She had large eyes of an unnatural shade of green. Her upper lip had a sharp, bow shape while the bottom was plump and only a little too big. She was pale like death with long, black lashes that matched her messy hair. Her jaw was oval shaped with barely a point or any obvious angles.

She had a different look about her but it wasn't ugly. She was very pretty actually. He might even say more attractive than Kushina-chan had been.

Blink.

Where… had that come from?

Had Kakashi just sat there and contemplated a woman's beauty? Especially in comparison to his dead sensei's wife? What was wrong with him?

"Neh, Kakashi-sensei, you think Hari-chan is pretty, don't you?"

He looked up, shaking himself from his mild panic attack because he had the attention of three Genin who all seemed to be waiting for something.

What to do when people have expectations of you?

Dash them thoroughly.

"Did you say something?"

"AAAARGGHH!!"

It was good to be the sensei.

"You might as well just ask, you've been thinking about it for the past four days."

Hari sneered at Death, who was standing in their favorite corner in the kitchen. She was more annoyed about the fact that they were right. She had been thinking about it a lot recently.

But Naruto had been gone for nearly two months already! The map revealed that he was indeed alive and well mostly - if his ridiculous training wasn't enough to drop him - but she just wasn't convinced.

So she had been toying with the idea of asking Death to take her to Nami no Kuni so that she could verify the situation on her own and deal with it that way.

It'd be like a Raid. When she'd been an Auror for like seven months, she'd been on enough Raids, hunting down Death Eaters who had escaped from the Battle of Hogwarts. Before the first betrayal,
Anyway, she knew the procedure of scouting out possible dangerous locations. She also knew how to take out her enemies swiftly. Hit Wizards usually hid within the Auror forces in hopes of getting good prey so to speak. Hari had learned a thing or two about swift assassination with a wand.

"You know that if you kill their opponent, you won't be helping them learn."

"How? If I get rid of the problem, they're guaranteed a safe return to the village."

"Never tempt Fate," scolded Death, sounding a bit agitated. "As the boy and his team, they will encounter missions where they will face opposition above their level. You cannot always be there to kill the enemy for them. They need to learn and grow on their own in order to mature."

The witch pouted because she hated sitting by doing nothing while her little brother figure was out there in the presence of a really deadly shinobi with designs on ending his life.

"I don't believe in fate," she snorted.

"Fate is real."

She stared. "No it isn't."

Death must have decided that the ruse was up because they admitted, "You are correct, fate does not exist in truth. It was simply something a young god once bragged about in hopes of terrifying a group of people in serving him. He succeeded partially."

"Which god?" she asked, curious despite herself.

"Jashin."

"Never heard of him. Anyway, why can't I handle this one problem?"

Death was silent for several moments, leaving Hari to wonder if they were going to answer her at all. Finally, she did receive an answer and she ended up liking it much better than she thought she would.

"Killing the ninja would not be beneficial to you… however, killing the one who hired the ninja, would bring you much wealth."

"I don't really care about the wealth, but do you think if I off this guy and leave the proper amount of money with the ninja, then maybe they won't attack Team Seven?"

"Who knows? I could always kill him for you if you don't wish to make the trip."

"Nice try," the woman grinned.

Hari was already in the flat. Someone had seen her go in, so they'd have to leave from there. She'd be gone maybe an hour.

"Death, take me to Nami no Kuni, please."

So the hideout of this Gato man was really ostentatious. The blighter was rather full of himself,
feeling safe enough to live on the same island as the people whose lives he was ruining.

From what she could see, there were a bunch of men all over the place, each holding a sword. No one looked like a ninja.

"None of them are ninja."

*Oh. You could have said something!* she thought scathingly.

Death shrugged, their great, cloaked shoulders twitching only slightly. *Gato does not respect ninja and greatly underestimates them. Also, he doesn't plan to pay the ninja he has hired. Instead, he's hired a group of vandals and ruffians to kill his mercenary when the man is too weak after fighting Team Seven."

She scowled at the revelation. This Gato sounded like more of an arse every time Death opened their mouth.

Well, if the men weren't ninja, then they probably wouldn't be able to hear her coming. If she managed to sneak 'exceedingly whisper quiet' according to Anko, who was a trained shinobi, then they couldn't possibly tell the difference between her and the rustling of the leaves in the trees. Thank Merlin it was a windy day. A bloody. windy. day.

She cast a small warming charm on her clothes and steeled her nerves. Fortress of unknown foes. Thirty-seven visible opponents, all armed. Possibly several more inside. She didn't really want to kill them all, but what if they found out their cash cow was gone? Would they take their anger out on the villagers of this little, impoverished nation?

One time during her training to be an Auror, she'd learned that the lives of the many are more important than the lives of the few. It was a tough lesson drilled into her by none other than Shacklebolt of all people, but she ended up having to deal with it.

As a former Auror himself, he understood the duty. But when he was finally relieved of his position as temporary Minister, the new Minister did not agree with the duty.

It was that situation which lead to her being betrayed for the first time. Her actions on the field had been reviewed while she rested in St. Mungo's from being hit with a stray curse. Which led to her Healer squealing her information for all of Magical Britain to hear.

She shook herself back into the present.

There were more important things at hand than negative, reminiscent thoughts.

She tiptoed along the tree line, using the darkening sky to her advantage. She had chosen to wear dark colors today, which was good because the forest was eerie and there was a small fog building as twilight began to set.

There was a gap in the guard of the one entrance. Now if only she could tiptoe quick enough. She could be deadly quiet when actually trying, so this should work just fine.

"Why are tiptoeing when you have an Invisibility Cloak and can use a silencing and disillusionment charm?"

She froze, vexation lacing through her body.

*You couldn't have said that ten minutes ago when I started this?!*
"You are your own person. I should not have to do all the thinking for you."

*You just enjoy watching me flounder around, don't you?* she asked peevishly.

No answer, but she knew the truth.

Holding out her hand, she sent a mental thanks when the Invisibility Cloak appeared. She slipped it on and cast the appropriate charms herself. Nodding now that she had a near fool proof plan, she continued on her way, stalking through the trees and into the open. No one took notice because they couldn't see anything there.

She influenced one of the men to go inside the building, conveniently allowing her to slip in behind him.

There was a large room ahead of her, filled with all manner of splendorous artifacts most likely of exorbitant origins. She was really hating this guy and his... his... *fancitivity*.

"That isn't a word."

*Who asked you?!*

Lifting the wand, she non-verbally cast, *Point Me, Gato*.

The wand sharply pointed in a particular direction and she grinned going that way.

The task wasn't as quick as she thought it would be. It turned out that Death decided to inform her at the very last moment, that the man ran some really important company and had a lot of workers and a lot of money. If he died, someone else would take the mantle and continue his job and shady activities.

*Will you please stop holding back information!*

"*You need to start asking for the information.*"

She grumbled, knowing that they were right.

*Is there anything else I should know then?*

"*The apprentice of the ninja he hired is about a mile away and intends to meet with Gato to discuss a time extension.***"

Well damn.

*Should I kill Gato then?*

"*Should you?***"

*You're the all-knowing being, help me!*

Death sighed, "*Simply cast the Imperius on him and order him about. Once he's done what you wish, end him however you please.*"

That was a sound idea. She wished she could take credit for it.

*I'm going to hell,* she thought to herself as she followed Death's idea, controlling probably one of the
most greedy bastards to have ever been spawned.

"There is no hell. There is Limbo and the AfterLife."

She blinked. *I'm losing some chances at rewards in the AfterLife then.*

"Everyone starts out with the same things in the AfterLife. For every deed committed, that is considered unforgivable by the Wholesome, a person's 'rewards' are removed. If that person has not landed themselves in Limbo like Tom Riddle and several others have, they will find the AfterLife to be a boring place."

*When I'm done with this, we seriously need to talk about what you know.*

"Indeed, Mistress."

Knock. Knock.

"Come in!" the Imperiused Gato called, moving the papers on his desk. Already, his countenance was different.

A pretty, young girl-boy-girl-boy-them. What the bloody hell was she looking at?

"Effeminate boy."

*Thanks.*

The prettiest boy she ever saw. Not fair. His hair looked so silky.

"Gato-san, I wish to formally request that Zabuza-sama and I receive a time extension on our task."

Hari Stupefied the fat, business man and cast a small charm over her face to hide her looks. She then removed her cloak, enjoying how the boy tensed and whipped out some needles. With the threatening stance he was affecting, she was sure he could actually make them into weapons.

"I have a vested interest in the Konoha ninja and as such, I wouldn't be too thrilled should any harm befall them," she said almost casually, while waving the Death Stick around the room, noticing his chocolate eyes following the movement. Basically, she'd cast some barriers so he couldn't attack.

"This man was intending to use all of his hired thugs outside, to ambush you and your leader once you had wasted your energy on your enemy. He was never going to pay you."

The boy's face twisted, eyes narrowing on the pudgy form of the unscrupulous male who was slumped over his desk.

"So I have a proposition for you," she continued. "I will make him pay the money he swore to give you, if you agree to leave the Konoha team and the bridge builder along with his village, alone and go about your merry business. Be warned, should you take what is owed to you and defy my conditions, I will seek you and your master out and end both of you. Think carefully on what you have seen thus far and then decide."

"I find it interesting how you can take knowledge that you only *just learned* and use it to your advantage in order to appear all-knowing in the eyes of strangers."

*Stuff it!*
The boy and she stared off for several moments. Hari was beginning to develop an itch that would have ruined her appearance if she broke eye contact all for that.

"Zabuza-sama wishes to repay Sharingan no Kakashi for his defeat," the boy finally murmured. "He would not be convinced so easily. He is stubborn."

"I'll make him pay twice the amount he promised you," she amended.

"I shall relay the offer!"

He was out the door the next second and Hari sighed, releasing the tension she hadn't realized had settled over her body

That was intense.

"You are the most confusing mortal I have ever encountered."

She glared at Death, who didn't even have the decency to feel sheepish. It was a bit difficult for skeletons to show moods and emotions after all.

"You had planned to kill the man and now you are going to keep him alive and control him from the shadows."

She hadn't even given it much thought and they were already revealing her plans!

"At least let me think it through!"

"You made your mind up already."

So what?

"WHAT?!"

"Twice the amount."

Zabuza really liked those numbers. He liked them a lot. The civil war happening back in Mizu no Kuni was being led by an old friend of his. Mei. She intended to take over as Mizukage and her forces were full of the remaining Kekkei Genkai possessors left in the country. Zabuza wanted to assist her, but in war time, funds usually were low. In order to overthrow the Mizukage, they would need a lot of money.

Therefore, they'd separated some of the more skilled shinobi and sent them off to seek the best assassination jobs possible to bring in the money quickly.

Zabuza knew that 1,000,000 Ryo was a lot and would help in acquiring weaponry. While he sorely wanted to crush Hatake Kakashi for his sad and admittedly pitiful defeat a few weeks back, he had to consider his home land.

The Mizukage needed to be taken out. At present, there were more important things happening than his petty revenge over a fellow ninja of admirable repute, doing his job and doing it well.

"And you are certain this person can do as she has offered?" he asked, trying to wrap his head around the situation. An unknown woman having physical control over Gato and asking for the safety of Nami no Kuni as well as the Konoha ninja.
If she could knock the fat bastard unconscious so quickly, why not just kill he and Haku and all of Gato's thugs?

Zabuza grunted as he stood.

"You need to rest!" the Hyoton user insisted, trying to push him back to the bed.

"Nonsense. I'm going to see this woman personally. Come on!"

Hari had already made Gato line up his thugs outside, without telling them what they were there for. As far as she was concerned, their lives weren't as important as the residents of Nami no Kuni.

"Well look at this…"

She flinched, looking around the forest for the owner of said voice. It was guttural and dangerous.

A man stepped from the mist, alarming all of the thugs. His form was familiar, as was the sword casually slung over his shoulder. The young boy appeared beside him, though none of his weapons were visible.

"I'm looking for the woman," said Zabuza. "But… perhaps I'll end the rest of you for even thinking you'd have a chance to kill me!"

Hari barely got a blink in, he was moving so fast! Heads parted from bodies, blood splattering the area. All the while, the pretty boy stayed where he was, eyes downcast.

Zabuza made quick work of the hired muscles and looked up at the large building.

"Time to get my money."

Hair retreated from the window and waited behind Gato's desk for the two to approach. This had to go over well. She'd already had Gato place his money - seriously, the combination for his safe was ridiculously easy, GATO - on the other side of the room. She then placed all manner of protective barriers so that no one could advance beyond the line on the floor. She wasn't an idiot. She wasn't giving the obviously skilled ninja a chance to kill her.

"I could just kill him if he gets out of hand," Death offered on the sly and she sent them a glare.

*What is with you and killing people?*

*I like death. It's my thing.*

*Har har.*

The door slammed open, revealing the eyebrow-less shinobi and his apprentice.

"So you're the woman ordering the little bastard around, huh?"

"So you're the gruff, missing ninja who needs cash quick, huh?"

They sized each other up.

He caved first, exhaling a loud bark of laughter. "You got more guts than I thought you would. Though… why can't I see your face properly?"
"Why would I want you to see my face?" she asked rhetorically because the answer seemed rather obvious.

He ran a hand over his blade, eyes challenging. "Perhaps I want to know the woman who managed to cow the greatest drug dealer in the Elemental Nations, into submission."

"You don't need to know me as I don't need to know you. The funds are before you, do we have an accord?"

He eyed the bags of Ryo and jerked his head toward the boy, who stepped forward cautiously to peer inside the nearest bag. "It is real, Zabuza-sama."

"I have a civil war to fund," the man said. "We are trying to overthrow the tyrant in control of my home country. If this is truth, then I will put in a good word for you when my friend becomes Mizukage."

Wait, he's trying to kill a tyrant?! Like Hitler bad or simply Gato bad?

"Hitler. Kirigakure's Kage has formed a terrible view against people with Kekkei Genkai. The Kage is being controlled by another person however and when the control is removed, his body won't be able to handle the separation and he will die. It would be more merciful to simply end him quickly. The war is for the rights of those who possess Kekkei Genkai."

So then, this guy isn't even evil?

"In your definition of the word, no."

The hell?

"Then I wish you luck in your war," she said finally. "You may call me by my clan name… Kuro. Good day."

Zabuza eyed the money and sighed. "I'll leave Kakashi alone, but if we ever cross paths again…"

"Then do as you wish."

She had faith that Kakashi would beat him again, so she needn't worry.

"Good then. Haku, seal this up."

"Hai, Zabuza-sama."

Kakashi blinked in astonishment when Momochi Zabuza stepped from the mist around the bridge and proceeded to inform him that Gato was no longer a problem for Nami no Kuni, that Tazuna was no longer his target, and that he was returning to Mizu no Kuni to participate in the civil war, using Gato's money to do so.

"Why?" the Konoha Jonin demanded, confusion seeping out of every pore.

"It seems that you have some kind of guardian angel watching over you and your brats," the nuke nin said mysteriously. "And she demands to be known as Kuro."

He turned, pompously showing his back to his enemy as he said, "Say your goodbyes, Haku."
The assistant, who had secreted Zabuza away after the last fight, removed his mask and smiled in Naruto's direction.

"It was nice to see you again Naruto-kun," the boy said. "Remember... always protect your most precious people."

"Haku!" bellowed the orange clad shinobi. "I'll do my best! -ttebayo!"

'Haku' bowed and retreated into the mist, which slowly began to dissipate, leaving the bridge in one piece and a very confused Team Seven plus Tazuna, wondering what had happened to change Zabuza's mind so much.

"So then... this Kuro woman has somehow stopped Gato's plans," Ino remarked. "So Nami no Kuni should be free now, right?"

It would see to be that way.

"And he just retreated?" Sarutobi Hiruzen asked, feeling a little amazed.

The whole of Team Seven's report was a bit shocking considering everything involved, but then to add on that a very important nuke nin from Kirigakure was trying to win the civil war against the Mizukage all along, was a shocker.

Yagura was a fear of all those who possess Kekkei Genkai. His forceful eradication of the bloodlines had caused many to scatter in fear. So Momochi Zabuza's attempted coup had actually been for the betterment of the country as a whole and not because he was a terrible man with mad designs on the seat of Kage.

"And the name of the 'guardian angel' he mentioned?"

"Kuro, Hokage-sama."

Strange.

"It is disturbing that the rumors our spies have managed to hear, are truth," said the Sandaime. "Mizu no Kuni was actually in the middle of a civil war, Faction against Kekkei Genkai. We'll need to pay more attention to the happenings in the markets, for when merchants of Mizu visit."

Kakashi nodded and bowed.

"You are dismissed. Team Seven may take a two day vacation from missions. Use your time wisely."

"Hai, Hokage-sama."

Hari was relieved that Team Seven had managed to make it back to the village without so much as a scratch on them. And Naruto had been so happy to tell her about all the 'amazing and cool' things he had learned while away.

So apparently, Koinu-kun taught them how to walk and spar on water. He showed them some tips for immediate first aid, he had a nice talk with them about what it means to be a shinobi and what to expect when out on missions, and overall, they seemed to have gotten a bit closer.

She'd noticed the way both boys seemed to stand a little closer to Ino than before. Sasuke was
especially confusing considering how he didn't really like fangirls. But then… she didn't know all of the details of the mission so she'd have to wait for someone to tell her. If she was even allowed to know in the first place.

Koinu-kun did pull her aside and inform her that Naruto would have to go with his team to T&I for evaluation. Usually, this didn't happen unless on B-Rank and above missions, but their mission ended up being bumped to a B-Rank due to the client lying through his teeth about the expectations of his guard detail.

Usually there was no death on C-Ranks, but apparently, Ino had killed an enemy shinobi in full view of the boys and she'd had a small breakdown. Kakashi wanted to make sure that all his Genin were mentally okay and not simply hiding their stress and fear. So a trip to Inoichi-san was in order for all of them.

Hari would admit to being a little jealous. It would have been lovely to get some mental help after her first kill. It would have been great if someone had told her that she didn't actually need to deal with all of her stress on her own. That she could have gone to a doctor or a healer for her problems. But noooooooo. Being the Girl Who lived, she was expected to know everything about everything.

The witch fully supported the idea of Naruto getting an evaluation done. This was what she had meant when she spoke to him that day in the kitchen. She didn't want it to come as a surprise when he was on a mission. Hopefully he took her's and Ino's words to heart that day.

So while the squirt was out with his team that day, Hari had reserved some time with Anko. Or rather, Anko busted down her office door and told her it was time for 'endurance training'. She was then given an outfit that left nothing to the imagination and was told to put it on.

Reluctantly she did so, finding the spandex clinging to her frame. It was a black one piece, with spaghetti straps, a low, square cut bust, and the legs were cut off at mid thigh.

"Since I know you won't agree to a mesh suit, this was the next best thing in breathable workout gear. You'll be doing a lot of hide n' seek today and since I'm holding the food and water, you need to come and get me!"

Anko flashed a devious grin and wiggled her brows suggestively.

Hari did her stretches and sighed, knowing that this was going to be hell. At least she was good at pacing herself when running. If she learned one thing from Hari Hunting, it was how to pace herself. Dudley always ran full speed ahead and got tired quickly and Hari had learned to use that to her advantage.

She'd use it here as well. Besides, if she said 'no', Anko would simply bother her about it until she caved, or threw the first punch. Sparring with Anko was hell and Hari wasn't going to have it.

"Alright! Find me at the Hokage Tower!"

Anko disappeared in a Shunshin, leaving the brunette to her misery. No cheating with magic either.

Kakashi was proud that all of his Genin were considerably well in the mental department with only lingering stress. Team Seven was fit for active duty when their vacation was over. Now however, they were simply sharing a team lunch in good company to celebrate their survival on a mission that no doubt could have seen them killed.

"Kakashi-sensei, we want to enroll in some basic first aid courses at the Hospital," Ino said suddenly.
"And why is that?"

"Someone here needs to know how to handle injuries," Sasuke muttered into his onigiri.

"True that," Naruto agreed, eyes squinting and he looked off toward the river.

Kakashi's eyes trailed to the Memorial Stone, where a large amount of chakra began to build itself, until Anko appeared in a Shunshin, looking too pleased with herself.

The Genin, having heard the sudden entrance, all whipped around from their seated positions against the training logs. Naruto was the one to react however.

"AH! It's the kunai licker!"

He held his bento in front of his chest in an obviously protective manner, eyeing the kunoichi distrustfully.

Kakashi snorted, finding the nickname he graced her with to be a perfect fit.

"Oh, gakis and Kakashi!" grinned the woman, twirling a kunai that she proceeded to lick suggestively, wiggling her brows in Naruto's direction.

"What do you want?!" he demanded, glaring.

"Meh, I'm playing hide n' seek with Hari. It's training day."

Interesting.

"How is this training?" Ino asked, interest caught.

"I tell her where to meet me and then she has to find me! I hold the food and the water so if she wants to eat or drink something, she needs to get here first! She's so far gotten me at Hokage Tower, the dango shop, and the hospital. I made it a bit hard by choosing a training ground!" guffawed the Tokubetsu Jonin.

Kakashi didn't miss the look both Ino and Naruto shared.

"Neh, kunai licker, Ino and I brought nee-chan here all the time when we trained her."

Anko deflated instantly. "I thought I had a good idea too," she pouted, kicking the stone beside her.

Kakashi's ears twitched as a new sound made itself known. The shinobi all turned toward the training ground's entrance where a small figure dressed in black was running toward them.

"Nertz!" Anko hissed.

Neko-chan was running at a moderate pace, arms pumping lightly as she made her way over to their little group. She stopped a few feet away, inhaling strongly through the nose and exhaling slowly through the mouth to regulate her breathing.

He was minutely impressed considering her status as a civilian.

"You found me faster than any of the other times!"

The brunette shrugged, "I went all out on the run here but I had to slow down a bit when my lungs started to protest."
"That was a little under ten minutes from the hospital. Your fastest time so far," remarked Anko as she stared at her watch.

Now Kakashi was even more impressed. For a civilian walk, the hospital was a little under an hour away. At a constant run, maybe half an hour. She had to have good management to make it in under ten minutes. Also, it must have helped that she knew where she was going already.

Anko pulled a bottle of water from her coat pocket and tossed it over, "You deserve a drink. After this, I want you to spar the Yamanaka gaki."

Neko-chan paled, "I don't want fight Ino, she hits hard!" She proceeded to down the entire bottle of water, clucking her tongue a few times.

Anko smirked, "It's either her or me."

If Hari-hime got any more pale, she'd be dead, Kakashi was certain. The young woman turned to Ino and with an exaggerated smile, she waved the blonde forward, "Hey, Ino, want to spar?" The pleading desperation in her tone was obvious.

"Sure, Hari-chan!"

Ino bounced up and got into an Academy fighting stance. "Just like last time," she instructed.

And the fight began.

Hari knew this was his revenge. Kakashi was totally using her sparring as a chance to pay her back for the flying window trick. All his little quips and comments were supposed to unnerve her, but she was more annoyed then anything.

Still.

He was being an arse and she had the perfect plan in mind. And conveniently enough, there was a river a few feet away.

Kakashi once again swerved into her personal space - why did she agree to a spar with him again? - and tapped her forehead. Hari, willing to do anything to win, threw herself back the second he poked her, acting as if he put too much force into the 'attack'.

"Nee-chan!" came a loud and worried yell. But Kakashi proved not to be too much of a dick as he leaned down much too fast for her to track and caught her by the waist, preventing a painful impact with the rocky ground of the training area.

"Mah, aren't I the hero? Rescuing lovely princesses even when they've been naughty."

Hari smiled in return, gripping his sleeves tightly and levitating them both. In a swift motion, she used all she had to throw both of them into the chilling river, enjoying the look of shock in the man's lone eye as they went.

She did say she'd do anything to win.

The cold never bothered her anyway.

A/N: Another is done!
The amazing @lucife56 on Tumblr made THIS FANART for that last scene!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics.

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

-Yes, that ending was genuine.

-Naruto's breakdown will come later. Like, in chapter 10, later.

-The civil war in Mizu no Kuni is far from over.
Wish You Were Here

Chapter Summary

Team 7 needs all the help! My poor babies! Poor Naruto. :( 

Chapter Notes

-Don't hate me for the major change that occurs in this chapter but I wanted to do something different so I did. Got to mix things up!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON, I FOLLOW BACK.

Kakashi swapped out his newest Icha Icha for his oldest version. As his team was going on some very boring D-Rank missions today, tempers would most likely be running high and he did not wish for his special book to be caught in the crossfire.

"Team, we are cleaning out the Magami-kawa today!"

Their frustrated groans were music to his ears.

"You mean, we're cleaning it out," Sasuke grunted, Uchiha Glare in place.

"Yeah, you'll just sit back and read bad porn all day! -ttebayo!" Naruto added, equally displeased.

"Now now, it's attitudes like this that keep you from another C-Rank mission!"

They rolled their eyes collectively.

"Well, we'll make this go by as fast as possible," Ino said, giving Naruto a look.

The blond nodded and put his hands together in the cross sign. "Taju Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

"Let's clean the river!"
Kakashi pouted, his plans for the day, ruined.

"Nee-chan, we're cleaning out a river today so I won't be home until late!"

Hari placed the paper down in order to eye the blond who had burst into her office a second ago. He looked annoyed.

"Do your best and we'll have ramen for dinner."

His eyes bugged out and he jumped for joy. "Thanks, nee-chan! The river will have never been cleaner, -ttebayo!"

In his haste, he ran right into the wall and dispelled in a cloud of smoke.

Hari shook her head. Children.

"Nee-chan knows!"

Ino pouted, "Hari-chan can't come spend time with us, can she?"

Her fellow blond shook his head. "No. Apparently some old geezer tried to come into her office and take some of the kids away for his secret ninja program or something. Anyway, he's in trouble with Hokage-Jiji and the councils and it's just a lot of trouble. Nee-chan has all this paperwork she has to do because of him!"

Ino noticed Kakashi-sensei sitting up straighter at the mention of 'the old geezer'.

"Who is the man Hari-hime has dealt with?" the Jonin asked.

"Some Danzo guy."

Both Ino and Sasuke gaped, knowing that name rather well. He was one of the Hokage's personal advisers. If he was in trouble, what did he do?

"Well team, I think I can trust you to finish up your mission on your own. I need to go have a word with a crimson bird."

Kakashi-sensei left them there, waist deep in dirty water and plastic bottles.

"What's so special about Danzo?" Naruto asked, confused.

Ino went back to pulling up garbage. "You tell him, Sasuke-kun."

And so Sasuke began telling their teammate all he knew about Shimura Danzo.

"Mah, I just learned from my kawaii, little Genin that Shimura is in trouble?"

Anko barked a laugh, flipping out of her chair, "He's fucked up! Like majorly I tell you!"

When it became apparent that Anko was too hyped up to explain further, Kurenai took over, folding her magazine in her lap in order to give her fellow Jonin her full attention.

"He apparently had some agreement with the former matron of the orphanage where he would take children away every three months. He tried to do the same with Hari-chan, but was shot down. In
preparation for an attack from him or his guard, she drugged his tea with a lot of sleeping aid.

The guard had a Ne tattoo on his tongue. Danzo's trial has been going on since you left for your mission. The orphans have given their testimonies of him, one even mentioning Ne herself and some less than stellar practices used in collecting the children."

Anko was nodding, "And apparently, Danzo's unconscious body was given an eval and they found under a special seal, numerous Sharingan implanted all over his right arm and Uchiha Shisui's eye in his right eye, as well as a face growing from his skin, which has been injected with the Shodai's DNA. There was also an Ura Shisho Fuin on his chest. I'm not supposed to know that by the way, so keep quiet about it. Only the people in this room and those at T&I, plus the Hokage and the council's, know about it all."

While Anko's nefarious actions in regards to sensitive information were questionable, Kakashi couldn't be more grateful.

He didn't know which bothered his most about it. The fact that Danzo had Sharingan, the fact that Danzo had Shunshin no Shisui's Sharingan, or the fact that he somehow got his hands on Senju Hashirama's DNA. All three were alarming. As well as the Ne operative.

"The trial is still on?" he asked, hoping to flush out more information.

Anko became serious then, voice lowering. "All I know is several shinobi in blank masks were escorted into T&I in the middle of the night. From what I could see, over fifty at least. They're being kept in the lowest cells."

As a shinobi who had worked in T&I for a little while during his tenure as an Anbu - it was a requirement after all - he knew that the lowest cells all the way in the dungeon were for the priority cases. The potentially dangerous and kill on sight cases.

Just what had Danzo been up to over the years Ne had been officially disbanded?

"Anyway, I think they found his hideout, because when the trial seemed to be coming to a close, suddenly it was lengthened by whatever it is they found."

"So this is more than him taking orphans and Sharingan and blood cells?"

"Yep!"

"Of all the times for this to occur."

Kurenai and Anko nodded. The Chunin Exams were coming up soon and with foreign shinobi walking about the village, there was no time for there to be disputes among their own shinobi.

"Oh!" Kurenai gasped. "Are you entering your Genin into the exams?"

Hmmmm.

---

Team Seven successfully completed the mission to clean the Magami-kawa. Genin Uzumaki Naruto enthusiastically took on most of the work with the permission of his fellow Genin, by utilizing his Kage Bunshin. The river has never looked so good.

"What's with the 'Genin Uzumaki Naruto' crap?"
"It's how you're supposed to word things, baka!" Ino hissed, handing in the report she had written up. Since Kakashi-sensei was not there, she had to be the one to write the report.

"Neh, can we take on another D-Rank mission even though Kakashi-sensei isn't with us?" the boy asked the Chunin at the desk.

The man stared at him with a blank expression. Ino nudged him aside. "We'll take the Tora Mission, please?"

"Wait! So we can accept D-Ranks without him being here?"

"Let's just go, dobe."

"Shut up, teme!"

Ino sighed. They were morons.

---

"Dobe, a square rock has been following us around all day," commented Sasuke as he sipped his tea.

Team Seven had taken a break in the dango shop. Kakashi was still nowhere to be seen so they were simply doing what they wanted. It was better than sitting by, doing nothing.

Sasuke had taken notice of the box poorly disguised as a rock the first moment it appeared. Ino gave a nod.

Naruto was stretching his arms out. "I know. I was hoping that if we ignored them long enough, they'd go away."

"'They'?" the other two Genin repeated in Shock.

"Yeah, one is definitely Konohamaru, but I can smell two others I don't recognize," the blond admitted, scratching his nose a few times. He inhaled another stick of dango, not caring about anything else obviously.

"Why are they following us, dobe?" demanded the Uchiha.

"Probably want to play Ninja or something. Konohamaru has insisted that I'm his eternal rival for the position of Hokage. But he's still a kid and likes to play games."

"Play Ninja? You're already a ninja!" Ino pointed out.

"Well yeah, but he isn't. Anyway, it's teaching him to hide better and track me down and stuff. Like advanced hide n' seek. Kind of like what the kunai licker was doing with Hari-nee-chan the other week. And Konohamaru wants to play games, but also doesn't want to be treated like a child, so I disguised Ninja as training. It's basically a game, but he doesn't know that. He thinks it's mega training for being Hokage."

"He sounds familiar," Ino murmured, sipping her tea.

"He's Hokage-Jiji's grandson."

"Oh!"

"You got the Honorable Grandson to view you as a rival?" Sasuke asked, not believing what he was hearing.
"Hey, his name is Konohamaru! He hates being called 'honorable grandson' because most of the village knows him by that term. They don't actually know his name and it depresses him a lot."

Sasuke leaned away from the tower of burning rage that was Uzumaki Naruto. Seeing as the dobe was feeling so serious about this, he'd drop it. So long as he dealt with the brat and his friends.

"Just get them to back off. We have training to do and I don't want a bunch of kids to be in danger or anything."

"Aw!" Ino squealed, wiggling in her seat. She said nothing more but the look on her face was enough for Sasuke to retreat inwards. No more speaking. She was fangirling at the moment.

"I TAKE IT BACK! YOU AREN'T PRETTY AND YOUR FOREHEAD IS HUGE!"

"SHANNARO! I'LL KILL YOU YOU LITTLE RUNT!"

"Hey, is that Billboard Brow?" Ino asked, running form the shop, leaving her tea behind.

"Neh, wait Ino!"

Sasuke sighed, knowing that he was about to be dragged into some drama. But a front row seat would at least provide entertainment. He followed at a more sedate pace. No need for him to waste energy.

He was greeted with the sight of Sakura being held back by Ino. In front of them were Naruto and three little kids, who were busy using the dobe as a shield.

"Sakura-chan, Konohamaru and his friends are just playing around. No need to get violent."

Sakura was struggling against Ino's hold, fist raised threateningly.

"Billboard Brow, stop it! That's Hokage-sama's grandson! You don't want to start an incident!"

Sasuke had never seen the pink one lose the wind in her sails so quickly. Why couldn't it be that easy when trying to dissuade her from asking him out on a date? Life was unfair.

"Sasuke-kun!"

Why him?

"Naruto-nii-kun, will you play Ninja with us now?"

"We have to do team training guys, I don't think I'll be able to play today."

The Genin and cadets were walking along the streets of Konoha, simply talking. Well, Ino and Sakura were fighting over Sasuke, Sasuke was ignoring all of them, and Naruto was trying to appease three little kids.

Udon and Moegi - Konohamaru's sidekicks - had heard 'tales of his might and amazingness' from their boss and had wanted to learn from him as well.

While flattered, Naruto wasn't sure he was one to be teaching children anything really. The fact that he managed to get Konohamaru to learn anything was sheer luck. But he wasn't like Iruka-sensei. He couldn't explain things like he could.
"Hey, that guy looks like a cat!"

Konohamaru's shout alerted everyone in the area, including the teen who apparently looked like a cat. And he did actually. He was wearing makeup and everything with a kitten eared pull over.

Said kitten did not seem to appreciate Konohamaru's words and glared. Naruto took up a defensive stance in front of the boy.

"Disrespectful little brats in Konoha," he groused, instantly making Naruto dislike him.

"Leave it be, Kankuro," the blonde with him hissed. "We can't deal with this right now. What if he comes along?"

"We've got time, Temari. I think we should teach these Konoha brats not to disrespect their betters."

A derisive snort from the side caught Naruto's attention. Ino had abandoned Sakura in favor of taking control of the situation. "I hope you don't mean yourself."

"We're the eldest children of the Yondaime Kazekage," the boy named Kankuro boasted, earning a slap in the arm from his sister.

Ino scoffed, "You're talking about teaching a lesson to Hokage-sama's grandson."

Cue the awkward looks and slightly terrified expressions. Ha! It's what they deserved!

"As well as the heir to the Uchiha Clan and the heiress to the Yamanaka Clan," Ino concluded. Her gaze darkened then, "Besides, you're in a foreign village and if anyone starts anything, it'll be you guys who take the fall."

"What are Suna shinobi doing in our village anyway?" Sasuke demanded, coming up beside them now that the attention was away from getting a date with him.

"Jiji said that the Chunin Exams are coming up!" Konohamaru announced loudly.

The Temari girl held up her passport and smirked, "Correct. We're here for the Chunin Exams, not to start trouble. Right, Kankuro?"

Her brother glared at the group of Konoha citizens.

"Kankuro, back off."

Naruto could only blink in shock, because he didn't see another person with them. Ino and Sasuke both had equal looks of surprise on their faces. The new guy was in the tree to their right and he was standing on the branch, upside down.

There… was something different about him. His eyes were so hard and cold. They reminded Naruto of the looks he usually got from the villagers. He seemed so angry.

Naruto had to withhold a flinch because the animosity just pouring off the redhead made him uncomfortable.

The other boy disappeared in a swirl of sand - pretty cool too - and reappeared beside Kankuro. "We aren't here to play games. Stop wasting time."

"S-sure thing, G-Gaara!" the kitten dressed shinobi squeaked.
"I apologize for the trouble he caused you all," said Gaara, nodding toward Ino.

The three Suna shinobi left then, leaving Team Seven plus Sakura and the kids, alone in the middle of the street.

"That was anticlimactic," said the dobe finally, much to the agreement of everyone else.

But Sasuke's interest was caught on the Chunin Exams.

"Sensei, are you going to enter us into the Chunin Exams?"

Kakashi stilled because he hadn't expected his kawaii, little Genin to know about it so soon. Hokage-sama hadn't even officially announced it yet! So how did they know? He was also a bit put off because it was Sasuke who asked and Sasuke was barely ever respectful to anyone.

"Well, as you should know, the Chunin Exams are what is used to test your mettle to see if you are deserving of moving up in rank. In a week, the Exams will begin and shinobi from all over will be coming to Konoha because our lovely village is hosting this time around."

The three nodded, listening attentively.

"I've decided… not to enter you."

"AW!" came three simultaneous groans of distress.

"But sensei!"

"Hush please, there is a method to my madness after all. You simply need to be patient."

They quieted down thankfully and Kakashi nodded approvingly. They had gotten much better at taking the negative information over the past few months. He might even say they could be tolerable every now and then.

"The Chunin Exams occur every six months, so that's twice a year. This exam won't be very large, but the next exam, will be one of the largest in the last twenty years."

"Why?" asked Naruto.

Kakashi put his book away, realizing that he needed to get on their level to get his point across. He sank to the forest floor and folded his legs. The Genin mimicked him quickly, getting more comfortable.

"Tetsu no Kuni has agreed to host the next Exam after this one. Tetsu holds no allies in any of the shinobi nations. The country is run by samurai and they do not look too favorably upon shinobi. However, they hold a perpetual agreement of armed neutrality, which allows the five Kage to convene without possibility of starting a war or getting attacked. But a Kage Summit is very rare, so there's no need to dwell on that thought."

"Why is waiting for the next Exam so important, sensei?" Ino asked.

He sighed. "Because they hold no treaties or agreements with any of the other shinobi nations, every shinobi nation or village can send their Genin teams to this Exam. Our Exam that is coming within the week, will not allow Kiri, Kumo, or Iwa shinobi because we are enemies. But Tetsu's Exam will welcome people from all over the world, giving everybody larger chances to make names for themselves."
It's the third Exam that is most important, because it is held in true tournament fashion. This is where lords and ladies, and Daimyo from all over will come view the matches. Your performance will determine whether or not they wish to hire you for missions. It's good for publicity."

"So you want us to work up enough strength to showcase our abilities in the third Exam," surmised Sasuke, eyes brightening as he realized the importance of Kakashi's planning.

"Exactly!" crowed the Jonin. "Besides, Genin rarely become Chunin after only six months. It took me a year after I became a Genin!"

He neglected to mention that he was literally half their age at the time, but that was neither here nor there. They didn't need to know that and he was sure it would only bring them down more from their excitement.

"Anyway, I'm going to be training you constantly and we're going to build up a lot of strengths for each of you. From medical training to stealth to tracking, we have half a year to work you all up to be presentable for the Exams!"

Naruto leapt to his feet, arms thrust over his head in jubilation, "Yeah! We'll be awesome! -ttebayo!"

Kakashi inwardly sighed in relief because he had just passed a land mine with all the grace of a seasoned shinobi. He deserved a medal of some kind because that took skill.

The Jonin stood, "So, my kawaii, little Genin, how did you learn about the Chunin Exams before they were even officially announced?"

"Eh, we ran into some Suna ninja yesterday," Ino grumbled.

"Yeah!" Naruto nodded. "The one dressed like a kitten was an ass too! -ttebayo!"

"Naruto!"

"What? He was!"

If the delegates were already arriving, then it wouldn't do for their team training to take place inside the village, where possible enemy shinobi could see them. Which meant long C-Rank missions and training trips all round Hi no Kuni!

He needed to prepare.

Sarutobi Hiruzen folded his hands as he calmly appraised the gathered Jonin and Chunin, having already debriefed the Anbu. He'd decided to make use of the conference hall because all of the Jonin and Chunin had to be present and those on missions would be debriefed later all upon returning.

"As many of you are aware, it is that time again. The Chunin Exams which will be hosted in Konoha this time, will begin within a week."

The ninja all murmured their understanding, some sharing telling looks and others looking downright annoyed at the prospect of having to host foreigners for a little over a month.

The Hokage cleared his throat in order to reclaim all of their attention. "Normally I would dismiss you all with a simply warning to keep your senses sharp and your blades sharper, but as we have recently graduated three teams from the Academy, I felt it would be prudent to see if any of the Jonin Sensei of those teams wished to nominate their Genin for the exams. This in turn would give anyone
with veritable reason to contend their decision and allow them to re-think their reasons for allowing green Genin into such exams."

He eyed Kakashi, Kurenai, and Asuma, who all stepped forward. Asuma nodded and raised his hand, offering the first half of the sign of peace. "I, Sarutobi Asuma, Jonin Sensei of Team Ten, hereby nominate Nara Shikamaru, Aburame Shino, and Inuzuka Kiba, for the Chunin Selection Exams."

There was a horrified gasp that came from the direction of Umino Iruka. The Chunin looked horrified at the idea and Hiruzen could tell he was already revving up a response.

Kurenai stepped forward and mimicked Asuma's actions. "I, Yuhi Kurenai, Jonin Sensei of Team Eight, hereby nominate Hyuga Hinata, Akimichi Choji, and Haruno Sakura, for the Chunin Selection Exams."

Iruka looked about ready to explode and his gaze, along with everyone else's, landed on Kakashi, waiting for inevitable. Only… it never came.

Kakashi stood still, reading his most recently acquired edition of Icha Icha, not paying anyone any mind.

Kurenai elbowed him in the gut and he blinked his lone eye, offering a shrug. "I'm not nominating my team."

Iruka sagged with obvious relief, no doubt having been worried for Naruto.

Kakashi's eyes tracked the Chunin's sudden relaxed form and he sighed. "It's not that I don't think they aren't ready. In fact, I think it would be a good learning experience for them. However… I want my team's first entrance into the shinobi world to be during the next exams. This way they will be smarter, stronger, have more personal and mission related experience, I can train them up specifically, and I can have my Genin burst into the exams like the assault team they are. I'm trying to send a message to the other shinobi nations and countries this way. If people know about them too soon, the intrigue will be almost non-existent."

Kakashi went silent then, returning to his favorite pastime, much to everyone's chagrin.

Iruka didn't seem annoyed. In fact, he was nodding. He agreed with Kakashi's decision, or at least some parts of it.

"Hokage-sama, they are too young. I happen to have been the one to give a lot of them their missions and I know that out of all the green Genin, Team Seven would be the only ones actually ready mentally. Not that I'm saying they should be entered either. Just that the other two teams have done less than ten missions collectively and none of them being on the same difficulty level as the one Team Seven had gone on. They aren't ready."

Once he said his piece, Iruka stepped back into line, head bowed.

"Kurenai-chan, Asuma, have you anything to say?"

Asuma shrugged, "I think it would be good for them to learn, that's all."

"I think my students are ready because they've grown so much these past few months," Kurenai added with surety.

"Remember, I was their Chunin Sensei for years, I know what each were capable of and I know for
a fact what their strengths and weaknesses were," Iruka growled. "Your team especially, is not ready. Sakura-san is a liability at present and you cannot risk your Genin in such an exam when you are faced with someone who does not care about anything but her hair and nails."

Kurenai had no response and no one else moved to say anything either. Though harsh, Hiruzen knew it was truth. It was one reason why he put Haruno-san on that team, so that Kurenai and by extension Anko, could help she and the Hyuga heiress find themselves.

With a sigh, the old man ended the meeting with orders to keep their eyes peeled on the foreigners, but not to engage unless the others start.

---

Team Seven was especially contracted for a D-Rank mission that required a lot of cleaning and baby-sitting. Or so they were told. Kakashi actually knew the entire purpose for the mission but simply let his Genin assume the worst. It was more fun for him that way.

"Wait, we're cleaning the orphanage?!!" Naruto asked loudly, realizing where they were going when they were about a block away.

"Koneko-chan needs some help today!" Kakashi announced cheerfully.

Hari-hime greeted them at the door and led them inside.

"We are going to be cleaning out the building every three months. Out of all the Genin teams I have become acquainted with, yours is the least annoying or creepy. And you don't dress in green spandex." She shivered at what was obviously a bad memory.

She'd met Gai and his team! Why hadn't Kakashi heard about that?

"Anyway, while Naruto makes a lot of Kage Bunshin to help with the cleaning, I need the real Genin to help my kids who are in the Academy. Out of the forty-four children, nine are training to become ninja and I think taking them aside and teaching them a thing or two would not only be beneficial to them but you as well. By teaching, you learn more. I know from experience. You'll also be aiding your village in the long run. Fifteen percent of all ninja that come from this village are orphans with no familial ties or status. The likelihood of them actually passing their Genin Exam is really high because they have a stronger drive to get out of here and do well in life."

"Mah, Koneko-chan, what should I do?" the Jonin asked, feeling a bit left out.

She smirked, "While the clones clean and your Genin teach the cadets, you'll be helping my assistants and I in watching the other children."

He thought too soon.

She was evil.

---

Sasuke found himself confronted with an Academy student who was older than him by a few months and who was finishing her last year in the Academy within a few months. She looked severe, her brown hair had been cut sharply so that is stuck out in several directions, naturally. Her eyes were as black as his own.

"I am Mikoko. I'm the best in my class so I don't need any instruction. The others though…"

She trailed off casting a look over the others who were busy practicing their Taijutsu against the
training dummies supplied in the large room.

Sasuke scoffed, "I can teach you to walk on trees and walls."

Mikoko regarded him quietly, before nodding. "That would be acceptable."

She had to be the strangest girl he'd ever met.

He kind of liked her.

Naruto had a one up on his teammates. He already knew all of the kids and had played with some of the younger ones before. This way though, the group he'd taken on were around Konohamaru's age, which made it easier to connect with them because he had experience. So, Naruto made four Kage Bunshin and set one to each child.

He may not have been the smartest person, but he could teach them the things he was good at. Stealth and Reconnaissance!

He gathered them closer and said, "Alright… so the prank is going to go like this."

"Girls, just because you are kunoichi in training and just because you are female does not mean that you are to be pushed around! You are just as strong if not stronger than boys!"

Ino had taken the eleven and twelve year old girls. The four of them sitting in a square as they listened to her lecture.

"How many of you have had your cycle?"

All four raised their hands.

"You go through that every month for the next few decades. Waking up in your own blood. Agonizing pain. Cravings, hormones. It takes a lot of work to go through this. Men don't have to suffer through any of it, leaving them blissfully unaware. They think it's a joke, but it is not!

Wouldn't you say it's foolish to be scared of blood when it comes out of you for several days each month?"

The girls all nodded, some though were resigned.

"We go through these things all the time and it proves how tough we are! Kunoichi are not meant to be delicate. We use what we have to our advantage to win! Blood, sweat, tears, dirt. Whatever it takes!"

Ino was so pumped, she felt like going for a run.

A run it was.

"Up and at 'em girls. We're running laps!"

"We'll be going on a two week training trip tomorrow," Kakashi told the young woman.

"Just training?"
"Just that. We'll still be in Hi no Kuni, but I'll be teaching them certain skills required when camping or foraging. Since I haven't entered them in the Chunin Exams, I need to keep them occupied so they don't complain about not being allowed to enter."

"Keep them focused and tired and you won't hear any whining," she surmised with a smirk.

"Exactly!"

"Nice work. Also, at some point in the near future, I'm going to need to give your team a talk that I gave Kurenai's and Asuma-san's teams. So beware."

While she knew that team Seven had a good rapport with each other - and seriously, they were lucky to have manifested one at all - it would still be beneficial for them.

"Mah, I'll be entering them into basic Shinobi First Aid courses when returning from our trip, so I hope that doesn't interrupt your plans."

Hari laughed at the convenience of it all. "I have all the eight years olds and up going to those classes. It's a precaution for war because the orphanage has always been either a civilian shelter in dire times, or a medical relief tent, so to speak, for wounded shinobi in war. The kids legally have to learn these things once they reach a certain age. It's some way for the orphans to give back to the village or some tripe like that."

Kakashi hummed, flipping a page in his book. "Ino is considering becoming a iryo-nin just so she can help the team when one of us ends up injured. They discussed it at length and agreed."

"Good for her," Hari nodded, proud of Ino's initiative. Sometimes you couldn't wait for someone to give you the idea or the order. Sometimes you had to take your future into your own hands and deal with it on your own.

Haruno Sakura was so excited! She was finally going to see her Sasuke-kun after months of being apart! She just hoped that Ino didn't infect him in some way during that time.

Sakura had been put through hell with her team. Kurenai-sensei and her friend Anko were terrifying when together. She felt that she had grown a lot over the past few months and now it was time to prove herself to the man of her dreams!

When her team got to Room 301 - after passing that ridiculous Genjutsu on the second floor - however, not one Sasuke in sight. She couldn't even see the pig walking around.

"You should give up on trying to find Team Seven," drewled a lazy voice from her left.

Team Ten walked on over, Shikamaru just slightly in the lead, but looking tired and cranky.

"Ino told me that Team Seven's sensei didn't enter them in the Chunin Exams this time because he's waiting for the next exams. Supposed to be held with shinobi from every shinobi nation or something. All I know is that it's a publicity stunt in a sense," yawned the Nara.

The only part of the explanation that Sakura cared about was the fact that Sasuke wasn't going to be in the exams meaning she had no one to impress! Why was she taking this exam at all then? What was the point of it all?

"Yahoo! Without them here, we don't have to deal with the Uchiha's emoness, Ino's bitchiness, and Naruto's stupidity!" Kiba grinned, earning a glare from Shikamaru.
"Please stop being so loud, you guys."

The Genin all turned to see the newcomer. He looked like a dork and totally uncool, and Sakura promptly ignored him because she was busy thinking. She did her hair for nearly an hour this morning in preparation for seeing Sasuke and now her efforts had gone to waste!

Also, she had only decided to come because she had hoped she could impress Sasuke. He was always doing amazing things and she wanted him to see her doing well.

Hari-san said that they didn't know anything about Sasuke, and Sakura didn't want to believe her. But she did realize that Sasuke admired strong opponents. So if Sakura was strong and pretty she'd totally land her dream boy! It was the perfect plan!

But how was she going to prove herself when he wasn't even in the village to begin with? There was no point right now.

Sakura was jolted out of her head by Hinata, who had pulled her arm roughly, yanking Sakura out of the way of an attack. Sakura blanched when she saw the white haired Genin from before, take whatever it was and end up coughing up blood.

"Keep your mouth shut about our village!" growled the most hideous one, who was hunched over with half of his face covered.

They attacked him simply because he insulted their village?

Sakura's heart rate jumped immediately at the thought. If these ruffians were willing to really hurt someone just because of an insult, then what else would they do?

She hadn't realized… this was very dangerous! What if she accidentally insulted someone and didn't know?! What if she even looked at someone the wrong way? What if they tried to kill her over something so ridiculous!

**BOOM!**

"Alright, sit down and shut your mouths! In my territory, you are under my jurisdiction. I am Morino Ibiki, proctor for the First Exam, which has begun now. Any fighting without express permission from me will result in the failure of your team."

The man who had appeared alongside a group of uniformed shinobi, looked like the kind of person that Sakura didn't want to make angry. His face was heavily scarred and his trench coat made his hulking shoulders seem all the more large.

Sakura was herded along with the other Genin, forced to take a number and then be placed in a seat that put her as far away from her teammates as possible.

The proctor began writing on the chalkboard, outlining whatever it was, three times for good measure.

"This is a written exam with the possibility of ten points, one point a question. The tenth question will be given at the end of the testing period, which is only an hour long. If you are caught cheating, two points will be deducted from you, meaning you can't afford to be caught. However, if someone reaches all five chances, you and your whole team will be disqualified. Also, if anyone fails their exam completely, the whole team is out."

Protests rose among the Genin and the proctor shrugged. "You entered as a team and your
teammates must see you through. Deal with it."

He looked at the clock, "Ten minutes prior to the end of the test I will offer you the tenth question. Until then… get to work!"

The Genin did so.

Sakura took up her pencil and gulped as she flipped her test over. The more she read, the more the relief seemed to calm her down. These were so easy! And people thought it was stupid for her to focus on her studies so much!

She cast a glance around the room, seeing that most of the Genin were looking at the tests like they were monsters. Feeling much better about this, Sakura laid the pencil on the paper and began the process of working out the various questions hidden in the questions.

She hadn't been feeling too confident with this test but now she was feeling better about it and she felt like she could take on any challenge!

The pinkette worked diligently, blocking out everything else, taking her time and shielding her paper from anyone who attempted to cheat off of her. She took this very seriously because these were questions that weren't normally taught in the Academy. How many ninja knew about Algebra II?

Her parents had scolded her for studying things that had nothing to do with being a ninja, but here she was, acing this test!

The time passed quickly, Sakura putting her pencil down and flipping the paper over. She let out a sigh of relief and smiled to herself. She was very confident in her answers. The tenth question was to be given in a few minutes too.

A Genin entered the room, escorted by a Chunin watcher, earning a smirk from the proctor and a snide remark that seemed to strike fear into him.

"It's time for the tenth question!"

Everyone sat up straighter, gripping their pencils tighter.

"Before I give it however, I will tell you that should you fail the question, then you automatically fail your test and your whole team will be booted from the Chunin Exams and will never be able to take the exams ever again."

Shocked silence followed his revelation, before the uproarious denial and complaints of the gathered Genin filled the room. It hit Sakura pretty hard though. While confident that she could answer this question just fine, she wasn't so sure about her teammates. Hinata could probably do it, but not Choji. He'd been in the middle of the ranking for their year.

This time, it wasn't just her career on the line. It was all of theirs.

"SHUT UP!" hollered the proctor, his glare fierce enough to silence the entire room. Sakura gulped.

"This isn't some kind of game. To be a Chunin you need to be willing to take risks. You need to be mature. Understand where you're at. You may be called to lead a squad of Chunin once you reach the next rank. Decisions will be placed on your head."

Ibiki pulled off his bandana, revealing his scarred head to the room and making several - including Sakura - rear back in disgust and horror.
"Sometimes you'll be put on the spot. We need to know if you can handle it. So you can choose to quit now and try again at another Chunin Exam, where you won't have me to deal with, or you can take the chance and continue forward, the possibility of remaining a Genin forever, only a mistake away.

The clock is ticking."

Hands began rising all over. The officials called out numbers. Whole teams filed from the room, heads hanging low and some cursing their teammates out for wasting their time or being cowards.

Sakura had to think about this. She'd considered quitting before the test began, but now that she knew this affected her whole team, she had to think it through. He'd already lied about the promotion. If they weren't allowed to participate in any other Chunin Exams, it still didn't mean they couldn't get promoted.

Field promotion, war promotion, or if a Jonin sensei observes their Genin and decides they are ready, they'll put forth a nomination that would be reviewed by the Jonin Honsho and the Kage of the village and they'd decide the fate of the shinobi in question.

But just because he lied about some of it didn't mean he lied about all of it. Could she really take the chance? Especially when people were willing to attack people for stupid reasons?

Her eyes tried to Hinata, who was fidgeting in her seat. She looked terrified. Like she was about to faint from her panic. Sakura couldn't see Choji but she was sure he was busy eating instead of worrying about promotions.

More than half the room was cleared already, hands still rising, though tentatively now.

Hinata was very nearly pouring sweat.

With a pang of regret, Sakura firmly raised her hand.

"Team Eight of Konoha, numbers 13, 34, and 78, you may leave."

Hinata slumped just a bit and scampered to the door, waiting for Sakura and Choji. Sakura murmured her apologies to her teammates as they left the room.

Hinata gave a shy smile."I-It's okay. I-I was going to raise my h-hand too."

"Yeah, me too. I ran out of chips. At least next time I'll have a better idea of how much food to bring," shrugged Choji.

Sakura felt relieved, knowing that her team didn't hate her for her decision.

She made the right choice.

Morino Ibiki read over the tests in his hands. There was one he'd kept, even though the Genin had quit before the tenth question. The girl had practically flown through the test.

Her answers were so detailed and expressive and he hadn't come across a test paper like hers in years.

Who knew that a Genin was capable of that much?

Ibiki found Kurenai sitting in the Jonin Standby Station, right beside Asuma. Both were drinking tea
and laughing freely.

"Yuhi!" the T&I Head called out, gaining their attention.

"Yes?"

"You team did not pass on to the second exam, however, I did keep track of your Haruno Sakura's test. She aced it perfectly. The only person in the room, besides my Chunin stationed amidst the Genin who had all the answers, to get every one correct. I haven't seen this kind of test in years."

He handed the paper over, allowing the woman to verify it with her own, crimson gaze.

"She is a budding cryptographer, among other things. You should get her into some of the courses in the Cypher Division. It would do her a world of good and in the long run, help the village." Yuhi's eyes widened as she finished reading the answers and she nodded thoughtfully.

"I knew she was book smart, but I didn't think it went this far."

"Think about, Yuhi."

They could not let talent like that just slip away.

"Don't feel so bad about them leaving. They just weren't ready."

Hari plated up the food, offering Kurenai her's first because she was so down. Anko began picking off her friend's plate the moment it was set down.

The Genjutsu Mistress sighed, picking a piece of broccoli up and munching on it. "I'd hoped they'd at least make it past the second exam first before quitting."

"Well, aren't there usually a lot of hard decisions to make while being a shinobi? Sometimes pressing forward isn't the best choice and the fact that Sakura-san had considered everything before quitting, instead of just herself, shows maturity and growth. I'm impressed with her foresight."

Kurenai nodded, a small smile playing across her features.

"So Anko, what sort of torture will you be putting the Genin through tomorrow?"

Anko beamed and went into an incredibly long explanation of what the Shi no Mori was like and what the Genin would have to face while inside, plus the extra little tidbits she threw in just because she could.

"It's going to be so much fun! Kami, I love the screaming!"

Hari was strangely reminded of Filch with that. She shuddered and resolved to ignore that part with all her might.

"Ah!" Naruto screamed because he'd fallen into another trap that their sensei had set up. When they went on a training trip, he thought it would simply be in an open space where they could practice new jutsu and stuff without having to worry about cleaning up the area when they were done!

Instead, Kakashi-sensei dumped them in a forest that he'd booby trapped the night before while they were sleeping and then left them. His Kage Bunshin stayed behind to relay the message and then disappeared, leaving the Genin all alone at the mercy of nature.
"Naruto, stop moving!" screamed Ino.

She'd taken to just carrying a kunai because Naruto seemed to be the only one falling into traps and both had gotten used to saving him.

"Why do the trees around here have to be so thick?" the blond demanded, because it was totally the trees at fault and not him.

"It's what Hi no Kuni is best known for dobe, deal with it."

"Shut it, teme!"

The two free Genin moved quickly to free their erstwhile teammate. Once Naruto was touching the ground again - from falling out of the net - he brushed himself off and asked which way they were to go.

"The instructions were to go to Konoha," reiterated Ino for the third time that day. "None of us have a compass though."

Nope. They didn't.

"We'd be wasting time if we tried every direction," Sasuke pointed out. Teme.

"I should probably get nee-chan to get a compass when we get back to the village. I have lanterns but no compass," Naruto said, feeling foolish. He hadn't thought he'd need one as a Genin when he had a Jonin sensei who knew his way around.

Ino snapped her fingers, "Naruto, make several Kage Bunshin and send them off to do the searching for us!"

"YES!"

Naruto did so and the various clones ran off, leaving the real team alone.

"While waiting, we should eat lunch and do some training."

Naruto was ready to crack out the ramen, but Ino put a hand on his arm, stalling all movement. "You had ramen last night. You need healthy food. I sealed some fruits in this scroll. You'll eat some of those."

"But I don't like apples!"

"I have bananas as well."

"I don't like them either. They got a nasty aftertaste!"

Ino and the teme shared a look and the teme began pulling ninja wire from his pouch.

"What are you doing?"

Naruto backed away as they advanced.

"No!"

They pounced.
Anko chuckled mercilessly as the screams and begging continued on well into the afternoon.

She hadn't expected for there to be so few people to make it past the first exam. She'd been banking on at least fifty teams, but so many bowed out, leaving her with only eighteen teams to terrify.

Still though, some of those Genin were ruthless! That Kusa shinobi in particular.

"Anko-san! Anko-san!"

The kunoichi sighed because she going to be able to finish her dango in peace now, was she? These little Chunin were so skittish and picky.

"Anko-san!"

"I heard you dammit! What you do want?!"

Anko had been resting atop a large boulder not too far outside the starting gate she'd made the announcement, when the twinky little Chunin rushed on over, looking for her. Of course he hadn't thought to look up but when he did, he jumped about a foot.

"The Kusa ninja! We found their bodies on the other side of the training ground, but-!" he cut himself off, a look of complete horror on his face.

"'But' what? Spit it out!"

"Someone stole their faces!"

And just like that, her calm afternoon of reveling in the suffering of the Chunin wannabes went to hell. She knew of only one person who could do that particular trick and if he was in Konoha again, they were in for hell.

Anko only needed a few seconds to look at the bodies before she was rushing into the forest, screaming for the Chunin to alert the Hokage of the situation.

Naruto jerked awake suddenly, the memory of being decapitated and drawn and quartered still fresh in his mind.

"Dobe?"

The blond shook his head a few times and began packing his things up. "There are Iwa ninja near us. They grabbed some of my Kage Bunshin and did," he shivered, "-terrible things to them. We really need to get out of here and as far as I know, nothing to your left is going to get us to Konoha."

Naruto shook Ino awake and explained the situation.

"What are they doing in Hi no Kuni?" she mumbled, scattering the dirt over the fire to snuff it out. She then kicked away the stones and the sticks, covering it with more dirt.

"Who knows, but they are here somehow and they hate Konoha shinobi," Naruto shrugged, already helping to pack Ino's bag up. "One of them called me 'Yondaime scum'," he added.

Both Ino and Sasuke stopped what they were doing to stare at him.

Ino was nodding, "I can see it. You look just like the picture of the Yondaime that sits in Hokage-sama's office."
Sasuke only nodded. "We should go though. Their grudge is so bad they'd attack a child simply for looking like the Yondaime and that doesn't spell anything good for us."

"We'll use the river. It won't leave any traces of us behind," Ino added.

Once packed up, they double checked the site to make sure no other traces were left behind and then they stepped into the river and began their run back to Konoha. Or at least… what they hoped was Konoha.

"Remember how we complained to sensei about the way he trained us in Water Walking?" Naruto asked rhetorically. "I'm not so offended by it now."

"True."

Naruto could only hope that the Iwa ninja were as dumb as they looked.

"There are three adversaries," he explained. "Brunets around Kakashi-sensei's height. The one with the short, spiky hair loves his kusarigama. He knows how to use it. The one with the ponytail prefers a mace and while I didn't see him use it, he seems to know how to handle it well. The last has a fringe that covers his left eye. He carries a sword that he seems a bit too happy to use. Also, I think he's a bit of a narcissist because he kept talking about his beauty being better than everyone else's."

"Good job, dobe."

Naruto practically preened because a genuine compliment from the the teme was rare.

"Thanks, teme."

Sasuke barely dodged the assault. He didn't know why Iwa shinobi were in Hi no Kuni, but what he did know was that he needed to get his team out of here!

But there were three shinobi at least Chunin level, and his team hadn't had to deal with this much yet. The Demon Brothers had been easy to handle because they underestimated their opponents and went easy on them. Ino's reflexive movement saved them a lot of hassle that day.

These adversaries were extremely different. They moved with a sort of grace that only came with being a seasoned shinobi. They were aiming to kill. Not simply kill though. To rend. Maim. They wanted to make Team Seven suffer simply because Naruto looked like the Yondaime, which was actually very strange once he gave it thought.

Still, Naruto didn't have time to make any Kage Bunshin and Ino was fighting a losing battle against someone who was too fast for her to capture in her family's jutsu.

Sasuke brought his kunai up too slow and took a direct hit to the left cheek. A sharp, shattering pain filled his face as he was sent flying into and through a tree.

The ninja scoffed. "You Konoha gakis are pathetic," he sneered.

Ino's high pitched scream filled the forest and Sasuke struggled to stand, but his neck wasn't moving well and his leg and face burned. Searing pain. He could only see out of his right eye and what he saw make his hackles rise and his anger burn.

"Oh boys, we have the last Uchiha on our hands!" crooned Sasuke's opponent.

How would he know that? Sasuke hadn't worn his clan symbol on the training mission. Unless… his
Sharingan! He'd finally gotten his Sharingan and yet he couldn't even move to use it!

"The girl was easy to take care of. Let's get the last one, he's still managing to keep up with Kosuke," offered the other ninja.

Ino wasn't moving. Sasuke could feel hot tears sliding down his cheeks without his consent. He was weak. He couldn't save his teammates and they were going to die. This was why he needed to be stronger. So things like this didn't happen to the people he cared about!

The feelings of uselessness hurt.

And Naruto was all that was left.

When Naruto faced his opponent, he hadn't thought the man would be so ferocious. His intense hatred of the Yondaime had spurred him on to fight with everything he had.

Naruto couldn't look away. He had to focus, because he was getting pummeled already and was just barely dodging the deadly blows.

"Come on gaki, live up to you old man's potential!" yelled the Iwa shinobi.

Naruto shuddered as another slash appeared on his arm. He was covered in cuts and bruises and his body throbbed with pain.

"I don't know… what you're talking about, teme. I don't have parents!"

"Ha! You're not going to fool me with that! I know you're the son of the Kiroi Senko!"

"Who?"

It sounded familiar but he really couldn't sit back and think of answers when someone was trying their hardest to kill him.

"Hey Kosuke, can't handle the Yondaime's legacy?" taunted one of the other ninja.

"Yeah, we already took care of his little friends!" boasted the other.

'Took care of'. Sasuke and Ino were…

"He's got more stamina than them and it's like his wounds are healing even as we fight! I expect no less from the Yondaime's son!"

Those last few words were Naruto's undoing. He'd foolishly allowed himself to freeze in shock at the man's exclamation and in doing so, received a gut full of tanto and a smirking Iwa ninja.

The weapon was extracted and Naruto stumbled away, having never felt this kind of pain before. No one had ever stabbed him before. He didn't have anything to liken it to, it was that bad.

"Aw, the little boy can't take the heat! Weak, Konoha gakis."

A kick in the face sent him careening through a tree. The blond struggled to stand again. He couldn't give up. Not on his friends, not on his dream. He couldn't die here! He had so much to live for!

What about Hari-chan? He hadn't even gotten to see her before coming on this mission! He couldn't not see her again!
You want to live.

Huh?

You want to see this mission through and come out alive? I can help you. I'll help you tear your enemies to pieces!

Naruto could feel a burning in his skin and his eyes. He blinked, trying to will whatever it was, away.

"What the hell is that?!!" he heard one of the Iwa shinobi yell, sounding terrified.

The burning persisted and Naruto felt like his skin was being eaten away. He could see a red/orange sort of chakra bubbling over his skin. It was the cause of the burn no doubt. His wounds were glowing red and sealing up slowly, until there was nothing but bare, peachy skin left behind.

He felt stronger. More powerful. The blond flipped to his feet to examine his suddenly healed body. The chakra was coating his entire frame. Like a cloak of some sort.

"Wait, I've see this! On both Han and Roshi!"

Naruto's head snapped in the direction of the enemies standing several meters away. Gone was the arrogant confidence, instead they were looking at him with horror in their eyes.

Good.

"He's a Jinchuuriki!" one of the shinobi breathed, already beginning to shake.

"Namikaze did it to his own son?!!"

"I'm outta here!"

His prey was escaping. They couldn't leave. They had hurt his team. They hurt him. They had to pay. Suffer. Blood for blood. One payment was due another.

Yes, the deep voice purred. Tear them apart for even touching what is yours!

He charged. Claws sank through warm flesh, spilling lifeblood with ease. His prey screamed their pain for the forest to hear. Naruto cut him down by tearing out his vocal chords and leaving him there to bleed out.

His next opponent was wielding his mace, trying to swing for Naruto's head. No luck, the Jinchuuriki was much faster, jumping over the heavy weapon and landing a chakra covered kick to the fool's face.

"AAAH!"

Naruto was pleased to see the red chakra practically eating the man's skin away. Served him right. A swipe of his claws severed the head from the shoulders, leaving the body to drop uselessly to the forest floor.

His final opponent had already managed to get far ahead. Naruto sank into a crouch and shot off, closing the distance between them in the blink of an eye and the man's realization that he wasn't getting out of this, and his fear that came along with it, was like heaven to Naruto.
With a pounce, Naruto took the enemy to the ground, fangs sunk into the flesh at his neck, claws piercing the arms, grabbing tightly into them. With a great wrench, Naruto ripped the limbs from the body beneath him and relished the agonized cry that came as a result.

*Yes! Make him suffer!* cheered the voice.

Naruto agreed with that plan, the pleas for mercy simply spurring him on.

Kakashi hadn't expected that his scouting of the perimeter while allowing his team to prepare for their journey back to Konoha, would end up like this. He'd simply traveled several miles out of the way so they couldn't sense him and he ended up near the border that split Hi no Kuni and Tsuchi no Kuni.

He hadn't know there would be trouble out this way since no one had mentioned anything in their reports as of late and the Hokage hadn't warned any of his shinobi to stay away from the area.

The border was separated by a small of strip of land that consisted of the unnamed lands where Takigakure and Kusagakure resided. The strip wasn't even a mile long, allowing for him to see the outposts on the other side easily.

Kakashi hated this particular place in general because Kannabi Bridge was about five miles to the West.

Still, the borders had been in constant dispute with Iwa shinobi actually pushing their luck and trying to get through.

Kakashi had sent a message to the Hokage via Pakkun and joined in the guarding himself, hoping that he'd be able to help resolve the situation before he had to get back to his kids.

How wrong he was.

One of his fellow Konoha shinobi, a Chunin, had ran up to him on the third day while he was standing guard with two others, informing him that he wasn't able to stop three shinobi from getting through. And they were headed in the direction of Kakashi's students.

He couldn't leave his kids, but he couldn't leave the border either. Kakashi believed in Obito's words wholeheartedly and he couldn't let either of his comrades die. But his kids... they were more important. And he couldn't go back to the village and see the look of heartbreak on Hari-hime's face if he didn't manage to save her little brother, who was also his sensei's son.

Kakashi left the border patrol with a Kage Bunshin of himself, because overall, his students were more important to him.

He'd been awake of fifty-nine hours straight and his chakra was only half full, but he still pushed himself to find the Iwa invaders because he would not let the Yondaime's legacy die out. He could not let his Genin suffer.

After hours of running, Kakashi passed where his team had been left and found their trail missing. The remnants of the campsite were sparse and he couldn't scent anything.

He summoned Guruko, as next to Pakkun, he had the best sense of smell.

"Hiya, boss!"
"Can you scent anyone who was previously here? I can't find my Genin."

The dog placed his whiskered face to the ground and began scenting the area. His nose led him to the river where he sat down. "Their scent disappears here, but they were going in that direction."

"Thank you!"

"No problem, boss!" the ninkei dispelled himself and Kakashi took to following the river. His Genin had gotten rid of the evidence and took to the water so they'd be more difficult to find. Very smart of them. He was proud.

After another hour or so of running, a chill ran down his spine as malicious chakra filled the air. He hadn't felt said chakra since… that night.

His team had been caught and it was bad enough for the Kyubi's chakra to be unleashed. He pushed himself harder, hoping to get there before Naruto lost complete control.

He was too late of course. Naruto was tearing apart a body by the time he made it.

His blond student was covered in red chakra that shrouded his body. Two long strips shot from his head and two longer strips jutted out from his back, swinging around like premature tails and ears.

Like a mini fox.

He shuddered at the thought and flickered his chakra to catch the Genin's attention.

Slowly, blood red eyes looked up, catching his gaze.

"Naruto," Kakashi called softly, trying to use a calming approach generally used to bring manic shinobi from the edge of insanity.

"Naruto, where are Sasuke and Ino?"

Their chakra signatures were very faint and while he'd love to go see if they were okay, he had to calm down his Jinchuuriki student to prevent anything else from happening.

His head cocked to the side like a curious animal, eyes regarding Kakashi intently. The Jonin's hands were in the open and far from his weapon pouch. His chakra output was calm and encouraging.

His scent was unfortunately mixed with foreign blood so he knew that that could raise Naruto's defense, but he was willing to try his hardest.

While having knowledge of Fuuinjutsu, Kakashi was not a master and didn't have the patience required to obtain a mastery.

"Naruto, everything is fine now."

It actually wasn't but assuring a frazzled shinobi that they were alright was usually the first step in calming them.

"You can rest now."

Red flickered blue for a second and Kakashi's heart sped up a bit. The blond flinched and backed away, clawed hands reaching for his own head. Furious blinking and head shaking, as if trying to dislodge something uncomfortable.
Perhaps… perhaps he was in contact with the fox.

"Naruto!"

The red chakra flared and dimmed in continuous motion, just as the red and blue battled for control. Naruto was ramming his head into a tree now, struggling to control his body on his own.

In a spare second of blue eyes, Kakashi unleashed every ounce of KI he could in hopes of shocking the Genin into the present. Kakashi could match Zabuza with his Killer Intent and judging my Naruto's suddenly stiff form and wide, petrified eyes, he could feel it.

Kakashi was a prodigy and rarely did his plans ever go wrong. He was proud of that fact and even more proud when Naruto body slumped to the ground and the red chakra seemed to be sucked back into the blond's body. Fangs and claws receded and blue eyes watched him tiredly.

"Sensei," croaked the Genin hoarsely. "Am I the Yondaime's son?"

Aw, damn.

Sarutobi Hiruzen was just getting too old for all of this. He had to seriously consider his second successor because he didn't know how much more of this he was going to have to deal with.

He'd just dispatched four teams of Tokubetsu Jonin/Jonin who mostly specialize in assassination to the borders of Kusa, Taki, and Iwa. Kakashi's ninken summons had given him the small note about what was going on down there and he was honestly not surprised.

The Chunin Exams were taking place and the Second Exam was ending at three this afternoon. Of course the Iwa shinobi would want to get an ear of the rising Genin prodigies.

The problem in this, was that Iwa ninja sneaking past borders while one Uzumaki Naruto resided mere miles from their location. If any of them got one look at the boy, he'd be dead. That, or close enough to unleash the Kyubi on them.

Over everything in his life, they'd managed to stave off any sort of contact between him and the Biju and Hiruzen knew that this stroke of luck was most likely not going to continue for very long.

So a few moments ago he'd sent for Potta Hari and Yamanaka Inoichi because he had to give the standard warning given to family members of possibly MIA/KIA shinobi. He hated giving these kinds of speeches and it was regrettable that it had to happen so soon after Team Seven became a Genin team.

The two entered the office a moment later to find him nursing a bottle of sake - which he almost never did on the job - as well as his pipe. It was the appropriate reaction given what he'd learned today.

"Hari-hime, Inoichi-kun, I have received reports from the border of Kusa, Taki, and Iwa, that several Iwa shinobi have been crossing the border and trying to gain entrance into Hi no Kuni. Team Seven, under the leadership of their Jonin Sensei, Hatake Kakashi, are currently on a training trip in the northwestern vicinity of Hi no Kuni and are uncomfortably close to the action.

At present, Hatake is not with his Genin, having left them instruction to find their way back to Konoha on their own, in an attempt to teach them how to strategize and navigate. He was supposed to follow behind them and subtly make their trek more difficult as time moved on, but while scouting the perimeter of the training area, he caught Iwa shinobi and returned them to the border patrol, only
to find that a small battle has been going on for the past few days.

Recently I have received notification from Hatake and have sent shinobi out to aid in the skirmish, but it is my sworn duty to inform you that Team Seven is mere miles away from this and should any of those shinobi get past our defenses, they may be in danger. If no news of them is brought within a week, we must assume they are MIA. If no new presents itself within a month, then we are to assume KIA.

I apologize for the suddenness of this information and effect it will have on your families."

Now that the standard revelation was out of the way, Hiruzen continued. "I have full confidence that the children will return. Kakashi will never allow his comrades to suffer and between the patrol and his Genin, he'd choose the children first."

Both Inoichi and Hiruzen turned to Hari-hime to see how she was taking the information. Not well, considering how pale she'd gotten and how her breathing had sped up.

"I will be sending someone to either of you should I be notified of their whereabouts or they have returned."

Inoichi bowed and took Hari-hime by the arm, leading her from the room as he spoke softly.

The Sandaime took another sip of sake. It was going to be a long few weeks.

On another note, he had to make his way to the Tower in the Shi no Mori. There were Genin and possibly a preliminary to hold. Not to mention, his wayward student may still be in the village and could either be one of the visiting Genin or one of their senseis.

He sighed, wishing that he could just be done with his job.

The assembled Jonin and Tokubetsu Jonin were reviewing everything they'd managed to learn about the individual, foreign Genin who had made it to the Third Exam this year. Only four Konoha shinobi had made it through and they were from Asuma's team, Nara Shikamaru and Aburame Shino, and Gai's team, TenTen and Hyuga Neji.

The others though. The Suna siblings were heavy hitters who were to be watched for. The two older ones were cocksure and while more advanced than some of the other Genin, were still easy to manipulate with their emotions. Their little brother however, was bloodthirsty, shown when he nearly tore apart Maito Gai's student Rock Lee. The boy bore the most watching because he was so dangerous and relentless.

Then came Kinuta Dosu from Oto, which was a relatively new village. His teammates had lost to the two advancing Konoha Genin. He had beaten the only Ame ninja who had stayed for the preliminaries, making him the sixth Genin in the Third Exam.

Then Gai's two remaining students had defeated their opponents from Takigakure and ensured themselves places in the final exam.

"I have faith that Shikamaru is going to defeat Temari," Asuma stated. "Her cocky attitude will make her overestimate herself.

"But her control over her element is impressive and should not be ignored," remarked Aburame Shibi, logical as always. "She could end the fight before it really begins, if young Shikamaru is not fast enough."
Shikaku shrugged, "Wind is nice, but it still cannot beat a shadow. I will be training him for various possible outcomes. That wind - while her greatest accessory - can also be her downfall. Wind can create a lot of damage to the battlefield and should she upend the trees or even the ground itself, she'd only be adding to his advantage in the end."

The others had to nod their agreement to that, because anything could make a shadow and many people forgot the shadows under the ground.

"Now about Kankuro, he too is very skilled," Kurenai stated, remembering his use of puppeteering.

"The problem with that is that Shino is an Aburame and they are naturally good at sensing chakra, a trait they share with their kikaichu," explained Shikaku. "The nearly, indistinguishable chakra strings he'll no doubt be using will be easily severed by the kikaichu and the various methods Shino could use against him to reduce his chakra flow are vast and would simply be too troublesome to elaborate. But they exist. Shino's battle is an easy win."

No one could argue.

Gai, who had been silent up until then - strangely enough for all who knew him personally - leaned against the table they were all sitting at in the Jonin Standby Station. "My youthful Lee fought Gaara and lost. As I have now seen his capabilities I am not certain that TenTen is the ideal opponent for him. He would require a Taijutsu specialist with intense speed. Close range. TenTen is long range and doesn't like Taijutsu all too much. I have faith in her skills if it was a battle against anyone else, but I am considering asking her to do something most unyouthful and quit."

"It would actually be best for her to quit," Shikaku concluded. "While her knowledge of weapons is impressive for a Genin of her age and experience, she is not one to be trifled with. Also, if what the report I've gotten this morning says is correct, Sabaku no Gaara is the Ichibi Jinchuuriki."

Everyone sat up straighter in alarm. It wasn't illegal to bring your Jinchuuriki to a Chunin Exam, but considering how unstable this one was, they had a cause for concern.

"Jiraiya-sama has returned to the village and I was with he, Hokage-sama, and the stand-in Anbu Honsho for nearly three hours today."

Shikaku looked around and placed his hands on the table, flat out with his thumbs touching at the tips and his pinkies folded under his fourth fingers. It was a sign in Konoha that the following statement would be made in Konoha Sign Language.

Suna and Oto are planning an invasion and the Jinchuuriki is the main force behind it.

Everyone nodded their understanding.

Maybe instead of fighting Gaara, TenTen loads the arena with traps? Gai offered, fumbling only slightly with his signs.

*If she can, it would be wonderful. I will be informing Hayate about this and he will be instructed to add protections on the stadium*, Shikaku nodded.

"How's Team Eight dealing with leaving the exams?" Asuma asked, changing the subject as some Chunin entered the room, arms loaded with paperwork.

Kurenai sighed at the reminder.
Death had kindly informed Hari that her little brother figure and his team were a few miles from the village and the Hokage had gotten a notice of their return.

She was warned to expect three depressive children and a somber Jonin.

So she waited and waited at the gate that morning to make it look like she hadn't known that her kids were returning that day. She paced incessantly, bought some food from passing merchants who were entering the village, and generally made herself at home under a tree by the North Gate.

Death had more to add. "Sasuke and Ino are unconscious and Naruto is perfectly healed thanks to his Biju. They encountered shinobi much stronger than them and Naruto ended up using the Kyubi's chakra to kill the enemy. He's using his Kage Bunshin to help transport his teammates who are really weakened, Kakashi included. He's in a terrible mood."

First kills were always harsh. She wished she could have stopped it from happening.

"As I said, you cannot be there all the time. He will have to grow up and mature."

*That doesn't mean I can't be protective!*

"Here they come."

Her head snapped up, seeing a large group of orange walking through the gate. It was a pack of Narutos, holding Kakashi, Ino, and Sasuke.

The Gate Guards were leaping over their desk in order get closer to ask what was wrong. Hari too was making her way over because she had to hug her squirt.

"I'm supposed to do something but I can't remember what is was," Naruto said to the guards. He then poked Kakashi, who was on the back of one of his Kage Bunshin. "Sensei, what do we do?"

Koinu-kun took the pen from the one guard and wrote something on the clipboard provided without even opening his eye.

The guards looked it over and nodded, advising him to get them to the hospital quickly.

Hari made her appearance then, levitating the three limp shinobi, relieving the Narutos of their burdens. The original looked ready to bawl, but he sniffed, tightened his jaw, and just gave her a quick hug.

"They're really hurt," he mumbled into her yukata.

"I'll take them to the hospital, you go to the Yamanaka Flower Shop and inform Ino's parents that she's back. Come to the hospital when you're finished."

She kissed his cheek and started to run, the three bodies in front of her were enough to make people clear out of the way.

*They can't die from their wounds, right?*

"No. But they will be in pain."

*So long as they're okay.*
A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other Harry Potter fics.

See ya! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

How was it?
Uzumaki Naruto shifted uncomfortably on the seat outside the emergency room. He wasn't allowed to be in there with his teammates because he was only a Genin with no medical experience and he'd most likely get in the way of what the others were trying to accomplish.

Hari-nee-chan sat to his left, her arm around his shoulders as her hand carded through his spikes soothingly. She was warm, which was something he hadn't gotten since the beginning of their training trip. He turned his head, burying his face in her dark hair, seeking the comfort only she seemed capable of providing.

"I lost control, nee-chan," he mumbled. "I-I did bad things to them."

"They were doing bad things to you. I'd have killed them as well."

He shivered, having never heard his nee-chan sound so angry or bloodthirsty before. "It's how I… killed them, that bothers me, nee-chan. It talked to me. It- it told me what to do and cheered me on."

She huffed, "So you used the Biju. That's what you're supposed to do you know. Your seal was created to let you use it's chakra, or so Sandaime-sama told me. While it may not seem good to you,
you didn't anything wrong. You saved the lives of your teammates. Whatever your enemy had done, warranted their deaths."

Naruto was not allowed to give details about the training trip because nee-chan was only a civilian. He could only gloss over everything. He didn't even want to remember any of it.

But just because the men wanted to slaughter him just because he looked like the Yondaime - and Kakashi-sensei had never answered his question about him being related to the Yondaime - didn't mean that he had to kill them.

And it wasn't just a kill. He'd hunted those men down and tore them apart with his fangs and claws.

For the first time in his life… he felt like a monster.

The ceiling above her was white. The whitest she'd ever seen even. She blinked a few times, because the light coming in from the window to her right was blinding and she didn't seem to have control of her arms yet to block it out.

The air smelled strongly of disinfectant and lavender. There were several IVs hooked up to her arms and wrists, and she realized that she wasn't in Kusagakure. Kusa was extremely behind the times in technological advancement because they were so poor.

The last thing she remembered was an enormous bear and then… nothing.

They must have scraped her off the ground of the forest or something.

She'd eventually have to go back to Kusa and she didn't even know what had happened to her teammates.

"You're awake!" a chipper voice said, shocking her. She should have been able to sense someone, but for some reason, she hadn't. Maybe she was ill.

It was a nurse. She was wearing a really bright, white uniform and was holding a brown clipboard in her one hand. "You've been unconscious for nearly six days."

Karin watched her carefully, from the pen in her hand, to the shifting of her arms when she moved. Karin wasn't used to dealing with people she didn't know and she was slightly uncomfortable to have the unknown person's attention focused on her so much.

"You will make a clean recovery and will be up and about within the next few days! Can you remember what happened before you passed out?"

She put the pen to the clipboard and looked up expectantly.


The nurse poured a cup of water and held it to her lips, only getting a blank stare in return. Karin didn't know if it had anything in it or not. She couldn't scent anything, but Konoha was far more along than her country and could probably have scentless drugs for all she knew.

"I can drink a cup first if you want," said the woman as if Karin's hesitance wasn't anything she wasn't used to. In fact, Karin was the premier medic in her land, so she knew about fussy patients. It wasn't that she wasn't grateful for help but she was also very reluctant to let her guard down, especially after just waking up from a very long sleep and finding out that she'd been hospitalized
and quite possibly experimented on for all she knew.

With an annoyed disposition, Karin allowed herself to drink the water, hoping that it wasn't laced with anything. Her throat did feel better though, so that had to be good.

Clearing her throat, she continued on. "I was separated from my team before we'd even gotten a mile into the forest. The team that attacked us was trying to section me off. The usual strategy is to take down a squad's medic first of course. I managed to lure my opponent away. I killed him with a well placed Chakura no Mesu to the throat. He died quickly. On my way back to my team, I encountered three large bears. They ran very fast and were really strong, able to knock over one of those enormous trees with a single headbutt.

I killed the first two, but I had to use all my weapons. The last was smarter. It waited for me to tire and then attacked. I- I think my abdomen was slashed open. I passed out after that."

The woman nodded as she wrote down Karin's account. "You say you're an iryo-nin?"

"Yes."

"All of our iryo-nin are called in the surgery at the moment for an extreme case and will not be present possibly for the next several hours. Do you think you can help run a scan of your body to check if you've healed correctly?"

She was a no nonsense sort of person. Very efficient. Karin liked that.

With a nod, the redhead began pulling herself up, intent on getting this check up over with as quickly as she could.

"Alright, focus your chakra into your right arm for me and tell what you find."

And the next half hour was spent with Karin being poked and prodded by the nurse who marked down everything she could.

Apparently, her injuries had included a fractured arm, three broken ribs, a broken femur, and a concussion, along with minor contusions and lacerations. The bones in her arm were still slightly tender, which set her hospital time back several more days. Her femur had been completely healed however and was doing better.

Her occupational therapy was going to begin on the morrow and she'd be on a swift recovery very soon.

Karin was left alone with a plate full of terrible food and a pitcher of warm water.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Her attention snagged to the open doorway, where a boy stood. He was dressed in a horrible orange suit and had the brightest blond hair she had ever seen! Also… his chakra was enormous and seemed very warm.

"I could be doing better," she murmured because it was the truth. She did not want to be in a hospital and she didn't want to go back to Kusagakure when it was all over. So basically, no matter what happened, her life sucked.

He walked in - uninvited if that wasn't clear - and plopped down on the lone chair beside her bed. His chakra flickered nonstop. His emotions were all over the place.
"Me too. My team got attacked by Iwa ninja and my sensei is in 'intensive care' and my teammates are in some super important surgery that needs like every iryo-nin in the hospital. They won't tell me anything but they've been in there for like six hours already and no one has come out yet."

So that was why there weren't any iryo-nin available for her checkup. Ninja had stronger bones and muscles than civilians, due to actively using their chakra all the time, so if their injuries were so bad that they needed such important work done, then the Iwa shinobi held nothing back.

She'd heard about the strained relationship between the two nations but she didn't think it was that bad.

"They just attacked because you're Konoha shinobi?"

"Yeah," sighed the boy. He looked perfectly healthy for just having a run in with such dangerous foes, but he seemed mentally drained. "A lot of stuff happened and I... I had to-.."

He clammed up immediately and looked away, the window suddenly becoming more interesting to him. She wasn't daft, she could extrapolate from what he'd said so far. He most likely had to kill for the first time and wasn't taking it too well. After all, he was around her size so they might be about the same age.

Speaking of age.

"What's the date?" she asked.

"Uuum, June twenty-third."

"Oh, I turned thirteen three days ago and I wasn't even awake for it. Great."

His eyes bugged. "You're older than me? And you didn't celebrate your birthday?!" he exclaimed, nearly blowing her eardrums while doing so.

"Uh, yeah?"

The blond shot to his feet, "Well if I can't help my team I can at least help you! Hospital food sucks so I'm going to get you some ramen, -ttebayo!"

He was running for the door in the next second, "I'll be back!"

Karin was left dumbstruck, because her mom had always said something similar when she was excited.

'-ttebane'.

And overall, she never even got his name!

Naruto always tried to be a positive person and since his team wasn't going to be around for Kami only knew how long, he had to make due with what he had. That didn't mean that he couldn't try other things in order to keep his mind off his constant worry, though.

Now the red haired girl looked miserable and since he couldn't help his team, he would do his best to help her.

So ramen it was.
And really, ramen would help him feel a lot better too.

"Ayame-nee-chan, I need five large serving of Miso ramen to go!"

"You're back from your training trip!" the brunette smiled, eyes twinkling. "How'd it go?"

His mood plummeted immediately. "Well, stuff happened and everyone else is in the hospital and I'm not allowed to give much detail," he mumbled, hoping she'd drop it quickly.

Ayame was always one of the best when it came to making him feel better and thankfully she didn't ask any further, but she did pat his head and tell him things would get better and that the first serving of ramen was free.

"I found a girl who got hurt in the Chunin Exam and she's stuck in the hospital for a while so I want to cheer her up a bit. Hari-nee-chan was going to stay with me to wait but I told her she needed to help the kids more. They need her because they're all little and stuff. I can see her when I go home."

The young woman sighed, "Why can't I find someone so understanding?"

Naruto's nose wrinkled, "If no one can see how awesome you are, then maybe your future isn't in Konoha. We have established that Konoha civilians aren't the smartest already, just look at my life for an example. Maybe you'll find someone who's a foreigner."

She beamed, "Thanks, Naruto."

The blond flushed and accepted the large bag containing the food. He placed the appropriate payment on the bar and waved goodbye, jumping onto the roof in order to take a shortcut to the hospital.

"I come back bearing a lot of ramen! -ttebayo!"

Karin jumped at the sudden intrusion, dropping her cup of water in the process.

"Sorry! Good thing it's only water!"

He was really loud.

Still, the blond was carrying a large bag that he proceeded to empty out onto the small table on the other side of the room, with bowls and chopsticks and a large container of whatever 'ramen' was.

"There's five servings in here so you should eat first, 'cause I eat a lot and it would be better that you get enough before I have a crack at it."

He placed the large bowl on her lap and plopped himself down on the chair. "The food of the Kami right here, -ttebayo!"

"Where'd you learn that little verbal tic?" she asked, splitting apart her chopsticks in the process. The 'ramen' smelled good at least and he didn't seem the kind to poison it.

His face went slack for a moment. "I don't know. I've been doing it for as long as I can remember, really."

"Do one of your parents do it?"

He winced, "I'm an orphan. Since the day I was born actually. I don't know know who my parents
are… though I might have an idea who my father is. I have to wait to give my mission account thingy before I think about that though. Ino was usually the one who was in charge of that - she's the team leader when sensei isn't around - and with her in the surgery I don't really know what I'm supposed to be doing. She's the smart one."

The kid was like a lost lamb.

"I'm Karin."

"Uzumaki Naruto! I'm going to be the Hokage! -ttebayo!"

Well damn.

"Death, exactly how bad is this going to be?"

"The medics here aren't skilled enough to completely fix all the damage. Sasuke's jaw is completely shattered after all and that kind injury would need exemplary healing ability."

"Can we vanish the bones and then regrow them?"

"I would not suggest that. It would vanish his entire cranium as well and his brain absolutely needs that protective space. The slightest bump could kill him that way."

"Fuck! What else? Who's got the skills to fix this?"

"She is no longer a part of the village. Senju Tsunade is the granddaughter of the Shodaime Hokage but her life has been filled with much heartache and she resigned from the active roster over a decade ago. She is hailed as the greatest medic in this world. She has the ability, but convincing her to return to a village she hates would be nearly impossible."

"I will Imperius her if need be."

"That would cause a lot of questions and should she awaken and not understand why she's in the village, she may even submit to a mind walk and they could find traces of your voice in her memories. There are some very skilled clans in the world, you need to be careful when you suggest things."

"Well it's not like I know everything about this world! Besides, I have you to help me when necessary."

Death did not answer and Hari continue to scrub the floor as she contemplated her future actions.

"Will they be disfigured or could this hinder their careers as shinobi?"

"Ino and Sasuke most definitely both."

"I don't know any healing magic besides how to clear the airways and how to help broken toes or noses, thanks to Luna."

Hari had to stop and consider her own stupidity. Sixty years old and she still didn't know a damn thing about healing. Tell her to destroy something and she'll have it obliterated, but heal a broken mandible and nope. She's useless.
"Tsunade would also be extremely difficult to get near a body because she now has severe hemaphobia."

The vase on the table shattered when Hari's magic reacted too strongly. The fluctuation caused the air to ripple suddenly. Nothing was going right!

"Is there nothing that can be done? Naruto will be heartbroken and I don't want these kids to lose their dreams."

Death's dark form drew nearer, away from their favorite corner. "You might be able to convince Tsunade's apprentice. She would be more willing, though not as skilled. Also, there is a young girl in the hospital at this moment, who is a distant relative of Naruto's. Their clan is known to have vast longevity and massive chakra reserves. Her chakra is special and could help heal most of the damage, but she's already considering helping. Naruto seems to be affecting her and now that she knows he too is an Uzumaki, she has been mulling over revealing her identity in order to help his friends."

So their only hope at present was in a little girl that was reluctant to expose herself? Harry's infinite amount of luck - either good or bad - seemed to have followed her all the way to this new world. She hated it.

"There is some all-powerful being in existence that just enjoys messing with me, I can tell."

Death didn't not comment and she huffed, going back to scrubbing. Maybe she'd keep her mind off things for a while.

Like baking some biscuits for her blond charge who was valiantly holding himself together. He liked chocolate.

"Hey Karin, I was thinking of placing itching powder in the men's clothing at the onsen, do you think I should use this brand or this brand?"

Karin blinked furiously at the two bottles shoved in her face so early in the morning. She hadn't even gotten a chance to put her glasses on and the blond was up in her space already.

She reached out for the frames and slipped them on, looking both bottles over. "Why not both?" she finally asked.

His look of wonder grew into a wide smile. He began to laugh. "Okay! This will be the best prank I have ever pulled! -ttebayo!"

"Shhhhh!" She cautioned, looking toward the door in case a nurse came along.

"Oh, everyone is still pretty wrapped up with my friends. They've been taken soldier pills and no one has slept yet," Naruto said, his shoulders slumping. His cheer dissipated instantly at the reminder that his friends were hurt.

Karin winced in sympathy. "Have you heard anything?"

Naruto fidgeted and looked away. "They might not continue as shinobi because there's not enough people with the skills or amount of chakra to do the work properly and the old hag that can, no longer lives in Konoha."
Tsunade of the Sannin he must mean.

Uzumaki Naruto was trying his best to remain positive but she knew that the situation had no positives. Unless…

She couldn't! Kusa would kill her! Or lock her up and refuse her to leave ever again! They'd bring her back if she managed to escape and then they'd chain her up and bring her out only when she was needed.

Karin wasn't keen on becoming a slave.

"I don't want a new team," Naruto mumbled. "Ino has helped me so much and besides my nee-chan, she was my first friend. She helped me even though she thought I was an annoying slacker. And teme, well, he's a teme but he was always nicer to me than everyone else was. And they both have their own dreams and stuff and I don't want them to end all because Iwa can't differentiate me from the Yondaime!

It's my fault that they're hurt. The Iwa shinobi attacked us because of me."

Karin’s will crumbled at how heartbroken the blond sounded.

If Kusa didn't like it, she didn't care. They had no business to keep her locked away like a slave anyhow.

Karin struggled to sit up. "Can you channel your chakra?"

"Um..."

"If I ask you to channel your chakra through me, can you do it?"

"Yeah."

"Help me walk, I still stumble a bit."

He reached out, grabbing into her arms as she began shuffling her feet toward the door. "Take me to the operating room your team is in."

"But-"

"Now! Everything will be explained when we get there."

Naruto led her down two floors and into the emergency part of the hospital. Luckily, no one was around to catch him escorting a patient away from her room.

They stopped in front of a large door that took up a good chunk of the wall.

"They've been in there for almost a full day."

"It's a good thing we have so much chakra," Karin commented. The Uzumaki heritage ran strong through both of them and she was going to try her best to make this person who seemed like he should always be happy, happy again. Besides, he was family.

She slammed her palm into the button on the wall that was meant for disabled people and the large door opened slowly. With a nod, Naruto walked her inside, much to the annoyance of the doctors and medics.
"You can't be in here!" some woman protested as she tried to get them to leave.

"Ignore her," Karin ordered, making Naruto bring her closer.

"Excuse me!"

No one but the nurse paid them any mind, their attention focused on the two people on the tables. Naruto put his fingers together and suddenly there were a dozen of him standing in a large cluster.

"EXCUSE US!" they all yelled, shocking everyone else.

Karin raised a hand in greeting and said, "My name is Uzumaki Karin and I am the only equivalent of an Iryo-nin in Kusagakure. I can help."

Naruto's mouth dropped open and so did many others. But Karin was already covering her arms in the disinfectant provided for the doctors. If she was going to help, she wasn't getting anyone ill while doing so.

"My chakra is imbued with my very own life-force which allows me to heal people at an excelled rate. By ingesting my chakra, I can mend nearly impossible to heal wounds and even regenerate body parts if need be."

The Iryo-nin were obviously weighing their options. She was foreigner and wasn't known to them, but the Uzumaki were well known for being good with their chakra. If they wanted to save the two Genin, they couldn't turn her away.

"Fine, but we will watch everything you do," warned the one medic who seemed to be the Head.

"Karin, what's going on?" Naruto asked as she limped forward to place herself at the blonde girl's side.

"I'm going to heal your friends. " Karin sent her new friend a look. "When my chakra begins to run low, I will need you to filter your chakra into my body. As an Uzumaki, you have an incredible amount of chakra at your disposal but you were never taught how to manipulate it like our clan is known for. Therefore I must take your chakra into my body, purify it, and then convert it so that I may use it to continue to heal them."

Karin rolled her sleeves up completely, revealing her arms, both riddled with numerous bite marks.

The blonde girl was looking better physically than the boy was. She could barely tell anything about his face because it was bashed up pretty badly.

Placing her arm to the girl's mouth, Karin began the long and arduous healing process, holding the girl's jaw in place so that he was actually biting down. One of the Iryo-nin massaged her throat to help her swallow and together, they worked to fix the damage done.

"Her vitals are looking much better," one of the medics commented after several minutes. "Heart steady, respiratory looking good. I think she's safe now. We managed to fix her organs and bones mostly, she was the easier patient."

Slowly, Karin retracted her chakra and pulled her arm away. The bite was deep, leaving red indentations in the shape of the girl's teeth behind.

"Woah!" came Naruto's amazement.
"The other one will need a lot more work. Naruto, I'm going to need you soon."

He popped up behind her while she moved her other arm to the boy's mangled mouth. His chest rose and fell at an alarming rate and his body was nearly ruined. They hadn't succeeded in fixing much of the damage.

Carefully, she had him bite down and could actually feel how quickly her chakra was being pulled into his body. He needed so much work done, she wondered if he'd actually make it out alive. She didn't say anything about it though, because Naruto seemed to care for his 'teme' a lot and Karin refused to be the bearer of bad news.

"Naruto, I need you now! Place your hands on my back and carefully focus your chakra."

He followed orders well, doing as she commanded with ease.

"Now slowly push it in. You will feel a sort of vacuum sensation which will be me pulling it from you, just continue to to filter it through me and we won't have any problems."

"Okay!"

Together, the two Genin worked on their individual jobs to come to one common goal.

Karin looked up, "I need someone to begin setting his bones back to the correct positions while we do this. I believe the organs are safe now, so the bones are going to need a lot of work as they are the most stubborn body parts to heal."

The Iryo-nin gathered around the body and began to set the different areas. Both legs and arms, the torso had suffered major damage as well. His face would probably have to come last because of all the work needed to fix him up.

Naruto's near endless supply of chakra saw them through the work and she had to marvel at how he didn't seem to tire, even three hours later when they could finally stop.

The boy's face was not finished and would probably need reconstructive surgery later on, but the rest of his body was fine now. He would live. His journey as a shinobi was still underway. Naruto's team would be fine.

His jaw had been shattered and the fractures had splintered off a bit. They'd have to cut his face open and find all the pieces that weren't attached and then put them back in the right places to realign the bone structure. That, or remove them and have Karin regrow the missing parts with her chakra. Which would take time.

When Naruto pulled away at last, Karin did not have enough chakra or energy to keep herself upright. The moment his chakra cut away from hers, she was slipping down, whether she fell to the floor while the darkness crept up on her, she didn't know. All she knew was that Naruto's warm chakra surrounded her again and she fell asleep in comfort.

---

All I ask is if this is my last night with you,

Hold me like I'm more than just your friend.

Give me a memory I can use,

Take me by the hand while we do, what lovers do.
Hatake Kakashi was roused to the sound of singing. The voice wasn't trained in the least, he could tell. It was also a bit pitchy in the parts that were supposed to be projected, but overall, the slight rasp to the sound was nice. And there was enough emotion in the words to get the point across.

The woman singing was walking around, fiddling with something most likely made of plastic.

He cracked open his eyes, blinking furiously at the suddenness of the light that hit him.

"Awake then, Koinu-kun?" came a teasing voice.

Koneko-chan. She was the one who had been singing. She was in his hospital room.

Oh dear.

"Don't sit up," she ordered sharply when he tried to move. "I presume you'd like to keep your face hidden and you are very much starkers under that sheet."

He laid back then, waiting for some kind of sign. She was pouring a cup of water for him and set it down on the stand beside the bed. She then turned around, showing her back to him.

"Drink all of that."

While Kakashi moved to do so - mentally impressed at how she was respecting his personal space and physically identity - she began to rattle off information that he needed.

"You've been unconscious for almost a week. Naruto has not gotten over his problem with what happened and I don't really know how to help him. When I first killed somebody, I wasn't given any kind of therapy or even asked how I felt afterward. He's been going to T&I every day since two days ago, for some psyche evaluations and they say he's fine, but you never know.

The hospital staff is all over the place currently because all Iryo-nin and several doctors and nurses had to work on Ino and Sasuke and exhausted themselves for twenty-nine hours in a row to help them. Eventually, Naruto managed to make friends with a young girl who is apparently an Uzumaki as well and she used her chakra and when she ran through all of it, used Naruto's chakra and they somehow healed Ino and Sasuke fully by having them bite her arms. I'm still confused over it, ninja are odd and chakra doesn't make sense."

She turned back around a moment after he situated himself again, and sat beside the bed. She was wearing a very baggy pair of black hakama and a black haori with long, belled sleeves. It was the most dressed down he'd ever seen her.

"Sasuke and Ino have not awoken yet, but I think that's good. Sasuke needed the most work and they had to do surgery on his jaw to fix everything fully. Karin and Naruto helped a lot, but his jaw wasn't just fractured, there were pieces sticking out of his face apparently. Reconstructive surgery was only done yesterday. They had to give the medics time to gain their chakra back because they'd been working with only those pill things for hours non-stop."

Kakashi nodded to show that he understood what she was saying. He really wished he had his mask.

"Naruto has yet to speak with Hokage-sama about what happened. I think he's finally realizing that he needs to learn how to do things like this on his own and that he won't always have his team with
him. Ino takes control when you aren't around and he became used to taking orders from her and without someone giving him orders, he doesn't know what to do. He's been listless as of late and only has Karin to hang out with."

"Who is Karin?"

Hari-hime sat up straighter, a frown on her face.

"I baked some sweets to thank her for her help and never let it be said that I'm not crafty. I got some interesting information out of her, by using food only.

Her name is Uzumaki Karin and she was born in Kusagakure. Her mother was a refugee of Uzu no Kuni and gave birth to Karin later in her life. Karin was taught by her mother, how to manipulate her chakra the way Uzumaki Clan members were taught how to.

Karin's chakra is vast like Naruto's and she can use it to heal or regenerate wounds or limbs or body parts in general. Karin and her mother were only allowed to remain in Kusa if they used their abilities to help the village. When her mum died, Karin was left alone at a young age and forced to be the sole medical ninja-type person for the village. They forbade her from sharing her clan name with people, but Naruto's conviction and feelings affected her. When she learned that he too was an Uzumaki, she decided to help his team."

That could pose many complications.

"Naruto has been thinking really hard about something and I've learned some interesting facts about the Uzumaki Clan because of Karin."

Many, many problems.

Kakashi cleared his throat a few times, trying to make certain that he wasn't going to sound squeaky when he finally spoke.

"Did Naruto mention... anything about the training trip?"

Hari's face became grim. "Other than the losing control, no. Hokage-sama called Inoichi-san and I into his office to deliver the bad news and I paced outside one of the Gates every day in hopes of catching you guys."

"Are my clothes still here?"

"Those were pretty torn up and I think your nurse tossed them in with the rubbish. I did bring you this thought!" she said, pulling a large piece of cloth from her pocket. It was navy blue, like the shinobi uniform was.

"So where I'm from, people hide their faces with these." She proceeded to fold it in half and pull up to her face, tying it around her head tightly and spreading it out until he could only see her eyes and forehead. She untied the fabric and tossed it his way, closing her eyes so that he could put it on.

Not once did she try to peek either. Everyone tried to peek. Why didn't she?

"Thank you," he mumbled, pulling himself into a seated position and trying to ignore the fact that he was naked with only a sheet for protection while a beautiful woman was sitting not three feet from him.

"Are you hungry?"
She pulled a large container out of a black bag on the floor and removed the lid. The scent of eggplant and miso assaulted him instantly, making his mouth water. "I remember what your favorite food was, from when Naruto told me. I figured it'd be more appreciated. I've brought food every day just in case you wake up while I'm here. Hospital food is rank."

She handed the container over, along with a pair of sealed chopsticks. "I finally learned how to make ramen! Naruto still swears Ichiraku's has better food, but as long as he ate it, then I can't be bad."

It wasn't. It was incredible. He had never actually eaten any of the snacks she'd packed for the team and felt a little foolish because he was missing out obviously. Ino and Naruto were not joking and he distinctly remembered Sasuke sneaking a few more when he thought no one was paying him any attention.

Best of all, he could eat and know that his face was covered and she couldn't see him.

He paused for a second to ask, "Why aren't you trying to see what my face looks like?"

She shrugged. "It seems like something private and important to you and while I am curious, I'd like for you to trust me enough to show me on your own. It'd be like you asking to see my scars. Terribly uncomfortable for me and rude to try to figure out when it's obvious I don't want to talk about it. As the saying goes, 'do unto others as you would have them do to you' and I don't want to be pestered."

She couldn't be a real person. She was just a civilian. One who had to do some hard things in life, but no civilian should be this understanding of a shinobi and their personal space.

She leveled him with a grin. "For someone of my… status, people tend to stick their nose into business that isn't theirs. Sometimes they like to talk too and I have experience with unwanted fame and people who can't mind themselves." Her grin was brittle by the time she finished, eyes practically screaming her brutal understanding.

"How are the children doing?" he asked, diverting their discussion to more simple points. His mind was filled with so much and he wanted to have more time to consider it all.

Besides, she was so expressive when she talked. Her eyes sparkled enchantingly.

"Well…"

Sarutobi Hiruzen sighed. He was really getting too old for this.

Looking at his once student, he could console himself that he at the very least did something right in his many years as a leader of a military village. Jiraiya had grown to be someone of worthy note and Hiruzen was proud of all that he had accomplished.

Orochimaru may have been the most naturally talented and Tsunade may have come to him with already amazing chakra control, but the raw power and determination in Jiraiya had made him the one to show the most potential. Room for growth and maturity.

"I heard that my godson was on a training trip and was attacked by Iwa shinobi."

Damn.

Hiruzen linked his fingers together, trying to find some way of explaining what he'd learned from Kakashi and from those who had questioned the blond during his evaluations.
They were testing our borders and Kakashi came across them while he was scouring the perimeter of his team's campsite. They needed help so he sent word to me and decided to remain with them. He'd tasked his team with find their way back to Konoha as training and he had been perfectly confident until news of a team of Jonin level shinobi got past the line a few miles down the divide.

He gave chase and came upon Naruto, partially transformed and killing his last opponent. Naruto's teammates had suffered terribly in the process and the stress overcame him. Kakashi described it like a cloak of some sort, covering his body in a thick layer of reddish-orange chakra. Naruto's nails grew into claws and his canines grew into fangs. The markings on his cheeks became more defined and whisker-like. His sclera were red with only a black slit as the pupil. The chakra took the form of a mini fox with two strips sticking out of his head and two much longer strips jutting out from behind him.

The information itself was disturbing. Hiruzen knew he had to get the information from Naruto but the boy was precious to him and he didn't want to cause him any more discomfort but that information was needed.

"I will have to question Naruto soon."

"Why not now? I can hide while you talk."

Of course Jiraiya would want to listen in.

"Fine. Buta, get Naruto."

"Kakashi-sensei!"

Naruto barged his way into his sensei's hospital room because he could and no one was going to stop him. He'd been worrying for so long and he was not going to miss this.

Besides, he'd just had a long talk with Jiji over what happened on the trip and he just wanted some good news for once. He also learned some very shocking news and wasn't too sure how he should handle it.

Kakashi was looking better. Awake and alive. His skin wasn't pale and he seemed to have gone back to normal, with his bad porn book in hand.

"Naruto. Hari-chan talked about you when she visited yesterday."

The boy gave an uncomfortable nod. "Sensei, I had to talk with Hokage-Jiji about what happened and... he told me."

They stared at one another for several seconds, neither moving as the weight of the words settled.

"Close the door."

The blond did so, waiting for his sensei to take the lead.

"How much were you told?"

"All of it."

Kakashi closed the book and placed it on the bedside table. "Then we have a lot to discuss, don't we?"
"Sensei, you didn't pass us simply because of who my old man was, right?"

It had been bugging him since he'd left Jiji's office. Did Kakashi only accept Team Seven because Naruto was his sensei's son?

"No," answered the Jonin. "Though there was much pressure from the councils and advisers to make sure that Sasuke passed as he is the last Uchiha and we need to keep his loyalty fixed on the village. I was fully prepared to fail you all like I always did. I have failed so many Genin and I hadn't expected you to be any different, but you were. That was why I passed you all, because teamwork is most important in a team.

I lost my first friend because I couldn't bother to learn that. I shamed my sensei often because of my attitude. I dedicated myself to a new outlook and for the first time in nearly eight years, a team finally made the cut."

Naruto heave a sigh, feeling relieved. Naruto didn't want favoritism all because his father… was the Yondaime.

*His father was the Yondaime.*

How does someone get used to that?

"What was he like?"

Kakashi settled himself on the bed. "The greatest and kindest man I ever knew."

Hari slipped between the people at the market. Vendors loudly exclaiming the worth of their merchandise and people being easily fooled into buying things for far more than they were worth.

Out of the busy side of town, Hari was about to simply breathe easier. She needed to get some new toys to keep the kids entertained and since she couldn't shop in peace in the village center, she'd go elsewhere.

Saturday was not the best day to go shopping.

"You might want to get to the hospital."

She nearly stopped in the middle of the walkway, but managed to keep herself going. Death just really liked to mess with her.

"I'm not joking. Two Genin are currently in danger. Sasuke and Gai's student Lee."

What's happening? she thought while turning around abruptly and heading for the hospital while trying to make it look normal. She didn't know if she still had watchers and it was best to be safe.

"One of the village's own nuke-nin has infiltrated the Chunin Exams in hopes of finding Sasuke. The man is on a quest to learn every jutsu ever created and he also has a fascination with immortality. He needs Sasuke's Sharingan eyes. When Sasuke wasn't in the Exams, he nearly gave up, but one of his men informed him of Sasuke's residence in the hospital at present and he's seen fit to mark the boy with a mind warping seal that will convince him to depend on the power it'll give him. It's like a piece of Orochimaru himself and it influences all who fall under it. The man will then take over the boy's body by using a special Kinjutsu."
These ninja were bloody insane!

Hari ducked behind a building and cast a disillusionment charm on herself, she then Apparated.

*What about Lee?*

"The boy he fought in the Preliminary wants to kill him. The boy is a Jinchuriki like Naruto. His father is the Kazekage of Sunagakure. His father had the Ichibi sealed into his unborn son which caused his wife to go in premature labor and she birthed Gaara. He was extremely small and only the Bijuu inside of him allowed him to live. She died soon after.

Gaara was raised to be a weapon and when they realized that the Ichibi isn't a Bijuu that can be controlled, they were going to kill him and re-seal the Bijuu until they could think of another plan. All assassination attempts failed. The village hates him. He hates them back. His mother's brother was enlisted to make a connection with Gaara and then break it. He was the last to attempt assassination on the boy.

Shukaku drives his containers insane. They cannot sleep, for the moment they rest, he takes over their bodies and wreaks havoc. His voice is shrill and he enjoys chaos and pain. The most bloodthirsty of the Bijuu and causes suffering to Gaara if the boy doesn't fall in line.

Shukaku took advantage of Gaara's loneliness and convinced him that he doesn't need anyone but himself. That he only needs to love himself. That the only way to prove his worth is by killing all those he deems as strong. Gaara thinks of him as his mother.

Gaara is worse than Tom Riddle could have ever been. There is hope, but it would take a lot of work to undo what has been done. And he'd have to want it and make an effort."

The more she learned about this world, the more she had to question the capabilities of the parents. Did no one ever care for their children anymore or was it all about power and wealth? Was family a foreign concept to these people?!

Hari looked around, *Which one is in danger now?*

"Sasuke. Gaara moves slowly, he hasn't even made it to the hospital yet."

With a nod, she turned for the lift, getting off at the fourth floor and rushing to Sasuke's room. It was dark and all of the machines were on as they should be.

"Place several wards around the bed. Against, animals, people with nefarious plans, people over the age of fifty, make him untouchable for the next few hours if you have to."

*This better work.*

Death raised a hand and seemingly slipped the Elder Wand out of thin air. They handed it over.

Hari proceeded to cast the appropriate amount of charms on the bed and the boy himself. She even carved a few runes on the wall beneath the window and some in the doorway. There was a Muggle repelling charm added for good measure, which would confuse those who got too close.

*Now where is Lee?*

"Despite the fact that he's supposed to be resting, he's out in the courtyard exercising. Take a
left and then go down the stairs. The entrance is on the first door to your right."

Hari did indeed find the boy trying to do some pushups despite the fact that his arm and leg were plastered. The fact that he was doing one handed pushups was impressive, but he really needed to just calm down and rest.

"Lee, you should be taking it easy right now, not overworking yourself."

The boy faltered on the push and ended up falling on his front. She rushed over to help him to his feet, taking in his injuries and calculating how long he'd be out of service.

"The rest of his life," said Death. "Those wounds are out of the league of even Uzumaki Karin. Tsunade would be the only one who could save him."

Just when she thought she'd dodged a hit with that woman, she comes back with a vengeance!

"Let's get you back to your room so you can rest."

Though he protested, she managed to drag him back to the door and convince him to tell her his room number. Once they were safely inside, she tucked him into his bed and murmured the stunning charm, knocking him unconscious.

She sat on the bed and stared at the door, wand slipped up her sleeve as she waited.

She didn't need Death to tell her when the boy had was near. She could feel his soul and the soul of the Biju with him. Both were so dark and twisted and it was nearly impossible to differentiate one from the other. But the Biju was simply wrapped around him, influencing his actions and trying to control him completely.

This darkness was cold and made her uncomfortable. It was worse than Tom's locket Horcrux.

Potent. That was what it was. Very potent.

The door slid open nearly soundlessly and Hari was struck by the appearance of the boy. His hair was like blood, the reddest red she'd ever seen before. His eyes were like a bright teal which were very beautiful. He also had black circles around his eyes, much like a tanuki Naruto had showed her a few months back.

"The Ichibi no Shukaku is a tanuki. Biju who are sealed into unborn Jinchuuriki influence their physical appearance a bit. That is why Naruto has whiskers."

If it weren't for the manic look in his eyes and the aura of doom surrounding him, Hari would say he was adorable. And she'd also question why anyone would want to kill such a cute child. Like how anyone could hate Naruto despite seeing how happy he normally was.

Gaara's eyes met her own immediately. "Do not get in my way."

No twelve year old should have a voice that deep and raspy. If only he was older.

Back to the reason he was there, however.

"Sorry, but I can't allow you to harm him. Despite loudness and dress sense, he's a pretty swell kid."

"I'll kill you if you get in my way."
The large peanut like object on his back began to shake and sand slowly poured out and onto the floor, surrounding his feet.

"Shukaku controls sand and the sand moves with the will of Gaara's deceased mother. It is his ultimate defense as well as his only offense. He has never been injured before and the sand is faster than you think. Be on your guard."

Hari gripped the wand in her sleeve and silently cast a barrier between she and Gaara. Nothing should be able to move past it. Hopefully.

*Would Legilimency work on him or should I not try? I'm not that good at it if you recall.*

"His seal was poorly constructed and it gives the Biju much control over his mindscape. You'd be entering its domain by doing that."

*But I have you to help me, right?*

"Indeed."

Faster than he could tell, Hari met his gaze and slid into his conscious thought easily. She immediately wished that she hadn't.

It was a mess. Like a large desert that was poorly disguising a very large beast seated in the middle. A bright sun shone down on their heads. The beast was indeed a tanuki and was very enormous in size. It was trapped in place however, by a large pyramid of what looked to be ofuda.

No, it was more like chains that were wrapped in ofuda. The creature was still capable of seeing through the bars of its prison and it's beady, gold eyes landed on her the moment she appeared.

"*How did you get in here?!*"

She winced, concurring with Death that Shukaku's voice was horrible. It made Bellatrix's high voice seem normal. Put her to shame. In fact, it's insanity might also put hers to shame as well.

"I have ways," she answered simply, looking around for anything. There were rocks and cacti, but nothing of substance in his mindscape.

The great sands began to twist and turn and she understood what Death meant by Shukaku having a lot of control of the mindscape. It was a creature mostly made up on sand and chakra so of course it would be able to control the sand around it.

"*I'll enjoy crushing you!*"

Waving her wand, Hari cast a silencing charm. Surprisingly it worked!

*How did it work?* she asked Death. *How can I cast magic while in someone's mind?*

"*The Biju is it's own being. Own consciousness, simply sharing a space for the time being.*"

The creature continued to try speaking but nothing was coming out and the eyes took on a more crazed look as the time went by. The sand shifting restlessly around her, beginning to rise higher and higher.

Hari retreated before she could be mentally drowned in sand. She didn't really know what would happen if she was but she most certainly wasn't going to find out. She had a book on Legilimency
and it did caution against entering another's mind unless you were confident in your abilities because if someone was particularly skilled in Occlumency and they had somehow set up traps in their mental space, you could get injured.

Injury received while in another's mind could affect mental health. It could also disturb the connections the brain has to the body.

So she didn't want to know what drowning in sand would do to her.

"What did you do?" demanded the redhead, eyes looking around frantically. "I cannot hear?"

As in he couldn't hear her or the Bijuu?

"I silenced it," she said, gauging his reaction. "That voice was incredibly annoying and I don't know how you deal with it."

Teal eyes widened and sand shifted around him in response to his emotions. "What are you?"

"Magic," came the anticlimactic reply.

He couldn't be that bad. He had insomnia from not sleeping because if he slept, then the Bijuu would take over and slaughter people. He had to have some kind of moral compass within him if he wasn't willing to give over the control.

Death insisted that there was hope for him.

"Why… are you protecting him?"

"I don't want him to die. And I don't like hurting children so I would ask that you don't make me hurt you."

A twitch developed over his left eye. The red kanji that rested on his brow creased ever so slightly in his confusion.

"I have to kill him… to prove my existence."

"I can see that you exist just fine," she soothed, voice calm. "You need to realize that there are beings out there who are much more powerful than you. You don't need to continuously kill people in order to prove your worth as a human being. Worth is measured in something much more than death."

She cast a glance toward Death, who was standing beside the bed, body half turned in her direction.

"Everyone will meet Death when they die. That makes us equal. That is the end we all share. How we get there is different for each and every one of us. Please don't make this the day you meet Death."

Allow only a little bit of yourself to show. Just some of the darkness in order to scare him into behaving.

"As you wish."

And she could see the very moment that he noticed Death's presence. The entire room got colder, cold enough to see their breath. And Gaara's eyes were riveted to the black figure standing beside her seated form.

"I am… feeling fear. I am not used to this feeling."
Hari stood, "Well, all you need to do is leave Lee alone and the feeling will go away."

He backed out of the room, gaze still on Death's form. "You will not end my existence!"

Gaara fled then, disappearing in a swirl of sand.

Hari felt the worry that had begun to grow in her stomach, lighten considerably. "That wasn't as much work as I thought it would be."

She awoke Lee up after a few minutes, telling him that he fell asleep and pointing out that she was right and that he needed to rest.

_Can't I just regrow his bones for him?

"You could, but how would you explain it to him and the doctors?"

Dammit!

"You can't get to the bed. What do you mean you cannot get to the bed?!!"

"I apologize, but it's almost as if there is a barrier surrounding him. I felt something strange when I entered the room and then when I got within a foot of the bed, I found myself walking away in confusion. I went back to try again and it kept happening. The snake disintegrated when it tried to go forward."

Kabuto flinched as his master snapped a tree in half with a simple punch.

"Find a way into that room, Kabuto."

"Yes, Orochimaru-sama."

Karin fidgeted in her chair. Never did she believe that she would be face to face with the Hokage of all people, but there she was, sitting in his office that was filled with Anbu members and two of the village's best interrogators.

"You are saying that you do not want to return to Kusagakure. Why?" demanded the man named Ibiki. She had to admit that his scare tactics were pretty good but she had seen worse in her young life.

"Those people are terrible. When they find out that I failed to keep my team safe, they'll most likely lock me up. When I tried to quit being a ninja so I could leave, they refused my request and told me that I'd be marked as a nuke-nin and that they'd force me back there and lock me away."

The Hokage - a very old man who didn't look to be much of a threat - regarded her silently.

"We have had a peace treaty with Kusagakure for years. We cannot just take you from them. You will have to leave this village and make your way back."

Her stomach and heart sank at the same moment.

"But... once you leave this village you are no longer under our jurisdiction and should you happen to get into a fight on your lonesome travel back to Kusa and end up going missing, then we cannot take any of the blame for it. You'd be declared MIA and soon KIA eventually and with a new pair of spectacles and some hair dye, you'll be right as rain."
He bestowed a grandfatherly smile upon her and Karin had never felt so happy in her life.

Konoha was so much better.

"Welcome to Konohagakure, Uzumaki Karin."

"Who is this Hari-nee-chan that Naruto and Karin talked about?"

Jiraiya leveled his sensei with a demanding stare because he had to learn of some woman living with his godson, right from the kid's mouth. Why didn't sensei tell him first?

"Hari-hime has been with us for a few months," sighed the Hokage. "She and Naruto live in the apartment building together. She is also the new matron of the orphanage and is the reason that Danzo is on trial, because he pestered her and she came to me."

And that was how Jiraiya learned that a grown woman had been living with his godson for the past half a year, teaching him anything she could and generally being the parental figure he always needed in his life.

"I'm going to stop by!"

He Shunshined from the office before sensei could stop him. Sometimes it was the only way to get things done. Pretend to be hearing impaired.

The building was looking better. There was a new layer of paint over the outside, turning it from the shabby orange and yellow to a bright green and cream coloring. It was much more inviting and the sign on the front explained that it was the orphanage.

He was greeted by an older woman who was holding a little girl who was crying.

"Can I help you?"

"Is Hari-hime in?"

"Hari-chan went out to the hospital with young Naruto. They're visiting the poor dear's teammates today. She baked some snacks just in case."

Jiraiya bowed and thanked her, waiting until he was outside before Shunshining. Some civilians weren't used to the ninja stuff and he wasn't about to give the poor woman a heart attack.

The woman at the desk was able to direct him in the direction of the young woman and his godson. Jiraiya was perhaps three feet from the doorway, when the young woman and Naruto began speaking.

"Nee-chan, I'm sorry I haven't been around lately."

He sounded so much like Kushina that it physically hurt Jiraiya for a moment.

"Squirt," came a very feminine voice, "-we all deal with stress differently. Koinu-kun handles it by reading porn almost all day every day. I'm sure he does more, but noticeably it's his niche. You have your own way of dealing with things. You like to cuddle. I like to bake. There's nothing wrong with taking time to yourself."

There was silence for the space of three breaths, before Naruto spoke again. "In the book, Naruto
climbs to the highest point he could find in order to calm himself down. So I decided to go and sit on the Yondaime's head. It's the closest I'll ever get to him after all."

Hari-hime sighed, "Do you at least understand why you couldn't be told? I mean it's sort of obvious if you look at his photo in Hokage-sama's office, but your health is most important at present. It was for your own good."

"I know, but sometimes 'for my own good' doesn't cut it, nee-chan. People making decision for you sucks! My team and I nearly died because of me!" The boy's voice cracked pitifully at the end, making both Jiraiya and the young woman sigh with sadness. "Had I known anything like that, I would have disguised myself and probably saved us the trouble! Sasuke's face had to be cut open and remade and Ino's liver had been sliced nearly in half!"

There was a sniffle. "Do you know what it's like to suffer because someone withheld important information from you, 'for your own good'?"

She did not answer right away but when she did, her voice was as choked as the boy's was. "I do. It's how I lost my godfather."

Her voice was filled with so much brutal honesty Jiraiya had to shake his head. Life was never easy. It seemed she was the perfect guardian figure for him. She could understand him.

"Nee-chan, why couldn't I have been told? No one had to tell the villagers or even anyone else. I would have been fine with being the only person to know. If they didn't want others attacking because of who my parents are, they didn't have to announce it to the world. How do we know that no one else knows? That Danzo guy was super important and look at all the stuff he did! Who's to say he didn't tell anyone about me?"

Jiraiya's blood ran cold at the very suggestion, but there was so much wrong with that question. So much of it could be possible. He would need to double check any leaks and go around to all of his plants later on when the Invasion was taken care of.

"You do make a good point, squirt. You're also taking this better than I did. I trashed an entire office with my temper and loss of control of my Kekkei Genkai. And all throughout it, the man who kept such important information from me, was calm. It was bloody annoying!"

His silence hurt a lot of people. He played it so close to the chest that a lot of people either died or were hurt or forever changed. And he recognized his mistakes easily. I didn't want to talk to him. I didn't want to discuss my feelings but he just wouldn't let it go! He kept on talking, kept making me listen to him. I was hurt. I was annoyed, I wanted to go home and forget it all. I wanted out. I didn't want to continue on. But I had to.

I had to suck it up. I have never and will never forgive him for that. He was a human being, he made mistakes. He made a lot of mistakes in his lifetime. He tried for something and it was his faith in the better that keeps me from hating him. From repudiating him. He was not a one dimensional person, there many facets to his personality. I understand that now.

So I'm saying is that it's okay for you to resent Hokage-sama, you have ever right. But take into account his position as a leader and how many people are under his jurisdiction. It is hard to be a leader. There is constant pain and sorrow and the ever present worry over whether you've made the right decision or not. He tried for something better for you.

This is a lesson for when you become Hokage. Maybe one day you'll have to do the very same thing, knowing the possible consequences that lie before you should you make the wrong choice."
Another sniffle.

"Nee-chan, can we have ramen tonight?"

"Sure."

Jiraiya eventually nodded to himself and turned away from the door.

She was a perfectly fine guardian.

On another note, he had to do some serious spying.

"Perhaps if we corner them here, then we can overthrow them."

"But what about the cove? It's supposed to be filled with sharks coming in from the ocean."

"We'll just have to have better reflexes than our enemies."

"And how do we accomplish that?"

"We're going to begin training our soldiers out on the water."

"Half of your fucking troops wouldn't survive that and you know it. Those damn things are fucking fast."

"The blood will rile them up and hopefully they'll help take out the enemy for us."

"Just so we're clear, I am against this all the way."

"Good for you, but I'm the leader of this rebellion and what I say goes. We have three months to get in shape for this. Don't. Fuck. Up."

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

See ya! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

-Can y'all guess what that ending was about?

-The lyrics are from Adele's song, All I Ask.
-To the butthurt Guest, do not condemn me for responding to rudeness with equal rudeness. No one can demand that I change my vocabulary simply for their sake. They can't bother to pick up the dictionary it is not my fault. I'm not here to cater to the whims of people who think that they are better than me. And if you don't like how I respond to people who try to rub my mistakes in my face but don't actually try to help me fix them, then don't bother reading the story. It is one thing to tell me that I have made a mistake in a certain place, it is another to claim I made a mistake but not be able to give me any proof that I did. If you have no proof then you're a liar. I don't like liars.

-Also(as of May 4th 2016): While your support of this fic is wonderful and I adore everyone who reads it, I would much appreciate it if everyone could NOT dis other stories when reviewing mine. Thank you.
I Solemnly Swear That I Am Up to no Good

Chapter Summary

Hospitals, Seers, and Invasions. OH MY!

Chapter Notes

I had to erase a few reviews from last chapter because it has become a common occurrence for some reviewers to insult some of the other fics that had taken up Tsume Yuki's prompt. Particularly, Akari-chaan's work. I happen to really like that fic and I follow it religiously, so I was offended over getting continuous reviews bashing that story up one side and down the other while comparing it to mine. We are two different authors who took one prompt in two different directions. Both of our stories are great and there is no need to be rude. You are reading this story, not that one. If you dislike it, then that is your opinion, but your review should not consist of content from other stories by different authors, because you are reviewing my fic, not theirs. If you have beef with them, go and leave a review on their fic. And warning, Akari-chaan does follow this fic and she could at any time see you bashing her and call you out on it.

Also, in case anyone hasn't heard yet, I am a part of the Quidditch League Fanfiction Competition this season, so I have a team of writers to work with and my attention is partially on that at present.

We see character development!

And a blast from the past!

Hari is not as alone as she seems!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Harry Potter or Naruto.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON, I FOLLOW BACK.

Haruno Sakura sniffed. She'd only just been told about Ino, despite the fact that the blonde had been in the hospital for almost two weeks.
A lot of things had been going on in Sakura's life since her team had dropped from the Chunin Exams. Kurenai-sensei had heard from the proctor of the first Exam that Sakura had perfectly passed her exam without cheating, and well within the time limit provided for the Genin.

Kurenai then took her aside and explained just how useful her knowledge could be. Sakura was a thinker. She had the brainpower to be a member of the Cypher Division when she reached Chunin rank.

The talk about considering her future had opened several things up for the pinkette. She really didn't know why she was a ninja. She wasn't on a team with Sasuke-kun and without him around as a constant reminder as to why she was putting herself through hell, she had to stop and consider herself.

Hari-sama had said that Sasuke admired strength and he was the reason Sakura had even bothered to enter the Exams because she wanted to prove that she was strong and worthy of his affections.

And then when her team quit, Kurenai-sensei told them what would have happened had they continued and Sakura was terrified! They would have been sent into Konoha's most dangerous training ground for five days! She studied up on the place just to be sure and it was definitely was the most terrifying place in Konoha.

The animals there fed off the natural chakra coming from the trees. Apparently the entire area was specially created by the Shodaime Hokage, who was the only person in history that could manipulate Mokuton. Because of that, the trees were extremely large and produced staggering amounts of chakra.

The animals residing within grew up around it and mutated because of it all. The common tiger from the Shi no Mori was eight feet high. The common bear was ten feet high. Then there were man sized leeches that ate people and chakra, the centipedes that were a quarter the size of the trees, the parasitic insects, and the man-sized, man eating plants.

So she didn't really want to deal with that at any point in her life and that was when the stray and utterly betraying thought came to mind. Was Sasuke-kun really worth it?

He was cute and talented, but he had never given her the time of day before. Though he didn't give any of the other girls his attention either so she didn't feel super bad about it. But she was just so confused.

He wasn't really nice to anyone. He didn't talk to anyone. He ignored their senseis. At the time, Sakura thought it was so cool of him, but she was reflecting on how rude that attitude actually was. She also remembered yelling at Naruto for doing the very same thing and was shocked at how hypocritical she'd been.

Sakura hadn't been the nicest of people either. All for Sasuke, she dumped her best friend and proceeded to attack people for doing anything remotely similar to what Sasuke was doing. She was a walking double standard and she didn't like that fact.

What was the point in being Top Kunoichi if she had nothing to show for it? All she had was perfect grades and great chakra control on her ninjutsu. Ino had beat her in everything else. And the more she thought about it, she realized that Ino had never once tried to rub her better results in Sakura's face despite the fact that Sakura had gloated over winning the top position for the kunoichi.

Sakura couldn't even remember her reason for being a shinobi. She knew that both of her parents had been shinobi and technically, since both were still able bodied, in times of crisis, they'd be called to
duty once again. But Sakura personally couldn't remember why she had wanted to be a ninja.

The moment she'd seen Sasuke, the reasons just seemed to disappear.

Did Sakura even want to be a shinobi?

Sakura had always wanted to be like her mother. Strong and amazing and capable of handling herself. Mebuki did not need Kizashi, she wanted him. She was a member of the Allied Mother's Forces and was willing to fight for what she wanted.

Mebuki was someone to look up to. Sakura often lamented the fact that she was nothing like her mother. And sometimes she wondered why her mother wasn't more like her. Sakura liked perfume and doing her hair. She liked to get manicures and pedicures and pampering herself at the onsen.

Sakura had yet to meet any overtly feminine kunoichi though and she'd set to being one but still remaining feminine. But life as a kunoichi was harder than she thought it was. She didn't have as much time to herself these days. Her hair was already showing split ends and flyaways because she couldn't dedicate all her time to it. Long hair took proper management and the longer it was, the longer it took.

And her diet was no longer working out. One thousand calories a day was not healthy for a shinobi apparently. She was tired and weak and found herself eating more despite how horrible it would be to her figure.

But Hari-sama had said that she could even eat fat free and sugar free food if she was so worried. She explained how she always made Ino special snacks to keep up with her eating choices that also allowed her to keep up with her diet.

Sakura looked at her former friend. She'd never seen Ino look so down before. Not even that time she'd had the pox did she seem so delicate.

Ino was like a force of nature. Her confidence made her seem bigger than she really was. Tougher in a sense, despite how feminine she was as well. Like nothing could drag her down.

But there she was, laying in a hospital bed after having gone through an operation. The chances of her continuing as a shinobi had been slim before the operation and now she was fine.

It was like a wake up call for the pinkette. To see someone so strong, being confined to a bed for an unknown amount of time, unable to move, not even awake. Who had been so close to the end of her career before it even got the chance to begin, Sakura felt pathetic.

It had nothing to do with Ino being prettier than she was. Now it was in terms of being a kunoichi. Ino was simply better than Sakura was. Ino was a fighter and Sakura was a coward who sat back and tried to avoid danger at all costs.

Sakura lost her way, her friends, and almost permanently lost the only true friend she'd ever had, all without realizing it.

The Genin reached out, grabbing Ino's still hand.

Shinobi were not immortal. Ino being stuck in the hospital proved that. It was a dangerous profession to be in. Ino never ran away from what she wanted and Sakura wanted to be just like that. She wanted her friend back.

Grabbing the brush on the bedside table, Sakura scooted closer and began to carefully brush Ino's
long, blonde hair. When she finally woke up she'd want to wash it of course and since it hadn't been brushed in who knows how long, Sakura could at least make it easier on her.

Because Ino was definitely going to wake up. She had to.

It started with a sniffle. Just a small one, nothing too noticeable. As the brushing continued, Sakura could feel her eyes burning and soon she could barely see the blonde strands in her palm.

"Ino, please come back."

Hari held a hand out to stop Kakashi before he could go into the room. She proceeded to shake her head several times, backing them away from the doorway and a little further down the hall.

"Who was that?" he asked, slipping his book into his pouch.

"Haruno Sakura. She and Ino used to be best friends but split from each other because of their mutual crush on Sasuke. Sakura is in a rough spot because she's realizing that being a shinobi is harder than she believed it to be. She's growing up and unfortunately, fans usually get it harder than others.

I think she may finally understand the ramifications of being a ninja. She obviously looks up to Ino - hell, I do as well - and it's a bit staggering to see someone like her, invalided in a sense."

"She was crying pretty hard in there," remarked the Jonin.

Thinking of Sakura's form hunched over Ino's arm, body quaking with her silent crying, had her heart lurching. "Some friendships aren't so easy to break off you know."

Pushing on his shoulder, she began to move them down the hallway. "We can visit later."

They could at least let the girl come to grips with her life in peace.

Noise. That was the first thing that registered. There was a low beeping sound just repeating over and over. The chirping of birds could be heard from a distance, though it was muffled. Level clicking followed.

A brief touch to his brow had him realizing that he was awake and that everything was coming to him slowly. Sound and touch received. Scent too as the powerful force of antiseptic filled his nostrils.

He struggled in the darkness, wanting to open his eyes and see where he was. It wasn't good for ninja to be immobile and unconscious. Anything bad could happen then. He was a sitting duck like this and he refused to be a victim.

The beeping persisted and the shuffling noise ceased. And then a voice, one that he hadn't been expecting but was relieved to hear anyhow, rang through his consciousness.

"Sasuke?"

A warm hand grasped his own as the voice repeated Sasuke's name.

Slowly, ever so slowly, he was able to open his eyes and find a head of golden hair and a whiskered face nearly pressed against his own face.

"Dobe," croaked Sasuke, voice rough.
He was confronted with a wide smile full of sharp and extremely white teeth. He was then covered in bluberring idiot as Naruto lost whatever sanity he had and began to cry.

"I missed you, teme!"

Sasuke blinked and looked around, finding himself in a darkened hospital room. There were IVs in his arms and flowers littering every available space he could see.

"Dobe, what's going on?"

Naruto sniffed and pulled himself together. "Do you remember the training mission?" he asked, voice low.

Training… mission.

Sasuke stiffened as the memory of being kicked through a tree flashed before his eyes. He was surrounded by Iwa shinobi who were taunting him and his team. Who were killing them. Ino had been brutally injured and Naruto… he'd been all that was left to face three deadly opponents hell bent on slaughtering Team Seven.

Sasuke's gaze jerked over to the blond, trying to assess his health level. Judging by Naruto's appearance, he seemed to be perfectly alright. Not even a scratch on him. So then… sensei must have come and gotten them out of their struggle.

"What happened to the Iwa shinobi?" Sasuke asked, trying and failing to sit up.

Naruto's expression dimmed even further and he looked away. "Sensei said that I should tell you and Ino when we're all together again. I can't say it here and now, but all I can say is that I… killed them."

Sasuke once again assessed the blond. Naruto looked incredibly uncomfortable, much like Ino had when she'd taken out that Kiri nuke-nin on their trip to Nami no Kuni. So Naruto ended up having to make his first kill and was feeling guilt over it. And whatever Naruto did wasn't allowed to be explained unless in a closely guarded area where others couldn't hear.

Judging by the blond's sadness, it was pretty bad. But Sasuke could be patient. For now, he could console himself with that fact that he and his entire Team were alive and relatively well now.

"Where is Ino?"

"She has a room a few doors down the hall. She hasn't woken up yet despite her wounds not being as severe as yours."

"What day is it?"

"It's only the first of July, teme, you didn't miss your birthday!"

He didn't really care about that. He was merely calculating how long he'd been unconscious and found that he was out for nearly two weeks! What had happened in that time frame?

"What about Kakashi?"

"Sensei got out yesterday! He had a lot of chakra exhaustion. Apparently he got held up at the border because Iwa was trying to get through."

So that was why they had encountered the worst of all foes.
"Has anything else happened?"

Naruto raise one shoulder and then froze, eyes widening as a grin began forming. "I made a new friend named! Guess what her name is?"

"Just tell me, dobe." Sasuke didn't feel like playing guessing games at the moment.

"Uzumaki Karin!"

Uzumaki?

Naruto was bouncing up and down manically as he started to tell the story.

"Turns out that the Uzumaki Clan was from Uzu no Kuni and that they were a cousin clan to the Senju! Some time before the last war, the entire village of Uzushiogakure was annihilated because neighboring nations were terrified of what my clan was capable of. Apparently, Uzumaki's were Fuinjutsu masters and had immense chakra and longevity. They were a threat and had to be… taken care of."

The dobe was looking away again, sadness pouring off him. Sasuke could feel it resonating within himself. So Naruto was a part of a clan that no longer existed, just like Sasuke. Only Sasuke actually got to know some of his fellow clan members and even knew his parents before… he happened.

"I'm not as sad as I thought I'd be and that's only because I finally learned who my parents are!" Naruto said, excitement thriving once more. His eyes sparkled with knowledge that he seemed to be bursting with, no doubt wanting to share it.

"My mom came to Konoha at the behest - I got that word from nee-chan - of the Shodai's wife. Not long after, Uzushio was destroyed, leaving her here. Her name was Kushina and she had long, red hair!"

The blond was bouncing in excitement. It seemed like his mood swings were as strong as they were frequent. One minute he was happy and the next, he was sad.

Sasuke nodded, to show that he was still listening.

"Teme, are you tired? You just woke up! -ttebayo!"

"You need to tell the nurses that I'm awake."

"Meh. Fine. Maybe I'll bring you some ramen for dinner."

Because ramen was the fix it food for everything, according to Naruto.

Luna Lovegood stared at the Arch in the Death Chamber. The Veil was considered one of the more terrifying things in Magical Britain. No one knew where it came from. No one knew where it lead. Only that it killed people who went through it. It had supposedly exploded when the former Minister threw Harry's lamp inside it, but she doubted that something of the Otherworld would be easily destroyed by a mortal's hands.

Luna and Hari had both heard things coming from the Veil. That was because both had witnessed death. The Veil was literally what the named implied. On Samhain, the Veil was the loudest it could be. The souls on the other side of the doorway attempting to free themselves at least for one night.
As the deterioration of the Magical World increased, more people were able to hear the cries coming from beyond the Veil. Death. One had to have witnessed it and then comprehended it in order to understand the Veil.

Luna understood very well. She could even hear a low humming that was familiar. Mum. Her mum had always said that the things people lost would always find a way to come back to them. Maybe in this small instant, she was right.

Luna ran her hand over the worn looking stone of the archway, marveling at how magically and structurally sound it was, considering how old it was. According to records, it had been there long before the Ministry had been built. Long before Gringotts had begun.

And according to the Unspeakables, muggles could not see the Veil at all.

Luna had a purpose for coming here.

Everything had fallen to ruin. The Ministry was in shambles and St. Mungo's was no longer available. It seemed that in the half year that Hari had been taken away, citizens had lost all hope. They had falsely accused their 'Savior' and had watched as their darling Minister tried to murder her in cold blood.

And with the beacon of hope completely gone, there was nothing left for them to hold on to.

Luna watched as those who had gone into hiding, came out to profess their gratitude to Hari. She than had to witness more suicides than she would have liked.

The Ministry couldn't be trusted. The Goblins were waging war, and winning. The other magical countries were sparing time of their own to harass Britain for starting the entire debacle. Overall, the times were dire and far worse than when Voldemort and his minions tried to overthrow Magical Britain.

Luna had seen better days while imprisoned in Malfoy Manor.

Luna had never been the sort to be easily fooled. She did not delude herself into thinking that everything was alright with the world simply because she ignored the blatant negativity being aimed at her. There were just so many more important things that she could devote her time toward.

Luna was the ripe old age of fifty-nine. In muggle terms, she looked like she'd reached her late twenties. Hermione looked so much older than her age suggested, because the stress had gotten to her. Hermione's hair was already grey!

Of course the oppression and depression had been strong in recent years, so Luna could not fault her anxiety. But Hermione had lost her husband to Aurors who had been out to capture them both and bring them in for questioning. Hermione had taken her children and swiftly fled the Magical World.

Most of the others from Luna's school years had died in the recent war, leaving Luna and Ginny, alongside Seamus, as the remaining living people of Hari Potter's school years.

Luna's father had gladly passed on a year previous, a smile on his face. Luna buried him beside her mother and took some soil from both of their graves with her. Luna was tired of fighting and running. She was tired of hiding away from Auror who had gotten too pompous in their roles. Scared of facing a nation of warriors perfectly capable of doing battle at any age.

So in the heart of the Ministry, the building that was once supposed to uphold the laws and foundations of Magical Britain's society, Luna Lovegood stood among the remains of the Death
Chamber. The Department of Mysteries had mostly been eradicated by the Goblins. The Ministry had truly fallen years ago, however.

Luna stiffened her spine, intent on escaping this life in her own way. She would do so with dignity and poise.

"Luna!"

The blonde froze at the unexpected voice. She turned, finding Ginny Weasley standing not too far off, a grim expression lining her features.

"You don't have to do this."

Luna's sad smile did not change. "I cannot fit in with the muggles. I have Seen it. Within a year's time, I would be the very one to expose the magical society. I don't know anything about muggles. I'm tired of running. I want to go somewhere where the sun shines, where people are happy, and where I can expect friendly faces instead of curses that will rip my face off."

"Are you sure you're not just infested with Wrackspurts?" Ginny asked, desperation in her tone.

The blonde laughed. "No. I am free and my mind is my own."

Ginny fidgeted, rummaging through her pockets. She pulled out what looked to be a broken plate, until she held it up to her face.

It was a mirror. A two way mirror that was a bit cracked.

"It may behoove you to check your belongings."

Hari looked up from her paperwork, finalizing the report against Danzo.

"I own a lot of stuff. Which 'belongings' do you mean?"

"Particularly a certain mirror."

"Why?"

"Just check it!" Death ordered, sounding exasperated with her. But she shouldn't be blamed for not wanting to move when the mirror was broken.

"It is cracked, not broken. The enchantments are still in effect and somebody you know is in possession of the linked mirror."

Hari's eyes bugged out in what she was sure was an amazing imitation of Trelawney. "Trunk, please?"

Death nodded, pulling the very trunk she needed, out of space. Or really, the negative space that only they could travel to. Not even Hari could go there, not that she wanted to anyway.

The trunk was her school one. Basic. There were none of those extra rooms or cupboards inside. It had weathered many kinds of conditions and was still in good shape, if one ignored the frayed edges and the stains all over it.

She threw open the lid and peered inside, trying to remember where she had stashed the mirror.
She moved the photo album aside and got caught in a memory when she looked at her Quidditch robes. Shaking herself off, Hari deposited them on the floor, along with her boots. Beneath them, lay a small mirror, the size of her hand.

She retrieved it gingerly, hoping that she didn't accidentally cause it to crack more.

The surface was covered in spider web like cracks, but she could still see herself. Or several reflections of herself in the mirror.

When did her hair turn red?

"Hari?!
"

The brunet blinked in shock, realizing that no, she did not have red hair. The person looking back at her had red hair!

"Ginny!"

"You're not dead!" the ginger breathed in obvious awe. "You went through the Veil, but you aren't dead!"

"No, I am most certainly not dead."

"Hari! Hari! I solemnly swear that I am up to no good!"

"Mischief Managed," Hari replied in the usual code for determining if one was friend or foe.

Ginny sighed. "It really is you." She turned to look off at something or someone. "Luna, step away from the Veil this instant and come see Hari!"

Hari blanched. "Why is Luna anywhere near the Veil in the first place?"

Ginny winced. "It's bad, Hari. It's really bad. The Ministry is gone, the Goblins have basically won the war, and the berserk Aurors that are left, have become so egotistical that they make the Death Eaters look good. People have just given up."

Luna joined the small space, looking worn, tired, and completely through with life in general.

"Luna, do you really want to die?"

The blonde lost her dazed look, eyes much too sharp for someone such as her. "Death? I do not seek death. I seek happiness, and it has become clear that I shall find none of it in this world any longer."

Hari frowned. She could relate. Her original world had been a mess. When first coming to Naruto's world, she had wanted to go home. But she realized that there wouldn't be much for her there. Living among muggles, chancing getting caught because of her magic. She had lost all desire to return to that dimension.

Hari's eyes caught Death's hulking figure in the far corner, and her brain exploded with an idea!

"What if you lived in a new world?"
Right before her eyes, Luna’s face went slack and her unearthly gaze became unfocused. Hari shot Death a look, mentally asking if it was possible to bring anybody else with her.

"It has never been done before. But in theory, it should work. Should you use the Elder Wand."

Hari waved a hand, summoning the wand of Elder from thin air.

"I am fully prepared to bring you to this new world I reside in. I will do what I can, if you want me to."

"To live with the Mistress of Death," came Luna's airy voice. "It would be an honor." The blonde no longer appeared to be lost in her own mind.

"This isn’t about honor, Luna. This is about me wanting my friend to stay alive. But if you don’t really want to, you don't have to."

Luna looked away from the mirror, meeting Ginny's gaze. The redhead gave a shrug. "You said you wanted to be happy again. Are you sure death will really give you that?"

"And if you choose to come here, there are things you will need to know," added Hari, feeling like she should warn the girl ahead of time.

"That you live in a world without magic and that the nations teach children to do battle and spill blood at young ages. I have Seen it, and yet I would prefer to be there, than here."

Luna took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "Into your hands, I relinquish my very being."

Hari looked to Death for instruction, having never done this before. Death placed a hand on her wand arm.

"Focus your magic and align it with my own," ordered the being.

Hari could feel the swell of it and tried to force her own power to match Death's. She may have been powerful for a mortal, but she was still only a mortal. Her magical ability did not equal Death's even though she was Death's Mistress.

Luna patted Ginny's face, a smile shared between them. Slowly, Luna's body disappeared from the Earth that Hari once knew, leaving Ginny alone, in a dilapidated room.

"She has reached the border of Hi no Kuni and will make her way here soon."

Hari looked over at her companion. Will she be alright? Should I go retrieve her?

"You will find that your friend is very versatile and will have easily saved herself without your aid."

How?

"Because she has Seen the outcome already."

Sasuke looked at himself in the mirror. His chin was more square. His jaw had been completely shattered and they had to completely reform it. In a way, he sort of liked it. It made him look even more different from… him.
The teen took a deep breath. He was finally being released from the hospital. Conveniently, Ino was also being released. Naruto was waiting in Sasuke's room, and then they would go pick up Ino and go out for lunch.

He wanted out of the room. He wanted out of the hospital in general. Sasuke had never been fond of hospitals, especially when so many of the nurses or medical shinobi lacked any kind of decorum when faced with members of prestigious clans. It was like fan-girls, but adult versions, and Sasuke avoided the place like it was plagued.

His hair was washed. He frowned at how small his shirt now seemed. He'd have to shop again.

Sasuke also hated shopping and only went out when he absolutely needed to. Since he didn't know certain things, due to being an orphan, he would often have to ask for help. Sasuke was not one to lower himself to ask for anyone's assistance. And while he did it a little more often now, he was not comfortable when doing so.

"Teme, are you ready yet?"

With a roll of his eyes, the brunet left the bathroom to find the dobe bouncing on the hospital bed, making the springs creak with every movement.

"Calm down, dobe. We don't want you getting too rambunctious."

The blond stuck his tongue out, but got up. "Now we can get Ino!"

The two boys walked a ways down the hall and Sasuke knocked on Ino's door. One thing he knew was to never enter a girl's room. Most guys wouldn't care for knocking, but then again, most guys were also not the kind to care about being seen naked.

The teen shook his head, dislodging all those thoughts and just where they had been going.

"Come in!"

Naruto pushed past Sasuke, barging in with a loud greeting. "Hey, Ino! Teme and I have come to save you! -ttebayo!"

Despite his mite annoyance, Sasuke couldn't help but find Naruto's antics amusing. Nothing seemed to ruin his mood. Naruto was simply a ball of sunshine all the time. Sometimes, Sasuke could admit to himself, that he was a little jealous.

How did someone who had a pretty terrible life, manage to find happiness?

Ino was already dressed, but she wasn't in her usual, purple shinobi garb. This was a simple t-shirt and shorts, with shinobi sandals.

"I know what you both are thinking, and my clothes had been ruined beyond repair. This will not be permanent, I assure you."

And just like that, Naruto's joy was sucked out of him.

Sasuke met his other teammate's gaze and the shared a nod.

"Naruto, want to go and get some ramen?" Ino asked.

It worked. Naruto was a ball of excitement once more and he bounced in place. "I haven't had ramen in two days! I am being deprived of what I need to live!"
"Big word, dobe."

"Shut up, teme! Hari-nee-chan taught me that one!"

"Let's just go! I need to change so bad! They don't have any of the moisturizer I use, nor the hair products I need. Quite frankly, this is the worst I have ever looked! I probably came out of the womb looking better than this!"

Ino gestured to her whole body was a very stiff wave of the hand. She looked angry and seemed to be barely keeping herself in check.

Sasuke knew the feeling. Being unconscious for so long meant no baths. Sponge baths did not count and were almost never good enough. His own hair was a mess.

"Then let's go!"

The three turned to the doorway, only to freeze at the sight of the person standing there. The person none of them had sensed.

Sakura stared. Ino was up. Ino was moving. A small part of her brain noticed that Sasuke was also up and moving, but for some reason, her eyes were only on the blonde.

Ino looked as good as new, though her hair really needed a thorough washing. Her skin was back to its normal color and she was no longer confined to a bed. She was all better now.

"Sakura?"

The sound of her voice made the pinkette's hand clench around the flowers she had brought. She even sounded like her old self.

Unbidden and completely unnecessary, tears welled in her eyes.

"Sakura?" Ino repeated, beginning to look worried.

Without preamble, Sakura launched herself at the blonde, wrapping her arms around her friend tightly and letting out every tear she'd been holding in over the past couple of weeks.

Ino was alive. Ino was well.

Sakura couldn't be happier.

Sarutobi Hiruzen sighed, feeling much older than he actually was. It was finally over. The whole incident with Danzo had been closed up properly. The man's brain was to be kept and studied closely for any information that could be useful to the village.

All of the Ne operatives were in custody and under constant scrutiny of the Yamanaka Clan. The chances of getting them out of the mindset that they had been forced into since early childhood, were extremely low. Basically, he had a conglomerate of soldiers who were prepared to do their duty to their village. They just had no sense of presence or self in the least.

Clan children that had been thought to be long dead from kidnappings, were under the care of T&I. The workers operating nearly constantly in order to help them.

It was hectic.
But Danzo's case had finally closed and he'd been beheaded that very morning.

The sheer amount of seals placed on the man's body were what took so long for a ruling to be made. Even with the Daimyo's opinion and personal sentencing, they had to free the body of all confines and secrets before they could do anything to it.

Jiraiya had done the most work he'd ever done in his life, making notes and recreating the seals used.

It was in times like these that Hiruzen was once again reminded of how Jiraiya was his best student. The one with the most potential. The one who was simply better than the others and always had more room to grow no matter what happened.

Hiruzen was grateful that he could rely on the man. It was good to know that he had people in his corner who were reliable and not out to overthrow him. Security was an important part of any work relationship.

Speaking of Jiraiya, he turned to look at the man who looked much older than he should for one of his age.

"Did you finally get to meet, Hari-hime?"

Jiraiya paused from his 'research' and shrugged. "I was going to, but she and Naruto were having a deep conversation so I decided to leave them to it. She sounded like an alright person, though I really think she should see a therapist every now and then."

Hiruzen nodded his agreement. "Hari-hime has witnessed more battle than a civilian should ever experience. She has minor capability with a sword if need be, and she has been getting endurance training from some of my shinobi, but should it come down to it, she is not much of a threat."

"How is she a threat at all?"

The old Hokage sighed, thinking back to how the whole mess with his former friend had even begun. "I didn't tell you that Danzo's duplicity was discovered by Hari-hime drugging his tea with a root that was normally used in the sleeping aids her godfather gave her.

Hari-hime might have a more in depth knowledge of plants than any of us know. She still warrants Anbu guards after all. I trust her not to harm Naruto or the children. I trust her to even sacrifice herself for them if need be. That is the kind of person she is. She may be a citizen of the village, but I do not believe she fully supports the civilians because of how they treat Naruto and that makes her a Level 3 liability."

Since three was below five, it wasn't a liability level to be concerned about. Most shinobi would overlook it as unimportant. But Hiruzen could see the little tic in Hari-hime's features when someone brought up Naruto's life and his experiences at the hands of the villagers.

The way she was treated by the people who were supposed to be her family had obviously affected her and she strove to be nothing like them. Any time she came into contact with people like them, she would sneer and abruptly turn away from them.

Reports of her ignoring people who needed help or an elderly villager who had fallen in front of her, simply because she knew they hated Naruto, had been brought to his attention. While she was not obliged to lend assistance to any person, it was still startling to realize that someone so pleasant could be so vindictive over something she felt so strongly about.

Her life before her 'rescue' would always affect her decisions. She acknowledged that she had
problems and she labored rigorously to prevent Naruto and the orphans from having the same issues as she.

"Hari-hime also had a similar childhood to Naruto. Probably worse if we conclude from the facts that Inoichi noted from his mind walk. She does not believe in particular methods of rearing children, and emphatically is against several others. She judges based on the happenings of her past, which are what makes her a liability. She had to kill. Had to literally kill in what looked to be a civil war. I do not doubt that if she felt it was necessary, she would do so again.'

Jiraiya nodded his understanding and returned to his writing, leaving his sensei to his disturbed thoughts.

"What are you doing?" Kakashi wasn't one to seek people out, but his team was meeting in a hour and this was one meeting that he couldn't be late to, so he figured that meeting Koneko-chan ahead of time. Since the woman already knew about the subject that was indeed going to come up in the discussion, she decided that they should just come up to Naruto's apartment and have dinner there.

When he landed on the windowsill of the kitchen, he found Naruto's sister figure on her hands and knees - and no, his mind did not go anywhere else, thank you very much! - and she had a rag in hand.

"I am washing the floor."

Her arm made a repetitive circular motion. Methodical. Definitely something that she was used to doing.

"For a princess, you aren't what one would expect," he commented, situating himself against the window and pulling out his trusty Icha Icha.

The woman scoffed as she scrubbed. "I have been cleaning since I was a child. Chores are nothing, nowadays."

She stood then, her black dress visibly dirtied but dust and speckles of white powder. She gave a perfunctory look around the room, before nodding.

She tossed the rag in the bin by the door and wiped her hands on her skirts.

"I will return momentarily."

She stalked off to where he knew the bathroom to be, probably to change. He'd never seen her so filthy before, so he was certain she wouldn't want to be seen in such a state.

The Jonin lounged on the sill, completely comfortable where he was at. This was the first time he'd been in the apartment with someone who wasn't the Hokage. His eye trailed to the large cushion in the corner nearest his position.

She slept on that because she insisted that Naruto kept his bedroom.

For someone of immeasurable wealth and status, she was more like a commoner.

The shower turned off. The fastest shower a civilian could even take. Less than three minutes altogether. Although there was a man in her home so that could be the reason for the swift action. Kakashi felt no shame at being mere feet away from a woman who was most likely naked in the shower.
His back stiffened as his thoughts caught up with him. Hari was naked. An attractive, young woman was not clothed whilst in the vicinity of him, and she had not in any way, tried to make a move on him!

He was minutely blown away at the realization. Was she okay?

Why was she unlike every other woman he had ever met? Hell, he still got propositions from Anko every now and then. She had no shame, not that she had anything to be ashamed of. Kurenai was clinging to Asuma, though she would deny it with her very last breath, and Yugao was with Hayate. Of course a few others hand shown interest, along with Genma and Raido, but every person Kakashi had met had at least made a sex joke about them and him together.

Hari-hime didn't even do that. Why?

"Sorry about that, I have been cleaning all day."

There she was, fresh from a shower. Her head was wrapped in a towel and she was dressed in a light green, knee length cheongsam, with a high collar, and a four inch slit on either side of the thigh. Her sandals were black, kunoichi grade, and had a thick heel, giving her an extra inch in height.

One thing Kakashi noticed was that while she dressed well, she never wore makeup. She also never did her hair.

Just now, she had pulled the towel off, ran a comb through the wet strands and then went and disposed of the towel.

"Do you not like makeup?" he couldn't help but ask. He only knew kunoichi and all of them seemed to like some kind of makeup. Something that lasted long. Like Kurenai's lipstick, or Anko's eyeliner.

He had been so certain that civilian women adored makeup.

Hari shrugged. "I never learned about it, or how to put it on. By the time I was finally free to do as I so chose, there was no longer a point to learning. Besides, I have never suffered a bad skin day in my life, so I wouldn't have anything to cover up."

Kakashi was also sure that women wore makeup for more reasons than to cover things up. But Hari didn't seem fazed in the least and her answer had been good enough and honest, so he dropped the line of discussion.

"So will it be you or Naruto who does the explaining?" asked Hari-hime as she rifled through the refrigerator and pulled out an armful of items that she set on the table.

"Mah, I would prefer it if Naruto did the talking, but I will most likely have to be the one to do it."

He flipped the page, realizing that he had not been reading his book at all, despite having it open and in front of his face. He'd been staring at the only woman in the room the entire time.

Koneko-chan tinkered with the stove and puttered about, picking up things and depositing them into the pan she had been heating up. The scent of onions filled the room, soon followed by garlic and many other spices. All the while, Kakashi sat back with his eye closed, intent on locating and labeling each new scent he came across. It could be considered a form of training, which then gave him an idea for when his team was ready to begin their daily routine again.

Before they got to that point however, they would have to have a talk, and would have to wait for the invasion to pass.
In that split second, Kakashi made a decision that could potentially get him into massive legal trouble, but he liked Naruto's sister and enjoyed being around her - for whatever reason he had yet to locate - and he didn't want to see her hurt.

"Hari-hime, I feel I should tell you to be careful in the upcoming week. There is a high possibility of an-

"-An invasion?" she asked, cutting him off.

His mouth fell open in shock, thankfully she couldn't see it behind the mask. "How?"

"Hokage-sama warned me because the orphanage may just become a civilian shelter. I hope it doesn't come down to that, but anything can happen."

Well didn't he feel foolish. Of course Hokage-sama would say something to the Head of the Orphanage about a possible war/invasion on the village.

Sentiment was getting to him it seemed.

"Could you set the table for me, Koinu-kun?" the woman asked, tossing a smirk and a wink his way.

Kakashi felt his body moving before his brain even caught up, but he didn't mind. Strangely enough, there was a lot he didn't mind when Hari was behind it.

Zabuza Momochi was not often right, but look at that, he was right! He had known it from the very beginning that training these newbies on the water that was infested with sharks of all sizes - because they regularly consumed chakra - was a bad idea.

He, Haku, Mei, Chojuro, Ao, and a few others, had the skill necessary to handle the upcoming battle. But the rest. All those shinobi who barely had any real life experience in true war, weren't the kind that Zabuza would entrust his life to.

They would fuck up, he was already aware of it.

And the cove was seriously the place that Mei insisted on having the battle, by luring their enemy.

Kiriagakure used to be a place of respect. Ever since Yagura had taken over, the reputation of the village had been shot to hell. Mizu no Kuni lost almost all of it's treaties with all the other nations and Kiriagakure was currently enemies with the other shinobi nations.

No one wanted to associate with the village that brutally slaughtered those with extra abilities. The Mizukage would most likely try to have anyone assassinated if they showed even a hint of a Kekkei Genkai.

This was what made Mei such a perfect leader of their rebellion. She possessed two Kekkei Genkai that were very rare, and thanks to her heritage from her Uzumaki grandparent, she had higher than normal chakra reserves.

If they had any hope of defeating Yagura, then they had to train harder than they had ever trained before. They had a small faction of under a thousand fighters. Over the past month they had lost almost one hundred to the climate and creatures than inhabited Mizu no Kuni.

"I told you it was a bad idea."
"Shut up," the redhead hissed with a glare. "Some were unable to handle the pressure, but that's fine. Others have prevailed and we will continue to train until we can accomplish our goals with our eyes closed."

As she stalked away, Zabuza had to marvel at the amount of determination she had. At least she was remaining positive, because a good leader always needed to inspire their followers.

It was quiet. It was so quiet. It had been years since it had been quiet. In fact, he couldn't remember a day where it was quiet.

Sabaku no Gaara fidgeted with agitation. His mind was empty. Or rather, there was nothing but his own thoughts to keep him company. No matter how much he tried, he could not find a way to make this situation any better. And Temari and Kankuro had noticed that something was… different about him.

It wasn't like he was required to tell them. They did not rule him. He abhorred them and every breath they took. If it was up to him, there would be no more 'fortunate' breaths for either of them, but that would bring the council down on his head and while he was skilled one on one, an entire group plus the man who was supposed to be his father, would be damn near impossible to demolish.

Without having to give it much thought, Gaara Shunshined. He appeared in a swirl of sand, standing atop the Hokage Monument. Putting his fingers together in the typical seal for the Ram.

'Daisan no Me.'

The sand covered his body until all the was to be seen, was darkness. In the safety of the small dome, Gaara closed both of his eyes and allowed the jutsu to take the full effect.

Slowly, the outside world became clear to him, telling him that the technique had worked. With his will, he forced the two eyes made of sand, to disperse and check every inch of the village that they could.

They searched keenly, trying to find even a glimpse of his intended target.

After nearly an hour, they spied her by the library in the shinobi district.

Gaara ended the technique and Shunshined on the spot, appearing on a rooftop overlooking the street the strange woman was walking down. She had an arm wrapped around two children who were around Gaara's age. One he remembered seeing in the second Chunin Exam.

The three were smiling, though the redhead seemed to be aware of something, her joy less pronounced than the blond's. The woman gave no reaction in the least, leading him to the conclusion that she was simply a civilian with a few extra abilities.

They continued to walk down the street together, none of them knowing he was watching them. Not even when they moved into a building and out of his sight.

"HI!"

The ginger haired Jinchuuriki started, whirling around in shock when the loud voice sounded in his right ear. He was met with the sight of the very blond he had just seen walk into a shop. Said blond was grinning like a buffoon, his eyes sparkling a bright shade of blue.

His sand never alerted him. His sand always alerted and defended him! Was it because he had yet to
be attacked? But the other boy was only two feet away at the most!

"I wanted to know why you are stalking Hari-nee-chan."

Gaara didn't answer, because he was still so caught up in the surprise of his defense not working!

"Hello! Suna guy named Gaara! I want to know why you're stalking my nee-chan! I know she's pretty but she is much too old and good for you and you are kind of young and I don't think you're her type."

The blond knew Gaara's name. They met before. Yes, when the Suna delegates had first arrived in Konohagakure. Back when Temari and Kankuro had made imbeciles of themselves.

The blond was talking about the woman no doubt. The woman was his sister? They looked nothing alike.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Something warm touched his bare arm and Gaara drew back, realizing that the blond had *touched* him! Touched his flesh and hadn't lost his hand over it! The sand did nothing to stop his advance and allowed him directly into Gaara's personal space! The woman was the cause for this! She had to be!

"Hey, calm down! No need to get so rambunctious there."

The hands again. One placed on Gaara's brow and the other back on his arm.

"Are you sick? You feel warm but I'm not really sure if it's because my hands are cold or not."

The redhead stuttered out his answer, which had nothing to do with the blond's question. "Th-the woman!"

"Eh? You mean nee-chan?"

"She did… *this*! Did something!" Gaara hissed, making a wild gesture to his head. "Said it was magic and made the voices stop! But *everything* has stopped! She needs to take back what she did!"

The head of blond spikes tipped to the side, blue eyes regarding him with a sudden intensity he wasn't very comfortable with. "Nee-chan used her magic on you? Why would she need to unless you were a threat?"

Gaara backed away from the blond, shoving the hands off of his body. "Before I was born, my father decided to seal the Ichibi no Shukaku into me, which caused my mother to go into premature labor. When the sealing was recognized as faulty, they tried to reverse the process, but Shukaku had already taken hold. And Shukaku has always been there, until recently, when the woman and her… companion did something and made it silent."

"You're a Jinchuuriki too?"

The blond looked around quickly, before reaching out and wrapping a hand around Gaara's wrist. "Come on. We can't say stuff like this out in the open, especially not in this village. Trust me, if these people know what you are, you will be treated like a monster."

Gaara's mind still rang with the words, 'You're a Jinchuuriki too?'. The blond was like him in some way. He had to be if he knew what a Jinchuuriki was and what his village's reaction would be to one. But he acted nothing like Gaara did. Was he not in contact with his Bijuu?
"Come on Gaara, we're going to see nee-chan and Karin-chan."

"Who are you?"

The blond paused, only to look back and give him a grin. "I'm Uzumaki Naruto, the Jinchuuriki of the Kyubi no Youko."

Nara Shikaku stared at the plans laid out on the table before him. They had to take every precaution against their foes and Jiraiya-sama was already out in the forests surrounding the village, planting seals all over in order to trap oncoming enemies.

Every shelter in the village was warned weeks ago about the possible development that would take place on the tenth of July. At the first sign of trouble, the civilians would be lead to the shelters as quickly as possible, in order to make the way clear for the shinobi to defend their land from the invaders.

It had been years since Konoha had to suffer and invasion and they should have been keeping the various bunkers stocked up, but for some reason, they'd slacked off. It seemed they had slacked off on a lot of things and this was not helping their cause.

Jiraiya-sama had already added extra seals to the various buildings that would be used as shelters and bunkers, to give them added resistance to damage and hopefully they could take it. So long as their enemy didn't have projectile weaponry that exploded, things should be fine.

The chances of them hurting their own fighters would most likely stop them from attempting such a takeover.

Hokage-sama wanted to offer peace, but Shikaku was certain that it would not be accepted. Suna was most likely sick of being the weakest of the shinobi nations. It would be the only logical reason they would decide to join forces with another village.

Shikaku looked over the escape route for all of the lords and ladies who would no doubt be in attendance, as this was one of the largest Chunin Exams in the past two decades. Top priority was to get them out of harm's way first and foremost. Then into the others.

While unable to comprehend just what he was feeling, Shikaku had a positive feeling about the invasion. Something was going to happen, but he was just so sure that it wouldn't be as bad as he thought it would be.

Hari sat among the nobles, as her station demanded her to. She was a princess in the eyes of these people and therefore she had to make a good impression. That meant her most lavish clothing and even doing her makeup with that spell Ginny had taught her all those years ago.

Her seat was cushioned for her comfort and she actually preferred the pillows she had been using on the chairs at home. So much better than these things.

On either side of her, was some noble who fancied themselves important in some or every way. Those who nattered on and on about some waffle she didn't care to remember.

Already she had been approached by three young bachelors who were seeking wives. Some news of the Hime no Konoha had been brought to the attention of the other nobles in the land and upon seeing her obvious opulence and status, decided that she was worthy of being their consorts.
They were promptly - though very kindly and cunningly - let down. Leading them to believe that it was their idea in the end. That she was too good for them and that she had to find better. It was the best she could come up with on the spot and to be forthright, she was better than them.

When someone was only good enough to be your significant other, when they had a lot of money, then yes, you weren't good enough for them.

Hari did get to meet the Daimyo of Hi no Kuni. He was a very eccentric man and was a little on the strange side. He made Dumbledore look normal, though he did not annoy her like the old coot did.

Hari took quick notice that out of all of the nobles, only a handful were thin. Hari, for various reasons too numerous to list. The Daimyo of Hi no Kuni, which she couldn't understand as his wife was a little corpulent. Another woman, who was older and almost as thin as Hari. Finally, a child.

Back in her own world, not all the wealthy sat on their arses and did nothing all day. A lot of them were forced to get up and do things or else they'd make their families look bad. In this world, it was apparently okay to be idle, which would explain why nearly every noble was covered in protuberances that left little to the imagination.

Some had servants with them. Others had surrounded their special chairs with food and drink. Hari was appalled at the lack of decorum. She, who had never gotten even one lesson on etiquette, was acting much better than most of the people sat around her!

Chins were jiggling, and tongues were wagging, food was being shoved in open orifices, and one man was even sleeping as he was being fanned by three servants at once. It was a very Crabbe and Goyle kind of atmosphere.

Seriously, having money did not mean one could get away with doing nothing.

What was wrong with this world?!

Thankfully, the Hokage decided to start the Third Exam, which would bring the swift end to her association with her 'equals'.

"Cheer up, Mistress. It could be worse."

Shut up, Death. Just shut up.

Ino grunted as she fended off yet another attacker. What was with her team and always attracting the danger everywhere they went?! She'd only been released from the hospital four days ago! She had no desire to rejoin the merry band of injured among the white walls of depression!

Naruto was all over the place, his Kage Bunshin allowing them to take on more than three opponents together. Sasuke feinted to the left, dodging his opponent and managing to down Ino's with a kunai. Ino had caught on to the movement and whipped a handful of shuriken in the direction of Sasuke's enemy, nailing him squarely in the back.

There was no time to consider that they had probably just killed, because these foreign shinobi were trying to take over their home and it just wasn't done! She did not just get released from the white hell only to have her new-found freedom taken away from her!

The two Genin launched back into battle, helping Naruto stop the oncoming ninja from tracking the civilians to their shelters.
"Naruto! I need an open shot!" Sasuke yelled, catching the ears of probably a dozen different Kage Bunshin.

The blonds gave a simultaneous nod and linked their hands together. The Naruto on the far end grabbed the one nearest him and lifted him. Without pause, the blond swung himself around, bringing the line of connected Bunshin around like a great whip and flinging them toward the enemy.

It was like a bastardized version of a bolo toss, with the Narutos wrapping around a large group of enemies and locking them in place by squeezing their hands together.

Sasuke's Katon jutsu was already prepared and he burn down the Bunshin and the group of enemy shinobi in one move.

Ino grabbed a nearby Naruto and ordered them to watch her body, before switching out with the mind of another Suna shinobi and using their body to attack his comrades. She managed to down four before her victory moves were interrupted.

"INO!"

She glanced back at the worried shout, and found someone standing over her body, dressed in Oto clothing. But the raised kunai never got a chance to kill her body, because there were suddenly large spikes protruding from the man's back.

Ino released the jutsu immediately, and found herself beneath two shinobi. The Suna one from the time Sakura had nearly killed Hokage-sama's grandson, and the one who had been run through like a stuck pig.

Blood spurted from the dying man's mouth and the spikes retracted, leaving his body to fall to the side in a limp.

The redhead didn't even spare Ino a glance, he merely turned and faced the other enemies.

"You're supposed to be on our side!" one of the Oto shinobi screeched, kunai raised in a defensive stance.

"Your leader killed my Kage, meaning I do not have to follow any of your orders," said the redhead, his voice deep and breathing erratic.

The sand surrounding the boy shifted and shot forward, wrapping around several of the shinobi while others managed to jump away in time.

"Now, make me feel alive."

Orochimaru of the Densetsu no Sannin was not often terrified, but in this instant, he was completely scared for his own life. He was supposed to be fighting his old sensei and even had the barrier up. But then a creature of unknown origin, interfered with their battle.

By interfere, he meant the feline towered over the Kage Box and breathed some kind of noxious fumes onto the barrier, causing it to melt away. When his ninja collapsed, clutching their throats, he knew it was dangerous to inhale whatever the purple tinted smoke was, and had to Shunshin away to a safe place.

All around the village, he could see battles. There were three toads, which meant that Jiraiya was
around. Orochimaru had not planned for that. The old man was still alive, and now there was this unknown creature. Whoever had summoned it had certainly been aiming to kill as many as they could. No one under his power had a contract for whatever it was.

It looked like a cheetah, but it might not even be one.

"Orochimaru-sama!"

"Kabuto, what is that thing?"

"I don't know, sir!"

"Excuse me!"

The two shinobi flinched, unaware that they had been joined by another person. Orochimaru turned to find a young woman with long, blonde hair worthy of a Yamanaka, staring at them. Or rather, her eyes were facing their direction, but she looked to be off in her own world.

"My friend tried to kill you which means you are an enemy and enemies die."

The woman's voice was eerie and light, almost like a whisper. All the while, her expression remained all of and slightly doe like.

She raised her hand and a beam of red light shot forth, slamming into Kabuto's chest and forcing his body to the ground. Kabuto ceased all movement. Another wave of the hand and Orochimaru Shunshined once again, hoping to avoid the hit.

He did… mostly. Whatever it was hit his arm just before he disappeared and a searing pain exploded through his body. Upon landing, he was finally able to see that his right arm was completely gone. It had been blasted apart by the woman. The bone, muscles, and veins were practically dripping.

Cursing, the man knew that with only one arm and his right hand man either dead or incapacitated, he was at a loss. The Konoha shinobi were prevailing in the invasion and - he cursed upon the realization - the Ichibi Jinchuuriki was aiding the Kyuubi Jinchuuriki in battle!

Finding no reason to remain on home soil any longer, Orochimaru fled, with an internal promise to make the woman pay for what she had done, and for Konoha to see and feel his wrath!

It was over. Hari had to shrink until she was of a manageable size and then Apparate to her apartment, in order to shift back to her human form. No one had expected a Nundu to appear, not that any of them knew what a Nundu was in any case.

Still, she'd done her part and managed to kill fourteen enemy ninja while doing so. She also saved the Hokage's life while she was at it.

The woman rushed down the stairs, knowing that the children would be on the ground floor with all the civilians who had to be escorted to the safety of the orphanage. She walked into a crowded room full of crying children - none of them were hers - and screaming adults.

Her three volunteers were running around, trying to help everyone at the same time. She spotted a few Chunin shinobi she normally saw at the Hokage's Tower. There was no order. Not even a chaotic sort of order. This was just a mess.

She quickly caught the eyes of the children and made a hand motion for them to remain in place.
Then, she climbed up into the reception desk, and screamed loudly, forcing everyone to go silent.

"I am Potta Hari, the matron of this orphanage. It is by mine and Hokage-sama's good graces that you are sheltered here. If anyone causes trouble, I will kick you out and leave you to face whatever dangers still lurk outside, got it?"

"Why should we listen to you?" someone near her sneered. "You favor that thing after all!"

She glared, knowing that her eyes took on a slight glow whenever she was angry. The man backed down instantly.

"Show of hands!" she yelled, throwing her left arm in the air. "How many people here have fought in a war?!"

She turned from side to side, surveying the room and finding no other hands raising to join her own. "No one? No one here knows what happens during a war? So then, I am the only one with experience in this area and how to handle these situations? Well, gee, I guess it would behoove you to listen to me then!"

Her index finger remained pointing upward as she closed her hand into an almost fist. "If you are not injured at present, you will be quiet! All those who are in need of medical aid, raise your right hands only!"

She counted twenty-three people who needed medical assistance. Looking over to the children who had been trained in this particular course, she gestured for them to begin. "The high priority ones first, please. First aid until we can get them to the hospital. Older kids, help the younger ones, please."

She then faced the room again and raised the middle finger to join the others. "If you are missing a family member, I want you to stand up!"

Once several people were standing, she added, "Look around to see if anyone who is standing, is the family member you are searching for!"

Eventually, only four people had children who weren't with them.

"Those kids are most likely with their schools which had also been evacuated to the Monument! Anyone else who can participate in helping the injured, please do so. No one will be leaving until we are given clearance to do so. Might as well make use of yourselves! Do not panic. Panicking helps no one. You are only as helpless as you let yourselves be, remember that. Everyone can make a difference!"

The second her feet hit the floor, she was startled by the appearance of an Anbu member. "Hokage-sama requests your presence, Hari-hime."

She was lifted and Shunshined before she could respond, and found herself standing in the old leader's office.

"Hari-chan, we have a... guest here who claims to know you."

Hari blinked, finding herself face to face with Luna!

Unable to help herself, she began bouncing in place. "Luna!"
"Wait, Hari-hime!" yelled the Hokage. "Are you sure this is your friend?"

No one else would know who Luna was, so she was sure. But she'd humor the old man. "Luna, which came first, the phoenix or the flame?"

"I would say that 'a circle has no beginning'," the blonde answered with a fond smile.

Hari returned the expression and responded, "'Well reasoned.'" She bounded forward and wrapped her arms around her dotty friend. "I missed you!"

"I did say things we lose have a way of coming back to us in the end."

"Just not in the way we expect," Hari finished, glad to finally have a link to her past once more.

"Hari-hime, care to introduce me to your friend?"

Shite.

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

See ya! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

How was it? Did anyone pick up on the... things I slipped in here?
The Genie's Out of the Bottle!

Chapter Summary

Well it seems that the fit has hit the shan. But they come out on top! So it's okay.

Chapter Notes

-Last chapter was already really long, so I was saving some parts for this chapter instead. Characters will be ruminating on past events. I'm giving two characters some time in the spotlight for the first time in this fic!

-Also, to anyone who was confused over the Veil, I had mentioned that it blew up in the first chapter, but I had Luna remark that it was impossible for mortals to destroy something of the Otherworld, hinting that it was still around, and had reformed. The Veil had been there since the founding of the Ministry and they could never move it.

-Still didn't manage to touch upon everything I wanted to in this chapter. But we get some Hari/Kakashi fluff. Some Sasu/Naru fluff. Some growth and maturity. Some sneak peeks at other happenings. I'm excited for the progression. The faster this goes by, the sooner I will get to the next Chunin Exams, which will be EPIC!

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Adam or Charlie Countryman.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Nara Shikamaru was laying on a roof. Some might wonder why he would nap on a roof when he normally preferred to sleep on a specific, grassy knoll in his clan's compound. And usually, Shikamaru was happy to do that. But not today.

While the village had survived the invasion with minor injuries and destruction, there was still work to be done. Work that Shikamaru did not want to be a part of. If no one could find him, then no one could give him any orders.

Shikamaru would have gladly gone to his usual spot, but his mother knew where that was, and the woman would no doubt drag him off by the ear should she find him. Therefore, Shikamaru was resting on a roof instead. And no, it was not the roof of his house, or even Choji's house.
After the past few months and the great changes that had been made in Ino's attitude, Shikamaru knew that his friend had found a better influence in her life. Sometimes, the blonde would go on and on about 'Hari-chan' and it didn't take much for Shikamaru to connect the dots. Hari-chan was the woman who had come to lecture his team on Kurenai-sensei's behalf.

She was also the one who had taken over the watching of Naruto.

That dunce could not really be considered a dunce any longer. In fact, Shikamaru wondered if the boy was ever a dunce to begin with or if it was the bias of the teachers and the ineptitude of the villagers that made him come across as such.

The fact of the matter was, Naruto pranked. Naruto was loud. Naruto liked to get attention from people. Naruto had not been pranking, and he had not been a loud, and frankly, the blond had been suspiciously staying out of the public eye.

During group training for the Ino-Shika-Cho combinations, Ino would talk and talk about her new team.

She was incredibly happy to be on a team with Sasuke but had not filled Shikamaru's and Choji's ears with nonstop chatter about the prodigy. She actually had other things to say.

She was helping train Naruto's 'sister' Hari-chan in her spare time. She was correcting Naruto's faulty Taijutsu stances. Sometimes her fellow blond would come up with a good idea and the team would work on it while waiting for their sensei to show up in the mornings.

There was always a story.

A lot of it centered around how she was positive that her sensei and Naruto's sister, might become a couple. If anything hadn't changed, it was the fact that Ino liked to gossip and was a romantic at heart and the girl wanted desperately to get the two together. Especially after finding out that they shared the same interest in literature.

Shikamaru found the woman to be… peculiar. He observed more than he spoke and from what he had observed on his own, she was battling some personal trauma from her past and was trying to ignore it. Unfortunately, that could negatively affect everyone around her in some way.

Ino trusted her. Ino was from a clan of people who searched for details within details. Ino swore up and down that she thought Potta Hari had been abused in her childhood, but with no legitimate proof, they couldn't really speculate beyond what Ino had witnessed herself.

Shikamaru's heart did go out to her, but it also did not stop him from contemplating everything.

An attractive, young woman of marrying age appears out of nowhere. She does not like talking about her past unless she absolutely has to. She managed to make friends with the village outcast. Managed to turn his life around. Somehow got the okay from the Hokage to become the matron of Konoha's only orphanage. A place where she could help shape the young and impressionable minds of the future.

She was given all these liberties and was still under Anbu watch. That was strange. If she was truly not a threat, then the Hokage would not need to watch her movements constantly, but being watched she was.

This was what lead him to reclining on the roof of her building. Or was it Naruto's building? Either way, they both lived in the building with the orphans.
Shikamaru was ruminating deeply on the facts.

Staring at the white, puffy clouds floating along in the sky, Shikamaru's mind trailed back to the Chunin Exam.

Basically, he had known that something was up. Something had to be. His father had been on edge for the past two weeks and even Asuma was looking a little worried.

The man hadn't held back in wishing he and Shino good luck in their battles, but his attention wasn't completely focused like it usually was. That had immediately set Shikamaru's alarm blazing. Luckily, Shino was a master at subterfuge, even when it didn't seem like he was doing anything.

His Kikaichu had spread all throughout the stadium and he found had several questionable people who did not feel friendly. With these thoughts in mind, the two had decided to prepare themselves for their battles, but to also keep a closer eye on everything around them.

Shikamaru was lazy and Shino was slow, but that was only because they did not feel the need to showcase their strengths at every minute of the day. Sometimes, it was best to be underestimated and to have an Ace - or in this case, two Aces - in the hole.

Kinuta Dosu did not show up for his match and was presumed to be missing. In reality, Shikamaru knew that the proctor meant dead, but the civilians wouldn't be able to fully understand the implications of that and would most likely jump to the wrong conclusions if they had learned the truth.

That had switched the roster around, leaving the Hyuga to face his teammate, Shino to still face the puppet user, Shikamaru to face the rowdy blonde who could put Ino to shame, and then Gaara got a BYE to the next round.

Nothing remarkable had happened during the two teammate's battle. In fact, neither of them had actually fought at all. In a completely choreographed movement, both unleashed a startling amount of bomb tags all over the arena and left the stadium a mess.

Both then forfeited at the same time.

If that wasn't suspicious, then Shikamaru wouldn't know what would be.

Shino had began his own match long before the Third Exam had been announced, using his Kikaichu to drain away his opponent's chakra. So when Kankuro had suddenly forfeited, Shino had looked to Shikamaru for an explanation that the Nara couldn't give.

Shino had ceased the drainage then, because what would the point be if they weren't going to get to battle?

Shikamaru's battle was over faster than he could believe. He hadn't wanted to fight at all, but the advantage of the ground being completely torn apart had given him more shadows to use. Which meant that he didn't actually have to distract his opponent as he waited for the sun to go down.

Shikamaru had won within five minutes of intense planning. He had exercised his shadows much more than he ever had before, but he had managed to wear his opponent out at the same time, so he felt a little better about it.

It was somewhere between his victory and the beginning of the Second Round, that a Genjutsu fell over the stadium.
He and Shino had both jumped in shock when Gaara had manipulated his sand and stuck both of his siblings to the wall of the box they were standing in. The redhead had then moved away at his own pace, ignoring the screams of his siblings.

Screams such as, 'this wasn't part of the plan!'. And so began Shikamaru's and Shino's interrogation with underhanded tactics and the use of way too many insects for either Suna shinobi's liking.

Their Kage had ordered an invasion on Konoha and had sided with the Kage of Otogakure in order to see it through. The four Genin immediately looked toward the Kage's Box, where the two Kage were supposed to be, only to find a purple barrier separating them from the Anbu.

"Ha! Your Hokage is old and decrepit. He won't be able to stand up to our father!" Kankuro had jeered, smirking as if Suna held all of the cards.

Shikamaru had taken in the area. Konoha was actually winning. Suna and Oto shinobi were quickly disposed of and left to bleed to death as more Jonin and Anbu than he had expected, flooded the arena.

And that was when the cat had appeared and drooled all over the barrier, melting it away. The men revealed to have been within were the Hokage and a man who was not dressed like the Kazekage had been.

"I don't think that is your leader."

And so continued the Invasion, with the revelation that the Kazekage was missing and that a strange man unknown to even the Suna siblings, had taken his place.

By sunset that evening, Shikamaru had learned that Orochimaru of the Densetsu no Sannin had been the one to lead the Invasion, having killed the Kazekage a month prior, before the Chunin Exams had even begun. That meant that Suna could not be held responsible when a wanted, rogue ninja of Konoha was the one to trick them all.

While Shikamaru found it incredibly convenient, he relented for the time being. There were more pressing concerns.

Like the fact that the house sized cat had disappeared in a flash of twisted colors. It was not a summon, nor was it from the Shi no Mori. It was the oddest looking feline he'd ever seen, with familiar green eyes that could probably glow in the dark.

Green eyes that he had seen before, which brought him back to another reason to be laying on someone's roof. He was positive that the woman who was taking care of Naruto, had been the one to turn into a cat.

Why?

She had disappeared from the arena and had somehow made it across the village to the orphanage with minutes of the Invasion beginning and since she barely had chakra and could not Shunshin, something else had to have happened.

Like disappearing suddenly and appearing out of nowhere.

Shikamaru was going to get to the bottom Potta Hari, one way or another. Once she left, he'd tail her and see what she did every day.

If only he had known that she wasn't home what this great plan had come to mind, and that she
wouldn't be home for several hours.

_Death! Death! Death Death Death Death Death Death!_  

"Yes?" The very being she was calling solidified themself on the far end of the room, darkening a corner with their chilling presence.

What do I do? How do I do this? I don't know what to do!  

"Stop panicking. Luna has already Seen this come to pass."

Hari turned to look at her friend, who was staring very tellingly at the corner where Death resided. Hari looked back and forth between them, until she realised that the reason Luna was looking there was because she could actually *see* Death!

How?

"The Oracle shall tell you."

And then Death faded away, leaving Hari to her internal ramblings and worries. Like, they couldn't even bother to at least sit by and help her work out her internal struggles? How rude!

"Hokage-sama," Luna said, her voice just as airy as it always was, "I am Aiyoi Luna, and I am an Oracle."

There was a breath of silence, before Hari whipped around to face the blonde, her hand pressed to her chest in her surprise. "Really?"

"Yes."

"So..." the brunette murmured, waving a finger, "is that how you know things that you shouldn't be knowing?"

Seriously, Luna always managed to know what to say and when to say it. It had always been a little strange, but Hari had always put it up to her being so in tune with people. Like she had gotten the skill from always watching and never participating. She was good at paying attention.

If Luna was an Oracle, it explained so much.

"So then, you're like Trelawney?" Hari asked with an obvious wince. Trelawney was just not a person she wanted to liken her friend to. Luna wasn't weird in *that* way, bug eyed, nor annoying.

Luna's wistful smile vanished and her eyes cleared. "Professor Trelawney was a Prophetess, I am an Oracle."

"There's a difference? Don't you just tell the future?"

Luna sighed. "A prophet is a person who makes predictions. Half the time they can be wrong. And sometimes, the prophet in question can be overcome by one of the Divine in order to impart something onto mortals. Some prophets remember their prophecies, others don't.

An Oracle, is a rarity. They must be born in either February or October. Must be born on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, or twenty-first. Must be born under a Blue Moon, which happen more frequently than Muggles think. Must be birthed between eleven and eleven thirty on the night of
choice. Must be acknowledged by a Divine power.

If all conditions are met, the child will be gifted with the Sight."

"You capitalised that, didn't you?" asked the older witch, because Luna had made it sound so official and special.

Luna nodded. "The Sight allows me to See more than just the present. I can See the future, the past, and other places in the present time. I can See other planes of existence. Other worlds. Other dimensions. I can See into the Afterlife. I can See into the Netherworld. My Sight is not limited to anything and can be overwhelming at times."

"That's why you randomly stare at open spaces!" Hari realised. It made so much sense now!

"So then all the creatures you talk about are real?"

"Yes."

"Wicked!"

Luna Lovegood was a Seer. But why would she never tell anyone? Surely her life would have been a lot better had people known about her ahead of time.

Luna's amused smile was full of false humor. "I would prefer people be kind to me out of the goodness of their hearts, than to pander to me simply because I could tell them their future."

Oh. That should have been obvious. Poor Luna. Hari just wanted to wrap her friend in a warm hug and never let go!

"Ladies," Sarutobi called, "can we get back to the situation at hand?"

"Sorry," they mumbled, giving him their full attention again.

The old man was sitting at his desk and though he seemed congenial, Hari could sense an unease in the air that she hadn't felt before. The room was filled with shinobi and quite frankly, she was sure it wasn't because they wanted to give Luna a warm welcome. They were eyeing her with distrust actually.

"Hari-hime, the only reason your friend is not in custody at present, is because she was able to knock an enemy shinobi unconscious and by doing so, has given us a plethora of information that will help us defeat the man who orchestrated the Invasion. Witnesses say that a red light came from her hand and knocked the prisoner in question, unconscious. She also attacked Orochimaru and managed to injure him before he fled."

Hari gave Luna a look and she merely shrugged. "I blew off his right arm."

Yes, she just simply blew it off, nothing big there.

"You see, Hokage-sama, it's something Hari and I can do because we are distant relatives."

And she just dropped a whole bloody bomb on everyone, why?!
This was why he kept guards on her at all times, because he knew that there was something more to her. According to her friend, both of them could create the red light that knocked a grown man unconscious simply by touching him. Which meant that she could probably make someone's arm explode as well.

Also… they were related? There was absolutely nothing similar in their coloring or even their bone structure that showed relation.

"Are you truly relatives?" the old leader asked because he was not prepared for more drama to be added to his life at present. There was enough going on at the moment without adding more clansmen to the equation.

"Thirds cousins, three times removed," the blonde responded without hesitation. That meant that their relation wasn't even close. Their relation was so far apart, they wouldn't even be considered family in Konoha. However, there was obviously more to this story.

"I want to know about the strange energy."

Aiyoi Luna seated herself primly and Hari-hime followed, looking less well put together. She slumped into her chair and seemed to have given up any kind of control in the situation and just let her friend/cousin do the talking. As long as he got the answers he was looking for, he didn't care who gave them.

"Mahou. You have chakra and we have mahou. If you lose your chakra, you will die. Depending on our age, we could die if we lose our mahou. It is a terrifying thought. Nearly everyone in our community possessed mahou, our primary Kekkei Genkai."

And entire community!

"But we are also distantly related to each other because the bloodlines were so scared of losing their purity and mahou, that centuries back, they began to marry into other pure lines. Hari's godfather was my third cousin, once removed. Her father was my third cousin, twice removed. The man who tried to take over our community and who murdered Hari's parents, was her distant cousin, because both were the remaining descendants of one family, which their respective families split apart from to sever their association."

"Hari-hime, what exactly does your Kekkei Genkai consist of?" he asked the young woman, intent on pulling her back into the discussion. The young woman was not about to get out of the situation. Not by a long shot.

She gave a heaving sigh and stood. With her open palm outstretched and facing the ceiling, a fireball appeared. It then froze over. The frozen ball melted into water, that remained floating in her palm. Slowly, the water evaporated.

"Some of us can manipulate the elements. Some, like Luna, can See things others cannot. Some study extensively for years, in order to transform into an animal. Some can change their appearances at will. Some can speak a specific language of an animal. All of these skills are consider Kekkei Genkai because they trace back through certain families and are not found in others."

She proceeded to shrink in on herself until all that was left behind was a very familiar feline which was much smaller than the last time he had seen it. In fact, it was over one hundred feet taller when he last saw it several hours previous.

The spotted feline expanded until it was once again the human woman he had allowed to control the
orphanage.

"That is a learned skill that can take years to master. It took me ten."

Aiyoi-san sighed. "I wanted to be a Blibbering Humdinger, but instead I'm a unicorn. Disappointing in a way but amazing in another."

Hiruzen simply stared at them.

"What did you just turn into, Hari-hime?"

"A Nundu. It is a creature of supposed myth that is capable of felling an entire village with just a breath. There is a high amount of toxicity within the body that make the drool, the blood, the sweat, and any other bodily fluid, incredibly dangerous to breath in or touch. That's why I drooled all over that barrier, otherwise you wouldn't have made it."

Aoyoi-san gave a firm nod. "I foresaw you using something called the Hakke no Fuin Shiki and meeting one of Death's agents. Your plan would have only partially worked at the cost of your own life, while your enemy would merely switch bodies at a later date, rendering your sacrifice pointless."

If he wasn't already sitting, Hiruzen would have no doubt fallen into his chair. That had been his plan as a last resort. He would have done it if it meant saving the village. The fact that Hari-hime, who was currently under suspicion, had stopped such a fate, and that her friend had assisted in a roundabout manner, put him off.

While she had withheld vital information, she had done a lot of good in the village. In Naruto's life. Her Mind Walk did not lie on the facts of what happened. Though the truth could be skewed a bit.

So how did he handle this?

He and the village owed their lives to these two young women. Their support in the battle helped end the Invasion early and prevented the loss of more lives. Hari-hime's involvement in the orphanage had exposed Danzo. Naruto was growing more mature as time passed and even Jiraiya approved of her despite never meeting her face to face.

By all accounts she should be arrested on charges of suspected treason, but in truth, he didn't want to do that.

Yet her threat level had gone from a Three, to a Seven at the very least, if what she and her friend had shown and spoken of thus far, were anything to judge from.

The old man reached into his desk drawer and withdrew his pipe. He needed a smoke and he needed it badly. The strongest opiate available because this situation had so many twists and turns that he wasn't sure of where it began and where it ended.

"Hari-hime, Aiyoi-san, I do not need to know everything about your lives. I am of the mind that you deserve privacy just like everyone else. Especially if you are of the same clan, where clans are allowed their own secrets. But you are both considered threats to my village. I will not have you arrested if you submit yourselves to a willing examination of your abilities and what benefits you could bring this village if you plan to remain here. You have both done Konoha a great service and I am willing to bargain in order to keep the peace and safety."

Hari-hime looked to the other woman, who shrugged and said, "You are my elder and my leader. Where you go, I go."
Hiruzen briefly considered how much older the blonde looked than Hari-hime, and he wondered about the story behind it.

"I am no one's leader," Hari-hime retorted with a sneer. "But fine. I had a feeling this would happen at some point. Just so you know, Naruto is already aware of all of this. He thinks it's cool but also unfair that I won't just use my abilities to clean the house and I instead, make us both do chores by hand."

Hiruzen's head fell into his hands, because that was exactly like Naruto.

Yamanaka Ino sighed as she shoveled the debris into a large pile that was going to be burned by Katon Jutsu.

So much had happened in the last month and she wasn't even awake for most of it! Upon her awakening, she was shocked to find herself staring at a white ceiling in the hospital, instead of the night sky as she had expected. The nurse who had walked in on her sitting up, had informed her that she had been unconscious for two weeks!

Ino was forced to sit still as she was given an overview of what her injuries were and the work that had to be done to fix everything. She was then asked to give her name and age and Genin Registration Number.

An hour after she had woken up - and proved that she suffered from no memory loss - Kakashi-sensei had joined her, with a mission scroll in hand. He needed her to recount the mission that had landed her in the hospital in the first place and that was how she came to the realization that she was alive but what about her teammates?

"Naruto is perfectly healthy, and Sasuke woke up yesterday," the Jonin had told her. "They both want to see you once this is finished."

Ino gave her report as best as she could, switching between talking and signing because her throat was raw and no amount of tea nor lozenges she was being given, were doing her any good. Eventually, the story had been finished and she was allowed to relax as she waited for her teammates to appear.

Naruto was the usual ball of flamboyant energy, though she could immediately tell that there was something different about him. As a Yamanaka, she was trained to notice the nuances in the personal behavior of everyone around her and the Naruto before her had changed drastically from the one she had known.

His eyes were dim despite the wide smile on his face. He was putting on a show for some reason and she was going to get to the bottom of it.

Sasuke on the other hand, had changed the most. His face! His face was a different shape now! The boy had told her that they had to completely remake his jaw because it had been shattered almost beyond repair!

And that was when she finally asked the million Ryo question. "Why did they attack us?"

Naruto had looked away immediately and Sasuke's head and turned to face him.

"He says that we have to wait for Kakashi-sensei and to find a good, quiet place to talk because it's literally against the law to speak about in public."
They had planned to talk the day Ino was released from the hospital. They would go for lunch and then go with their sensei to some secluded spot where they would learn about some super special secret.

But then Billboard Brow showed up.

Ino had never seen her once friend look so terrible. Her hair was dry and suffering major breakage. Her skin was oily and poorly managed. She looked worn out, and overall, finished with everything.

When Sakura walked in and froze in the doorway, Ino had expected some kind of comment on her standing too close to Sasuke, or maybe even breathing too near him, but instead, Sakura's emerald eyes began tearing up, until Ino found herself with an armful of crying Genin and was completely unsure of what to do.

Somewhere in the mess of things, Sakura had apologized 'for being a horrible friend' and for 'pushing her away'. She then went on to ramble about how the life of a shinobi was incredibly difficult and that she didn't think she was meant for it.

In the middle of her hospital room, Ino had reared back and smacked the pinkette across the face, stopping the stuttering and the crying right in their tracks.

"I don't know what happened to you, but the Sakura I know would never act like this! You are strong and capable of anything you set your mind to and no amount of crying is going to make it better!

We fell out of touch over a boy. I understand how ridiculous that is now that I have had time to think about it. It wasn't just you, Sakura. It was me too! We are both at fault, so trying to take all of the blame isn't doing you any favors right now!"

"B-bu-"

"No!" Ino had growled, making sure to get up in the other girl's face. "I refuse to believe that you've lost it simply because life isn't as easy as you thought it was. I refuse to believe that the girl I once knew has become a coward!"

"BUT I AM A COWARD!"

The two had stared at one another for several minutes, trying to gain some kind of ground in the argument.

It wasn't until Naruto of all people, said something incredibly profound, that both were jolted from their stare down.

"You know, it takes a great amount of courage to admit your mistakes. If you can manage that, then you aren't really a coward."

Ino and Sakura both looked at him like he was this new being that neither had ever seen before, and in a way, he was. Ino realized in that moment, that Naruto had certainly changed from the loud mouthed idiot she had always known him as. He was growing up.

"Hari-nee-chan once told me that 'it takes a great deal of courage to stand up to our enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to our friends'. And I think that both of you have finally found that courage."

Sakura's jaw moved a little as her head lowered. She stared at the floor for several seconds, before
looking Naruto in the eye and saying, "I'm sorry for how I treated you, Naruto. You didn't deserve it and I had no right to lay a hand on you."

The blond looked as shocked as Ino felt, but he beamed the widest she had seen in awhile. This smile was a genuine one and full of compassion that not even Ino had expected. The sunny warmth that was Uzumaki Naruto, was present in this smile.

"It's okay! Sometimes... we need to learn to love ourselves first before we can learn to love others. You're finally learning to love yourself and realizing that you don't have to be unhappy simply because your expectations weren't met. Life as a shinobi is changing the way you perceive the world and allows you to be more honest with yourself. Soon you'll realize that your shortcomings aren't as evident as your talents."

The moment of awe and inspiration was ruined by Sasuke who actually cracked a second joke in one day!

"Big words, dobe."

"Shut it, teme!" the blond glared. "We were having a moment!"

"Hn."

Sakura turned to face the other boy on Team Seven, causing him to stiffen immediately. This was the frosty wall that Sasuke put up when he was trying to be avoidant without actually fleeing. Because 'Uchiha do not flee from anything.'

"Hari-san told me that I didn't know you, and as a founder of your fanclub, I didn't want to believe her. But she was right. I really don't know anything about you. You're cute and talented, but it's just not enough anymore."

Sakura gave a deep bow. "I apologize for the trouble I have caused you and I promise to make a better effort in getting to know you."

And what had Sasuke's brilliant answer been?

"Hn."

Ino sighed and leaned against her broom. There was so much work to be done and thinking about what had happened wasn't helping her pay attention. Although, Naruto's hundreds of Kage Bunshin were beings champs and helping out in the clean up.

They never actually got to talking about what they should have talked about, because they went to lunch, with Sakura tagging along and Naruto stopping by his home to pick up his cousin.

Yes, Naruto had a cousin. Ino would have called bull, but then she actually met the girl.

Uzumaki Karin was a vibrant redhead with a big temper and was just as loud as Naruto. The two had gotten into three stare downs while eating ramen and kept trying to outdo each other in how much they could eat. She was like Naruto's long lost twin.

Ino couldn't deny their relation after that. Seeing Naruto pack away fourteen bowls had become a usual sight in her day to day life. Seeing a girl the same age and size as him, pack away the same amount and still want more, had suspended her disbelief real quick.

And once again, Naruto had something to say that changed lives. It was like he'd been replaced with
some wise person that used to live on a mountain and reflect on his life.

"Karin is a medic and she could probably give you tips for your training."

Which then got Sakura's interest peaked, to which Ino explained her desire to become an Iryo-nin. And it was like Sakura's self contained manner, melted away as she exuberantly informed everyone of what happened during the First Exam in the Chunin Exams and how she had managed to ace the written test perfectly, without cheating.

And then that the Head of T&I himself had recommended to her sensei that she enter the Cypher Division when she became a Chunin.

Ino was insistent on Sakura doing it, which meant that she had to train hard to reach the next level on the shinobi ladder, if she wanted to join the elite shinobi in the Cypher Division.

Ino wrangled a promise from the girl, which got Naruto involved, who then managed to cajole Sasuke into it. They would attain Chunin Rank by the next Chunin Exam, which meant extra work, extra training, and overall time and dedication.

Karin wasn't a Konoha shinobi yet, so she admitted to waiting for where the future took her before promising anything.

Still, it had been a good day.

"Ino, can we stop yet? My feet hurt! -ttebayo!"

The blonde shook herself off. "Nope! The more we get done today, the less we will have to do tomorrow!"

Besides, tomorrow was a Saturday and she had learned that Konoha's onsen had not suffered any damage in the Invasion, which meant she needed a girl's day out.

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The Comprehensive List of Abilities Attained Through Possessing "Mahou":

1. Transfiguration

2. Potions

3. Arithmancy

4. Divination

5. Charms

6. Ancient Runes

7. Occlumency and Legilimency

8. Necromancy

9. Dark Arts and Light Arts

1. TRANSFIGURATION
A. The ability to transfigure objects into other objects by altering their physical makeup.

B. The ability to transfigure one's own body into that of an animal.

2. POTIONS

A. The gathering of specific ingredients that when combined with mahou, will react together when ingested.

B. Sleeping Potion induces slumber.

C. Dreamless Sleep induces dreamless slumber.

D. Skele-Gro regrows bones and strengthens bones.

E. Polyjuice temporarily turns the drinker into another for a very limited time period. (Requires a part of who you will be changing into.)

F. Wit Sharpening helps clear the mind and allows better focus.

G. Felix Felicis gives the drinker good luck in anything they attempt. (Poisonous if taken in mass quantities.)

H. Blood Replenisher makes blood replenish at three times the normal speed.

I. Oculus fixes the drinkers eyesight and cures Conjunctivitis.

3. ARITHMANCY

A. The study of the properties of numbers in relevance to mahou and possibly divining future events.

B. Certain days could be affected because of the number they are on.

4. DIVINATION

A. A branch of mahou that deals with attempting to see into the future.

B. Prophecies fall into this category.

C. Tasseomancy is the art of reading tea leaves.

D. Crystal ball gazing helps with dream interpretation and future telling.

E. Tarot Card reading can tell of past, present, and future events in a person's life. (Person in question must be involved in the card selection.)

5. CHARMS

A. Adds certain properties to an object or a creature to make them more than they appear. Alters what the object does, not what the object is, unlike Transfiguration.

B. Unsupported flight.

C. Levitation.
D. Elemental use.

E. Emotional Control

6. ANCIENT RUNES

A. The study and application of runic scriptures that can be empowered by mahou.

B. Applying the proper set of runes can have a reaction, depending on one's goal.

C. Runes can lend a powerful aid in warding and erecting barriers.

7. OCCLUMENCY AND LEGILIMENCY

**Occlumency** is the art of protecting the mind from outer assault.

A. Reorganizing memories into a more orderly pattern.

B. Setting up mental defenses against invasion.

C. Sealing anything unpleasant away.

D. Trapping invaders quickly and ejecting them from your mind.

**Legilimency** is the art of invading the mind.

A. Ability to enter someone's mind and manipulate what you find.

B. Ability to alter someone's perception of events.

C. Altering their memory.

D. Adding false visions or memories.

E. Taking away their memory.

F. Fracturing their sanity.

8. NECROMANCY

A. The Dark Arte of raising the dead.

B. Animating corpses to do your bidding.

C. Summoning creatures from beyond this plane and making bargains with them. (Usually demands sacrifices and murder.)

9. DARK ARTS AND LIGHT ARTS

A. Emotion is what powers these the most.

B. It is a common misconception that only good emotions fuel Light and only bad fuel Dark, but it is in fact, not true. The emotions just need to be intense.

C. Details are sketchy at best.
Luna nodded to herself, finding the list to be pretty good. Hari's list would be much smaller because she didn't go into as many subjects as Luna had. Nor did she show interest in as many. Still, she had given an overview, without going into too much detail.

There were certainly hundreds of potions she could have listed, but had decided not to because giving that much power over, wouldn't be smart. Also, certain plants did not exist in this world and the potions she had listed, could actually be made here. If was all for the sake of the future and she hoped that from what she had seen, she could help guide Hari into making the right decisions or at least affecting the right outcomes to make the good futures a stronger possibility.

The blonde smiled to the large man in the trench coat and handed him her list while offering some advice.

"Don't eat the dango Mitarashi-san has put on your desk."

Kakashi stared at his adorable little students who had all changed so much in the last month. Gone was the childish innocence that always accompanied their slightly chubby faces. Sasuke's face lacked any form of baby fat now.

It was… a lot to take in. Kakashi had nearly bailed that morning. He had been determined to not show up to the meeting and just let them assume he'd forgotten or that he was going to be late. But then he thought of something.

Kakashi spent a good portion of his life, running away from things he didn't want to do. And even though he ended up doing them, he always expended unnecessary amounts of energy in being lazy. It made no sense to wear himself out mentally, emotionally, and physically over something when he knew he would have to do it eventually.

It was only by the strength of Obito that he had managed to suck it up and meet his team on time, instead of hiding in another training ground for several hours. Obito had not been the type to run away from his problems. He'd brashly faced them all head on and with a loud mouth and while some of his demeanor wasn't something Kakashi felt the need to emulate, he did draw courage from Obito's attitude on what was right and wrong.

The three Genin looked tired. Like they had seen too much. In a way, they had. All three had been unnecessarily forced into a life or death situation on a training trip that was simply supposed to help them learn. The lesson they all learned, was not the one Kakashi had intended for them to experience. Not yet.

Never mind that Kakashi had been through a similar lesson when he was only eight. Never mind that he was already in Anbu by their age. Kakashi's experiences could not be pushed on anyone else. He could not expect them to take things the way he had. And frankly, he didn't want them to.

When he was their age, Kakashi had been an asshole. He didn't want his team to be like that. He couldn't expect the same things of them as he once had for himself.

Things were different these days. The demands in the Academy were less bloodthirsty because they lived in an era of peace. Without the War Teachings being implemented, the children got to have a longer childhood. They got to experience life at a slower rate, which allowed them more time to mentally and psychologically prepare themselves for the real world. These children had grown up in relative safety for the most part. They didn't have to fear that the village would be bombed at any moment, or wonder if tomorrow, they'd lose all of their friends.
These kids were not like the kids of Kakashi's era. And they had to grow up too quickly.

"Have you all been down to T&I recently?" the Jonin began, hoping to start a conversation to make the awkward air dissipate.

"Yeah," Naruto sighed. "I had to go a few times but they let me go early because I wasn't a raving lunatic like they expected me to be."

Ino's reaction was similar, though she looked more put out. "Dad is making me go there despite the fact that he could just give me therapy at home. But he said that I need to not rely on the same people to always help me solve my problems and that becoming too attached to a familial figure could have disastrous effects on my psyche. Particularly when I am branching out and becoming my own person."

She did not look like she agreed with his conclusion, but gave no further information.

Kakashi turned to Sasuke, who was leaning against a tree. "I will continue therapy well into the next year."

"As long as you are getting the help you need, then everything will be better. As you all know, we are here to discuss the last mission and the points involved in putting you three within the scope of Iwa shinobi.

The answers is, the Yondaime."

Naruto was stone-faced this time, showing absolutely no reaction. Sasuke and Ino however, seemed to be very interested in what was to come.

"Naruto resembles our venerated Yondaime Hokage. The Yondaime is considered one of the greatest shinobi to have ever come from our village, because he single-handedly took down an army, with only two jutsu that he used repeatedly. Iwa shinobi spit on his memory because of how he decimated their numbers."

His throat nearly closed up as he spoke. Kakashi hated living in the past. It hurt too much to think about and yet he had a duty as a squad leader. He had a duty to his kids. And he had a duty to his sensei.

Drawing upon Obito's courage, Kakashi continued on.

"The Yondaime was my sensei, so I knew him very well. He was like a second father to me. He and his wife were kind to me, despite how terrible of a child I had been."

"He had a wife?" Ino interrupted, looking confused. "None of the history books say that."

Kakashi nodded. "It was to protect Kushina-nee-chan, from being attacked by outside forces. You see, she was one of the remaining members of a very important clan that had been destroyed in the last war. She had been kidnapped once in her younger years, by Kumo shinobi. Once her pregnancy was finished, she and their child would have been announced to the village."

He paused in order to take in their reactions. Sasuke was paying much more attention since he'd mentioned that Kushina was one of the last of her clan. Of course he would connect with something like that immediately. Ino looked concerned.

"Unfortunately, the Kyuubi attacked during the night she had gone into labor. Right after the child had been born, actually. In an attempt to save the village from the rampaging Biju's actions, the
Hokage and his wife sacrificed themselves, to seal the being into their child. There are very few methods that can be used to seal a Biju into a human and these people are called Jinchuuriki, which means 'power of human sacrifice'. The method they chose was the fastest and safest method for everyone involved, except them."

Kakashi sighed, feeling shame and disappointment fill him at how the village had treated Naruto his whole life.

"Had the child not been there, with his underdeveloped chakra coils capable of allowing a being comprised of chakra only, inside his body, Konoha would not be here today. And though the Yondaime died with the intent for his son to be viewed as the hero who had saved the village from utter annihilation, the villagers did not follow his dying request. Because they see only the Kyuubi."

Slowly, ever so slowly, Sasuke's head turned to face Naruto, who was staring at the ground now. The Uchiha seemed to have put it all together quickly and was gauging Naruto's actions at present.

I no didn't seem to be that far away from her realization and together, the two teammates faced Naruto silently, waiting for him to say something.

"I gave in," was the quiet answer. "The Kyuubi offered me a way out that would make the bad men go away and possibly save our lives. I allowed him to manipulate me and when I was too far in, I couldn't bring myself to stop… because hurting them like they had hurt us had just felt so good. And justified.

They were begging and running, and I didn't stop."

I no looked to be ready to say something, but it was Sasuke to spoke first.

"You're an idiot."

"Sasuke!" I no hissed, glaring at him for probably the first time in her life.

The Uchiha ignored her and instead, looked Naruto dead in the eye. "You feel guilt over ridding the world of those pieces of trash? They were trying to kill us. For a grudge they held against a man long dead. You used a power you mostly have never used before, in order to save our lives, and are beating yourself up over not having enough control necessary to stop a creature that can't even be killed. As if a little Genin such as yourself has power over the most powerful Biju in existence."

Naruto and I no were both gaping and though Kakashi would never admit it to anyone, he was as well.

"If you weren't strong enough to control it this time, get stronger so you can control it next time. Your father entrusted you with this burden for a reason. Remember, that everything you learn as a ninja, is just like a double edged sword. It can be used to do harm and can be used to stop harm. How you use it defines who you really are. It is not what you are that matters, Naruto, it is who you are."

I no cooed very loudly and wrapped her arms around both boys, drawing them into a group hug. And finally, after weeks of putting up a strong facade, Naruto broke down fully and Kakashi had never seen such a heartwarming sight in all his life.

This was the meaning of teamwork. This was what the Will of Fire was.

To witness the personal growth of each of his students in such a short time span, was an honor that Hatake Kakashi felt would never be transcended.
Sabaku no Gaara sat calmly in his cell as his two blood relations paced back and forth. It seemed that he was the only Suna shinobi who was absolutely unaffected by the death of Rasa. In truth, he didn't give a damn. Why should he care about a man who had never bothered care about him?

In the other cells, the rest of the shinobi who had managed to live through the Invasion, were all mourning their leader. Some were even angry at Gaara for showing no emotion. They called him a monster and said that he was heartless. They said he was a shame on his family name.

And Gaara's only response was, "Rasa was not my father, for he never raised me. Temari and Kankuro are not my family, for they never gave me their time. As I see it, my actions have nothing to do with their family."

The rest of their wait was spent in relative silence, with Temari and Kankuro sending him questioning looks every few minutes. Both looked guilty, but neither seemed to have the courage to say anything. As always, they were cowards when the moment really mattered.

Not that Gaara expected them to say anything. His whole life they had never bothered to get to know him, so why should he care about what happened to them?

Soon they would be escorted from their cells and to the village gate, where they would be retrieved by Suna shinobi.

The only thing worth noting during this entire mission, was that he was finally able to sleep and that he hadn't had any headaches ever since Potta Hari had intervened in his mind.

Some day, the redhead was going to speak with the woman at length, on what she was. Someone capable of silencing a Biju and limiting the control it had on their host, was someone to watch out for.

Gaara did not seek a confrontation with her at any time in the future.

_I still have guards, don't I?_

"Of course," Death agreed. _"They wouldn't let you out of their sight now that they have just an inkling of what you are capable of."_

The witch cursed.

"Careful with that language, little ears might hear it!"

Hari wheeled around, finding herself confronted by a man who had been in the Hokage's office when she and Luna had been questioned. He didn't look as intense as he had that day, but he still seemed pretty unnerving.

The man was also standing in the middle of Naruto's kitchen.

"Can I help you?" the woman asked, hoping that the Hokage didn't need her again. She was trying to cook dinner because Naruto and his team would be back soon and she wanted to have everything mostly prepared before they got in the door.

It was Sasuke's birthday and she had assigned Naruto with the duty of convincing - more like nagging, but who really cared - Sasuke to come to dinner. She had a feeling that the dark teen hadn't
celebrated ever since his family had been killed. He could use something pleasant after the drama of the last month and a half.

"I'm Jiraiya, and you're my godson's guardian."

Everything came to a screeching halt in that moment. Hari looked at the man who was supposed to have taken Naruto in when he was a baby. The man who had been nowhere to be seen during said child's life. There were many things that she wanted to do at the moment, and her Gryffindor tendencies were screaming for her to do the most physical of reactions.

Walk up and punch him in the face.

Unfortunately for her, this man was a ninja and most likely would be able to see her punch coming from a mile away. He would then probably be capable of snapping her arm in half with little exertion, and while she was certain that the Hokage would not be pleased with such actions, she was not so foolish as to try and start a fight with somebody who was obviously more physically powerful than she was.

She did have some Slytherin inside somewhere. Hari could be very considerate toward her own safety if only her life was the line. At present, while her life was not on the line, she still wasn't foolish enough to start a fight that she knew she probably wouldn't be able to win. Naruto had once pointed out to her, what little use was her magic would be if she couldn't even see her enemy. And shinobi were bloody fast!

Basically, she would exercise caution at all times until the man proved not to be a threat to her personally.

But just because she wouldn't punch him, did not mean that she couldn't do anything else!

"Would you like some tea?"

"What? No questions on why I'm here? No anger at my lack of presence until now?"

She sent him a blank look. "Sir, I am very annoyed with you at present, and would very much like to send you flying out of the window you used to get in here. Unfortunately, starting a fight with you would not be beneficial to my health."

She shrugged. "I'll get you back somehow. I happen to be a pretty good prankster and I'm certain Naruto would like to help me."

Enjoying his sudden wince, Hari went about preparing some tea.

A few moments later, Kakashi appeared at the window, because Merlin forbid these ninja ever use a damn door!

"Are the kids with you?"

"I skipped on ahead," the man responded, sending a nod in Jiraiya's direction. In his hands was an Icha Icha book that Hari had never seen before.

The brunette hummed and slipped the book from the man's fingers. Green met black, as their eyes clashed. She placed the book under her arm and went to grab the stack of plates on the table.

"There is a time for porn and a time for setting the table."
Holding out the crockery, the woman smirked and said, "Make yourself useful."

Kakashi sighed, but took the plates in hand and began setting the table as requested. He had done it enough that he should no longer be surprised that he was asked to do it whenever he came over for dinner.

Now that she had the mysterious book within her grasp, Hari turned it over in order to give it a good look. The cover was fuchsia and was accented with bright gold lettering. On the front was a young woman dressed in black leather and holding a whip. It would not take someone with even a pathetic imagination, long to understand what the book was about.

She flipped it open and began speed reading the first page.

"Oh! *I'm* not allowed to read it right now but *you* are?" Kakashi protested playfully, earning himself a half-hearted glare.

"*I'm* making the food! I deserve a little break." She flipped a page and added, "Besides, *I* don't have this book."

Jiraiya gasped then and began to choke, eyeing her like she was something new and confusing.

Oh yeah, women apparently didn't read *Icha Icha* much. Oh well.

"I could be *persuaded* to let you borrow it, perhaps," said Kakashi, a teasing lilt to his voice.

"And what would you like in return, oh mighty warrior?" she smirked, interested in hearing his offer.

"Stop flirting with my nee-chan, sensei!"

Two things happened simultaneously. Jiraiya disappeared in a plume of white smoke, and Naruto almost immediately took his place.

The blond came flying through the open window suddenly, startling Hari only. Kakashi had already been ahead of the blond, grabbing Hari's elbow and pulling her aside, preventing her ward from slamming into her and knocking her down. Unfortunately for him, it did nothing to prevent him from slamming into the opposite wall.

"Naruto, doors are there for a reason," the woman chastised, though she didn't really mean it.

Kakashi at least was kind enough to rescue her and steady her so she didn't fall. His hand was also much larger than she had assumed it would be, wrapping around a good portion of her arm.

"But doors are for boring people, nee-chan! -ttebayo!"

On cue, the doorbell rang and she called for the other Genin to come in. Sasuke shuffled in behind Ino and Karin, who looked to be a little excited, but were trying to restrain their enthusiasm.

"Happy birthday, Sasuke!" Hari exclaimed with a beaming grin. "I made you a carrot cake with cream cheese frosting."

With the teasing of Kakashi, the glomping of Sasuke, the cheering of Naruto, Karin, and Ino, and the overall uplifting mood, the night had gone rather well.

Hari looked forward to repeating it in the future.
Anko stared down the two girls that had been gifted to her. One was a secret Uzumaki, the other was the pink girl from Kurenai's team. Both were going to be working with her for the next few months in order to up their training.

Haruno had found some new source of inspiration and her desire to be a shinobi had been renewed with vigor. Anko was going to train her ass into the ground.

Uzumaki was a new resident of the village and wanted to participate in the next Chunin Exams, but needed to be a Genin first. She was scheduled to take the next exam within a month's time and it was up to Anko to prepare her.

Kusagakure was very different from Konoha and required less of their Genin for them to graduate. Anko had higher expectations.

She leveled the two kunoichi with a demented grin. "We are going to begin with a lesson on how to use our bodies as weapons."

As one, two heads tilted to the side in confusion.

Anko was fast as lightning as she summoned a shit ton of snakes and bound the gakis up so they couldn't flee. She then pulled out her trusty Icha Icha and found herself a comfortable position on the ground.

"We are going to go through this porn together and determine which moves could be useful maneuvers in battle."

The pained whines from her pupils were music to her ears.

"Chapter one: Oh No. Miki was a very voluptuous woman."

She really needed to thank Hari for suggesting this.

"This is going downhill fast. We are losing manpower."

The redhead glowered. "There isn't much we can do! We are lacking in funds, we are lacking in muscle, and we are lacking in aid! Quite frankly, the hopes of our people are falling every damn day and there is nothing we can do about it!"

"How about reaching out to any of the other villages?" Zabuza suggested. "Do you plan to keep Kirigakure sequestered from the rest of the shinobi nations after we win? Establishing connections right now would be the best course of action."

"And how many would be willing to help us?"

"Konoha."

There was a round of scoffs from all over the room and even though Zabuza would agree most of the time, this was not the case.

"Think about it, Mei. They have the widest assortment of Kekkei Genkai within their village. They accept such things and view them as gifts. To have a Kekkei Genkai earns you respect among the villagers and shinobi. So us fighting for the rights of those with Kekkei Genkai and fighting against the oppression from Yagura, would pull on their sentimental heartstrings."
It was pure fact.

"And Konoha is the most powerful shinobi nation at present," said Ao, looking as if he was considering Zabuza's words more closely.

"Didn't they just have to deal with an invasion though?" asked Mei. "How much damage did they sustain and would they even be worth going to for help?"

"They would be worth a lot. Remember, those idiots are the friendliest village in the five great nations and Sarutobi follows the beliefs of the Shodaime Hokage very closely, despite what his advisers think. They would be our best bet."

Mei sighed. She suddenly looked much older than before, her true age showing.

"I'll begin writing the missive."

Miles away, Luna Lovegood sat up in bed as the vision ended. She would have to inform the Hokage immediately.
With a start, the two shinobi drew their weapons and pointed them at the unexpected intruder. It was a woman who was a little shorter than Itachi was. She had long black hair and piercing green eyes that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

And Itachi should not feel any kind of worry because it was obvious that she was a civilian. But she was a civilian that had managed to enter the room without he or Kisame taking notice and they were trained ninja who had been in their profession for more than ten years each.

The woman was also not meeting Itachi’s gaze and was instead, looking at Kisame. So either she knew who he was, or she felt that the bigger one of the two strangers, was more of a threat.

Foolish or intelligent? That was the question.

"Who would you be?" Itachi asked, hoping to keep the situation as calm as possible. He hated confrontation.

"I'm the matron of the building you just illegally entered. Not to mention a favourite of Hokage-sama. My Anbu guard rotates the building every minute and all I have to do is raise my voice and two people will be on you like fangirls on their idol."

"Itachi," Kisame purred, "can I chop off her legs?"

The woman cocked a brow. "How could you do that when you can't move?"

And suddenly Itachi was aware of the fact that he could not move. At all.

"Good job, Hari-hime!"

Itachi very nearly groaned at the sight of Konoha’s ‘fiercest beast of battle’ and his friend, Sharingan no Kakashi.

The mission suddenly got a lot harder.

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**A/N: The first is done!**

**How was it? Let me know!**

**Check out my other Hannigram and Spacedogs fics!**

**See ya! :D**

**CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELDON, I FOLLOW BACK.**

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Chapter End Notes

-I will always have an issue with Temari and Kankuro. Like, everyone expected Gaara to change who he was to be more 'normal' and no one looked at his brother and sister? Like, they never tried to reach out to him. Instead of sticking up for him, they let him be
bullied, teased, and beaten down. They never questioned their father and simply hated Gaara because they assumed that he was the reason their mother died. Like they ignored the fact that their stupid father is the reason she died. Sealing a Biju into an unborn child is what caused her to go into premature labor. Rasa is the reason his wife didn't make it, but he and everyone else blamed Gaara. Not cool.
Genies and Wars: Not a Pleasant Mix

Chapter Summary

Being reminded of a danger that lingers not far off the shores of Hi no Kuni isn't pleasant. War is painful and bloody afterall. The Kiri Rebellion looks to Konoha for help. Hari has to keep positive.

Chapter Notes

-So this chapter was posted on FFN for like 3 months and I forgot to update it here, so when I got a few reviews for this story this week, I was reminded and yeah, sorry. Also, Happy Birthday to the reader who said today was their b-day.

-I told everyone the war in Kiri wasn't to be ignored, and from this chapter and on, it will play a part in the plot. Stuff happens and as I guess I'm using the 'butterfly effect' and 'avalanche effect' things, I'm really changing things around. Just think, Hari changed one thing, or interfered somewhere, stopping one thing from happening, or changing the canon future. By using the Imperius on Gato and not killing Zabuza and Haku, things already drastically changed. Naruto didn't meet the Kyubi at the right time and Sasuke didn't unlock(for the 2nd time) his Sharingan either, meaning that they were lacking experience. By having them skip the Chunin Exams, they missed several key plots from canon, which I fucked around with and did not have happen.

Stopping only one thing has long-lasting consequences no matter what happens. So we can't expect everything to happen exactly as it did in canon, even if I am loosely following the canon timeline. Things just keep changing from here on out.

-As for Itachi, well, more on him and such will be explained later.

-I'm also taking liberties with Mei's life. There wasn't enough about her which leaves me to plot and plan!

-Karin's official Konoha name is now Potta Karina, and she dyed her hair black. That way if Kusa has people in the next Chunin Exams, they wouldn't notice her by name or appearance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!
Itachi knew that he was severely limited once he could not move his body. At the most, his eyes and a Shunshin would save him from any trouble. Kisame not so much. The great shark was struggling against whatever was binding them, and his only chance of escape was to Shunshin, if he even thought of using it. Kisame was more of a man of action and while he was a brilliant thinker, his frustration tended to take control of his mind during times of hardship.

The woman, whose name he had learned was 'Hari', gave a sigh. "Do I take the kids somewhere?"

Hatake gave a curt nod. "They don't need to see this. Sasuke especially."

Itachi could feel the pang in his body, unable to determine just where it came from. Sasuke was here. As in, in Uzumaki Naruto's house. The woman knew Sasuke well, it seemed. Why was his little brother in the company of these... people?

'Hari' turned and walked down the hall toward Uzumaki's room. Suddenly, where the room had once been quiet without even a sound to tell them that anyone had been there, he could hear snoring. Snoring that had not been there before. Almost as if a veil had fallen.

"Nee-chan?" a gravelly voice that could only belong to Uzumaki Naruto sounded, muffled and laden with somnolence.

The woman hushed him and a second later, a small pop sounded, taking all other noise with it.

"Kakashi," said Gai, "don't look him in the eye. I know enough about his particular Sharingan to know that you can't afford eye contact with him."

"You're telling a Sharingan user this, Gai," Hatake retorted, lifting a fuin fuda used to cancel chakra flow. "I know how it works."

Itachi took a deep breath and focused his chakra. Just as Hatake lunged, the sight of Uzumaki's clean kitchen disappeared from view, and he found himself standing in his clan's old district.

Unfortunately, he couldn't move still, but at least he was away from Hatake. His only hope would be that Kisame was smart enough to follow his actions, though he didn't really know the layout of Konoha and could possibly get lost. And then he'd most likely get caught.

"Uchiha Itachi."

If he could move, he would have flinched. Especially since he had not heard her approaching him.

The woman, 'Hari', came to stop in front of him. She was perhaps four inches shorter than he, and her stunning eyes trailed from his chin, to his feet, lingering on certain places a little longer than they should. Or was his mind playing tricks on him?

"He who single-handedly slaughtered a clan of five hundred plus people in less than an hour."

He did not respond to her goading. He would not give her the pleasure. Instead, he was more interested on how she had followed him. How she even knew where he had gone?

"Or should I say, he who teamed up with an unknown man in order to slide by on the undercover order of one Shimura Danzo?"
Itachi's eyes widened without his permission, but he actually could not help himself. This unknown woman somehow knew about what had happened. She claimed to be a personal favorite of Hokage-sama, but Itachi was certain that the man wouldn't go around telling just anyone about what had really happened.

She smirked. "Danzo messed with the wrong person and got busted. It was bloody brilliant how just when they thought that they had enough charges against him, more kept on coming. He tried to take one of my kids, and that is not done, sir. It is simply not done."

Itachi felt a low tingle trail up his spine at the sight of her eyes. They made him think of the Sharingan. Glowing in the darkness.

They were standing on an abandoned street, in an abandoned section of the village. One that not many people knew about. The street lights no longer worked in this area, because no one lived there. There would be no point for them to waste energy over it.

Her eyes glowed threateningly. He didn't know if it was a sort of Kekkei Genkai or just his imagination.

There were often people who were born with Kekkei Genkai who never got Shinobi training. It would explain the strangeness of it. But Itachi was shrewd and he knew that it was something else.

"So, Uchiha-san, why did you lie to Sasuke about what had happened? Do you know how much work it's taking to get him to socialise with people? To look at people beyond what use they are to him? Merlin, that kid needs so much help, and he's getting better, but very slowly."

Itachi did not have an answer, because once again, the mention of his little brother choked him up inside.

"You know, I know that you care about him a great deal. And I know that you aren't as terrible as you think you are. Frankly, you are a pacifist first and foremost and this little mission that you've been on for forever, is simply a mission. On top of that, Danzo manipulated you and your clan to a very elaborate extent. More than you will ever realise unless you look into it yourself, and discover the long list of charges against him.

"One of the first is the theft of the Sharingan of his kidnapped Uchiha Ne operatives. Another is his hand in the Kyubi attack and the growing resentment of the Uchiha clan. Basically, your clan was played masterfully."

Itachi's entire self seemed to just freeze. Not his body which was already immobile. It was as if his mind, heart, and soul had all decided that it was just too much, and had shut down.

All he could think of was fruitless everything he had done, had been.

He was so caught up in his own thoughts that he hadn't realized the woman was looking him in the eye, until he found himself in the Tsukuyomi.

The woman was there in the negative space. As usual when he had some poor soul ensnared in his inner world, she was affixed to a cross. Though she didn't look alarmed in the least.

Itachi realized that he had freedom of movement. So whatever she had done only affected his physical form. It was an interesting piece of knowledge to keep in mind.

"So this is what happens," she murmured, looking around with obvious interest. "Seems kinky."
Itachi very nearly spluttered in embarrassment, vaguely reminded of Mitarashi Anko.

"You are not... worried? I have tortured many into insanity using this method."

Her only response was to smile and while it was enchanting, it also unnerved him. Especially when a dark Figure seemed to take shape behind her.

"You may be more powerful than I, but my friend holds more power than all of us." She craned her neck back in order to see the black blob. "Hello, Death."

From the darkness stepped a Figure, cloaked in an inky blackness that he couldn't even described. There was a hood pulled over what he assumed was the head of the being, masking it's features.

A sort of cold chill creeped down Itachi's spine. Especially when a slightly breathy, but almost bone rattling voice responded, "Mistress."

Sasuke rolled over, his head swimming just a bit. When he blinked, he found Naruto staring out the window of his bedroom. Sasuke's bedroom. He was staring out Sasuke's window, in Sasuke's room, in Sasuke's house.

Since when did they fall asleep at Sasuke's house?

"Dobe?"

"Nee-chan brought us here," the blond said quietly, gesturing to the side where Ino and Karin also lay. "She just woke me up and then did this weird popping thing and brought us all here. She hasn't come back yet. I can't get out of the window or door either."

Potta Hari had taken them to Sasuke's house - which not many knew of - and then somehow locked them inside so they couldn't leave. Why? Why did she feel the need to sequester them away unless there was some kind of danger?

But he and Naruto could plainly see out the window and the village looked perfectly fine. As if nothing was wrong. So what was it?

"So we can't get out?"

"No."

"Damn!"

If only they'd pushed for the Shunshin training.

Yamanaka Inoichi sighed, feeling ten times his age. Why? Because he'd just been called into T&I - in the middle of the night no less - in order to give a 'mind walk' to three Level 7+ people.

When Hari-hime had been revealed to be one of them, he'd almost had a heart attack from the sudden strike of worry that filled him. But then he'd learned from the on sight Iryo-nin that she had been caught in a Mangekyo Sharingan and they needed to evaluate whether or not she was mentally stable and if her mind was safe.

One of the other persons who was peaking over Level 10 threat and beyond, was none other than Uchiha Itachi. Hoshigaki Kisame was detained elsewhere, still unconscious and unable to be questioned at present.
Hokage-sama was already in the room, and he looked stern, though not worried. Uchiha was seated at the interrogation desk of Room 00, the most important cell at T&I.

Due to the information he'd been given, as Head of T&I, and a Clan Head, he knew that some of the things Itachi had done, were under order of Shimura Danzo, but who was to be certain that whatever he'd done since then, had him still loyal to Konoha? They just couldn't afford to make any sort of mistakes regarding the teen.

Kami, he was only a teen. Sometimes it was hard to reconcile such a skilled warrior with the picture of a child. Because that was all he'd been when he became a tool for Konoha to use. It was… disheartening to say the least.

Hari-hime was seated across from the criminal, looking unphased by the happenings going on around her. Both were chained to their chairs, and the Uchiha was covered in all manner of chakra repressors and gravity seals.

"Hari-hime, I apologize," Hokage-sama said, sounding much older and more saddened than Inoichi would have expected.

She gave a shrug. "It's not a big deal."

Inoichi opened the door, making the only woman in the room jump and twist around the best she could, in order to see who had entered. Her hackles dropped instantly upon seeing him. As in he was a sort of visual comfort for her. He couldn't help but smile at the thought. The last time they had seen each other, she had still been uncomfortable with eye to eye contact.

"Hi," she greeted simply. No bowing of the head or formal suffixes added. It was refreshing in a sense.

"Hari-hime, Hokage-sama," the blond responded with a polite nod in both of their directions.

The princess huffed at how respectful he was being, but said nothing. Probably because of the High Priority S-Ranked shinobi sitting across from her.

"Hari-hime, would you be able to recount the evening for us so that we have the full story from your point of view," Inoichi asked as he took a seat at the table.

With slumped shoulders, she nodded. "Okay, so Team Seven had dinner at our home today. The children walked in around 8:02, and Karin followed about two minutes later. Kakashi had beaten them by eleven minutes and had set the table for me while I went to wash up."

Inoichi quirked a brow and how familiar she was with Kakashi's name and how she seemed so unshaken by the fact that man had set her table. Inoichi was going to have to talk with Kakashi later about certain things that he'd never expected from his fellow Jonin.

He was also minutely impressed by her time keeping.

"At 8:47, one of my Anbu watchers Shunshined into the kitchen and summoned Kakashi away for 'something important'. The kids wanted to know what was going on, but Kakashi simply gave them, 'an old lady needs help walking across the street' as an excuse."

The blond nearly face-palmed. Kakashi needed better excuses, or at least needed to stop using the same ones over and over just to infuriate people. Entertaining for him though it may be, it was annoying.
"I proceeded to make the kids some tea to calm them down. I laced it with a heavy dose of Valerian Root and they fell asleep in their chairs at about 8:55, and I levitated them into Naruto's room a moment later.

"I cleaned until Kakashi and Gai appeared, informing me that Luna had a vision about two S-Ranked Shinobi breaking into Naruto's flat within the hour. I was instructed to 'play along' and that Hokage-sama had ordered me to use my Kekkei Genkai to stall both for as long as I could."

Hokage-sama nodded to prove her words as truth. Inoichi made a mark on his notepad.

"I cleaned up the remnants of dinner and took another quick shower. I stepped out at 9:03, and found two unknown men in my kitchen at 9:07. I used my Mahou to stick them both to the floor. They were talking about Naruto. We exchanged some quips before Kakashi and Gai appeared.

"Kakashi advised me to take the kids elsewhere, so I Apparated them to Sasuke's flat and sealed them inside. They should be sleeping still. I hope."

Inoichi nodded, thankful that his daughter was not lost in the woods somewhere.

"Because he and his friend were in Naruto's flat and my Mahou touched them, it left a lingering trace, which allowed me to track him. To be honest, he wasn't even a mile from Sasuke's new location, which is a bit annoying. He still couldn't move his body, though I made the mistake of looking him in the eye."

Inoichi did not miss Itachi's narrowed gaze when she said that, and the young woman sighed. "Fine! I looked deliberately because I wanted to know what would happen. Also I have a pretty strong line of mental defence. You met them before," she said with a slight nod.

"The cloaked Figure or the animals?"

"Yes. Everything represents some kind of defence one way or another, remember that."

Inoichi nodded, adding that little tidbit to his mental file on the woman. The mental Figure that called itself Death, was considered a defence. That would explain why it held the power to push him from her mind.

Also, she looked an Uchiha in the eye despite knowing at least to some extent that she shouldn't?

"I found myself ready to be crucified in this odd place where the sky was an unnatural shade of orange and our skin was as black as the night. Like looking a photograph while it's in the negative. It gave me a bit if a headache. But then I brought Death out and they switched the positions really quickly.

"I had only just gotten Uchiha-san comfortable in his new position, when I found myself sitting here."

She pursed her lips and gave another shrug. "That's what I got."

Inoichi set the pad down and focused all of his attention on her. "You know what comes next."

She stiffened only slightly. A lot less than the former times she'd gone through it. She was becoming accustomed to it, and Inoichi wished she didn't have to be.

The woman took a deep breath and closed her eyes. A moment later they opened, and he was faced with the most deadened color green he'd ever seen.
As if she'd gone blank.

Placing his thumbs on either side of the bridge of her nose, and the rest of his fingers over her temples, he stared into her eyes and immersed himself within her inner world.

It was… a lot different than he'd last seen it.

The sky had gone from black, to a bright shade of orangey/pink, smattered with bright white stars. Like the sky at dawn. Amidst the lush grass that was still vibrant in color and covered in lilies, were little, albino piglets and mask wearing scarecrows.

On the wood of each shelf, were small, red and white uchiwa evenly placed in the center on each end.

The air smelled sweet, like perfume, and if he listened quietly, he could hear the laughter of children.

The longer she spent in Konoha, the much her inner world took shape of what was around her. Kakashi and Ino were in the grass. Naruto was in the sky. Karin and the orphans were in the air, and Sasuke was on the shelves.

"Sssssssss!"

And the small, purple snakes slithering on the ground had to be Anko. She was opening up a lot more and was accepting her new life and the influences around her.

Still, he could tell that some of the flowers had wilted, turning brown and shriveling up. Recent trauma. Very recent. In fact, it could probably be from being confronted by the Sharingan.

She was strong, true, but not strong enough. And while her mind had heavy protection, it wasn't good enough to fully withstand the effects. Though he was impressed.

Besides dying flora, there was a lingering darkness around some of the shelves, despite the fact that the sky was light, allowing him to see almost endless shelves in every direction. Certain sections were covered in a black haze that he could not see through or past, which worried him a little.

"Back again."

He was not shocked to hear the voice this time. He merely turned and regarded the dark clad Figure with a calm gaze.

"Is there something you wish to add?" he asked the being.

"She might need counseling."

The being then turned and disappeared into one of the many blotches of darkness surrounding the world.

"No, I don't!" a sharp voice sounded through the area, the vibrations so thick and heavy that the ground shook from it.

He couldn't see her, but somehow, Hari-hime had somehow found her way into her inner world.

"Inoichi, I don't need counseling. I don't even know why they suggested that."

"Where are you, Hari-hime?"
“E-hem?" 

"Hari-san," he corrected reluctantly. 

"I'm watching you. It's kind of like watching a programme on the television. I see you, but you don't see me."

A sort of third person experience perhaps? 

"Why do you think you don't need counseling?"

"Because I'm fine. Everything is fine."

Inoichi hummed, though he didn't believe any of it.

"You don't believe me, do you?" came her deadpan question.

"No."

"Bloody fuck."

A moment later, he was back in the interrogation room. Hari-hime was facing away from him, her arms folded tightly across her chest.

"She'll need some counseling, though not for too long."

Her rigid shoulders loosened up a bit, and Inoichi knew he'd dodged a sharp kunai.

Now for Itachi. And then Kisame.

Joy.

"Hari-chan, when is your birthday, so we know when to celebrate it?" Ino asked as she munched on a cookie the woman had baked for Team Seven and the kids.

The brunette was sitting on the ground beside her, watching as the boys tried to instruct the nine and under orphans in Taijutsu. At least so they would know how to escape bullies. There was no harm in teaching them self-defense.

Hari seemed to pause for a moment, before she laughed once. "My birthday was yesterday."

"WHAT?!"

Ino's ear-splitting exclamation was met with silence in every direction. Naruto, Sasuke, Kakashi-sensei, and the children had all turned in their direction to see just what was going on. And Ino was intent upon telling them.

"Hari-chan's birthday was yesterday and she never told any of us!"

The children collectively groaned and stumbled on over to Hari's side. Several of them wanted to know why she hadn't said anything. Others exclaimed that since she celebrated their birthdays with a cake and some ice cream, then they should have celebrated hers.

Naruto looked the most offended.

All Hari-chan did was shrug. "I don't celebrate my birthday. There are just certain days I don't find to
be particularly important and my birthday is one of them."

"Of course it's important!" Ino blustered. "You've helped all of us in some way and we think your birthday is important because if it wasn't for that, we wouldn't have you!"

And Hari-chan gave a small smile in response.

"Did you ever celebrate your birthday?" asked Sasuke, who was looking a lot less stoic than usual.

"Almost never," the woman answered. "Years and years of lacking birthdays and boring or painful things happening have just turned me off to them in general."

Ino could see it a lot clearer than any of the others, sans Kakashi-sensei, would. She still stood by her original assessment that Hari-chan had been abused and this just gave her belief more credence.

Why would someone hate their birthday unless they had terrible experiences on said day? And as she had lived with her crummy relatives for so long and her birthday was in the summer when civilian schools were not in session, it had to be their fault.

Hari-chan didn't feel that her day of birth was anything important and that kind of hurt Ino, because she'd been so excited about Sasuke's birthday and celebrating that in order to draw him from his depressed silence.

It was like the woman had all of these wonderful and kind things to say, but no matter how inspirational, she never though they included her.

It was sad, and Ino didn't really know how to deal with it.

Perhaps asking her father would be helpful.

"Well I'm buying you a cake nee-chan! -ttebayo!"

The children gave a cheer.

"Hari-chan, I passed!"

Karin was grinning from ear to ear. When Anko had told she and Sakura that she was going to train them hard, she wasn't lying! She had put them through hell in only a month, and when Karin went to take the Graduation Exam in order to become a Genin, she had found it to be a lot easier then either girl had made it out to be.

Or maybe she had been worked up so hard so that she could pass with ease.

It was definitely harder than what Kusa demanded of their Shinobi, but nowhere near hard enough to give Karin any trouble.

Potta Karina was now a Shinobi of Konohagakure, apprenticed alongside Haruno Sakura, under Mitarashi Anko. It was awesome!

Hari smiled in response to her announcement. "Congratulations. Is there anything special you'd like for dinner?"

Karin dragged her fingers through her now dyed black hair. "Okonomiyaki, if you know how to make it."
Hari reached up and took a book off the top of the refrigerator. Flipping it open, she spent several moments just staring at the index, before turning to the proper page.

"I can totally do that. Anything else?"

Assured that the woman could in fact make her favorite food, Karin added, "And some of that really spicy rice you made that time, with all those peppers?"

"Sure."

Hari tended to make spicy food the most. Something about nothing liking food that lacked 'a kick'. She also preferred to eat things that were carefully prepared ahead of time and quick and easy for she was unable to enjoy heavy meals.

It was why she made food small enough to be eaten by hand, often times. But now and then she would accept a request for something different.

"Thanks, Hari-chan!"

Karin, or better known officially as Potta Karina, rushed out the door to find her 'master'. That way she could totally get that dango Anko promised.

Sarutobi Hiruzen was beginning to feel his age. There was just so much happening at once that he wasn't certain he'd be able to take much more. He was well into his seventies for Kami's sake! He really needed to find a permanent replacement. So that he may live the rest of his life in relative peace.

Kiriwagakure was in the middle of a civil war that had spread through almost all of Mizu no Kuni. The Bloodline Rebellion against the Mizukage's Faction.

To be honest, Hiruzen had been completely baffled by the sudden change in the Mizukage. He never understood why the man suddenly began the mass killings of anyone with a Kekkei Genkai. He also never agreed with the decision.

Innocent lives were being lost, and protection for their village was lowered. Kirigakure was the weakest of the five great nations, and it was Yagura's actions that made it so.

So when Hiruzen received a missive from the leader of the Rebellion, Terumi Mei, pleading for some assistance in finally ending the decade long war, he had to consider everything carefully.

Who would he send on such a mission? Who could handle a war?

Already there were several shinobi he had in mind. And thankfully, the village was being repaired at an alarming rate, meaning that they could afford to send some of their military force out to the battlefield.

Terumi, if all plans went well, would be the Godaime Mizukage when all was said and done. And in her letter, she cited a few of her followers who spoke on Konoha's behalf, one Momochi Zabuza being among them. She admitted her skepticism in Konoha's ability to aid them, but asked anyway, because she didn't want to lose any more lives.

As a sign of good faith, she added that she had two Kekkei Genkai, and was the daughter of an Uzumaki. Her mother's mother had been a prominent Iryo-nin in Uzushiogakure. Her daughter had fled the village with her five year old daughter months before the mass attack on the village. Mei's
father (a non-Uzumaki) had died when she was young, from defending the village.

They had made their way to the outskirts of Kirigakure, where Mei's mother used her training from her own mother, to help small villages. Her ability gained reputation and she and her daughter were welcomed into the hidden village.

Mei's mother was made an Iryo-nin immediately and Mei was signed up to enter the Academy a year later. Neither had ever told anyone of their Uzumaki heritage, not until the Mizukage began to act differently and problems began to rise in the divisions of Shinobi throughout the land.

Mei was one of the few able to hold out for more than five years, but she too eventually fled, taking with her a fifth of Kiri's shinobi force.

Ever since then, the Rebellion had been doing any kind of work they could to gain the funds necessary for food and equipment. Wars were not cheap after all, and they had much to fight for. So in the end, all the Nuke-nin who had come from Kirigakure hadn't become bounty hunters to satisfy their own pockets, they were aiding their leader in a war.

It was a noble cause, Hiruzen would admit. And to learn that so many people in the Bingo Book weren't what he would consider to be evil, did make his feelings regarding the entire missive, much lighter. Easier to handle in a sense.

He wanted the Purge to cease. It not only affected those in Mizu no Kuni, but also other nations. Kirigakure had cut itself off from the rest of the Shinobi worked, in essence, leaving any sort of trade with the entire nation strained. The Daimyo had next to no power thanks to Yagura's iron fist, and that meant that each Shinobi nation suffered in some way.

So Hiruzen would not only be helping his own people in forging a new bond with Kirigakure, but he too would also be aiding the minor countries that had lost so much without the backing of Kirigakure's shinobi and support.

He wanted to help, he just wished he had more people like Minato under his command. Minato decimated an entire battalion in less than an hour. All on his own. With people like him fighting, there would be less lives lost and more time for the victors to regain the control they needed over the nation.

There was more to war than just the big battles. Small missions intermingled within the grand scheme. Connecting with the people first and foremost. Letting them know that you would be there for them and that they would not be forgotten! There was more to being a leader than just sending out fighters and waiting for news.

Sometimes the leader had to get out there personally and demonstrate their beliefs on the battlefield. Sometimes it was by their leader's example that the fighters found the resolve they needed to keep fighting. It was support and faith in those around you. Showing that you cared and that you would fight for what you believed in. That was what the Will of Fire was!

Hiruzen retrieved a blank scroll from his desk drawer and proceeded to draw up teams that would be the proper aid in such a venture.

**Team 1: Hatake Kakashi**

Uzumaki Naruto, Uchiha Sasuke, Hyuga Hinata, Kurenai Yuhi, Mahi Youna, Tenzo, TenTen

**Team 2: Maito Gai**
Hyuga Neji, Hyuga Keiichi, Ororo Rin, Mizumi Nora, Shiranui Genma, Inuzuka Hana, Yamishiro Aoba

**Team 3:** Sarutobi Asuma

Nara Shikamaru, Higurashi Suzaku, Haruno Sakura, Li Ho, Gekko Hayate, Hyuga Bo, Akimichi Chojuka

**Team 4:** Mitarashi Anko

Potta Karina, Yamanaka Ino, Bakiwa, Hino Masashi, Ebisu, Uzo Ishimaru, Aburame Shino

**Team 5:** Uzuki Yugao

Hagane Kotetsu, Kamizuki Izumo, Shibi Aburame, Inuzuka Kiba, Namiashi Raido, Akimichi Furoka, Aburame Shibuta

**Team 6:** Morino Ibiki

Yamanaka Inoichi, Nara Shikaku, Akimichi Choza, Kururugi Kagome, Ren, Yamamoto Murasaki, Inuzuka Tsume

He sighed. At least five more teams to make a Company of Shinobi.

He hoped he was doing the right thing.

"Hokage-sama, Nara Shikaku has arrived!"

"Send him in."

Hari stared at the elaborately decorated invitation and literally had to run a finger over the upraised lettering on the card. It looked like someone had painted over it with gold lacquer. And if so, it was definitely sent by someone who had a lot of money.

|Potta, Hari|

|Konohagakure no Sato|

|Konoha Orphanage|

You are invited!

Urameshi Sanju, Daimyo of Hi no Kuni, is turning 50!

|20 August - 27 August|

|Tanzaku Gai|Royal Palace|

Daimyo-dono requests the pleasure of your presence as he celebrates his fiftieth birthday.

You are allowed a maximum of three attendants, and all shall be provided for during your stay at the palace.

You are also allowed to bring one guest.
You will need:
- 3+ ōfurisode
- 3+ hōmongi
- 5+ jūnihitoe

His lordships hopes to see you there.

In her opinion, the invitation was incredibly informal. She didn't even know why she was getting an invitation. It wasn't like she was important or anything. And it wasn't like any of them knew her.

And did she have to go?

"Yes."

And of course Death would know. "If you do not go, it will be seen as a snub."

Well great.

"So I have to buy all of these stupid dresses too?"

"Yes."

"I don't want to go!" she whinged. "I hate parties. And who has a party for seven days in a row?"

"Royalty."

"Har har."

That meant she would be gone for seven days.

"Ten at the least, due to travelling there and back and time in between for resting," Death interrupted her thoughts, making her frown.

"Ten days away from the orphanage. From Naruto. From people and places I know."

"Don't tell me you're shy," Death purred, their voice lowering a tad for the effect.

"Hell yes I am shy. I don't like being around people I don't know. Can Luna come with me?"

"It does say 'one guest'."

Hari nodded and set the card down, intent on going to ask Luna.

The door rang though, cutting her plans down a few minutes. Ironically, it was Luna at the door and she was smiling largely. "Of course I'll go with you! I already know where we're getting our kimonos."

That saved so much time.

"Now we have to go shopping!"

Or not.
"Can I at least get a hug from everyone before I have to go on this ridiculous trip to spend time with annoying people that I know I won't like?"

Sasuke stiffened when everyone turned to look at him, as if he was the one holding the duo up from leaving.

He still hadn't been given a good enough reason as to why she had felt the need to lock them all in his apartment that night, and he wanted answers. But no one felt like giving them.

Still, Hari-san's bottom lip began to quiver just the slightest and she sniffed once, before looking away.

Crying. He was not good with people who cried. He didn't know how to handle them.

Personally, he hadn't cried in years. Not since... it had been years. He didn't like it when people cried because he didn't know how to handle them. Was he supposed to be kind like his mother had been, or harsh like his father, who had claimed that emotions were weakness?

Sasuke's thoughts were interrupted by Naruto, who decided to give him a little push - literally - and shove him in his sister's direction.

The woman wasn't clinging. She lightly wrapped both arms around Sasuke's shorter frame, but she didn't drag him in and squish him. She didn't try to suffocate him or anything. There was a small rub on his back, like he was the one that needed reassurance or something, and a ruffle of his hair, before she pulled away.

"Be good, and protect your friends, okay?" she whispered, eyes pleading. "They need you to remain strong for them. Both like to act tough, but they're really just big softies underneath all the bravado, and they need someone with a level head to keep them afloat."

She was essentially entrusting him with not just Naruto's life, but Ino's as well.

And it wasn't as if they were in danger or anything, but she would be gone for a little over a week and would surely miss them all, because that was what Hari-san did. She worried.

Sasuke gave a firm nod, because it had been years since anyone trusted him with... anything.

A relieved smile made her worry disappear and she patted his head. "Thank you."

The woman and her blonde friend gave a little wave and signed themselves out of the village, alongside their escort.

Sasuke also noticed how not once did Hari-san look in Kakashi's direction. He wondered what that was about.

When Kakashi said that he had wanted to get some more experience under the belts of his Genin, he hadn't meant like this. But the Hokage was certain beyond a shadow of a doubt, that all of them would come back from their mission.

Rarely did fresh Genin have to see war, and Kakashi surely hadn't wanted any of his kids to have to bear it, but unfortunately they had to. It was just the way of a shinobi's life.

Basically everyday of their lives they were on the precipice of war, it was just by the Hokage's good graces that things he considered to be minor infractions, did not become aggravated into a war. So
obviously there was a chance that his Genin would see war in their lifetimes, he just wished it didn't have to be so soon.

But soon it was. Hokage-sama had faith in the group of people he'd assembled for this mission, and Kakashi knew that he would have to do the man proud.

What worried him the most out of everything though, was how Hari would take it? And the sad part was that she had left two days before, on an unfortunate - according to her at least - journey to the Daimyo's palace where she had to attend some sort of party. She had whined and bemoaned the entire idea and had tried to get him to give her some reason stay, so she could refuse. He'd had none to give her.

She had pouted and refused to look at him the entire time she packed and even left with her blonde friend, and the ninja they had hired. A Chunin who was rising through the ranks at a steady pace. Would probably become a Jonin in another year. He should be more than capable of defending the two women, and it wasn't like they weren't able to protect themselves if it came down to it.

Kakashi hadn't been as unaffected as he'd let everyone assume. It kind of annoyed him that she had just ignored him the entire time, though he didn't know why. Especially when he made a habit out of ignoring everyone around him in order to annoy them.

Anyway, she was gone, so there was no way for her to learn that he wards was being taken on a very dangerous mission. An A-Rank level mission, though it wouldn't go down as a 'paid mission'. The payment was a treaty with Kirigakure should they help the Rebellion win, and that was the important thing.

He could only hope that they could end the war quickly, before the next Chunin Exams. He had plans for his team and with his extensive knowledge of Tetsu no Kuni, he hoped to give his team the upper hand in the biggest exam in the past twenty years.

Kakashi knew that his team would be the knock out team. The one that everyone would have to keep an eye on. He was working to make it that way after all.

This war would cut into training time. He still needed to teach them how to Shunshin.

"Sensei, can I send a Kage Bunshin after nee-chan? I don't want her to come back and find me gone. The Anbu aren't always the greatest at spreading info and they tend to force instead of ask first, so I don't want them to scare her the moment she gets back. No matter how awesome she is, she's still a civilian."

Kakashi considered it. For a Shinobi, it should only take a few hours of medium paced running to reach Tanzaku Gai. The Bunshin wouldn't take too long, should he go now.

"Go ahead," the masked Jonin relented.

"-ttebayo!"

As the Kage Bunshin rushed off to do as the original ordered it to, Kakashi took a good look at the team he was personally leading.

Each person held a particular place of importance. Of course the Hokage knew what he was doing when he had assembled the groups.

Uzumaki Naruto, was most familiar with him as a Jonin, and Uchiha Sasuke, was in the same boat.
They also worked well together, which had shocked many considering how much they had opposed each other in the Academy. Still, they had many team formations down perfectly and had a few maneuvers of their own that worked well. It was best to keep them on the same team because they motivated each other to do better.

Frankly, he was pleased to have them to work with. He could pass on his knowledge of wartime in order to prepare them for the possible future.

Hyuga Hinata and Kurenai Yuhi were from the same Genin Cell and each held a significance of their own.

Hinata needed a strong female she was used to, to help guide her. Placing her with her cousin would have been folly, but Hokage-sama knew what he was doing.

Kurenai was a master at Genjutsu, and Hinata's Kekkei Genkai could see through them easily. Luckily that the Byakugan was good for stealth and their Company had a few Byakugan users among their number to aid in the planning.

Mahi Youna was a Tokubetsu Jonin who showed impressive skill in Shurikenjutsu and basically weapons in general. She would get on great with TenTen, who was a weapons specialist and in terms of her art alone, would already be a Tokubetsu Jonin. Their in depth knowledge of weapons would aid the Company immensely.

And finally, there was Tenzo. Tenzo was the only person alive who could possibly calm Naruto down should he go on a rampage. The Shodaime Hokage had been unnaturally good and subduing the Kyubi, and the Mokuton was incredibly good at cutting off Biju chakra. Therefore, his ability would no doubt be helpful for Naruto.

Kakashi just hoped they could prevent him from using too many Mokuton Jutsu, so no one would notice just how important he was to the Company.

Naruto had finally tasted the power of the Biju within, and Tenzo would be the greatest ally needed, in terms of Naruto staying safe and sane.

Also, there was a rumor that the Yondaime Mizukage, Yagura, was also a Jinchuuriki, and if anything else, Tenzo might be able to help restrain him as well. It would take careful planning, but it would be worth it.

Overall, Kakashi was proud of his Team and intended to lead them well.

In terms of leading the Company as a whole, Kakashi, Shikaku, and Inoichi had been put in charge, though as Kakashi had served as Anbu Honsho for a time, they deferred to him if the decision wasn’t major. Kakashi had already gotten used to Shinobi who were older and had been in their profession for much longer, bowing to him in terms of leadership. It happened all the time.

"Halt!" a stern voice called out, making the progression stop before they could even begin.

Two Anbu Shunshined before the lined up teams and Kakashi recognized them immediately.

"Hokage-sama wishes for Minku to be stationed under Hatake's direction."

Minku was Uchiha Itachi's code name in the Anbu. They couldn't give him the Itachi mask because it literally would have given him away. His hair was bad enough as it was and the boy had refused to cut it like a sensible person. Not that Kakashi had room to talk about give-away hair.
"Still... "Is Hokage-sama sure about this?"

Yes, he had been briefed, but that didn't mean everyone else had been.

Sasuke didn't know that his brother was back and not considered a 'bad guy' any longer. That would probably explain why the teen was masked. No one knew exactly how to break this to the boy and Kakashi knew that the moment Itachi's true actions were revealed, would also be the moment when Sasuke's goals for the future disappeared.

Anbu Buta held out a scroll and Kakashi gave it a close look before nodding. It was official, with Sarutobi's personal seal of approval.

"Okay, Minku will be joining Team Kakashi."

The Anbu bowed and departed immediately, leaving Itachi to await instruction. Honestly, having him would definitely aid in the upcoming battles.

He just wished he knew how to handle the whole revealing Itachi to Sasuke thing.

Perhaps after the war was won.

Hari held her fan in front of her face as she tried to keep some level of privacy between her and the rest of the people in the room. Luna was sat beside her, fanning herself. The blonde didn't seem as annoyed as Hari, no doubt used to having to play games and pretend to be something she wasn't.

Hari wasn't that great because while the laws of the land decreed that she was a 'princess', she most certainly wasn't one and had not been reared in the mindset required of royalty. Though she had a brief stint as a Baroness, but that had ended after a few years. It wasn't like any had given her the training she would need to be the Lady or 'Princess' of her lines/Houses.

So far, Hari had been dragged into two conversations about the orphanage, which she was proud to speak on behalf of, though was annoyed when some questioned the capability to a woman as young as she, watching over forty plus children.

One woman had even tried to rile her up by talking about how 'untrained' she must be.

Of course, Hari had laughed politely and let slip that the Hokage recognised her work and how the orphanage had been better than it was in the past four decades since she had taken control.

"The former matron was quite lacklustre in her overseeing of the children. Illness and uncleanliness was rampant in the building before I came along. I decided that a change of scenery was in order, and set to fixing up a larger and better building.

"The children receive First Aid Training, and all of them get to attend school now. They have their own rooms and chores, and are quite happy to help out whenever they are asked. They merely needed the correct minder and as I've managed to pull the orphanage out of debt as well as set up quite the future in terms of management, I'd say I'm the best thing to have happened."

Other than tooting her own horn a bit, she rubbed it in the face of the woman that Hari was better.

Yes, Kurosaki Sayori was just one of the various women who had attempted to take the position from the former matron, and had failed. She had then tried to oppose Hari's leadership of the children, but was ignored. Finally, her daughter had failed to acquire a job as one of the assistants that Hari needed to hire to help watch the children.
The woman was simply offended that she had no control whatsoever over the new generation of children. Hari didn't give a damn about her feelings.

Hari also had to turn down a would-be suitor who had gotten quite boisterous and had loudly proclaimed that he would obviously be the best suited for her hand.

That had started a discussion about marriage in which the Daimyo had quickly claimed the discussion once again, regaling them all about his marriage and how lovely it was. He had his wife had been together for thirty-five years already and did not feel the need to separate.

Even people like the stuck up nobility could find love somehow, in an arranged marriage.

If Narcissa Malfoy ended up loving her husband despite their marriage being arranged, then surely Hari would be able to find a significant other!

Luna placed a calming hand on her forearm, or rather, the thick amount of cloth covering her forearm. With a sigh, Hari tried to relax and wait for the first night of the celebration to end.

The night was quiet. Nearly as silent as death. The coordinates would lead them to the general area of the Rebellion's lair, but they were to be met by a group.

Kakashi was hopeful that things would not start off on the wrong foot. That everything progressed smoothly and that they could hopefully provide the right amount of assistance needed to end the war.

Four months. They had four months to do this.

The collective group barely made any noise as they traveled across the forest floor. They'd already sped through the water without so much as a problem, easily passing out ships and civilians lingering well into the night.

They spent less than half an hour speed running across the surface, in the cover of the darkness. It was just easier to do it this way, than risk being spotted in the daylight. And it wasn't like one hundred Shinobi could just get on a boat unnoticed. Especially when the only boats that would be larger enough to fit them, would be either full of pirates, or would be holding weapons.

Thankfully, Mizu no Kuni wasn't a large island, which meant that from where they were entering, the land was currently controlled from the Rebellion. That made their progression much easier.

Kakashi was certain that the eventual meet up would be interesting.

"Halt! State your name and reason for trespassing!"

Well, he was expecting it to be interesting.

"Luna, I need liquor. I need so much liquor."

They'd left their guard to her own devices. Both insisting that they didn't need to be so carefully monitored.

The blonde gave a nod. "I have several hungover draughts prepared ahead of time. You can drink as much as you want."

"Thank, Merlin!" the brunette praised.
The reason for her sudden need to drown herself in alcohol, was because it had only been the first night of the 'celebration' and she was already through with it.

The kimono she had to wear on the first night, was hell. Twelve layers. Who the bloody hell needed twelve damn layers for a fucking dress?! And she wasn't the only one to wear one!

Nearly every woman of incredibly high standing had to wear one as well, though they all looked to be fine with the arrangement and some even tried to walk sensually.

She didn't see what could be so sensual when not one part of the body save for the neck and head, showed. There wasn't even a small line to tell where her knickers were! Nothing to hint at what could possibly lay beneath. Nothing about the outfit screamed 'attractive' in her eyes.

More like 'suffocating'.

Hari's kimono had consisted of varying shades of dark red(that all had strange names). Not a usual colour choice, seeing as most of the women had worn rainbow like colours, but Hari wasn't usual. She had chosen her dresses specifically to be different. Hari didn't like bright colours in mass quantities anyway.

Then there was the whole 'speaking' thing. Ladies of the court weren't allowed to speak often unless spoken to first, or they had specific knowledge in the subject in question. Hari had bitten her tongue so many times and had found herself holding her fan in front of her face in order to hide her frustration from people.

The traditions of the royalty and noble class were much too high for her to keep up with. She wasn't ready to do this. And she had not wanted to be considered a 'hime' in this world, but look at what happened anyway.

Bloody Death. They never told her anything!

"You never ask."

Sod off!

On top of that, her hair had been in this incredibly elaborate updo that she didn't even want to take the time to suss out. Overall, she had a headache and her body was so hot from the bajillion layered dress she had to wear.

And to think, she had six more days of it.

Great.

"Cheer up," Luna ordered. "We don't have to attend the breakfast in the morning, meaning we can sleep in until eleven. So tonight is all about us."

Hari threw an arm around her friend's shoulders. "I'm going to get pissed, just so you know. You might have to lug me around a bit."

Luna smiled. "And if we need to relax tomorrow, we can avail ourselves of the town's prized onsen."

"Yeeesss!"

The two women slipped into the liveliest building they could find, seeing lights of many colours
flashing about. Music was blaring loudly in their ears, and people were all over.

"I think it's a casino," Luna murmured.

"And a bar," Hari added, eyeing the long object directly in the center of the room. The one that was basically calling her name.

"That as well."

The two made their way over, enjoying the cool breeze from the air conditioning. Hari had to be grateful that in this world, they actually had air conditioners. Sure, a cooling charm was useful, but sometimes it was a hassle having to remember to reapply it. This way, she wasn't wasting energy or magic by sitting directly in front of the cool air blasting down from above.

She and Luna took their seats at the bar, beside two women were looked to be familiar with their surroundings.

"Whatever has the strongest alcohol content is what I'll take," said Hari, placing her money purse on the mahogany bar.

The bartender gave her a searching look. "Are you even old enough to drink?"

Luna tsked under her breath and looked away. Hari's face had gone completely blank.

"Do I look like I'm in the fucking mood to argue my bloody age with you? I just had to sit in the Imperial Palace, listening to several old men who think far too highly of themselves, whinging about how unfair it is that the dear tea they prefer, has gone up three percent in taxes as of last week!

"And don't even get me started on how ridiculous it was when they started complaining about how rough it was for them to have to live in such rural places. How they wanted better servants. How they 'deserve better things'. On and on and on.

"If you do not give me my liquor, I will raise all hell and most likely shut your entire establishment down."

For a solid minute, Hari and the man stared each other down. Luna was shaking her head slowly and the two women were watching in avid interest.

"Fine," the man relented.

Hari barely withheld the need to rub her victory in. That wouldn't make her seem mature enough to drink and then he might refuse to give her any more alcohol.

Fire Sake, something that Hi no Kuni was well known for. And she was only getting a shot to start with.

With a scowl, she slung it back immediately and didn't even blink at the burn that accompanied the liquid. It was nothing like Firewhiskey, which usually had the drinker belching a fireball immediately. The flavour was potent though, so it wasn't a total loss.

Luna was already pulling a bottle from her bag. "I keep it on me just in case." She poured it in the shot glass and Hari shot her a grateful smile and she downed that one as well.

This burn was more pronounced, scorching almost in its intensity. The liquid went down quickly and the fire followed. Her tongue and mouth were numb now. The gurgling alerted her and she opened
her mouth, breathing out a large cloud of brown smoke.

Probably because she was used to drinking Firewhiskey.

The bartender was staring. "People usually cry when they have Fire Sake for the first time."

"I'm not 'people'."

Holding her glass out to Luna, the blonde refilled it. "Would you have something fruity, but not overly sweet?"

The man shrugged and set to preparing a mixed drink for her.

"Hey, nee-chan!"

Hari choked around her liquor and Luna had to slam a hand into her back to help her get the drink down. Not the best of surprises, especially when one has a mouth full of Firewhiskey.

Turning, Hari found herself facing Naruto, who was standing about a foot behind her. His blue eyes were wide with excitement and wonder as he looked around.

"Naruto, you're not supposed to go into bars!" the Mistress of Death hissed.

The blond sent her a bland look and said, "Nee-chan, I've killed a man."

She snorted. "Put a blade against his head. Made a gash, now he's dead?"

Besides Luna's small snort at her absurd moment of humour, no one else seemed to find anything she said funny. "Just ignore me. Why have you traversed the wide plains of Hi no Kuni to seek me out?"

Naruto looked confused but he did begin talking. "We've been given a mission that will totally be ranked A if we succeed. Though my team isn't the only one on the mission. Still, Jiji got some kind of thing from some lady in Mizu no Kuni because they're fighting some war over there and she asked Jiji for help, so he's sending a Company of Shinobi over."

Hari's entire world froze.

War. There was a war going on. She'd forgotten about that. She'd forgotten all about it, because it wasn't like the news from the other countries made it's way into the everyday lives of the Konoha civilians.

It was far too soon for Naruto to be involved in a war. He was only twelve, soon to be thirteen! Hari hadn't truly been a part of a war until she had turned sixteen. She was given some personal time before the war had started, but Naruto wasn't getting any kind of reprieve.

"When are you leaving?"

He winced. "We already left. Like, hours ago. I asked to come and tell you because I didn't want you to go home and find me missing."

Hari took a deep breath, trying to calm herself. "Naruto, you do realise what a war is, correct?"

"Yeah."

"People will die," she said plainly. "People will die because of you. They will die because of your friends and comrades. They will die whether you have anything to do with it or not. You cannot save
everyone. Especially if you have been contracted to fight for a side in a war you know nothing about.

"You realise that the side you're helping might have beliefs that you don't agree with? And that you cannot start problems and make a fuss simply because you don't agree with the leader's actions. Your feelings will most likely not be taken into account and you will have to hold your tongue when things become far too maddening. Can you handle that?"

The Kage Bunshin was silent for a moment.

"Nee-chan, I became a ninja for a reason, and while the reason has changed somewhat over the past few months, I'm still in this for the long haul. I will fight for what I believe in and I will do it to the best of my ability. I never go back on my word, nee-chan, because that's my nindo. And if I say I'm going to help end this stupid war, then damn it all, I'm helping no matter what!"

Luna placed a hand on Hari's shoulder. "He trains for the eventuality of this happening. He isn't just randomly being thrust into this world. We weren't so lucky. We had to do everything on our own because we had no one to help us. At least he has his friends and sensei with him. He'd not going in inexperienced like you had to."

Hari sighed. "Fine. I won't try to intervene, but you better tell Kakashi that if anything happens to you or your team, I'm throwing him out another window or ten."

Naruto's whiskered cheeks stretched wide across his smile. "Sure thing, nee-chan!"

The Kage Bunshin placed a kiss on her cheek and disappeared in a puff of smoke, taking the information back to the original Naruto who was who knows how far away.

"They'll be fine," Luna said reassuringly, and Hari sent her a dubious glance. "I'm positive."

Did that mean she actually knew what was going to happen, or was just trying to calm Hari down?

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Senju Tsunade hadn't paid that much attention to the young women seated beside she and Shizune, but when the Konoha Genin had showed up, she had definitely made it a point to pay more attention, because Shinobi were always ones to watch out for. For all she knew, Sarutobi-sensei was sending cute kids to try to reel her in again. She wouldn't have that.

But no, he was there to see his sister, who had a morbid sense of humor.

Tsunade was so sick of the Shinobi way of life and how they sent children out to kill and be killed. That was how she had lost Nawaki and hadn't wanted a repeat.

And the girl had obviously not liked the idea, although when her friend commented on their own war, she calmed down some.

And in the end, the kid had disappeared, proving that he was only a Kage Bunshin. She didn't even want to know what Sarutobi-sensei was thinking, letting a child learn something of that nature at his age.

And in the silence after he boy's disappearance, Shizune took pity on the girl and ended up offering some advice.

"It's best to think positively," she had said. "Do you have faith in your little brother's skills?"
The girl nodded. "Against certain opponents, sure. But war is vastly different from facing people of his own strength. It will be a lot harder than some random C-Rank mission."

"Do you trust his sensei?"

"Yeah. Pervert though he may be, he's pretty powerful and smart. But then again, keeping your eye on your pupils while fighting a war is going to be damn hard."

Tsunade hadn't met such a pessimist in years. The girl just seemed to come up with all manner of depressing things to say in order to tear apart Shizune's kind-hearted, well-intentioned words.

The blonde friend looked exasperated, though she did not say anything to calm her friend down some more.

Unable to help herself, Tsunade had to ask, "If you don't like that he could be in danger, why let him become a Shinobi at all?"

"That kid wants to be a hero. He wants to take after Hokage-sama and uphold that Will of Fire that the man talks so fondly about. Naruto and I aren't blood related, and I only came into his life about half a year ago, so it wouldn't be right for me to try to control his desires and dreams for the future simply because I don't agree with the idea of weaponizing children."

Shizune's mouth dropped open at the blatant categorizing of the Shinobi lifestyle. No one was ever so forthright, even among Shinobi. And civilians shouldn't have such knowledge to understand what being a Shinobi was about. But then again, her friend had mentioned a war they had to take part in, so it wasn't all too shocking.

"I was forced to become a weapon for my people. They hid behind me and expected me to do all the saving for them. Able-bodied men and women, pushing a child to do what they were capable of, but too scared to do. I don't agree with making children fight battles, but I'm at least softened toward the idea that there are Shinobi of all ages, and it isn't just older generations expecting children to do all of the work for them. It's why I don't make such a fuss about it."

"Sarutobi-sama did change the Academy requirements," Shizune added. "He wanted the children to have longer childhoods. And since there are no world wars at present, he doesn't have to enforce the mass production of Shinobi like he used to."

The girl sighed. "I'm conflicted, but I can try to be the support he needs when he comes home. And his team certainly needs it. His sensei is an orphaned recluse who reads porn to himself. His one teammate is also an orphan and we're trying to bring him into the fold. And the last is the only one with family out of our entire group, so we're trying to get her to understand the minds of orphans and why they would react a certain way to certain things.

"I'm trying the best with what I have. It's not much, but it's what I've got."

"That's good!" Shizune said with a smile. "You'd be surprised at how lonely Shinobi life can be. You might not know it, but having someone there to support you is something that most Shinobi wish they had."

Tsunade chugged what was left in her glass. "I just don't get why anyone would want to be a Kage. They always end up dying prematurely and for what, a group of people that don't truly know anything about them, nor actually care," she groused.

"You know, I have to partially agree. Being the one that people look to can be taxing at times. Especially when you make a mistake just once. People are so quick to turn their backs on those they
claim to respect so much. It sucks a shit tonne. Especially when you try so hard and fell like you get nothing in return.

"But at the same time, there are people like Naruto, who want to keep everybody safe and happy. Despite how the villagers treat him terribly. Despite how they don't understand him and degrade his father's dying wish. He wants to change their perception of him and is very slowly doing so. He has the ambition and the drive, and he isn't afraid of toil. He's brave and courageous, and when the times call for it, incredibly inspiring and witty.

"That kid embodies things that many people lack, and if anyone can manage to change Konoha, and change the world even, I think it will be him."

Tsunade gaped openly because she hadn't expected a civilian who obviously had no Shinobi training, to be so supportive despite not agreeing with the basic idea of it all.

And she felt a little sad because judging from her words, she too was an orphan and didn't have anyone but the small group of people she'd gathered together. And if she lost the kid she was so fond of, or anyone else, it might just destroy her.

Tsunade had stopped forging relationships with people. She had refused to make more 'friends' and avoided those who called her 'friend' for years. Tsunade was sick and tired of losing everyone she cared about and had even taken to sheltering Shizune.

Life of the Shinobi was hard. She had known that when signing up for the Academy. She just hadn't expected it to hurt so much.

"What if the kid doesn't succeed?" she asked, looking the brunette in the eye. "What if he fails at all his dreams?"

She refrained from calling his dream stupid, because starting a brawl in her favorite casino wouldn't do her any good. She didn't want to be kicked out and the girl was obviously opinionated enough to try and fight someone she didn't even know. Also, whatever positions she held that made her important enough to attend the Daimyo's birthday celebration, would obviously start legal trouble.

"He won't fail," said the girl with much conviction. "He has me on his side, and people like me hold more power than others want to believe. I will see that kid's dream become a reality, even if the people who will benefit from it aren't good enough in my eyes. Because I'm not doing this for them. I am doing it for him. He needs me and so long as I am here, he will have whatever help I can give him. In any way… I can give it."

Her green eyes, unnatural in shape and color, began to glow just the slightest. Tsunade could instantly see the ruffle that went through her messy locks. One that started from the tip and traveled to the root, so it couldn't be due to the air conditioner above her head.

There was something strange about the girl. Something different about her, starting with her civilian status, but being the leader in a war. And the many other interesting things that had come up since she had entered the building.

Tsunade found herself caught by the words as well.

"Many said he couldn't graduate, because he'd failed twice. But that kid mastered that super dangerous Jutsu in a few hours, forcing his way into the Genin position. Many claimed he wouldn't make it as a Genin, but he's succeeded for several months and came out of an A-Ranked mission alive and well. That kid's team was assaulted by a group of powerful ninja from Iwagakure and he
managed to protect everyone until their sensei arrived to help.

"He's done so much already, so I know very well that he is capable of anything he sets his mind to. That kid will do many great things. I don't need to be clairvoyant to know it."

Zabuza stared at the goons who were guarding a large carriage full of scrolls and only scrolls. The men all stared at him blankly, no trace of fear in their eyes.

"Are you Momochi Zabuza?" one of the men asked, his voice monotone and unnatural for a civilian who was in the presence of an obviously dangerous Shinobi.

"If I am?"

"Kuro-sama wished to lend aid to your leader's cause and sent us to deliver the contents of this carriage to you."

Zabuza wasn't one to gape, but damn it all he was. Even if no one could see it beneath his bindings, his mouth was wide open from shock. A name he hadn't heard in months, coming up all of a sudden, the day after the Konoha Company blew into their hideout.

It was all convenient, but could potentially be helpful.

Gesturing to one of his Chunin to check the carriage, it was revealed that there was several million Ryo within. And all of it was real.

"And what does Kuro-sama want in return?" he asked, refusing to believe that this was out of the goodness of the woman's heart. Things always came at a price after all.

"Kuro-sama requests that you win at whatever the cost necessary, so that the Konoha Shinobi make it home in one piece."

That was it. Somehow, the Kuro woman knew what was going on and had decided to only truly invest herself because of Konoha. And since she had interrupted his plans last time on behalf of Hatake's group, and she admitted to having a connection to them, then she had to be someone important to either one of the children, or Hatake himself. Or all four maybe.

Still, Zabuza couldn't wait to tell Mei about this. The woman needed some hope, and shouldering the faith and hope of everyone else had certainly worn her thin over the past five years.

"Tell Kuro that we are… eternally grateful for her generosity."

The four civilians all bowed as on body and turned to depart, leaving the carriage where it was.

Among all of the happenings, Zabuza did not miss how the men had somehow known exactly where to find the area where the Rebellion's hide-out resided.

Interesting.

Terumi Mei looked out at the battle that had been going for nearly an hour. Sometimes Shinobi never realized just how quickly time passed until they were in the thick of the danger.

Only an hour, and yet there was still no obvious victor in sight. There was an even footing, although she was proud to say that none of those fighting on the Rebellion's side, had lost any lives, compared to the Kirigakure Shinobi they were fighting.
Still, she was looking for something to put an end to the battle, and make it in their favor.

This wasn't even the culmination. There would be more battles and much larger opposition to face. And while their chances were looking good thus far, she needed something more. Something to give her people the spirit they needed to keep fighting. Money was good, but victory would be better.

"Mei-sama!" someone yelled, catching her attention.

She side-stepped an opponent and with a round house, sent them flying.

The person who had called her, was pointing up toward the sky, where a small dot could be seen getting closer and closer. Faster and faster it seemed to fall, until she could finally make out the form of one Senju Tsunade, free falling toward the rocky earth in the center of their battlefield.

Her fist was glowing with chakra and was extended toward the ground she was nearing.

Mei's eyes went wide and she called out an immediate retreat for her people, Shunshining out of the way.

The female Sannin landed with the force of an earthquake, her fist creating mass eruptions in the damp earth. The ground splintered and then cracked under the sudden force of her attack, and human sized boulders went flying in various directions.

Mei could see the entirety of the enemy's line of Shinobi, fall into the wide fissure that came with the attack. She also noticed how no one on the Rebellion's side had been even near the massive cracks. As if Senju was capable of controlling just where the results of her extreme strength were directed.

If so, it had to be quite the boon in battle.

The remaining Kiri shinobi, took a collective step back once the dust cleared and revealed Senju, standing atop an upended boulder, looking at them with fiery eyes.

Almost as one body, they turned and fled.

Mei could only breathe a sigh of relief and began ordering her fighters to guard the large trench in the center of the field. If any of the Shinobi from before managed to crawl their way out, they would either be quickly disposed of or taken captive and drilled for all the information they had.

She wasn't playing games. She was in this to win and they needed all the help they could get in this situation.

Without even looking in their direction, the Sannin raised a hand to her mouth and spread some blood on her wrist.

She slammed her open palm into the boulder she was standing on, and said very clearly, "Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

And Mei was witness to the miraculous appearance of Katsuyu, one of the greatest healing summons to have ever lived.

"Tsunade-sama!" the great slug greeted, her voice carrying over the field.

"Katsuyu, please help the injured to the best of your ability!" the strong voice of the world's best Iryo-nin filled the stale air.

"Right away, my lady!"
The slug began to separate into several mini slugs, each the size of a fully grown human. The slugs spread quickly, taking one person each and glowing green with healing chakra.

Tsunade's eyes trailed over the collected group of Shinobi and she asked in a very firm tone, "Who is the leader here?"

Mei straightened to attention and answered in the same, powerful tone, "I am."

_A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D_

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMEllINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

For the time being I am stuck in the Yuri!! On Ice fandom and don't know when I'll be able to update anything not for that fandom. Sorry, peeps!

-I love throwing unexpected things in the chapters. And now y'all get to consider just what is going on and what will happen eventually!

-I already know three things that absolutely HAVE to happen in the next chapter, and am excited to get to it! Mostly. They'll be war related. Hopefully my brain will comply with my hands.

-And for The Daimyo and the invitation, I made it incredibly informal for a reason. I also followed a light bit information on the high-court women of Japan and how they acted centuries ago. Of course, as it is present day, I tweaked some facts around to modernize it all.

-YAY, Tsunade! And Itachi! And Kakashi! And my peeps!

-Kakashi is on Hari's shit list. How will he get off of it? Should he give her the Icha Icha she doesn't have, or something else?
Chapter Summary

Things start heating up in the Rebellion and Hari is going stir crazy.

Chapter Notes

So it's been a while since I updated this. I admit that I had a basic Outline of what I wanted to happen in this chapter but not matter how many times I sat to write them out, I could get the words to work! Then my interest in Naruto sort of died for a while, and I ended up picking Yuri! On Ice up easily. YOI took my attention for about 9 months where I focused only on that and pumped about 500K words into the fandom over on AO3.

I have started to read HP fanfics again, which lead me to re-reading this. I decided that I wanted to update and began reading Naruto fanfics and Naruto/HP crossovers in order to get into the mood again. And then I was reading 'Sneaking Around Konoha' for like the millionth time and felt it hit me! Basically the last 5 days have been non-stop typing for this. And I didn't even get in everything I wanted! So the war will be taking up more chapters. At least another chapter!

Remember, this fic employs use of the Butterfly Effect and the Avalanche Effect. Thanks for sticking around despite the absence! I can't guarantee how long this inspiration will last, but I hope it's a while. I will try to start the next chapter soon.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Hari fidgeted and twisted her fan around multiple times between her fingers. She wasn't comfortable
and was really worried. The woman - whom Death and Luna had been so kind to inform her was named Tsunade - had approached her the next morning saying something about inspiration and telling Hari that she was joining the Konoha shinobi out on the battlefront. She then asked if Hari had anything she wanted passed along to Naruto or his team.

Senju Tsunade was a former student of the current Hokage and she was considered the best medical ninja in the world. She was the one who could have helped Sasuke and Ino had she been in the village at the time. She was also deathly terrified of blood, or so Death explained. Hari didn't know how she was going to make it in a war, healing people of their injuries that would no doubt be bleeding. War didn't see everybody coming back in one piece despite how much they wished to.

Kato Shizune, the assistant and somewhat niece-in-law to Tsunade, took Hari and Luna aside after her master's departure to explain some things, including Tsunade's depressing opinion on the title of Hokage and how both her grandfather and granduncle died protecting Konohagakure. How Tsunade's little brother wanted to be Hokage and also died soon after. How her fiance Dan - Shizune's uncle - had wanted to be the Hokage and ended up dying. Both times, Tsunade had gifted each with a necklace that had belonged to her grandfather. It was supposed to bring good fortune. It didn't. Ever since she couldn't stop Dan's severe blood loss, thereby making her question her position as a 'legendary medic', Tsunade had been completely turned off to the idea of the shinobi life and the idea of being a Kage. Her fear of blood had been fostered through personal tragedy and she hadn't done anything healing wise in over a decade. She was out of practice and was completely lost in terms of who she was and what she wanted for her future.

And now this tough woman who was apparently a consideration for the seat of Godaime Hokage - though she didn't know it yet - was going to join in on a war. Why? Hari couldn't have said anything particularly interesting seeing as they shared similar views on certain topics, so it wasn't as if it was something Tsunade hadn't heard before. Hari wasn't exactly the best at giving inspirational speeches and she hadn't been trying to be all-knowing or anything when she had spoken of her desire to help Naruto fulfill his dream.

Anyway, Shizune had been instructed to go back to Konoha alongside Hari, Luna, and their shinobi guard. According to Shizune, that meant that Tsunade was coming back no matter what, and that she would make sure everyone would remain safe, even if it killed her. There was an enormous amount of doubt placed on anyone's ability to kill the blonde though.

"Tsunade-hime was impressed by your conviction," Shizune told her as they walked along the dirt road leading toward Konoha. "She lost her will and dream ages ago, and after what kept happening every time she encouraged someone to follow their dreams, she felt that it was foolish to dream at all. She thinks of herself as bad luck incarnate and stopped trying for fear of bringing harm to others. She stopped herself from forming more bonds out of fear of hurting another person."

It was a pretty sad way to live.

Luna hummed and in a crystal clear tone, said, "I foresee an amazing future ahead of Tsunade-hime. And she will forever be grateful that she decided to lend her aid to a worthy cause."

Hari sighed. At least the woman would live. Then maybe Hari could pick her brain more later on.

Kakashi stared as a woman that he'd never gotten to known personally, took charge of the battlefield and practically ordered everyone around. And the whole while Terumi Mei of the Rebellion, stood back and let the legendary medic do her thing. Though he couldn't blame the woman as Tsunade obviously knew more about medicine and healing than she did, so it was best to just let the Sannin
do her job. And as it was impossible to replicate that type of entrance as well as the summoning that followed, it was certainly Tsunade of the Sannin stood before them and not an impostor.

However, the woman's cross countenance and amber eyes scanned the groups of shinobi as they waited their turns as her summon animal worked on healing everyone as quickly as possible. She didn't look pleased with what she was seeing, not that he expected any medic to be happy about the gore and violence. It usually meant more work for them in the long run. And if there were broken bones, then it was even harder work ahead because bones were like the rebellious teens of the body. They just didn't like to listen when told to obey.

"Where is Hatake Kakashi?" Tsunade's firm voice demanded.

Damn. Why did she single him out, out of all the people there? It wasn't immediately obvious that he was in control of the Konoha group. Was it? Did he just give off an air of some sort? Did she possibly stop by the village and learn about this from the Hokage?

Kakashi sighed, knowing there was no way to escape it, and raised his hand high to call out, "Yo!"

Her amber eyes zeroed in on him immediately and she was coming, crushing any rubble in her path instead of just stepping over it. It made him quiver just the slightest because when someone was moving in your direction, looking like they were ready to commit murder, you didn't just stand there and let them come to you. But this was Tsunade who had proven herself by not only her monstrous entry, but her summoning immediately afterward. He couldn't just ignore her. Kami-sama knows what would happen to him later on if he did such a thing.

"The orange brat's sister wanted me to give you a message, Hatake."

Koneko-chan had met Tsunade-hime? How? Where? Why? What went on when the two were talking? And how did Koneko-chan manage to get the legendary medic who had sworn off the shinobi lifestyle, to come into a battle in the middle of a war, and help people? Tsunade had gotten herself a newer reputation that involved selfishness and insane drunkenness. And fighting to stop a war that was centered around murdering countless innocents simply for how they were born, held neither of those things.

The woman took a deep breath once she was forehead to chin with Kakashi. She obviously wouldn't let their height difference dissuade her from her intentions. "Our kids better come back alive and in one piece, or your books will get it."

Well it was a good thing he'd already planned to make sure that his cute little students made it back to the village happy and whole. Still, her threat rang of truth, and was even more ominous since Tsunade-hime had been the one to pass along the message. Also, why would she agree to pass along a civilian's message? Just what had happened between the two women?

The blonde looked up at him, a calculating look on her face. "Hatake, you have an odd taste in women, yet at the same time I don't think anyone else would be better for you. Treat her well or so help me I will permanently remove some valuable body parts, clan revival be damned."

He was left gaping and wondering just why the woman thought he and Koneko-chan were together in a romantic type of relationship. She couldn't have known anything about their acquaintance. It wasn't as if his fellow shinobi were even aware of their budding friendship. And that was all it was! A friendship which had formed over the love of the same book series and the mutual satisfaction they got from taunting the hell out of one another. Nothing more and nothing less to consider.

Though he had to admit that Hari was beautiful in an unconventional way. Her eyes were her most
stunning feature, beyond the unique shape of her face. Her cheekbones were higher than he was used to, eyes more almond shaped instead of wide like those of Hi no Kuni's indigenous inhabitants. A thin nose and even a beauty mark just below her left eye that wasn't automatically noticeable unless one got close to her face, in which Kakashi had many times already.

While not particularly outstanding in terms of appearance if one added her short stature and messy hair that was one of the most common hair colors, she was still a different kind of beauty. But that didn't mean that he just up and wanted to start a romantic relationship with her. Besides, rarely had the super attractive people he'd ever slept with, been someone he'd want to start that type of relationship with. Usually the character was lacking in places, so if he were to want that sort of thing, he'd need someone of a specific mindset.

Hari was intelligent and severely loyal to the people whom she felt were worth it. She was good with children and respectful when necessary. Frankly, she had a temperament that he admired, and she could appreciate good literature for what it was.

Kakashi paused in his thoughts. He was actually considering what he wanted in a significant other, and was using Potta Hari as an example to base his desires off of. That was kind of unnerving and slightly unexpected, as he didn't usually spend his time thinking about love and sex beyond whatever was happening in his books.

Everything seemed to be turning on its head recently and a war was no place to be thinking about romance. He was a part of a Rebellion currently and the shinobi of Mizu no Kuni needed him to be in the right frame of mind in order to get business done. He could think about impossible things later on, when he wasn't required to be analytical and tactical.

"Hey, Kakashi-sensei!"

Kakashi turned to look at Naruto, who was frowning heavily at him. Sasuke stood not far behind him, staring very intently as well. Neither looked particularly pleased and he did not want to deal with drama right now. He was having a small crisis and wanted to get over it sooner rather than later. Teens and pre-teens had an astounding ability to not let things go and Kakashi wasn't in the mood.

"Who is that old granny and why was she saying stuff about you and Hari-nee-chan being together? Are you making moves on my nee-chan? Do I need to get Ino and Karin?"

Kami-sama help him. He would somehow have to deal not only with a war, but two - possibly three or four if Naruto made due on his words - overprotective pre-teens while he was at it. And it wasn't as if any of them were particularly skilled at just letting things be, so it was basically ensured that he would be subjected to the same damn topic for days.

Fuck his life.

Sarutobi Hiruzen blinked several times as he read the report resting on the desk before him. After days upon days of investigation and questioning, they'd finally come back with everything they had on Yakushi Kabuto. And the amount of information the ninja possessed, was astonishing. If Hari-hime's friend had not managed to knock the shinobi unconscious, they wouldn't have all the information at their fingertips. It had taken some time to get everything situated, but the folder was just handed to him and he had to spend the next however many hours, going through everything that had been gathered over the past month.

Dozens upon dozens of papers to read through. He resigned himself to several hours of intense reading, and called for some tea because he would need to remain calm.
Name: Yakushi Kabuto

Aliases: Kabu, Yuudai, Aki, Goro, Seiji, Daisuke, Toshio,

Date of Birth: February 29th

Age: 19

Gender: Male

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Height: 176.2 cm

Weight: 65 kg

Blood Type: AB

Classification: Iryo-nin

Occupation: Spy

Affiliation: Konohagakure shinobi forces an Ne forces. Sunagakure shinobi forces, Kirigakure shinobi forces, Otogakure shinobi forces, Iwagakure shinobi forces, Kumogakure shinobi forces, Amegakure shinobi forces, and Akatsuki.

Chakra Nature(s): Earth, Water, Wind, Yin Release, Yang Release

Notes of Interest:

Ambidextrous- Masterful use of both hands in combat.

Senjutsu- Ability to gather Natural Energy at an excessive rate.

High Pain Tolerance- Almost no reaction to stimulus from Levels 1-19. Levels 20-25 showed minor twitching. Levels 26-36 were accompanied with mad thrashing. Level 37 brought the screaming. Level 42 rendered him unconscious. Most shinobi give in by Level 27, so this development is amazing and concerning all at once.

Severe Myopia- Without aid of his glasses, he can only see about twelve centimeters in front of his face before everything becomes a blurred mess. Patient admitted to being partially colorblind as well and has trouble distinguishing certain shades from others. The issue becomes four times worse without glasses.

Eidetic Memory- An astounding ability to recollect everything he sees, hears, and learns. This skill was often used in Reconnaissance missions.

Perfect Chakra Control- Picks up chakra output and easily mimics it. Much like a Sharingan user would.

Fuinjutsu- His most important information was stored in his own mind under a well constructed seal that was created by him personally.
Memory Loss - A head injury as a child leaves the first few years of his life completely blank to him. No searching provided any answers. Not even a subconscious memory of any sort.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder - Has an obsessive need for his possessions to be in the order he prefers them (reverse alphabetical). Obsessively cleans his medical equipment multiple times with a particular solution he created. Intense Anxiety builds when these actions cannot be seen through, followed by mental draining and frustration.

Borderline Personality Disorder - Lacks any sense of self, and is very unsure of his own identity as a person. Dissociates frequently. Is terrified of being abandoned and forgotten. Intense mood changes from peaceful to uncontrollable anger within seconds.

Personal Comments from Examiner Yamanaka Inoichi:

Kabuto worked under Shimura Danzo for years, as a member of Ne. He was one of the more valued members and was trusted to do Reconnaissance missions in other shinobi nations, for months at a time. He had to incorporate himself into other countries and join their military forces in order to gain inside information for Danzo's cause. He was one of the best operatives Ne could get, rivaling Hatake Kakashi in skills and intelligence.

After accidentally killing his mother figure, Yakushi Nono (who was also a member of Ne), he joined Orochimaru (a former member of Ne) in hopes of leaving Ne behind for good.

It has been established that Ne played a great part in fracturing his sanity and ability to discern for himself. While desiring to form an identity of his own, Kabuto also clings to direction and taking orders as it is all he has ever known. Should he have not met Danzo or Orochimaru, he might have grown to be like any other shinobi, but his association with both has completely removed him from a stable mentality.

Reform seems impossible. While he wants to become his own person, and wishes to be someone worthy of respect, he looks up to Orochimaru too much and is blinded by admiration. His knowledge is invaluable however, and any further action regarding him would have to be taken under Hokage-sama's direction.

I would not recommend keeping him alive, however. The chances of someone such as he, escaping and becoming a problem later on, are too great to ignore. Taking his knowledge is the best option and then disposing of the remains so that nothing could possibly be used against the village.

Personal Comments from Examiner Morino Ibiki:
While harsh, I would suggest intense therapy to determine if there is still some use in the patient. Perhaps we can make use of Hari-sama's 'potions' in this instance to keep him under control. After some intense sessions we should be able to see some positive results from our efforts.

I have seen broken shinobi and while Yakushi is indeed fractured, he is not of the worst. Ridding the village of his possible aid does not seem very clever in my personal opinion. His intelligence is something we cannot get rid of simply because he did questionable things. After all, T&I are attempting to reform the Ne operatives that we have managed to find, so that they may be able to serve their village still. He is also a Konoha shinobi first and foremost.

Three-fifths of Yakushi's life was under the scope of Shimura Danzo. One fifth is unknown to him, and the other fifth was under Orochimaru's dubious guidance. And while working with the Sannin, he was working as a Ne operative still. I simply feel he would be of more use to Konohagakure alive than dead. He is a soldier and a healer and a spy. The benefits outweigh the cost in this instance. We should not let such a bounty escape.

As for any therapy, might I suggest Electric, Spacial, Cerebral, or Somatic Therapies. They show the best results when bringing shinobi to heel.

Hiruzen sat back and took a deep breath. Under the words of his best interrogators, he had two drastic opinions on how to handle the situation. It was obvious that Kabuto had the potential for greatness, but also the potential to do even worse than he already had. And technically, Konoha and its leaders could take half of the blame for his actions because he worked for a group that was supposed to be disbanded and Hiruzen had foolishly hoped would remain secretive.

Ibiki was of the opinion of reform and weaponization, like they were doing with all the other Ne operatives under their control once more. Inoichi thought they should drain the teen of all the information he had and then kill him so that he couldn't pose a threat to the welfare of the village's future. Hiruzen, whom has always been a bleeding heart, didn't really want to kill someone automatically, but he also didn't want to just turn the boy into a mindless weapon. But he couldn't just let him go because he felt guilty over not controlling Danzo like he should have.

There was also the skepticism. Kabuto was talented in many areas of the shinobi life. Who was to say that the Yamanaka therapy would even work on him? Who was to say that he actually wanted to step out of the shadows of the great roots and truly become his own man? What if he was pretending? They could not take that risk.

He flipped the sheet over, facing another packet of paper that had been clipped together to keep those of similar writings, in the same category. It was full of phrases the cryptographers had to decipher. Many of Kabuto's memories were recounted with varying odd symbols and writings. Things from other villages that were written in codes that none of them would be able to understand automatically.

It took a lot of mental strength to be able to recreate his reports in such detail. Should something happen to interfere with the messages being sent, they would no doubt have burned up somehow, leaving Kabuto's mind as the only way to access such information. And it had all been settled into different sections, kept together by a firm control of chakra, Fuinjutsu, and sense of duty.

There was a page on his work in Sunagakure, a page about Kumogakure. Even a page on his
mission in Kirigakure. A mission that took place during the the Purge of the Kekkei Genkai.

Thinking about the Rebellion, he removed that page from the packet and set the rest of the papers aside for the moment. Kirigakure was the primary concern at present. Everything else could wait.

They were reports that were put in order of first to the very last.

**KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #1**

**Codename:** Aki

*The Gate Guards for Kirigakure are listed below. Their rotation for the next month is listed in order of their pairings. All Chunin rank and none are specialists. Strengths and then weaknesses added and abbreviated.*

1. **|******|**** Nin/Tai/Gen | Tai/Nin/Sen

2. ****|***|******* Gen/Shuriken/Tai | Shuriken/Nin/Nin

3. ******|***********|* Ken/Tai/Gen | Sen/Gen/Nin

4. ******|**|********** Nin/Shuriken/Nin | Gen/Gen/Tai

5. ******|********||******** Sen/Gen/Tai | Nin/Nin/Nin

6. ********|**|* Gen/Shuriken/Bo | Shuriken/Nin/Gen

7. *******|********||******** Tai/Nin/Sen | Shuriken/Gen/Nin

*On the top of the North Wall, approximately 2200 meters left of the North Gate, there is a turret hidden by a Genjutsu. Only those who are Anbu or sanctioned by the Mizukage himself will know of it. There is a rotation of guards inside at all times, who watch for possible intruders.*

*My searching has revealed five other places around Kirigakure where Kiri Anbu are stationed. Their exact locations are listed below. I apologize for not being able to learn of their rotations however.*

*Kiri's shinobi academy has reinstated its old graduation exam, but with a twist. Children are paired up into groups of three and then forced to fight each other. Death is allowed and rarely do the children allow the ones they defeated, to live.*

**KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #5**

**Codename:** Aki

*Yagura never goes anywhere without a specific guard. The other villages I have spied for, always have a rotation of the guards of their leaders so it is never the same people twice. Yagura seems to only trust the guard who I've come to learn is called, 'Kaguro'. The guard never removes their mask and never speaks, and seems to always have an enormous supply of swords on hand. They are silent and fast and almost never go*
anywhere alone.

'Kaguro' seems to be able to materialize out of thin air. Not like a Shunshin would work either. There is a ripple that appears seconds before his body seems to emerge from empty space. I have seen no other resident of Kirigakure perform such a technique so I will assume it is only something 'Kaguro' can accomplish.

Yagura seems to understand 'Kaguro' to an extent. He actually changes actions or decisions whenever 'Kaguro' touches him. I do not understand the importance, but I will try to find out more.

**KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #7**

**Codename: Aki**

Yagura seems to distrust all other hidden villages. He was quite vexed when the Daimyo of Mizu no Kuni asked for permission to open trade with Hi no Kuni once again. After destroying his office and killing two Chunin shinobi, Yagura ordered one of his Anbu to take his reply to the Daimyo and told him to 'enforce the new laws if need be'.

After this incident, things have become rather tense in the district building. No one will meet the Mizukage's eye, and everyone seems uneasy within his presence.

He has not noticed this at all, and ends up staring out the window for extended periods of time. As if awaiting something.

I have spotted a shadow departing from the window in Yagura's office. It is not 'Kaguro' for 'Kaguro' remains in the corner unless Yagura leaves the room.

**KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #10**

**Codename: Aki**

I spied Yagura in the company of a black cloaked individual. The cloak bore red clouds that were outlined in white, and the person himself, was none other than Hoshigaki Kisame. Hoshigaki is not as estranged from his home village as once thought.

The Akatsuki is involved in Kirigakure, but the extent is unknown. All I can say is that Hoshigaki was passing off a scroll of some sort.

**KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #13**

**Codename: Aki**

The Mizukage has ordered a complete search through his entire faction. The shinobi below Jonin rank are completely unaware that they are
being watched. Yagura holds no trust for anyone or anything, and he knows that there is a spy among the ranks. I have escaped notice by remaining as a lowly Chunin with sub-par ability.

However, my base has been raided thrice, though they are unaware that know this. I remain uninteresting and for the most part, no one cares for my existence. For now, no further information has presented itself. Beyond his connection with the Akatsuki, Yagura is still the same as ever. Quiet and ruling with an iron fist.

KIRIGAKURE STATUS REPORT #16
Codename: Aki

'Kaguro' changed masks recently. His mask used to be grey with black markings, but it is now a violent shade of orange, and there is a swirl pattern on it. A single eye would be visible if there wasn't any mesh beneath said mask.

Hoshigaki returned but instead of speaking with Yagura, he spoke to 'Kaguro'. He did not stay long, but it appears as if he is taking orders from 'Kaguro' and not Yagura, judging by the scroll that passed from hand to hand.

Hiruzen blinked twice, realizing that much could be gleaned from these revelations. He needed to have Hoshigaki examined more intensely if he wanted any information about the Akatsuki and their connection with him and Yagura. He needed to write a message to Mei of the Rebellion, and he needed everything to be done yesterday!

A knock disturbed him from his thoughts. He didn't know whether to be annoyed or grateful and reserved to make judgments when he knew who it was.

"What?"

When Kato Shizune stepped foot into the room, with Hari-hime and Luna-san trailing behind her, Hiruzen knew that he wasn't ready. He also felt extremely old at present.

However…

His gaze landed on Hari-hime's concerned face, and he recalled something that Luna-san had added to her explanation of their abilities. Legilimency. The art of entering the mind and extracting information. The ability came with possibilities of fabricating new memories, removing memories, and destroying someone's mental health if one so desired.

Luna-san said that Hari-hime wasn't the best at it, but Luna on the other hand...

The blonde woman smiled at him and nodded. "Hokage-sama, I will do what I can to assist you."

He was never more grateful to not have to explain himself. The woman being an Oracle made life so much easier for all of them. Thank Kami-sama she had decided to come to her friend, otherwise the village would be in dire straits.

When Luna-san did not explain anything to the two women she was with, leaving them to their confusion, Hiruzen sighed. "A lot had happened in the last day, ladies. Shizune-chan, it is good to
see you again. May I ask where my wayward student is?"

Shizune sent Hari-hime a smile. "Tsunade-sama has gone off to join the Rebellion, Hokage-sama."

What?

Itachi stared at his group leader. Hatake Kakashi was standing still as always when he was learning about mission parameters. The book concerning questionable materials, was nowhere to be seen. He was taking the situation as seriously as anyone could expect him to.

Their group was to be stationed at one of the sations on the northern side of the board of Mizu no Kuni. Four other groups would be sent to the remaining stations, while Team Kakashi got the rights to the headquarters so to speak.

Terumi Mei was very straightforward in her planning, explaining what she wanted to be done and how fast she wanted it to happen. It was in times like these that Itachi was pleased with how Konoha decided to form their teams. There was always someone who specialized in something, on each team, so that everyone wouldn't be greatly overtaken when faced with unknown foes.

On Team Kakashi, there was Hatake himself, who was known by various titles all across the elemental nations. He'd built a lethal reputation for himself as the man who has copied over one thousand jutsu. He was like Itachi, but better.

Then there was Itachi himself, who was a very capable Anbu trained shinobi who had learned various techniques while under the roof of the Akatsuki. His gained experience made him a perfect addition to the group.

His little brother and Uzumaki Naruto were the next two in the group. Both supposedly worked well together. A Jinchuuriki and a Sharingan wielder.

It hurt in a sense, to see Sasuke once again. To see how much he had changed with and without Itachi’s influence. To see the proof of his injuries and have to face the fact that he no longer looked like their mother had, with his newly squared jaw and slightly less angular face, had hurt.

Itachi had taken after Fugaku, while Sasuke had taken after Mikoto. And now Sasuke resembled no one from their long dead family. If Uzumaki had not saved Sasuke's life, Itachi would have hunted those Iwa shinobi down, and ended them in the most painful method he could manage. Even if it cost him his life.

Team Kakashi had a Hyuga. The heiress in fact. A Hyuga with a current range of three hundred and seventeen meters of field vision with her activated Dojutsu. For someone of her age, that was an incredibly good number. He wondered if her family knew. He wondered if they’d even care.

Hinata was quiet and a little shy, and seemed to fancy the Uzumaki boy. Naruto didn't notice anything, though Sasuke seemed to, and he would frown at the girl every time he caught her staring at his blond teammate. It wasn't hostility in the sense of hatred, but Sasuke most certainly did not like the girl paying his friend any kind of positive attention.

Perhaps he was jealous and wanted Naruto's attention for himself?

One of the remaining members of the group was Yuhi Kurenai, who was the Hyuga's sensei. She was a Genjutsu mistress and would be perfect should they need a diversion.

Then there was someone Itachi recognized from his time as an Anbu. The name he was going by
was Tenzo. Tenzo was a special Anbu who usually was sent on missions on his own because of his status. Something about him required him to usually be on S-Rank mission, alone. If so, he was definitely someone who should be on the team.

Mahi Youna was a new Tokebetsu Jonin who was a master of Shurikenjutsu. She was also an iryo-nin. There weren't many iryo-nin who made it to Tokubetsu Jonin, preferring to stay at Chunin and simply work in the hospital. After all, a raise in shinobi rank didn't get them better pay, but a raise in their ability did. And if they were good enough, they would be sent on special missions regardless of their shinobi rank.

Finally, TenTen. She was a weapons specialist and sought to master all weapons in existence when she attained rank of Jonin. She had come particularly well stocked with advanced weapons that many of them had never even seen before.

All in all, it was a well-rounded team of individuals he'd been grouped in with.

"Border patrols always have at least five Jonin and over twenty Chunin. Sometimes there will be Genin among them, but it shouldn't be too difficult for your group to handle them. I request that you capture as many as possible instead of outright killing them. However, should someone not cooperate, you have my full permission to silence them permanently," Mei said firmly, eyes tight and jaw set.

Hatake gave a sharp nod. "Of course, Terumi-san."

The woman hummed. "Zabuza will lead you half of the way there. He has been testing their defenses off and on for the past nine months and will know the best direction for you to come from."

Kakashi turned to his group and made a simple sign, that ordered them to assume Tsuru Formation. "I want the four youngest in the body, the two youngest directly at the center." That meant Hinata and Naruto were the most protected out of all of them.

The formation was in the shape of a flying crane. Those with the lowest ranks remained in the middle for extra protection, and then the youngest of those in the very center. The other two then spread out a bit from them to take the flanks/wings. The Team leader took point/head in Tsuru Formation, while the remaining members took the rear/legs.

Kurenai and Itachi made up one leg, with Itachi as an Anbu at the far back, and Mahi and Tenzo made up the other leg, with Tenzo as an Anbu at the far back.

"Our mission is to infiltrate the Headquarters of the Mizu no Kuni border patrol and take control," Kakashi said in a no-nonsense tone that he used all the time back in the day. There was joking to be had here. "We are not expected to kill everyone, but death will most likely be a certainty. You cannot hesitate for even a moment. The enemy is not looking to be merciful toward you and should they not cooperate, then killing is what you must do."

Itachi caught the look that Sasuke and Naruto shared. The concern passing between them. He did not miss Sasuke's small shoulder bump with the blond, nor did he miss the smile his brother got in return.

"Clear your minds, because the mission has begun and there is no place for caring until the objective is complete."

I really don't think this is a good idea, but I also realise that there is nothing I can do about it.

Death shrugged their great shoulders. "You can do something about it, you simply don't wish to."
However, I would like to remind you that you still hold control over Gato and if you decide to do something in regards to him, no one would have to know."

True. She could continue to work behind the scenes in order to make it easier for everyone. Even if Death said that she needed to let people grow up on their own and make their own choices, that didn't mean she couldn't help in her own way. And if she had to influence Gato into lending some assistance to the cause once more, then she would do it.

Still, letting her friend rummage through the mind of a wanted criminal was not exactly Hari's cup of tea. She knew that Luna was better at Legilimency between the two of them, but she was still uncomfortable with putting the blonde in such a position. But it also wasn't Hari's call and Luna was her own person. That didn't mean Hari had to like it though.

Luna had been in the interrogation room with Anko for the past four hours. Luna was fully immersed inside Kisame Hoshigaki's mind, and was mumbling whatever she was finding, to Anko, who was expertly writing everything down. Hari had been watching through a two sided mirror, alongside the Hokage and a few other people whom she'd never met before.

"This could greatly increase the Rebellion's chances," the old man had told Hari when the entire situation had finally been revealed. Helping the Rebellion's side meant possibly ending the war even sooner than they had estimated, and that could mean that Naruto and his team would return home sooner as well! So this was more important that Hari's complaining. This could mean life or death for some people.

In a way she felt bad for the shark-like ninja, but she also couldn't bring herself to give a bleeding damn at the same time. Whatever his story was didn't matter to her, because he had information that they needed. Hari's fragile conscience had no place in war. Not after what happened in the last war she'd taken part in.

Pity and concern had almost cost her not only her own life, but the lives of her friends. Hari had grown over the past few decades, into a woman who took things more seriously and who made actual use of her brain instead of just taking everything as if it was the only way. Death had been a great aid in her growth as a person and while they argued with her a lot, they were still brutally honest and she couldn't ask for anything more.

"It is good to know when I am being appreciated."

Shut up!

Anyway, this whole thing being able to help with the war efforts, was why she didn't say anything specifically about it. The Hokage had explained to her that Mizu no Kuni and Kirigakure had been far removed from the rest of the elemental nations because of the actions of their Kage. They had absolutely no allies and should the Rebellion be victorious, there would be a treaty of peace between Konoha and Kiri. That would then help other smaller nations in their efforts to begin trade with the cut off country, and would eventually bring Mizu's specific goods back into the trade that had long died out and affected the rest of the nations.

This was about more than just Konoha. It was about many other people who needed help and Hari had a feeling that she should have Gato take an interest in those struggling nations. After all, what did one man need all that wealth for if he wasn't doing anything productive with it? Hari at least used hers to help the orphanage.

Speaking of the orphans, she had take them for their what-would-now-be quarterly doctor appointments. The best way to make certain everyone was healthy was to get them regular check
Anything to not have to think so much about war.

"How do you think Hari-nee-chan is doing?" Karin asked Ino as they helped transport some medical equipment to the proper tents. Naruto and Sasuke had been placed with their actual Jonin sensei on another team, and Ino had been placed with Karin. They were split apart, and it made her think about Hari and what she might be feeling like since they'd been gone a while. Basically, the family had been split apart.

Ino flipped her long, blonde hair over her shoulder and huffed. "I think Hari-chan is working hard to take care of the kids so she doesn't have to worry about us. She always worries and she doesn't like being lazy, so she would do something to keep occupied. She's probably tiring herself out while she's at it."

Karin nodded. She had pretty much assumed the same, but it didn't hurt to ask another's opinion.

On the other side of the tent, Senju Tsunade was sitting behind a desk, going through papers and frowning to herself. Before leaving, Naruto had come over to tell them that he'd seen her with Hari-chan out in Tanzaku Gai, when he went to tell his sister that they were going on an indefinite mission. That meant that she had to have spoken with Hari-chan at some point. Why else would the Legendary Medic who had sworn off all shinobi related actions, join a war?

Amber eyes looked up, probably sensing Karin's obvious stare. "Can I help you, gaki?" The most amazing kunoichi in history was staring at her!

"Um! No, Tsunade-sama!" She wouldn't know what to say to someone who was such a major goal for anyone of Karin's profession!

Ino glanced between them and unlike Karin, who seemed to freeze up under attention from unknown people, she seemed to become more animated. "Tsunade-sama, did you meet a woman named Potta Hari by any chance?" She had such guts!

"You're Hatake's other student then?"

Ino nodded. "And Karina here was adopted by Hari-chan. She's my teammate Naruto's cousin and she trains with us often."

Realizing what Ino was doing, Karin stood taller. She was an Uzumaki who was an Iryo-nin and was standing before the Legendary Medic. The most powerful woman in the world. She could break and heal at the same time if she wanted. Karin couldn't afford to be weak at the moment!

"Oh really?" said Tsunade, setting aside the papers and focusing on Karin completely.

Karin nodded. "I am an Iryo-nin as well, Tsunade-sama. I'm an Uzumaki, and my chakra can heal anything when it is ingested." To prove herself, she pushed her sleeves up to show the numerous scars she'd received from feeding her chakra to injured shinobi.

Tsunade's attention was thoroughly caught then. "Show me what you can do, gaki."

"Naruto, we are going to need you more than ever."

Said blond perked up at the chance to be able to do something for the group. He had been itching to
do something useful since they had been dispatched from Konoha and now he actually got to do something! It was so exciting!

"What do you need, sensei?"

"I need you to teach our entire group, your special Henge. We have a night to master this technique."

Naruto could see the heads of everyone but Sasuke, turn toward him. He also couldn't keep his grin off of his face. His special Henge was going to be of some use in the mission!

Naruto stepped into the circle of their temporary camp so everyone could see him clearly. "Okay, so the seal is the same as to one we learned for the normal Henge. I wasn't allowed in class the day it was taught and I don't like reading, so I just mimicked everyone else's movements, and then assumed we had to force our chakra through our bodies instead of coating our bodies.

"This isn't an illusion though. By envisioning what you want to turn into, and forcing your chakra through every inch of your body, you can actually transform yourself into the object of your choice so long as you have enough chakra to do so. You have to cover every part of your body though, not just your core and pathways. Saturate your whole body with chakra and then mold it into the shape you're thinking of. Imagination is just as important here. Watch me."

Naruto made the simple seal, focusing his chakra. He could see Hinata watching very closely, her Dojutsu activated so she could see his chakra. Within seconds, Naruto was laying on the ground, face up. He'd turned himself into a fuma shuriken.

TenTen whistled and leaned down to pluck him up. She twisted her wrist to and fro and tossed him up and down a few times. "It's real," she breathed, the amazement obvious in her tone. "He's turned himself into an actual weapon. The blade is just as sharp as any Grade A weapon found at my family's shop."

When he was set down again, he reversed the Henge and beamed at the group. "So if we can all turn into weapons or something, we could sneak in right under their noses, right Kakashi-sensei?"

He received a pat on the head from his team leader. "Indeed, Naruto. Our blond here likes to spam Kage Bunshin and then have them Henge into shuriken he likes to use in training. Having a weapon transform into a person seconds before it hits you, can be disorienting and we never know which weapons are real and which are Kage Bunshin."

Naruto was awesome! There was no other way to say it. He couldn't wait to get home and tell his nee-chan all about how something he'd made ended up helping in their mission! She might even make him some cookies for it!

"Now, this is the plan for us to infiltrate their headquarters. TenTen here, is going to be our bait."

The brunette blanched for a second, and looked around worriedly as she fiddled with the straps of her shinobi sandals. "Um, may I ask why me?"

"Frankly put, you have the least amount of chakra out of all of us and with enough control, could mask it well enough to seem non-threatening when we execute our plan."

TenTen didn't seem offended, which was great. Naruto knew that his sensei tended to not be very good at explaining himself and he could accidentally insult people. TenTen was made of sterner stuff though.

"You are already carrying an intense amount of weaponry on your person. So we are going to load
you up with hundreds more and you are going to pass yourself off as a traveling blacksmith who is trying to sell her wares. They will want to question you and search your belongings to make certain that you aren't a threat. They might even attempt to keep your possessions and make up a story about them being suspicious. Once we are all inside, we can surprise them. Mei-san said there should be less than fifty shinobi inside, most of which are Chunin level."

If there was literally less than fifty people inside, it should be easy for all of them. Naruto was sure he could handle a few Chunin of his own, and his Kage Bunshin could be a great distraction no matter what.

Sensei closed his porn and shoved it into his pouch. "Let's get to practicing. We need to get this mastered by tomorrow morning."

It seemed as if whatever divine being(s) that existed, had finally decided to send some good fortune their way. After years upon years of building up to this Rebellion, they finally had the necessary pieces in place. There was enough money. They had the support of the greatest of the five great nations. They had some of the best shinobi from said nation, on their side. And now the Hokage had sent them new information that would make the siege of Kirigakure's walls easier.

Mei drew up the plans as she looked over the map of Kiri. She'd only made Jonin by the time she had defected from her village. She wasn't aware of the spots on the walls, but thanks to the information the Hokage had provided, they would be able to scout the premises and then determine what to do from there.

Also, when she took office as the Godaime Mizukage, she would need to tear down those hiding spots and build new ones so the village's secrets were not so easily known. But that was for a later time.

She pointed to the map, stepping aside so Zabuza could get a good look as well. "This is where the most easily accessible one is. I would think you would best be on the group to take down this one, wouldn't you agree?"

Momochi shrugged. "I think we should get the Nara in here and see what his opinion in all of this is. They're supposed to be ridiculously brilliant, right? He should be able to shed some light on what would be the best option."

Sighing, Mei had to give it to him, because he was right. "Ao, please go and fetch Nara Shikaku for me."

Moments later was met with the Nara Head staring down at their map. His mouth was pressed in a tight line and he seemed to be concentrating hard on what he wanted to say.

"It would be in your best interest to take over each of these stations, all at once. However you would need to scout them all beforehand. Those with skill in stealth would be best suited for the mission, but also those capable of mimicking and adapting to their surroundings. And I would, in my own opinion, save this particular movement for last."

"Why?"

The Nara pointed to the red X marks on the map. They all represented major outputs for the shinobi force of Kirigakure. The border stations, a stock house, and a few bunkers spread throughout Mizu no Kuni. "What you are doing, is laying siege to Kirigakure. But first you need to make certain that you have truly boxed them in, so there is nowhere to go. Once you take control of the outposts at the
borders, you can then start working your way in."

He reached for the various pens on the desk and started laying them out on the map in a specific order. "When you have the control of each of these places, you have then removed the possibility of them sending for aid when you finally issue the coup de grâce. They have effectively alienated themselves from all the other hidden villages and nations, meaning that no one would come to their aid, and there would be no time to do so if you act fast."

It was all so very simple once she considered all of it with a clear head. She was just so sick of the damn war and wanted it to end. But she didn't want to be hasty and end up costing more lives in the process.

The woman nodded and murmured her gratitude to the genius. "If we give you a list of information about each of the bunkers, would you be able to devise a strategy on how to take control of them?"

"With time," the man said. "I would also need to know the basics of everyone currently under you command so that we can form proper teams for a mission such as this. Konoha's greatest strength is in our ability to make cohesive units of shinobi."

Mei nodded and snapped her fingers twice, making Chojuro and Ao straighten up. "Gather our troops, boys! We need to hash out these plans as soon as possible."

She didn't care what it took, they would see the war's end before the next Chunin Exams! She had to help rebuild the strength of their nation and the only way to do that was to have all of her shinobi up to the levels they deserved to be at. And she needed to abolish Kiri's newest graduation exam as soon as possible, lest their village's manpower be decreased even further.

Being a leader was so tiresome, but if she didn't lead, then who would? Mei was the backbone that was keeping the Rebellion together. She needed to remain strong in the face of adversity and the near insurmountable negative odds that had been stacked against her since she started the Rebellion.

On a side note, she fervently hoped that Team Kakashi was doing well with their mission. They had Sharingan no Kakashi amongst their group and taking over the Headquarters should be a lot easier with him there. Plus two Konoha Anbu, two other Dojutsu users, and some Jonin. She had faith that the team would manage to assume control of that section of the border easily.

At least… she hoped they would. Things needed to turn around and she desperately needed this to work!

It would boost resolve and morale and it would prove that their aim wasn't foolish after all. Mei needed this to work in order to prove to everyone that dared question her actions, that she wasn't shooting blindly in the dark! This was more than pride. It was the future of their entire nation that was at stake.

"Hari-chan, you can't keep worrying over everything. You've got all the little twerps to worry about, you've got society to deal with, and you need to keep up on clan matters as Luna-chan gets more involved with the Hokage's business," said Anko as she looped an arm around the shorter woman's shoulders.

She sighed, knowing full well that Anko was right, because how couldn't she be? She had been through things like this before. The only reason Anko hadn't been sent off with the Company of Shinobi was because she was the third best interrogator in the village and with the first two gone, they needed someone of such tremendous reputation and skill to remain behind and deal with all of
the prisoners under their control at present.

On one hand, the kunoichi had been devastated to not get a chance to go and kick some foreign arse, but at the same time she was spending her days doing what she liked. Extracting valuable information from enemy shinobi and making people scream. For someone like Anko, it couldn't get any better.

"You gave to keep yourself distracted in any way you can. It's only been three weeks, you know? They could come back tomorrow, next week, or months from now. So the best thing you can do is just continue on as you will and just watch over your end here."

Shizune smiled from where she was stood and nodded as she and Luna set the table. It was a girls' night and Hari really needed the patience they were giving her. Because it was different now.

Hari was not the one who was out on the battlefield, risking her life while all of her friends and family that mattered, were safe and hidden. This time it was everyone she cared for, being out on the fucking battle field and she had to remain where it was safe, unable to do anything beyond influencing a little flea of a man into giving a portion of his savings over to help the cause.

She hated being useless. Hari hadn't felt this compelled to help people in years and now when the urge was at its strongest, she couldn't do anything! Who the hell decided to throw her into this type of situation in the first place?

"Anko-chan, I finished the book you suggested," said Luna, holding up the first volume of Icha Icha Paradisu. Shizune's face went pink instantly, and Anko launched herself at the blonde, a beaming grin on her face as she hugged Luna.

"It's great that I've managed to corrupt both you and Hari-chan! Shizune-senpai, want to join the group?"

Luna held the porn out while said woman sputtered, trying to shake her head. "Don't worry," said Luna with a calm smile. "You'll end up loving Icha Icha Arashi the most."

No one questioned Luna because they'd gotten used to her random predictions. Hari merely grinned, proud to have another porn lover among their group. It was nice to have a growing group of friends who all shared similar interests. She couldn't believe how much she had missed social interaction with interesting people.

There was a minor pang in her chest as she thought about Kakashi. Yes, she had been petty over him not being able to save her from the stupid party, but she kind of regretted not saying goodbye to him. He was fun to fluster and annoy, and having not told him farewell face to face made her a little guilty. He didn't deserve her attitude and the last time he'd seen her was with her ignoring his existence. He then had to go off to a war.

"Hari-chan, stop worrying about everyone," said Anko, abandoning Luna to her own devices in order to once again wrap her arms around the Potter Lady. "I've gotten familiar with all your little micro-expressions and I know that you're standing there, worrying your fine ass off. Kakashi is damn good soldier and he'll make sure that all of your little ones make it back in one piece!"

She sighed for the second time. "I can't exactly help myself. I'm not used to being the one who has to sit back while everyone else goes off to fight the bad guy."

Luna hummed in agreement. "Hari has always been poor at following rules and being considerate of her own safety."
A flush worked its way across Hari's face and she stuck her tongue out at the blonde. "It's not my fault that all the bloody adults in our lives couldn't be bothered to do their damn jobs and that I ended up either always being right, or in danger that required me to be a heroine." Honestly though, had some people done their damn jobs and used their brains, she wouldn't have had to do their jobs instead.

No matter how often it was stated, it would never be repeated enough. Wizards lacked common fucking sense.

"Is our darling Hari-chan a rebel?" Anko asked, suggestively rubbing her endowments all over Hari's arm.

"Yes. I rebel against stupidity."

Shizune snorted and covered her mouth to conserve her dignity, but the damage was done. Anko turned immediately, a grin on her face. "Finally! I thought it would take forever to get you back into your comfort zone! I thought I was going to have to bring up that time in the onsen where we-"

Shizune launched herself over the table in a movement almost too fast for Hari to keep up with. The woman slapped a hand over Anko's big mouth, her own face cherry red with embarrassment. "Anko-chan, no one needs to hear about that particular time of my life. It is over and done with!"

Anko sniggered, jaw moving still. Shizune remained unimpressed.

"Anko-chan, I'm a medic. Your saliva isn't the worst thing that has ever touched me." That got Anko to huff.

It was Hari's turn to snort as she turn back to her pressure cooker, hoping to finish the rice at the proper time. She had already made the lamb curry as hot as she could, and now it was just the side of rice that had to be finished. Ah, she couldn't wait for her mouth to burn! And she couldn't wait to see everyone else's reactions!

It was a good thing that she had made gelato for dessert. She could be merciful when it mattered.

Sasuke was well aware of the plan. He knew the plan by heart because he had the recollection capable of memorizing things almost immediately after reading or hearing them. His sensei had detailed his plan while they were five miles away from the border patrol HQ, and that was after a day of full on training in Naruto's special Henge.

After being on a team with Naruto for months, Sasuke and Kakashi had a head start over the others, able to pull off the Henge rather easily, without their Sharingan activated. Sasuke had been relegated to explaining the technique in a much clearer manner, to Hyuga Hinata and her sensei.

Naruto never learned the proper terms and didn't seem interested in learning them any time soon. Thankfully, Sasuke had gotten used to the blond's subtly growing vocabulary and could translate into language that made more sense. Naruto's brain worked a bit differently and he saw the world from another angle that many wouldn't be able to understand, so Sasuke being that buffer in a sense, was good.

Also, Hinata and Kurenai-sensei ended up grasping the jutsu rather easily. Hinata because of her Byakugan and Kurenai because of her skill as a Jonin with high chakra control. After all, one does not become a Genjutsu Mistress if they have shit chakra control. She probably knew manipulation and shape easier than all of them because her field of specialty depended upon it.
Sasuke had Henge’d himself into a fuma shuriken alongside Naruto, Hinata, and Kurenai-sensei. He was very familiar with the weapon, but not familiar with being the weapon. There was a level of discomfort when it came to being a weapon and the need to regulate his breathing in order to prevent himself from losing necessary air, was taxing at best.

He had faith in the plan. After all, not even Kakashi had heard of people actually turning into objects. No one would ever suspect that the hundreds of weapons a blacksmith was carrying, were actually shinobi in disguise. So they would be able to slip into the enemy's camp and then wreak destruction upon their outpost. It was one of the best plans that Sasuke had ever heard before, and it was only possible because of Naruto.

It wasn't often that Sasuke felt proud of other people, but he couldn't help himself in Naruto's case. The blond had come a long way from their Academy days. He'd gotten himself an older sister figure, who seemed determined to be Team Seven's big sister one way or another. He got some friends. He got some experience in life outside of the village. And he was stronger and all the more determined because of all of it.

The Yondaime's Legacy was already making a difference, even in the slightest ways. From his insistence in including Sasuke in everything, to his desire to protect the village that probably didn't even deserve it after the past decade.

Naruto was an inspiration. And Naruto was going to give his all to this Rebellion if it meant saving people.

So Sasuke would do the same. He wasn't as emotionally invested, but at the same time, he couldn't let his teammate walk into such danger without having his back. Besides, Hari-san had asked him to watch over his team while she was away. Just because they were no longer within the safety of the village didn't mean that his promise no longer applied.

A cacophony of explosions alerted him to the beginning of the plan. The screams that sounded from the result, let him know that it was time to fight.

He canceled his Henge and found himself standing in a dome shaped room with dozens of shinobi. Some were his comrades and the others bore the hitai-ate of Kirigakure.

With his Sharingan activated, Sasuke was able to intercept a blade that had been aimed for his head. His arm came up and pushed the attacker's arm aside while his leg lashed out and landed a heavy kick to the enemy's midsection. They were sent flying across the room and crashed into a table that caved under their sudden weight.

"Sasuke, Naruto, get to the watchtower!" Kakashi's voice rang out through the mess. "Stop them!"

Orange shot into Sasuke's line of vision, heading in the direction of the stairwell. He followed closely behind his teammate who released a flurry of shuriken and bellowed, "Shuriken Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!" Immediately, thousands of shuriken appeared, raining down upon the two enemies who Sasuke would have pegged to be at least Chunin level. But perhaps he was wrong. The two fell easily.

They burst into the watchtower and Sasuke managed to intercept an attempt at sending for help by using his Hosenka no Jutsu to burn not only the messenger bird, but the message and the shinobi trying to send it.

On his side, Naruto created a dozen Kage Bunshin that proceeded to circle a ninja that looked far older than the both of them.
Sasuke slammed a hand into his burned opponent's neck, knocking him unconscious, while pushing his elbow into another's face. He hadn't expected it to be this easy. It should have been this easy. Weren't border patrols usually more well equipped than this?

The man that Naruto surrounded, raised his arms in the pose for surrender and gently got to his knees. "I am not looking to fight."

Before there could be any question of it, Sasuke appeared behind him and slapped a paper seal their sensei had made, onto the man's back. Instantly, his chakra was disrupted and he was forced into sleep.

Sasuke pulled out the four other seal papers his sensei had drawn up, and whistled to himself. Perhaps he should take up Fuinjutsu training?

"Teme, don't forget to put some on the other guys! -ttebayo!"

"Tch. Like I would forget something so important."

He'd actually forgotten, not that he'd tell his dobe that.

---

Jiraiya,

We need you back at the village as soon as possible. It seems as if the Akatsuki hold more power than any of us originally presumed. Hoshigaki and Itachi came for Naruto, but Itachi's cover was revealed and he has returned to active service. I sent him as an Anbu under the codename Minku, to assist in the Rebellion of Mizu no Kuni.

Hoshigaki-san has been in holding and is undergoing intense interrogation. What we have learned from Itachi-kan, Hoshigaki-san, and Yakushi Kabuto is remarkable as well as concerning. Your presence is required in order to put everything into a place that makes sense.

Many apologies for this sudden urgency.

It was a small message. Straight to the point. Jiraiya had thought he'd have a few months before having to go back to his home, but it seemed as if that was not the case.

He'd only heard whispers of Akatsuki, and now they had the minds of a member and a sleeper at their disposal.

He glanced up at his sensei's summon and sighed. "I'll be there."

It was a good thing he'd only gotten to Suna during his trip.

---

Hyuga Hinata used to question her decision to become a shinobi. She wasn't fond of violence and didn't like fighting, but at the same time, she was the Heiress to a clan and was expected to do her duties. Duties that were very important for the safety and future of the clan.

She was not a genius like her cousin or sister. She wasn't particularly talented in anything but herbs. For the most part, Hinata was a normal shinobi. But she did have something that her genius family members lacked, and that was determination.

Since she was young, Hinata had noticed the looks and stares. Her clansmen would look at each
other in such a way, and it always made her uncomfortable. Mainly, the Main Branch members treating the Cadet Branch members like dirt beneath their heels. And for a time, Hinata wondered if it was only her family that did such things - and by extension wondering if such actions were okay - but no.

She'd been accosted by Academy students once. She was small and defenseless, and they picked on her for her eyes and her clan. They said horrible things. Had Uzumaki Naruto not appeared and gotten their attention off of Hinata, she didn't even want to imagine what would have happened to her.

Despite getting beaten bloody, Naruto had been very positive. Despite the horrible things they had begun to say to him and the way they looked at him, he didn't stay down. He'd sworn he would be the Hokage one day and that he wouldn't let some lowly bullies get him down or stop him. He was determined to see his dream become a reality.

When Hinata had entered the Academy, she had immediately noticed the general attitude toward Uzumaki Naruto. The instructors were not the most kind of individuals, which was a disappointment, and the civilian children whispered about the orange loving boy. Their parents had told them to stay away from him because he was 'a freak' or 'a monster'. They glared at him like their parents did when they would come and pick them up after classes. If anyone caught a glance of the blond, they would start gossiping, saying horrible things just loud enough for Naruto to hear.

And Naruto wasn't exactly passive. He wanted attention so he pranked them in half parts revenge, and half parts a desire for attention that wasn't pure hatred. Annoyance must have been preferable instead.

It became clear to Hinata that there was some sort of corruption, and while she was relieved that it wasn't singular to her family only, she did not like the way people treated Naruto. And she knew he was boisterous and a bit foolish at times, but he didn't deserve such actions and words.

And just when Hinata was beginning to resent her family for the horrible inner structure and hierarchy they had, she realized that it wasn't what Naruto would do. Naruto took all the unfounded hatred of the village and just loudly proclaimed that he was going to earn their respect one day and become the Hokage. He swore he would protect everyone with everything he had. Those horrible people who didn't even give him the basic respect he should have been afforded as a human being.

Naruto wouldn't let the negativity turn him into a bitter person. He was determined in his words and refused to go back on his word. And Hinata realized that as Naruto wanted to change the village, she wanted to change her clan. She didn't want them to be separated any longer, and she didn't want to sit back and be a passive member.

No, she was not powerful or spectacular like others, but she too had determination, and she had compassion. So while she didn't fulfill her father's wishes, she worked toward her goals in her own way.

For the most part, she had befriended the Cadet Branch of the family, except for her cousin Neji. She learned the names of everyone in her clan. She learned each individual family's history. She knew their birthdays and always made sure to have a gift and something positive to say should someone need it.

Being a leader was more than being strong, she had come to realize. Her sister Hanabi was strong and talented. She wasn't liked by a majority of the clan, however. While Hanabi foolishly assumed that being the stronger of them would make her the better leader, Hinata worked toward her own agenda, in her own way.
She befriended anyone she could, being kind and understanding. Sometimes people sought out her counsel and advice. And that was what let her know that she was doing well. That she didn't need to be powerful automatically. When more than half of the clan chose to place their faith in her judgment, she knew that she was doing the right thing. She didn't have to be like other Hyuga before her in order to be a good leader. She just had to remain determined. Like Naruto.

Hatred wasn't something she wanted to succumb to. Naruto didn't let himself fall to it, and Hinata would follow his example by being kind and open.

This mission. This war. It was a chance to learn. To understand how foreigners operated, as well as a chance for her to study her fellow Konoha shinobi. Naruto was among that group especially.

He'd changed. Hari-san was the reason for it. Hinata had considered Naruto a goal for many years. He was someone to emulate and she noticed immediately when he started changing little by little. He had finally gotten a family, and then not too long after, literally found a cousin! Another Uzumaki! Karin was like a female version of Naruto down to the ramen addiction.

Things had continued to change in the other's life and if he was amazing before, Hinata practically worshiped him now. Though she tried not to be creepy about it. She was too scared to approach him and decided to just admire from afar.

And yes, she knew he was just another person, but when someone so amazing and great kept being amazing and great, it was hard to control oneself. Still, Hinata maintained a modicum of propriety by not physically stalking him, and she didn't throw herself at him all of the time. She had an unhealthy obsession and a crush, but she had control!

Unfortunately, the past few months showed that her crush was most likely permanently unrequited. Naruto knew her and spoke to her on occasion, but his attention was more focused on his own team. His teammates in particular. Uchiha Sasuke to be specific. Whether the blond knew it or not, he was practically attached to Sasuke's hip and the Uchiha did not mind in the least.

It wasn't much of a secret. Sasuke liked Naruto a lot more than anybody else at present and had always elevated the blond above others, much like Hinata had, but to a different degree.

He teased Naruto while ignoring all the other students in the class. An Uchiha deciding to even give someone their attention, was already a big deal. Hyuga members had the habit of acting very similar because they were of an prominent clan that was considered more important than many others. And by that, she meant that they were shown preferential treatment and given more leeway than other important clans. It was because of their Dojutsu.

Sasuke only took the spars he had with Naruto, seriously. The rest were always quick to be finished, whereas he would rile the blond up and subtly correct his mistakes by taunting him for 'doing it wrong, dobe'. It bred a strong rivalry, but it also affected Naruto in a certain way.

The Uchiha had become one of the only few people who could get Naruto to listen. The Hokage, Iruka-sensei, and the two ramen stand workers being the others for a certain time. Naruto didn't realize it and probably wouldn't understand the significance if someone pointed it out. And that was fine.

Basically, Sasuke treated Naruto differently from the very beginning and Hinata had noticed the intensity growing ever since their graduation and promotion to Genin status.

Sasuke was more open and sarcastic. Naruto was more playful for the sake of fun and less for the sake of attention seeking. Especially since he was getting enough attention from Sasuke all day every
day. And both were on a good team that really ended up working for them.

Their sensei treated them all equally. Ino-san had seemed to sail over a hurdle of maturity while with them. Team Seven was probably the best of all the Genin Teams in Konohagakure at present, and that was a fact.

So while Hinata had been slightly jealous that she hadn’t been placed with Naruto, she had to sigh and realize that Naruto needed people who pushed him constantly. That meant loud and strong people like Ino and Sasuke. Hinata was needed elsewhere. She was needed to calm Sakura-chan down, and to help Choji-kun realize his potential. Hinata liked being needed and she knew that had she gotten her old wish, she wouldn't have been very useful and would not have grown like she had under Kurenai-sensei’s instruction.

And she had also come to terms with the fact that Sasuke had a small crush on Naruto as well, and that he had more of a chance than anyone, at acting on it and forming a deeper bond with the orange loving shinobi. Hinata was not bitter and she knew the chances of her crush transcending its current status, were low.

That didn't mean should wouldn't try.

As she stared at the two teammates who had worked very well together when the fighting had started, she sighed. Naruto was oblivious for the most part. She briefly wondered if perhaps she was trying too hard to gain his attention.

Naruto was worth it though. She just hoped that this mission she had decided to take on, would prove her feelings. To Naruto and to herself. She wasn't so sure if it was just because she considered him a hero, or because she was in puppy love. She hoped that the answer didn't hurt.

"Hinata, Naruto, Sasuke, TenTen, how are you all faring?" Kakashi-sensei asked, breaking her from her thoughts. She glanced at the other Genin. Naruto and Sasuke both shrugged.

TenTen was flipping a kunai as she said, "I'm fine. They were a little rough with manhandling me, but Gai-sensei's training makes it pale in comparison."

Finally, the man's attention was on Hinata, who restrained the urge to fidget under his gaze. "I am fine, taichou. I managed my first successful Hakke Rokujuyon Sho and fought off two other shinobi after that." It was like everything had become even clearer and then Hinata knew she could do it, and she'd done it! And her enemies had fallen because of her.

And maybe, just maybe, she would return to Konoha and be able to impress her father.

Kakashi-sensei's eye curled up in what she would assume was his version of a smile. "Then I'm proud of your success." She flushed in response.

"Good job, Hinata! You'll continue to kick ass, I just know it! -ttebayo!"

The Hyuga Heiress hastened to thank the blond, and tried not to let his encouragement fluster her. She had more self-control now.

Yes, there been a lot of growing from all of them.

"Hari-hime, it's so good to see you again!"

Hari smiled at the shop owner. "Hisana-san, it's a pleasure to see you as well. I've brought the
children along today so that they may each choose a prize. The quarterly exams came up in both the
civilian and ninja academies, and all of them did wonderfully."

The old woman leaned over the counter to get a good look at the twenty-seven children lined up
beside Hari. She adjusted her spectacles and smiled even wider. "Then congratulations are in order!
And as a treat, half off each item!"

Hari bowed to the woman and thanked her for her generosity. "Children, you may each pick one
item that you wish to have. Price is no limit."

And it wasn't as if the shop sold anything worth more than ten thousand Ryo to begin with. Besides,
half off each item basically meant half off the bill. This was why Hari was nice to people even if she
didn't particularly like them or didn't want to converse. Benefits came from keeping her dislike and
opinions to herself.

She sighed for what felt like the millionth time in the past month. Keeping herself distracted from
thinking about the civil war, was harder than she thought it was. If she didn't have a duty to the
children, she would have been out there as well, doing something of use.

"The children are lucky to have you," Hisana-san said quietly, a small knowing smile on her face. "I
can see how much they adore you, and you try so very hard for their sakes. I know we old gossips
like to tease you about when you'll have children of your own, dearie, but in truth, you already have
dozens."

She wasn't wrong. They were all Hari's kids. And she and her teachings were going to be the
cornerstone their lives needed.

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I
FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

Particular parts of Kabuto's info are actually canon facts.
I don't feel like explaining which ones, but most of the
stuff in his physical description.
Chapter Summary

Things are looking up for the Rebellion, while Hari is going stir crazy in the village and decides to do something about it. And there might be some light flirtations if you squint. But between who? Also, Naruto has no sense of self-preservation. FYI.

Chapter Notes

-So the note for this chapter centers around something that has been annoying the piss out of me ever since I decided to start this fic. If you don't like Homosexual situations, then why the hell are you reading this at all? I gave a clear warning in the very first Author Note that this fic would have Heterosexual and Homosexual pairs in it. The whole NaruSasu thing is not only in the pair box as Pairing B, but it's in the Summary as well as the Author Note. If you honestly hate the pairing that much why the hell did you decide to read a fic where they will become a couple? And why the hell do I have to keep seeing the whining about them getting together?

Furthermore, I've had Hari check out men and women and mentioned her crushes on the other 3 TriWizard Champions. Anko is obviously interested in women to an extent. I haven't hidden anyone's preferences if they actually matter in the fic. So if all of this offends you why they hell are you here? I don't want to keep seeing the whining from people about how 'gay shit' is always going down, or how they don't like my side pairing. If you hate it so much, go away. Simple way to avoid what you so desperately hate.

I am not a Sakura fan in general. I would never ship her with anyone. I don't do NaruSaku and I don't do NaruHina either. Frankly, admiring someone for years doesn't mean they should like you back. I don't in any way see those pairs as real ones and they aren't going to happen in this fic, so kindly stop talking about them? If you are so against what I do in my own fic, no one is keeping you here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!
"Hari-chan, you need to regulate your breathing more if you want to be able to run for longer than you usually do."

Sometimes, Hari would awaken to Mitarashi Anko sleeping on her pillow with her. It had lost its effect after the third time it had happened, and after so many times, she merely would roll over and allow the other woman to wrap herself around the witch.

On the days Anko decided that she wanted to get super personal by sharing a bed with Hari and making as many sexual innuendos as she could manage, Anko also took Hari out for exercise. The kind that Ino would be insanely proud of. The kind that left Hari hurting in places that shouldn't even exist on the human body. The kind of exercise that literally left her hair aching. The kind that had her wanting to take a potion to make all the pain go away. Not that she would take a potion for something as simple as pain. She had more tolerance than that. Gryffindors took it no matter how hard it got!

And on this day of days, in order to keep Hari from going stir crazy, Anko had gotten the Potter Lady up and out of bed incredibly early, had her eat a light breakfast, and then Shunshin’d them both to Training Ground Three where Hari would start off by doing the stretches that Ino had instructed her on, in order to warm herself up. And the warm ups could take forever if someone thought she was doing them incorrectly. And then they would begin doing laps where the levels were drastically different.

Recently, her lap distance had changed. She used to run around the clearing ten times and be out of breath while doing so, but Anko had expanded the perimeter to include a part of the forest as well. She then used kunai that had been strung on thick ninja wire, to make an obvious path through the trees. Basically, there was no way for Hari to get lost so long as she kept the kunai, that each had a red painted handle, in sight, and didn't run into any of the wire that was capable of cutting limbs off if enough pressure was applied.

The former distance she'd traveled was inches shy of seventy five meters, which she would run ten times in a row to make it about seven hundred and fifty meters altogether. She had now expanded her ten laps to one hundred and twenty-five meters all the way around, making the total amount of distance, twelve hundred and fifty meters. Almost an entire mile for her to run. She wondered what Koinu-kun would think once he returned and found that he couldn't tease her as much as he used to. It would be glorious!

As Hari had grown up needing to be quiet and stealthy on her feet, she was used to needing to move fast in most scenarios. But she was more of a sprinter than anything else. Sprinting dealt with bursts of speed used quickly to cover short distances in no time at all. Long distance running was not what she preferred, yet she did it anyway because she knew how disappointed Naruto and Ino would both be if they came back from their mission to learn that she hadn't been keeping up on her promise to learn how to defend herself.

So she let Anko put her through hell. And it wasn't as if Anko didn't know what she was doing or
anything. Her advice was sound and was given from an honest hope to help Hari succeed. Sometimes things in life were worth doing even if they were annoying and troublesome.

Once the laps from hell were finished, Anko instructed her to strip down to her undergarments, because they would be doing some cooling down in the river before getting to the sparring. And this was the reason Hari had to go and purchase specific clothing for these types of things, because Anko had weird ideas half of the time and it was best to be prepared ahead of time in case she decided to up and change her mind. Kind of like that time she decided they should climb trees in the Shi no Mori. Hari would swear that those bloody trees were higher than the ones in the Forbidden Forest. She also refused to think about the building-sized centipede that had almost eaten them.

The water was delightfully cool and Hari sank into the sweet embrace of the river. Anko was already far ahead of her, having decided to just launch herself into the water without a care to acclimating her body to the temperature. She had higher tolerance though and had probably done some kind of resistance training to be able to acclimate herself so well.

"So, your Kekkei Genkai lets you do all kinds of cool stuff. I don't need clan secrets or anything, because that stuff is none of my business and frankly, I don't want to know because you never know what would happen if I got captured one day, so keep those things to yourself." Anko flicked some water in Hari's direction, splashing the woman in the face. Hari splashed some back without hesitation, making the other woman crack a grin. Anko went on to say, "But we should at least consider what you can do with your Mahou thing. Have you considered what you can do offensively? Like make weapons out of it or something? Shape Transformation is an intense part of shinobi training and some shinobi are so advanced at it that they can literally expend amounts of chakra that turn into weapons during battle. And they don't break like metal eventually will."

Hari dunked her head for a moment, to cool her scalp off, before coming back up quickly. The water of the river flowed at a relaxed pace and there was no rush as the two women stood waist deep in chilled perfection on such a hot day. Hi no Kuni was too hot in her opinion. Hari wasn't someone meant for hot climates, which was probably why it was good that she hadn't been discovered in Suna. A desert sounded like a right pain in the arse. Scorching in the daytime and freezing in the evening. It was like yelling a big 'piss off' to the dwellers of the land.

As for Anko's observations. "I had never considered that. There was never a need to before. Everything was pretty straightforward and only the best of the best could probably do things like that. Though I am thoroughly interested now." Imagine being able to make a sword out of magic only. She would probably be able to surprise her enemies with that kind of technique. She was sure she didn't have any books talking about manifesting magic outside the body that wasn't done in a spell or Runic form. At some point in the near future, Hari needed to review all of her books again just to make certain.

Her darling kunoichi friend held up a hand and showed her blue chakra. It was covering her palm like a transparent glove. "Well, you're living in a shinobi village now. You've got a bunch of little twerps under your care, and have associated yourself with many important or high level shinobi in the past several months since you've arrived. Therefore, it would be best to train you up a bit in case something were to happen because of one of us."

She had a point, not that Hari liked being reminded. Hari had gotten her hands on a 'Bingo Book' that was from Iwagakure. She had checked up on everyone she had come to know. The Sandaime, Kakashi, and Uchiha Itachi had Flee On Sight orders(Kakashi, because no one knew if his skills expanded or not and it was best to be safe than sorry.). Inoichi, Anko, and Morino Ibiki had Approach With Caution and High Numbers on their pages because of their specialisations in T&I being well known. Frankly, what was known about them all was pretty dangerous, even down
to whatever connections they might possibly have at some point. No one spared any expense when it came to searching for information.

When word eventually got out that they were seen in the company of Potta Hari, an aristocrat of the hime classification, who had practically formed relationships with all of the people in the more dangerous listings for Konoha, she would probably be faced with some shit. And while the prospect of finally seeing some fighting for herself, was actually really great, she also had many connections that could be used against her and that would probably get her to go with an enemy or at least comply for a short while.

So in a way, she was going to have to put up more protections around the orphanage and the children. Luna would be a big help in fixing that. And when Team Seven and Karin got back, she was going to have to find a way to do something about those five. Not to mention all the upper level shinobi she had befriended if she wanted to keep all of them safe.

What a pain in the arse these shinobi were.

At least things would be interesting from now on.

With a deep breath and a nod, Hari said, "Teach me about this Shape Transformation. I suppose I should learn how to do it at least. Especially if people assume I'm just a civilian that can't do anything of consequence."

Besides, it would give her the upper hand later on, and this meant more Slytherin cunning and less brash Gryffindorish behaviour. Good thing she was capable of flipping between both easily these days.

"Team Kakashi, you have done well! I thank you for your expedient actions in taking control of the patrol headquarters."

Mei was more than grateful. After only two days of being gone, the blond garbed in blaring orange, returned to their camp to tell them that they had secured the base itself and had taken half of the shinobi who had been stationed within, as hostages. All whom remained unconscious. Once he informed her that he was a Kage Bunshin, she knew that she could give him the instructions for further action.

Once he had their new orders, he poofed from existence, taking the information back to Hatake. She had been momentarily amazed because a child being able to perform such a chakra intensive jutsu as if it was nothing, was astounding. She didn't know what the Sandaime Hokage was having taught in his Academy, but she seriously needed to be taking notes so that when she took over Kirigakure, so the Academy could come up to the proper level.

Mei had sent out a team of her own to keep control of the base so that Team Kakashi could return back to their bedrolls. And they had promptly made their way back without an issue, bringing with them a mission scroll detailing the fight, the attacks used, the information revealed, and anything else Hatake had personally noticed that he felt were important for her to know of.

"You all deserve a break. Once the rest of the teams return from their missions, we will then plan our takeover of the individual bunkers hidden on the island."

Hatake bowed once and turned to face his team. "Rest up for now." The group of shinobi dispersed immediately.

Mei sighed and made her way toward the medic tent where Tsunade-san was busy going through
paperwork still. The woman had been incredibly kind in informing them of certain procedures that
they should add to the Kirigakure hospital once the Rebellion had won. With her advice and tricks
up their sleeves, they could progress their nation once more and return to the greatness they had once
possessed.

And the next Chunin Exams were the best place to get the message out there. Kirigakure was still
there. Kirigakure would not stand for the way things had gone. Things were going to change and
they were willing to make alliances.

With all those Lords, Ladies, and Daimyo, not to mention all of the spectators that would be
watching as potential clients, the coming Chunin Exams were the best opportunity to gain the aid
they so desperately needed.

Team Seven plus Karin, stared up at Kakashi expectantly. Their faces were all open and full of
wonder, no doubt curious as to what he had planned for them. What kind of training could they
possibly do during a war, they were probably wondering. But Kakashi was not a conventional
shinobi and as they had exactly five days before any other missions would be carried out, there was
time to train. The cute little Genin were in for some hell. It was so fun being a squad leader. He
honestly missed all the hell training he used to put others through.

"In the coming days, I am going to take you four through Shape Transformation. Just because we are
not in our village now, doesn't mean we can't take advantage of our free time. So instead of lazing
about, I am going to test your ability to mould chakra outside of your bodies, and teach you how to
shape it to your advantage. This was one of the many lessons I had planned to impart upon you all in
the next few months and I will not let a war come between you and my plans for your training."

Sasuke and Karin looked the most interested, while Naruto and Ino seemed passive. He would
rectify that eventually. He couldn't have them being so lethargic now, could he?

Kakashi pulled out five strips of off-white colored paper. "Before we start with that, I want to get an
idea of your Chakra Affinities now. This will give me time to plan ahead for further training when
we get back to the village. I prefer to be prepared so I can gather the necessary materials ahead of
time."

He handed each Genin a piece and held up his own as an example.

"Every shinobi has at least one Chakra Affinity. There are five basic Chakra Natures. Fire, Wind,
Lightning, Earth, and Water. Fire is most powerful against Wind, but it falls to Water. Wind triumphs
over Lightning but is susceptible to Fire. Lightning overrides Earth, but fails in the face of Wind.
Earth is strong against Water and weak against Lightning. And Water conquers Fire, but wanes in
the might of Earth."

Ino's face brightened instantly with knowing. "It's a cycle!"

"Precisely," agreed Kakashi. "Each has a strength over something, and a weakness to something.
However, that doesn't mean a Suiton Jutsu always defeat a Katon Jutsu. It also depends on the skill
and the power of the person using the technique, so it is quite possible for the weaker Element to
overtake the stronger one in such an instance."

"Makes sense! -ttebayo!" grinned Naruto, looking more excited by the minute. If he got any more
energy he would never stop moving.

"Now these," said Kakashi, holding up his piece of paper, "are Chakra Litmus Papers. They are
made from special trees that are fed numerous amounts of chakra constantly. When exposed to your chakra, it will have a reaction. Fire burns to ash, Wind cuts in half, Lightning crinkles, Earth crumbles to dust, and Water becomes damp. You channel your chakra into the paper and then we will see which Affinities you possess."

As an example, Kakashi channeled his chakra into the thin strip of paper, and it immediately crinkled. "I have an Affinity to Lightning. Lightning based jutsu are the easiest for me, though thanks to my experience with the Sharingan, I can perform jutsu of almost every Chakra Nature."

That caught Sasuke's attention immediately and the small blue glow around his paper showed that he'd gone ahead before his fellow Genin. The paper crinkled immediately and Kakashi joined the boy in his shock. Uchiha usually had Fire Affinity. Most of their jutsu were all fire based. Sasuke only knew Katon Jutsu because it was an Uchiha requirement and considered a rite of passage. Even without a clan any longer, he still followed their teachings and training methods. Learning three Katon Jutsu on his own even.

"It would explain why the Gokakyu no Jutsu took forever," the pre-teen mumbled to himself, though Kakashi pretended not to hear it to save him the embarrassment.

The other three Genin had immediately followed Sasuke's actions after all.

Naruto's paper didn't just cut in half. It practically shredded itself when exposed to the potency of his chakra. He probably should have expected that Konoha's Most Unpredictable Knucklehead Ninja, would go above and beyond the norm in order to stand out. Even when he didn't mean to. It was just in Naruto's character to be different.

Ino's paper crumbled and Karin's turned soggy.

Team Seven was a mix. This meant more studying for him, but it was also good to know. This could help him with his planning for team training and the possible creation of any new jutsu or combinations. It would also keep all of them dedicated to their own area of chakra control when the time came. It would keep them focused and quiet. Hopefully.

"Now that I know your Chakra Affinities, I can plan for upcoming training sessions. Mind you, this is training that high level Chunin usually partake in, so I am starting you all off early with the fullest confidence that you can handle this now."

"Don't worry, sensei! We can handle anything you send our way!" Naruto boasted, his grin wide and beaming. He patted his chest three times and not so humbly asked, "What kind of Hokage would I be if I let this stop me?"

The former Anbu chuckled lowly. Such naivety would be what Naruto needed to press onward after this. Kakashi fondly remember when he put his old Anbu team through it. Good times. "I'm glad you feel so strongly about this, Naruto, because today's exercise is going to be all about sending things your way."

He could see the dread building in their expressions, and had to withhold a gleeful cackle at their expense. He was that evil. At least not enough to let them know. He was simply going to put them through some shinobi tag. Basically everyone did it at some point during their training. His was just a little... different.

"The forest and camp are your only options to hide in. You cannot be upright though, and your feet are not allowed to touch the ground. On some missions you will need to learn how to improvise because things don't always pan out as you wish them to. Good luck."
Sasuke stiffened for a moment, before his body relaxed in preparation. Karin looked confused and Ino's jaw dropped. Naruto merely scoffed. "That's nothing, sensei. I'm getting that hat and this training will just bring me one step closer!-ttebayo!"

"You would think so, Naruto," Kakashi said with an eye smile. "The twist is that I will be sending my ninken pack after you when I finish counting. So you will have to cover your tracks, follow the rules I have set, and do not get found. If all four of you manage to not get found after half an hour, then you win and the training ends. If not, you'll be here all day until you can manage that half hour."

As if one entity, the other three Genin turned to glare at Naruto, who had the decency to look sheepish as he rubbed the back of his head. But then...

"Come on, guys! We're all awesome shinobi and there's no way we can't handle this! -ttebayo! We're some of the best Genin in our village!"

Kakashi pulled his trusty book out, opening up to chapter fourteen. Koneko-chan's favorite chapter if he recalled correctly. "I feel I should warn you that this training will extend to the next few days even, should you continue to fail. No Shape Transformation until this exercise is passed, I'm afraid."

"Fuck," Ino uttered, much to the shock yet agreement of her fellow Genin. Being around Naruto was affecting her on a much deeper level than even she must have realized.

"Then I wish you all good luck. You have one minute to hide. And the sooner you get the exercise done, the sooner we can get to your training in Shape Transformation. Good luck, my cute little Genin!"

"Rub yourselves over everything!" was Naruto's advice when they started off with their training.

The camp for the Rebellion was about seven hundred meters by three hundred and fifty meters. It was heavily protected and had a bunker of their own, a medical tent set up directly in the center, plus several makeshift buildings that had been set up over the course of their time as defected shinobi.

Mostly the sleeping quarters and kitchens were underground in order to keep them well hidden. What was on the outside however, were the bathrooms which were haphazardly created (glorified outhouses basically). The medic tent and all of their wounded. There was a watchtower on either side of the camp. And finally, several iron poles had been erected and then covered with a thick net of ninja wire. The wire was strung so thinly that the net would not let any sort of projectile into the camp, and would actually deflect any such attacks. He was told it could also withstand a few jutsu.

The process of even entering the camp actually required an underground passageway not afar off that only those in the Rebellion knew of. There were high level Genjutsu placed around the area. Those that actually confused people should they get too close without knowing about the camp. And the camp was located on the side of the island farthest from Kirigakure. There was basically no need for Kiri shinobi to come in their direction, though that didn't mean they didn't prepare just in case something happened.

Other than buildings, there were large crates of supplies settled around the enclosure and small barricades all around the perimeter of the camp. The only source of light when there was no sun, were the torches that held fires that were kept going at all times.

The nearest water source was the ocean which twice a day, people went and fetched water from. Naruto had already been on a mission to gather water and he learned that they used their chakra to keep the water together. They then brought the water back to camp and placed it in the large
container thing they used. Much like a water tower, but with less space.

Basically, he'd been all over the place already and had a decent chance of finding a hiding spot. Problem, was that the could not be upright while doing the test. And Kakashi-sensei was sending ninja hounds after them, meaning tracking would be put to the test. So in order to confuse the dogs that would be coming after them, he'd told everyone to spread their scent as much as possible.

Naruto had created a Kage Bunshin immediately and leapt into its arms so that it could carry him around while they found a hiding spot. As he wasn't upright, it wasn't breaking the rules. Hari-nee-chan had been teaching him about looking for loopholes and thinking smart, not hard, which was what he was doing. So while Ino and Sasuke ran on walls and ceilings, Naruto was relaxing as he plotted.

Also, to make it more difficult on the puppies that their sensei was going to summon, Naruto cut his hand and wiped the blood that managed to well up, on a few boxes here and there. While the wound healed up, he licked his other hand and wiped that on a few poles they passed. The Kage Bunshin then made a quick round around the perimeter where Naruto considered peeing on something, but decided against it simply for cleanliness purposes and the lack of time on his side.

Still, his plan was almost finished. All he had to do was Henge himself into something and then have his Kage Bunshin put him somewhere. If he recalled correctly, there were a few bookshelves in the medic tent. He could probably hide in there.

"To the medic tent," he ordered his Bunshin. He was totally going to get this exercise!

"Start over!" Kakashi-sensei announced cheerfully after Sasuke ended up being brought in by his largest ninken. And Sasuke was not pleased in the least over the situation. He hadn't expected to get caught at all, but for some reason, he was the one they found first. Ten minutes and fourteen seconds into the session too.

Naruto, Ino, and Karin all sighed and split up once more. Sasuke decided to take a leaf out of Naruto's book and cover the area in his scent as best as he could. Or maybe he could mask his own scent with something else that was more potent.

Naruto had made a dozen Kage Bunshin that spread out immediately. The original Naruto turned into one of the crates that surrounded the perimeter of the camp. He was placed on top of another stack by his Bunshin. Left on his side so he wouldn't be upright. The Bunshin then ran off, changing into a crate on the other side of the field.

The rest of the Bunshin were making loud noise, possibly to distract all the ninken would would no doubt be listening for them. Sighing, Sasuke shifted into a crouch and leapt from the wall he was crouched on, landing on the side of the stack of crates the real Naruto was resting on. He then used Naruto's special Henge to join the blond because he honestly couldn't think of anything more at the moment and there were only eleven more seconds left.

Kakashi was evil for wanting them to accomplish their training the way he demanded.

He had a feeling they would get caught during this game as well. At least he was with Naruto during all the ruckus. That made things better.

Momochi Zabuza stared at the little Genin that flitted back and forth across the camp. It had been three days since Hatake Kakashi had imposed such a training mission upon his little students and
they still hadn't managed to get it right. And if hiding from ninja hounds wasn't hard enough, the brats couldn't even walk like normal folk.

He's also been seeing multiple Bunshin of the orange one running everywhere. And he had to admit that he was impressed by what he was in Nami no Kuni, the blond wasn't as coordinated and he didn't seem to think things through. Fact was, there was something different about Hatake's team. Something that had changed.

And it wasn't just the Uchiha brat's jaw structure, though that was a curious development.

No, it was their eyes. They each had a new look in their eyes, and they didn't treat the Rebellion mission they had been assigned to, as a type of game. Some of the other Genin that had been sent by Konoha, still weren't aware of the situation or the extent of it. If he had to guess, he would say that Team Seven had experienced true danger and had finally awoken to the reality of what it meant to be a true shinobi.

The blond Uzumaki - and yes, he was apparently an actual Uzumaki - was using his brain. Ninen had terrific senses and he not only spread his scent everywhere, but his Kage Bunshin were making loud noise and rearranging crates and sacks in order to confuse the trackers.

The team had yet to finish the training, but they were getting better.

And the little redhead who had joined the group was apparently Uzumaki's cousin, though her name was not Uzumaki. She'd fidgeted when asked by another Konoha ninja, which probably meant she was hiding it. She had the red hair - her eyebrows hadn't been dyed and gave away the fact that black wasn't her natural color - and the chakra of an Uzumaki, so it was only possible for her to be one. The Hokage was probably hiding it. If word got out of two blood born Uzumaki living in Konoha, that would put targets on their backs.

Mei was a descendant of the Uzumaki. She would probably become protective of both kids should she find out about them. And the Sannin was the granddaughter of an Uzumaki. Maybe not direct relations, but he had a feeling that once the truth was revealed, and the battle won, Kirigakure and Konohagakure would be thick as thieves in the near future. If only to keep strong ties with what was left of a once prestigious clan.

He blinked as one of the Kage Bunshin approached him, holding up four shuriken. "Can you hold these for half an hour?"

Though confused, he accepted the weapons.

The Bunshin lingered near him for a moment before asking, "So do you guys have crappy puns?" He wasn't looking at Zabuza though, he was staring as his fellow Bunshin as they ran around, making noise and trying to provide a suitable distraction.

"What?"

Blue eyes looked up. "In Konoha we do all kinds of training with trees and leaves. I'm not sure how long it's been going on, but we've incorporated even the damn trees into our training styles. And the leaf and tree based puns are all over the place. So I was wondering if people in Kiri have their own puns about water or mist or something."

The 'demon' of Kirigakure ended up snorting at that. Of course the tree-huggers would have such things. Though he couldn't really condemn them since he'd gotten his fill of Mizu no Kuni's poor puns as well.
"Just get back to training, gaki."

"We'll win this time! -ttebayo!" the Bunshin exclaimed as it ran off, joining its temporary brethren. Zabuza found out later, after thirty minutes had elapsed, that the four Genin that Hatake had been relentlessly tor-training, had been under a Henge the entire time, and had sat in his pocket waiting for the 'game' to end.

Damn. Whatever Konoha was teaching the brats, they needed to start teaching their own brats. Turning themselves into weapons and then just passing off to other people? Genius. Not that he would tell them that. It was always good to leave them waiting and wondering after all.

"Mah! My cute little Genin have finally finished their training!" Hatake practically cooed, not even bothering to look up from his porn. The bastard's gleeful voice and appearance annoyed even Zabuza. "I suppose you can all rest easy for the next hour. Then it's on to Shape Transformation! How fun this is going to be!"

The four Genin slumped and headed for the bunker. Either for food or rest, he didn't know. But what he did know, was that Hatake Kakashi was an asshole. And Zabuza really admired the devious mind of his fellow Jonin. Though he would never admit such aloud.

Jiraiya hadn't thought he would be confronted with so much information when he had turned and high tailed it back to the village. He'd expected his sensei to have uncovered a few secrets, but instead, he found himself staring down at one Mitarashi Anko, and a young woman he wasn't familiar with. He'd seen her with Potta Hari, but he hadn't actually spoken to the blonde, and from the far away look in her eyes, he wondered if she was all there to begin with.

"Jiraiya-sama," Anko said forcefully, presenting a large notebook, "we have collected invaluable amounts of information from Hoshigaki Kisame, Prisoner #6920173. Thanks to Hari-chan and Runa-chan, we have an entire book full of information for you. Hokage-sama wished to wait for your return before we decide what to do with the prisoner himself however. The information is of the sensitive nature and needs your attention immediately. And we haven't even collected everything yet."

The blonde was nodding, her distant eyes becoming clear and sharp. "The shark man is quite a difficult one to crack. He holds loyalty in high esteem and his sense for it has been left a fragile mess ever since he experienced utter betrayal from his squad leader back in the Cypher Division of Kirigakure. Ever since, he remains on the outside looking in, wanting to be able to trust those around him, though not having a reason to. I am unsure of what could be done in his case, because death does not sit well with my conscience, yet I know he is dangerous."

He took the book of notes, eying both woman carefully. "Mitarashi, what say you on the matter?"

The interrogator smirked. "Sir, you'll find that I align more with Ibiki-kun in these types of matters than Inoichi-san. He could be useful to us. Play on his emotions if we can. Get Runa-chan and Hari-chan to help a bit with their Kekkei Genkai maybe."

'Runa' winced, silver/blue eyes becoming wary. "I have the ability to do what you are suggesting, however I do not have the power level to accomplish such a task. Hari-chan has the power but not the skill. It would take a lot of work to either rearrange memories or wipe them completely. And even then, I am not so certain how Hari-chan would feel taking someone's personality away."

Jiraiya had been given the basics during his last visit a month ago. He had seen the list that had been
written up about the two women and what they could do. Herbal and animal mixtures that, when
infused with their Kekkei Genkai, could restore perfect vision, re-grow bones, and even allow
someone a full night of dreamless sleep. From what sensei had told him, the Potta Clan, and yes, it
was considered a clan of Konoha, would supply the village with its wares in order to fall under the
full protection available to clans. Meaning Potta Hari and Potta Runa were separated from normal
civilians and were under different laws.

And the 'potions' as the two called them, would be constantly supplied to the Hospital, as well as
T&I, and the Anbu Headquarters.

He had been skeptical until he - under a disguise of course - and his sensei got to witness Potta Hari
'brew' a 'potion' alongside a random Iryo-nin who had coped her every action perfectly. Only Hari-
hime's 'potion' worked though, meaning it really was influenced by her Kekkei Genkai, Mahou.
Basically, the Kekkei Genkai was one to be feared thanks to the extent it could go to in the use of it.

Rearranging memories or completely removing them without having to use chakra was bizarre, yet
so very interesting. He honestly needed to speak with the woman at some point in the near future.

At that thought though, they needed to determine Hoshigaki's future. And that could only happen
once he read everything in the book. Said book that would have to be sealed immediately once he
was finished with it. Any others would join it soon enough.

Gato was one of the most disgusting and probably the creepiest people to ever exist - and she had
known Horace Slughorn and Rita Skeeter for Merlin's sake - and that was saying something. But
still, Hari had put the man under her control and had simply let him to do whatever after the incident
in Nami no Kuni. But now she had to literally involve herself even further if she was going to be
using him to help the Rebellion. And also if she wanted to restrict his actions toward other
unsuspecting nations. The tosser had too much in his grip.

She'd left Konoha behind two days ago, and Luna had already been aware of her plan. She'd then
done some very questionable magic that Hari had never seen or even thought of, and made a golem
of Hari that had some of her magic imprinted on the Runes drawn on its body. The golem and the
runes then worked together to simulate life and intelligence and would pretend to be her until she
returned. Until then, Luna would be a part of everything going on and would share her memories
once Hari returned. That was the deal.

Being holed up while others did the dirty work, just didn't feel right. Hari could help at least
somehow and she was going to use Gato and his legions of followers and untold riches, to get the
work done. He had connections and the means to get anything he wanted, if he decided he wanted it.
That was the kind of reach that was beneficial in her opinion.

Gato resided on a plot of land heavily guarded by all sorts of people, from shinobi to samurai, and
then normal civilians. His true home resided on an island off the coast of Mizu no Kuni, which was
the nation he held the tightest agreement with. Hari had traced his soul and had Apparated to his base
of operations easily, finding herself faced with something even more elaborate than what he'd built in
Nami no Kuni. He'd abandoned that home because there was a suggestion in his mind to avoid the
country at all costs. A 'suggestion' that Hari had put there.

However, things became hellish once she realised just what was going on.

Gato had his fingers in many pies, she had learned. The paperwork was extensive and annoying to
sort through, but she had found out that his shipping company was basically the only outside source
that Kirigakure worked with. The Mizukage - who was being controlled by another person, if she
remembered Death's words correctly - seemed to agree with Gato's thought process and therefore Gato supplied the village with whatever they wanted in order to keep thriving during their time in a civil war.

As the village resided on the side of the main island of Mizu no Kuni, closest to Hi no Kuni, and was right on the water, the port wasn't too far and shipments were allowed in and out of the area without issue every few days. Gato made good money off of the village and land itself because Yagura and his master puppeteer had alienated the entire land from the rest of the Elemental Nations. They had no other way to get what they needed. In truth, Gato had been a genius businessman, and even through her dislike, she had to marvel at his actions involving the island nation.

It would be the perfect opportunity, she had realised. The chance for the Rebellion to use. She didn't know to what extent they could use such a chance, but any chance was better than none, right? Hari merely needed to review everything she could find and then write up a report about it. Thank Merlin for translation charms, because her Japanese was still poor in terms of writing. At least she could write her report in English and then had it translated over the best she could. She didn't feel like Melding with Death any time soon. It was such an unnerving feeling and she wasn't that lazy to resort to it yet.

Hari gave the stout man a mocking pat on the head, feeling endlessly amused. Her decision to not simply kill him had been a good one after all. It was nice to know when her actions actually bred possibilities. If this got her kids home sooner, then anything was better than nothing. And Hari was willing to do whatever it took if it meant getting her way faster.

Finally, she was able to be of some use!

Now, how should she write up such a message to the leader of the Rebellion?

Team Kakashi had been paired up with two of the Rebellion Teams, in order to take out one of Kirigakure's hidden bunkers on the island. At the same time, three other groups had been dispatched to deal with the other bunker miles away.

Now bunkers were vastly different than border patrol stations, which was why more shinobi had been sent this time. Those at border patrol had simple medical supplies on hand, and basic communication devices. Bunkers however, were hidden underground and usually had advanced medical supplies within easy reach, as well as an assortment of back up weaponry, and other supplies necessary for defending the land.

Basically it was a storage house, a weapons facility, and a control center for Kirigakure's dispatched Anbu. And the one that their team had been sent to, acted as Mizu no Kuni's Bounty Collection Office as well.

There were sure to be an abundance of shinobi within, as well as the means to destroy the place should they go about their takeover well enough. However, they did not want to alert Kirigakure to their actions, and Itachi knew that silent was the best method in this scenario.

No big flashes or wild jutsu if they could help it. Simply placing seals on people so they could not fight was the best option.

In this mission, he had to keep an even tighter watch on Sasuke and his friend Naruto in order to make certain that both boys made it out alive. He'd realized that both boys valued each other beyond a normal friendship, and if something would happen to either, it would cause problems. Especially if Naruto was there to witness it.
After all, Naruto eradicated three Jonin level Iwa shinobi when he and his team had been assaulted without reason. The boy had caused mass destruction all to protect his friends. If Sasuke got hurt again, there was no telling what the Kyubi might do to get control of Naruto and his roiling emotions.

"Minku, Tenzo," said Kakashi, capturing his attention. "We are going to need your particular skills in this mission. Keep sharp."

Hatake-senpai had been once again, made the leader of the mission. He was the most qualified to lead in Itachi's opinion, simply because one doesn't become Anbu Honsho for nothing. And once a member of Anbu, you never really leave. So Hatake was still an active member and the Anbu would always listen to him since he'd been Honsho for quite some time and no one else was appointed despite the fact that he had 'stepped down' in order to teach some Genin.

Both Itachi and Tenzo nodded to show their understanding. The knew the way team dynamics worked. Tenzo was aware of who Minku really was. They both had been on the same team under Hatake. He'd been their team captain. Falling back into the same movements and roles from before wouldn't be as difficult as one would think.

And there were a few things their entire Anbu team had been the best at. Infiltration, Assassination, Reconnaissance, and Tracking. Frankly, three of Konoha's best shinobi were on this mission and there was little doubt in Itachi's mind, that they would succeed with little issue.

Hopefully. Kirigakure couldn't possible have many qualified ninja in their ranks if they let so many possible-ninja kill each other in order to graduate. Right?

"This can't be serious," Mei murmured to herself. But no, she read and then re-read the entire message over and over just to be sure. And the words never changed. No light produced any possibly hidden words. It was a simple letter than held so much meaning. So much that could either make or break them, and her heart pounded erratically as her thoughts drifted.

To whom it may concern,

It has come to my attention that the great shipping magnate Gato of Gato Company, has strong ties with Mizu no Kuni. As such, his company is the only one that has managed to keep contact with the land ever since the Purge of the Kekkei Genkai began. Whether it is because of his wealth or attitude is unknown.

As his company is afforded what no other in the Elemental Nations has, weekly supplies are brought to Kirigakure's port using Gato's company as the connection the country has to the rest of the nations. The village then distributes the goods they receive, to the various villages scattered about the island. Yagura currently holds control over the Daimyo and his court, as well as all the land in control of Mizu no Kuni. He decides whether or not a town or city will receive its weekly provisions. So long as they follow his orders, they get good food, clean water, and are kept relatively safe.

There is a set schedule for when the boats come in with supplies. Every 5th, 13th, 20th, and 29th, a new ship docks. There is an exchange of Ryo, some signing of paperwork, and then the crates and containers are transported into Kirigakure's center where the
shinobi in charge have to divide the shares for the different towns among the country. This is how the country has managed to stay afloat despite being cut off from the rest of the world.

The boat always takes a long course in reaching their destination so that the nature of the ship's mission isn't revealed to outsiders. The course is mapped out below for your reference.

Your best option would be to take advantage of this boon and take one of the ships captive. Disguise yourselves among the shipment and when you have been escorted into the very heart of Kirigakure, unleash your fighters upon the unsuspecting. This plan is titled, 'The Trojan Horse'.

The name comes from an old story where two rivaling nations fought for an undetermined amount of time. Many battles had waged and many lives had been lost. The leader of the Trojans, in an effort to not be beaten however, planned to destroy his enemy in a cunning manner. His army erected a finely crafted wooden horse that stood dozens of meters high, and they hid the best fighters inside it. The horse was then given to the enemy kingdom as an apology for desecrating their Kami's temple, and a declaration of surrender.

The kingdom fell for the trap and took the horse into their city. That night, while the kingdom fell to drunkenness in the face of their supposed 'victory', the hidden soldiers broke out of the horse and slaughtered their enemies. The Trojan Horse had been the downfall of the kingdom.

The plan is relatively simple as long as you trust those who will undertake such a mission. And I promise that should you decide to take this advice, a cargo ship carrying the usual supplies will be awaiting your entourage. You may take the supplies if you wish and use the boat as you see fit. The workers will not act against you at all. And I will be alerted immediately to when the ship moves out, so that no other ships interfere with your course.

Directions to where the boat will await you, are listed below.

My only favour that I ask of you, is to make certain to the best of your ability, that all the Konoha shinobi make it home safely. There are some precious people among the lot for me, and I do not wish to see them hurt. Zabuza-san would be able to tell you how committed I am to seeing Hatake Kakashi's team return home well and alive.

Thank you for your time and consideration. May good fortune favour you.

~Kuro

P.S. Yagura seems to be in bad health and looks weary and worn. He has not been making executive decisions on his own in quite some time. There is another involved here. And he is apparently making the decisions while Yagura merely sits back and allows him to order others
This man wears a black cloak that is covered in red clouds. Beware of this man, for Yagura only listens to him and one of his status, bowing to another's orders, is not good.

She stared at the letter, completely baffled by its contents. I connected so many dots, while leaving her with so many questions. And indeed, there was a map pointing out the location of the ship they could use.

It didn’t hurt to at least verify the words, right? Besides, she had been informed by Zabuza of this Kuro’s actions prior to Konoha’s involvement in their Rebellion. They had paid Zabuza to not harm the Konoha shinobi and then months later, sent the Rebellion a large sum of money and a vast amount of supplies to help their cause. Twice, had Kuro interceded upon the behalf of Konoha. And now this person was doing it again.

Another worrisome thing however, was the point about Yagura. He was deferring to another individual. One in a black cloak that was covered in red clouds? Such as those worn by the criminal group Akatsuki, that the Sandaime Hokage had warned her about in his last message?

Said group that had Hoshigaki Kisame was a known member before Konoha got his hands on him?

So much to consider. Once the Nara got back, she would need his mind to determine just what was the best course of action. Though the ‘Trojan Horse’ idea seemed sound in her opinion. It reminded her of what Team Kakashi had done to the border patrol HQ. It could work.

Looking to Ao, Mei sighed. "Get me Utakata-san."

Life would be so much better once she finally took office as the Godaime Mizukage and finally got herself a husband. No matter what, she would be getting some good sex in the near future. One way or another, dammit! The stress relief was long overdue.

Luna hummed quietly as she took the children to the playground. Beside her was a team of Konoha Genin who had been hired to help protect the children. As all of them were under the age of five, it was imperative that they remain safe, even from the dangers a playground could pose. And Luna couldn't obviously use all of her magical skills in front of people, so hiring a team was the best option.

Hari was back at the orphanage, having returned to find a stack of paperwork awaiting her. Luna’s golem had done its job well for five days and five nights. And Hari’s trip hadn't been very fun nor could it have been considered a holiday. She had to deal with paperwork while away as well, so she had simply traded one hell for another.

In the time of her absence, many things had occurred. Luna had routinely gone to T&I in order to assist Mitarashi Anko in working through the minds of Konoha’s current, dangerous prisoners. Days and days of Legilimency sessions, taken only two hours each so that she didn't become drained, still hadn't seem them through everything. She would be called in after dusk in order to lend her assistance once again.

It was an interesting process, and she greatly enjoyed being able to do something productive for once.

The Magical Community of Great Britain had fallen far and fast. The Goblins, had been under the pejorative opinions and statements of many in the wizarding world for far too long. They rose up after the weakness Voldemort's war had wreaked. They took out ravaged families and lands and
forbade wizards and witches access to their blood born rights.

It had been a disappointing time. Luna, who had always been a free spirit and had always been one in mind, had mourned for such a loss. They weren't necessarily bad beings, they had simply been under the fire of slanderous utterances and disgusting racism, classism, and facism. And the wizards, ever foolish enough to leave their possessions in the hands of the very creatures they belittled constantly, couldn't understand why they were despised so much.

Fortunately, the Lovegood family had never had trusted the Goblins enough to open a vault in Gringotts, meaning they weren't rendered impecunious like most of Magical Britain was. They also never suffered any sort of insolvency like many ended up in after the Gringotts doors closed for good. For the most part, Luna had remained untouched by the Goblin War.

It was however, the actions of those who rose to power during such a time, that caused true chaos. She had seen it coming. She had warned Hari to hide and take everything of hers away. And there was no stopping any of it. Not even the Mistress of Death could make it go away, and Hari was still convinced that she had years ahead of her before she actually asked Death to kill someone for her.

If her dear sister-in-arms only knew what Luna knew.

Luna sighed as she sat on the bench, watching as the children played back and forth. Of all the things for Hari to do when coming to another world, she adopts a lonely little boy and then becomes a pseudo-mother figure to an entire orphanage of children. She gave them cooking lessons, and sewing lessons. She signed them up for lessons in first aid, as was expected of them. She helped with their homework and was there when someone got hurt.

Hari, who had refused the demands for her hand. Who had refused the idea of having children, ended up hitching her horse to an entire group and finding herself a man who she wasn't even aware would mean more to her than just a common friendship in the future. It was ironic in a sense, and Luna couldn't wait to watch as Hari stumbled her way through a complicated courtship that she wasn't even going to be aware of while it occurred.

She closed her eyes for a moment, considering the past and how things had changed around her. The deaths of friends young and old. The Elemental Nations resided on another version of Earth. This was where she and Hari had come to start anew.

A new family that Luna had gladly joined, taking the name immediately. Potta Runa to make it easier on those pronouncing her name. A chance to start over and make her own branch of the family.

She almost had a chance years ago back when she had met Newt Scamander and his family. There had been something there in Rolf, but Luna hadn't the time to consider it beyond a passing fancy at the time. She might have regretted it a few times, but after so much time had passed and their vastly different priorities, she didn't mind as much now.

Besides, there would always be more chances to start over. Luna quickly shifted to the side so a free space was opened up on the bench. Mitarashi Anko dropped down beside her and beamed. The younger woman was always so cheerful and while she resembled Bellatrix Lestrange in some ways, she was far better all around.

"Well if it isn't our blonde doll!"

"Hello, Anko."

She graced the woman with a small, tolerant smile. It was interesting how Hari had managed to
surround herself with people who could basically be the copies but more pleasant versions of Voldemort's supporters. It was a testament to how similar the two had been, and how they attracted people with relatable temperaments.

"I got this new technique I wanted to talk to you about," Anko went on to say as she began a long and detailed explanation about some torture method she couldn't wait to try out on the next prisoner she was given clearance over. Meanwhile, Luna merely smiled and and nodded as she watched the children give the Genin team a run for their money. Testing the boundaries of what they could get away with. Children could be crafty little buggers.

The new life was good. And the chances at a new family, rising with every day.

It was dangerous. More so than the last mission they ended up going on. This one actually involved more high level shinobi and there had already been many attempts at escape. Thankfully, they had blocked off the escape route and the fools had constructed a barrier of sorts with Fuinjutsu, that was supposed to be impossible to break. Thing was, they'd slipped inside the barrier and now not even the Kiri shinobi could break it, meaning there was no way out currently.

While that was good in a sense, it was a problem in another. Sure, this apparent barrier blocked visual and audible happenings from within, thereby blending it into the surrounding forest, it also was constricting and apparently fed off of the chakra of everyone inside to an extent. Meaning, that most jutsu being used, were pointless because the seal was powered by chakra. They quickly learned that Taijutsu would be their best option until someone could either ruin the seal for the barrier or they killed the caster.

Which brought on more problems that Sasuke didn't want to deal with. Who the hell among the group was the Fuinjutsu user?

He'd always been unnaturally good at Taijutsu. He had assumed it was because he was an Uchiha and that their clan had a specific style that they used in conjunction with their Sharingan, but Sasuke hadn't had his Sharingan yet, so maybe it was just skill. Either way, these weren't mere Genin and Chunin. This was a Bounty Station as well as a command center. Actual Tokubetsu Jonin and Jonin had been on standby inside the barrier.

Sasuke's Taijutsu was not the best anymore. He was used to being better than others, but at present, he was on equal footing with the two shinobi he was battling. Both were larger than he was by several inches, and their physical masses dwarfed him easily. But Sasuke was smaller and faster. He could slip into their guard, but the problem was that both had muscles that could take his hits just fine.

A stalemate in a sense.

"Sasuke-teme, what do we do?!"

He gritted his teeth as he leaned back to dodge a punch. His legs came up, feet filled with chakra, and he kicked the enemy ninja in the jaw, sending him flying. If he wanted to do this, he needed to enhance his moves with chakra.

They'd done some training like it before. Kakashi had them do control exercises where they used chakra only to move weapons all over their bodies. They did endurance control on the water by sparring often. He'd even made an offhand comment about how Tsunade of the Sannin always pushed chakra into her limbs and through her Tenketsu when fighting in order to enhance the damage she doled out.
The concept was easy enough to understand. Allow his chakra to flow freely, pinpoint the Tenketsu he wanted to use, and direct the flow of his chakra to that area. Once he had enough of his chakra built up at the specific point, he would release it in a burst upon contact and watch as his enemy went sailing. In theory, it sounded easy. He was certain however, that it was not so.

Sasuke fell into a split in order to avoid a hit from his other adversary. He reached up, twisted the man's wrist, and yanked him down with one hand while stabbing him in the gut with a kunai. The fool was tossed aside. He would probably have to use his Shurikenjutsu skills if he wanted to deal any proper damage.

Naruto wasn't too far too, fighting his own enemies. He had four on one though, and he was keeping them all occupied, which was good. Naruto's Taijutsu was not the best in their team and being able to hold off four Chunin level shinobi, was a testament to his growth over the past several months. Sasuke felt a small speck of pride flare up, before he had to push it aside to focus on the Kiri ninja coming his way.

A moment ago, Naruto had asked what they should do. He wracked his brain even as he spun around and backhanded the fool in the jaw, releasing a burst of lightning chakra while doing so in order to electrocute his opponent even if only slightly. If he hit someone in the jaw enough times in a row, it should break eventually, right?

The seal made chakra impossible to use without being drained and left useless. Seals were part of a very delicate branch of the shinobi arts. Not many people had the mettle to take up such a practice. It required not only good chakra control, for fear of not overloading the seals in question, but also intense focus.

How did one fight against something like that? If they didn't do something soon, they would take even longer to finish this battle. If only there was a way to disrupt a seal that seemed to absorb even the slightest amount of chakra.

He reached an epiphany the same time a foot buried itself into his gut and he was sent careening across the area. He grunted when he landed, but didn't stay down for long, not even when Naruto screamed his name in worry. He flipped to his feet, bringing his kunai up in order to engage his attacker once again.

No, this wouldn't keep him down because now he had the solution to their problem! The seal stole chakra, so the best thing to do, was give it loads and loads of chakra at once. However, there was a more potent type of chakra right at their fingertips and he could kick himself for not realizing it sooner!

Naruto was the key to disrupting the seal! Overloaded seals failed and would usually explode, thereby rendering themselves useless! And from what he'd managed to learn from Kakashi-sensei, Biju chakra was dangerous outside of a Jinchuuriki's body. It could melt and burn any kind of nature, as Kakashi had witnessed when he returned Naruto to normal back when the Iwa shinobi had attacked.

The blond had grown up and became used to such a chakra source in his body. That was why a newborn was necessary for the type of seal used on him. So the coils would develop alongside the Kyubi's chakra and not harm its container.

So if Naruto pumped enough of the Kyubi's chakra into the seal, he should be able to make it fail and thereby let everyone use Ninjutsu and Genjutsu again and also break the troublesome barrier. Besides, no one else would have enough chakra stored up to be able to give so much to the seal that protected such a large amount of land. So it was best that Naruto be the one to do it.
Sasuke used the Kawarimi to replace himself with one of Naruto's foes, driving his kunai into the one he appeared right beside and then kicking him away before he could become a problem. His kunai had snapped in half unfortunately, and he was running out of weapons. Naruto's gaze brightened upon seeing him, but he turned and roundhouse kicked a woman in the face, trusting Sasuke to keep his back clear.

Sasuke reached into his pocket and slapped the sleep seal onto the forehead of the remaining shinobi in their immediately vicinity. She dropped immediately. Ignoring her, Sasuke took Naruto's hand and started tugging him forward. "Naruto, I normally wouldn't ask this of you, but I need you to access the Kyubi's chakra."

"The fuck? Why?" the blond demanded, though he didn't pull away or stop. He didn't even question where Sasuke was leading them to as they dodged many Taijutsu battles on the way.

The seal was being maintained in the center of the area. Large, black and red markings that told him they had used special ink and blood in order to make it. After all, a secret bunker couldn't be so secret if it was seen, could it? Not that they had managed to hide it from the Rebellion's knowledge. Perhaps Terumi Mei had known about it because she was a former Jonin and they felt too secure in their abilities to change locations.

He was getting a firm impression that Kirigakure shinobi weren't all too brilliant.

"Naruto, a seal needs precise chakra to be able to work, and will have stores built in to house chakra for later. This one sustains itself by absorbing the chakra in the area and building it up within. So if you were to use Nin or Genjutsu, it would suck away the chakra before the attack would even work. That's why everybody is fighting hand to hand and why your Kage Bunshin exploded the moment you summoned them."

"Well fuck us!" Naruto swore, and Sasuke had to agree.

"The Kyubi's chakra is dangerous outside of your body. Kakashi-sensei said so. If you force a ridiculous amount into the seal, you will overload it and it will explode, thereby ruining the seal and removing the need for Taijutsu only. It'll also increase our chances as there are more from our side that are still standing right now."

The array of markings that made up the full seal spread out for several feet and looked to have layers. No doubt they had been meticulously drawn and re-drawn over the past several years. Well, Sasuke had a Naruto on his hands and Naruto was going to cause the most havoc these morons had ever seen before.

Blue eyes stared intently at him, full of doubt and worry. Naruto wasn't normally someone who wasn't chipper and pleasant, and Sasuke didn't like how scared he seemed. But it was necessary. "Sasuke, I've never willingly drawn on the Kyubi's chakra. I don't- I'm not even sure this would work. What if I end up hurting you or someone else?"

Before answering, Sasuke flung a handful of shuriken in an oncoming ninja's direction. He didn't even bother to watch them make contact, nor did he pay attention to the squelch that sounded when they connected. Naruto needed his attention at present. Naruto was far more important than some idiot who couldn't even dodge a few shuriken.

Placing his hands on the other's shoulders, he looked the blond dead in the eye and said, "I know you can do it. And I know that you would never hurt me. I'll watch your back and keep you safe."

There was a moment of lingering doubt, before Naruto nodded silently and closed his eyes. His body
became lax and unresponsive in Sasuke's hold. Sasuke snapping his fingers didn't even help him capture Naruto's attention. No matter though. Naruto was going to do what he could, and Sasuke was going to protect them both until the time was right.

He just hoped the other could do it soon.

Reaching for his very last kunai, Sasuke fell into a crouch that basically dared anyone to come for them. He would beat the shit out of anyone who came near him and his dobe. After all, he had always been good an shurikenjutsu, and he wasn't going to let some weak ninja threaten them.

It was dark and dank, Naruto realized. There was water beneath his feet, but he was standing atop it and not trudging through it. The walls were close together, and there were pipes all around. The lighting was poor, giving everything a vomit-after-eating-ten-bowls-of-miso-ramen sort of color.

A sewer. He was in a sewer.

Why the hell was it a damn sewer?

"So you've finally decided to come and pay me a visit. To think that I would be the one who got stuck with such a lazy vessel."

Naruto whirled around, coming face to face with a large head that floated behind a large, red gate. The head was angular and orange. Two slitted, red eyes stared back at him, and a massive maw opened wide to reveal what seemed to be hundred of fangs. They could probably bite a body in half with a simple chomp. And while that visual was kind of cool, he didn't want that to happen to him. Naruto wasn't that irresponsible.

It was the Kyubi. The Kyubi was giant orange fox. Why did it have to be his favorite color?! That wasn't fair! Also, it would explain some people's actions. If he'd run around his entire life wearing a shade of the same color as the fox's fur, then of course they probably thought he was possessed or something. Kami-sama, what a pain in the ass the universe was.

Two hands suddenly appeared beside the large head, startling him. Naruto's attention was caught on the fact that they were fucking hands! Not paws like one would expect from a fox or any other furry creature of the like. No, they were huge ass hands with fingers and thumbs that could probably pick things up and toss them around. Thumbs. The Kyubi no Kitsune had thumbs.

"So the Kyubi is just a giant rodent with man hands," Naruto remarked with wonder. This was the source of the dark and terrifying voice that had urged him to kill the Iwa shinobi for their transgressions. Odd. The image did not match the voice at all.

"I AM NOT A RODENT YOU USELESS FLESBAG!" the fox roared, its head suddenly coming closer to bash against the bars of the cage as water sloshed around. The cage that was being held shut by a simple strip of paper with a small word on it. 'Seal'. Not very original, but with all the obvious clues, he would say that it was a physical representation of his seal.

So he was in the seal? His mind? His stomach where the seal was? Fuinjutsu made no sense to him even though it could do awesome stuff. But Sasuke seemed to get it, and that was the reason why Naruto was even there. He wasn't using the chakra to hurt people this time, he was just going to pump chakra into the seal outside and hope for the best. There would be no tricking him into brutally annihilating everyone in the area. Because if the fox even dared, Naruto would just annoy it until it gave up. And Naruto was a master as annoying people.
"I need some of your chakra, Mokomoko-sama," the boy decided with a beaming grin. There was just something about his current situation that didn't worry him. The outside world held more terror actually.

The man hands kind of ruined the image for him. One moment it was an almost monstrous visage, and the next, the man hands came into view. What did a fox even need man hands for anyway? The heart stopping and petrifying stories he'd once heard, seemed to be more exaggeration than truth.

A thunderous growl that shook the room, sounded from the being's throat. Crimson eyes narrowed dangerously, pure hatred noticeable. Hatred was such a tiring emotion and Naruto had no time for that. "Why the hell would I aid you? You have no respect for your betters, you little fool. You're weaker than any other container I've had, and I do not aid the weak. So how about you be the mindless fleshbag you are and come over here so I can eat you?" The mouth spread apart again, fangs coated in strands of saliva.

"Yeah, no." Not in this lifetime at least. "You live in my body and had no problem shoving your chakra down my throat several weeks ago. You can just do it again. Otherwise, we might just die out there and then you'll have to wait several years before you become relevant again. Before you get a body again. Before you can make any use of your uber terrifying power. At least with me things stay interesting."

A scoff met his ears as the hands and head retreated from the bars. Arms were revealed and the great orange head with abnormally long rabbit ears - honestly, the Kyubi seemed more mix breed of whatevers than it did a fox - rested on folded forearms. Such a human-like position for a creature that seemed to despise humanity. Even the uninterested look in its eyes made it seem more human.

"Fine. I'll play along. Let's see how well you handle it, gaki. I'll laugh when you fail."

And then suddenly, a pool of red chakra seeped out from the creature's body, flowing past the bars of the cage and engulfing Naruto in a burning inferno before he had the chance to blink.

It had been mere seconds since Naruto had disappeared inside his own subconscious in order to draw upon the Kyubi's vast stores of chakra. In that amount of time, Sasuke and slit the throat of one Kiri ninja and broke the arm of another. Nine seconds had been all it took, and the air changed around them.

He could feel a shiver traveling down his spine and felt slightly ill. His hair ruffled in the wake of the energy pouring off of Naruto. And he knew that the Kyubi's chakra was the source because the activated seal didn't even allow natural wind into the bunker's area.

A bubbling substance leaked from the blond's skin, bright red in color and looking more threatening than anything he'd seen in a while. Naruto's body change as well. His whisker-like markings became jagged in shape and more defined. His gritted teeth lengthened and seemed to sharpen into fangs. His fingernails became elongated and deadly looking. And when Naruto looked up, Sasuke was struck by the missing blue.

Instead, a demonic red that could put the Sharingan to shame, stared back at him. Pupils slitted and countenance becoming animalistic in every sense of the word.

"I just force my chakra into the seal, right?" his voice was guttural and not all normal like Sasuke and gotten used to. However, he could tell that this Naruto was different that the one who had slaughtered the Iwa shinobi. He was in his own mind. And Sasuke didn't feel terrified in this instance.
"Do your worst, Naruto."

As Naruto bent to his task, laying his hands on the swirling lines of the seal, Sasuke whipped around to halt an attempt at cutting his head off. The sword that almost cleaved his head from his shoulders, was caught on the edge of his kunai. The push of the other's strength was obvious and required both of his hands to push back.

Behind him, he could feel the malicious chakra of the Kyubi being used for something good for once.

"W-what is that?" the Kiri shinobi demanded, eyes looking at Naruto in horror, foolishly leaving Sasuke's form.

Sasuke adjusted his grip and lashed out, kicking the man's knee to stagger him and twisting the fool's wrist to disarm him. The sword went flying and the kunai arced upward, cutting through the man's cheek and eye. With no mercy, Sasuke gripped the man's flailing arm and hoisted himself onto the enemy's shoulders. Without thinking, he stabbed his kunai into the space between the shoulder and the neck, and felt the body crumple beneath him.

His victory was short lived though. One second he was standing atop the body of his dead foe, and the next, he was staring at Naruto's face. Naruto had been behind him, with their backs almost touching, but now Sasuke found himself across from the blond, on the opposite side of the seal.

Blinking, he glanced up and found two forms close to Naruto. The back of Anbu member Minku, and a Kiri shinobi who was also wearing an animal mask and a cloak.

It was an Anbu from Kiri, he realized. Minku had used the Kawarimi with him in order to save him from being impaled by a master swordsman. And in doing so, they had taken the full brunt of the attack themself. He could see the long blade, covered in blood, sticking out of the Anbu's back, gleaming in the light of the moon. The blood looked black. Unnatural. A sight Sasuke had seen once before in his life.

The Kiri Anbu reached out and ripped the mask off Minku, revealing a dark head of hair.

In the same moment, the seal between Sasuke and Naruto, glowed red for a split second, before it started steaming. The ink and blood proceeded to sizzle and evaporate under the intense heat from the Kyubi's chakra. And the ground melted beneath the power of it. He'd expected an explosion, but that would work too. Especially when a ripple seemed to spread through the area.

To test out his theory, Sasuke turned and unleashed his favorite Katon Jutsu on the nearest enemy. Said enemy turned to ash on the spot. He smirked in response. He wasn't a genius for nothing after all. His plan had been perfect.

"Uchiha!"

Sasuke's head turned, searching for whoever called his name with such fear that he was certain he wasn't skilled enough to inspire. Not yet at least. He just needed a few years and competent teaching.

It was the Kiri Anbu, but they weren't looking at Sasuke. They were staring… at Minku.

"Hn."

Sasuke froze in place at the sound. The ever so familiar sound. He hadn't thought he'd ever hear it again. His mouth went dry immediately.
Minku reached up, seemingly not caring about the blade sticking through their gut, and removed the mask of the Anbu who had injured them. Pale hands gripped a terrified face, and suddenly, the foreign ninja was screaming bloody murder. A scream Sasuke had found even more familiar than Minku's voice.

The shinobi fell to the ground, form twitching madly and eyes staring ahead blankly. It was all so familiar and it made Sasuke's blood run cold. Sweat ran down his back, cold and terrifying in the wake of shivers he'd never wanted to feel again.

Naruto attempted to draw his attention by calling his name, but he was staring at Minku, eyes wide and horrified. "Who are you?" he demanded, raising his kunai once again, feeling his blood pumping madly through his veins. He would swear he could hear and feel his own heartbeat. It was so loud that the sounds of metal clashing with metal and jutsu being unleashed, were drowned out.

The gleaming sword retracted from Minku's body as the shinobi turned. Sasuke gaped as the familiar face finally turned to him. The owner of said face held the sword in a loose grip as the Mangekyo Sharingan stared into his soul. He knew those eyes and that face. He knew them better than anyone else ever could.

"Hello, Sasuke-kun."

It was Itachi.

Sarutobi Hiruzen heaved a great sigh and set the letter aside. Within, he had found some very interesting information from Kakashi, who had sent his ninken, Pakkun, back to deliver said message.

Uchiha Sasuke had found out that Minku was Itachi. Naruto had channeled the Kyubi's chakra all on his own and used it to destroy a Level Four, triple layer seal array. Mei was contacted by the ever elusive Kuro, and was given a piece of information that could very well help the Rebellion end the war. And finally, Tsunade was taking on Potta Uzumaki Karina as an Apprentice as she planned to begin a new class at the hospital upon her return. Yamanaka Ino, Hyuga Hinata, and Haruno Sakura would also be attending said class.

There was just so much to consider. First, he knew he would have to deal with the Sasuke situation upon their arrival. He hadn't expected Itachi's cover to be blown, but in a face off against a ninja of almost equal standing, and in a drastic attempt to save his little brother from pain and possible death, even Itachi would risk himself and his identity. Hiruzen couldn't fault him for that.

He needed to find out who Kuro was, and soon. He wanted to know their motives and their reasoning. Sure, wanting to protect Kakashi's team seemed to be the biggest requirement in order to receive their aid, but why? What was it about Kakashi and his Genin that made this person want to protect them?

Finally, the thought of the civil war ending soon was probably the best news he'd had in weeks. Even with all the information that Hoshigaki and Yakushi had, this certainly topped all of it.

"Someone get me Potta Hari," he ordered to the 'empty room'. One chakra signature disappeared instantly. The woman would want to know about what was going on. Also, as she had seemed to make it her duty to get Sasuke to open up, she would probably want to begin planning on how to deal with a volatile Uchiha who had been kept from some serious information.
A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

-We're getting so close to the Chunin Exams!
I have been waiting for this! I've compiled a
list of possible exams and am going to get my
mom's advice on which would be best for this.
Also, finally, the Itachi & Sasuke scene I have
been thinking about since forever! YES!

-I have also dreamed up a few cute scenes
for Hari and Kakashi and once we get everyone
back to Konoha, I can finally put them in the
fic! Hopefully they come out as cute as they
seemed in my mind. Sometimes things don't
always work out, but damn it all, I want these
to happen!

-Finally, Utakata was said to have died at some
point during The Purge of the Kekkei Genkai in
Kiri, after he defected. Since The Purge is still
going on in my fic, I decided to have him join
the Rebellion under Mei's attention. She has a
Kekkei Genkai and advocates for the support of
those with Kekkei Genkai, and no doubt would
be able to convince him to join them. After all,
he defected because of an assumed betrayal.
So in my fic, he's alive and his master had
actually explained his plan of extracting Saiken
before doing it, so no betrayed feelings in
this.

-I changed The Trojan Horse to fit my needs in
this. I already know the real story. If you didn't
notice that I had changed more than a nation's
name, you obviously don't know the story all
too well either.
Sasuke blinked furiously when he opened his eyes. The light overhead was far too bright to be normal, and it made his eyes sting terribly. While his eyes calmed down, he took quick stock of the situation he was in. He was laying on something hard and slightly rough in texture. A wartime cot if he was correct. It even smelled like a burlap sack and was one of the most uncomfortable things he'd ever touched. And since Sasuke had come into physical contact with all forms of fecal matter ever since becoming a Genin, thanks to those lovely D-Ranks, it was saying something.

The area around him smelled heavily of antiseptic and focused chakra. He could pick out a variety of other scents, including heavy amounts of sake, nature based perfumes, and what he was certain was chocolate of some sort. Finally, Sasuke could hear murmurings from afar off, the telltale noise of
shinobi sandals that didn't fit someone correctly as they would squeak obscenely if too large every
time the person moved, and the breathing of several people within close proximity to him. It was all
too much and yet not enough for him to handle.

His mind put it all together. He was in the medical tent in the Rebellion camp. He'd been there before
when hiding from Kakashi's shit training with the hounds from hell. The problem was that he didn't
remember being injured in any way, so there was no reason for him to be in the medic area, let alone
on a cot, in the least. So why was he there, he wondered. Why did he need to be taking up space that
someone else with an actual injury could obviously need? His body wasn't aching so there was no
need for him to be there. A light headache was not enough.

He tried to open his eyes once more, finding the light overhead to not be so damn annoying the
second time, though there was a slight amount of strain still. He ignored it in favor of sitting up and
taking in his surroundings, and everything came rushing back to him the moment he laid eyes upon
the one dark figure who sat on the other side of the room, directly across from where he lay. Said
dark figure who still sat as he used to, and stared with the same blank face that had always annoyed
him as a child.

Sasuke's mind took stock of the fact that his Genin team was also in the room, and that his sensei was
there. He didn't even care that Naruto's cousin or the Tsunade woman were there as well, alongside
the Jonin Honsho and the Head of T&I. While he noticed all of these important things, they just
weren't important enough for him to divert his main attention away from… Him. The very person
whom Sasuke had dedicating a good portion of his life toward. The person that had told him to
become stronger through hatred.

Uchiha Itachi was sitting across the room from him. He was the furthest away from Sasuke, with
seven people in between their positions. Sasuke took note of the fact that he wasn't cuffed or tied
down, which made his pulse rise without his permission. He, who had slaughtered an entire clan in
the course of a single evening, was not being held like a prisoner. He, who was certainly a dangerous
individual, was resting among their group as if… as if he belonged there always. As if he had the
right to be there and that this was some friendly gathering.

Something arose inside of him. Anger was definitely the first thing. It was forced and hot beneath his
skin and made his right hand clench into a tight fist. Something he had become familiar with over
the years along with the sharp pain of his nails digging into the meat of his palm. But the second
emotion that rose just as quickly, conflicted him immediately. For some reason, even after all the
trauma and suffering that he had put Sasuke through, his big brother was right there, looking at him
like he used to. Like he mattered still despite the words 'testing my mettle' ringing through his head.
And Sasuke was uncomfortably reminded of the fact that his hero-worship of Itachi had never truly
gone away it seemed.

How could he still feel such positive emotions for such a person? It made no sense! Itachi was bad,
and Sasuke had spent the past several years trying to reach the level necessary in order to kill him for
his crimes. And here he was, dressed in full Konoha Anbu vesture, looking at him like he was the
most precious thing in existence. Which was wrong. It shouldn't be like this. Their meeting once
again should not have been with Itachi taking a hit for him, and the man should not be staring at him
like that.

He wouldn't believe it was Itachi had he not remembered the eyes. No one could just replicate the
effects of a Sharingan. Not even Itachi's special Sharingan and the abilities it possessed could be
replicated. Abilities Sasuke had come to know all too personally that night many years ago. Abilities
that not even a Genjutsu would be able to copy. Doujutsu weren't something easily stolen either,
especially since there weren't any other Uchiha to steal from, and Sasuke would never believe that
someone bested Itachi. It would be an insult to not only him but the entire dead clan as well.

Itachi had been on the mission with their group the entire time, he realized after a moment of consideration. The Hokage had added him to their group at the last minute, but it was obvious that Kakashi knew who he was from the very beginning. Anbu Operative Minku, which was no Itachi’s former positions. They gave him the mink mask because giving him the weasel would have been too obvious even to Sasuke, and they couldn't afford for his cover to be blown before the mission began. And it was so frustrating!

Why was he allowed to accompany them in aiding the Rebellion? Why did the other Anbu and Kakashi accept him as a part of their group easily? It didn't make any sense!

"Sasuke, we have much to discuss," Kakashi stated solemnly after Sasuke had remained quiet for several moments after his awakening. Not even a sigh had come from him. The man appeared to be wary, but willing to talk, and Sasuke wanted answers.

"Why?" the teen demanded, voice clear despite having been unconscious for who knew how long. He needed answers and he wanted them immediately.

His sensei hadn't received his full attention yet. And he couldn't. Not with Itachi in the room. There was a strong urge to shove a lightning covered kunai down his throat and choke him with it. The lethargy he was experiencing and the memory of Minku taking a blade through the guts for him, stopped from him making any attempts, though. Also, his weapons had been removed, but he could have easily fashioned a lightning kunai with enough concentration, so he wasn't helpless. He just needed answers and while he might have just jumped into it a few months back, he actually decided to stop and think now.

A gravelly voice, one that he recognized as Ino’s father, spoke up next. "Sasuke-san, what do you know about a man named Shimura Danzo?"

Danzo. One of the Hokage's advisors on the Council. Under investigation for something to do with the Konoha orphans for the past several months or so he was told. Might be dead, he didn't know or care enough to find out. What did the life of one decrepit old fool matter to him? "I know enough," he murmured, not understanding why he was relevant to the situation.

The grave faces he was forced to look at, put him on edge instantly. Why else bring him up unless he played a part in the situation?

Nara Shikaku, Jonin Honsho, stepped a little closer, and held up a scroll that he proceeded to unravel and read aloud with a dull tone. "Shimura Danzo, last of the Shimura clan, War Hawk of Konoha, Leader of the underground organization Ne, was found guilty of several thousand accounts of kidnapping clan children, aiding and abetting known criminals across the nations, torture, identity theft, larceny, conspiracy, voluntary manslaughter, forgery, fraud, extortion, nationwide embezzlement, vandalism, treason, and clan line theft among other charges.

"His actions include the kidnapping and brainwashing of various clan children not only from Konoha, but other countries as well. The most to be under his thumb however, were Hyuga and Uchiha children."

A very uncomfortable feeling settled in Sasuke's stomach as the list of charges was read off. And despite the bored tone of voice the man had used, he could tell that the Nara Head was very unhappy with the words on the scroll. And rightly so. Kidnapping children from clans and committing line theft was a big problem. All the other stuff was too, but the clan things went against so many Konoha laws. There was no wonder the old man had gotten into trouble if that was
what he was dealing in over the years.

But how did it tie in with Itachi and his actions on… that night?

It seemed his big brother was the next to speak though, saving Sasuke from having to think too much about a time he would prefer to forget at present. "Due to my rising fame in the clan, I was entrusted with the elder's plans and ideas. They were unhappy with their hand, feeling as if they were being disrespected by the village. So they planned a coup to take back what they believed was rightly theirs."

No. Impossible. That would be treason. It would be foolish and dangerous. Uchiha were not foolish. Uchiha did not do stupid things, it was like asking to be made a mockery of.

But Kakashi and Shikaku and Inoichi were all very much somber and did not look to be joking. Because this wasn't a matter that one joked about.

The Nara held the scroll up once more and proceeded to read more of what was written therein. "Shimura Danzo, Konohagakure Prisoner #6920170. After weeks of thorough evaluations, we revealed his slanderous actions toward the Uchiha. For the past few decades, he'd been slowly but surely undermining their influence by spreading lies and false stories. On the night of the Kyubi attack, he forbade any Uchiha for assisting in the evacuation of the village, and threatened to have the clan held under house arrest. Afterward, the clan was forced to the outskirts of the village in order to be watched easier. He then went on to spread more lies, saying that the Kyubi was only in Konoha because Uchiha forced it to attack.

Eventually, the growing resentment toward the clan, from the civilians, was enough for the elders to plan a coup."

What. The. Fuck? What the hell was wrong with the old bastard? Who did things like that? Even for shinobi that was fucked up! Just because one of their ancestors was an asshole who didn't like not getting his way, didn't mean all Uchiha were like that!

Itachi nodded. "Danzo's organization was originally supposed to be an offset of Anbu. We have specialist Jonin who take the term Tokubetsu. We had specialist Anbu, who took the name Ne. For a time, the Foundation was legal. They had supposedly acquired recruits legally and morally under the direction of Sandaime-sama, but over time, Danzo grew to love power and despise positive emotions like those Sandaime-sama supports. And when Kirigakure began their deadly graduation exam that labeled them Chigiri no Sato, Danzo liked their style and began warping the original use of Ne to his liking," said Itachi, a frown in place. "He quickly descended into immoral practices and unnecessary murder of children. Even going so far as to mutate what was once a special program and turn it into a charade of deceit."

Kakashi sighed. "He was crafty," the Jonin stated quietly. "He knew what to say to sway you to his side. He knew how to force you if necessary. Sandaime-sama put an end to Ne when it resulted in Danzo trying to have him assassinated, so he could take over as Hokage. But Danzo had grown Ne so much that the recruits he'd returned to Hokage-sama's hands, weren't even a tenth of what he truly had control over. And he continued his dirty business down in the roots of Konoha, doing despicable things and causing international incidents from the safety of his hideout. There's proof of his misdeeds exacerbating many events that led to the declaration of the Third Shinobi World War."

Fuck. One man. One man who had managed to gain enough corrupted power and managed to pull off such terrible things. It was atrocious. Revolting. Sasuke shivered, thinking about how such a person had existed within his home, unchecked for however long. The lives of so many children had been in danger because of Shimura Danzo.
Shikaku sighed and shook his head in disappointment. "Danzo was kept on the Council simply because of his respected position and how invaluable he'd been over the years. When he'd learned of the planned Uchiha coup from Itachi-san, he demanded for genocide, while Hokage-sama wanted to talk it out peacefully with Fugaku-san and the elders."

And that was it. That was where Sasuke's lungs decided they no longer wanted to work. It was Danzo behind it all? It was Danzo who ordered such a thing? It was that depraved freak who was behind all of it?

He cut a look to Itachi and saw the sadness in the man's eyes. After a moment of enduring Sasuke's penetrating gaze, he added his own recollection of the events. The words Sasuke realized he valued above the others. "Danzo approached me and threatened the entire clan if I did not do as ordered. It was either kill them all and leave you alive and free of his influence, or all of us die. I chose the one I preferred. Then threatened to release Konoha's most valuable information to every other hidden village should he not keep away from you."

Then a glint appeared in Itachi's coal black eyes. It was the most dangerous thing Sasuke had ever seen. Even more so than the Iwa shinobi from that one time back home. "Danzo was unaware that I had been in contact with someone over the past few days. Someone who decided to call himself Uchiha Madara and who had wicked designs on the clan for whatever grudge he held against them."

Madara was the Uchiha who helped the Shodaime Hokage build Konoha. They had worked together in uniting so many clans into one place and bringing the military up to something worthwhile. He was also the ass who threw a fit when he didn't get his way, and started a fight with the man that resulted in the Valley of the End being created, The Kyubi being drawn to Konoha for the first time, and Madara fleeing Konoha altogether with his tail between his legs. Uncouth behavior that wasn't befitting an Uchiha.

"On the night of the massacre, I took the man's offer to help me with my… problem. He handled the majority of the clan while I handled the upper district and our parents. And you." Itachi's mouth twitched into a sneer. "I had thought that I would influence you to become stronger. That you would come after me and regain the honor of the clan by bringing my head back and proving that you were loyal to Konoha and that the clan reputation could be salvaged through your good hands. Upon revelation, and the words of one Potta Hari, I have come to understand that that was not a good plan."

Hari-san?

Kakashi placed a hand on Sasuke's shoulder. "Koneko-chan was the one who managed to get the ball rolling on Danzo's trial, so to speak. Danzo tried to take some of the children from the orphanage like he had been doing for the past two decades, and she would not stand for it. Her actions brought his actions into the light, and revealed all of this to us. She has been kept abreast of the situation because it's so far reaching and extends to too many areas, that we can't keep her out of the barest parts of it."

"She is strange," Itachi added, much to Naruto's indignation, proven by the blond's loud yell of 'hey!'. A feeling that Ino and Karin also seemed to agree with as they glared at Sasuke's older brother. And Sasuke. Well Sasuke was too busy trying to keep up with various lines of thought to be too annoyed over that. At present, while Hari-san's help was appreciated, he cared more about finding out the details of why his clan had been brutally slaughtered. What had been going through Danzo's head when he gave the order?

Naruto stepped forward and demanded, "Who is this Madara person and how could he kill so many people so quickly? Weren't there like, hundreds of Uchiha wandering around? I find it a little weird
that this guy just managed to walk into the Uchiha Compound without anyone noticing, and off everybody without any trouble."

Itachi stood then, making Sasuke and Naruto both tense only slightly. Kakashi's hand on his shoulder helped keep him calm though, while Ino reined Naruto in with a hand on his shoulder. Kakashi seemed to understand Sasuke better than he originally thought. He wouldn't admit to liking the fact that Kakashi was so concerned for him.

"Madara has a jutsu that allows him to become intangible in a way. He can disappear into nothing and reappear as if warping himself into existence. It is soundless, scentless, and takes less than a second to occur. He can kill all of Konoha should he desire to do so, which is a problem."

"What about Danzo?"

"Dead," said Inoichi firmly. "He was beheaded and his brain is still being experimented on. It'll take ages to finally get everything out of him. In the meantime, all of his Ne operatives are in our control and are being rehabilitated to the best of our ability."

With a nod, Sasuke turned his attention back to Itachi, who was looking less tense than he had before. Sasuke recognized his expressions and body language even after five years. Discomfort but also resignation. He was certain the same emotions were played out on his own face.

"That is not all," Itachi said after a moment of silence passed between the group. Kami-sama what else could there possibly be? "It appears that Danzo had kept a number of Uchiha from going out on missions the night of the massacre. It would explain why the entire clan was in the village that night. Those very Uchiha have been kept alive, and according to Hokage-sama, are in T&I Headquarters, being evaluated with the other Ne operatives."

'Uchiha have been kept alive'. It was ringing through his mind. Over and over, the words he never thought he would hear, had been on repeat. There were others. They weren't alone. Reviving the clan wasn't going to rest on only his shoulders now.

"How many?" he asked, looking toward Inoichi since he should have the answers as he was the Head of the department in charge of the situation.

The man sighed. "The first group of Ne operatives had two. The second group had three. They might have located another hidden group since we've been on this mission, though we'll find out later. Currently, we have knowledge of three Uchiha men, and two Uchiha women. All with awakened Sharingan. All blank slates that are willing to take orders from their leader, thanks to Danzo's inhumane training."

They weren't alone. There were more Uchiha. They weren't alone. And somehow, despite how terrible this day had started, he was feeling a lot better than he thought he would. Because had Potta Hari not stood up for the orphanage inhabitants, then this would never have been revealed. Who knew what would have happened had Danzo been left unchecked.

The woman managed to change things, even if it was just from a tiny bit of interaction. He didn't know how she did it, but he w be forever grateful for it.

They weren't alone. And he and Itachi needed to figure some things out between them.

Jiraiya always wondered if it was possible for him to love anyone other than Tsunade. Of course the possibilities were incredibly low, and he was very well aware of that, but it seemed like someone had come along to capture his interest and seriously make him reconsider some things. And as this was
something he hadn't put much thought into in his life, it was a massive situation!

It was not love, but certainly a good deal of lust and a healthy dose of interest and appreciation, which could become anything at any time under the right circumstances. So he wasn't all that shocked once he realized that he had a bit of a crush. And what an astounding thing it was! Jiraiya of the Sannin, slayer of the hearts of thousands of women, already in his fifties, and he had somehow developed another crush even at his age. It just goes to show that age cannot stop the heart.

Potta Hari was interesting, and as such, she garnered a lot of Jiraiya's attention. Whether she knew it or not. Ever since she and her clan member had been brought into the investigation of Danzo, Kabuto, and Kisame, he'd paid even more attention to them. And it was almost impossible not to pay them any mind.

To his amazing fortune, Hari-hime read his works. She actually had a small collection in Naruto's kitchen, that rested on a shelf that had been set up on the wall near the window. Three Icha Icha books rested thereon, new and in good condition, but obviously used. That time with Kakashi in the kitchen wasn't even the tip of the iceberg. He'd gotten some more info from Anko over their relationship. They read Icha Icha together, shared ideas, debated on which parts were best, and apparently teased each other endlessly over it. And Jiraiya had Anko of all people to thank for introducing the foreign woman to his proud work of literature.

She was spunky, and had courage, especially if she was befriending shinobi left and right and now blinking an eye at their actions. Also, she had admitted to wanting to hit him, and that was perfection. He'd always been a glutton for punishment so long as it came from a beautiful woman!

Recently, he had been observing her interactions with everyone in her life. And they did not disappoint.

With Naruto she had been understanding and open. She treated him like he was her son, though she referred to him as a little brother figure. Still, she did his laundry, cooked him food, taught him how to fix the tears in his clothes, how to cook for himself, and clean the smart way. Naruto learned how to read better from her, and she was even supportive of his pranking, having advised him on how to plot better and now get caught so easily. She was everything the kid needed in his life, and had assumed the role easily.

With Uchiha Sasuke she was quiet and calm. She seemed to understand the boy's need for attention, but also his need for independence. She was gentle with handling him, and respected his personal space unlike many others who bothered him. Though she always made sure to include him in everything, and went out of her way - according to Sarutobi-sensei - to get him and Naruto in a friendship. She never let him remain alone for too long and was an open ear should he require it. She made sure that he knew he had her support. She was just more subtle about it.

Yamanaka Ino seemed to view the woman as an older sister. From what he'd gathered, she'd taken it upon herself to help Hari-hime train in Taijutsu so she could protect herself from any threats. Something about Naruto pointing out that her Kekkei Genkai didn't seem to work well if she couldn't see her enemy, so she should know self-defense. And that lead to Ino talking the woman under her wing and instructing her in all the ways Academy shinobi were taught, throwing extra bits from the kunoichi classes in as well.

And Hari-hime did not hold back as she carefully instructed the blonde on proper manners when dealing with the 'Last Uchiha'. She was so subtle that the Yamanaka Heiress didn't even notice that her mannerisms started to change the more she was exposed to Hari-hime. And it was a good change according to Anko.
Hatake Kakashi was probably the most introverted individual that Jiraiya had ever met. After everything the kid had gone through in his life, it wasn't surprising that he'd ended up the way he was. Besides, most Jonin ended up having an odd quirk or two. It took guts to walk about with a book that featured explicit adult content and not blink an eye when confronted over it.

He'd kept tabs on the boy. He was Minato's student after all. Basically Jiraiya's grand-student! And Jiraiya had ended up teaching him a few things now and then, so it was perfectly fine to keep watch. Once again thank to Anko, he'd learned that Hari-hime was very open in her interactions with the man. When any of the shinobi she knew, did ninja type things around her, she'd merely blinked. Except the Shunshin. She hadn't gotten used to that according to Sarutobi-sensei. But otherwise, she was an oddball in terms of civilians.

Anko even said that when she licked the woman, Hari-hime licked her back and later informed her that she tasted like blood. It was just so unusual and of course that would grab anyone's attention! And yet somehow, after several little meetings and a game in which they tried to trick the other into revealing their real names, they'd become friends. And if they flirted all the time, like they had in Hari-hime's kitchen, then he wasn't shocked that the friendship had bloomed suddenly and easily between them. She was a one of a kind woman!

She read Icha Icha for kami-sama's sake! She actually liked it and was engaged in it.

With Kakashi, she was playful, but knew when to be serious. She seemed to approve of him as a person, and liked teasing him. The feelings were mutual from what he'd seen and gathered. Anko was certain they'd get together at some point in the near future. He wasn't foolish enough to take that kind of bet.

After all, he might be a little smitten, but Kakashi had an advantage over him, and he knew at least subconsciously that he didn't have a chance, so he wouldn't really try anything. Besides, she might not appreciate real advances since he was more than twice her age. But some teasing and light flirtations wouldn't go wrong. So long as he was careful.

After all, she had used her Kekkei Genkai to throw Kakashi out a window. He didn't want to deal with that.

Jiraiya's sensei liked the woman, even if she was a threat level higher than what was usually allowed around other civilians. Still, she headed the orphanage despite being monitored constantly, and she truly cared for the children. It was her steadfast loyalty to Naruto, Team Seven, the orphans, and even the Hokage himself, that had earned the man's trust. And as such, Jiraiya knew he could trust her as well.

After all, the woman had given Naruto what he always needed, because she saw herself in him, and didn't want him to go through what she had to go through. The woman would die for Naruto and his friends. She'd die for the orphans. She'd die for the friends she'd managed to make in the past several months. So long as the people she cared for were around, she would remain loyal and willing to help.

Finally, there was just something about her. Far beyond the odd Kekkei Genkai. Not even her foreign features, which were strangely attractive anyway, were it. Maybe it was her attitude, but overall, not having a crush seemed stupid and impossible.

So Jiraiya, in hopes of lessening the woman's worries over the Kiri Rebellion, decided to make a move or two. And no one was surprised when he swaggered his way into the Jonin Standby Station, looking like a man on a mission. And his mission was easily over when he laid yes on the woman he'd been looking for.
"Ah! Hari-hime, it's an honor to lay eyes on a beauty such as yourself! I am a most lucky man!" He was laying it on extra thick and ignored Anko's exaggerated rolled eyes. It was fun to be spontaneous and dramatic. How could life ever be interesting without excitement?

Hari-hime turned her unique eyes on him and smirked. She genuinely looked amused. "What do you want, Jiraiya-san?"

"Can't a healthy male appreciate such a beauty as yourself without having ulterior motives?" he asked, wiggling his brows flirtatiously. He'd even be okay if she tried to hit him. In fact, he'd probably pay her to do it. He was a bit of a masochist in a way. So long as it was a beautiful woman doing it at least.

Anko snorted loudly. "Hari-chan wouldn't fall for any of that shit, Jiraiya-sama. She'd sooner sleep with me than she would with an old man like you."

Slightly offended, he was prepared to defend his legendary skills. But it turned out that he didn't need to.

Hari-hime giggled into her hand and rolled her eyes again. "Now Anko, his age wouldn't mean anything in the equation. If I wasn't annoyed with him, I'd probably jump at the offer."

There was stunned silence in the station as every shinobi within the walls turned to stare at the woman, who looked unrepentant as she stared up at Jiraiya, a smirk on her face. She was an angel, he decided. There was no other way to explain how such a perfect being existed. She was some form of holy being and needed to be praised forever and a day! And he was so jealous that Kakashi and Anko met her first!

Anko didn't seem as willing to stare in silence like the rest of her fellow shinobi. The woman flattened herself against the sofa as best as possible and sent Hari-hime a horrified look as she pouted up a storm. "You would honestly fuck the old hermit?" And Jiraiya was hopeful for the answer, leaning closer just a bit because he was curious and needy.

A shrug was the woman's first response. "He's a skilled shinobi who would be able to keep up. Besides, he isn't that old. And he writes erotica. Obviously he knows what he's doing. It wouldn't be bad or anything, I just have a small grudge for now."

Angel! He'd repeat it to the heavens! He'd shout it from atop the Hokage Monument!

Hari-hime wrapped an arm around Anko's shoulders, pulling the woman closer and giving him ideas for his next book while doing so. "Don't worry, Anko. I'm sure you're as skilled as he is and you aren't even on my nerves."

There was a moment where the two stared one another down, eyes dilated to the extreme, before they both disappeared in a Shunshin, leaving the shinobi to their own assumptions as the puffs of smoke dissipated.

And Jiraiya cracked open a new notebook, intent upon making this next book about a woman inspired by Hari-hime. A brunette beauty with eyes greener than any stone, and an enchanting air about herself. A woman who liked men and women and would love whoever she wanted no matter what. He'd never used a brunette as a main character before, and it seemed like the perfect thing to do.

The next book in the series would be a hit. He'd call it Icha Icha Yononaka(イチャイチャ世の中-Make Out World). Hari-hime and Kakashi would even get special edition versions up front. He'd
love to see how long it took for either of them to notice who the story was about. Perhaps Tsunadehime would like to take up a bet with him when she returned?

Itachi had been brought along on the mission for many reasons. The primary one being his skills. Having a currently S-Ranked ninja on their side, would definitely help the war efforts. Another reason, was that he had personally been in contact with Yagura before.

During his time as a member of Akatsuki, he had two partners. Both former members of the Shinobigatana Shichinin Shu. Of course his first partner had been killed in the altercation between them and Yagura, but it still counted. After all, he had a grasp of some of Yagura's abilities because of such a meeting, and under Nara Shikaku's orders, he revealed himself to Terumi Mei alongside the man.

"I am not going to even question your involvement with Konoha though I am certain it would be quite the tale. Instead, I am not going to overlook the boon you present. Anything you can say about Yagura's abilities will be what helps the upcoming battle."

And so Itachi revealed everything he remember from the Version 2 Biju Chakra Shroud that Yagura was perfectly capable of controlling, to his abilities with his darling club.

"This is alarming, yet also very helpful, Itachi-san. According to a report sent by Hokage-dono, Yagura is currently being controlled by a masked ninja calling himself 'Kaguro'. From the minds of both Yakushi Kabuto and Hoshigaki Kisame, it has been revealed that Yagura has been under Akatsuki control for years, and that 'Kaguro' possesses a Sharingan."

He twitched at the very mention of such a thing. Leaning forward, he asked stoically, "Was there a physical description of the man?"

Mei nodded and held up a scroll. "Tall, spiked black hair, wearing a long black cloak. Until recent years, he'd worn a greyish/purple mask that was covered in black, flame-like markings. Now his mask is orange with a swirl design and a hole allowing the right eye to be seen. Further information states that he has the ability to simply materialize out of thin air and never leaves Yagura's side. Hoshigaki took orders from him directly on multiple occasions, or so the memories state."

It was as he feared. "Madara," Itachi stated firmly. Or better known among the Akatsuki circles, Tobi. A man pretending to be a fool in order to slip by unnoticed amount some of the world's most powerful shinobi.

Akatsuki had control over Mizu no Kuni for far longer than Hokage-sama had assumed. And this made things troublesome, because Madara was a troublesome individual. Madara was somehow controlling the Yondaime Mizukage, and Itachi would bet that it was a Genjutsu, because the Sharingan was capable of anything.

Mei summed up all of their feelings in one word. "Shit."

He had to concur, because this made things a lot more problematic. "He is the unspoken leader of Akatsuki. And he is also the one who took out his vendetta against the Uchiha that night many years ago. My mission was to join him in a sense, but for simplicity's sake, Hokage-sama is aware of everything that happened."

After all, if he wanted to acquit himself from the conclusions among the world, then he had to spread the news. Starting with Konoha's new allies was the best option. Because despite what many people would lead others to believe, shinobi were quite the talkative lot, and loved gossip. It was training,
battle, possible-war, training, battle, and possible-war in a vicious cycle. There had to be some form of entertainment or else they’d expire from boredom.

The news would eventually spread, and then the realization that he was still loyal to Konoha, would make others wary of confronting the village. It was all a power play, but Itachi would play until he drew his last breath.

"Ao, Chojuro, Zabuza, we are going to need a better plan for the siege just in case," said Mei, looking at her three best men. The ones she always kept at her side no matter what happened.

Ao nodded and sighed in obvious relief that wasn't common for his temperament. "At least now things are not so harried."

Mei’s eyes twitched as she sent the man a look that could probably execute on the spot should it become any more steely. "What was that about me not being married?"

"Wh-what? But I didn-"

"Ao, shut up or I'll kill you."

Itachi had to wonder just what Konoha was getting into by allying itself to these odd people.

Hari and Luna were being put to work, and not even in a fun way. Hari was not someone who disliked working of any sort, having gotten used to having to work for what she wanted over the years, but this kind of thing wasn’t her strongest skill. And it was always more fun or interesting to work in a field you were already knowledgeable in instead of having to rely on the instructions of another. Even if that other person was Luna.

She could use Occlumency to its most basic ability. Entering someone's mind and rifling through their brain, and then asking for Death's help because she wasn’t learned enough to know how to do much else on her own. She had not been taught how to rearrange memories, or remove memories and implant false memories. Nor did she know all the other intricacies that dealt with the mind because it was such a bloody confusing subject and as Severus Snape had once stated, there was no such thing as mind reading, because likening a mind to something as simple as a book was impossible. Meaning it was hard as hell.

But this was she and Luna's job now! In order to make Yakushi Kabuto and Hoshigaki Kisame upstanding shinobi once again, who were loyal to their own villages and willing to fight for their leaders, it meant that they needed to mess with some things, and while she didn't agree to it at first, it was either remove the bad so they can still live, or kill them. And as the Hokage wasn't for the killing like Inoichi had seemed to be in his notes, she had to agree with his side more than the other offer. Though Hoshigaki would be offered back with a slight aversion to ever attacking/betraying Konoha in any manner of course.

After all, had it been back in her world and during her war, she probably would have done the same thing. Because they still had their uses and getting rid of someone when they could help later on, was stupid. In fact, she done that when sparing Zabuza and his apprentice. They went on to help fight in a civil war that who hopefully end with the useless slaughtering of people who were born different. So while not liking it half of the time, she understood the need of it. That was why she held her tongue over the rehabilitation of Danzo's shinobi.

"What exactly am I doing?" she asked aloud, awaiting a response from her director.

The room was empty save for a single slab of metal. She didn't know what kind, but it didn't matter.
It was the only coloured thing in the white room. And the body laying across it, was unresponsive, as it should be. From what she had been told, the boy had managed to train himself into an incredibly fast healing ability. His body had naturally healed him of any injury he got, at seven times the speed a normal healing would take. This was learned from experimentation and observation, or so she had been informed. Or more bluntly put, torture.

They also had to keep him at a particular level of chakra so that he couldn't awaken or struggle or interfere with their plans. Plans regarding draining him of all the information he possessed.

She would thank Circe, Merlin, and even Hecate that she was particularly talented when it came to picking up verbal instruction. If she had been forced to read this entire process from a book, she would have fucked it up somehow. But with Luna there, willing to dictate everything to her, she would no doubt be able to get it over and done with. And the more she had to do it, the easier it would be.

Luna's voice was calm and soothing as it dictated her course of action. And paying attention to that, plus keeping herself anchored in someone else's mind, was difficult. It was like trying to play Quidditch as a Chaser while eating an ice lolly without dropping anything on yourself or getting hit by the bludgers. In other words, hell. Still, Hari placed a hand on the boy's head, and injected his mind with her magic. She found herself standing in a new place, in what she realised was his own mind.

"You are going to follow the golden strand that you see," came Luna's voice from a distance. "Now depending on the amount of trauma, the gold might not be as visible as it would be in other beings. The gold is the life force. It is connected to every important part of the body, anchored by chakra. It's the same for our magic, which keeps our essence anchored to our bodies. If hit with an AK, the golden strand with snap in the area closest to where the spell hit, making the life force dissipate and setting the soul free. And when the soul leaves the body, the magic or chakra then scatters, which is why the body would die because it would be incapable of going on without what it always had. Bodies can live without souls, as evidenced by those who have been Kissed, but they can't handle being chakraless and magicless."

Interesting. She had never actually considered what happened when the Killing Curse connected with its victim. She just assume one-hit-kill meant what it meant and that was all. But of course there was some kind of extra facts involved. And of course those facts were not taught to anybody in or out of Hogwarts, because why would someone need to know such intricate details about one of the Unforgivable Curses? And daring to ask would only bring negative attention.

She rolled her eyes and proceeded down the pathway where she could see the gold disappear into the floor and stretch on ahead.

Kabuto's mind was a lot different than her own, which she had spent decades mastering, and even then, it still wasn't perfection. But his mind was interesting in the way he had structured it. A hospital with the usual decorations. Clean white floors, atrocious wallpaper in a disgusting shade of pea green, and iridescent light bulbs overhead. It even smelled like a hospital, and she hated it immediately, having come to dislike any for of health care facility after the drama she went through because of Magical Britain.

The strand Luna spoke of, which wouldn't be visible to a non-Legilimens, seemed to be woven into the grout between the tiles on the floor. And it stretched outward. "I found the golden strand," she announced, moving to follow it to where it lead. "It isn't very bright and it's been almost melded into the floor and if my eyesight was like what it used to be, I'd be done for in here." The little golden flickers reminded her of a Golden Snitch, and since she knew how to keep track of one of those, this
shouldn't be too difficult.

Luna gave a considering hum. "That strand will lead you to the center of his mind and where it originates from. It should be brighter at the source, so be careful. When you get there, tell me and I will guide you."

Now, Hari knew that in the ninja world, they didn't have many mind walkers, so there wasn't a great fear of one's secrets being found out. But people could still build their own mental defences since it was simply good training in general to learn how to keep oneself calm and composed. And Kabuto seemed to be one of the people who did, as Hari nearly found herself impaled by various traps and weapons that seemed to spring out of nowhere.

Being injured in someone else's mind would not hurt her physically. That was a whole point. This wasn't a physical thing. It was a spiritual and mental thing. She would be enforcing her will and spirit over his in order to mould him to her desires. Basically, any kind of damage received this way, would result in her own mental trauma. And yes, she could handle a bit more at present, that didn't mean she wanted to go through more PTSD Relief. Not Luna's or Inoichi's versions. Both were shite.

The part she needed to concentrate on, was watching closely for any traps. Such as the tiles suddenly disappearing in some places, to be replaced with inky black voids that she didn't want to even personally get to know. Two tiles dropping suddenly would be enough for her to be sucked beneath the black, which would then take ages to break free of. So not only did she have to follow the gold, she had to avoid the black while she was at it. And it was fucking annoying.

Honestly, for someone unaware of the existence of Occlumency, he'd done a splendid job of protecting his mind. And it made her a little sad that they were going to be destroying that. Everything she touched as she followed the golden strand, would disappear once she was finished, and it was a shame that this had to be their course of action. If only that Danzo creep didn't exist at all, and Hari wouldn't have to remove someone's entire personality just so they could be around other people and be allowed to live.

And here was where 'the greater good' came into play. Because it was for the greater good of the village that Kabuto remain under Konoha's control. It was for the children. The children of the village were the future, and the more of Danzo's unchecked minions that ran loose, the more chance there was of the numbers of children dwindling. And Hari had her own children to worry about, so while she didn't give a bleeding damn about the village as a whole, since they treated Naruto so terribly, she cared about her kids and the kids who were friends with her little brother figure. For them, she told herself. For them she would do this. Because sometimes one's own morals had no business in the situation, but that didn't mean she couldn't try to justify the action to herself. Besides, it wasn't like it was a lie after all. She had sworn to protect the orphans as well as Naruto and his friends.

The gold disappeared behind a pair of double doors that were padlocked with chains for added protective measure. Those wouldn't bother her though. Laying a hand on the twisted bits of metal, she watched as they began to fade. Her force of will was much stronger than Kabuto's at present because she was awake and aware of herself, whereas he was asleep and any control he had remained sluggish and weak. It was hard to fight when unconscious.

When the chains and lock disintegrated, the doors flew open, revealing a room filled with only a bright golden light. It was so bright she felt blinded for a second, unable to see the details in anything else around her. Her eyes stung.
"Luna, I've found it," she announced, squinting through the light in hopes of seeing something else.

Her friend gave a low hum. "That is the nucleus of the mind. Seeping your magic into it will allow you full control of his mental faculties which will then give way to the encephalon's functional abilities. For a time, it will feel as if you are one being, but you cannot let his emotions and thoughts to pervade your mind. This is where your magic and will matter most. You will need to keep yourself separate from him as you work to strip his mind of the components Hokage-sama wants gone."

And therein lay the crux. Much of Kabuto's abilities were developed because he interacted with everything the Sandaime wanted gone. So removing Danzo and Orochimaru was already bad enough, but she had to remove those, study them carefully, and then rebuild the memories with better endings and replace everything problematic with what the Hokage had extensively written out for Luna to read to her. By the time she would be finished, Yakushi Kabuto would be a different man. She just hoped it was the right decision.

Taking a deep breath, Hari reached out and latched onto the glowing orb of energy and surrounded it with her magic, which was lavender in comparison to the gold. The pull was there instantly, trying to pull her in and keep her tied to it. The energy was insistent, but Hari was even more so, able to deny it what it wanted, while forcing it to follow her orders instead.

It was like playing tug o' war. And Hari was winning. She was intimately familiar with the workings of her own mind, after spending time meditating under Death's suggestion for the past few decades. She could tell herself apart from others easily, so keeping Kabuto's clingy mind at a workable distance, was easy enough.

He was like a marionette in a sense, when the give finally came. She now had full control over his mind and could at any time, stop something if she wanted. The idea made her a little uncomfortable if truth was to be told. It was one thing to Imperio someone and tell them to send money to a Rebellion in hopes of aiding the favoured side of a civil war. It was another to have so much control over a person's body that she could literally halt the function all of his involuntary muscles by messing with the brainstem and everything within it.

Great power; great responsibility and all that rot.

Things were not going at all according to plan. In fact, if he could be honest at least with himself, things were going to hell and he didn't know how to stop it. He didn't even know where all of it began because there were so many factors that were causing him issues and changing things that would have gone unchanged.

Perhaps he hadn't been paying enough attention. If he had stopped babying Yagura, and focused on other events, he might have been able to unravel the bundle of troubles that had been dumped in his lap. Maybe.

Itachi and Kisame were caught by Konoha. Somehow, the two of them had been caught by the leaf loving fools. They had not checked in at any of the intervals required of them and their rings had been destroyed. No doubt they had been studied thoroughly before that though. Adding on to that, he'd only just received notice of Shimura Danzo's death and some of the circumstances surrounding the incident. There were people in Konoha, strong enough to take down two S-Ranked nuke-nin and that was concerning.

Zetsu had been doing a lot of reconnaissance lately in order to make up for whatever they were lacking. And it wasn't good. None of it was good.
Old man Sandaime had sent a company of shinobi to aid in the Kiri Rebellion. And everything in Mizu no Kuni, save for the hidden village, had been taken under control. In less than a month, they had made enormous leaps and bounds over their opposition and Yagura sat safely behind his walls, not in the least bit aware of just what was happening. They had boxed Yagura in behind his walls and Obito hadn't heard a whisper of it until the night before the siege.

It was too late to take them out, and Obito knew that Kirigakure had lost any use it had formerly provided. It was weakened considerably. Even more than Suna was after their attempted invasion of Konoha alongside Oto. Kiri had no ties, no livelihood, and no support. It would take years before they managed to build up anything again. They were of no threat to Akatsuki, especially since the village itself operated under only a third of what it used to be two decades prior, and the Rebellion didn't have many Kiri shinobi left in their ranks.

Once the Rebellion decided to take the village, he'd abandon Yagura to his fate. With him dead and the Senbi freed, the Akatsuki could just collect the Biju once all was said and done.

The telltale sound of Zetsu's approach came from his left. He didn't bother looking. There was no need.

"I have come across some valuable information," White Zetsu said.

"You're about to learn the full reason for why Itachi is once more in service to Konoha and why Danzo was exposed," Black Zetsu added, sounding far too thrilled for this to be common information. "She looks delicious and not as useless as other Konoha scum," he added.

"Her name is Potta Hari, and she adopted the Kyuubi Jinchuuriki. She is also frequently seen in the company of Hatake Kakashi's team. She runs the Konoha orphanage now, and revealed Danzo's Ne to the Hokage when he tried to take children away."

Interesting. And troublesome. "Tell me more."

Luna stared up at her bed and blinked repeatedly.

Not good. Not good at all. She had to warn the Hokage and Hari.

Someone out there had the power to sneak into the village without anyone knowing. Not even she. And that was a problem.

"Are you certain you can handle this?"

Itachi nodded as he fixed his mask upon his face, his chakra working as an adhesive to keep it in place. "If it is a Genjutsu, I can break through it easily. Give me five minutes and then come inside."

He wouldn't even need that much.

It was just a quick take out of the first of the many blind spots in Kirigakure's wall. He needed to act fast in order to take control of the people inside. Once the turret was overthrown and the Rebellion had the control, then he could move on to the next.

The sooner the siege was finished, the better.

Utakata had forgone Kirigakure during the beginning of the Purge of the Kekkei Genkai, for many
reasons. The first being the betrayal he’d suffered at the hands of his shisho. Or rather, he’d assumed it was a betrayal, but after being on the run for so long and thinking it over, he realized why his shisho had done such a thing. He’d thought he’d done the right thing.

Saiken was rather tame in terms of attitude, if a little boastful and energetic. Harusame hadn't known that, living under the same preconceived notions and tall tales spread around the nations about the Biju. He had assumed that Saiken was dangerous to Utakata's health and wanted to save Utakata from a life of being used as a weapon and being disregarded because of his status as a Jinchuuriki. His attempt at extracting a Biju had failed, resulting in his death and leaving Utakata questioning his life for years.

Enough for him to defect from Kirigakure with bitterness in his heart for the way his former home had warped so terribly from its once greatness.

But now things had changed. The spurned shinobi and clan members who held Kekkei Genkai, or were at least related to those with Kekkei Genkai, had gathered in a Rebellion against the weakest of the five great shinobi nations. And should the leader Mei manage to take control of Kirigakure once more, Utakata had been assured that things would change drastically. She had been dead serious on making changes, because she was also of a clan that was mostly gone thanks to the actions of Kiri's past, and she did not agree with senseless murder just because someone was born with a skill you didn't possess.

Even though the war efforts seemed impossible, Mei never gave up. She sent for aid many times, pleading with anyone that would listen to her. Suna had been very blatant in their refusal to assist the Rebellion end the civil war. Citing something about not wanting to lose manpower. As if they really had any manpower to begin with.

It was eventually revealed that Sungakure aligned themselves to Orochimaru of the Sannin and his new shinobi village in order to assault Konohagakure. And even with two separate nations and over one thousand foreign soldiers to face off against, Konoha still managed to come out the victor with their Kage still alive. And in the face of their victory, it was revealed that Orochimaru had murdered the Kazekage and had impersonated him for nearly a month, making executive decisions in his stead and leading the village further into poverty.

Suna was now down in their shinobi forces and wouldn't be able to handle sending aid if they would even consider it. Not when they were without a leader at present. to when they had sank to Kirigakure's level of power. Not when the Daimyo of Kaze no Kuni wouldn't even go to them for missions and aid.

Konoha had already healed up from the ambush, the village back as it once was in no time, seemingly as if it had never been through an invasion. It was a statement for the rest of the world. 'Behold our might!' it cried to the nations. 'See what we are capable of and don't think of attacking us!'. Ultimately, it was their victory that did it.

The Rebellion had tried asking for aid from Iwa and Kumo, only to be viciously torn apart for daring to ask. They had been mocked for 'daring to think themselves important enough for either nation to send aid'.

Basically, the major nations had all decided it was a fruitless venture. All but Konoha, who sent some of the best names in their current history to aid the Rebellion. That showed a lot of faith not only in their own abilities to help, but also in the words of Terumi Mei. And now they even had one of the Sannin on their side, who was busy coaching several squads of shinobi on how to perform medical techniques quickly and effectively. The woman had taken over easily and had spread her no-nonsense attitude around immediately.
So far, after a total of thirteen operations that had been taken since the Konoha relief had showed up in their midst, none of their shinobi had died. There had been injuries, and the loss of some limbs, but it was obvious that in Konoha, things were done different. Such as the fact that the Sandaime Hokage had ordered everyone into teams of nine, each with their own special ability in order to even them out. Basically, their team making was evened out, and it worked surprisingly well. And Utakata had noticed Mei taking notes on their formations. Especially Hatake Kakashi’s Konoha team.

For years, the gossip and jokes about Konoha always revolved around them being Tree Huggers who would never hurt anybody. That was in fact not true. One only needed to look at their histories and take note of their most notable shinobi. Those being the Shodaime, Nidaime, Sandaime, Yondaime, Shimura Danzo, Hatake Sakumo and his son Kakashi, Uchiha Madara, Uchiha Shisui, and Uchiha Itachi, the Sannin, Mitarashi Anko, Uzumaki Kushina and Uzumaki Mito, anyone from the Nara clan, and even several Hyuga. Many more who weren’t even of notable clans, but managed to become notable on their own.

While the ‘Will of Fire’ certainly drove the shinobi, and they would always angle for peace first and war if only absolutely necessary, every single one of those ninja, be they still loyal to Konoha or not, had all been brutal at some point or another. Konoha had something about them that kept their best students alive and well into their old age. Examples being the fact that they had many middle-aged shinobi under their will.

So despite the jokes made at their expense, it was very obvious to the other shinobi nations, as to why they held the most influence and power on the Elemental Continent. The Will of Fire did not view people as simply weapons to be used for an end, and insisted upon friendship and teamwork through the ranks to build steadfast relationships. Experience spread to each other and knowledge was shared in order to help everyone reach their desired position in life. And that would explain why Konoha had more specialists that other nations.

And if the Rebellion won the war, then they would have an alliance with such a nation, and would be able to take all they have learned and apply it to their own country. This was why his role was important. His duty in the siege of Kirigakure’s walls, would take place once most of the civilians were cleared.

A few bombs dropped in harmless places would be enough of an alert to get the civilians out of harm’s way as soon as possible, even if it set the village on alert. But with the civvies gone, Utakata could then get to his part of the plan, which was to unleash his full transformed state in the certain of the village.

They weren’t aiming to murder everyone after all. They just needed control and needed to establish that control in a manner that assured there would be no chance of Kiri’s victory. Yagura would be drawn out from hiding and Utakata and he would dance.

The island was pretty much half under the Rebellion’s order by now. The only thing left was the source of the shinobi. Their former village itself.

From the various border patrol stations, bunkers, and outposts, they had wrangled up three hundred and seventy-two living shinobi and one hundred and thirty-four dead shinobi. That had to equal a large amount of Kiri’s shinobi force already. Mei had taken one third of the military with her when she fled all those years ago, and with the brutal graduation exams continuing on, there was no doubt that the five hundred and six shinobi that had been spread all over the country - which was currently under the Rebellion’s control - equated to a large number of the shinobi population of Mizu no Kuni.

Utakata sighed and popped his neck as he stretched. He was the main weapon so to speak. As he could voluntarily enter Biju Modo easily, and he and Saiken worked very well together, he was
going to be the main force. Once the walls were taken out, Kiri would fall, one way or another.

Now all he needed was for the damn cargo ship to stop swaying.

How odd for a shinobi to get motion sickness. It would end soon at least. He could smell Kiri's special mist already.

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Sirens sounded through the air as several areas all around the village suddenly exploded. He frowned, watching as the civilians deviated from their daily lives and began rushing for the shelters as such a predicament called for. The shinobi were rallied immediately and several Anbu appeared in his office, awaiting instructions.

Yagura turned, face stoic as usual. "You will investigate the source of these attacks. Find the Rebels and bring them in. Injuries are acceptable, but death is out of the question." Most of them disappeared, while three remained behind, awaiting further orders.

He would need to question their attackers after all. Since they thought themselves brave enough to enter the village and lay explosives. Still, he paused in his thoughts, they'd gotten into the village. That shouldn't have been possible. The village was highly fortified and they had eyes on every section of the wall. There was no possible way for anyone to have gotten in!

Snapping his attention toward the remaining Anbu, he said, "I want you three to check the turrets! No one should be able to get into our village in the first place! Disable anyone you find and bring them here immediately!" The three disappeared in the usual mist Shunshin, leaving him to his thoughts.

This wasn't good. If they had gotten past those protective measures, then they somehow learned about them. That would not do. Especially since their shinobi force wasn't as large as some of the other Elemental Nations. Things had changed drastically in the village since the start of this ridiculous war.

As the civilians screamed and ran for safety beneath the village's center, Yagura watched with trepidation as twilight fell upon them. The night would bring either victory or death. Maybe both.

But for whom? That was the question.

And a malevolent chakra filling the air had the hairs on his arms standing on end. Jinchuuriki. They'd found Utakata and he was on par with Yagura in terms of control.

Dammit.

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Kakashi shifted his hitai-ate until his Sharingan was exposed. His group had been ordered to wait exactly ten minutes after the bombs went off. They were supposed to attack with the Third Wave of shinobi on the Rebellion's side. Their team had been joined up with four other teams with nine shinobi each. They'd been forced to get familiar with each other's appearances in order to prevent added injury. Thankfully, none of them wore Kirigakure hitai-ate, so that was less of a chance for injury from comrades.

All Kakashi could say, was that he was proud of his students. They had taken this maturely. They didn't cry and whine. And if he was allowed to be honest at least for a bit, he was surprised at how Naruto had seemed rather relaxed for the most part. He wasn't spouting off about becoming cool and being the Hokage. He was focused mostly on the mission, only rarely bringing up Koneko-chan.
It showed growth in his character. While he was loud when not on the clock, he knew that these types of situations weren't meant for boasting and posturing. It made his pride soar when he thought of how much his Genin had grown up in the past several months. They'd gone through so much and came out stronger for all of it.

He was thankful that life had been favorable to them.

Now they just had to survive a siege.

They had a clear shot of the Southern Gate and remained a quarter of a mile outside it, ready for that ten minute mark to be up.

Forty-three seconds to go.

Turning to look back at his group, he gave an eye smile many of them were used to. "I'm proud of all of you. So let's go in there and show them what Konoha's Tree Huggers are capable of."

Eight nods of agreement. Good.

It was time to win. And they would all be coming back alive. He'd make sure of it. He never left his comrades behind.

Naruto ducked under the attack that seemed ready to simply chop his head off. And the thing was, he'd never seen weapons of that nature before, and found himself sidetracked by how interesting they were. Rotating metal circles. Like metal discs that had most of the insides cut out, so it was just the outer ring, and then a small piece of metal straight through the center to hold on to.

He'd never seen such weapons, but the enemy kept throwing them at him, and they would spin dangerously like tops as they came closer to slicing him in half.

His Kage Bunshin provided interesting detail on them. The enemy Kiri shinobi had nine of the circle things, and was very good at manipulating them all at once. And his Bunshin had taken note of how they had been thrown and handled, even as they were being cleaved in half by said weapons.

He wanted them. He could just imagine adding his Wind Chakra. Kakashi-sensei had Asuma-sensei show what his Wind Chakra could do once he learned how to channel it properly and Naruto would love to cut trees in half with flying circles! It would be so awesome!

The best way to get the weapons, especially since he had no idea what they were called, was to liberate them in a sense. Which meant not letting them get back to their soon-to-be-previous-owner.

He created a dozen more Kage Bunshin, all fully aware of the plan, and let them at it. It was all a matter of placement, really. The Kage Bunshin would Henge into the discs and then Kawarimi with the real ones in order for Naruto to finally gain possession of them. It was an ingenious decision and he would have patted himself on the back if he had time.

"Get me those circles things!" he bellowed, and the army of orange descended upon the Kiri shinobi, who gaped in slight horror. "For the Leaf! -ttebayo!"

Naruto wondered if TenTen would know what they were. Kakashi-sensei said she was going to be a weapons specialist, so it was best to just ask her when there was free time.

Also, he noticed how smoothly the invasion of Kirigakure was going. How odd. Shouldn't there
have been more of a challenge from a village that was supposedly keeping the entire country under its boot heel? It just didn't feel right to him.

Then again, Naruto had never been part of an invasion before so he really didn't know how they were supposed to go.

On another note, he really needed to learn how to use the circle things because they were awesome!

Flipping one experimentally, Naruto turned and whipped it in the direction of a Kiri shinobi. The sight of it hacking the man's arm off was kind of cool and kind of gross. But mostly cool.

Sakura was already in training to be a medic. The moment Tsunade of the Sannin had joined in on their side, she had been in awe of the woman. Sakura didn't have many people to look up to in life, and now it felt like Kami-sama had just shoved one right in front of her and said, 'here you go!'. It was like a blessing from above.

And when she said she would be starting a school specifically for training more Iryo-nin, Sakura knew she just had to join. Conveniently, Ino, Hinata, and Karina were also going to be joining. And when they all volunteered after the reveal, Tsunade began putting them to work, teaching them as quickly as possible, to help them with the basics.

Sakura had competition. She knew that she was not the best kunoichi. It had taken time for her to wake up from her musings. Her dreams. Ino and Sasuke-kun had to be gravely injured for her to finally see things as they should be. And it had sucked.

Her competition existed in three other Genin who all apparently shared skills in the medical field and who had good chakra control. This meant that all of them were going to be advancing at similar rates, which meant competition. And Sakura didn't want to be left behind, so she knew that she had to train hard and give a good showing.

After almost a month, the four girls had managed to learn the Shosen Jutsu and were each capable of healing minor abrasions and contusions because of it. Any more advanced ninjutsu in the medical field would require more in depth study. But for now, being able to heal scrapes and cuts was good enough. It gave them a one up.

So far, Hinata and Karina were ahead though, because they got the Chakra no Mesu easy. Hinata had her Byakugan to tell her how much chakra the scalpel needed whereas Karina was a sensor and could gauge easier. But Sakura and Ino weren't far behind! Soon they would be able to do it freely instead of needing to concentrate first!

Still, a moment of concentration was all it took for her to cover her hands in a smaller version of the technique that was still deadly in its effectiveness.

And she knew that because she had just severed the tendons of an enemy's left ankle. The skin had cut away under the move and she could even feel some of the body being sliced open by the technique. While that would have been so gross months ago, now it seemed awesome! She could just imagine what she'd be capable of once she mastered the full version of the jutsu.

Eventually, Sakura would become a fearsome kunoichi. It was just going to take a bit of time. But she had a lot of time.

And she had the drive to go with it.

Sakura turned, deflecting another attack by someone closer to her size, and murmuring a low
apology as she left a large gash across their chest.

It was worth it though. This surely would to help her become a better kunoichi.

Sasuke, Naruto, and Hinata had been sent in the direction of a small group of younger looking shinobi, with explicit orders to detain them. Minimal injury if possible, but no death. It wasn't that hard if one thought about it, but still, they were unknown foes. They could be capable of anything.

And the fact was, one of them had a sword, which meant he had to know at least the basics of it if he was willing to wear it proudly at his hip. The girl among the group had long hair, meaning she thought herself good enough a shinobi to be able to let such a weakness continue to exist. Finally, there was someone whose entire face was covered in a mask, much like Kakashi's was, and on his arms had been odd circular weapons.

"Hinata, who has the most chakra?"

There was only a second of consideration before she softly mumbled, "The masked one."

"Naruto, you take him. You'll be able to outlast him better than any of us. But be careful."

"On it, teme. You can rely on me, -ttebayo!" And then Naruto went on ahead, summoning an ass load of Kage Bunshin and making the masked shinobi go wide-eyed.

"Hinata, do you think you could handle the kenjutsu user or no?"

"I'm not fast enough yet. I'm sorry."

"Then disable the kunoichi as quickly as you can. Don't pity her and don't hold back. Prove that you're superior."

She was a Hyuga after all. She had better be superior to some random Kiri shinobi. She even had a trained Doujutsu on her side.

Meanwhile, Sasuke had eyed his own opponent, taking note of his preparing stance. It wouldn't be easy, especially since swords were like extensions on oneself and Sasuke didn't have anything like that. But it was okay. He had skill. He was an Uchiha. He'd practiced in shurikenjutsu for many years and had mastered that aspect of the Uchiha style of fighting.

And he wasn't alone anymore.

Kakashi had entrusted him to keep their small team safe for this, and he intended to see them all through.

They had danced around one another, Sasuke making use of his kunai and wire while the other swiped his sword too close for comfort, but not close enough to deal damage. Sasuke was good at evading, and his Sharingan was able to predict the movements of the sword enough for him to dodge effectively.

He would not lose.

The swish of the sword was loud in his ear and Sasuke blocked with his kunai once again, right near his right cheek.

"Tree Huggers have no business here!" the ninja hissed, his blues eyes narrowing in what he probably thought was a threatening manner. Sasuke merely scoffed. First off, his eyes had the most
plain shade of blue Sasuke had ever seen. They were nothing like Naruto's. And second, he didn't take kindly to being called a Tree Hugger by some coward who had to hide in some mist just to be able to hit his opponent.

"And filth isn't supposed to be clogging up Kirigakure, and yet you're still here."

One thing Kakashi had stressed in many of their training days, was self-control. He even had the Anko woman work on them a little bit. Maintaining self-control was a must when in battle, and he could tell that his opponent sucked at it. Sasuke hadn't fully been able to mask his emotions, but he was far better at it than his enemy, whose attacks became less focused but more insistent. Every deflection of his weapon left Sasuke's right wrist stinging just the slightest as every motion jarred the bones.

Another standstill as he pushed against the sword, and Sasuke decided to try something. Something reckless, but it could work if he played it off well enough.

The hand holding the kunai began to tingle with what he realized was his Lightning Chakra, while he brought his left hand up and began making half of the seals necessary for the Gokakyu no Jutsu. The chakra mingled slowly and he took a deep breath, as if ready to burn his enemy as close-range.

The swordsman proved not to be so pathetic, as he tried to distance himself immediately, only to blink when a minuscule stream of fire came out of Sasuke's mouth. He was of course, not paying attention to Sasuke's other hand. So when he opened his mouth to mock Sasuke, he missed the throwing of the kunai. He certainly hadn't missed when it lodged itself into his right hand. In that simple second, the sword fell to the ground, the boy screaming as the Lightning Chakra electrocuted him, and he then fell back in a dead faint that made Sasuke smirk.

The whole Nature Manipulation lesson had been a very interesting thing. He could only imagine what would happen if he had a better weapon while doing so. And speaking of weapons, the fool had a nice sword that he wouldn't be able to use for a while.

To the victor go the spoils, or so the saying went. He was unrepentant about taking the gleaming weapon. After all, he'd won.

And judging by Naruto and Hinata's finished battles, they had similar ideas. He felt good, knowing that Naruto and he were on the same wavelength so to speak.

"Looks like the Tree Huggers won," Sasuke said, sneering at the unconscious enemy. "Fool."

Some people needed to learn not to underestimate an Uchiha. And by extension, they should really learn not to insult Konoha shinobi if they knew what was good for them. Then again, the fool didn't seem like the sharpest kunai in the bunch, so he could extend some pity for inferior intelligence and breeding.

Ino grunted. A hand in her hair had made it nearly impossible for her to move. It was not a good position to be in, which she was very well aware of. It was a mercy position, used specifically to either cow someone into submission, or taunt them before killing them. And her opponent seemed to be fond of the taunting aspect. While annoyed, she couldn't bring herself to be angry because it was an obvious opening and she would have done the same thing had she been given the opportunity. She'd simply have to rectify her error.

"Such lovely hair. Too bad you Tree Huggers are too weak to even know how to protect it," the man sneered, his grip tightening and making her wince as the strands pulled right at the base of her scalp.
Huffing, the blonde held her hands together, focusing her chakra and envisioning what she wanted. She hadn't had to try this particular skill out in battle, but it seemed like any time to do so. Her chakra took the shape of a standard kunai, glowing blue and radiating power. Without hesitation, Ino swung her arms back until the chakra kunai sliced through her hair, setting her free from her captor's clutches and letting her get some distance between them. Once she had a good view of the enemy once again, she held her kunai up protectively.

A scoff was the man's reaction. Without even a blink, he threw the long strands of hair in her direction, scattering them and leaving a trail. It was a perfect opportunity and she pitied his stupidity.

"Ino!"

She didn't even need to look away to know that she'd been joined by Shikamaru and Choji. She simply reabsorbed her chakra kunai and made a Yamanaka hand seal. "Shintenshin no Jutsu!" The chakra rushed forward, and the link between them was stronger than it would normally be, because the fool had decided that her hair meant nothing. Since it was on and under him, he'd pretty much trapped himself in her essence so to speak.

The invasion of another's mind was an intense process, especially for someone who hadn't been fully trained in the art. Thankfully, she only needed a few seconds of control for Shikamaru to fully trap the enemy. She managed to exit in time for Choji to bowl over the shinobi with his Baika no Jutsu, leaving a human-sized dent in the ground.

"That worked better than I thought," said Shikamaru, taking a deep breath. "We only practiced that formation three times before, so the fact that we got it is impressive."

"It's great!" Ino agreed, a wide grin on her face. "And it also means we get to move on to the next formation when he finally get home!" she cheered, thinking of how cool it would be to use in battle.

All at once, Shikamaru's interest died and a long, drawn out, "what a drag" slipped through his lips.

"Come on, you two! We have asses to kick!" she ordered.

And once again, Ino was charging into battle, ready to beat anyone who dared to challenge her. She could worry about her precious hair when everything was over. For now, the Ino-Shika-Cho trio was at large and ready for anything! And she also would admit that if she had gotten on a team with Shikamaru and Choji, they would have been pretty awesome together.

Kakashi knew that at some point in the near future, he was going to have to instruct Naruto in the ways of the Uzumaki Taijutsu, Uzuken. His standard, Academy Taijutsu just wasn't working and while he was capable of simply overpowering most of his opponents of the same level, it was a waste of energy.

He was proud of his student though! Of all of them. Though Sasuke had Uchiaken and Ino was learning minor Yamaken defenses from her father. Still, if those two got different Taijutsu classes from their clans, then Naruto needed some catching up. It was only fair since Kakashi or Jiraiya were the only people alive who could teach him Uzuken and he deserved to learn it.

What brought this realization on, was the fact that Naruto had somehow managed to gravitate toward the very center of the trouble, bringing Sasuke and Hinata with him. The center was where Utakata and Yagura were, both having entered their respective Biju Modo. Though none of his students looked frightened, he didn't want them to be exposed to such chakra so often.

And when he caught sight of them, it was to see Naruto head-butting an enemy who had captured
him in their ninja wire. He hadn't known how to maneuver himself out of the hold and had to use unnecessary force that hurt both him and his enemy, in order to escape. If he knew Uzuken, it wouldn't be like that.

At least the plans to train were coming together well enough. Kakashi knew what needed to be worked on in the next few months.

Though he really wanted to know where Naruto got chakram from and how his Kage Bunshin seemed to know how to use them properly.

On a related note, Kakashi got in close to the area and proceeded to down the three opponents the small team he'd made, were battling. Then, he grabbed all three Genin and Shunshined to a safer place. There was no need for them to be near a Bijū brawl.

"But sensei!" protested Naruto when he was deposited a safe ways away from the main battle.

"No. You particularly aren't trained like they are and it's dangerous for you to be exposed to such conditions. Who knows what it'll do. Let the more experienced shinobi handle it. Besides, I see some oddly dress Kiri shinobi at four o'clock and they don't look too pleasant. Try your hand against them instead."

Both Sasuke and Naruto pouted, though he was certain Sasuke would never admit to pouting. Hinata seemed perfectly okay with the plan and turned toward the approaching enemies, activating her Byakugan seallessly as she did so.

They were all growing up!

He felt old.

Kakashi turned to Sasuke. "As the small team leader, I expect you all to make it out of this alive and well, or more horizontal training is ahead of you."

The two groans were music to his ears.

"Ja!" And he was gone with a Shunshin, deciding to join Itachi and Tenzo near the Jinchūriki battle, where some of Mei's ninja also waited for a sign to join in. Now it was just about waiting, and Itachi's Sharingan was flaring by the second.

"Kakashi-taicho, I am dismantling the Genjutsu on Yagura. It is the most complex creation I've ever seen."

"We'll guard your back, just keep working."

Itachi gave a stiff nod.

Blinding fury. Burning pain. Sounds were amplified to the maximum. He clawed at the other Jinchūriki, feeling frustrated that the man was somehow capable of going toe to toe with him. For years he'd been the epitome of perfection. He was the best Jinchūriki. There was no way he could lose!

But he was losing. And there were none of his own shinobi around. He was was surrounded by enemies, both new and old. And Utakata was quick and methodical as he attacked, managing to remain calm despite the situation.
He lashed out, hoping to at least knock down one of the nearby Konoha ninja, only for his attack to be halted by one of Utakata's many tails. Such an inconvenience the other man was.

Suddenly, something cold broke over his head, and Yagura fell backwards in a slump. He could feel the Biju chakra being sucked away by an unknown force, and felt like he needed to sleep.

He didn't know what was going on, but he was just so tired. And his head hurt too.

It felt like he was being held underwater, without the terrifying feeling of suffocation though.

"Goodnight, Yagura-san," someone in the distance said.

Night meant sleep. Sleep was good.

Yagura feel asleep.

Yagura never woke up.

Zabuza glared at the Konoha shinobi gathered before him. "If anyone ever hugs me again, they're losing an arm!"

Haku tsked and shook his head. "It's just Naruto-kun, shishou. He means well."

The blond, orange idiot was simply grinning, as if Zabua no longer inspired any fear. Fuck the gaki and his stupid grin.

"I am a legendary terror in Kirigakure. I demand some respect!"

"You have my respect because you're awesome, but you're also lacking eyebrows and you're weird. -ttebayo!"

He hefted Kubikiribocho. "What was that, gaki?"

"Shishou, please don't attack Naruto-kun. He's been so well-behaved ever since coming to us."

The blond was still grinning even as Haku lead him away. If he ever saw the gaki again, there would be some shit going down.

"You can't protect your little boyfriend forever, Haku.," he grunted.

"Zabuza-sama!"

Ah, the scandalized tone was hilarious. Haku was too easy to tease.

Hiruzen stared at the scroll on his desk, and found himself breathing a sigh of relief. Everything had worked out well in the end, and Naruto was in no way forced battle using the Kyubi's chakra. Everyone was safe and well or the most part. He'd actually done the right thing in terms of sending off his shinobi.

September 11
Sarutobi Hiruzen
Sandaime Hokage of Konohagakure no Sato
Head of the Sarutobi Clan
In agreement to our very first correspondence, in the event of the Rebellion's victory and my instatement as the Godaime Mizukage, I, Terumi Mei of the Uzumaki Clan, hereby pledge Kirigakure's support to Konohagakure no Sato and its leaders. Only under excessive action and the perceived abandonment or betrayal of our agreement, will Kirigakure rescind its alliance.

On the behalf of our village and the entire nation of Mizu no Kuni, advocated by Kenjiro Minami, Daimyo of Mizu no Kuni, we thank you for your service and aid.

May the future between our villages shine brightly.

Terumi Mei
Godaime Mizukage of Kirigakure no Sato
Uzumaki Clan, 3rd Branch

Kakashi's letter had been much longer and far more detailed, but in the end, he was pleased with it. And it also allowed him to write up a list of questions that he wanted answered before anything else. He was grateful that Kakashi was the type to take notes during his missions and didn't just wait until it was all finished. So he would be ready to answer when it finally came time for the debriefing..

The Rebellion managed to overcome the Loyalists on September 2nd. Yagura was noted by Minku, to be under a Sharingan induced Genjutsu, furthering the belief that the masked figure from both Kabuto's and Kisame's memories is the same man Uchiha Itachi worked alongside in annihilating the Uchiha Clan. Uchiha Madara is alive and incredibly powerful.

The battle that broke out between Yagura and ex-Jonin Utakata was over in less than five minutes. Both, having mastered their Biju Modo many years ago, managed a quick and ferocious battle until Minku managed to break the Genjutsu placed upon Yagura. Unfortunately, his body was under the influence for far too long and it could not withstand the sudden dissipation of foreign chakra in his mind. He fell into a coma immediately and Tenzo had to act in order to put the Sanbi to sleep.

It is now known that Madara controlled the Yondaime Mizukage and that he had been hoping to remove Kirigakure's strength. Yagura's mind is being handled currently and when they have gathered enough information, they will execute him fairly. It was revealed that he met three figures during his first week as the Mizukage and the masked figure among them placed the Genjutsu upon him, which turned him into a tyrannical ruler who did his bidding. As he is not expected to ever awaken from his comatose state, the needle was the most humane action they could give him. A small mercy.

The Godaime Mizukage has personally handed me many scrolls to give to you directly, the alliance being the most important. She also wrote several accounts of our actions during our time in the Rebellion's camp. She made mention of suggestions for promotions and advice on training for some of our younger shinobi so that they may reach the level they deserve to be at.

There are few injuries sustained thanks to Tsunade-sama taking control of the medic tent. Anything that went untreated here, will only require periodic visits to the hospital for medical attention. She has designs upon a Medical Academy, so do not be surprised when we return. Tsunade-sama and Mei-sama also seem to have formed a camaraderie.

Anything further will be discussed in the debriefing upon our return to the village.
In deference to the Will of Fire,
Hatake Kakashi
Jonin/ex-Anbu'
Anbu Honsho
Head of the Hatake Clan

It was a relief. He'd been skeptical of the entire situation, as a leader would be when deciding to deploy several of his best and newest shinobi out to war. But at the same time, he liked to believe the best of everyone, and he knew that the Purging of the Kekkei Genkai was a terrible thing. And this was why his way was better than Danzo's.

Danzo had wanted ultimate power. He never truly cared for peace because he felt it was better for Konoha to be feared by all. Sometimes Hiruzen wondered if he was aiming for world domination. Many of his revealed actions seemed to point in such a direction.

For many years he had been mocked and told he was 'soft'. That he was too lenient on their enemies or any neutral parties. But he liked to believe that peace wasn't afar off. And now look at the situation. Mizu no Kuni was back on the map. With new ruling and a new system, the rest of the Elemental Nations would finally be able to return to how their trade routes used to be. Where import and export from the land would once again flourish.

Hiruzen wasn't so selfish that he would want the rest of the nations to suffer. As a leader, his actions would affect everyone in some way or another. And making the decision to aid the Rebellion had been taxing on his nerves and emotions. He just wanted to pass his damn hat along and go retire.

How many ninja managed to reach his age? Or even the ages of his students? It was a long time coming and he wanted to toss the hat and go practice Ikebana like his dear Biwako had when she was alive. Was it too much to ask for?

And already, he had a few people considered for the position of Godaime, and the problem was that all of them expressed a dislike of the position of Kage. So how would he convince any of them that it was a good job? They'd all seen the stacks of paperwork! They were forewarned enough as it was!

Hiruzen sighed. He needed happy thoughts. After all, the prosperity of Konoha would once again rise after the results of the Oto/Suna Invasion.

And speaking of Suna, he needed to look at a recent message sent by their stand-in Godaime Kazekage.

Hari glanced up from her Icha Icha Arashi. She'd been not so casually walking around the area near the North Gate ever since a bird had come from Mizu no Kuni, saying that the entire Konoha Company would be returning within a few days. Which meant that she had decided to stake out the area.

"Here they come," she heard Death mumble. "Don't move too quickly. They've just been in a war and it'll take time for all of them to calm down and return to their normal lives."

She nodded absent-mindedly, her head snapping around as she looked out past the gate and down the road. The road ended about one hundred meters away from the wall. In the distance she could see small groups running in her direction and she took a few steps closer to her tree in preparation.

She was looking for the yellow. The stunning blond hair that belonged only to Naruto, because he was the only person in the village with that particular shade. Spotting Sakura wasn't difficult, but
Naruto, who wore bright orange, should have been easy to see. But she couldn't actually see him among the group, and it made her a tad nervous.

The gate guards, Izumo and Kotetsu if she recalled, straightened immediately. Izumo started shuffling around some papers while Kotetsu pulled out a box of pens. Everyone was going to have to sign back into the village, and judging by the size of the group, it would take forever unless they were all prepared.

"Ninja drag their feet a lot."

True.

A few shinobi passed by where she leaned against a tree, giving her a better view of those in the back of the groups. Tsunade was the first person she saw, as the woman was taking her time among the remaining procession. Flanking either side of her were Inoichi and Shikaku. Behind them was Team Seven, Karin, and two Anbu.

The tight feeling in her chest dissipated instantly. They were safe. Home and safe and in one piece, thank Merlin. Though she immediately noticed that Naruto was not wearing orange anymore, and that Sasuke was wearing shinobi trousers and his hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Ino's skirt had remained in one piece, but she was wearing one of Naruto's back up shirts. White with a red swirl on on the front. Also, her hair was about a foot shorter, sticking out in all directions from the tie she had used to pull it up. Finally, Karin had also undergone a small change of her own. Her hair was now cut into an even bob that touched her collarbones.

Kakashi remained unchanged upon first glance, but he looked a lot more calm than he did when she had last laid eyes on him. And she realised that she was actually very glad to see him again. And as usual, he had out the blessed Icha Icha that she didn't own yet and was pretending to pay more attention to it than anything else at the moment. Of course him bringing up the rear of their group proved otherwise, but to each his own.

"War tends to change people, remember that. Just because he looks fine doesn't mean he is."

I know that. I am trying to remain positive, thank you very much!

"Why lie to yourself for something like positivity?"

Because I don't want to face the bloody truth, you twat!

"Your mortals are so strange."

Forcing a smile and trying to push away Death's annoyingness, she stepped away from her tree and watched as Ino elbowed Naruto in the gut. The blond turned to her for a second, before whipping around to see Hari awaiting him, after Ino murmured something in his ear. His face broke out into a beaming grin that she had missed seeing every day.

"Nee-chan!" he bellowed, lunging toward her and crossing the distance between them in less than a second. His bone crushing hug was like a balm to the soul. He was there, he was safe, he was happy. It was all as it should be. He'd gone to fight in a war and he came back and didn't seem traumatised like Hari had been. "I missed you so much! -ttebayo!"

She made sure to squeeze him extra hard. "I missed you too, squirt." Over a month of him being gone. It was strange how silent the flat was when he wasn't there to inhabit it. It didn't feel right and it made her uneasy every night as she prepared her pillow. "It's been way too quiet without you
screaming about ramen every second of the day."

Looking up, she caught sight of the rest of the team watching, and with one arm around Naruto, she tugged him on over and proceeded to motion Ino and Karin forward. Both came willingly. Sasuke didn't even get a chance to protest when Hari grabbed his collar and pulled him into their group hug as well. "Other fruit that are not of my loins! I missed all of your adorable faces and I'm never letting you go anywhere ever again!"

There was a low, groaned chorus of 'Hari-chan/Hari-san' but she didn't care. She was going to pamper all of them for days! She missed her brother, her training partner, Sasuke pretending that he didn't care about anything going on, and even Kakashi and their playful games.

"I'm so glad that all of you are back. I'm going to make a team dinner to celebrate and you are all going to come over or else." And they should already know by now not to challenge her, because she could out-stubborn anyone. It was a Gryffindor thing and it took skill. "You'll stuff your gobs and relax for once. Also, we have three upcoming birthdays that you've returned just in time for."

Ino and Naruto giggled a bit, and she noticed Kakashi shift from the corner of her eye.

Once she was sure that each of the kids got enough affection, she turned her attention to Kakashi, who stood stiffly, waiting for her to do something. She remembered their last encounter and smiled. Of course he would still be on his guard after a month and a half. At least it proved that he took her seriously, which surprisingly made her very happy. It showed respect, and getting it from someone who was very much capable of killing her before she could blink, showed his strength of character.

"Are you just going to stand there or am I getting a hug some time today?" she teased, hands on her hips as if she was annoyed. He wasn't going to get out of it.

The widening of his only visible was like victory and it sang in her blood. "If you don't hug me, you better start watching all the windows you see," she added for good measure. She would never let the window thing go.

Almost immediately, he stepped forward, arms raised in a robotic fashion. Hari grinned, throwing an arm around his shoulders in an effort to give them both what they wanted. He didn't like closeness all too much and she wanted a hug, so she didn't force her way into his space, and simply bumped hips with him for a few seconds in a side-hug. His hand rested on the small of her back, barely touching her at all, but the warmth of his body was obviously there and it was nice. "See, Koinu-kun? This isn't so difficult," she murmured, glancing up at him and seeing the amusement in his eye.

A low, slightly rough laugh. "It's nice to see you as well, Koneko-chan."

"Damn right it is."

When everyone had their own space once again, she asked, "Do you have to do something specific right now or can you come back to the house?"

"Mah. Debriefing first and foremost. Usually A-Rank missions and up can wait a few days, but the nature of this mission in particular requires immediate care. You might have to postpone that dinner to tomorrow as we are all going to be extremely busy."

"Fine," she agreed easily. "I can plan ahead now." Casting a look at Sasuke and then at the one Anbu behind him, who she knew was his brother, she asked, "Does anyone else want to come for dinner?"

Tsunade stepped forward. "Yes. I'll get Shizune to lead me there. I favor alcohol, so don't be
offended when I bring some. I also hate sashimi with a passion." The woman then stalked off toward the Hokage's Tower.

Kakashi glanced back at the two Anbu stood beside him, and nodded. "I think Tenzo and Minku can come along as well. It'll help them get acquainted with new people."

"Senpai!" the two masked shinobi hissed simultaneously, and then sent each other a look she wouldn't be able to understand because the masks made no sense to her. But whatever.

"Good. Then I need to go shop."

They were home! She'd never get over the feeling of relief.

"You worry too much," Death said, sounding exasperated.

Shut up!

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

The weapons Naruto stole are called chakram.
Chapter Summary

The return to Konoha doesn't make things calm. Too much work to do.

Chapter Notes

So for anyone who has noticed, these recent chapters have been a lot longer than usual. I made the conscious decision to get this fic to 1 million words in length before it is done. And in the beginning, I had decided to go for 10K word long chapters. That would've required 100 chapters though. So then I thought that a 12K word limit was even better, because then I'd only need 84 chapters in the end. BUT THEN, I realized that if every chapter from here on out was more than 15K words in length, I could reach 1 million words by chapter 72. So that's what I am going to try for for most chapters.

This fic has reached 200K words as of this chapter, which is 1/5 of the way to 1 MIL. The odds are looking good, imo. I mean, we haven't even gotten to the Chunin Exams yet, and those will be a while. I've already Outlined them, but a lot of stuff has to happen during them. That might just span a few chapters.

-This chapter is almost 19K words long! ^-^
Secretly, the Uchiha was very pleased with that. However, it was late in the evening, and they’d been forced to write up their individual missions reports. Sasuke had taken a leaf from Kakashi’s book - damn Konoha puns - and written his observations down daily so he could compile them later on. Naruto on the other hand, had spent hours biting on a pencil as he panicked. He still hadn’t gotten used to the whole mission report thing.

And they had waited and waited and waited some more. Why? Because over one hundred shinobi had to not only write their reports, but then they had to go in and speak with the Hokage one on one. The highest ranking shinobi went first, which was why all the Genin were still left. And Sasuke did in no way miss that Kakashi was in fact, the person to go first despite the fact that the Jonin Honsho and the Head of T&I were there with them. Kakashi was stronger than them and held a higher rank than both. That meant that Sasuke was being trained by more than just a guy who could copy jutsu with his Sharingan.

He actually liked that thought too. Kakashi could teach them a lot. They were already doing well among their fellow Genin, but it was nice to know that Kakashi was more than he seemed. And he played the unassuming character very well. He let people think that the Sharingan was what made him amazing, but he seemed to be pretty amazing in his own right.

Naruto shifted and Sasuke glanced down to find a much larger wet patch growing on his sleeve. He looked up, finding Hyuga Hinata staring them down. The girl was not blushing like she usually did. Instead, her gaze seemed hard and unhappy. Envious, if he was being bold.

She didn’t like that Naruto was laying on Sasuke and not her. Her crush on the dobe was very obvious to anyone who bothered to pay enough attention.

He smirked in response. That got her to activate her Byakugan, which in turn had him activating his Shraingan. The two Doujutsu users glared at one another, a silent challenge brewing between them. And while he didn’t fully understand what was going on, he wasn’t going to lose. Also, the blond preferred Sasuke’s company over most others, which meant was already ahead in whatever this tiff was.

When the Hyuga was called in first, because alphabetically she was next, Sasuke smirked again. No alone time with Naruto for her.

Once again, he was on top.

Food. Hari was in need of food for that evening. And she actually had to hire a Genin team for assistance. Unfortunately, as it was last minute, the team that she ended up getting stuck with was headed by some odd looking shinobi and his equally odd looking team.

There was a lot of combs involved and she politely ignored the fact that the entire team seemed to collect decorative hair combs in their hair. No, she just needed some damn help in the shopping, and once everything was back at the flat, she could relieve them of their duty and never think of the multitude of combs ever again.

Hari held out three pieces of paper, one for each Genin. "I separated them into sections to make this easier on all of us. The aisle you will find the items in is listed at the top, the general amount that it should be worth is listed at the bottom, with additions and taken into account for possible inflation. Find the items, taken the money to the register, and get out as quickly as possible, please. I have a dinner to make."

The three comb obsessed ninja nodded and took the lists from her.
"Try to keep all the delicate groceries on the top. Bagging is a lot more difficult than you think it is. You need to learn to be expedient, yet mindful of your surroundings, so consider this training."

She always stressed that whatever it was should be considered training. Most of the time it was endurance and patience, but she knew how these things worked well enough. The teens would be more willing to help if the mission was phrased a specific way. Much like Naruto was. It was a manipulation tactic that was probably one of the most innocent in her arsenal. Because no one got hurt in the process.

And the help was really appreciated since she needed the food quickly and the bags would be hell to drag home on her own. Floating them above everyone's heads would just be a waste of magic and they'd be too heavy to carry herself. Besides, she acting had work to do at the house, so it was best to burn two leaves with one flame.

And yes, she had gotten that from Anko. The Konoha puns were numerous.

She handed the sensei a piece of paper with directions to the flat on it. "Bring everything to this address once you are finished, and I'll have a small treat for all of you. Thank you for your time."

Hari turned and bustled off. While they were shopping for ingredients, she had to make sure the flat was in good condition. If she was to play host to several people, at least eleven if she did her math correctly, then she needed some things to be rearranged and some other things to be put away from prying eyes. More space for the diners. Actual comfortable seating arrangements.

"I don't see why you're so worried. You can simply wave your hand and everything would be finished," Death murmured as they floated beside her.

She scoffed. Relying on magic all the time is unhealthy. I know that I can use it, but there is something about fixing things with your own strength and not relying on a power boost I was given at birth. Besides, sometimes magic doesn't do everything the right way. Like cooking. Food made my magic is usually not as good.

"The Weasley woman had used magic for nearly everything and it didn't make her lazy."

True. But Mrs. Weasley had seven children and a husband, and a farm. I have Naruto in my primary care and he is pretty self-sufficient, plus he has Kakashi to watch over him when I'm not there. And then there are five helpers for less than fifty children and teenagers in the orphanage. Luna being among them. I'm not a single woman doing all this work, so I don't need to rely on magic only.

"I suppose."

Death may be an amortal non-being who had existed for all time and would continue into forever, but they still didn't understand the human thought process very well. Because humans could be both predictable and unpredictable.

Of course on her way to the flat, she spared a moment to stop in her office to see how things had been going all day. Luna was filling in for her so she could get some work done, and was shuffling through papers. The blonde sent her a smile. "Hari, I would use the green table cloth today and make something chicken related for Tsunade-san, and some Dango for Itachi-san."

"Thanks, Luna. Do you want to take a break?"

The blonde shook her head and hummed. "I'm actually very interested in familiarising myself with
The history of the orphanage. I think it's best to know the past so we can shape the future properly. We'll be having some new additions in the near future and I think we should know all of this ahead of time. I'll be setting things into their proper order for your perusal later on. Some chamomile tea with honey wouldn't go amiss though.

"I'll send it down for you."

The blonde beamed. "Ta!"

Once back in the flat, Hari grabbed her pillow and towed it into Naruto's room, where she shut the door. This left a large amount of space in the kitchen and she was finally able to pull out the hidden sections of the table. From square to circular in ten seconds. Then, she unlatched the legs and pushed until it resemble a chabudai, standing only a foot off the floor.

Would it even be able to fit eleven people though?

Waving a hand, she watched as the table proceeded to grow in circumference. Once she was satisfied with the size, she flicked her hand to open up Death's void and snatched her trunk from inside it.

She had all kinds of things inside. It shouldn't be hard to find some bloody pillows capable of holding a grown adult. Right? The Black Family was known to have extravagant tastes and even if things were never used, they were purchased anyway. For the sake of looking good before their peers.

Crockery, decorations, a box of tools she had once bought on a whim, shrunken trunks that were full of jewels, weapons, and clothing. She had so much crap that it was a wonder she had managed to deal with any of it. After several frustrating moments, Hari held her hand out and demanded, "Accio pillows!"

It was a mistake. The first pillow was fine. The rest were not. Who knew that she actually had so many pillows to her name? Hari found herself buried under a mountain of pillows in the middle of the kitchen. Some smelled like dust and stale air.

With a wave of the hand, the pillows floated out the window where they beat themselves against the side of the building many times until the excess dust was gone. One back inside, she cast a freshening charm and then situated the pillows around the table. All of various colours, and all in their own place. She left three out just in case more people than she had expected, ended up coming for dinner. Another wave of the hand had the cleaning supplies lining up for her to use. The table, the counters and sink, the fridge, and the walls most definitely. They'd sparkle by the time she finished.

Before getting to that, she needed a few moments to make Luna's tea.

The doorbell rang several moments later, and Hari grinned. It was nice to have a reason to cook again. Also, she had to remember to tell the Genin that they would get to keep the money left over from the shopping. For doing such a good job, "You're far too nice. They are supposed to do their jobs. It's the whole reason they became ninja in the first place. All of them start at the bottom of the tier and are expected to do well no matter the task."

That doesn't mean I can't be kind! They're just kids!
"Hmph!"

"You have salt-broiled saury," Kakashi said with wonder when Hari placed his dish down in front of him. The young woman smiled and nodded as she set the utensils down as well. The food smelled good, but even over that, he could smell Hari herself, which actually smelled even better if he was so bold as to admit it.

She scented of metal, honey, fire, and something not necessary floral, but certainly nature based. It was a nice mixture and it didn't make his nose itch which meant it wasn't perfume. It was literally just her scent alone. It was nice, he realized. It had a pleasant effect on his mind too, since it kind of reminded him of Konoha, which was home.

"I know you like it, so I decided that Team Seven gets their favorites, to congratulate you on a job well done."

This wasn't the first time that he considered the possibility of her being an angel. She had gone through the trouble of making seven different meals for everyone, all because she wanted to. There was no benefit for her in the end, but she had done it anyway, and smiled as she was thanked. And he knew from experience that she would gladly do it all again.

Sitting at the imitation chabudai, were Team Seven and their leader Kakashi, Karin, Tsunade-sama and Shizune-san, Itachi, Tenzo, Runa-san, and Hari who was scuttling around the kitchen, still arranging food here and there. She spared a smile as she set two plates down in front of the two Anbu who thanked her stoically. Itachi's plate had some dango on it, Kakashi noticed.

When the woman finally sat, she made a wide gesture and everyone dug into their own dishes, Kakashi being an asshole like usual and messing his his adorable Genin by disappearing pieces of his fish every few minutes. And yes, he was actually eating it, he'd never let Hari's cooking and hard work go to waste. He was simply enjoying himself as Ino and Naruto got more and more frustrated as the seconds ticked by.

A knock on the door and a called out invitation from Hari, revealed Anko, who barged in, looking to be in a hurry.

"I made a plate for you and put it on the counter," said Hari without looking up from her own plate.

"You were sent by Kami-sama!" Anko said, taking up the plate. "I only have a few minutes because we've got a lot of paperwork to do tonight, but this is the best!" She then bounced forward to place a kiss on Hari's cheek, and the women smiled at each other. "I'll be the envy of all my colleagues! And I'll make sure to rub it in all of their faces!"

There was an odd feeling in Kakashi's gut from seeing such interactions between both women. And he got a closer look than the others because Hari was sitting right next to him, so it was practically done in his face. The feeling was comprised mostly of bitterness, he noticed. Though he didn't really understand he was feeling bitter at all. It was just two friends being friendly with each other and Hari being the considerate person that she always was.

Anko was gone as quickly as she came, taking the plate with her and leaving a scroll for Hari, which disappeared into the woman's pocket. She said nothing about it and no one commented.

"Your cooking is glorious," Tsunade-sama said as she took a generous amount from her sake bottle. The woman hadn't even gotten a cup, she simply drank straight from the bottle. In her other hand were her chopsticks, which were holding up a piece of chicken that had been marinated in lemon
juice and garlic for hours according to Hari. "How did you know I like chicken?"

"My friend, Runa," said Hari with a smirk. "She knows things and gave me a heads up for some dishes tonight."

The blonde nodded and sent Hari's friend a smile. "Well done, girl."

Runa nodded. "Hari-chan simply did the work. I made a few suggestions."

Hari shook her head. "It was a joint effort. Don't listen to her, she has a problem with accepting praise."

"Pot/kettle, Hari-chan!" the blonde sang, her doe-like eyes sparkling slightly. "Both are black."

"Nee-chan makes the best food ever! She made everything here!" said Naruto before shoving some ramen in his mouth. "I love all of it," he said around his mouthful of food, which got him smacked on the back of the head by Ino.

"Hn," was Sasuke's agreement. His brother echoed him, but did send the woman a nod of gratitude as he lifted a stick of dango to his mouth. Hari merely waved them off. She wasn't so good at accepting praise either. Kakashi wondered if the woman even noticed that.

Kakashi strategically disappeared another piece of fish, and smiled when Naruto leaned over the table from where he was squished next to Sasuke, eying his plate like it held all the answers to life itself. Kakashi withheld a snort and turned to Hari to ask if she could pass the soy sauce.

The woman grinned and passed it over while she turned a pout in Naruto's direction. "Hey squirt, is the ramen not good?"

The blond looked horrified at the suggestion and proceeded to shovel more food into his mouth, sending the woman an innocent look as he eyed his plate like it held all the answers to life itself. Kakashi wondered if the woman even noticed that.

His entire team looked at him, only to find his plate completely clean. They gaped, tempers raising. Veins throbbing. He couldn't help but ask, "Are you well?"

The amount of air that Naruto suddenly expelled through his nose, was concerning, but also funny. He loved being an asshole! And he loved the fact that both Ino and Sasuke patted Naruto's back in order to calm him down. That was some good teamwork.

While hilarious and definitely something he was going to remember for years to come, most of Kakashi's attention was on Hari though. The woman was smiling to herself as she cut into her chicken. She had understood what he was trying to do and had acted accordingly. He hadn't even given her any cues to look for. She had simply understood what he'd been planning and then aided him in messing with his adorable minions.

It was no nice to have the company of like minded individuals. Also, he once again noticed that she never tried to see his face while he was eating. She didn't try to peek beneath the mask and she did not encroach upon his territory. And of all the people he knew, he had a feeling he would mind the least if she was the one doing the encroaching. Not after knowing her for so many months and learning to understand how her mind worked.

All too soon, Hari had fixed her attention on Tenzo. The Anbu immediately noticed that he was
being watched, and met her gaze evenly. Kakashi was aware that many felt that eye contact with the man was creepy because of his ability to stare anyone down, but he was impressed when Hari remained fixated on his person. She did in no way seem uneasy under his watchful gaze and merely smiled at him.

"What should I call you?" the woman asked. Kakashi immediately noticed that she didn't ask for Tenzo's name, she had asked him what she should call him. Meaning she knew that he either used a code name, or she was respecting his boundaries. Or both. A lot of people, shinobi even, didn't realize that when people said 'call me [name]' it didn't necessarily mean that was the person's name.

Interesting.

"Tenzō," the man murmured. "Thank you for the meal."

She smiled at him and nodded. "Nice to meet you, Tenzō-san."

The rest of the dinner was filled with some light-hearted banter, suspicious looks from Tsunade-sama that were aimed at Kakashi, teasing from Hari-hime, and whining from his cute little Genin who didn't like being left out of the adult loop.

It was good. Also, the immense body heat coming off of Koneko-chan was enough to grab his attention all evening. And he wouldn't mind being within such proximity to her again in the future. She smelled and felt good. What was better than that?

Itachi stared out at the abandoned district before him. After a very lengthy discussion with the Sandaime, he'd been officially reinstated as a shinobi of Konoha, thanks to his efforts in the Kiri Rebellion. He was also once again, the Heir to his clan. Or, since his parents were dead, he was now the Head of the clan. What was left of it in any case.

The district had been out of commission for years. There was no water or electricity, and he wasn't certain he should get everything set up once again when there were only eleven Uchiha left in the village. At present at least.

He had not been wrong. Eleven was the current number, but there were still teams out searching for Ne operatives, so there might be more in the future.

So far, from the various groups of Ne members that had been found all over Hi no Kuni - not just in Konoha - they had recovered nine other Uchiha. Danzo had kept his favorites alive for as long as possible. Itachi supposed that he should be grateful that the old collector hoarded so much. It meant that he and Sasuke were not solely responsible for the re-population of their clan. Though each member needed to have at least three children in the future, but that was a thought for another day, because he was exhausted.

The streets had been cleaned. No more blood to muck everything up. The Head House was as it used to be. Pristine and full of terrible memories. But Itachi was a prodigy and an Anbu member. He had dealt with trauma before, so it should have been easier for him to deal with now. It had been years after all, and surely it would have gotten easier?

It wasn't though. Why?

The door opened easily. He could remember opening it all those years ago, for what he had believed was the last time. He could remember how he'd stalked from room to room, only to find his parents seated beside one another, awaiting him. No weapons. No arguments.
And he could remember how easily both had accepted their fates. How they told him to go through with his duty and that they were proud of him.

Now all of his plans were ruined and he had to make a life again, and live with the knowledge of what he'd done. There would be no relief and he'd have to rebuild the clan's reputation now.

Itachi hated violence and killing. So why in Kami-sama's name was he so good at it?

The full moon overhead reflected off tear stained cheeks. There was a lot to do.

Hari stared at the four children, and single teenager that the Hokage had standing off to the side in his office. Three of the children looked similar, with Weasley red hair and green eyes, while the last boy was paler than even Hari was, with black hair and black eyes. Beside him, standing close enough to show some kind of relationship between them, was the teen who possessed greyish/lavender hair and light coloured eyes she couldn't see so well in the shoddy lighting of the room.

"Hari-hime, these are the first batch of Ne operatives who have passed the psyche evaluations. As these five had not managed to 'graduate' from the program in a sense, they didn't complete Danzo's training. They are also the only ones to remember their names and lives prior to their institutionalisation."

The eldest stepped forward. "I am Shin. Danzo-san tried very hard to brainwash us into forgetting our names, like he did with everyone who entered his forces. I was assigned to these four however, and because I had not forgotten my own name, I would not let them forget theirs. Nor would I allow him to destroy their love for their hobbies."

Gesturing the the pale boy beside him, he said, "This is Sai. I see him as my little brother. Directly after him are Fuyu, Aki, and Haru. They are all children of the now dead Honda Clan. We are all orphans unfortunately, and have nowhere to go."

So that was the reason. They needed a place to stay and what better place than the one that was already on constant watch because of her threat level to the village? It would ensure them a safe space to reside in, while being kept under close watch just in case. And besides, she would never leave orphaned children who didn't even have any livelihood, out on the streets.

The Hokage lifted his pipe and took a few drags from it. The smoke he released created a ring around his face. "They have each taken the Genin Exam and passed brilliantly. The Honda siblings will be making up a team that will be handled under Jonin Tenzo. Shin-san and Sai-san will be joining Karina-chan's team for the time being. Mitarashi Anko has accepted her promotion to Jonin in time to take this team. They will undergo the amount of missions necessary in the proper amount of time for the upcoming Chunin Exams. You must speak with Tenzo about his new team at a later date."

How convenient. Also, it meant that Anko's and Tenzo's teams would be around Team Seven a lot if the women had any say in the matter. Hari knew how Anko was and Anko loved annoying people. She also liked freaking Naruto out, and what better way that to be around all the time? And Tenzo viewed Kakashi as his senpai despite both of them being the same level as 'ex-Anbu'. He would surely bring his team around in order to get advice from his beloved senpai.

It was a good thing the orphanage had all those extra rooms. She had a feeling that many of the Ne operatives would be joining the orphanage in the near future, and it was a good thing the rooms were sectioned off. She also needed to plan ahead for what she would do with them.
The Hokage held out a small stack of files. Five altogether, and one for each child. "Familiarise yourself with them and make sure that they are being treated fairly. While the Honda triplets are the same age as a majority of your children, they are not accustomed to being around normal children. It will take time for them to acclimate themselves to their new surroundings."

She accepted the information and bowed. "I will see to it that they assimilate perfectly, Hokage-sama. I know the perfect way to get kids to get along with each other."

It involved an arse load of sweets and games, but it would be done. She would get ten year olds to act like ten year olds in one way or another. Even if it resulted in tantrums.

Turning to the group of new Genin, she said, "My name is Potta Hari. I am the matron of Konoha's only orphanage. I read and cook for fun, and I will be taking care of you until you are allowed to live on your own. Anything further can be explained once we get to my office."

The children all gave a simultaneous bow of respect, before following her from the Hokage's Tower.

Mentally, she was going over the different rooms that would be available. The triplets would be put on the same floor, rooms apart from one another. Shin and Sai would be getting almost an entire floor all to themselves because the most children were beneath the age of ten. There was Mikoko, but she liked to keep to herself most of the time. She was also out on missions since she had recently graduated as a Genin.

Overall, she had a feeling things would go well.

"Sai-chan!"

Said young teen merely blinked when one of the orphans he'd just been introduced to, came bumbling over, smiling like they were friends.

A friend was someone that you formed a bond of mutual affection with. Friends were said to share secrets and happiness, and were supposed to confide in one another. When he thought of the definition, Shin came to mind, but no one else. He didn't know the girl with the black hair buns, and he didn't understand why she was smiling at him.

"Sai-chan, you were gone for so long!" she went on to say as she pulled him into what he knew was a hug. Shin gave him hugs. Shin's hugs felt nice and warm and not at all invasive like the one he was being forced into.

"Now, Miki-chan, please give Sai-san some space. He's been through a lot because of The Man," said Hari-sama, the matron of the orphanage that Sai was to be residing in until he reached Chunin Rank and could care for himself. The woman was soft spoken for the most part, but did seem willing to get intense if it was necessary.

The collective group of orphans all gulped as one unit and set their terrified gazes upon him.

Sai blinked. "Hari-sama, who is 'The Man' supposed to be?" The way the title was said, it sounded ominous. The children looked what he would describe as horrified at the mere mention of said title.

She spared a glance to say, "Danzo," before returning to filing of her papers.

"You survived being chosen by The Man?" one of the other girls asked, looking at him with big eyes. "You must be very strong."
Sai was thankfully saved by Shin, who decided to take over the answering of questions. Meanwhile, Sai pulled out his pocket-sized dictionary and looked up the word, 'unease'. Because he was feeling a lot of it and he didn't like it. It was troublesome, he decided. And unnecessary as well. What good did such emotions do for him?

"We never thought we'd see Sai-san again," an older girl insisted. Her name was Mikoko, if he recalled her introduction correctly. She was around his age, though he didn't ever remember meeting her, and she was also a Genin of Konoha.

"He was four when The Man came and took him away," Mikoko added stiffly, a frown marring her plain features. "I was almost the one taken that day, I remember it well."

Sai's head tilted and he asked, "Then my name is actually Sai?" Danzo-sama had said they would be given codenames. But then again, Shin was still using his birth name, or so he claimed. So perhaps Danzo-sama had lied? Or maybe it was a hoax all along?

"Yes," said Hari-sama. "Your birth name is Sai. Your parents were civilians who were killed during the Kyubi Attack and you lived in the Konoha Orphanage for the first four years of your life. Under the dubious care of the former matron, you were traded into Shimura Danzo's hands for a measly sum of money that didn't even go into helping the orphanage get by."

He could feel Shin's annoyance. Shin had become very emotional as of late. Shin had always been better at expressing his emotions, even though he had been in Ne longer than Sai.

In a moment of curiosity, Sai flicked through his book a few times before stopping on a page. "It says here that one of the definitions of slavery is 'owning another who has been sold into bondage, and forcing them to do your bidding while denying them their rights'. That is what has happened to those of us who had been in Ne, yes?"

Hari-sama gave a short nod. "Unfortunately. That will not happen here, I promise you. These walls are safe."

He nodded. While he couldn't recall his time in Ne being terrible, he wouldn't really want to return to that life. Besides, he could continue his art now, and perhaps finally name one of his many creations. And no one would be around to tell him it was a pointless hobby.

"I am looking forward to being under your care," said the boy with a small bow.

Shin nodded. "I too look forward to our time together."

Sai's silence was interrupted by the girl that had hugged him first. Miki. "You still like to draw, right Sai-chan? We can go to the rec room and draw on the boards!"

She proceeded to tug on his arm, leading him to wherever it was that she wanted to go. He sent a helplessly confused look at his older brother figure and huffed when all Shin did was laugh.

Perhaps his book would have a definition for the odd tingling feeling in his gut.

Early that morning, Kakashi found himself staring at a white box that Naruto held out with a smile. And when he opened it, he was staring at a fresh miniature cake with chocolate and strawberries. And it smelled delicious, which showed that it wasn't made by a shop since those types of sweets always tasted metallic from sitting too long.

The card inside had a small heart on it and was written in a slightly sloppy script that he realized was
Hari's. He'd never seen her handwriting before, so it was a unique experience. He was going to use it as a bookmark from now on. For memory purposes only of course.

*Congratulations on another year!*
*Eat the cake and relax.*
*Come over for dinner again.*

~Hari.

Naruto thrust a small, orange bag at him. Inside was a medium sized potted plant with many green leaves. "The name is Mr. Ukki, sensei. Treat her well."

"*Her*?"

"Don't judge," the boy deadpanned.

With his hands up, he nodded. "Thank you, Naruto." He accepted the bag, hooking it over a wrist.

Sasuke tossed him a red book, which he caught with his now free hand. The title said, *Icha Icha Violence*. The newest in the series. It was reverently place beside the plant in the bag. Ino then handed him a large packet of free ramen tickets. Now, it was either for him to eat food, or to save his wallet whenever he offered to buy the team their lunch and Naruto dragged them to Ichiraku's on impulse where he then decided to gorge himself on fourteen bowls at once. It was much appreciated either way.

"Thanks."

He hadn't really celebrated in many years, and in a way, it was nice. Also, Hari had baked a cake specifically for him. He really liked that. Sure she had done it for Sasuke when it was his birthday, and would probably do it for Ino and Naruto, but it still made him feel just a little bit special.

Also, no one had ever baked him anything for him personally before, so it was an even more emotional gift. Someone cared enough about the fact that he was born, and that was what hit him the hardest.

He would also expecting something 'youthful' coming from Gai at some point, but that could wait until the deed actually came about.

September 15th was looking to be a pretty good day.

"Hey, Ero-Jiji, you shouldn't be perving on the women in the baths!"

Jiraiya flinched at the sudden sound of his godson's voice coming from behind him. He had not heard anyone join him, and yet there the boy was, standing there in his orange monstrosity that practically begged anyone to target him. He winced upon laying eyes on the jumpsuit and knew that he would have to fix that at some point.

Also… "I am not that old!" he protested loudly, feeling offended deep within his very being at the suggestion that he was old enough to be a grandfather. Technically he was, but he most certainly didn't look it and there was no way that everyone remembered his age off the cuff! It was not fair!

"And I am not a pervert," Jiraiya added, folding his arms in hopes of appearing more important and larger than life. Of course the unimpressed look his godson sent his way, didn't do much for his self esteem at present. "I'm a super pervert!" he decided.
There was a difference.

Naruto had Minato's eyes. And the look in them reminded Jiraiya so much of his former student that his breath was arrested for only a moment. Because it was the same calculating look that Minato got when he was planning something, and coming from the son of two geniuses - one of which that was a prankster - and this did not bode well for Jiraiya's sanity in the least.

"You a shinobi, Ero-Jiji? You got the hitai-ate and everything, though it looks weird."

"I am glad you asked. I am the gallant Jiraiya! Gama Sennin of Myobokuzan, most powerful of the Densetsu no Sannin, lover of women, and winner of the hearts of all fair maidens that walk the nations!" As usual when introducing himself, he made a split-second summon and stood atop the human sized, red toad as he announced his greatness for all to behold!

Naruto was not look at him though. He staring down at the toad, eyes wide and completely enraptured. Hearts were practically swirling in his eyes as he reached out to pat Gamamori's head. "That's the biggest toad ever! It's great! -ttebayo!"

Jiraiya felt a pang of remembrance for the vivacious Kushina and her little verbal tick that somehow sounded cute all the time, even when she was ready to cut someone's head off. Naruto took after his father in appearance, but Kushina's temperament had passed on wholeheartedly instead. It was such a strange mixture of the Kiiroi Senko and the Akai Chishio no Habanero, that blended together to form… Konoha's future Orenji Hokage. The irony was not lost on him.

Still, he could see this as a way to ingratiate himself into the blond's good graces. When an opportunity presented itself, it was foolish to ignore after all. And Jiraiya was all about taking opportunities.

"I can summon toads ten times as large, gaki."

The heart eyes practically multiplied. "You must be pretty awesome, eh Ero-Sennin?"

The nickname was never going to go away. Although he had to admit that it was at least better than being called a grandpa, and it was also better than what Kushina used to call him. He shivered at the memories and decided to push them away for the time being.

"Tell you what, kid, I can teach you how to summon toads if you want."

As expected, blue eyes went wide with excitement, before it was all reined in, the boy looking up at him with a calculating gaze. "What's in it for you? It's hard to believe that some old ninja I insulted a ton of times just suddenly wants to teach me."

Those Academy reports - at least the ones written by anyone other than Umino Iruka - were completely wrong. The kid didn't just take everything at face value, which was good. It showed that he was capable of thinking for himself and wasn't as naive as he lead others to believe he was. Jiraiya couldn't feel anything but pride at how Naruto managed to turn out despite being mostly alone his whole life.

"Naruto," Jiraiya said, letting Gamamori return home so that he could bring himself to the boy's level. It was time to reveal all. "I trained the Yondaime."

Another moment of wide eyes.

"I practically raised him. He named you after the hero of my very first book. A name I got when I sat down and ate some ramen during a rainstorm. He and Kushina were very excited when they told me
you were on the way. They named me your godfather."

Naruto blinked a few times.

"So where have you been this whole time then?"

He had a godfather. A man he had never met in his life, whom his parents had entrusted his health to. Why hadn't he ever met the man then? What else was being kept from him? Why was it that everyone and their brother could make decisions about his life and not at least tell him about them?

Jiraiya sighed. "I'm Konoha's resident Spy Master. I could have brought you along into the danger, but there are problems that you need to consider. You look like your father, and should the Yondaime's sensei be seen in the presence of a mini-Yondaime, it would paint a large target on your back. My job consists of a lot of dangerous missions to capture information from all sorts of people, and another person with absolutely no skills in defending themselves, would jeopardize the missions I went on. The Konoha Council did not approve of the idea of bringing you, meaning Danzo convinced the other members who were in his pocket, to disagree, which made things harder on Sarutobi-sensei. If he acts out against their judgment it could be seen as favoritism which can cause a national incident should the right people find out and cause a scene. Finally, having you hidden within the walls and using a different name was more safe overall than any life you would have made as a nomad alongside me."

It made sense, but that didn't mean he liked it. But at the same time he was kind of grateful that it wasn't just because he wasn't wanted. He was used to it by now, but it still hurt to think about all those years he'd been alone and no one would even smile at him. Until he went to Ichiraku's with Jiji and met Ayame and Teuchi.

"Also, kid, I sent in your stipend every month."

Naruto's jaw dropped without his permission. "I thought that was the orphan stipend!"

Jiraiya snorted. "There was no such thing. The former matron in charge of the orphans hoarded funds for her own personal gain and lied about how much money the orphanage accrued. There was no way that you would have been sent money from her. Now Hari-hime is a different story as she actually sets aside a small stipend for each child under her care, but she's also a better person and has skills in dealing with those financial situations, so it makes sense."

So then his godfather had been sending him nearly one thousand Ryo bi-weekly for the past however many years. From a distance, he'd been taking care of Naruto's basic needs, and Naruto never even knew. He cared in his own way.

"I also sent Gama-chan, and your Gama night cap, and the Gama slippers you still use."

His face flushed instantly upon realizing that the man knew that he still slept in his kiddy pajamas that still fit him perfectly. How embarrassing!

"So what do you say, kid? Want to learn from your father's sensei and possibly pick up some of the Yondaime's skills while you're at it?"

He didn't even need to think about it. Naruto was nodding before Jiraiya even finished speaking. Being taught shinobi stuff by a Sannin who was probably just as strong as the crazy blonde lady meant he could learn super cool Ninjutsu and become even stronger! And if would bring him a step closer to taking the hat from the old man!
"Bring it, Ero-Sennin! I can handle anything! -ttebayo!"

Hari grimaced as the young man in front of her would not stop talking! She didn't know what to do to get him to go away but every time she went to move, he would follow. And she didn't want to be followed all the way back to the flat with him on her bloody tail! Perhaps levitating him into a skip would do him some good?

"Hari-chan!"

She breathed a sigh of relief as Shizune came literally out of nowhere, holding a bag of ingredients that seemed plant based. "It's so good to have run into you!" the woman gushed. "Tsunade-sama was hoping to speak with you today!"

She gave a nod. Tsunade was a hero. Turning to the man/boy/person, she said, "Sorry, I have to go. Can't keep a legendary kunoichi capable of punching down mountains, waiting on little old me."

The two women escaped immediately and she could only breathe easier once they disappeared around the corner. "Usually if I'm with Anko or Kakashi, people don't bother me. The one time I decided to go out without anyone with me and I get hounded."

Shizune snorted into her palm and tried to remain polite even as she laughed at Hari's expense.

"What does Tsunade-san need?" the Potter Lady asked after a few moments of them just walking.

"Nothing. I just needed an excuse to save you."

She took it back. Shizune was the hero instead.

"Thank you. You just saved me from having to be unnecessarily harsh. I hate being put in those kinds of positions. And he couldn't take 'no' for an answer! Is it really that difficult to stay out of my personal space?"

The other woman hummed in understanding. "People like him are annoying."

"So true."

"You focus your chakra pretty well," said Jiraiya. "I had expected it to be more erratic, but you're actually coming along farther and faster than I thought you would."

Naruto scoffed. "Don't underestimate me, Ero-Sennin! Ino and Kakashi-sensei have had me using my Kage Bunshin for months and I've learned how to control my chakra better than before. It was either getting good, or being hit with Ino's straight edge, and while a foot long piece of wood doesn't seem like a big deal, it still hurts when she uses it. She's too fast to dodge most of the time."

He shivered, remembering how many times he'd been smacked. She'd called it 'positive reinforcement training' in order to get him to work harder so he didn't have to deal with the hitting. The faster he perfected the training in question, the less hitting would happen. It made sense. It was also evil.

He'd already managed to fix his Academy Taijutsu, even if he wasn't that great at it still. But with a hundred Kage Bunshin working on it nearly every day, it was decent. And now Jiraiya had about one hundred of his Kage Bunshin going over the basic kata of what he was calling Uzuken. The Vortex Fist of the Uzumaki Clan, developed in their home of Uzushiogakure and apparently very
dangerous should he add Water or Wind natured chakra while doing it. And he had Wind, so it was going to be kick ass!

Meanwhile, Naruto himself was trying to learn how to summon toads. Jiraiya had him sign the summoning the contract days ago, and he'd ended up summoning a tadpole on his first try. But he hadn't known how much chakra to use, and had lowered the amount, thinking it would be best to start off small.

After Jiraiya cackled like a madman for several minutes, pointing very rudely to the small creature Naruto had unfortunately dragged from its home, he decided to get his ass off the ground and actually instruct a bit. Which was what lead Naruto to trying to reach different levels of chakra for the jutsu to even work properly.

This time - the eleventh try in total today - there was a lot of chakra to use.

The hand seals would take time getting used to, but he'd get it eventually. He just needed time. At present, he just wanted to summon a toad that could speak.

"Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

The explosion resulted in a large white cloud, and Naruto no longer standing on the ground. Instead, he was overlooking Konoha, the trees that always seemed so large ever since he was a little kid, looking like nothing but plain sticks while the civilians resembled little ants now.

Cool.

"Jiraiya!" the toad beneath him hollered, and Naruto realized that he had finally done it! He had summoned a toad that could speak, and it was taller than any of the buildings in Konoha!

"Sugoi!" he couldn't help but cheer, proud of himself and amazed all at once.

"Why is there a little gaki tap dancing on my head?" the toad demanded, his deep voice practically shaking everything around him.

"I am not little!" the blond protested, jumping down so he was standing on the toad's nose, putting them sort of eye to eye. "I am perfectly normal, and my name is Uzumaki Naruto! I summoned you! -ttebayo!"

The toad's entire body heaved with the force of his snort. He didn't believe Naruto!

"There's no way a little punk like you could summon Gamabunta, Boss of the Toad Clan!"

"Hell yes I can and did! Ero-Jiraiya let me sign your contract and then I practiced summoning a few times before you came out!"

"I refuse!" the toad roared. "You wouldn't even be able to last ten seconds on me, gaki! You aren't cut out to be a summoner!"

Naruto did not like being underestimated. "I can keep you out here all day, Gama-Jiji! You'll never get rid of me!"

He then planted himself on the toad's head, using his chakra to adhere himself to the surface of the skin. He would not be moved and that was that! And then the old toad would have to acknowledge him and his new summoner!
"What the hell?" Hari demanded as Jiraiya jumped in the window with an unconscious Naruto slung over his shoulder.

"He trained really hard today," the man said, already heading for Naruto's room. "He learned how to summon, and managed to summon the boss, which is about the size of your animal form. And the bigger the size of the summon, the more chakra one needs to summon them."

"Naruto has tonnes of chakra! How could he have depleted all of it?"

Jiraiya winced. "He and Gamabunta didn't get along well at first and ended up with a bet. Naruto had to keep Gamabunta here until sunset, which meant extreme use of chakra to keep the paths between the summoning realm and our realm open, and then he also had to stay on top of Gamabunta's head as well. It was a lot of work, but he managed it, and really impressed the Boss while he was at it. Finally, he'd been using about one hundred Kage Bunshin all day to memorize the kata of his clan's special Taijutsu, and foolishly dispelled all of them at once. The memory overload knocked him out."

She sighed. "He'll be okay though, right?" At least he wasn't bleeding in the hospital, so that was something at least. He was now laying in his bed, shoes removed courtesy of Jiraiya, while Hari placed his headband on the table beside the bed.

The man snorted. "It'll take a lot more than simple chakra exhaustion to take this gaki down."

"Thanks for bringing him home."

"What kind of gallant shinobi would I be if I left my apprentice/godson unconscious in the middle of the woods?"

"So he knows?"

"He understood surprisingly well. Also, the fact that I sent him most of his precious items and am the one footing his stipend, seemed to settle him down even more."

She sighed, feeling drained. If Naruto could forgive the man for his lack of obvious presence, then maybe she could as well. It was just to hard to remain objective when she was emotionally attached to the boy.

"It's time to train, my cute little Genin!"

Naruto, Ino, and Sasuke all shared a look. When their sensei pulled the 'cute little Genin' card, it usually meant bad things. For them specifically. And the last time he had aimed such words in their direction, they had been forced through horizontal training for nearly four days. And while it was a nice skill to have in a way, it still sucked ass.

Naruto huffed and folded his arms in an attempt to gird himself. He wasn't going to like this. Kakashi-sensei wasn't like Ero-Sennin. Ero-Sennin demonstrated first, and then went off to 'research'. Kakashi-sensei stood there reading his porn and making comments. So no, it wouldn't be fun at all. For any of them.

"Today, we are going to be doing some Retrieval training!" said their sensei, looking for all intents and purposes, like he'd just won the lottery. That made everything even worse, because he was actually happy about this ind of training and a happy Kakashi was an annoying Kakashi. "I'm going to send each of you out to retrieve something for me. You will have a time limit and I will be judging you more than you think, so I hope you give it your all."
They were waiting for the ball to drop because there was no way that any kind of training that Kakashi-sensei came up with, would in any way be so simple as to just retrieve something. He was a devious man and had been a former Anbu for Kami-sama's sake! There was no way they would just get off with a time limit and an evaluation of all things!

"Mah, why do you all look so scared? It's a perfectly normal type of training, I promise." The eye smile did not ease their worries in the least.

Lies. All lies.

"Follow me."

They did, though the three shared unnerved looks behind the man's back. Kakashi-sensei had to be getting some kind of enjoyment from putting them off so much. He was a bit of an asshole, if Naruto was to be honest. He liked the man, but he was also pure evil.

After several minutes of meandering through the village, Kakashi came to a stop, his eyes latched onto a moderately sized house in one of the civilian districts in the North Quarter. The blue house was of a more modern make, lacking all traditional architecture like the clan homes. Naruto wrinkled his nose at the sight of it, not liking the theme of the garden that rested outside in the front. It was all just a mashed up mess that offended even him. Hari-nee-chan would probably hate it too.

"This is a good spot," said Kakashi, putting his book away. That wasn't good. It meant he would be dedicating all of his attention to this exercise. "Naruto-kun, front and center."

The blond stepped forward, though not exactly in the very front. More like a little behind Kakashi's right shoulder. Best to not have his back vulnerable within the man's presence. "Yes, sensei?" Dread was building in his stomach and he hated every second of it.

"You get to go first and show our less seasoned teammates how it's done. You are going to infiltrate that house and find something that is obvious and out in the open. You are then going to take the item and bring it to me. If you get caught, you fail and get to do some horizontal training until Ino-chan and Sasuke-kun perfect this exercise."

Ino's loud sputtering made both of them turn around. She was staring at their sensei, looking horrified. "You want him to steal from a civilian?" she asked, sounding as baffled as Sasuke looked. Naruto was equally confused, though he didn't really know what to say in the situation. Though why a civilian had to be the target did confuse him a bit.

Kakashi patted Naruto's back three times, nearly knocking him over with the unnecessary force used. "Our resident Prankster King should easily be able to sneak into some civilian's household and take some of their possessions without being spotted. If I recall, he managed to infiltrate the homes of a number of our registered Chunin and never got caught by them. And those pranks stretch back three years ago. He has more skills now."

His face flushed instantly. He understood in a sense, what was going on. Naruto had the best skills when it came to pranking. Pranking, according to Hari-nee-chan, involved Trap Making, Infiltration, Reconnaissance, Scouting, and Strategy. So Kakashi-sensei was basically teaching them these five great lessons, all rolled into one training session. The man was brilliant, even if he was evil.

"I can do it, sensei. -ttebayo!" It was his specialty after all, and he couldn't let himself be outdone in this!

"The demonstrate for us. You have ninety seconds."
And Naruto was gone, making ten Kage Bunshin and sending them out to the different corners of the house. Some scaled the walls, others sneaked inside through the open windows. He waited for a few seconds, before they all dispersed. The only person in the house was a woman in relative youth. She was in the lounge, watching TV. She wouldn't be able to hear him even if he was loud enough for a civilian to hear. That was good.

He had to steal something obvious. Something that would be missed.

He smirked. Her remote. She would have to get up and cross the room every time she wanted to watch a different channel, or wanted to change the sound. It was devious and he loved it!

Naruto wanted no time in scaling the wall and entering through the bathroom window. The memories of his one Bunshin let him know where to go. He crawled along the wall instead of using the stairs. He didn't know what sort of condition they were in and didn't want to deal with the possible creaking.

The lounge was decorated nicely in shades of blue and brown. So even though the outside was a mess, the inside was decent enough. Naruto recognized the civilian immediately when he glanced around the corner. She was an avid, anti-demon supporter. In other words, she really hated Naruto and made her dislike of him very well known over the years. A few stones may have thrown a few times as well.

He was overcome with the urge to do some damage to her property. To pay her back for being such a horrible person over the years. However, there was just a small voice inside that was telling him it was wrong. He was there for a mission. He was supposed to be training, and his emotions should not be interfering on said training mission.

But even more important than that, were the words of his nee-chan. Hari insisted that a prank was never meant to hurt anyone. Pranks were supposed to be funny and done in good humor (unless they were revenge pranks like he did to an old Academy sensei). She had told him stories of her twin friends who played pranks but didn't do so with the intent to hurt people, unlike her father and his friends who became bullies in school because their pranks went far enough to hurt others or worse.

Naruto didn't want to be a bully. And he didn't want to be a bad person. Just because the civilian was horrible to him, didn't mean he should lower himself to her level. If she was too stupid to see him for who he truly was, that wasn't his fault. She'd simply learn her lesson when he finally became the Hokage. One day she would see.

Until then, it was not Naruto's job to play judge or jury. Being mature sucked.

Huffing to himself, Naruto slipped through the room, sneaking up behind her chair and taking the remote off the table beside where she sat. She never even noticed either. He stuck his tongue out for good measure, and then fled because his time was almost up.

"Here you go, sensei!" he said when he returned to his team, well within the time limit, offering the remote to the man.

Kakashi hummed and accepted the offered item. "Well done. You showed some admirable self-control as well, Naruto. I'm proud of you."

He flushed. Apparently his sensei had known the type of person that had lived in the house. It wasn't necessarily a mission for him to prank, but for Kakashi to see his temperament. He wanted to know if Naruto could put the objective of the mission before his own wants and desires. He wanted to know if Naruto was capable of understanding when revenge was necessary and when it wasn't.
And he probably just passed a very important test in the man's eyes, which made him beam with pride. And to think, if he hadn't had Hari-nee-chan in his life, he probably wouldn't have made the decision to be the better person in the first place.

Sometimes, Kakashi could be pretty cool.

"Naruto, wait ten minutes and then go put the remote back exactly where you found it. It'll be enough time for her to notice and get agitated. Your time limit is thirty seconds this time. If you get caught, not only do you fail and end up with horizontal training all day, but you will have to dig yourself out of the hole you fell in."

He sighed. Kakashi was still evil though.

Ino grunted as she worked. She was standing in a line of shinobi who were currently undergoing Tsunade-sama's training regimen for the Iryo-nin. She had signed up for this and had pledged herself to learning so she could help her team! Just because there was some strain, didn't mean she could give up now!

Also, Kakashi-sensei's demonic ideas for training were paying off. Slowly but surely, she had noticed that her chakra reserves had been increasing in size over the past few months. The man knew what he was doing, and didn't baby them at least while he was doing it.

Ino was able to last a lot longer than even some of the older and more experienced shinobi simply because her sensei was evil. She wouldn't tell him that though. She'd let the results speak for her, because Ino had come to really not like braggarts. At least those who try to make others feel bad when they bragged. Naruto exclaiming that their team was 'super awesome' didn't really count because he genuinely believed their team was great and no other could compare. Faith and arrogance were two very different things.

"Yamanaka, thin your chakra output some more and focus it through only one tenketsu in each of your palms!" she heard Tsunade bark from across the room. The woman was so good that she could literally tell that Ino was using far more tenketsu than necessary! Ino wanted to be able to do that!

"Hai, Tsunade-sama!"

Closing her eyes, she focused the Yang Chakra that she was using on the fish, and thinned her chakra as much as she could. After doing all the damn vertical training that Kakashi kept throwing their way, she had to learn how to conserve chakra if she didn't want to end up flattened by the end of their training days. This meant becoming intimately familiar with her chakra coils and how much she used at any given time. Even where she released it.

She chose the tenketsu directly in the center of her palms as her output, and focused on the internal damage that had been done to the fish.

It wasn't just her having to fix the gash in its underbelly, she also had to fix everything inside, and then patch up the outside while she was at it. Ino was further ahead than most of her classmates, beaten only by Hinata, and two shinobi she didn't recognize. But that was fine. She was catching up on her own terms. She was making a difference. Meaning something.

Tsunade stalked through the lines of their tables, murmuring things in passing. Some good, some not so good, but nothing overtly terrible or degrading. She was the world's best medic! She was allowed to have incredibly high standards. The fact that she was teaching them at all was a blessing.

Another ten minutes had Ino staring down at her seemingly perfectly healed, dead fish. She wiped
the sweat from her brow and smiled at her work, looking around to gauge how everyone else was doing. Hinata was already done, looking more tired than ever though. Karin was not too far behind her, and Sakura was just finishing up, mere seconds after Ino.

A few others were already sitting back as Tsunade-sama and Shizune-senpai examined their fish to make sure the Shousen Jutsu had been performed to their standards. Ino tried to ignore the fact that Tsunade-sama was carrying around a bottle of sake. She had to remind herself that all shinobi had their quirks and that she shouldn't judge. Also, the woman had fought in war, sacrificed a lot for the village, and decided to come back after everything she'd been through in life, just to teach them how to protect their comrades. She had every right to her guilty pleasures.

"Hello, Yamanaka-san!" Shizune-senpai said as she came over to review Ino's hard work. "Your chakra stitching was done very well," she said as she poured her own chakra through the dead fish. "I can tell that you were getting a bit tired though by the time you finished. The heart was your first choice as it shows the most detail, and the belly was the last because it had the least refinement. Still good, but had it been a person, it would have caused some unnecessary strain on the muscles and left them decidedly tender for an unnecessary amount of time."

Ino wilted just a bit. She had powered through it and still managed to make such mistakes. Damn.

"Don't feel down. You've only been taking this class for a week and have come in almost every day. You are in the 90th percentile in the class, which is a big deal. And you will learn better control and refinement in further lessons. You did a very good job and should be proud of all that you've accomplish in this limited time frame."

Ninetieth percentile. In a class of fifty-four individuals, that meant that she scored higher than at least forty-eight people! That ratio was good in her opinion!

She couldn't wait to get home and tell her parents!

"Thank you, Shizune-senpai!"

"Why do we have to be blindfolded?" Sasuke demanded even as he slipped his hitai-ate over his face and proceeded to tie it as tight as he could. Immediately, he tried to focus on his hearing, because he knew that whatever they were about to do, was going to be hell on all of them. Uchiha did not like surprises and they did not like being uninformed.

"Because, my cute little Genin, you are going to be dealing with raising your awareness through your other senses. Can't rely on your eyes all the time."

And that was when Sasuke knew that he was going to hate whatever they would be doing. He was a member of a clan that specialized on ocular techniques. That meant his eyes were a very important part of his life as a shinobi.

Kakashi's voice sounded pretty close to them. In front of Sasuke, a little to the right. "The Hyuga have this test where they deprive their clan members of their senses for however long it takes for them to unlock their Byakugan. Every member has it, but some unlock their Doujutsu earlier than others. If a Hyuga has to go into confinement until they unlock their Byakugan, it is considered a stain on their name and reputation within the clan."

What. The. Fuck? Hinata was forced into total sensory deprivation just so she could unlock her family's Kekkei Genkai? That was disgusting and it didn't sound right to him. Especially since he was a member of a Doujutsu clan as well and the Uchiha had never put such expectations on their
members. Sure, those with the Sharingan were considered better and earned more praise and respect, but they weren't locked away until they had the eyes everyone wanted. It was barbaric and he didn't like it.

"Not only am I preparing you three for life as a shinobi, but I am also preparing you for the Chunin Exams. Tetsu no Kuni is a mysterious place to most of us, and from what little I know, I have already devised a set training schedule for your team. This not only requires you to begin the training in a specific weapon, but it'll also have you learn how to regulate internal body temperatures, train you how to blend into different backgrounds in different climates without using Henge, help you learn how to liberate things from your foes without being noticed, and hopefully you'll learn how to single out each of your senses for specific purposes when you need to."

The promise of eventual weapon instruction sounded good to the Uchiha. He wanted to learn how to use the sword he'd stolen off that Kiri shinobi. And Naruto seemed to have acquired some chakram that he was excited to learn how to use properly. Finally, Ino would need to pick a weapon and then the whole team would have weapons to specialize in.

Kakashi cleared his throat to capture their attention again. "I am going to begin this training by talking casually. I will surround you all and make it difficult for you to keep up with me. Within ten minutes, I won't even be in the training ground, and you'll still have to listen for me. I will still be able to hear you all just fine, but your job is to stay put and answer my questions. If you go more than thirty seconds without answering me, you'll get a little zap from somewhere. Of course if you manage to sense the incoming attack, you are allowed to dodge.

"I will be moving at Chunin speed and if you dodge, you will have avoided a hit. I will not attempt to strike again until another thirty second silence occurs. Good luck, my cute little Genin."

There was a familiar sound of a poof. Now, that could mean that Kakashi had used Shunshin, that he used a normal Henge, that he used the Kawarimi, or that he made a Kage Bunshin. So they had to rely on their other senses, but mostly hearing, in order to locate him.

"Question number one," Kakashi said casually, voice coming from Sasuke's left. His immediate left. He was practically right next to Sasuke and the teen had to withhold a shiver at how frighteningly quickly the man had gotten into his guard. "What was the name of our Shodaime's wife?"

"Uzumaki Mito," said Naruto immediately, without any hesitation.

A swish alerted them to Kakashi's movement, but it was coming from Sasuke's other side now. Maybe he'd gone a created some Kage Bunshin? Sasuke could still smell the scent coming off the pages of Kakashi's Icha Icha novel, which was still beside him, so the man hadn't moved, right?

"What is the best way to counter drunkenness if you imbibe too much alcohol?" But that voice was coming from their right. A Bunshin?

Ino gasped. "You have to focus your chakra into your esophagus and your stomach and apply heat to the alcohol by boiling your chakra through intense vibrations. Eventually it'll burn away, but it does cause indigestion."

A cricket that sounded in the distance almost made him jump, but he held back the impulse movement. Just barely though. Uchiha did not do such plebeian things as flinching. At least not in front of others.

"Why have we formed up to twenty-seven generations of the Ino-Shika-Cho formation?"
"Because if it isn't broke, there's no reason to fix it," Sasuke said quietly. "Compatibility aside, it would be stupid to break up what usually ends up working so well. Our team doesn't matter in the long run because there are many Ino-Shika-Cho potentials in the Academy as we speak and they will be paired together when they graduate, so the loss of Ino wouldn't really be felt."

"Well reasoned." Kakashi sounded much further away this time. Somewhere behind Sasuke. It made his skin crawl, being unable to see a possible enemy. Having his back exposed. It also made him realize that he relied upon his vision far too much when faced with problems. If he became one of those annoying shinobi who relied only upon their Kekkei Genkai, he would be weak. Weakness was not int he cards. Uchiha were not weak.

Should there come a time where he cannot use his Sharingan in any manner, he needed to learn how to handle it. It just sucked that this was the way he was learning.

There was breathing from in front of him, but he could hear Kakashi walking away in the other direction. And then there were both Naruto and Ino. Naruto's sandals were squeaking as he hopped from side to side, trying to get his energy out. Sasuke could smell Ino's shampoo and it was distracting in its floral make. There was a loud cricket somewhere in the distance though he couldn't pinpoint a direction. He wanted to squish the damn thing.

"What does the term Jinchuuriki mean?"

Kakashi was really far away then. Like really far. Sasuke could barely make out those words and felt himself straining and even tilting his head so his ear would face where he was sure Kakashi was. Five o'clock if he was correct. Or maybe that was just his Bunshin talking.

None of them had an answer for the man though, and the seconds ticked by. He was hyper aware of the trickle of cold sweat trailing down his back. It was practically freezing amidst the heat around him, and he felt uncomfortable as it started to feel hotter outside. Or more muggy he should say, as it was kind of stifling, but not in a dry sense.

Sasuke whirled around suddenly, but was too late to intercept the disturbance that had been headed for him. A hand on his forearm halted his attempt to escape and he felt a slight shock zap him then, the current trailing down to his fingers and made them go uncomfortably numb. The area where he'd been hit, tingled and he tried moving his arm a bit to relieve the feeling. He gritted his teeth to refrain from cursing.

"First missed question," Kakashi tsked, sounding a lot closer than before. "For your information, Jinchuuriki means 'power of human sacrifice'."

Why would they even need to know that?

"Take heart, my cute little Genin! We aren't going to give up when you seem to be doing pretty well so far!"

He was a sadistic bastard. Sasuke was many things, but a snitch he was not. Yet, he felt that some retaliation was necessary in this moment. Something that would put their sensei in his place for deciding to spring this on them at the last moment.

"What is the current political climate like between the villages of Kusagakure and Amegakure?"

Once again, why would they even need to know that?

He was going to tell Hari-san. And then she could make their annoying sensei suffer.
Or just throw him out a window. Either would work just fine.

"And then he made us run laps horizontally around the outer wall while he sat at the top and watched us! And his 'eternal rival' showed up and then we had the company of two green leotard wearing weirdos that wanted to run with us!"

Naruto hadn't even gotten into his ramen yet, he was too busy complaining about how unfair training had been that day. Kakashi-sensei was a slave driver and he'd begun pushing them since the first three days of their reprieve had passed. And push and push he did, without any mercy. The man didn't even let them break for more than half an hour before they were up and at it again to something new!

"He said it would increase your chakra control though, right?" asked Hari as she set down a bowl in front of Karin. "That has to be good for something. All training is good for something. And Gai-san is very energetic and someone to look up to in terms of Taijutsu and will power."

He grumbled, knowing she was right but not really wanting to admit it. He was too annoyed to be rational now. The whole day had just been one headache after another and he was actually hurting in some places!

Karin huffed. "You think you have it bad. Anko-sensei decided to set her snakes upon us today! We had to dodge them all day and even when we managed to just get away, more would appear! It was horrible, and they bite hard and are poisonous too! Shin had to be taken to the hospital."

Naruto shuddered at the thought of the kunai licker that his nee-chan had decided to become friends with for some reason. At least Kakashi-sensei was nice enough to bring them lunch sometimes, or at least treat them now and then. The pervy lady though, was even more evil. And she flirted more with Hari-nee-chan than Kakashi-sensei did, so she was more annoying right now. All the groping and kissing was too far. Kakashi-sensei at least kept his hands to himself!

"They just want to help you become better. It won't happen overnight," said Hari as she finally sat down to join them. "I think it's nice that they are treating you like adults instead of children. It means that they are taking this training seriously and think that you're ready to handle it. A lot of adults forget that kids aren't stupid and that they are more capable than they appear. So take this as a sign of their faith in you and don't let them down."

She was right of course. Kakashi-sensei had withheld Team 7 from the Konoha Chunin Exams because he had faith that they would destroy people at the exams in Tetsu no Kuni. He even promised to train them super hard so they would be ready to administer Plan: Shock and Awe. It was nice that he thought they could do it if they worked hard enough. Naruto didn't have many people who would put their faith in him yet.

So maybe his sensei wasn't that bad. But still!

"Maybe I can get Ino and teme to help me prank him!"

"How are you and Sasuke-san doing?" Hari asked after a moment.

"Um… fine? Why?"

She shrugged as she lifted a piece of meat to her lips. "I just thought that maybe your relationship might have gotten a little closer while you were in Mizu no Kuni."

Well… the teme wasn't as quiet lately and he got involved more, but it didn't seem all too different.
He still brooded when he thought no one looked, and he pouted a lot too when he thought no one saw. It was actually kind of cute since it was coupled with the duck butt hair.

Karin snickered and he narrowed his eyes at her. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing!"

"Uh-huh."

He'd get it out of her eventually. But for now, he needed to plan a good prank. Something Icha Icha related would be good.

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Hari stared up at Kakashi from where she was seated on the ground at Training Ground Three. She had been busy doing the laps that Anko had specified for her, and had only just finished her second run of stretches afterward so that she could calm herself down in a healthy way.

On this day, Hari had brought a small personal picnic with her, so she had some cold water, and finger sandwiches to snack on for lunch that were kept under a cooling charm. On this day, she did not expect to see Kakashi at all, but then again, she couldn't control the man and he usually frequented this specific training ground more than the others.

"Koneko-chan, I see you've been improving," the man observed, staring out at the marked trees that made her path. "That's about a mile of running if you still do ten laps, correct?"

Damn ninja intelligence. The fact that he could guess that just from looking at the course for a few seconds, was amazing.

"Yes. I hate running, but at the same time I'm pretty good at it. I've always needed to be fast." Fast enough to flee from the bullying of her annoying cousin and his groupies. Fast enough to escape the hail storm of curses being thrown at her from Death Eaters. Fast enough to evade Voldemort's AKs that he tossed about like sweets. Yes, there had always been a need for Hari to be fast.

The silver-haired man hummed. "Since you're training is finished for the day, would you care to help with my training?"

She sent him a bland look. "I am not sparring with you any time soon. While the last time was humorous enough as it is, I don't feel like getting wet at present. It's a bother."

"How sad!" Kakashi sighed dramatically. "Koneko-chan doesn't like it when I get her wet and bothered."

The woman flushed at the suggestive words, but did not answer his taunting. She would not let him see the results of his words. She was better than that.

"No you aren't," said Death. "You give into his teasing all the time. You like it."

Shut up!

Anyway, back onto the subject at hand. "What kind of training and what's in it for me if I do help you, Koinu-kun?" she asked in a sickly sweet tone, batting her lashes repeatedly in hopes of annoying him or at the very least creeping him out a bit. Because that wasn't her normal attitude and obviously it would be weird, right?

It didn't work. He merely seemed amused. Perhaps all the other odd Jonin he knew raised his
tolerance for wonky shite. "Mah, I figure that if you could help me with this, then we can both read this lovely book I own, that you have yet to get a copy of." He held up said book. The one from the time in the kitchen. When she had him set the table while she messed around with the book and Jiraiya gaped like a fish as they argued over his porn.

"And how would we both read it if we're working?" inquired the woman doubtfully.

"Simple. I place it on the ground, and as I do my push ups, you sit on my back and read over my shoulder. You can then use your Kekkei Genkai to turn the pages. Both of us will be getting something out of it then."

She had sat on Anko's back a few times when the woman trained, but never anyone else. And this was Kakashi of all people. He wanted her to sit on him and read erotica with him, while he exercised. He she had been anyone else, she might have thought he was trying to be a pervert, but she knew better.

While it could have suggestive themes, it was a practical request and both would indeed benefit from it. He for exercise and she for new reading material. And he didn't ask her to read it aloud, which kind of negated any assumptions of him doing this out of a desire for sexual anything.

"Okay," she found herself agreeing, wanting to read the damn book. "How many push ups will you be doing?"

"One thousand."

Merlin.

"Speed run, or taking your time?"

"Taking my time."

He was suddenly even more impressive. And Hari was going to be sitting on his back for the next however long, reading erotica. She ignored the small tingle in her belly, and shrugged. Not sexual despite the content that would be involved.

"Let's do this."

Kakashi got into position and Hari gazed at his arse only for a few seconds. It wasn't wet this time so the fabric didn't cling as much, but it was still a nice view. Probably a result of the hard training he put himself through for years. Pert and firm. Nice.

"Go ahead," he urged her, and Hari was careful, throwing a leg over him and ending up straddling him. She shifted a few times, before shrugging and laying down instead. Sitting would be uncomfortable since he was ripped and she was pretty thin herself. So her butt would end up hurting. But laying on him was far more easy, and brought her face closer to the book. And if her head rested beside his own, neither acknowledged it.

And yes, she realised that this was not the position he'd spoken of, but it was just better for both of them. Besides, he was longer and wider than she was in frame, so she was easily able to lay on his back and not cause him any discomfort. Her hands couldn't even touched the ground from how her arms dangled over his sides. So it just made sense. Also, her weight was more evenly spread out this way.

"Chapter one," she announced unnecessarily, flicking a hand and watching as the page turned. "Just tell me when you're ready for a page flip."
And so went the next hour of Hari trying to divide her attention away from the rippling muscles of Kakashi's back, to the book that the both of them had managed to get twelve chapters into. It was difficult, and she only slightly regretted the position, especially when she was left feeling warm and fuzzy in the lower portion of the body.

How dare he be attractive and strong. And shame on her body for being so damn weak in finding obvious displays of strength, sexy!

"Thanks for your help, Koneko-chan," the man practically purred as he put the book away. "Perhaps we can finish the book together at a later date."

"Sure." It if meant finishing the book and laying on Kakashi's sexy body again, she would totally go for it. No shame at all. "So long as you're delicate with me, Koinu-kun," she added jokingly.

"I'll take care of you. I never let princesses overwork themselves. It's bad for my reputation."

"Your reputation as what?"

His lone eye curled upward to show that he was indeed smiling because of their banter. "My reputation as a protector of beautiful princesses of course. I won't work you too hard, Hari-hime."

She scoffed. "What if I want to be worked hard?" And if her voice got a little husky, who cared?

The stunned look on his face was like heaven for her eyes. His suggestive words and actions over the past hour seemed to melt away from his mind as he was reduced to light stuttering, shocked by her own suggestive words.

Taking pity on him, she patted his forearm and smiled. "It's okay, Kakashi-kun. You can work me hard when you're ready to." She then sat herself down for a late lunch, and gestured for the man to join her. Which he silently did, accepting a bottle of water with a stiff nod.

So Koinu-kun was susceptible to sexual overtures. Interesting.

"Happy birthday, Ino!"

Things went a little differently in the Yamanaka household. Ino had a big family, that had many connections to a lot of other big families. Ino was also the Heiress to a clan, and as such, her birthday was a big event in a sense. It dealt with posturing, politics, and so much drama. All things she secretly loved even if she wouldn't admit it. They were like her bread and butter.

But she was a Yamanaka so that was to be expected. The mind games and the duality of the situation were right up her alley!

Unlike her teammates who had spent many years without parental influence and didn't really have chances for large birthday parties with a bunch of other people, Ino had practically lived and breathed the decorum required for such events. And she had taken her training with pride, knowing that she would soon be like her mother, who could talk circles around anyone. It was a learned skill and Ino was still learning, but one day she would be a master!

It also served to help prepare her for her kunoichi classes back in the Academy.

This year wasn't any different from the former years, though not all of her friends could come this time because most were shinobi now and were out on missions. But they had still left gifts for their families to bring in anyway. Something to make her happy while also making themselves look good
Ino had invited her entire team, adding a threat in for her sensei that she would get Hari-chan to do something to his books if he didn't come. He agreed before he could even attempt to lie his way out of attendance. She felt powerful and smirked the entire day before the party, knowing that Hari-chan was good enough of a threat for Kakashi-sensei to give in.

The Yamanaka spared no expenses when hosting gatherings for the clans. Ino got to wear what she wanted, plan everything on her own, and basically give orders all day. It was great to be in charge!

Shikamaru and Shino had gotten to come, but Kiba ended up joining his older sister on a mission and couldn't make it. Sakura, Hinata, and Choji also managed to make it. Naruto, Sasuke, Karin, and Kakashi-sensei also got to come. A few of her older friends, though not all since many were above Chunin rank now and had missions.

Overall, the turnout for the people she actually gave a damn about, was good. And it was nice to be around people she had known instead of those annoying noble children who had to come for a certain time each year. Shinobi and civilians didn't mix well, so those guests stayed to one side of the room while the shinobi remained with Ino.

"This is pretty cool!" said Naruto, looking around with bright eyes as he took in the details of the decorations. He'd been wrestled into a formal enough outfit that just barely passed, but also showed that he could clean up really well. "I've never been to a party before!"

It made her sad, that he'd never had friends before Hari-chan came along. Iruka-sensei, Hokage-sama, and the Ichiraku family didn't really count because they were adults and treated him more like family. And while Hari-chan was an adult, she didn't act stuck up and super important nor did she lord herself over them like some adults tended to do.

Naruto missed out on a lot of important things because he didn't have parents and because his own father sealed a Bijū inside of him on the day of his birth. And instead of respecting his decision, the entire village basically said 'fuck you' to the Yondaime's memory and treated his chosen savior like crap his whole life. And it resulted in the creation of a socially stunted, uninformed moron.

How Naruto was such a good person was beyond her understanding.

"It's always like this, and since we're all friends here, you're going to be invited to many more in the future," said Ino. She then cast a look around their group that consisted of their former Academy graduating class and said, "Right everyone?"

Shikamaru groaned but nodded. Shino gave a hum of agreement that blended in with the buzzing of his kikaichu. She withheld a shiver at the thought of bugs, and moved on to stare Choji down, who was shoving food into his mouth.

"Yeah," the chubby boy agreed. "Having you with us will make everything more fun!"

Naruto's beaming grin made Ino's chest feel lighter. Sometimes, he had those moments where he seemed even cuter than Sasuke-kun. This was one of them. He'd be a slayer when he grew up. He looked so much like the Yondaime... and the Yondaime Hokage was one of the most attractive men to ever come from their village!

Ino paled with realization. Fans. Naruto fangirls and fanboys. When people finally dislodged their heads from their asses, they were going to realize just how amazing of a person Naruto was. And then they would be all over him! Ino was going to have to protect his virtue! He was too sweet for
that kind of stuff yet! Not until he was thirty at the very least! And there would be those jerks who would want him simply because of who his dad was, or his status as the Hokage, because Naruto was going to become the Hokage some day. It would happen!

He just needed to be guarded until he understood his position.

The blonde pulled Sasuke aside while the rest of the group moved on to reassure Naruto that he would get invited to their future parties. The blond was beaming at all of them, looking like they had just made his night.

On Ino's end, the Uchiha stared at her blankly, quietly asking what she wanted. She'd gotten a lot better at reading his expressions as of late. Voice pitched low, she said, "Sasuke-kun, one of these days, Naruto is going to have stalkers. We need to guard him until he's ready to understand flirting and stuff. What if someone tries to take advantage of how nice he is?"

Coal back eyes narrowed immediately and a chill trickled down her spine. He looked angry at the very thought, and his chakra jumped a few times in response. While some didn't know, both were very protective of their teammate. It had taken time for them to understand his personality, but Naruto deserved to have friends and be protected. He was too gentle and kind despite their profession. He should never have to deal with the manipulations of false lovers or false friends. It would be like dousing the sun in water.

"Not going to happen," the Uchiha insisted firmly. "We'll bundle him up. Maybe make him wear more orange to keep everyone away. And he's so dense that he might just manage to chase people away on his own."

She nodded. It sounded like a good plan.

"Ino-chan, time to open your gifts!" her mother suddenly shouted, bringing her back to reality. It was her birthday, and they had been sitting around talking instead of actually doing anything interesting. And now she had to do the customary opening of the gifts in front of everyone so that each person/family got their bragging rights. Or shame, either would happen.

Not that she minded. Ino liked free gifts whether they were useful to her or not.

The Yamanaka Heiress took her seat at the head of the table and allowed her father to place gift after gift in front of her. Several minutes of cooing over jewelry and thanking many people, Ino spotted Hari-chan slipping into the room and placing a gift on the pile that had been lined up along the one side of the room. The woman waved at her and then took up a space next to a slouching Kakashi-sensei, whom she shared a deep look with.

Ino would consider that little interesting interaction at a later date. Presently, she was busy pandering to various egos.

When Ino finally got toward the end - after receiving books on Botany, poisons, and Iryo Ninjutsu, vouchers for free meals from places all over the village, packets for free experiences at the onsen, more jewelry, clothing, and more sets of kunai and shuriken - she was a bit tired from sitting in the same place for so long. It wasn't as fun as it used to be.

The gifts from her team were of the better ones…

Sasuke and Itachi had gotten her a collection of natural shampoo and conditioner. Scentless, expensive, and meant to last a long time. They would be good on missions in foreign territories. Naruto and Karin got her thread that was basically ninja wire. It was stronger than usual wire though,
but more thread-like in texture, and able to be woven even. It wouldn't break even under intense pressure, which could work either for clothing or injuries even. And it was expensive as well.

Kakashi-sensei went even further and got her weapons. But not just any kind. Dual weapons. Sai.

Both were forged beautifully. She never thought that a weapon could look pretty, but forget any time she had ever doubted her fellow shinobi. They were gorgeous. The monouchi was rounded and made of chakra conducting metal. The tsuka was not wrapped like with traditional Sai, and there was a sapphire embedded in each tsukagashira that matched her eye color. Both weapons had an even weight and looked cool when she held them up for everyone to see. AS expected, some awed cooing met her ears.

"You'll be learning how to use them so you'll have close range training as a surprise for your foes," Kakashi-sensei said from the back of the room. "If you focus your Earth chakra into the blades, you can shoot spears of rock from the tips. The tips aren't blunted like usual Sai are, because they are hollow inside and made specifically for Earth users. You'll get to that kind of skill eventually."

"Thank you Kakashi-sama. The Hatake Clan's contribution is most appreciated.

The man gave a small peace sign before returning his attention to his questionable reading material.

Finally, it was Hari-chan's gift that was left.

It was a care package of sorts. Oddly shaped bottles holding foul smelling liquids.

Hari stepped forward and smiled. "My fellow clan member and I provide the hospital with those now. However, once they are relinquished into the hospital's direction, they cannot simply give them out. They are for special cases and if you want one, you would have to fill out forms, be put on a waiting list where then you would be evaluated to see if you deserve any of the potions or not. And most likely it would be a no unless the situation is dire. However, no one said that I can't give or sell them to others myself."

There were fifteen bottles. Three of each kind.

"In order from your left to your right you have Blood Replenisher, which causes the creation of blood to multiple at three times the normal speed. Beneficial if you've lost a lot of blood suddenly.

Skele-Gro, which will heal broken or fractured bones by increasing the rate in which they mend by one hundred percent, and then strengthens the regrown area making it harder to break again.

Then you have a Sleeping Potion which sends you to sleep instantly by increasing the amount of melatonin you produce. That dose lasts for seven hours exactly. Nothing will wake you up.

Polyjuice is next, and it will briefly turn you into someone else, so long as you have a piece of who you are turning into. And by that I mean hair, nails, skin, or even blood. Once added to the dosage, you will have two hours as that person before you return to normal. And no, it does not give you to their blood type or DNA, so no line theft is possible.

Finally, you have Liquid Luck. It is in the golden vials for a reason.
Clear and flavorless, but with intense ability. **Liquid Luck** influences you to an extent. Anything you attempt will come to pass one way or another. However, the potion merely brings your attention to specific things. If you ignore a chance presented to you, another chance for something else will pop up. If you decide to go along with whatever the urge is, only good things come your way. Only take the dose in the vial, it can be poisonous if you drink more than that."

There was a moment of silence as they all stared at her with wide eyes. Her gift practically blew the others out of the park. And she had deliberately given them in sets of three in a to-go sort of package because she knew they would help on missions for her team.

The Potta Clan, the newest clan in Konoha, had just upstaged everyone else. It was as much a power play as it was Hari-chan showing how much she cared. The woman worried constantly and sending them off with things like that on their persons had to be her way to assuring herself that they would be alright. Like she was helping form a distance. It was a much a gift for Ino as it was for Hari.

As for the power play, she was showing that just because she was not a shinobi, didn't mean she and her family weren't valuable to the village as a whole. It would also reflect well on the orphanage and her reputation once everyone left for home, their tales of the night on the tips of their tongues, ready to be spread.

Ino was proud of the deviousness and incredibly thankful as well.

"Thank you, Hari-sama. The Potta Clan's foresight is much appreciated."

"Team Seven, I have a protection mission for you that fits best with the skill sets of your team," the Hokage said as he handed Kakashi the scroll that held the details for their mission. "Also, no other team would be able to accomplish the side task I am assigning this mission."

Hiruzen smiled when Naruto blew a raspberry. "Is this going to be boring, Jiji? I don't want any D-Rank missions for the rest of my life. Our team is awesome and there is nothing awesome about D-Ranks. We need to do cool stuff! -ttebayo!"

Both Ino and Sasuke nodded in agreement, even if neither were brave enough to be so blatantly disrespectful to their leader like Naruto was. He hadn't influenced them that much yet, but their friendship was getting there. Eventually he would have his friends calling the Hokage Jiji too. And Hiruzen wouldn't mind in the least because he was too old to be grumpy about every little thing.

Still, Hiruzen sent the blond a placating smile. "I think you'll end up liking this mission, Naruto-kun. You'll be working in tandem with a Suna team. One that I'm certain you are familiar with, as your Suna counterpart is on said team."

It only took a few seconds before the boy understood, and the Hokage was pleased to see that he retention and thought process were a lot sharper than a year previous. Watching Minato's eyes light up on his son's face, made him proud. It also showed that there was a much brighter future ahead of Naruto.

"Gaara's going to be there?"

He hummed. "Affirmative. There is going to be a convention of sorts at the border between our countries. The merchants from our villages will host a rather large joint market for a week where
there will be a considerable amount of trading done as people from all over travel in just to shop there. However, some families have received threats to their safety, so each hidden village decided that they would hire a Genin team with experience in battle, to guard and patrol for the week.

"The is however, another reason your team gets this mission."

All three of Kakashi's Genin frowned and waited for him to explain. He sighed, but understood that it wasn't a topic often discussed, so of course the three Genin wouldn't fully understand yet. Soon they would become more aware of the political climate in the world. Until then, imparting some wisdom wouldn't hurt.

He sighed once more, feeling much older than he'd like to. "Both Genin teams who are on this mission have Jinchuuriki among their members. Both Genin are also very well known by their respective villages and the merchants will know who you are upon seeing you. By having the Jinchuuriki out in the open, stationed on protection detail and possibly saving lives should any danger occur, it'll hopefully give you both better reputations among your home villages when all is said and done."

Sasuke understood the plan first, his mouth twisting into a small, appreciative smirk. "You're hoping that if these people all see Naruto and Sabaku no Gaara saving them, then maybe their opinions will change and their reputations in their respective villages will lighten up. And maybe the tense atmosphere between our villages will also loosen a bit by us working together toward a joint cause and the merchants taking their accounts back home where they will no doubt embellish the story greatly and spread their opinions to their peers."

"Exactly," Hiruzen murmured. "Orochimaru murdered Suna's Kazekage. He then posed as the man for almost two months. The Invasion was an unfortunate happenstance, but they all believed to be following their leader's orders at the time. Konoha is not the sort of village to withhold aid from those who truly need it. That is not what the Will of Fire stands for. So we will do our best with what we have to reforge this tentative alliance between our villages once again."

Naruto bounced on the balls of his feet. "What are we waiting for, Jiji? Let's get this done! I can't wait to see Gaara again!"

"Make sure you share them with Gaara-san, okay?"

"I know, nee-chan! And I always share your snacks!"

"I just wanted to be sure." Hari then looked to Ino. "Please make sure he remembers. Gaara-san is a good kid, he just needs a little bit of help."

Ino winked. "You can count on me, Hari-chan!"

Sasuke nodded. "Hn."

"Then good luck, and you better be home in ten days or else."

"Mah, Koneko-chan, do I not get a farewell?" asked Kakashi as he placed a hand on her forearm, initiating physical contact - for the first time on his own - that had nothing to do with training. It was a groundbreaking moment and she only blinked twice in shock, before smirking at him.

The woman snorted as well. "Fare thee well, Koinu-kun. Don't let our kids get hurt. And don't spend all day reading. Live a little."
Kakashi pouted and slumped his way through the gates, leaving Hari to giggle at his back as he went.

When she got home, she found a new addition to her haori sleeve. A certain Icha Icha book that she hadn't gotten to read in full yet. The one from the kitchen and the push ups. Kakashi had slipped it into her clothes and she hadn't even noticed.

The woman smiled fondly and cracked it open, eagerly taking up from where she had left off.

"It's okay to be sad, you know."

Itachi glanced up as the woman approached. He'd barely heard her because she moved on the balls of her feet, though he had smelled the contents of her basket easily. He hadn't felt the need to move though, because he was... thinking.

He'd taken the example from Kakashi-senpai, and found himself staring at the Memorial Stone in Training Ground Three for the past several hours.

"Sadness is but another part of life," Itachi concluded stoically. "It is a perfectly normal feeling. I simply wish I wouldn't experience it so much when I was certain I had come to grips with everything years ago."

Hari-san seat herself beside him. "You're only seventeen. You may be a big, bad ninja and have been such for many years, but that doesn't mean you don't have feelings. And it doesn't mean you won't be affected by anything. It's good to cry now and then, because bottling up your feelings can lead to disastrous consequences in one way or another."

She was correct of course. That didn't mean he liked it.

"I have enough food for two, if you're interested," the woman said as she opened her brown, wicker basket. "And there is fresh dango as well."

Itachi would still stand by his assessment of the woman. She was indeed strange. But... she was also very nice. Especially when she needn't be.

The moments passed in silence, until she opened her mouth to spill some wisdom. "I've lost many people, and while it doesn't coincide with what others will tell you in life, it actually does get better. There aren't enough hours in the day to keep thinking about what you've lost. There are jobs to do, and people to watch over, and even your own health to consider. You won't have the time to recount every mistake you've ever made. And pain from their distance will eventually dim and become tolerable. The only way it wouldn't get better, is if you keep thinking about it all the time. People who are always depressed over the loss of loved ones, are usually the very same people who think about them all the time, which ends up keeping them in their depressed states to begin with. And then there is no progression."

"Who did you lose, if you don't mind me asking?" What was it that made such a person completely unafraid of death? What made her so comfortable in her words?

"My parents were murdered when I was one. My godfather was murdered when I was fifteen. My honorary godfather was murdered when I was seventeen. My godson died of a disease not too long after. Many friends who died in battles." She looked down and grabbed a green apple from the basket. "I eventually stopped being concerned over death, because it really isn't horrible. They got to move on and I'm going to see them again one day. My old Headmaster once said that 'to the well organized mind, death is but the next great adventure'. Why should I fear or mourn one of the most
natural things in the world, I have come to realize. Death is probably the only thing that will never scare me."

She then took a bite from an apple, and he couldn't help but admire her. "They wouldn't want us wasting our lives thinking about them when we'll just see them eventually."

"Exactly."

In the end, pain from the memories of the deaths of loved ones would fade from the mind. He had become rather desensitized over the years, with brief moments of intense emotion in between on the anniversary. But he did not dwell on those intrusive thoughts all day, every day. Because Hari-san was correct, he had things to do and thinking about the past would not help him move forward.

It is okay to be sad, but it is not healthy to wallow. He understood that perfectly.

_A/N: Another is done!_

_How was it? Let me know!_

_Check out my other fics!_

_Ja ne! :D_

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

Chapter End Notes

-The next chapter is already finished. I am in the process of editing it now. It is currently over 15K words in length and I'm hoping to make it longer during the edit.
Chapter Summary

Team Seven has a mission and Hari has some issues.

Chapter Notes

-Team Seven is on a mission in this chapter! And we finally get to see some more Gaara action! On another note, I won't be doing the whole Morino Idate and race arc because I found it boring. I am using Aoi though, so yeah, expect to see him in this chapter. And I might do the Clash in the Land of Snow movie, but I'm not sure yet.

-This chapter is also over 19K words, just like last chapter was! I'm glad that I can actually pull this off. Editing saw me adding 4K words in total! ^-^

-There is still drama going on outside of Konoha, we all need to remember such. Meaning that are things going on that the MCs don't know about. And not everyone is friendly or willing to just lay down and take what they perceive to be an insult. Also, this is a ninja world, where people hire them to kill other people!

-The Chunin Exams are coming so close! A few chapters at the very least! Also, don't hate me for this chapter's ending. It was necessary since Hari is doing the Slytherin thing. Also, playing on Kakashi's protective instincts is always great. ^-^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.

The amazing lucife56 made FANART for this story! It's beautiful!
The area between the lands was very… different. Hi no Kuni was all hard earth and a multitude of trees and plants and wildlife. Kaze no Kuni was a bowl of sand and unforgiving sun and a few birds of prey here and there. The village in which the mission was taking place in, was sandy like Suna, but only for a few feet until it reached the packed earth Hi no Kuni was known for. There were large trees all around the area, but also some cacti. Finally, while the sky was the brightest blue he'd ever seen and there was no sand blowing this way and that to obscure their view of it, the sun beat down upon them, making everything dry and intolerable.

It was the worst possible mesh of both climates and countries, and he hated every moment of it. And Gaara had grown up in a desert, and he hated everything about it. Especially since the nights in Hi no Kuni were just as hot as the days.

Not that him hating it really mattered. Gaara's opinion never really mattered before in his life, so he knew that saying something, or even daring to complain would simply get him odd looks from his siblings, and their team leader. They would probably cower for a few minutes, but would eventually go back to ignoring his existence and talking among themselves. The novelty would wear off almost immediately.

At least they weren't vulnerable. Gaara had enough sand around should something happen. There was a well nearby that the village used frequently. The forecast had been decent. The Suna team was perfectly ready for any kind of altercation. Their Konoha counterparts however, he had no idea.

They hadn't been informed of what team would join them, just that it too was a Genin team who had seen some difficult battles and gone on a B-Rank or higher mission. An attempt to keep their power levels even or something. Gaara hadn't cared enough about the report that had come by hawk, to listen to every single detail. All he had to do was incapacitate anyone trying to harm the clients. Nothing else mattered to him.

He sighed. His sand had been used as a shield against the harsh sun all day as he sat on a large boulder on the outskirts of the small village. Just because he was exposed to sunlight all the time, didn't mean he liked it. Gaara had gotten used to fashioning himself sand umbrellas over the years, and this was no different.

The market was being set up faster than he'd expected, and he could see a lot of people working. People his age and even younger. Non-shinobi doing heavy lifting, and steering carriages to and from stalls as they spread their work around. It reminded him that even civilians had jobs to do or their own and that they didn't just sit around waiting for shinobi to save them every minute of the day.

Gaara wouldn't know the first thing about gardening like the blond woman twenty-seven yards away did. She was a Konoha merchant and she had come earlier than many others. Her business would be one greatly sought after because Sunagakure had only two greenhouses with limited flora and fauna inside. They would be willing to pay almost anything for the multitude of plants the woman had brought with her. They couldn't afford to be stingy when it came to lack of resources.

The most Gaara knew about plants was how to cultivate cacti efficiently. He also knew which cacti were safe to consume in times of necessity. Gaara could also do some minor sewing when it was required. But as he thought about it, if he hadn't become a shinobi for whatever reason, would he be able to live at all? All he knew was violence and being a civilian with no skills that civilians learned, would be a shame. Pathetic.

Perhaps he should take a trip to the library when he returned to the village?
"Shinobi-san, can you help me?"

Gaara blinked. The woman with the plants… she was looking at him expectantly. She was standing a few feet away. He hadn't noticed her move!

Her blonde hair was held up in a tight bun and her eyes reminded him of his own. A lack of pupil, but more blue instead of green. Like Gaara's.

"I'm Yamanaka Inoka, shinobi-san. I wanted to ask if you could help me move some of my crates?"

A thing Gaara had preferred about Konoha, was no one knew who he was. He could walk in the streets and not see people glaring at him every second of the day. They didn't know anything about him and paid him no mind. And it was nice, he'd learned. He preferred it when people didn't know him, which was why he hadn't liked the idea to destroy the place.

And now he was being asked by a Konoha citizen, for some help. She didn't know about Shukaku. She didn't think he was a monster. She probably saw a child. She saw him as someone who could help her with her work.

No one had ever asked for Gaara's help before.

The redhead stood slowly. It was an opportunity, he realized. He could not pass it up.

"Will you teach me what each plant is?" he asked, voice lower than usual. He was a bit uncomfortable, but she wouldn't know because they were strangers to each other.

She beamed. "Of course!"

Gaara's sand came in handy as it transported crates of plants to and from the carriage. There was soil, seeds, and bulbs even. She had brought everything she could think of. And she had come alone.

"Now some of these can be used in teas," Inoka said, gesturing to some of the herbs. "Stomach soothers, headache soothers, Valerian is especially good for inducing sleep. Steep it in some hot water for six minutes, add some honey, and you're all set!"

Gaara blinked. "Can you eat them as they are, or is tea the only means to experience the effects?"

Inoka blinked twice and shrugged. "I mean, it won't taste so great naturally, but yes, it would work."

Interesting.

Hyuga Hiashi stared the woman down, completely baffled but trying not to show it. After all, it wouldn't look good for the Head of the Hyuga Clan to gape like a commoner. Still, it was difficult not to be shocked when one sees a civilian walking down the street with one Mitarashi Anko, wearing what he could only describe as training clothes. There was no other possible description really.

Both women were dressed for a hard workout, though the new Jonin didn't look nearly as exhausted at the woman beside her did. The fact that anyone would willingly spend time with Mitarashi in the first place, was odd enough, but the person herself was more intriguing. And she had, if he was assuming correctly, actually trained with the kunoichi.

He'd heard enough, though he'd yet to meet her in person and hadn't felt pressed to at any moment. Potta Hari was the Head of a new clan in Konoha. Current matron to Konoha's only orphanage.
Guardian of the Kyubi Jinchuuriki. Possessor of a unique Kekkei Genkai. Not a kunoichi though. No real training of any sort despite the fact that she obviously exercised on a regular basis if she was so toned.

Still, despite being considered a princess, she didn't seem to act like one, and she was covered in scars. None in obvious places if she was appropriately attired for a walk around the village, but in her training clothing, they were obvious. And she made no move to straighten her clothing nor did she seem affected by the looks some of the villagers were sending her for how she appeared currently.

Hiashi's concentration was broken when both women met up with none other than Yuhi Kurenai at the shinobi friendly dango shop, who had his own daughter standing beside her. And the young girl looked up at the women around her, and seemed to just relax. As if all of the problems in her life had melted away in an instant when being surrounded by such people. He never saw Hinata like that.

"Hello, Hinata-san," Potta Hari said with a smile and a nod.

"Hari-sama." Hinata was the epitome of perfect attitude and reputation that was required of her, even when she didn't know there were eyes on her at the very moment.

"You can just call me Hari, Hinata-san."

The obviously got her a flush from the young Hyuga, who understood how significant of a request that was. "Hari-chan," the girl amended, looking minutely horrified while doing so. "You may simply call me Hinata if you would like."

"Thanks!"

Definitely not princess material. She was far too kind to be any sort of raised nobility. Even Hinata's kindness was drowned in years of expectation and tutoring. It was a reflex by now.

"Hari and I are going for dango, you want to come?" asked Mitarashi, eyes bright with mischief as she eyed her fellow Jonin with amusement. "We plan to scope out some hot people while we're at it!"

As expected, Hiashi's daughter squeaked at the offer and turned an even brighter shade of pink. Her calm disappeared instantly.

Yuhi patted the girl on the head. "Anko is just messing with you, Hinata-chan. You don't have to check anybody out if you don't want to. We're not going to make you do it or anything similar."

Words that should have been reassuring, had the opposite effect. Somehow, the girls' face flushed even darker and Hiashi wondered if she would collapse in the middle of the street. It would look bad on all of them if so. For varying reasons. Though he was pleased that she didn't seem interested in... 'checking' anyone out at her age.

"Does the little Hyuga have a special someone she's thinking about?" Mitarashi asked, face morphing into an unholy grin that made even Hiashi unnerved. The woman slinked closer to the heiress apparent of the Hyuga clan, looking for too excited for anyone's sanity.

"N-no!" Hinata squeaked, shaking her head wildly.

"Girl, I know all the tricks to bagging the people of your dreams." Mitarashi then wrapped an arm around the Genin's shoulders and started tugging her into the dango shop. She continued to talk. "What you have to do is get rid of that ugly, baggy coat and show off some curves. Saunter around, maybe get some mesh like me, because it's awesome and empowering, and then when everyone's
lapping at your heels, you expose them for the superficial shits they are and crush their egos. No better high, I tell you. You dress to slay, not for anyone else, okay?"

Hinata tried to turn, but there was no hope. She could only level her Jonin sensei with a look that practically screamed, 'help me', but Yuhi merely smiled and shrugged.

"We should probably go before Anko gives the poor girl a heart attack," Yuhi suggested with a small grin, rushing to catch up with her long time friend.

And Potta Hari nodded, but before she followed, she turned and made deliberate eye contact with Hiashi, from across the market. There was only a few seconds that passed between them, but the young woman gave a small bow of the head and then continued on her way without waiting for anything similar in return. She didn't need his approval, was basically what she had said without even speaking.

She'd known he'd been there. No one just randomly turned to stare someone down for four seconds unless they knew the person was there. But how had she known? She was a civilian, and her Kekkei Genkai didn't work like the Byakugan did. She also had no shinobi training.

He needed information. And he was also strangely intrigued.

"Gaara!"

Said Suna shinobi blinked and wasn't even given a chance to prepare himself before something slammed into his side. And his sand did absolutely nothing to halt the advancement of whoever it was. Though judging by the scent of ramen, and the unholy strength in the arms currently trying to squeeze the very life form him, he had a feeling that his assailant was none other than Uzumaki Naruto of Konohagakure no Sato.

The redhead blinked a few times, unsure of what he was supposed to do. His arms were trapped at his side because Naruto was clutching him tightly. He wasn't sure of the type of greeting should be given when a foreign shinobi who had too much energy, suddenly decided that he wanted to embrace you without permission. This wasn't something he ever had to prepare for in life. He was trained to expect attacks, not... an embrace.

The boy was rambling already, barely taking even a moment to catch his breath. "It's been forever since I've seen you, Gaara! You're looking good! Your hair grew a little longer, it's touching yous collar! You changed your clothes, you look really good in burgundy! You smell like flowers. You haven't gotten a tan or a sunburn yet. You don't look crazy!"

Naruto pulled away, finally giving him some room to breathe and to comport himself once more. Gaara spared the blond a glance, and noticed how his blue eyes practically sparkled with joy. He was actually happy to see Gaara again. He was certain that Uzumaki Naruto wasn't the most skilled at hiding his emotions, so he didn't have fear the expression being false. He knew that Naruto was free with his feelings all the time and hid nothing from people, so Naruto wasn't a fraud.

"Mah, Naruto, could you please wait for us to officially arrive before you run off on your own?"

Gaara and Naruto both looked over to where the rest of Naruto's Genin team stood. The man with them, their sensei if he was correct, was none other than Sharingan no Kakashi. He was a legend, even in Suna. He was also staring at the two Jinchuuriki curiously, even though there was a book in front of his face. There was nothing obvious in his gaze, but still.

Having his attention made Gaara feel uncomfortable. Sure, he looked lazy and laid back, but that
was simply a mask. The man was almost on par with the Sannin if not already. Copying over one thousand jutsu with his Sharingan eye, being trained by the Yondaime Hokage, being a brilliantly skilled prodigy all on his own before either of those things even happened to him. It meant a lot, and he was certainly enough of a threat for for a Flee on Sight order in the Suna, Iwa, and Kumo Bingo Books.

Basically, Hatake Kakashi was a capable shinobi and being under his watchful eye was like being under a microscope. Like he was being dissected piece by piece like a bug.

Naruto was pouting, arm still wrapped around Gaara. "But sensei, I was so excited to see Gaara! And it's not like you wouldn't have caught up anyway since we're all going to the same place! And it's Gaara, -ttebayo!"

The blonde on Naruto's team, who looked much like Inoka did, now that Gaara looked closer, huffed and folded her arms. "Naruto, it's just the principle of the thing. And bad manners to just rush ahead without us! Nor did you introduce your friend either! very rude."

"Oh," the orange clad Genin said, deflating slightly. "Sorry, Ino."

Naruto then beamed again, miraculously unable to stay down for very long. "Gaara, these are my awesome teammates! We got Yamanaka Ino and Uchiha Sasuke. You remember meeting them before, right?"

The blonde was related to Inoka. That would explain their similar appearances.

"Yes," he murmured. he remembered the day in the street quite well. It was what really started his whole adventure into Hi no Kuni.

"And that's Kakashi-sensei. He's a bit of a perv, but a good guy nonetheless."

"Perv?" Gaara echoed in confusion.

Naruto leaned in to loudly whisper, "Don't be fooled. The book is porn."

"So how have you been doing, Gaara?"

Naruto handed one of the cups of ramen over - it was shrimp flavored, Naruto had gladly told him - waiting impatiently until Gaara accepted the offering. The redhead was confused, but took a pair of chopsticks anyway and murmured his thanks. He then held the cup between his palms and did absolutely nothing with it. He was too busy paying attention to Naruto to worry about food.

"I am well. Nothing has really changed." Nothing in the least, really. Suna was still dry, sandy, and full of people terrified of his existence.

"Even though Shukaku has been shut up?"

Well… He could sleep now without having to stay up all night with the strident voice of a Bijū in his ear. That was certainly a lot better than before. He was actually sleeping for once, even if it terrified people all the time. And he wasn't walking around with migraines every day. So in a way, things had changed for him, though in another, it was all the same. At least he was well-rested most of the time.

"I have changed. People haven't," he clarified.

The blond inhaled a large amount of ramen. He didn't speak until his mouth was empty though, so it
seemed that his sibling was managing to slowly influence her proper etiquette on him one action at a time. "That sucks. We'll have to work on that somehow. This mission would be a good chance to do that."

"What?"

Gaara still hadn't eaten any of his ramen. Naruto was an odd one and every time he thought the conversation would lull, Naruto would come back with something new and confusing to say. It was best to have his wits about himself so he could answer in a timely manner and not let himself become confused.

"Hokage-Jiji had a reason for adding my team to this mission, instead of some other team. We're going to impress each other's villages by our actions. And then we're going to work together like heroes do and save everyone when the shit finally goes down. And it'll let our people see us differently that what they'd always perceived us as."

How… devious. Also, the old man cared enough about the reputations of Jinchuuriki to do something like that? No wonder Naruto referred to him as a grandfather. He was one of Naruto's precious people. One of the ones who had kept him from the darkness that Gaara had been swallowed up by. The man seemed to deserve more respect every time Gaara learned something new about him.

"Okay, Gaara! We need a plan of action! We're going to offer our services to all the merchants. You got your sand and I have my Kage Bunshin. Together, we can make a big difference. So while our teammates patrol the area, you and I are going to be in the center of everything, showing off without showing off. Kakashi-sensei already debriefed me, so I know what to do."

Because he couldn't even find the energy to argue, Gaara just nodded. He would follow Naruto's lead, with much less enthusiasm than the blond had, and then mimic whatever he was doing. On a less grandiose scale of course. Naruto was strange, but he was oddly innovative and wise. It would only be profitable to follow his lead in something Gaara was not learned in.

"Now eat your ramen before it gets cold! After that, Hari-nee-chan made some snacks for us but we have to be responsible and eat them after all of our dinner is gone. He made me promise and I'm trying to be more mature, -ttebayo!"

Gaara paused, chopsticks halfway to his mouth. He wasn't sure he wanted whatever it was that the woman had made.

Itachi found himself sharing space with Potta Hari's cousin. Her name was Luna, but he couldn't pronounce the first half correctly, so like with everyone else, she had told him to call her Runa. He was a bit obsessive over mastering how to pronounce it though, because he was used to doing things right on the first try. Uchiha did not fail. He just had to train his tongue. His Sharingan had memorized the tongue movement when saying the first syllable. The tip of the tongue pushed against the backs of his front teeth slightly. He'd practice and then surprise her one day.

And really, he wondered why he even wanted to surprise the woman. It wasn't as if it was something important. But he wanted to do it. It only seemed fair since she was obviously foreign to an extent but was speaking his language with ease. And she didn't complain when people couldn't say her name correctly.
"It seems like the Wrackspurts have infested your ears," the doe-eyed woman said upon greeting, though she wasn't even looking at him and couldn't have possibly known that he was within her vicinity. But then again, he'd heard from Hokage-sama that she was an Oracle, so maybe she had Seen him coming her way. She might have known of this meeting days in advance even. Seeing the future seemed so troublesome to him.

"What are infesting my ears?" He'd never heard of any such being and the word felt foreign also. Much like the blonde and her Clan Head. Everything screamed foreign, from the shapes of their eyes, mouths, noses, and faces, to even their dress sense and accents. No one around the Elemental Nations spoke their language in such a manner.

"A creature that is not visible to the beings residing on this plain," the woman explained. "They feed off of confusion and uncertainty, and will deliberately nest in your ears in order to ruin your concentration. They are dreadfully annoying and are very persistent."

"And… how do I rid myself of them?" She seemed to believe in what she was saying, so he wouldn't treat her words as false until proven so. After all, a myriad of people in the world were capable of ridiculous abilities, so how could he speak about the validity of her claims? Itachi could put someone in a seventy-two hour illusion in only a second. Some skills were just unbelievable despite being real.

She turned her benevolent smile on him, eyes strangely focused compared to the other times they had been in the same room together. "You must cease with your depressing thoughts and think of something joyful. Then and only then will they be chased away. They detest any form of happiness."

"That is much easier said than it is done, I'm afraid," he admitted, knowing that his stress simply wouldn't go away just because he smiled or had a happy thought for a few seconds. It was something that many people, shinobi included, were mistaken over. Joy wasn't enough to make Depression flee. In fact, according to his therapist, it would take time that he probably wouldn't have as a shinobi and even then, it might never truly recede.

"Then perhaps I can help you." Runa reached into the bag handbag at her hip and pulled out an uncut piece of meat. Raw meat. She was carrying raw meat around in her bag and handling it as if there was nothing strange about the situation. And he hadn't been able to smell it either. Odd. Like the time he couldn't hear Potta Hari moving around in Uzumaki Naruto's bedroom despite her being only feet away. It was like one of his senses just wasn't working for a specific reason.

"Uchiha Itachi," Runa addressed him, no longer looking in his direction. She was staring off into the forest around them instead. "You have eyes that can see through any illusion but you cannot see everything just yet. Cease relying on the Sharingan, open your eyes, and See what is before you. You will eventually come to understand."

She then tossed the slab of meat into the treeline, and a few seconds later, Itachi's hand snapped toward his weapon pouch. The meat was being lifted off the ground by an unseen force or being. And slowly, the meat began to shrink in size until there was nothing left and the leaves beneath their feet crunched. There was something out there.

Runa held her hand out, and moved it as if she was petting a horse. Or at least a creature of similar height.

"Open your eyes, Uchiha Itachi."

His Sharingan melted away - he didn't even remember activating it, it had become instinctual over the years - and it was like he'd been exposed to a new world, because under Runa's hand, was a
creature that had not been there before. It was like a horse in shape, but darker, bleaker, and colder. Like death. Pure darkness taken physical form before him. But he didn't feel any dread when gazing upon the creature.

"What is it?" he found himself asking breathlessly.

"A Thestral, but you can call it Shi. It can only be seen by those who had witnessed death and comprehended it. It is a creature of great strength that represents loss of our innocent minds. Sadly, where Hari and I come from, they are viewed as omens of death and are regarded fearfully because of this. They live lonely lives indeed when all they seek is companionship and understanding from the world around them."

Such a tragic being. Of course he could understand why some would fear it, seeing the skeletal structure of its body and the milky white of its eyes. It was unnerving upon first glance, but certainly nothing that could match what he had seen before. It was strangely beautiful even. Like many of the things in the world were, despite their origin.

Hesitantly, he reached out, and blinked in shock when it head-butted his palm, trilling something he couldn't understand. It was as smooth and cold to the touch as he had assumed it would be, but not in a clammy way.

"She likes you. She feels that she has found a kindred spirit in you."

She was just a creature of strength that had been misunderstood simply because of how she was born. And she was shunned because of it. It wasn't fair, yet he knew that human nature was anything but fair. The poor being had no doubt experienced some negativity for existing. Itachi was familiar with that kind of attitude and his heart reached out for the creature.

"She understands you, and will be a companion in times you need solitude. She will listen and you will bond. And when times seem stressful and you are distraught, you may turn to her with your concerns. She will alleviate your sorrows and you will give her the friendship she has always desired.

"This kind of bond is sacred, and our people would refer to her as your Familiar. While you may be able to use or summon crows, they are not spiritually inclined to you. Your new companion however, is known for loyalty and kindness of heart. You will both go far in this life and the next."

Runa smiled at the two, before turning and walking off.

Itachi and the Thestral - such an off word, but another to learn how to pronounce - stared one another down.

"I am Uchiha Itachi," he murmured, gently rubbing the broad wing off the creature. "I detest violence, and wish the world could just be at peace."

Another trill from the creature as she stepped forward to nudge his head with her own. And in a way, he could feel her response, even if she hadn't spoken his language.

"Yes," he answered. "I would be honored to have your friendship."

He couldn't say that he had too many friends currently, and it would be nice to finally relax for once and let himself be a normal person. To just take a step back from all the drama of his clan and the total seventeen members that would be transferred into his care within the next five years. To be free of worldly expectations for a while.
Kakashi stared at the two Jinchuuriki as they walked around the open market. Or rather, as Naruto bodily dragged Gaara from vendor to vendor, offering to help with whatever they needed and then making an ass load of Kage Bunshin while instructing Gaara to use his sand. There was a sea of orange and a large amount of sand being distributed around the market.

He'd seen the startled looks from both the Suna and Konoha merchants. Some were aware of who either shinobi was, and as such, eyed both with confused gazes. But Naruto was outgoing and bubbly and Gaara was quiet and simply went along with the blond's plans without hesitation, so some had reluctantly accepted their help. They were accepted just barely, because who would deny free labor when there was so much work to be done? Workers without pay, was always welcomed no matter the profession.

On the other hand, there were the four other Genin for Kakashi to consider.

Ino and Sasuke had been paired off with Kankuro and Temari. And it wasn't done in the way most would expect. Ino actually got paired up with Kankuro, as he was a Puppeteer and a Poison user, and both did long-range attacks that would work on saving each other's backs. Sasuke got Temari because of her proficiency with Fuuton Jutsu. Sasuke's many Katon paired up with her deadly Fuuton would be a great boon should they end up doing battle together.

Also, it would just do them all some good to work with someone they weren't familiar with. That meant scouting, patrolling, and training. It would prepare them for future missions where they would be put with people who weren't on their original Genin teams. And they would have to learn to either put aside differences for the sake of the mission, or learn how to adapt to an unfamiliar comrade's skill set.

And just because they were on a mission, didn't mean they got out of training. Kakashi was still building Team Seven up for the Chunin Exams, which meant more work. He actually had a few dozen Narutos out in the field, working on Uzuken. Jiraiya starting him on the style was the best thing for all of them, and Naruto was picking it up quickly thanks to his ability to abuse the Kage Bunshin. Eventually he'd be able to move on to Level Nine. Level One was far away currently, but they would get him there eventually, even if it took a couple or years.

Ino and Sasuke were each doing their own specific training. Ino was becoming familiar with her Sai and Sasuke was getting used to handling his new sword. Sasuke and Temari had already sparred once, both coming to a nice deadlock as neither had decided to use Ninjutsu or Genjutsu, wanting to only test their physical strengths. Ino and Kankuro had been in an hour long discussion about the uses of different poisons on their end.

It was only the first day of the annual market, and nothing had happened. Though the first day was usually the least important. The last day was usually when all the sales prices went down in hopes of getting people to purchase more items at the last second. It was an old tactic, and the civilian merchants had learned to do it very well. If anything would happen, it would be toward the end of the week, where more people would be out and about with their money ready to be spent.

The Suna team's Jonin sensei was named Baki. He wasn't a very high threat in any of the Bingo Books. There was less than twenty million Ryo on his head, which, compared to Kakashi who was up for around triple the amount that was on Sarutobi Asuma's head, wasn't much. Still, Baki was a capable shinobi and was apparently good with weapons, as was noted in the Iwagakure Bingo Book. Also, they had estimated his skills to be right at thirty points in their Databook.

Kakashi's Databook statistics had improved since the last time he'd been evaluated, which was when he'd been removed from Anbu for the time being. He'd only been evaluated recently due to Tsunadesama needing up-to-date information for the hospital records. But the results had been pleasant, so he
couldn't mind all too much the time it took to be examined.

Kakashi had jumped from 33 overall, to a 38. Out of 40 possible points for the basic shinobi skills, that was alarmingly good. It moved him higher up on the threat level for the village and once again gave him a bit more rope to tug on than his fellow shinobi. The only other shinobi in the history of Konoha to reach over a thirty-five in the basics, were the Hokage and the Sannin.

**Kakashi's stats read thus:**

- Ninjutsu: 5
- Taijutsu: 5
- Genjutsu: 4
- Intelligence: 5
- Strength: 5
- Speed: 5
- Stamina: 4
- Handseals: 5

If one added on 5 points from Shurikenjutsu, 3 points from Fuinjutsu, and 4 points from Kenjutsu, the his score rose even higher. Not to mention all the other shinobi related things he was particularly good at. Being a jack of all trades after all. Kakashi had felt it necessary to learn how to do more than what the normal ninja learned to do.

Anyway, the numbers were good, which would probably explain why the Sandaime had suggested him as a possible next Hokage. Not that he even wanted to be the Hokage, because there was a requirement in the type of person such a job needed, and Kakashi felt as if he was missing something. He wasn't deserving of such a role. Even if his stats were among the highest in the village, above Jiraiya and Tsunade even in some areas, he still didn't want the position.

Yet he knew that with every successful mission and every hurdle his Genin managed to pass in so little time, his abilities and reputation were made even further obvious. If his Genin went on to become successful shinobi, especially in a relatively quick amount of time, it would be a glowing example on his personal file. And then no one would contest the Sandaime's decision to make him the next village leader.

It was either him, Jiraiya-sama, or Tsunade-sama. With Jiraiya needed as a Master Spy, that dropped the possibilities down. He didn't like those possibilities too much because 50% was a greater chance than 33%.

Sharingan no Kakashi sighed. It was all too frustrating.

He blinked. It seemed that Naruto and Gaara had found the Yamanaka merchant and both were drawn into the woman's talking as she handed the Kage Bunshin pots and packets. Both seemed to hang onto her every word, and Kakashi had to smile. Of course one of Ino's clan members would be more understanding than the rest of the fools in the market. And judging by how both boys paid very close attention to what she was saying, they liked her.

It was good for them to get positive attention from people not related to them or on their teams. It
would help them branch out more.

Kakashi had to pause, wondering what Koneko-chan was upon to at that very moment.

"Why are you handing me this?"

Jiraiya grinned and patted the young woman's shoulder. "I need to get back to my work. Now that we have more information on the Akatsuki, I am being deployed to test their defenses and see what information is truth and what is false. I will not be here for the next month or so."

He gestured to the box he had just placed on her table. "That is all the training information for a jutsu I wanted to teach Naruto. I have a detailed instruction on how to perform it, plus several photos for reference. I even purchased the training materials for him, and they must be used in the proper order. It's a pretty dangerous jutsu and he needs to master the levels properly before skipping ahead, which is where you come in."

"Me?" the woman sputtered, looking confused.

"Yeah!" he agreed with a nod. "You get to impress upon him the seriousness of this training and the fact that this jutsu was the only original creation of his father. It took Minato three years to master it fully, and he was a genius. It took me a three months to learn it, and I think Kakashi mastered it in a single month if I'm correct. So maybe you can also challenge him to beat Kakashi's time by abusing his Kage Bunshin a little."

The green eyed beauty gaped at him for a moment, before a smirk spread across her face. It spelled deviousness and he greatly appreciated her appreciation of his planning. "You are a surprisingly clever man, you know that?" She sounded impressed, which made his stomach do little flips. He felt young again. At least thirty years younger.

He winked. "Hari-hime, one doesn't reach my age or skill level without learning cleverness in some form or another. I just so happened to excel at it naturally and then harness it over the years."

She nodded. "I'll make sure he knows."

"Thank you."

Jiraiya reached into his pocket and held out something that was for her alone. "A gift for you, since you still haven't seemed to get your hands on a copy yet. Signed of course, with an inspirational message from me on the back cover."

She accepted the light pink Icha Icha book with wide eyes. Icha Icha Tokimeki "Koinu-kun is going to lose his shit when I tell him that I have a book before he does. Thanks! Now he'll be asking to read it with me and I get to set the terms!"

Kakashi and Hari were reading it together? And since only Kakashi had owned more of the books between them, they had to have been pretty close for that to have happened.

Damn. Kakashi had all the luck.

"I'm off, Hari-hime!"

"Ero-Sennin, don't die."

He couldn't even bring himself to annoyed by the nickname Naruto had so graciously gifted him
with. He simply smiled and said, "I would never."

He Shunshined away, contemplating on how to get two socially inept adults together through the power of erotic literature.

Kurosaki Sayori smiled thinly at the shinobi in front of her. She had never really liked shinobi, and always found them to be a barbaric sort, but they still had their uses. Much like servants. A blight to look upon but also useful in order to maintain her well-respected position among the court of Hi no Kuni. And like those useful servants, this shinobi would be put to work. The reason she had called such a man to her order in the first place was to have him do work that she would never be caught doing personally. It would send a bad message and ruin her image otherwise.

She took a sip of tea, enjoying the flavor and also finding the man’s annoyance at her taking her time, amusing.

"Rokusho Aoi, former shinobi of Konohagakure and current Jonin of Amegakure," she quoted from memory, addressing him with the barest amount of respect. The brute wouldn't respond well if she didn't at least appear to respect him. "Would you say you know your way around Konoha, well? That you wouldn't lose yourself among the hustle and bustle of the crowd or the deliberately winding streets and forests?"

The man nodded, eyes calculating and interested. "Better than most would, Kurosaki-dono," he almost sneered, just barely keeping his temper in check. "It isn't difficult to get around the village if one is a native to the area. We were trained to recognize it easily."

She didn't care all too much about the difficulty. He was there for a job, nothing more and nothing less. A servant came and poured her some more tea upon her silent gesture, and she turned her attention back to Rokusho.

"There has arisen some opposition to my family," she told him. "It resides in Konoha. Our place in Daimyo-sama's favor is decreasing by the month, and so long as this nuisance remains alive, he will continue to disregard my family and our worth. I need a skilled mercenary to get in and out of the village with the Head of the family, and bring her head and heart to me. Are you capable?"

"Very much so," the Ame shinobi said with a nod, hand falling to the odd weapon on his back. "Who is my target, Kurosaki-dono?"

Sayori's mouth curled upward, face breaking into a dark smirk. Her husband had once told her that it morphed her face into that of a hideous beast. His head currently rested in her collection as a result, not that anyone but she and her servants knew that. "The name of your quarry is Potta Hari, and she is the Head of the new Potta Clan. Her contributions to the village have been causing problems for some of us more well-bred folk, and she cannot be allowed to continue. Search for black hair that resembles a rat's nest, and sickly green eyes like you've never seen before. She is truly repugnant in all forms of the word, so it shouldn't be too difficult to find her.

"Do this, and you will find yourself ten million Ryo richer."

Rokusho accepted the scroll detailing his mission. After all, she had specific details that had to be observed. He bowed briefly. "It'll be done."

The green-haired shinobi was gone a second later, with no proof of his existence remaining. He was good at covering his tracks at least.

Sayori hummed pleasantly and sipped at her tea once again. Soon her family would be back at the
top where they deserved to be, and Potta Hari's head would be a nice addition to the heads of the other people she had moved against over the past decade.

She had such a nice collection and felt that this newest addition would just make it all the better. That would teach the little bitch to deny her daughter a position at that rundown shack of an orphanage! Her eyes would become Sayori's new baoding balls.

Without looking up from her tea, she ordered, "Servant, run a hot bath. I wish to pamper myself today." She deserved some time to herself after all of the hard planning she'd been doing as of late.

One of the many servants standing along the wall, bowed and rushed off to do as ordered, while the rest remained behind, awaiting instruction.

It was good to be the Head of the family.

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Naruto was out with that Gaara person. He'd been assigned to a mini squad with Sabaku no Gaara, while Sasuke got stuck with the blonde kunoichi from the Suna team. And while he could understand the whole fire and wind being a strong mix against enemies, he was also stuck with Temari's poor flirting skills. Ino could flirt better.

He'd gotten so used to Ino's subtle flirtations and Sakura finally backing off that he probably got a little too pampered in the end. It wasn't so great to be reminded of the fangirlism. And yes, Temari wasn't so bad, it was still more intense than what Ino had devolved to doing lately. Meaning it was still too much for Sasuke to tolerate. He could only extend his vaunted Uchiha patience so far.

At least he got to practice with his new sword, which was the only upside for him personally. Because his dobe was out with someone else, doing other work and messing around. He was smiling and laughing and dragging Gaara into everything he wanted to do as see. And Sasuke was jealous, though he couldn't really understand why since he wouldn't want to be doing any of that stuff. It was boring and none of it would benefit him personally, so he saw no appeal in trying out games and sweet foods.

He felt like a child.

"Hey, Sasuke!"

The Uchiha blinked and looked up to find Naruto charging in his direction with obvious intent. Gaara was following at a much more relaxed pace, his arms folded in front of his chest and his face set in a mask of calm. Naruto though, was waving something back and forth and looked like his birthday had come early. And since it was less than a month away, that was saying something.

"Look at what I got! This cool lady from the Suna merchants saw me messing with my chakram and asked me if I'm going to be using them anytime soon. She then offered to sell me a pair of their really strong gloves that are chakra resistant so my Wind chakra wouldn't be able to cut them while I use them to keep my hands safe while practicing and fighting!"

Said gloves were black and were made of an odd material. They smelled like leather, but couldn't actually be leather, right? No leather he'd ever touched felt like they did.

Gaara had joined them by then, and he actually had an explanation. "They are made by capturing one of Kaze no Kuni's Giant Scorpions and then melting the carapace down. It's a long process of extraction because it needs to be done by regular flame. These scorpions are nigh invulnerable to chakra and extreme climates, so chakra made wind or flames will not kill them and they are resistant to heat. Objects made from these scorpions are usually very expensive, but he made several of his
Bunshin to help the merchant and she lowered the price by half in response."

Damn. Only Naruto could manage something like that. Now if only his charms could work on the assholes in their own village, then everything would be grand. And he looked so excited too. As if waiting for Sasuke's approval as he bounced up and down expectantly.

Sasuke settled for a simple, "Nice going."

"Neh, teme, they some really cool stuff here! We should get some things before we leave!"

"Save your money until the last day. Things usually go on sale on the last day." Sasuke had been living alone for years and had learned this lovely tidbit on his own. And just because he was part of a wealthy clan, didn't mean he couldn't be frugal. Also, he really hated shopping and wanted to do it as quickly as possible to avoid any... disturbances.

The blond nodded. "And you'll come with me?"

A smirk accompanied Sasuke's reply. "Sure."

The team consisted of Yamanaka Inoichi, Nara Shikaku, and Akimichi Chouza. Their duty was to escort their unconscious load to the border of Hi no Kuni. They'd taken turns in the past eight hours, carrying him. And the man was heavier than expected.

Inoichi had finally declared Hoshigaki Kisame fit for return to Mizu no Kuni and Kirigakure's forces. Hokage-sama had Potta Hari and Potta Runa working nonstop on rearranging the man's mind. And it was a technique that was extremely different from what his family could do because they couldn't really remove memories, but they could lock them away under seals. As it was rare for anyone to have such in depth knowledge of their own mind, the chances of someone finding out that their memory had been tampered with, were slim.

But what Hari-san had done, was completely remove the memories that their leader wanted gone. Years and years of work that had to either be removed or edited just so Hoshigaki could remain alive without being a threat to his home village or the allies of his home village.

The official story, was that Hoshigaki Kisame was working with Terumi Mei for years against the oppression of the Mizukage, Yagura. As Yagura's actions were disloyal to the village and Mizu no Kuni as a whole, Kisame was disgusted, so he joined Mei's plans for an uprising. When Momochi Zabuza 'failed' his attempt at a coup, Kisame was instructed to join the group they suspected Yagura to be a member of. To infiltrate their numbers and spy from the inside. he'd been a 'sleeper agent' for years already.

Potta Hari, under the direction and knowledge of her friend, had to rework all of those memories of the man being a member of the Akatsuki organization. The reason being was because the more truth there was to the story, the less chance of him finding out that he'd been manipulated into becoming a different person altogether. Half-truths were more difficult to spot than whole lies. So Hari-san had been instructed to keep as close to the original memories as possible. Meaning Kisame knew about Madara and Itachi. He knew about the other Akatsuki members and their skills. And he agreed that his mission as an Akatsuki member was finished which was why he joined Itachi's return to Konoha.

That was the official story anyway. Itachi was on a long-term mission to also scout out their enemies and as both countries would possibly have an alliance should the Rebellion win the war, then they were technically allies. And Kisame knew the Sandaime Hokage was kind at heart and would understand. They even had the idea of the old Hokage being 'too much of a tree-hugger to really hurt
him', just to further it along.

It was a lot of work, but eventually, after over a month and a half of work, Hoshigaki Kisame could be transferred into the hands of his fellow Kiri shinobi. He was sane of mind, reaching the green area of the pyramid easily, and he no longer posed a threat to them personally.

Inoichi was impressed to say the least. Because Hari-san had managed to implant several intense ideas in the man's mind. Those that were firmly rooted even in his subconscious that would never be able to leave. It had taken her days to do, so he knew it wasn't a simple procedure, but it was still incredible, because Hoshigaki Kisame would never even think of betraying Konoha. He would balk at the very idea of doing such a dishonorable thing. He would refuse no matter what, to betray Konoha. There was also a strong aversion to anything Akatsuki related, and mild disgust with the organization's goals in general.

To keep him loyal even by extension was a talent that he would never fully understand, but could appreciate all the more. The Potta Kekei Genkai was something to be feared if they could do so much to a single individual. He just hoped that she and her clan remained loyal to Konoha in the coming future and that no one acted to drive them away before her contract was up.

"The Kiri shinobi aren't too far ahead of us," said Shikaku as he glanced back at Inoichi and Chouza. "Be as positive as possible. Despite being allies, who knows which shinobi they sent to us. Some may still hold a grudge against our village for one thing or another."

When they broke through the tree-line and found themselves on the shore, they saw none other than Momochi Zabuza awaiting them with a small squad of his own. All looking surly and scowling at the Konoha shinobi.

"Not a word," the man growled. "Not a fucking word." His attempts at appearing threatening weren't working in his favor though.

In response, Chouza lifted a hand while beaming. "Hi."

The zanbato user's growl was enough to bring a smile to Inoichi's face. The young people were so amusing these days.

Ino glared at the Suna ninja she was unfortunately paired up with. He was a rather lazy one, and she wasn't too fond of lazy. As such, Ino had decided that it was in their best interests to get some training in. Because no matter what it would benefit the both of them in some way. And besides, she'd gotten used to the normal motions of training and when she wasn't doing anything, she got frustrated.

"Alright! Up! We're going to be doing some training. I attack and you dodge. I need to experience with these babies and you need to stop relying on your puppets to save you. Not every battle is going to be at a distance."

The purple make up wearing Genin sent her a bland look. "I am decent at Taijutsu. I don't need any additional training in that."

Ino cocked a brow and readied her Sai. He seemed to think she was joking, but Ino was not one to joke about training. Naruto would know very well what she was like when it came to training. She had hit him enough times with a ruler for him to get the idea. If he didn't have the healing factor going for him, the lessons would have been left in a little longer.

She launched herself at Sabaku no Kankuro, and snickered when he tumbled off his boulder in order
to dodge her attack. The Sai scraped against the stone as he landed on his side, wincing upon impact. "The hell?" he demanded, flipping to his feet and jumping back once again so her swipe passed through thin air. He could move fast if he just put more effort into it. So she was going to go even harder.

"I don't joke about training, so keep dodging. I'll get these things eventually, and what better way than live experience? And I would prefer to get it now before returning home and being exposed to sensei's evil version of training. You can't just leave a pretty girl to suffer, can you?"

Batting her lashes seemed to stun him for a second, and she took that opportunity to land a kick to his solar plexus, which had him grunting and he cradled his stomach. "Don't fall for a pretty face, Kankuro-san!" she called out. "I know that I'm beautiful and probably someone you aren't used to seeing, but that kind of thing can be your downfall in the future!"

The Suna shinobi glared and actually charged with his right fist raised. She could immediately spot the flaws in his form. He was leaving his left side completely open. And since he was a specifically long-ranged fighter, she had a feeling that it wasn't false. Most long-ranged specialists got too cocky in their skills and didn't freshen up on their Taijutsu because they always assumed they would be safe at a distance.

Ino had been like that until some time before graduation. She had thought that her family's specialty would save her, but technically, if she was on a team that couldn't function well enough, she wouldn't be able to trust them to watch her unresponsive body. So Ino had joined Naruto and Hari in their training, knowing that it was even more important that she didn't rely on mind tricks to win her battles for her. And she had been right.

The blonde backflipped while whipping her one hand out, narrowly missing Kankuro's fist by a centimeter. The blade would have torn through his flesh like a hot knife through butter.

"How the hell can you do that mid-motion?" the boy demanded, glaring even harder.

She smirked when she righted herself. "I trained specifically to be able to defend even when upside down in the air. That's why."

The ensuing spar resulted in her victory and Kankuro swearing at the ground for the next hour as he nursed a bruising hand. She felt good. It was nice to get some experience. And hopefully he would prove to be more of a threat come the Chunin Exams.

Hari looked around and frowned. The air felt odd. Kind of like that weird static that could be felt in the anticipation before the beginning of a major battle. As if the energies in the air were just itching for a fight to commence! And she didn't like how the hairs on her arms rose in warning, or how a shiver trickled down her spine despite her feeling nothing when she spread her senses out further.

Silently, she cast a Revelio charm, but nothing happened. Nothing under disguise was around her for at least a kilometer. Which, in a ninja village, was a little strange, but it wasn't that strange. Still, she could not shake the feeling of being watched and the odd thrumming for battle in her magical core. It wasn't the type of watching the Anbu did either.

Sighing, she continued on her way down the street, taking the less populated alleys to get around, hoping that she wasn't being paranoid and that someone would eventually present themselves to prove that she wasn't going mad. Also hoping that she didn't lead them to the orphanage by taking the winding alleyways and slinking through the side streets.
Of course the thought that she was leaving herself open, didn't really bother her too much. She had magic and could Apparate if something went wrong. Why should she have to worry, especially in a village of people trained to intercept and defuse dangerous situations? If someone did something it was asking for trouble.

The moment she stepped foot in the flat, she realised that something bad had happened and she hadn't even noticed. Because something shiny and sharp wrapped around her midsection suddenly, and she hadn't even noticed when it got there. Just as her eyes landed on whatever it was, the object tightened unexpectedly, cutting through her clothing instantly and slicing into her stomach a bit. The burn that accompanied it was familiar and unpleasant.

Within seconds, she was covered from neck to ankles in the object that was like metal thread, and it cut into her exposed skin, leaving burning gashes in its wake. Her neck and arms were especially vulnerable to the attack, and the burning intensified all over.

Something hot puffed against her ear and and deep voice whispered, "Good night, Potta-hime."

And then something hard slammed into her head, and the darkness bloomed as someone shouted her name.

"You've never had dango?"

Naruto was horrified by the revelation that was completely unnatural. He looked at his Suna friend with wide eyed disappointment. It was a great shame. They didn't really make dango in Suna because it wouldn't last very long. Apparently, their water reservoir wasn't very large, and the harsh winds interrupted anything electrical which limited what could be used. Add on the crappy land conditions that didn't give them much in terms of plants, and Suna was bereft of so many important things! Like fridges, and fans, and other really great stuff that even Naruto managed to grow up with regardless of the fact that he'd been hated so terribly!

And he learned the word *bereft* from Sasuke-teme, in case anyone was actually curious. He'd been expanding his vocabulary recently and felt a lot smarter because of it!

"So like, how do you bathe if you have limited amounts of water and stuff? Or do you all have to be really careful with what you use water for?"

Gaara gave a small shrug. "Sand baths are our primary source for bodily cleansing. Water is mainly for the greenhouses and the hospital. Every day however, each house receives five kilograms of water. There is no change for anyone, even if some houses have more occupants. It simply wouldn't be fair to everyone in the village if some families received more when it's a freely given necessity and they aren't paying for it out of pocket. By law, five kilograms must be given to each house every day. It is then up to the residents to decide who gets to use it."

It was shocking to hear about the odd laws of another shinobi village. Also that was a small amount of water and he had to feel bad for any families with more than three people. As for the sand... the Konoha Genin shivered at the very thought. Sand could be very rough in texture and uncomfortable when hot. "Doesn't the sand get everywhere though? Like, how do you deal with it if it's so rough and everything?"

Gaara hummed and shrugged one shoulder. "Most shinobi in our nation have Wind Chakra. Like how most in your nation have Fire. With a proper current, or a few sporadic flashes of chakra, we can simply knock it all off so it doesn't get lodged anywhere unpleasant. And for me, the sand will move if I order it to. It'll move even if I don't order it to."
"I'm gonna take a leaf from my friend Shikamaru's book and say that that sounds troublesome. Hari-neeq-chan would probably die if she couldn't use water whenever she wanted. Though I suppose it's good that she can at least make some at any second if she wants to." The whole Mahou thing being able to do almost anything was really useful, Naruto realized. Even if something were to happen to her, should would probably be able to get around on her own. Too bad ninja couldn't do the same though.

He also felt kind of sad for the people of Kaze no Kuni. Suna didn't have enough water and not even enough plants. And he knew they ate insects so that probably meant that they didn't have enough wildlife either. It sucked. How was anyone getting by in those conditions? How could they even manage a hospital when they lacked the basic needs for human beings to survive?

Water didn't just appear out of nowhere unless summoned like Hari did, or if someone was performing a jutsu...

An idea popped into his head! He was a genius! He proceeded to smack Gaara's arm in his excitement. "Hey Gaara, what Chakra Nature do you have!"

"Wind, Earth, and Lightning," was the succinct answer that had Naruto momentarily reeling. It was just so impressive.

Kakashi sensei had said that people could be trained to use natures that weren't even in balance with their own. Shown by him having Lightning Chakra, but being able to use jutsu from other Chakra Natures without much hassle. So Gaara being able to use more than one wasn't too shocking for a shinobi, but for a Genin, yeah, it was a big deal.

"You're going to learn a Suiton Jutsu!" said Naruto, standing and moving away a bit so he had some space. Now, he needed a certain amount of chakra for the size of the toad he wanted to summon. He could feel his core, and sectioned off about one twentieth of it. That should give him a toad that could not only speak but also instruct in their language.

I, Inu, Tori, Saru, Hitsuji!

"Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

A Naruto sized toad appeared in a plume of white smoke. Said toad was green in color, with large violet eyes, and a very pink mouth. The red bow on its back was kind of... ugly. All in all, it wasn't the coolest looking of all the toads that Naruto had managed to summon so far, but it would have to do. If the toad could teach them how to do a jutsu, who cared what it looked like?

"So you're Jira-chan's newest summoner, hm?" the toad asked, looking Naruto up and down. Its voice was incredibly high-pitched. "You look just like the last one too though much smaller than him."

Naruto grinned at the thought of the Yondaime Hokage who was actually his father. "Yeah, he was my dad. I'm Uzumaki Naruto. Nice to meet you!"

"Gamariki," the toad's voice was a little annoying.

"This is my friend Gaara," Naruto added, tugging Gaara closer by the strap of his gourd. No way would he let the other Jinchuuriki remain in the background. "I wanted to ask if you could teach us a simple Suiton Jutsu that can just create water. He lives in Suna and there's next to no water over there, so it would really help their village."

Gamariki looked between the two boys. "Jinchuuriki from opposings villages who are
friends? Interesting." He sighed, obscene eyelashes fluttering madly. "I supposed I could help you. It must be terrible to be without water. Come Naru-chan, Gaa-chan, we are going to practice over there."

And then Gamariki was hopping off in the direction of the fields, flattening the flowers as he went.

"We're learning Suiton Jutsu?" Gaara asked in confusion.

"Yep! Imagine being the only person in your village who can summon water for a jutsu! You could help! And then they would have to rely on you for more than just missions! And after some time, they might even come to really like you!"

Never let it be said that Naruto wasn't a genius!

"We'll get this easily! -ttebayo!"

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"Hari-hime was attacked, Hokage-sama!"

Hiruzen slammed the file down, completely disregarding its existence upon hearing those words. "What?" the old man demanded, hoping that he had not just heard what he thought he had heard. "How did this happen when I have Anbu stationed around her at all times?"

Anbu Neko stiffened upon hearing just how angry he was, but went on to explain anyway. If she didn't want to be doing menial tasks for the next month it was best to admit to her faults as quickly as possible. "It was three minutes and seventeen seconds past noon. I was switching out with Tori at the vantage point when an individual appeared behind Hari-hime as she was walking in the doorway of her apartment. The shinobi wrapped her in ninja wire and then Shunshined away. Tori pursued immediately."

"Description!" the Hokage snapped while drawing out a new piece of paper and scrambling for a pencil.

"Male, tall, around one hundred and eighty-two centimeters. Shoulder length, layered green hair. Fair-skinned. On his back was an umbrella commonly utilized in Amegakure. At his hip seemed to be the hilt of a weapon, though there was no blade. He was clad in a sleeveless, black and grey vertically striped one piece with shin high, black shinobi sandals," the woman spouted off quickly in the most impassive voice she could manage.

He was given pause at the physical description and reached for a drawer in order to grab Konoha's most recently printed Bingo Book. After a few pages, he finally came to the one he needed, and turned the book in Neko's direction. "Is this him?"

It didn't even take a second. "Hai!"

Why was Rokusho Aoi back in Hi no Kuni, and why was he after Potta Hari of all people? And furthermore, what kind of power level did he manage to reach during his years away from the village? What kind of threat level should he be pushed to and who would be the best to confront him? How could he sneak into their village and kidnap a high priority citizen so easily?

"Neko, fetch Mitarashi Anko, Morino Ibiki, and Shiranui Genma. Then bring Potta Runa here as soon as possible." Ibiko had experience with Rokusho and he'd certainly like a rematch. And Anko would surely try to disembowel someone if she found out that she was not included on the mission to rescue her friend. She was also skilled at capture exercises.
They needed to get the young woman back before Team Seven returned. Otherwise there would be hell all around. Everyone on that team, Kakashi included, would raise hell should she not be in perfect condition upon their return to the village. And with all of her dangerous friends in the village, he didn't want to imagine what his shinobi would do as well.

Rokusho Aoi, the man who had stolen the Raijin no Ken and then fled the country, had finally been found. They could recover a national treasure while bringing in a nuke-nin and saving one of their most important citizens. Hopefully they caught up in time.

Everything had been fine. The stalls and vendors were constantly busy with buyers and curious children. And some time after noon, all of that changed when an explosive tag was dropped in the square and Gaara's sand surrounded it instantly, saving everyone from the blast, but also kicking up quite a bit of dust that could prove dangerous for them if they couldn't see.

The dust settled after a few seconds, and ten shinobi, wearing blank hitai-ate, stood before the throngs of people and the shinobi. The man in the center, bedecked in a white yukata and a pair of white shinobi trousers, stepped forward. "I am Komura," he announced, holding up his ebony bladed naginata. "And I am here to liberate you all of the burden of such possessions, as promised in my warning letter."

His men all drew their own weapons. Wakizashi it seemed.

Kakashi hummed and put his Icha Icha away. "I'm afraid you chose the wrong place to steal from, Komura-san." Both Kakashi and Baki stepped forward, willing to meet the threat head on. The Genin were smart enough to know that they should protect the civilians until the battle was over, or they were needed.

Kakashi lifted his hitai-ate and opened his Sharingan eye. "Let's dance, eh, Baki-san?"

The Suna Jonin hummed, holding up two fingers that were practically swathed in Wind Chakra. "Yes. Let's."

The two launched themselves at the group of foes, and Komura engaged Kakashi head on.

Ino whipped around suddenly and shouted, "Ten incoming shinobi at six o'clock!"

"How the hell do you know that?" Kankuro had demanded even as he turned as well, pulling the string for his puppet.

"Sensei's hell training," was the blonde's cheeky reply.

Naruto was already ahead of everyone though, having also heard the group approaching and creating some clones who were ready to fight at any second. "Taju Kage Bunshin no Jutsu!"

Now, Naruto would have been perfectly fine with letting his sensei go and be awesome, but he would be a little annoyed at getting no action himself. However, the moment Kakashi and Baki engaged the ten shinobi in front of them, ten more shinobi appeared at the other end of the main square of the village, meaning that Naruto would get his desired fight! And Kakashi-sensei's evil senses training was paying off since they learned to channel chakra into their ears! And he'd been able to hear them coming!

The only real problem was that the fight would be happening directly in the center of the village and he didn't want any of the civilians or vendors getting injured in the process. So, a good portion of the
Kage Bunshin would go about defending each and every person around, while the rest would try to get the ten shinobi out to the fields where it was much safer to battle.

"What the fuck?" he heard one of the enemy shinobi hiss at his comrades. Of course he couldn't blame the asshole. A hundred copies of an orange Genin was a lot to take in at once. Especially when it was revealed that they were all solid in form and not just illusions.

At present, there wasn't much any of them could do until they were in the clear. Certain maneuvers were dangerous with some many people. And it could also prove fatal should they try anything beyond Taijutsu,

"Gaara, use your sand to shield the village from any damage, because this is gonna get messy and we can't sit back, worrying about them all getting hurt!"

And Gaara listened! The redhead merely nodded and without even moving his arms, the sand beneath their feet was rising up. And when the enemy shinobi got a good look at what they were faced with, they wisely chose to distance themselves, which was perfect for the group of Genin because that gave them a better advantage. Sasuke and Temari took off after them immediately, followed by a large amount of Naruto Kage Bunshin.

Naruto glanced back for a moment, to see that Kakashi and Baki had managed to push their foes to the exterior of the village. "Gaara, how wide is your range with the sand?"

"About half a mile. I can engulf the village if necessary. It isn't even half that size."

"When you see the chance, make sure that the people are safe. All of your attention it to be on shielding them and nothing more. Trust us to handle the idiots, okay? I know you can do it, you're awesome." Gaara was a badass, of course he could do it!

Gaara fixed him with a strong stare. "I trust you." And coming from a Jinchuuriki who had grown up with a crappy life like Gaara's, those were incredibly important words that Naruto would never want to take for granted ever.

He patted the other's arm and beamed. "Thanks."

And he really meant it.

Ino and Kankuro flanked Naruto as he took off for the fields. And Naruto found himself completely taking charge, which wasn't really usual for him since Ino liked to be in charge the most. But he was treating this like it was a big prank, and pranks had to be executed with precision. Naruto knew his pranks, so he knew that he was the best shot.

"Kankuro, do you have any poisons with you?"

The Suna Genin nodded hesitantly. "Um... yeah. Paralysis poison in liquid form that I've dipped all of my weapons in. It works quickly if you keep the blood pumping. Nothing deadly though. I haven't reached the level where I'm allowed to work with those yet, but I'm getting there! I'll have it by the Chunin Exams, so don't underestimate me!"

"Wouldn't dream of it," Naruto replied sincerely. After all, he hated it when people underestimated him. "Do you have the antidote to the poison with you?" Naruto was very good at working with liquids of questionable nature. he'd stolen many in his twelve years and had done... things with them.

"Yeah. I would be a piss poor poison user if I didn't have it just in case." That was good.
Up ahead, the battle had begun in earnest. Sasuke was using his Shurikenjutsu and his ninja wire. He'd trapped one shinobi and then hit him at close range with a Katon Jutsu, reducing him to ashes instantly. Naruto could only feel proud of his teammate's skills. Those were some skills. If he wasn't careful, Sasuke would outshine him soon.

Temari was keeping her enemies at bay with Fuuton Jutsu, the purple circles on her fan spreading out as she did so.

"Fuuton: Kamitachi no Jutsu!" Temari swung her battle fan, releasing dozens of sharp air currents that slashed everything in their wake, including two enemies that fell into bloodied pieces, and the ground with was left with several deep gouges. It was utter devastation and it was beautiful. Naruto couldn't wait to learn Fuuton Jutsu so he could be just as awesome!

Fixing some of his attention back on Kankuro, he said, "Take the antidote and then give some to your sister and my teammates too. Things like that poison would burn out of my system before it would work. I know from experience in dodging Anbu after pranking certain people that I probably shouldn't have pranked. They don't like being outsmarted and eventually thought of using paralysis poisons, which ended up not working. I'm going to need all of your poison though, because we need to spread it and fast."

There was only a moment of indecision, before Kankuro sighed. "Fine." After a few seconds of him shuffling through his small bag, he produced a clear container filled almost to the top with the poison. It was light green in color and he could smell how vile it was from through the lid.

"Damn."

"Give me some credit, Leaf. I fight with the equivalent of a wooden doll. From a distance. I need all the help I can get and imagine what it'll be like when I have lethal poisons on my side."

"This is great though!" Naruto insisted with a grin and he knelt. "Ino, want to help me cover my Kage Bunshin shuriken in these?"

The blonde's eyes went wide with interest, before she was cackling. "There is no way in hell that they are going to be able to dodge a thousand shuriken that are covered in poison!" the girl hissed, sounding amused. "The screaming will be musical."

That was the plan at least. And then they would keep them busy for several minutes until the effects fully came into play. Anything that was injected into the veins or bloodstream, was always spread faster when the blood pumped faster. He grinned in anticipation.

Neither missed Kankuro's uneasy looks in their direction as they spread out Naruto's collection of weapons and proceeded to dip stacks at a time into the poison. Kankuro executed his own job well enough as he prepared the small vials of antidote he'd brought along, conveniently having four on him, which would hopefully be enough.

"Inject it into a major vein," the puppet user instructed as he handed Ino one, and then pushed his own into the crook of his elbow. "They work faster when they spread faster, so keep moving at all times and don't for a second stop after this. If you get hit with a poison covered weapon, you will feel a tingle and it won't feel good, but it won't directly affect you because the antidote is already spreading in your system."

Ino, who had just dipped her Sai into the poison, nodded thankfully and quickly administered the antidote to her jugular. The blonde hadn't even blinked while she'd done it. She then took up a large pile of shuriken for herself and charged into the battle without a fear, looking like she was having the
time of her life. Anko had more of an affect on Team Seven than Naruto had originally assumed, it seemed.

"You know, you Konoha ninja are mad," remarked Kankuro, looking a bit horrified but also resigned.

"Yeah," said Naruto fondly as he dipped more shuriken in the poison. "But all the best people are."

"What is this crap?!"

"Not now, Naruto!"

The blond huffed and lifted his hand, which was now stuck to Sasuke's hand. "This is something to be worried about, Sasuke! We are stuck together because that asshole in the yellow threw some strange jutsu at us and we couldn't dodge it in time!"

"I know, but we have more important things to do than argue. So sync up with me already and let's kick their asses!"

He huffed, but silently agreed. Whatever the green goop that had stuck them together was, didn't matter at the moment because they still had to fight and even though their foes had slowed down more to their level now, it was still a fierce battle.

Sasuke swung himself around, picking Naruto up in the process. The blond caught on to his plan and he angled his body so that he could smash his foot into one of the enemy's faces. He gave a pleased yell when the jerk was sent careening across the distance. Her deserved it.

Naruto stiffened and grabbed Sasuke's collar, yanked him out of the way of Katon Jutsu. Sasuke followed easily, putting his faith in Naruto's actions. While Naruto had saved him on the front, Sasuke had defended his back. Colliding metal sounded right beside Naruto's right ear. Someone had just nearly lobbed his head off, and Sasuke had managed to save him in time.

They really did work well together. It was instinctual to just trust one another, and he was touched that their friendship and teamwork had advanced so well that they could rely on each other to keep one another safe and well. Sasuke would always have his back.

Sasuke's free hand rose, almost as if doing- no he was actually managing to do half seals for the Gokakyu no Jutsu! Naruto didn't even know it was possible to do that! Without mercy, he blasted Naruto's would-be killer away with a half-sealed Katon Jutsu. And honestly, Naruto needed to learn how to do that because that was so cool! Not that he would tell the teme because he would get all smug and arrogant about it. And then they'd tussle and Naruto would somehow get pinned again. But it was definitely cool.

Temari called out to Sasuke, and the Uchiha nodded, hand coming up to form more half seals. This time it was for a more destructive Katon Jutsu. The Katon: Ryuka no Jutsu. Without the wires since their current predicament wouldn't allow for the use of since Naruto didn't know Shurikenjutsu as well as Sasuke did.

Finally, Sasuke inhaled deeply and then spat out a large stream of flame that were alarming in size and strength. Temari followed up behind his attack, swinging her battle fan with a wail of, "Fuuton: Kamaitachi no Jutsu!" And the effects were devastating on not only their enemies, but the fields as well.

Everything was on fire. The plants and the bodies.
"The fields are going to burn, and if we don't move soon, then the entire market and town are going to be joining it!" Sasuke screamed, looking more and more unkempt as the minutes passed. He'd lost his hair tie some time during the battle. For just a second, Naruto could reflect on the fact that Sasuke looked a bit odd with long hair. Good, but just really odd compared to his old duck butt hairdo.

"I know, teme! It's not like I'm the one the used the Katon Jutsu to begin with."

"Well it defeated the rest of the shinobi, so you can't get angry at me!"

"I am trying to think! I only know one Suiton Jutsu and Kakashi-sensei is still busy or something so he won't even be of any real help with whatever ones he knows! We're on our own right now! Anyone know Suiton Justu?" asked Naruto, though he received four shaking heads in response. Damn.

If Naruto tried to do the only Suiton Jutsu he knew, it wouldn't affect much because it had a small range. And from what he could see, Gaara's sand had built up an impenetrable dome around the town in hopes of keeping the civilians safe. Because that was the purpose of the mission. Protecting everyone. So encasing the entire place in a dome of sand was the best protection they could ask for currently. He was doing his job.

Which meant that the rest of them had to find a way to put out the flames. Damn Katon Jutsu for having pros and cons!

Naruto wasn't big enough for his jutsu to make any difference. Not even a dozen Narutos could make the jutsu big enough. But…

That was it!

"Give me a moment, Sasuke. I gotta get some of the Kyubi's chakra."

Closing his eyes, Naruto focused on that dark place deep inside. Where the Kyubi resided deep within the seal.

"Once again stealing some of my power, gaki? Fine. Let's see what you can do with it."

And suddenly, Naruto's entire body was filled with chakra again, and he could feel his small injuries sealing shut. Any lingering pain from Komura's group's attacks was gone in an instant, and he smirked.

"I need to summon a big toad, Sasuke. How exactly can you do your Katon Jutsu without any hand seals? Is there some big secret I don't know about?"

The brunet entered lecture mode, which wasn't the usual for Sasuke. "Seals help us focus our chakra, and each seal represents the formation of the chakra. If you have memorized the feeling of the chakra as you mould it, you will be able to replicate those movements on your own, without using seals. I can only do half now, but soon my Katon Jutsu will be mastered and I won't need seals at all."

The only Jutsu Naruto knew that he could intimately recount the feel of his chakra being used, were the Henge, and the Kage Bunshin. So he'd just make a Kage Bunshin and then have it summon a toad for him. And it should all work!

Concentrating, Naruto separated most of his and the Kyubi's chakra, he then formed it until it resembled his own shape. Instantly, a Kage Bunshin with slitted red eyes appeared beside him. He let out a cheer, because that was awesome and could save him so much time in the future! And it could totally help him out with some good pranks too.
"Right!" Naruto bit into his thumb and wiped the blood on his clone's hand. His Bunshin made the seals and slammed his hand on the ground.

"Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

And Gamabunta joined them then, towering over not only Gaara's sand dome, but the entire area as well. From atop his head, both Genin could see just how far the fire had spread, and Naruto tsked in displeasure at the sight of it. Sasuke merely whistled in amazement.

"Hey, Boss Toad, can you help us put out the fire? It's going to burn down the town behind us otherwise!"

"Gaki! Of all the things I have been summoned to assist with, this is not even close one of them! But fine! We need to share some sake after this though. To commemorate our first true cooperation together as boss and henchman."

"Boss and henchman?" Sasuke repeated quietly, sending Naruto a look.

"Shut it, teme." This was not the time for the Uchiha's snark.

Gamabunta brought both of his large hands together in a hand sign. In the next second, a large amount of water was shooting into the sky and coming down in a torrential rainfall. The fires were doused almost immediately, leaving behind heavily smoking wheat and grass among other things. And the water built up enough in some places for there to be large puddles left behind.

The smell of burned vegetation was kind of gross. The smelled of burning bodies was even more gross.

But everyone was okay once again, and that was all that could ask for.

Naruto tugged on Sasuke until the other got the hint to get off the toad. Both looked up at Gamabunta, from where they stood in the shin deep water. "Thanks, Gamabunta-sama!" the blond cheered.

"No problem, gaki," the toad boss huffed. "Reverse summon yourself to Myobokuzan within the next ten days so that we may share our sake."

He was gone the next instant, with only smoke and water to prove that he'd ever been there to begin with.

"That went well."

"Naruto, you are crazy."

"Hey!"

Sasuke smiled though, something he didn't normally do. "Don't ever change."

Naruto flushed unexpectedly and looked away. "Stop making me blush with your nice words, teme. It's not natural for you."

The Uchiha hn'nd and started walking toward the large sand dome that was coming down little by little now that the threat had been neutralized. Naruto had to come along of course because his hand was connected to Sasuke's and they were stuck together until someone could get whatever the goop was, off.
The town and market were both safe. No damage and no tragedies had occurred. Everyone was alive and well. And Komura was tied up in Gaara's sand. Kakashi and Baki were sitting not afar off, and Ino had caught up to them and decided to test her growing skills in Iryo-Ninjutsu.

Kakashi-sensei looked up as they approached. His Sharingan was shielded once again, and he didn't seem at all affected by Ino healing the gash on his left arm. "How did you all fare?" the Jonin asked.

"Well enough," Sasuke murmured with a shrug. "Temari-san and I set them all on fire, and then Naruto summoned the boss of the Toad Clan and had him use a large Suijton Jutsu to put out the flames before they could become a problem for the rest of us."

"Teme helped by telling me how to do jutsu seallessly!" interjected Naruto before anyone else could talk. "He explained the theory so I got a Kage Bunshin to summon for me because we're stuck like this! And I think we work pretty well together since we managed to kick a lot of ass even when working with one hand each. But we're awesome so I'm not shocked that it all worked so well."

The grin Sasuke shot him made his stomach flutter a bit. He didn't know why, but he liked it. Nice Sasuke was... nice.

"Well done, you three," Kakashi-sensei said as he stood, nodding to Ino in gratitude for her hard work. "Now we need to run a patrol of the perimeter just to make sure that there are no more enemies to expect. Gaara-san, please keep yourself vigilant just in case, while we search."

The redhead gave a firm nod, the sand shifting at his feet in preparation for anything.

"Come on, teme. Let's go!" said Naruto as he rushed off in a randomly selected direction.

"Don't drag me! Hey!"

Hari blinked, feeling stiff and tired despite the fact that she was waking up it seemed. Her entire body was aching in one way or another. A migraine that rudely pounded at the back of her skull and several small burns all over her arms and legs. There was a sharp pain shooting through her stomach, and her left wrist throbbed painfully. It was probably broken. The feeling of broken bones was familiar enough though it had been years since she'd had to experience them personally.

"So, the princess is awake, hm? It's only been eight hours. I had expected you to never wake up since you'd have been unconscious for the... fun part. I suppose you just have terrible luck."

It was muffled. As if she was listening through a pillow. The voice was familiar and masculine. When she turned her head, she couldn't actually tell the gender of her captor, and decided to just call them Twat in her mind. It was funnier that way. And boy was Twat in for a rude awakening when Hari was finally out of her bonds. But there were some things that she needed to know first.

She opened her mouth, the insult coming before she could even think to hold it in. The Gryffindor side was very strong in her at the moment. "Your hair looks like poorly made wasabi paste."

Twat's face well into a sneer. Any form of pleasantry was gone in an instant and she didn't feel bad in the least. "And yours looks like it's never seen a brush."

She shrugged. "At least mine doesn't look like a condiment. I got the well-fucked, sex hair, and you have sub-par wasabi paste hair."

It had been less than a minute since she had awoken and she was already pissing them off. It was kind of funny, in an ironic way. The Gryffindor in her just couldn't seem to shut up even in
dangerous situations. Digging herself into a hole seemed to be a talent. Hari was particularly skilled
at annoying her would-be killers. She reveled in it even.

Hari looked around, finding herself in a wooden house with no furniture except the chair she was
seated upon. It was obviously abandoned and didn't belong to the fool in front of her. Twat wouldn't
want to do whatever was planned, in their own home. It would make such a mess and could
implicate them further. The dust was too much though and she could feel the demanding itch for her
to clean. She hated messes.

Twat couldn't have at least picked a better place to kill her in? Though maybe the fool didn't know of
any better places.

The headband was different, meaning this was a resident of a different country and she hadn't been
asleep long enough for Twat to flee the borders of Hi no Kuni while carrying her as well. Konoha
was strategically placed in almost the direct center of Hi no Kuni for a reason, making it a day and a
half journey for shinobi to make it to any side of the border. Since her captor was carrying extra
weight, they wouldn't have been able to make it in time.

"Since we don't know each other, I assume it is safe to say that you were hired to off me, though I
can't fathom who knows enough about me to want me killed. Unless it was one of the idiot villagers.
Though hiring mercenaries is expensive and I doubt anyone but me in Konoha could afford to hire a
mercenary skilled enough to sneak in and out without getting caught.

"So it's someone from outside the walls."

Honestly, they whole situation was given away with the widening of the eyes. The orange sunset
coming in through the window made them look murky brown. Dull and banal basically. It was
strange how Kakashi's coal coloured eyes were much nicer despite being darker and not the best at
reflecting light. Though Kakashi was better all around than dear Twat Knacker was, so really, she
couldn't compare at all.

She was still talking though, trying to piece together everything. "I would guess Orochimaru, but he
could easily infiltrate the village and off me himself. And since my clan member blew his arm off,
he'd want to exact his revenge personally so the message can sink in. Can't do it right unless it's done
by yourself and all that rot. I don't know many people from outside the village, and only met those at
the Daimyo's birthday event, so it's probably some power hungry politician who isn't happy that they
aren't the most important person around anymore."

Her dear Twat was silent for a moment, before the frown flipped, becoming an amused smirk
instantly. "You are quite entertaining, and far more intelligent than I would expect civilian nobility to
be."

So she was right. Ugh! The drama of politics. She hated people and she hated having to play games
with them. It was so troublesome.

"Any chance you can be persuaded to let me go and possibly tell me the name of the person who
sent you after me so I can make their life hell?"

"No."

They raised a kunai to her throat, forcing the tip just past the barrier of her skin and drawing a trickle
of blood. She didn't even blink, the pain was nothing compared what she was already feeling. Hari
had been through some shite in her life and one little cut wasn't enough to make her whimper.
"That's a shame," she huffed, making her body go limp in the chair. As if she couldn't be arsed at present.

Hari made eye contact and the link was instant. *Legilimens.*

When she had her information, and he - Rokusho Aoi - was too busy holding his throbbing head from the force of her intrusion, Hari Disapparated from her chair, and appeared beside the shinobi, feeling a little wonky and off balance. With a silent curse that almost missed its target, he was knocked across the room and rendered unconscious immediately. A little too easy, but it was better than wasting energy uselessly. Hari felt a little ill.

All the movement made her wrist throb anyhow. She couldn't move it, and when she attempted to force it with her other hand, the pain was immense. here was an urge to swear up a storm, but she held it in. Though there was an intense temptation to vanish the bones, but that would just cause problems when she finally appeared back in the village. Such as how the hell did she vanish the bones to begin with? They wasn't something she had explained about her abilities and didn't feel like having another intervention over it.

With a sigh, and a cursory look around, Hari proceeded to fix up the area until it looked like he'd released her of his own accord and decided to do questionable things while she was unconscious and of no threat to him. And Hari would claim that she used that lapse of judgment as a surprise attack with her Kekkei Genkai. And it was a viable excuse, so no one would question it.

*Death, where am I?*

"About eleven miles outside of Tanzaku Gai. Walk to your right once you step out the door. You can't miss it."

If it was just her, she wouldn't need to let herself stay hurt just so she could screw over not only Rokusho Aoi but also Kurosaki Sayori. But the Slytherin thing to do was to play it all out for as long as possible, milking it for all she was worth. And Hari would milk. After years of denying the inner Slytherin, she was ready to make people suffer.

Hari was *supposed* to be in Slytherin for a reason and staying injured just to tear down her foes, was the best way to go. It would earn her more sympathy and respect, and she would get to tear down the cunt that put a hit on her head. All in a day's work for The Chosen One.

And now it was time to drag not only herself, but her errant kidnapper, to the bustling civilian city. She needed the wounds to be obvious, and she needed to look helpless. She felt devious.

It would be kind of fun. If the pain wasn't involved that is.

She could only imagine what people would think when they got an eyeful of her appearance, covered in cuts and blood, and cradling her broken wrist while an unconscious ninja floated behind her.

Magical maybe.

"So we have to bathe with this thing on?"

Not that Naruto hadn't had to bathe with Sasuke on missions before, but he seemed a lot less eager. Not that Ino was blaming him! There was one thing to share space at an onsen, but it was another to be stuck together and have to bathe one another! And help one another use the bathroom too. Some things just shouldn't be shared.
She didn't know who to pity, but there was a *lot* of pity involved.

"Sensei, are you sure you don't know a way to get it off?" she had asked out of concern for her friends.

The man had shaken his head. "I'm currently low on chakra, so my one original jutsu can't be used for several days at least. Not even Gaara-san's sand or Baki-san's Kaze no Yaiba could get it off, so it'll take some intense strength or heat probably to break it."

The onsen at the town didn't offer mixed bathing, not that she *wanted* to mix bathe with them! But it would work a lot better if they had an extra set of hands. She had spent the past three minutes in the water, wondering just what to do.

Oh!

"Hey Naruto, make some Kage Bunshin to help you both out!" she called into the men's side. It was unlikely that Kakashi would help them, so they had to do with what they had on hand.

After a moment, he yelled back, "Great idea, Ino!"

"What are you *doing?" Sasuke demanded loudly through the barrier between the baths. "Do not touch me with that!"

"It's just a sponge. It's not going to kill you or anything!"

"No!"

"Let me scrub your back! Then you can scrub mine, teme!"

"Why would I want to scrub your back?"

A few seconds of silence met his question, before Naruto asked almost too low for Ino to hear, "You don't want to help your best friend?"

She was practically straining herself to hear Sasuke’s reply. But it ended up being really sweet and proved that Sasuke was capable of kindness and that anyone who told her she was crazy for liking him, was wrong.

"Just turn around and let me scrub your back already, Naruto."

"Thanks, Sasuke!"

Her boys were idiots. She loved them anyway.

"You ninja are so weird."

Blinking, Ino turned to the brunette who had spoken. "Huh?"

"Nothing."

Civilians were so weird.

"So which snake should I use when I get my hands on the fuckface that took Hari-chan?" Anko asked with faux pleasantness as she went through a mental list of what she wanted to do to Rokusho Aoi. And nothing that her demonic brain came up with, was good or sane.
Ibiki and Genma shuddered upon hearing her words, though neither said anything in response. They were smart enough to stay their tongues because Anko was quite obviously pissed off. After all, her friend was kidnapped and she'd wouldn't sleep a wink until Hari was safely back in the village.

Kakashi was going to lose his shit when his team got back. That was, if they didn't get her back before Team Seven's missions ended. And the mission time the ex-Anbu had predicted, was coming to an end in the next few hours. They were all fucked.

And if the orange wearing gaki found out that his sister figure had been kidnapped right under their noses and no one could keep up with her attacker, there was no telling what he would do in a fit of rage.

She was still thinking about what she'd like to use first. There were serpents for all kinds of things. Paralysis, pain, blindness. The venoms all had different properties and effects when introduced to human blood. And Anko was especially good at manipulating the venoms her beloved snakes possessed.

Perhaps a mild paralysis coupled with the one that took away one's hearing, and then the vision crippling poison would work well? Some sensory deprivation would do. It was always fun to use that in interrogation.

Rokusho had fled to Ame and it always rained there, so he was used to continuous noise. She could only imagine just what it would do to him to be forced into silence for an undetermined amount of time while Anko laid out her plans one by one and began the slow extraction of all information he had, as well as the revenge that was going to get on him for daring to lay a hand on one of her precious people.

Hari had accepted her. Unlike many of her fellow shinobi, who had only come to form bonds with Anko because they'd had to loosen up over many missions and the upcoming years of working together ahead of them. Hari simply said fuck it and the friendship was formed immediately. She didn't need to witness Anko defending her village, proving for the millionth time in a row that she didn't follow Orochimaru's ways, to have her opinion changed or anything.

And that was what made Hari special. She let Anko's actions from the times they met, help her form an opinion, instead of listening to what the villagers had to say. She didn't just take the gossip as a good enough explanation or reason.

She had done the same for Uzumaki Naruto. And it was a rare attitude to see in anyone, let alone a civilian.

Anko gave Potta Hari her friendship and alliance, because the woman had accepted her. And Anko didn't have many people in her corner who would literally stand up for her character and her feelings. She had to protect all she had.

Aoi was going to get a spear shoved up his ass. And then she'd send some Lightning Chakra through it just for a laugh.

She almost cackled in light of her own genius.

"See you, Gaara!"

"We will meet again at the upcoming Chunin Exams," said Gaara, giving the blond a nod.

"I hope we get to fight each other!"
And both teams turned to face opposite directions, the merchants from both villages following their lead.

The two groups set off, returning home.

"You should know that your friend who has the snakes is currently on a team looking for you and she plans to torture your attacker into insanity."

Hari cracked a smile. It sounded like something Anko would do. Also, she was oddly touched that Anko would torture someone on Hari's behalf. The bonds of friendships should never be tested by outsiders, lest some terribly heavy shite happen.

I'm actually really happy to hear that.

"I figured you would be. She is with Morino Ibiki and Shiranui Genma. You can either stay in Tanzaku Gai and wait for them to pass through and get wind of your arrival, or you can continue on to Konoha and they might choose to head in your direction."

Which would get her more sympathy, she wondered. Shuffling into the village on her own, looking like death warmed over, or letting Anko and her team catch up?

I'm going on ahead. Being tired with such surely, but I kind of want this look worse than it is. Just because I'm an arsehole and I want Kurosaki to get fucked up when they find out that she sent a killer after me. It's all worth it in the end.

Death snorted. "I could simply kill her for you."

No. This isn't serious enough for me to abuse that kind of power. I've gone over forty years without falling to that level and I have faith that it will be a long time before then. Besides, death is way too easy. I don't get why you think it's the worst thing ever when having her alive and suffering is more up my alley.

"It's a shame that you had to be in Gryffindor. Slytherin would have helped you a lot more in life. Salazar weeps."

Really?

"Yes."

Great Circe.

She trudged onward, legs practically begging for some kind of break. But she wouldn't give in. This was some strong dedication worthy of a Hufflepuff. Hari was not ashamed of her plan nor did she care that she looked like hell. Some things were more important than aesthetic beauty.

How long until I reach the village?

"Five hours if you walk and don't rest."

Maybe she could jog a bit? If she ignored the pain it would cause her wrist, she could probably do it. I wish I had a bloody Pain Reliever right now.

"It must suck to be you."
Hagane Kotetsu liked his job working at the village gates. It meant he got to spend time with his best friend every day. He didn't have to go out on dangerous missions, and the chances of him seeing danger were thin. He also got to meet some really interesting people and people watch without being looked at like a creep for it.

When Izumo pointed out something coming up along the entrance, he hadn't thought to actually look. Just another civilian as usual.

"That looks like… Anko's hime friend," said Izumo in awe.

He cracked open one eye, and realized that his friend was right. But… Potta Hari hadn't filled out any paperwork to leave the village. Right?

Putting his feet back on the ground, he grabbed the clipboard and started rifling through the papers, searching for her name. Today was missing her name. Yesterday was also missing her name. The day before didn't even have her name. Not even the day before that.

She was not on the list for the past week, but she had been seen walking around the village days ago.

"There's an unconscious shinobi floating behind her," Izumo observed as he stood.

When the woman was close enough, they both gaped at the sight of her. Hundreds of small cuts littered her dainty frame. Her neck, arms, legs, and the random rips in her clothing all showed scabbed over cuts. The contusions that bloomed over them were dark purple and disgusting in how numerous they were. She looked like a walking bruise.

Her hair was the neatest thing about her, and it was still a mess like usual. She favored her right leg, cradled her left wrist to her stomach, and both could see a long slash running horizontally along her abdomen, the fabric surrounding it was bloodstained into a dark brown shade.

Her eyes were bloodshot, and puffy from lack of sleep obviously. Cheeks red from exertion - and maybe even a fever - and she was sweating heavily. Lips chapped to the extreme.

The moment she stepped past the gates, she gave them a nod. "Sup?"

Both were baffled. What kind of civilian was so unconcerned by the fact that they were obviously injured? She looked terrible and didn't even seem affected by that fact. Maybe she'd gone numb?

The mussed up woman nodded in the direction of the unconscious shinobi behind her. "This twit kidnapped me from the front door the other day and I brought him back so you could deal with him."

She then grabbed the pencil on their desk and started filling out her information on the provided page on the Entrance Clipboard. Kotetsu would have been fooled into thinking that she was perfectly fine had he not seen her wince several times. She also took a lot longer than necessary to write out the few facts she needed to regain entrance into the village.

"Now, could either of you help me get to the hosp?"

"Nee-chan!" an exuberant voice called out.

All three stiffened at the sound of Uzumaki Naruto's voice. And they all turned to see the orange clad boy rushing toward the village gates. Unlike last time though, Potta Hari was not actually there to
greet him, and when he finally took note of her appearance, it was too late to rush her away before he could see the damage done to his sister.

"What happened?!" the blond demanded, stopping mere inches from her and looking absolutely horrified at her appearance. "Nee-chan, who hurt you? Who do I have to beat up?!"

And thanks to the boy's yelling, the rest of Team Seven hurried on ahead, where they too got to see the woman in such a poor state. The Yamanaka and the Uchiha both looked ready to murder, and the blank look Kakashi's lone eye gave them, made them shiver in undisguised terror. No one wanted to piss Kakashi off. It just wasn't done.

Potta Hari simply pointed at the floating man with the Amegakure hitai-ate. "I was kidnapped," she said simply, voice hoarse and crackling a little. "And I'm really tired and hurting right now."

Her body fell forward then, and Hatake Kakashi was the fastest to move, catching her and cradling her close before she could smash her face off the dirt road and do even more damage to poor body.

"Hospital first, mission debriefing later," the man decided, and disappeared in a Shunshin, taking the unconscious woman with him. When they disappeared, the kidnapper dropped to the ground, not that any of them cared about his health. Not after what he'd apparently done to the civilian princess.

The Genin all cursed, and quickly moved to fill out the paperwork so they could follow behind their sensei. Kakashi could get away with not filing simply because of his status, the Genin weren't so fortunate.

Kotetsu withdrew some ninja wire from his pocket and set to wrapping the Ame shinobi up. "When the Anbu arrive, they'll escort our… friend to T&I."

And as if on cue, Anbu Tora appeared, arms outstretched in expectation. No words were exchanged as the shinobi was handed over into their custody.

The Genin were already gone by the time he returned to his seat, and he and Izumo shared a look that managed to communicate every feeling they'd gone through in the past few minutes.

More drama than they usually experience at the gates.

"Anko is going to be pissed," Izumo said suddenly, making them both shudder at how true the words were.

"Fuck."

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON. I FOLLOW BACK.
I have started the next chapter. I have taken a bit of a break in typing though since my wrists are starting to hurt. I will probably do some voice typing if I can get Google Docs to stop being an asshole.

On top of all the shit going on with the Akatsuki and Orochimaru remaining on the low, Hari now has to deal with this jealouse bitch getting revenge for Hari not hiring her daughter as a caretaker in the orphanage. *eye roll* I know what you're thinking.

Should I add Clash in the Land of Snow to the fic? It would have to happen before the Chunin Exams since timeline-wise that comes next. It could be used to bring our idiot boys closer. Add more drama and give them new experiences as well.

Finally, next chapter will be another village-centric chapter. So we'll get Anko and Kurenai. Kakashi and Hari. Some poor Itachi. Luna and Karin. Sai and Shin will be joining our main storyline soon. I am looking forward to it! ^-^
I'm Wishing

Chapter Summary

And things begin to pick up for Hari and Kakashi, as well as Naruto and Sasuke.

Chapter Notes

So this chapter went through a lot of editing. When I started, the chapter was at 19,000 words, and when I finished it was over 26,000 words. This is 1/4 of 100K words. That is a big deal. There is a lot going on in this chapter and if you ignore some parts you might miss important revelations or realizations.

There is fluff and there is drama. There are also humorous sections splattered around. But there are some sad/angsty parts too. It's basically a rollercoaster of things.

I did use part of Clash In the Land of Snow, but not all of it. I wanted basically one thing, but needed to add the whole last third of the chapter to get to it. So I got what I wanted and managed to open up a few possibilities for anything in the future.

Hope you enjoy. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

The amazing lucife56 made FANART for this story! It's beautiful!

Morino Ibiki took a deep breath before entering the basic interrogation room. It was the most common one, where they simply talked to their guests and would determine what happened afterward depending on how the guest answered. This however, was not a common interrogation since they were only giving the false image of a proper investigation.

Rokushi Aoi had a date with Mitarashi Anko, who was busy bouncing up and down in the surveillance room on the other side of the window. And just as Ibiki hesitated outside Aoi’s room, down the hall a room was being prepared to Anko's specifications for how she was going to be
dealing with their dearly missed rogue shinobi.

He stepped into the room, enjoying how Aoi’s head snapped up upon seeing him, and the color just drained from his face. Yes, the last time they had crossed each other’s paths, Aoi had thought that he left Ibiki to a fate worse than death. How entertaining it was to just prove him wrong by existing. Ibiki lived to be the nightmare in everyone’s reality.

"Hello, Prisoner #6920199," he began genially, as if water had gone under the bridge between them. As if Aoi hadn't tried to kill him once upon a time. "Do you know your name and why you're here?"

Aoi glared. "I know I'm in Konoha and that I am Rokusho Aoi. I also know that you somehow managed to live after our last encounter. I'm impressed."

"I don't know why," was Ibiki's casual rejoinder. "You couldn't kill me with such subpar torture techniques, so obviously nature wouldn't accomplish it either."

He often liked to rub salt in the wounds. Purely for cleansing purposes of course.

"So you sneaked into the village and managed to go undetected until you reached Potta Hari's front door," stated Ibiki as he dropped a long, black file on the table between them. He did not take a seat. That gave a false sense of security to the 'guest', by putting them and the examiner on the same level so to speak. Ibiki wasn't looking to do that or give anyone false hope.

"You miscalculated however, because she is under constant surveillance and has a Kekkei Genkai that is capable of varying degrees of danger. It is by your own foolishness that you are where you are," Ibiki couldn't help but rub in. He was insanely pleased by the fact that a civilian woman had managed to take down a registered Jonin and then bring him all the way back with her. It made the embarrassment all the more intense in Aoi's eyes.

"And here comes the fun part. I'm going to hand you off to the lovely Anko for some one on one. Just thought you should know before we just send you off, you understand. Potte-hime may have been easy on you, but we won't be."

It took only a nanosecond, but the other man got it instantly. "That's a breach of protocol!" he blustered, looking terrified at the implications.

It was. But who would care when they already had proof of him accepting a mission to kill one of their high-ranking nobles? Amegakure wouldn't take him back and would just let them keep him. He was also a nuke-nin of Konoha, so they had rights to him already. Different protocols came into play depending on the offense, and Aoi had stacked up many.

Ibiki smirked darkly and gave a cheerful wave as two Chunin came in to escort their 'guest' to Anko's private room. How lucky for them that the Hokage favored Anko quite a bit and let her get away with so much.

Tsunade was holding up a clipboard, eying the words on the paper before her. The entirety of Team Seven, plus Potta Runa and Potta Karina, waited beside Hari’s bed, where the woman lay unconscious. Naruto was fidgeting madly, full of energy and worry as he awaited the results of his sister's physical examination. He'd been pacing in the waiting room for hours and had refused to leave until he knew all the details.

"There were a total of one hundred and forty-seven lacerations all over her body from neck to ankles," began Tsunade, glancing down at the pale form that was covered in the hospital's plain white blanket. She looked washed out and even her black hair seemed to have lost its striking color.
"She has an unnaturally fast healing ability, so many of them had already begun to heal over. Unfortunately, they were not clean, and became infected. We had to reopen them all in order to clean them out properly, and then heal her once again. Many of them scarred though and will remain for the rest of her life."

Runa sighed. "I will have to make a special paste. It should lighten the scars a tad and make them difficult for even those with basic vision to see unless blatantly staring. Shinobi will probably still be able to spot them easily, but I don't think she'll mind all too much. Hari never cared much for her own appearance so this won't really be a bother for her." That didn't mean it wouldn't bother others though.

Tsunade nodded stiffly. "One particular injury in her midsection was far deeper than the others and came dangerously close to cutting into her intestines. That one was healed perfectly though, so there will be no complications. She does have a fever from not only exhaustion, but dehydration, blood loss, and the trauma from the whole ordeal. We gave her one of those Blood Replenishers and it worked wonders in helping us heal her injuries."

Runa gave a small smile and a nod.

"She will be safe to leave the day after she awakens. And if she manages to sleep long enough, she'll be perfectly fine when that time comes. Now it's all about rest and relaxation. No strenuous movements for a week though, no bothering her with taxing information, and no stress of any sort is allowed."

No one on Team Seven seemed appeased, and Potta Karina looked frustrated over it all. "Even I wouldn't be able to help?" the redhead asked, tugging at her sleeve as if ready to bare her arm at any second if it meant helping her adopted mother/sister figure. Not even her extraordinary healing skills would help this.

"I'm afraid not, gaki."

Naruto stepped forward. "Nee-chan will eventually be okay though, right? She's gonna get better? She'll be back to normal?" His eyes were all wide and blue and looked ready to tear up. Tsunade didn't want to be the one having to do this, but as the senior practitioner in the building, of course she had to. It was her duty. Emotions were so taxing though and this kid had so many of them!

"Yes. She will have to be re-enrolled in the Yamanaka Course. There was simply too much that happened in a short time span for her to get away without a Psyche Eval, but I know Inoichi will be gentle so you needn't worry too much."

The boy sighed, and accepted the hug that his blonde teammate bestowed upon him. And while it looked like she was comforting him, Tsunade could tell that both of them needed comfort. After all, it seemed that Potta Hari touched everyone in some way or another, and in the end, they were just children. And someone they cared for had just been through hell and back and managed to come out alive.

Of course they weren't okay. They might also need therapy. She'd have to make a note of it.

Both the Yamanaka and the Uzumaki clung to one another, and the Uchiha placed a hand on both of their shoulders, showing his silent support of them.

Karina was hugging Runa, and Kakashi stood by, eyes only for Potta Hari.

The boy could try to fool everyone, but Tsunade wasn't easy to trick. He cared in his own way and
tried not to think about it too much. Perhaps from a fear of forging bonds, or from a fear of opening
up to another person after what happened to all the other people he opened up to. If something were
to happen to another person he cared for, it could possibly prove detrimental to his mental health.

Kakashi was learning that it was nice to open up your world even just a little, and he was also
learning that he couldn't protect everyone, whether by always being there, or by avoiding them in
hopes of that being protection enough. And the harsh truth wasn't exactly a pleasant revelation and
often times made one feel powerless.

Potta Hari evoked a lot of interesting reactions from people. Tsunade could only hope that it didn't
end up with some of the best and most feared shinobi in their village, going on a warpath on her
behalf. That kind of power over others, whether aware of it or not, wasn't good.

"We couldn't just take the scroll itself as proof alone. Even with the seal of the Kurosaki family on it.
However, we were able to pinpoint the owner of the ink on said scroll, which is what confirmed it
for us. All of the old, noble families in Hi no Kuni all have their ink created by a certain man. Each
family has a specific thing added to the mixture and the Kurosaki family likes to add gold dust to
theirs because they are the most financially prosperous and this is the ink their family uses."

Hiruzen looked at the five different scrolls laid out before him. Four were in direct order, but the last
rested above the line to separate them.

The young Chunin before him worked in the Cypher Division and she had been the one to
personally scan the scroll for any additional messages. It was pretty straightforward as far as a
mission scroll went. Written in Kurosaki Sayori’s personal hand even.

All five scrolls bore the woman’s personal writing and signature, as well as the same ink her family
used when sending missives. The thought of one of the Daimyo’s favored court members, doing
something such as this, unnerved him but did in no way surprise him.

They lived in a warring world. Even if there were no major battles going on at present, it was also
the small things. Expecting there to be no heat between members of the same country was foolish.
And shinobi were of course hired to handle other people all the time, but it just unnerved him all the
more as he re-read her mission scroll for Rokusho Aoi.

It was perfectly written and not a sense of hesitation in the characters. She had been fully aware of
what she was asking and felt no qualms over it personally. Meaning she was familiar with it in a
sense. Familiar with telling someone to kill a certain person in a high position in their nation, and just
how to handle the body for her.

And his mind traveled back over the years as several nobles in Hi no Kuni would turn up dead in the
most random of places. And the way their bodies would be upon discovery, would have been how
Potta Hari’s body would have looked like had she actually been killed. Head missing as well.

The similarities were far too close to just be a coincidence. They had a serial... he wasn't even certain
the classification she’d fall under. She didn't personally kill them(perhaps) so could she even be
considered a killer? A contractor perhaps? She was still guilty, that much was plainly certain.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes, feeling so much more tired than he wished. "I am going to need to
send a letter to Daimyo-sama. This is going to require his knowledge first and foremost. He will not
be pleased by these events."

And when Potta Hari awoke, she was going to have to decide to an extent, what sort of action she
wished to take against the woman who tried to have her killed.

He felt so old! Nothing was ever simple in a ninja village. He really needed to pass the hat on to someone already. Just so he didn't have to do this kind of shit any longer.

"Okay, kids. These can be very useful in extracting information."

Karin raised her hand. "Anko-sensei, aren't those supposed to be for getting corks out of bottles?" Never before had she assumed that they could be used for something like this!

Anko, who had been in the middle of inserting said twisted piece of metal up Rokusho Aoi's urethra, blinked twice, not even stopping what she was doing as she answered. "My dearest student, these lovely pieces of creation have multiple uses. Yes, the corkscrew can help with your retrieval of life-saving liquids known as liquor, but they are also useful in interrogation purposes."

Said screw was shoved in further, and Aoi unleashed a mighty wail of pain, his body writhing against its binds. He wasn't going anywhere though. They'd had slapped so many kinds of Seals on him that he wouldn't make it to the door if he somehow managed to escape the rope.

None of the Genin paid his whining any mind. This was what happened when you got caught. He deserved it.

Sai even made a comment about how corkscrews had many other uses that they should really explore in the future, which got him a nod of approval from Anko.

Karin would never forget the very odd mixture of blood and urine that came out when Anko finally removed the metal. Nor would she forget the very intimate look at a man's genitalia while they was being tortured.

At least Anko-sensei took their training seriously. She now knew all the creative ways one could use a corkscrew. Including whatever Sai had envisioned.

Haruno Sakura blinked in confusion. No one but Naruto had ever actually shown an interest in her before. She wasn't sure how to react to the situation, because it was new territory.

The green jumpsuit clad figure before her had called himself Rock Lee. His choice of clothing made her eyes hurt, but she had to look past that to truly get a feel for him as a person. His arms and hands were wrapped in bandages. That had to mean intense Taijutsu. And the orange leg warmers he was wearing were blocking a specific kind of chakra based weights.

Upon first appearance, he looked like a joke with his bowl cut and bushy eyebrows. And his stare was blank for the most part which made him appear dense. The outfit didn't help. But when one looked past that, there was an air of confidence about him, as well as the way he held himself. Add on the other things she'd observed, and she was certain that he was much more talented than he looked.

And maybe he deliberately looked like a joke to lure others into a false sense of security.

But back to why she was even considering him.

Rock Lee had appeared out of nowhere while she was training in Training ground Fourteen. He'd been firm when asking her if he could spar with her. He said he was a fellow Genin and had been
one a year longer than she. Which meant he had more experience.

And Sakura had accepted because she wanted to test her skills in combining her medical knowledge with her Taijutsu. No, she wasn't the greatest, but she was working on it. And if people didn't take her seriously, then she would be able to surprise them with the unexpected damage done to their bodies when she actually landed hits.

She lost horribly and all she had to show for it was the fact that she'd managed to bruise his left cheek with a punch that had actually knocked him back a few feet.

Meanwhile, Sakura was covered in blooming bruises of her own, and wanted to sleep for the rest of the day.

But then Lee had laid it all out there.

He'd asked her out on a date.

As in for lunch.

He said he admired her hard work and wished to get to know her better.

And his blankish face morphed into a blinding grin. When he tried, he could emote really well.

And Sakura had a decision. He wasn't creepy like some boys their age were. And he'd taken her seriously in their spar. And he thought she was a hard worker. And had called her a 'beautiful blossom of spring' which was kind of weird but also sweet.

"I would like to have lunch with you, Lee."

How often did a girl meet someone so nice and decent? Who didn't have ulterior motives behind their friendly smiles?

Who knew what could happen. Maybe they could even spar more regularly and she could improve for the Chunin Exams. It was nice that someone was willing to hit her in return.

She smiled then. This could be leading her in the right direction!

Hatake Kakashi sat dutifully beside the bed of the woman who acted as an older sister figure for his team of little misfits. Koneko-chan had been there for him when he'd been in the hospital, and he had decided that it would be good of him to return the favor. And if he was also standing guard because he was feeling a little paranoid, that was no one's business but his own. And Tsunade-sama's, but she swore herself to silence.

The scars from where the cuts had been, were numerous. Her arms rested atop the white sheets on the bed, showing off the new marks. They crisscrossed and overlapped one another, in an odd amalgam of cicatrices that he'd never seen before. The skin was pink from being newly stitched together, and growing at twice the normal speed.

While no scars had made it to her face, she already had a scar on her face. He'd never taken note of it before, because her fringe was always in the way, but she actually had an oddly shaped scar above her brow. The hospital staff had clipped her hair back, which revealed it entirely, and it reminded him of his Raikiri. Like the crackle of lightning across the night sky.

It spread across her brow and took up the right hand side all on its own. How did one gain a scar
such as that? And how was it colored so different from the rest of her skin? A scar that seemed as old as that should have blended more into her skin tone, but it was relatively pink still. As if it was new.

He'd seen the large oval shaped scar on her upper arm, and the odd one on her hand, written in another language he was certain. The claws marks down her back were also obvious when her hair wasn't in the way. The woman had already been covered in scars, and the universe seemed to just decide that she needed even more of them? And the odd thing, was that all of those scars were silvery instead of the pink of the one on her brow.

If he wasn't intimately familiar with how the world worked, he would bemoan the fact that it wasn't fair for her to suffer through whatever got her those scars. Instead, he sat vigilantly and waited for her to awaken. He waited for any true sign that she was okay and that nothing could happen to make her situation worse.

He'd even been bringing dango every day just in case she woke up and wanted something not disgusting as her first meal. Just like she had done for him many months back. It wasn't much because he hadn't made it personally, but he thought that it would still mean something.

His team had been sent to do their individual training, though all three had decided to just head out together. Potta Runa had given Naruto a box from Jiraiya-sama on how to do the Rasengan. Kakashi demonstrated how to do such so he'd have a good idea on what to do, and then showed Sasuke the watered down version of his Raikiri, and explained how to create it. Sasuke, having taken to his Elemental Manipulation better than his teammates, would probably get it quickly.

Finally, Ino was handed a scroll on an A-Rank Doton Jutsu. In essence, it would allow the user to pass through any type of stone undetected, because their chakra would be muted by the density of the stone. Not something flashy like Naruto and Sasuke, but as Ino had decided to become the medic of the team, she would need more jutsu that could protect her in times of struggle. After all, the common plan in a skirmish, was to take out the medic first in order to fuck everyone else over.

The teens had all accepted their training duties solemnly. He had a feeling that no one would be happy until Hari woke up though. Not even Sasuke, who liked to pretend that he didn't care about anything.

It had been three days since their return to the village and the subsequent heart attack Kakashi almost had when he saw the woman faint right before his eyes all while her body was covered in blood and gashes. Three days since she'd been admitted into Tsunade's personal care and had remained under forced unconsciousness for her own benefit.

He felt so disappointed. In himself for not being there to help. And at the Anbu guards for not being able to catch up to her attacker. And Kakashi was so pissed off, he'd already begun devising a new training regiment for the active Anbu members. Because if such a kidnapping was able to happen in front of their faces, then obviously they needed to step up their game quite a lot. And the ideas that came to mind were inspired by what he'd seen Momochi Zabuza do to those under his control during their time with the Rebellion.

Anko and Ibiki were working on their newest prisoner. Or rather Anko had been given full permission and Ibiki was supposed to 'observe'. Basically, Anko did whatever she wanted while Ibiki sat back and watched, doing nothing to keep the woman under control. And honestly, not even Kakashi would interfere with that, even if he too wanted a piece of the vermin's flesh.

This was personal for all of them in some way, but Anko deserved to regain her friend's honor. Anko didn't have much, just like many of them, but it was always a bit worse on her end. She needed the catharsis from this more than anyone did, and so Hokage-sama gave her leave. The man had always
shown her his softer side because he felt for her personal situation.

Kakashi's eye latched onto a small bit of movement coming from the bed, and his head snapped around immediately in order to get a good look at the limp form laying there. The left hand was twitching a bit. That could mean that she was waking, or that her muscles were spasming. He hoped fervently that it was the former instead of the latter. The hospital was a terrible place to be, even if he wasn't the one currently admitted. It always made him feel uncomfortable ever since he'd once listened to a patient's heart stop in the middle of the night. And it had been most uncomfortable since they'd been across the hall from him and he still heard it as clear as day itself.

Another twitch of her dainty fingers. He lifted his own hand for a moment, and considered how much smaller her own hands were, compared to his own. Gently, he took up her hand and made note of how much more fragile she appeared. She was quite small and looked more breakable than he'd ever considered before. Usually her personality was able to take up the space she lacked in size.

Even with a bad ass Kekkei Genkai on her side, she still hadn't been able to fully protect herself. It was an uncomfortable realization that she was just a civilian with a few extra skills. She got along with shinobi so well that sometimes it was difficult to remember that while she had seen death and battle, she was not one of them. No matter how well she fit in amongst them, she just wasn't a part of them.

The epic power packed into her tiny frame hadn't been much help when she was in immediate danger. It showed that one couldn't always rely on their Kekkei Genkai. He wondered how she had taken that realization when she finally came to whilst in the clutches of her abductor. Had it been disheartening? Did she even give a damn?

More twitching beneath his fingers that carefully cradled her own. Her skin was smoother than anything he'd ever felt before. Including Pakkun's paw pads. It was strangely nice in a way.

"I think I'm the envy of every member of your fanclub right now," a whispery voice called out, making him jerk in shock.

Bright green eyes, half-lidded with obvious weariness, stared at him through long lashes. Hari was awake though she honestly didn't look any better than she had when sleeping. And it had nothing to do with the multitude of scars on her arms.

"I know I just woke up, but I'm really tired, Kakashi."

She said his name. No teasing nickname this time around. She was completely fixated on him, but not enough to be playful. Well, other than the fan club mention of course. But Hari looked harrowed and completely done with everything. Despite sleeping for several days, she looked like she needed to sleep for ten years at the very least.

"Of course you're tired. Your body has been through a lot in a very short span of time," he murmured, unwilling to release her hand even though she was awake and could probably feel him. And she didn't try to remove herself from his grasp either, so he knew it was fine. He was also intent upon ignoring the... feelings. So many feelings.

"Is that dango?" she asked, drooping eyes honing in on the small, black container on the nightstand. The logo of Anko's favorite shop was pressed on the front in bright purple characters. It was the fourth box he'd purchased and this one might actually get to the person it was meant for instead of being dumped off on some random Chunin in the waiting room because its intended recipient wasn't awake yet.
"Yes. I wasn't sure when you'd wake, you see," he said, feeling a little embarrassed now that attention was drawn to it. It had been a spur of the moment thing the first time and he'd convinced himself it was just an act of kindness the other times. That it was what friends did for each other.

"There's ice water as well," he added, hoping to draw them away from the embarrassing revelation of his actions and the fact that he cared more than he let on.

"Help, please?"

Her voice was cracking, and he realized that yes, she needed water and he should get off his ass and assist the poor woman since it would be a hassle for her otherwise. So he did just that, reaching for the pitcher and pouring the water into the generic paper cup provided by the hospital.

To help her, he had to let go of her hand, but was soon holding her again, cradling the back of her head so she could take careful sips. It took time, and he had plenty of it, but she eventually got through the whole cup and asked for some dango.

"I want to sleep again, but I'm hungry and want that dango before I pass out. And to have a couple of good things before I'm gone for the night."

Kakashi then proceed to hand feed her the dango, trying not to think about the fact that she accidentally licked his fingers several times. He was simply helping his friend who was in need. That was all. Nothing perverted about the situation.

For a moment, her eyes sparkled with enjoyment, and he was momentarily struck by how strangely beautiful she was even when she was literally at her physical worst and couldn't possibly look any worse. But then her lashes fluttered shut, cutting off his view to living emeralds, and she mumbled out a slurred, "Thanks, Kashi. Remind me to give your book back later." She was lightly snoring a moment later.

He absolutely refused to acknowledge the fact that his stomach flipped in response, his heart rate increase, and his mask suddenly felt hot. No. He did in no way care that she had so adorably thanked him and was incapable of pronouncing his whole name while doing so.

Nope, he was as solid as a mountain and just as unmoving.

Kind of.

The woman sighed softly and her breathing evened out, the monitor also slowed down a bit, and Kakashi knew that he was a fool and couldn't stand by his own internal promises.

He cared. He cared too much for anyone's benefit.

He was well and truly fucked. And to be honest, he wasn't so sure if he really minded all that much anymore.

"She was awake and you did not call for a nurse?"

Kakashi stiffened and gave the Sannin his casual eye smile, hoping that it was distract her with his very fake innocence. "She said she was tired but wanted the dango before sleeping again. What kind of friend would I be if I denied the woman something so simple after all she'd been through?"

Tsunade was obviously unimpressed and Kakashi Shunshined from the hospital before she could yell at him. He'd seen what she'd done to Jiraiya when she was angry and he didn't need a personal demonstration. He liked his body in the shape it was currently in, thank you very much.
With such a tactical retreat, he completely missed the amused smirk that crossed her features. Nor did his ears pick up the low snickering at his expense.

Naruto worked hard, making his one hundred Kage Bunshin train over and over as he read the instructions that Ero-Sennin had left him. Unfortunately for him it was a lot harder to concentrate when he was worrying so much. Naruto hadn't had many things to worry about in his life, and he honestly didn't like the feeling of helplessness that accompanied the knowledge of his sister's attack.

He and Ino had even tried preparing her for such thing and it still hadn't helped!

How was he going to become the Hokage if he couldn't even keep his sister safe? How could he work to keep foreign people from entering their home and stealing her away? And on a much more grand scale, how to work to prevent foreigners and enemies from entering their village and causing mayhem and destruction on their people?

There was no answer forthcoming and he hated it. He hated how nothing seemed to come easy in life.

"Naruto, there was nothing you could do. You aren't to blame for what happened to Hari-san."

The blond turned to stare at Sasuke, who was standing a few feet away, looking contemplative. "I know, teme. But I still feel like I could have done something. Not even her super cool Mahou stuff could do much! We tried to prepare her and it still failed. What more could prevent this from happening again?"

When Sasuke didn't reply automatically, he'd assumed the Uchiha had no answer. But then...

"Fuinjutsu would be able to protect her from assault."

"Huh?"

Sasuke sat down beside him. "Seals have many uses. Some used on perimeters to erect barriers. Some used on objects or people to seal things away in pocket dimensions. Some to tamper with a person's ability in some area. They can been used in everything. If there is a seal that could repel certain people by reacting to their intentions, or could be activated by the wearer, it could really help a lot of people. Something like that could work in her favor."

Fuinjutsu. Ero-Sennin had said he was considering a Master at it. And it… could possibly help. Ero-Sennin was his godfather too.

Naruto needed to learn all about Seals and he actually had someone in his life would could help!

"Sasuke, you are the best!" he yelled, launching himself into the other's arms. The best part about it was that Sasuke didn't push him off despite how clingy he was being!

Things were looking up.

"I'm free!"

Naruto bounced in place as Hari threw her arms above her head. She'd just stepped foot outside the hospital walls and looked like she couldn't be happier. And everything would be fine if she wasn't covered in thin pink scars that crisscrossed over one another in an almost never-ending pattern.
Runa-chan had insisted that she could make something that would help them fade, but how long would it take? And how well would it work? Not even Karin could help! And the redhead was as equally antsy as Naruto was, swaying back and forth.

"Hey squirts, don't I get a hug?"

The Genin launched themselves into her arms immediately, having known already that she was not in any pain and they wouldn't hurt her accidentally. The scars were misleading, but hopefully they wouldn't be as obvious in the coming weeks.

They represented a reminder of what happened and it left him on edge.

"Nee-chan, we wanted to take you out for barbecue. Because it's been a long time since we've gotten together for a meal but we didn't want you to have to cook at all. And I got a nice paycheck from my last mission so I thought we could go out tonight."

"You don't have to waste your money on me, Naru," she told him as she ruffled his hair and placed a kiss on his brow. "Just spending some time with you is good enough for me."

Karin scoffed. "Hari-chan, it wouldn't be a waste. Besides, you never got to celebrate your birthday this year and I also wanted to do something for you. So we're getting some food and we're going to see this badass princess movie in the theaters right now. It's gotten great reviews and the main character is awesome like you since she's kicking all ass."

The woman laughed and looped her arms around their shoulders. "I haven't been on a date in a long time, so please take care of me."

"We'll be the best dates ever! -ttebayo!"

Also, Naruto could consider this practice for whenever he decided to start dating.

"I apologize for interrupting your much needed convalescence, but this is a matter of utmost importance that we need to handle immediately lest word get out. There is already talk."

Hiruzen truly pitied the young woman, because it seemed like every week, she was in his office for one reason or another. And this time was no better than any of the other times. And the stark reminder was obvious on her skin that she made no attempt at hiding. Because Potta Hari didn't give a damn about her physical appearance.

Hari-san waved off his apologies. "It had to happen sooner or later. If it's now, then we can just get it out of the way. And I'm fine, despite what some people would have you believe. I have been through much worse before, and I'm not going to die any time soon. What exactly do we have to do here?"

The old Hokage handed over a sheet of paper. "Since we have already informed Daimyo-sama of the incident, as well as given him all the proof we could accrue without your assistance, what you need to do now is formally appeal to him and the court as a whole. If you were a normal citizen this would have been brought to the civilian council in the village, but since Kurosaki-san resides outside of the village, and both of you are members of Daimyo-sama's court, this is out of our hands so to speak. But my word will hold much sway in your favor, worry not."

The proof was undeniable. And if it came to a vote, the rest of the court would be put on the spot. Who brought more benefit to the land? The Kurosaki family hadn't been making any great strides as of late. Their family put forth nothing that would actually assist the nation as a whole, whereas Potta
Hari's clan brought in much assistance not only in the hospital of Konohagakure, which in turn would aid the entire nation, but she was also skillfully bringing in funds on her own.

From just the little she'd placed in Konoha's banking system, she had a higher amount of worth than the Kurosaki Head did. Add on the Kekkei Genkai that could possibly be passed on to another family or start a new line there in Konoha which would add to their overall power as a nation, and her chances of winning the popular vote were much higher.

And since Kurosaki had most assuredly labored under the impression that Rokusho Aoi would not fail in his mission, she wouldn't have spent time trying to buy anyone's allegiance or silence. Basically, there was no way for her to get out of this.

Also, Daimyo-sama himself wanted to hold court the moment Hari-san was well enough to make the trip.

"Once we send your appeal out, a response will return with a date and time for you to appear in the capitol. It will be disguised as an urgent meeting. Once there, and everyone is secured, then Daimyo-sama will announce the true meaning of the gathering."

She nodded. "Sounds troublesome."

If only he could tell her the full details. But that wasn't allowed at present. It would be seen as favoritism and he couldn't afford that.

"You are not allowed to leave the village for any reason before this meeting. It is not only for your own safety, but also so it cannot be claimed that you have attempted to sway others to your side. Such a thing before the actual trial could be seen as you attempting to manipulate your fellows into your favor, whether you've done anything or not."

This was why he hated dealing with the nobles at the capitol. The drama that came along with them was so tiresome.

Hari-san took the paper and proceeded to read it over, once again earning herself just a little more respect from the wizened shinobi. Not many people bothered to read before signing anything. It was always best to double check for oneself.

"This is going to be annoying, isn't it?" she asked, already sounding done with everything.

He could only nod solemnly.

Anko beamed, glad to finally get out of the underground and get up to some shit with all of her friends! And what better way to celebrate Hari's recent release from the medics than to go out for some liquor? Which was how she, Hari, Runa, Kakashi, and an entire group of Jonin and Chunin were on their way to a bar.

Tsunade-sama had said Hari could have alcohol so long as she didn't get too rowdy and didn't overexert herself. So no sex yet, but drinking was all okay. But sometimes sex wasn't necessary in order to have a good time. And in any case, the Uzumaki gaki had given the Jonin twin glares when she and Kakashi came to collect Hari for their evening fun.

They proceeded to wrangle promises to keep their sister safe for the evening and the orange one even mentioned something about a prank and genital crabs. While Anko wasn't threatened by some little twerp, she was going to go home and shave just to be sure. If he could sneak into a seasoned Chunin's home without being detected when he was only nine, who knew what he could do when
he put his mind to it at thirteen. So she wasn't risking it.

"We are getting hammered, and you're going to enjoy yourself, princess."

Hari rolled her eyes and sent Runa a smirk. "We can out drink all of them, right?"

Runa looked away, a knowing smile on her face. She probably already knew what was going to happen during their night out and had chosen to remain silent on the matter. "It'll most certainly be an entertaining evening," the blonde admitted sweetly.

Anko decided to wrap herself around Runa since Hari and Kakashi were seemingly about to collide with one another they were walking so close together. The Jonin grinned when Runa accepted her embrace easily. "Perhaps we can test some of the new drinks good old Kosuke has come up with while we're out tonight?"

"You'll like the blue one, it has a very sharp flavor."

Yes! "Am I going to have company tonight. You know, scientific curiosity abounds."

Runa smiled, but divulged nothing. Meh. She'd find out later. Waiting was half the fun.

They had congregated in one of the more reputable bars in the upper shinobi district of Konoha. And the entire group that had come out just for some liquor and bullshitting, was relatively large, consisting of Kakashi, Kurenai, Asuma, Gai, Anko, Hayate, Yugao, Itachi, Tenzo, Genma, Kotetsu, Izumo, Iruka (who had to be dragged in by Anko), Luna, and Hari. And they were all there to relax.

It was still considered early in the evening since the sun had only just set and it was the Autumn season. The leaves were already turning different colours and the air was a little cooler though not by much since it rarely changed temperature in Hi no Kuni. It was a nice change of pace from the usual Konoha life.

Hari, in the interest of making the evening a lot more thrilling for everyone, suggested a drinking game. A game she had played many variations of, but all still had the same results and rules. A game that had seen her very sober at the end, nearly every time, but with new personal information on everyone she knew. It was a way to get dirt on people whilst under the cover of plain old fashioned fun.

"Let's play Never Have I Ever," she told the group, taking charge immediately. The shinobi all turned to her, awaiting an explanation. Anko and Kakashi looked the most interested. "We go around in some semblance of a circle. Each person takes a chance to list something they have never done. If anyone else has done it, they have to take a shot. We record our list of shots, and whoever drank the least is the loser and has to do something the winner - the one who drank the most - tells them to. Sexual favours are not included though."

The devious look that spread across Anko's face let her know that the other woman was totally on board. "This could be fun!" the newly promoted Jonin yelled excitedly. "Order some alcohol already and let's get this game started! I got shit I wanna know!"

The other shinobi decided to join in because why not? Kakashi, whom was seated at Hari's left, had ordered himself a bottle of something that looked like whiskey, but was nowhere near as bland. Luna, sitting on Hari's other side, had a bottle of Firewhiskey for she and Hari to split. Anko, who was on the other side of Luna, was surrounded by sake bottles. Everyone else had random choices from beer to mixed drinks.
Hari decided to go first, and grabbed her shot glass. Luna filled it with Firewhiskey. "Alright. Never have I ever been a part of an orgy." Regretfully, she hadn't been that adventurous, but she was still open to new experiences and wouldn't write them off.

Immediately, Anko took a shot, along with Genma and Gai of all people, following right along. And Hari was not the only person at the table to stare at Gai in complete astonishment because he just didn't come across as a person who was interested in anything but training. So it wasn't as if Hari had sat there thinking of him doing anything romantic or sexual. NHIE always brought out interesting information.

To get them out of the awkward realisation of Gai having a sex life, Hari turned to Kakashi and nudged him with her elbow. "Your turn. Never have you ever what?" she prompted expectantly. Everyone waited with baited breath and slight apprehension.

Kakashi seemed to lazily contemplate his own glass, before saying, "Never have I ever taken longer than an hour to read an Icha Icha book on the first read through."

"Shite!" Hari hissed as she lugged back her Firewhiskey and expertly blew out the black puff of smoke that had crawled up her throat in response."You did that on purpose, you arse."

His eye crinkled upward, showing that he was amused. Far too much for her own good, actually. "I don't know what you're talking about, Koneko-chan. Anko, Genma, Hayate, and Izumo all took shots as well, so it isn't as if it's something directed at only you."

"Uh-huh," she murmured, disbelieving. "Nai-chan, it's your turn."

The red eyed woman hummed and cast a searching look around the table. As if she was trying to come up with some form of ammunition. Hari fervently hoped that she wasn't the one being targeted. She always ended up being the most sober and if this was the time she wasn't, she would be disappointed in herself.

Thankfully, Kurenai was grinning at Hayate, who coughed into his fist and refused to meet her piercing gaze. She looked like she's just been given three months of paid furlough and was living it up.

"Never have I ever had sex in a dojo."

Instead of Hayate getting annoyed, Yugao scowled at the Jonin as she took a shot with her fiance. Of course Anko, Genma, Gai, and Kakashi all took shots as well. Meanwhile, Luna was giggling into her hand as she eyed Anko up for being so open with her exploits. Anko wiggled her brows at the blonde and blew her an exaggerated kiss. Luna caught it and pretended to hold it to her heart.

Tenzo's turn was next, and while he looked uncomfortable while saying it, he still muttered, "Never have I ever not had sexual relations of any sort."

To all of their surprise, Itachi took his first drink of the evening, looking in no way embarrassed or harried by the fact.

"I am not particularly interested in sex and most likely never will be," was his only response. And not even Anko had anything to say about it. They just accepted his word and continued on with the game. To each their own.

Iruka stuttered out his statement about never drinking beer, to which everyone but him literally had to take a drink.
Asuma apparently never experienced pegging before, which had Genma, Gai, and even Kotetsu drinking to it. Hari's snort turned into a cough that had her gasping for breath as she choked. And Kakashi, because he was such a generous soul, patted her back a few times to help her out.

The nevers continued. Yugao had never smoked before, making Asuma and Izumo sigh and take their shots. Hayate coughed out that he had never gone swimming recreationally. Everyone else drank.

Genma leveled the entire table with a smirk and stated proudly that he'd never had a hangover and proceeded to brag about his alcohol tolerance. Everyone else consumed another shot, though Hari did so with minor skepticism. No one called him out though so there had to be a grain of truth somewhere.

Itachi considered his fellows before his eyes landed on Luna, who merely stared at him, a smile already on her face as she reached for her shot glass, downing the Firewhiskey inside before he'd even spoken.

"Never have I ever seen the future."

Luna was the only one to drink that round.

Izumo had his turn next and he looked ready to drop a bomb on them all. "Never have I ever had sex with Anko!" he yelled triumphantly, eying the entire table expectantly.

As if one unit, everyone but Itachi, reached for their glasses and downed their alcohol without hesitation. And by everyone, Hari meant everyone. Kakashi, Gai, Kurenai, and Iruka included. And while she wasn't exactly shocked because Anko was great, she couldn't help but smile at how casually they treated it.

Of course, just because she easily took the revelation of almost everyone seeing Anko naked at some point, didn't mean others did. As in Izumo gaped like a fish as Anko also drank her liquor and sent him a knowing smirk, wiggling her brows at him. "You want to join the club, Chunin-chan?"

"Never mind that!" Kotetsu interrupted, waving his hands frantically as he stared Hari down while Kakashi kindly poured her another shot of Firewhiskey. "Hari-san, you and Anko actually… you know! You survived a night in bed with Anko? You?" He sounded incredulous.

Hari smirked. "Don't worry. The only kind of dying that happened between us was little." If only they had French in this world. It would have been a great pun. Luna could at least appreciate her humour as the blonde giggled into her hand and shook her head in exasperation.

Kotetsu huffed and finally took his turn. "Never have I ever turned the whites pink in the washer."

Izumo scowled at him as he took a shot. "I didn't know the red shirt was in there!"

"And all of my underwear are pink because of you," concluded Kotetsu succinctly.

Gai took his turn with great excitement and a beaming smile. "My youthful comrades, never have I, the beautiful green beast, ever been to Training Ground 0!"

Everyone else but Hari and Luna drank, the two witches sharing a look of confusion but not saying anything.

And then… came Anko's turn. Hari already had her cup prepared because she knew that Anko would be devious no matter their friendship. This was a game and while friendship prevailed most of
the time, it did not count in times such as these.

"Never has this bad bitch ever, not taken at least three dicks at once!"

It took a few seconds to comprehend her words, but then everyone but Hari, Kakashi, Luna, and Itachi was drinking. Hari leaned over Luna in order to ask Anko, "How exactly is that physically possible though?"

Luna cut Anko off before she could explain, by saying, "Never have I ever taken more than two lovers at once."

One loop around the table had proven that they were some debauched fuckers. And the night was still young.

Also, Kakashi had taken more than two lovers at once? Was there a tale behind such a memory?

Hari found herself greatly interested in many things that evening.

Kakashi stared at the small vial of liquid Hari was holding in front of him. She'd taken a similar bottle only a moment prior and any hint of alcohol on her, disappeared instantly. She wasn't swaying, her eyes had cleared, and even her breath smelt free of alcohol.

"It immediately cures hangovers and gets rid of the effects of drinking," the woman explained. "I figured it would be easier to take this than to suffer tomorrow morning. I don't often suffer hangovers, but just to be sure."

He was sorely tempted to explain that there was a chakra method he could use to burn away any of the effects himself, but at the same time, she'd brought an extra vial of the hangover cure thing and had offered it to him out of concern. He was strangely touched by the action, and decided to trust her judgment and take it. Kakashi didn't often accept things meant to be ingested unless he watched it being prepared himself, but Hari was different. He felt he could trust her. She wasn't a malicious person and wouldn't hurt her friends. He'd also been eating things she'd made for months, so why doubt her now?

It was freezing on the tongue and tasted like fresh mulch. He could track how far it went until it wasn't even in the esophagus anymore, leaving a trail of cold in its wake. Within seconds, the light buzz he'd been feeling, was gone and his mind was very clear. He also couldn't detect any alcohol in his own scent. Interesting.

"Wow," was the best response he could some up with.

She beamed. "I know. It's genius and I love it."

He handed the vial back and looked around to take in their surroundings just in case. He'd been walking her home when she'd pulled out the hangover cures. Everything looked, sounded, and smelled clean. He sensed no danger.

"You don't have to walk me to the door, you know."

"I want to." It was only right. She had only recently gotten out of the hospital and didn't need any additional stresses heaped onto her shoulders. Besides, even in Konoha, it wasn't safe to just wander at night. Also, he might have been a little worried and wanted to make sure she got in alright. It was simply a need of his at present.
The woman bade him a farewell when she reached her doorway. "I have to throw Naruto a party so don't have anything happening on the tenth. It's a surprise and he can't know though, so keep it to yourself. And I'll tell you more about it later on."

Of course she would do that for him. Kakashi had a feeling that Minato-sensei and Kushina-nee-chan would have loved Hari. She was doing what they couldn't. All the more reason to keep her safe.

Sai stared at the woman who had been assigned as his Jonin sensei. She was suffering from a hangover, and whenever that was the case, she didn't feel like training them personally, which was where the Shi no Mori came in.

Today was one of those days where their team had to survive for several hours, with only one kunai each. She had taken all of their possessions and dumped them off to the side. Then slurred for them to spend the next five hours in the forest, hunting for some kind of rabbit.

When Shin had questioned her about the lack of things to defend themselves with, she had laughed. "When I was your age, I didn't need a piece of metal to save my ass. Besides, there might be some shit left over from the last Chunin Exams. You might be lucky enough to dig up some cool things. Or encounter some not so cool leftovers, either or."

She then reclined on the grass and waved at them to go ahead.

Sai and Shin shared a look, and then stared at Karina. The redhead huffed. "So I'm the leader, huh? Let's get this crap over with. Hari-chan has got some plans for this afternoon and I am not missing out!" she hissed, eyes taking on a manic gleam.

Sai wasn't comfortable taking lead. He still hadn't finished reading all of his strategy books yet, as well as the dictionary. He needed to understand basic things in order to lead a team, so it was best to let the more outgoing of them all, choose who did the leading.

His brother never cared who lead, so long as they got their training finished. Shin just preferred to work.

"Come on, boys! Let's do this so we can get back on time!" the kunoichi announced, charging through the gates.

They followed, kunai at the ready just in case.

Sai surprisingly liked being on a team of more than two. He wouldn't mind if it continued.

"Alright my kawaii little Genin, we're going to have a scavenger hunt today!" announced Kakashi, his book for once nowhere in sight. And it was that tiny fact that had Ino alert and ready for something unpleasant. He was sneaky like that. The smallest changes in a person's countenance could spell out danger.

"We've never done this before, sensei. Why now?" she asked sweetly, hoping he would be merciful if even just a little bit. It was foolish to hope.

"Because sometimes you'll find yourself in the middle of a mission where you need to retrieve certain items. And other times, such as the Chunin Exams, you'll be given a list of requirements to fulfill and sometimes that means reaching the designated area with a specific amount of items. So it's best to get
The Genin all froze at the mention of the Chunin Exams. There had just been so much going on in their lives recently that they hadn't had much time to really think about Tetsu no Kuni and the fact that they were going to be tested for the right to become Chunin very soon. Only two months away if her math was correct. In front of the largest audience in the past twenty years according to their sensei.

She needed to make sure she got to as many of those medic classes at the hospital as she could. Since they weren't allowed to know about everything before going into the exams, it was best to be as prepared as possible.

Naruto took the reminder of the exams with a beaming grin and a bit of a bounce in his heels. Sasuke merely stared expectantly.

Kakashi handed over a single piece of paper. His writing was on the front of it, all neat and even. Ino frowned though as she accepted it. Why weren't there more? Like one for each of them? He usually had three of whatever it was.

"This is team training, meaning all three of you are going to be put to the test," said their evil sensei who was no doubt smiling at them judging by the curve of his eye. "Assume Manji Formation!"

The three jumped to it immediately, their backs to each other as they formed a triangle. Kakashi was in front of Naruto and the sound of metal clashing against metal reached her ears. It was jarring a bit grating is she was being honest.

"Sensei, what the hell are those and why are you putting them around my ankles?" the orange-clad shinobi demanded, sounded horrified. "I am a free Genin, dammit! -tabeyo!"

"Because this is a special version of this training that I created. You are all going to be chained together at the ankles during this training time."

Oh no.

"And then comes the difficult part."

Sasuke scoffed. "This isn't difficult enough?" he asked, the sarcasm lacing his tone very heavily.

"No," was the bland reply.

They were done for!

Kakashi appeared before her, holding a pair of headphones. She frowned, but accepted them. "I've given you each and item. You will put them on, but before that, I'll explain what's so special about them.

"Ino, you won't be allowed to hear for the duration of this training, so the seals on the headphones will cut off all sound. Sasuke, you are not allowed to speak, and the seals make it impossible to make sound. Naruto, you will not be allowed to see. The seals make sure to block out any chance of color perception on the bandana.

"So you three will have to find a way to communicate with each other while getting the objects for this scavenger hunt. Good luck! Decipher the code at the bottom to learn where to bring the items you collect. Have fun!"
He was gone a second later, leaving the three Genin to listen to the leaves in the wind as they contemplated their lives and how much they all sucked right now.

"He's evil," Naruto grumbled. "This has to be the worst training he's put us through so far and we haven't even started yet. -ttebayo."

Ino could only concur. It also meant that she was not leading this one because Sasuke had the superior eyesight thanks to his Sharingan, and he would be invaluable on a mission like this.

"Let's just do this already," said the Uchiha.

With a sigh, the team all put their individual items on. Ino shuddered as all sound vanished immediately. Sensory deprivation was considered a form of torture in all nations. She could understand why now. It had only been five seconds and she was already hating it. Being unable to make out anything coming her way. No leaves, or wind, or the sound of her teammate's heartbeats to let her know that they were still alive.

There was nothing.

She had to rely only on her vision and a shinobi's senses were like their bread and butter. She could only imagine what her teammates were experiencing because of this. Naruto wasn't allowed to see and Sasuke couldn't speak!

"I hate this," she announced. She could feel the vibrations in her throat, but nothing beyond that made it to her. It made her wonder if she'd managed to say anything intelligible at all. "But we have to start this! Do either of you know Konoha Sign or Code?!" she asked, hopefully loud enough for them.

Sasuke tapped his reply in Code on the side of her thigh. Naruto's left hand entered her right peripheral, and Signed an affirmative. If Ino hadn't been a Yamanaka, she wouldn't have been taught both from a young age. Thank the Sage for her mother being so demanding in her tutoring when she was younger! It helped out so much!

"I know both so we'll get through this. Let's just take our time to get used to everything, and we'll go from there."

They could totally do this. And they'd get back at their evil sensei at a later date.

"Koinu-kun, you are an evil little bugger, aren't you?" Hari laughed when he told her exactly what he'd done. Though she really shouldn't be surprised by him any longer. He had an unconventional approach to the way of shinobi and this was just more proof of something she already knew.

"Dear Koneko-chan, I don't know what you're talking about."

Hari was certain that the man was smiling though, so it completely negated the intense sincerity in his voice. She cackled even harder. His playful attitude was very... fun. And sexy if she was being bold, but mostly just good fun.

"Who do you think will get it first?" she asked as she returned to her stirring, not wanting the frosting to stiffen.

"I think it'll be Sasuke," said the Jonin. "As we both know, he's been paying Naruto a lot more attention lately and he would probably realize that they've been picking up things for the party some time soon. Then Ino will realize it a while later on. Naruto won't get it until they walk in the door, I
guarantee it."

Kakashi was right of course. Naruto wasn't very good at that sort of stuff. That kind of observation wasn't his forte.

At least the team would take their time, giving her a chance to finish everything up on her end. There were full sheet cakes made of chocolate, and the frosting was even more chocolate. It was all sugar free and she lowered the fat content by exchanging a few items. Finally, the main meal was going to be Ichiraku.

Teuchi and Ayame had known ahead of time and had already made their way over and were in the orphanage kitchen, preparing the food with helpers. Since it was a fully party and all the orphans were invited - since all of them really liked Naruto a lot because he would play with them from time to time - and Hari had invited several of Naruto's old classmates as well, they needed the extra space to fit at least fifty people. But it would definitely be more than seventy if everyone she had in mind, showed up.

"Okay, my darling puppy, I need your assistance with these little baggies," she said, gesturing with her elbow, toward the kitchen table. "Each person in attendance will get one before leaving, but they need to be filled. I want one of each sweet you see, in every bag."

Kakashi's confused face was almost enough to make her snort. Almost.

"Is this a common thing where you're from? We don't give gifts to the people leaving the party."

She had to think about it. She didn't know much about Britain - magical or muggle - since she'd never had an actual birthday party. She'd heard about it from an American acquaintance and had always liked the idea. And now that she had people to spoil, of course she was going to do all the things she'd ever considered for birthday parties! If she couldn't have it personally she could live vicariously through her kids!

"I got the idea from an acquaintance who did it for their children. I liked it. Also, it'll give a lasting impression."

And since she was in the business of making sure that Naruto had tonnes of friends, endearing the children and teens to the both of them was the best way to go. Her Slytherin side was on full display today.

"We also observe birthdays differently. So there won't be the anal retentive requirement for calm and order. This is about pure fun. Plain and simple. Naruto and I don't care about social standing so there aren't going to be any judgments from us on who gives the best gift or any of that tripe."

She knew how to play the game very well, even if she thought it was stupid. But this was Naruto's party, and while he was certainly the heir to the Konoha branch of the Uzumaki, he hadn't been raised like his fellow Genin yearmates had been. So he wouldn't give a damn either way. He'd just be happy to see everyone and probably emotional over having his own party if his response to being invited to Ino's was any example to go by.

"The customs of your home are very odd," Kakashi remarked as he actually set to placing sweets into the bags. "I suppose this would explain why you are so very different of course."

She shrugged. "I'm sure it's like that all over though. Many things affect one's way of life. I imagine Suna is vastly different from Konoha because they're surrounded by sand and intense changes in temperature on the daily. They're livestock probably isn't large and the herbs must be of low quantity,"
meaning they have to make do with other things for nutrition." Like insects.

Kakashi hummed and nodded. "They have large scorpions that could grow as big as a house. And after finally killing them, they're basically used in everything from food, to poison, to medicine, to armor. Nothing goes to waste because they cannot afford it. So I can understand in a sense. But the way you act has always been vastly different from anyone I have ever encountered and I've been all over the Elemental Nations in my lifetime."

"But not everywhere," she murmured, wondering how to get out of this discussion that was straying into territory she didn't want to be in just yet. "There are communities, villages, and even sovereign grounds that shinobi do not bother with. And some societies of people who went underground ages ago and don't want to be bothered." Thank Death for all of that information.

"You're welcome," they crooned from the back corner of the room.

"To my people I'm an apostate because I am one of their oldest bloodlines and they expected me to marry someone, split my immense wealth with their family, link them to my outstanding ancestry and the perks of being a Potta, and then pop out as many children as my body can handle in order to further the line of whatever family I join, and possibly pass on my blood-born talents to better their mediocre line. My actions have pretty much ensured that they will never see me, mine, or my riches again, and that means betrayal to their delicate senses."

Also not standing up for them when they fucked up with the Goblins. That was also a way for her to be public enemy number one. But when you betray someone for the third bloody time, don't expect them to rescue you. It wasn't her job to be a hero. It was no one's born purpose to put their lives on the line for others. Just because some decided to do it, didn't mean it was a requirement for all people.

Kakashi had completely stopped what he was doing and was just staring at her.

"What?"

"This just gives me further reason to despise socialization and the problems that occur when I do," the man huffed, shaking his head. "Things are similar in Konoha with the big clans. I'm even under such expectations as I am the last Hatake. I have a time limit thanks to my ranking succeeding most other shinobi. So long as I have an heir before I'm thirty-five, I'm fine. Everything else is ridiculous and a bit sexist when you consider that the men don't have the same expectations for marriage placed on them in our village."

He sounded annoyed and she merely shrugged. "I had to sign a tonne of paperwork to gain citizenship here and one of the requirements I'm faced with is either marry into a clan, or have two children for a clan that doesn't have a Kekkei Genkai. I've got three more years because civilian women age with less grace around here or something?" Not that she would be aging for a long time, but she would deal with that when the time came.

Kakashi nodded and gave a hum of understanding. "That isn't a shock actually," he admitted. "Shinobi are more sturdy physically because we use our chakra. From young ages, we are taught to channel, control, and train our chakra strength, whereas civilians don't even acknowledge their chakra. Ours saturates our very beings and has strengthened us naturally. That is why even shinobi in training can jump higher or run farther than their civilian peers. So civilians, because they don't flex their chakra and just let it sit unused, tend to age more noticeably because it's as if their bodies are lacking life compared to the body of a shinobi that is always thrumming with energy."

Honestly, she had wondered how they trained themselves to do vertical leaps the height of houses. It made a bit more sense now. Something in their chakra being constantly used, allowed them to retain
physical youth a little longer. It was like the with magic. Hari was actually 62 and she wasn't even in
the middle of her expected lifetime as a witch. Most wouldn't go silver until they reached a century
and Hari, being Mistress of Death that she was, would last for twice that number.

Magicals lived longer because of their magic. And those who constantly used it, had a chance of
retaining their young appearances longer, so long as they didn't dabble in questionable magicks.

It was interesting how they had so many similarities despite the vast differences between them and
their worlds.

Anyway, it was time for a change in the conversation.

"Ero-Sennin had a gift delivered for Naruto. Something about Fuinjutsu and learning his parents'
shared craft?"

That certainly captured Kakashi's attention since the man managed to drop the bag in his hand. He
cought it before it hit the floor, but the fact that he dropped something at all was shocking enough.

"Naruto is learning how to use seals," the shinobi breathed, a cross between horror and amazement
clouding his tone. "This could be in equal parts brilliant as well as destructive."

"...How?" What was that big deal? Fuinjutsu was a bit like Runes and Hari found them useful. They
could lend extra protection in any situation.

"We're giving a prankster access to seals and everything they are capable of."

Hari blinked twice, realising that she had to give her ward some more lessons on subtlety. Just so no
one could point fingers at him when the shit happened.

"I suppose we just have to watch what we do and say around him from now on," she murmured with
a shrug.

"You will regret that line of thinking."

Shut up!

"He also gave me a new book that you do not have, and if you're good, I might let you read it with
me."

His lone eye snapped over the the bookshelf she'd gotten. The book had only been carried in Hari's
pockets since some people(Anko) kept trying to filch it so they could copy it illegally. Not that she
cared much for laws, but it was fun to see Anko squirm and plot.

"You have to be good, and then we'll see," she teased, going back to her work.

Hinata fidgeted as she and Hanabi walked the streets of Konoha together. They never did such
things, so it was understandable that Hinata be a little uncomfortable. But she had received an
invitation to Naruto's birthday party, which had been extended to her sister and father as well. While
the Head of the Hyuga did not wish to attend, he informed his daughters that they would go in his
stead.

In Hinata's pocket was a scroll that held Naruto's gifts. One from the Hyuga as a whole, and the
other from her specifically. She'd knitted him a scarf because they would be heading out to Tetsu no
Kuni in December and being warm would be a necessity.
Internally she was panicking over giving it to him, but she had a duty. To be good representation for her clan, even though she knew Potta Hari wouldn't care in the least. To make sure that the Hyuga didn't offend anyone even by accident. And to be a friend that Naruto needed.

"So why did I have to come along to your crush's birthday party?"

Hinata sputtered in response to her sister's question. She knew that she held deep admiration for Naruto, but she had never so blatantly acknowledged it before! And there was Hanabi, spouting half truths and making Hinata want to bury her head in the ground!

"Father wishes for us to go in his place." Though honestly she would have gone by herself anyway. No way would she miss Naruto's first ever party! What kind of friend would she be if she did?

And how would she get one over on Uchiha Sasuke if she avoided all the chances she would have to spend time with Naruto? Their silent competition was pretty one-sided at the moment but Hinata had faith in herself and was willing to put in the hard work necessary to win Naruto's heart.

"I don't even know these people. I haven't even heard about them before. They can't be that important."

*If you bothered to do more than train, you would know about more than just Hyuga matters. Not that you even know much about the clan to begin with.* Hinata almost said it aloud. She was tempted to mention it even, but what good would it do?

"Hari-san's clan have become very important in the village thanks to their contributions to the hospital and their Kekkei Genkai. Father wishes to remain on her good side since she is also a princess and has Daimyo-sama's favor."

That was part of it. She didn't know everything, but her father had seemed very insistent on keeping an eye on the woman and making sure that she viewed the Hyuga in a good light. Hinata was allowed to keep contact with her, meaning her father approved on some level.

Hanabi sighed and grumbled to herself. Hinata merely shifted her shoulders a bit and prayed for patience. She could keep impeccable control over herself during the worst of times and handling her sister for a few hours shouldn't be too difficult.

Maybe Hari-san would be able to affect Hanabi as well. If that happened, then Hinata would go home and praise the woman's name in every manner she could think of.

"Why is home the place we have to meet up?" Naruto asked, though he didn't really expect an answer. Kakashi hadn't given them much of an explanation, so it wasn't like he could expect Sasuke or Ino to know. Sasuke tapped on Ino's leg a few times.

"Why don't you ask Hari-chan, Naruto?" Ino suggested a bit loudly, a wide grin on her face. "Since it was a shopping list, I'm sure it was her who made this our mission."

"But why would she need so many paper plates and cups?" the orange clad young man wondered, signing as well for her benefit. And according to Sasuke, she even specified that they had to be in glorious orange! Naruto wished he could see them for himself.

It made no sense for her to use them when they had plenty of dishes to use.

Still, he wanted to know!
Sasuke took a deep breath and proceeded to tap some more on Ino's leg. Naruto was getting far too used to the sound of it. Ino in turn, spoke aloud for Naruto. "Okay, Sasuke wants you to jump toward your five o'clock when he counts to three. And it's one, two, three, then go. Okay?"

"Yeah."

Three taps followed, the Genin took a simultaneous breath and bypassed the stairs with a very concentrated leap that actually worked very well. Naruto could feel the familiarity of the railing in front of him. They'd gotten the hang of this training thing easily! They were awesome! -ttebayo!

Ino announced, "We're moving again, Naruto."

The sound of a door opening was enough for him. "Nee-chan, why did we have to get all of this stuff? And can you get sensei to free us already? I wanna see the orange!"

There was a loud snort. "Koinu-kun, can you release them from their suffering? Also, you owe me a drink. They didn't take as long as you thought."

"You bet on us?"

"Yeah," his older sister figure affirmed without shame. "I had faith in you all, and I was right!"

Seconds later, Naruto was able to perceive the light through the cloth and tore it away from his eyes, glad to finally see once more. Though the sharp pain in return for being exposed to the brightness suddenly, wasn't that great. Sometimes sacrifices had to be made. His ankles were freed seconds later.

"All you three need to do is bring the bags downstairs and you'll be finished with your training," Hari-nee-chan said as she held up a large bag of her own that looked way too heavy for her. It was as long as her legs were and wider than her body!

"Okay!" the Genin agreed, wanting to finish up. Before moving though, Naruto sent the one-eyed shinobi a glare. "Sensei, be the gentleman you like to brag you are, and help nee-chan."

The cheeky smirk Hari sent their sensei's way made him both curious and annoyed. Especially when his sensei's hands lingered far longer than they should on Hari's. They were going to have words. Naruto would totally get Sasuke and Ino to help him too.

The ground floor of the orphanage wasn't a place he was used to visiting, so when they opened the double doors to find the place bedecked in orange and filled with people he hadn't seen gathered together in such a long time, he merely stared.

"Huh? What's going on, guys?"

Party streamers exploded in showers of orange and a loud chorus of 'happy birthday, Naruto!' met his ears.

Sasuke and Ino were smirking as they pushed him forward to greet his friends from the orphanage and former classmates who were all congregated. For his birthday of all things.

Hari appeared by his side in order to throw her arms around him. "Happy birthday, squirt. I've got a lot planned for you all today."

He was having his own birthday party! Naruto had enviously watched other people's parties from a distance over the course of his young life. He'd tried not to be bitter over the fact that he wouldn't get
one, but it had been difficult. It was only those few people he'd had in his life, who helped keep him stable.

And now he was finally going to get one of his own!

It was so awesome and it hadn't even started yet!

"Thanks, nee-chan!"

Also, he could see the ramen in the distance and if that didn't make it all perfect, he didn't know what could!

"Here's how you play," Hari said as she pulled on a white tarp, revealing several chalkboards lined up. "You each get twenty seconds to draw something. The first one in your group to guess the drawing correctly, gets a point. You will go for ten rounds, giving each person a chance to draw something twice. No cheating or you forfeit the game and lose a chance at a prize. The one with the most points receives the big prize, the participants receive smaller ones in the form of sweets. Any questions?"

There were twelve groups of kids/teens. She'd made sure to separate them based on their age group and maturity. Each group had five people.

The older shinobi would be helping to keep track of who won points. She figured it would be a good way to bond.

Also, she'd been pretty bad at it when she tried once, so she wanted to know how the kids would manage.

And as usual, Kakashi looked intrigued.

"Another one of the games from your home?" he inquired when she slinked on over to his side so she could make sure the big prize bags were ready.

"Of a sort," she murmured with a shrug of the shoulder. She hadn't played it in Britain, but it was from her world, so in a way he was correct.

"What kind of prizes are there?"

"You'll see!"

Kids liked money and chocolate… right?

Inoichi stared at Hari. The young woman had been to this particular office many times over the past several months. Usually she didn't need to come back for multiple visits, but this was one of those times where Tsunade-sama scheduled her for at least three in a row. Her mental state by her third visit would determine whether or not she needed to come back.

Now, he knew that she hated anything related to psychiatry. He also knew that she was very good at pretending to be well when she wasn't. She knew what to say and when to say it. So how did he go about getting truthful responses from her when she was a very good liar?

His approach to her had to be different than with others. Psychoanalysis didn't often work on Hari, because she tended to turn it back on the person using it. Or she just became far too sarcastic to
handle. So instead of asking about how she was doing lately, Inoichi very bluntly stated, "You were kidnapped."

She nodded and succinctly said, "It sucked."

"Can you give me a rundown of your emotions when you realized what had happened?"

Hari have a long-suffering sigh that seemed to flatten her body as she expelled stale air. She reclined in her chair and stared off into the distance. "Once I took stock of my physical pain, I was a bit amazed to realize my wrist was broken. I haven't broken a bone in a while so it was a bit of a shock."

Inoichi made note of that on his clipboard. Not a standard reaction to a kidnapping, but then again, nothing about Potta Hari was standard.

"I was annoyed because everything about Rotten Wasabi Paste was deceptive. Couldn't tell the gender for the life of me and basically spent several minutes pissing them off with poorly timed insults and nicknames. But that's my go to method whenever in danger. My mouth runs first and I don't care enough to stop it."

A severe lack of self-preservation. Probably because she didn't have much self-worth compared to other civilians. Even those not of nobility. People usually caved to the demands of their captors in an effort to avoid pain and suffering. She seemed to take ironic pleasure in riling up Rokusho even more than he was already riled.

It showed that her opinion of herself was very low. Perhaps they needed to have a talk about her self-image and how she viewed herself as a human being.

"My attitude only soured when I noticed how much of a mess the house I was being held in was. I can't stand messes. I grew up having to clean a lot and I have this intense need to clean things that are dirty, and organize things that are messy."

An obsessive compulsion brought on by years spent as a live-in maid for the relatives who abused her. And while she might not personally view it as abuse because there wasn't a lot of physical abuse going on behind closed doors, it was still abusive mentally and emotionally. Also, forcing a child to clean everything from a young age was actually a form of abuse. Who had four year olds handling cooking and chemicals? Who starved four year olds as punishment for not doing something to an exacting standard that their young minds could not comprehend yet?

So yes, her experiences had basically shaped her reactions to anything and everything.

"The indecency of them not finding a better place to kill me in got to me too," Hari added a moment later. "I don't want to die in filth."

She didn't say, 'I don't want to die'. She said, 'I don't want to die in filth'. Because as established quite some time ago, she did not fear death. But apparently, there was an intense distaste for dying while either dirty, or surrounded by a mess.

"I started putting the pieces together, and then it was just tiresome. I don't like political shit, and when I realized that it was a political hit that had been put on me, I was done. And so began the escape because he wasn't smart enough to take my offer."

She shook her head, a look of bewilderment on her face. "I'm not used to people not taking me seriously. I'm a woman of action who keeps promises, and where I'm from people know that immediately and are properly wary. I think I miss that kind of attitude."

She had built a reputation of a sort wherever it was that she was from. After fighting in a civil war of
her own and having to be a leader to a group of people who didn't deserve it, she'd done and seen things. And in response to all the work she'd put in, she'd gotten herself a reputation as someone to be feared. And in a way, while she wasn't the type who would rule through fear and an iron fist, never say never. Because she was the crafty sort who - should it actually benefit her in some way - would actually play on someone's fear of her if it got her what she wanted.

So there was a bit of arrogance in there. Sure she had confidence, but the woman also believed that she should be respected and feared to a degree. Even in a new place where her past exploits were not well known. Yet she had poor self-esteem when it came to her alone. Perhaps the arrogance was steeped in her power and not her as a person.

There was a bit of an over-reliance on her Kekkei Genkai and all that she hadn't even revealed of it yet, so it would explain this situation easily. Contradictions in human psychology were so fun!

"Anyway, after that, I was just an internal debate on whether I should Apparate back or walk back. And that's when I got all devious and decided, after rummaging through Aoi's head a bit, that me walking back would result in more problems for dear Sayori. It was a very intense, and beautiful moment of vindictive glee and maybe a powerful desire to cause violence that I haven't actually managed to rid myself of yet. I would very much like to break something and have withheld the urge with near monk-like patience."

Honestly… he wasn't surprised. She could have gotten back to the village sooner and saved herself a lot of trouble, but decided that revenge was better in the long run. Even if it meant she hurt for longer than necessary.

It also strengthened his belief of how she didn't really care about herself in the least. What happened to make her think so little of her own safety? What sort of examples had she been given to make her like this?

"I know what you're thinking," the young woman began, face a mask of amused blankness, "and nothing has managed to kill me thus far. And if I'm being honest, I probably can't die anyway. Not after everything. So why should I worry all that much about myself when I'll just get fixed up again in one way or another?"

He would say suicidal, but in the long run, it was more of a lack of care for her own well-being and not an immediate desire to harm herself. Sort of a, take it as it comes, line of thinking.

It was still concerning.

"Hari-san, while you might not hold much stock in your own safety, may I remind you that there are at least fifty minors in this village, who care about you and look to you as an older sister figure, and they would not appreciate not only you getting hurt, but you not caring about yourself and putting yourself in the path of unnecessary harm."

She stared for a second, before scoffing and looking away, eyes flaring a bit. "You had to bring them into this?" she grumbled, pouting.

"Yes. Someone has to remind you of the obligations you decided to saddle yourself with. Naruto was an emotional wreck and actually came in for a session on his own, just so he could vent. Shinobi he may be, but he is still a child and he is greatly affected by your actions or lack thereof." If no one was going to address it, then Inoichi would.

Hari sighed. "I get it. Possible immortality is no excuse to be careless." The woman looked away and mumbled, in a voice she probably thought was too low for him to hear, and almost was too low,
"Being unaware that you've been moulded into a pig for slaughter kind of leaves lasting impressions on you though."

A second mention of being unable to die. At least in reference to it. He wondered if she truly believed that she couldn't die. She had died once and came back on her own, so perhaps that had affected her thought process on death.

The inability to die would surely make anyone less concerned for themselves and make them reckless.

But... what did she mean by being 'moulded into a pig for slaughter'? Inoichi didn't know if he should bring that the the Hokage's attention, or just keep it to himself for the time being.

"Team Seven, you are here for an assist and retrieval mission. Team Gai accepted a mission to protect a well known actress during the filming of her upcoming sequel. The director of the film is the one who requested protection detail because they would be returning to Yuki no Kuni and he knew his client happened to be a former resident high on the political ladder and she might have living enemies.

"Unfortunately, the mission has been compromised due to the arrival of skilled shinobi bearing an unknown form of technology we have not encountered the likes of before. Chakra resistant armor, which in a way would be beneficial for a primarily Taijutsu based team, but it also means neither Gai nor his student Rock Lee can use the Eight Gates, nor can Hyuga Neji use his Jyuken to its fullest ability. It also is resistant to Level 3 Explosives and basic shinobi weapons, and doesn't hinder the wearer's use of jutsu."

Ino took note of how their sensei seemed to straighten. His lackadaisical attitude disappeared at the mention of his fellow Jonin being in danger, and his porn disappeared. And Ino was getting a sinking feeling of a sort because an enemy you couldn't use chakra against, or common weapons, seemed pretty dangerous even for experienced Genin. Thankfully, Kakashi was a former Anbu member.

"Gai sent in a distress message with one of his summons, marking his last coordinates for us in the process. You are the only cohesive team I have that is in the village, is well-rested, and has the experience necessary to be back up. The client will be familiar to you especially, Kakashi, so I trust that you can handle this expeditiously and professionally?"

"Hai, Hokage-sama," was their sensei's firm reply.

Their leader handed over a scroll. "Your mission details are within, as well as Gai's description of the enemy shinobi. Err on the side of caution and make sure everyone comes back alive and in good condition. You are dismissed."

Kakashi turned to the three Genin awaiting his instruction. "Go home and pack for a month's worth of travel. Prepare for a lot of snowfall and stormy weather. Don't forget your compasses. Move out!"

The three nodded and headed for the windows.

Ino was slow enough to catch the Hokage scolding their sensei.

"Did you have to let them pick up your bad habits?" the old shinobi asked, sounding completely done with life in general.

"Doors are for boring people, Hokage-sama."
"You're going to the place that has snowed every day for the past several years?"

Hari knew enough about each country in Naruto's Earth. Yuki no Kuni was basically one big snowstorm for like a decade. She liked snow, but an overabundance of it was like a death wish.

"Yeah. We have to save an actress and Team Gai or something. I'm going to consider it training for the upcoming Chunin Exams because they'll be in Tetsu No Kuni and it's always cold there too. I'm going to be the Hokage, so I can't like cold weather hold me back! -ttebayo!"

That didn't mean she had to like it. But it did explain why Luna had told her to get the needles and thread prepared. Lo' and behold, four people would need some Runes sewn into their clothing and Hari was the person to do it. She'd gotten better an controlling many needles at once. Training did pay off in the end!

"Let's get to the gates. I got something to do before you go."

Kakashi stared down at the woman who was staring very intently at the floating needles in front of her. Each had some thread already prepared and were hovering near the necks of each member of Team Seven. She had a pair of scissors in hand.

"Just stand still for a minute. Trust me, this will benefit you in the long run," she told them, eyes squinting as the needles began to move closer.

Kakashi stiffened as his needle began to stitch something into the cuff of his left wrist. By itself. Hari was controlling it, but it was by her Kekkei Genkai. Hari was doing the same thing four times and seemed to be concentrating very hard. Enough for her brow to be covered in sweat.

In truth, a minute later, the sewing was finished and each member of the team had an odd symbol added to their clothing.

"When the temperature changes drastically, you will find your clothes filtering the outside temperature. If it's cold, they will get warm, if it's hot, they will get cool. It won't last forever, but should help you a lot. Think of it as my people's Fuinjutsu, and no, I'm not a master in any form. I only learned basic protective things because I'm always in danger."

She proceeded to hug the Genin and kiss each of their brows, before turning her expectant gaze upon Kakashi. On one hand, getting a hug didn't really bother him as much as it used to. On the other hand, he liked it when she became frustrated. Her face got red and would puff up a bit. It was great!

"Are we really going to do this every time you leave the village?" she demanded, folding her arms in what he recognized as a frustrated manner. Her eyes were damn near glowing with annoyance.

"Perhaps. Does it still annoy you?"

She glared. "You're lucky I respect personal space. I really like hugging others."

He knew both facts very well and appreciated the first one very much. But he also kind of wanted to hug her too, though he could see the way Naruto and Ino were eying him.

With a sigh that truly wasn't as put upon as he made it out to be, Kakashi spread his arms a little. He wasn't comfortable with exposing his torso so much, nor giving his sides an opening, but at the same time they both could get what they wanted without having to give too much.

Hari took the opportunity without the blink of an eye, and practically launched herself into the circle
of his arms. And instead of wrapping her arms around his midsection, she latched onto his neck.

He got a face full of her hair and the scent of fresh cherry blossoms. Oddly enough it was the greatest thing he'd smelled in the past few weeks. And her hair was the softest thing too despite looking like a perpetual mess.

"Don't die," was Hari's brilliant advice as she pulled away. "I will resurrect you and smack you around if you do."

"I'll miss you too."

He hadn't been lying either. Even though his voice had been light and cheerful. Playful even, he hadn't been playing.

"Of course you will," she nodded sagely. "I'm a fine thing to miss."

She proceeded to turn around and saunter back into the village, her messy hair swishing to and fro as she went.

Kakashi refused to admit that he'd looked at her ass. He'd just so happened to glance down and his eyes had landed on her blue covered backside. A very shapely backside that he did not ogle for ten seconds.

Nope.

"Sensei, stop flirting with my nee-chan."

"Naruto, if I flirted, you would know it."

Flirting was totally more obvious. Right?

That evening, around a pitiful excuse of a fire, Kakashi-sensei said, "Sasuke, please take this time to instruct Naruto and Ino on how to regulate their chakra in order to warm their own bodies."

Naruto looked over at his friend and beamed, awaiting his advice. "Move me however you want. I can do this! -ttebayo!" Kakashi-sensei thought it was important to learn, and Naruto was going to make it happen!

He didn't understand why Sasuke's face would be red though, when it wasn't hot or freezing out just yet. It didn't matter in the end because Naruto got to learn how to keep himself warm when he was super cold. Meaning his nee-chan wouldn't have to worry when they finally got out to Tetsu no Kuni for the Chunin Exams!

Though he wondered if Sasuke knew that his hands were really warm. Like super warm and cozy and Naruto might have bemoaned the loss of said warmth when Sasuke felt he was skilled enough that he didn't need Sasuke's stability, and had decided to step away.

Maybe he could pretend to be bad at it still?

Koyuki glared at the shinobi she found herself stuck with. If she could have her choice of anyone from the team, it wouldn't have been the mini green monster nor the blind looking one who seemed to have an icicle shoved up his rectum.

The team leader was at least strong and the girl hadn't been anywhere near as obsessive as her
teammates had been. But no. Koyuki got stuck with a Hyuga and the Lee kid. If everything didn't spell bad before, it all did now.

She got the protection squad that could fight hand to hand, which was all great and good. But apparently only one of them could manage to stay alive against powerful foes when not using any chakra in their Taijutsu, which made it kind of pointless. The Hyuga couldn't use his family skills to their fullest ability because the chakra armor absorbed foreign chakra. And while the miniature of the team leader apparently didn't know how to mould his chakra so no jutsu were viable for him to begin with, he still couldn't use his Taijutsu to its fullest ability either because it required unlocking the Eight Gates. Which meant chakra usage.

Koyuki had never cared enough about shinobi matters to learn much, but even she knew enough to get by. And the whole fighting with the Eight Gates thing was a unique and damaging fighting style. To both the user and recipient.

And the girl with the dango hairdo was a weapon specialist, which was pretty useless since Doto had gone and improved Yukigakure's armor, making most of her weapons useless in the long run.

It was one unfortunate thing after the other.

And just as the film crew had set up their newest location, they'd been attacked, leaving Koyuki to be shoved into the Hyuga's arms and told to hide. The Hyuga and the Lee boy were charged with protecting her and so ended up in a dark and cold cave, trying to maintain some form of heat while keeping their ears perked for anything coming their way.

The whole situation was shit and Koyuki shivered as she tried to keep her hands warm. Her fingers were practically icicles by now and she was pissed beyond belief.

No one had asked if she wanted this. They just kept making decisions without her permission and then tossing her around. And she found herself in the company of a boy who was too depressing for even she to deal with, and a boy who was too cheerful and interested in springtime and youth. Polar opposites with her attitude smack dab in the middle of them.

Rock Lee believed everything would work out in the end. Meanwhile, Koyuki was certain someone would at least die because that was her horrible luck. And the Hyuga... well, he'd made his opinions quite clear. He thought it was futile and didn't even see a point in all of it. And the doom and gloom speeches were so annoying.

He did not respect her as a client. He did not respect his teammates. In fact, she doubted that he even respected their sensei since he was so quick to back talk and tear down anything positive anyone had to say. And if she had to hear about destiny and fate one more time from his snarky little mouth, she'd do her best to smack the hell out of him. He was legally considered an adult due to his hitai-ate and she wouldn't regret a damn thing if she did.

No, she did not view the world as she once did. There were no pretty colors and happy feelings. She was jaded and worn, and simply pessimistic. But her shitty attitude was always countered by the upbeat attitudes of those around her. She deliberately surrounded herself with cheerful people in hopes of siphoning off something pleasant for herself since she struggled creating joy on her own.

Hyuga Neji was too much like Koyuki for her to even ignore him. While she didn't feel drawn to the green clad kid all too much because he was just too hyper for her tastes, she'd take him over the brooding one any day. Being stuck with someone so much like you, was a struggle and a half. She wondered if this was what people felt like when being around her, and it kind of sucked.
"Destiny has already decreed the outcome."

Kami-sama, he was at it again! She clutched at her hair in an effort to stay her tongue. The air was cold, her throat burned, and her fingertips were freezing. Nothing would come out of her screaming at him right now. Maybe later when they weren't in immediate danger.

"Neji, where is your spirit?" Rock Lee demanded, his thick eyebrows drawing together in a frown that did not fit his face very well. "I have the fullest confidence that we will dig into our flames of youth and prevail over our foes!" He lifted a balled fist, looking as if he was about to start some kind of epically filmed training montage. "The odds may seem bleak but we will never allow something as simple as chance to control us!"

He proceeded to fall into a plank and do push ups that way, body perfectly parallel to the ground.

"I will never give up!" Lee announced to the cave. "I will always fight my best and give everything my all! Fear not, Koyuki-hime! We'll get you out of here in no time!"

After hours of being stuck with the two of them, Koyuki was secretly rooting for the green kid and his beliefs. If only because the pessimism from the Hyuga was beginning to annoy her. So yes. She hoped that they all actually made it out of this perfectly fine, because it would teach the kid a lesson in giving up before trying.

Also, she planned on filing a complaint about his shitty attitude. If she was stuck being the team's client, then she was going to give her opinion on all of them.

Already she was mentally going over what she wanted to say. None of it was good either. Koyuki may have built a career around pleasing people under other characters, but as herself, she did not pander.

"We're saving Fuun-hime, this is so cool!" Naruto squealed. Yes, squealed. Sasuke was a bit unnerved by his excitement, but also found it kind of adorable how happy he was. Naruto didn't get to do things like other kids had, so Sasuke could give him his chances to experience normal things. Which included idolizing someone famous.

So one of their clients just so happened to be a big shot actress who played a princess in a series that Naruto liked. Said blond had already asked everybody to remind him a dozen times, to get her autograph. Sasuke wasn't sure on how to go about telling him that actors were not the characters they portrayed and that Fujikaze Yukie might not actually be as kind hearted as Fuun-hime was in the movie.

But Naruto was so happy about their mission for once. Did Sasuke really need to ruin it with reality just yet? Perhaps he could wait a little while before dropping the information on the blond's head.

"Kakashi-sensei, since Yukigakure is involved, are they our enemies now?" Ino asked out of the blue, though Sasuke was grateful. It had been something that had come to mind of course, and he was curious for an answer as well. Since they were the main opposition, it had to mean nothing good. Konoha didn't have an alliance with them after all.

Their sensei sighed. "A difficult question. Kazahana Doto is controlling and exacting in his standards. We do not know what lies he's filled their minds with. For the time being, they are our foes, but that does not necessarily mean the country or even the shinobi village therein, are inherently bad. Don't aim to kill if you can help it."

Maiming, not killing. He could do that. Sasuke had become very good at directing damage to certain
places above others.

Their run was interrupted by the appearance of one of Kakashi's hounds. Pakkun was the name, if Sasuke recalled correctly. Pakkun was very good at tracking. How did he know that? Because of the demented version of hide n' seek they'd been put through while helping the Rebellion in Mizu no Kuni. Sasuke would never forget the days it took to hide from the group of mutts.

Of course their sensei would make use of his expert tracking team when trying to find Team Gai's location from where they'd last been according to Gai-sensei's notes. Notes which only Kakashi had actually been able to understand because the man wrote like a maniac and apparently hand some form of shorthand that blended characters together in a special style all his own. And only his greatest friends and the Hokage would be able to read it easily upon first glance.

"We found several trails. Most of them went cold. Two splintered off in opposite directions. One strongly bearing Gai's scent and another with him but mostly covered in metal went South. The other trail is more faint with Gai's scent, Konoha's hospital's muscle cream, and something floral, and it headed northeast."

Kakashi's silver head bobbed twice. "Gai split them up. Follow Gai's scent South and you should find him and TenTen. We'll gather the other group and come for you."

Pakkun nodded and disappeared then.

"We'll hopefully find Rock Lee and Hyuga Neji with Koyuki-hime," Kakashi announced. "Lee cannot perform jutsu at all and Neji has a Byakugan. Koyuki-hime should be with them."

Naruto's giddy squeal was enough to make them all eye roll.

"Thank Kami-sama!" Koyuki practically gushed when new people showed up and the Hyuga didn't attack them and had actually them to come near. That meant they were okay. "Help me, please?"

She proceeded to throw herself into the arms of the closest person. That also happened to be the shortest person. Who was wearing kill-me orange. And she didn't give a damn how garish it was to the eyes. He was warm and looked like sunshine personified. And since the black-haired one was slightly glaring at her, she would prefer the blond no matter what.

"I am bitter, pessimistic, and an asshole," she announced without shame, showing that she knew herself very well, "but nothing and I repeat NOTHING, makes this kid's equally annoying nature tolerable in my eyes!" she added, pointing at the Hyuga and glaring for good measure. "He makes my attitude look tame and I can't take it anymore."

The short kid that she'd latched onto, snorted loudly, which seemed to do the trick for the rest of the new team of shinobi.

One of the shinobi being someone she recognized from many a year ago. Her rescuer of a sort.

"Koyuki-hime, I wish I could say it's nice to see you again, but the situation isn't really a nice one, is it?" he asked, his voice a lot deeper since the last time they spoke. He was much taller as well, but literally looked like an exact copy of his younger self without the white armor.

"Not in the least," she agreed, holding the blond boy closer. And she was minutely impressed with the fact that he hadn't attempted to cop a feel despite the fact that she had wrapped herself around him like glue. His arms remained at his sides. "Do we have to stay here?"
"Perhaps the better question is, what does Doto want from you that he's trying to capture you but not kill you?"

She was given pause, having not thought of it like that before. Why would her uncle come for her? They weren't on good terms. She had nothing to her name besides the fame she'd worked hard to earn. There was nothing she could specifically offer beyond an old crystal from her father. She'd been too young to know anything of importance.

Just a crystal. She reached up to take hold of it. Why would he need it? It was just a piece of old gemstone. Right? Nothing special other than being her father's once upon a time.

"So it has to do with a piece of jewelry," Hatake Kakashi surmised. "Though I'm certain it goes far deeper than even you know. However, I would ask that you give that to me until we are certain Doto either is neutralized, or is no longer a threat to you personally." He held his palm out expectantly, his lone eye glinting like black onyx in the darkness of the cave.

Koyuki glared then. Asking her to part with the only keepsake she had of her father. All because her greedy uncle might possibly long for it for some unknown reason.

"Kakashi-sensei will keep it safe, princess."

The gravelly voice did not fit the small stature of the young boy she was clinging to. Still, he was looking up at her, his whiskered cheeks pulled into a large grin. She'd chosen well when laying eyes on the group. This one was definitely the happy one among them all.

"Sensei is pretty awesome. He'll keep your necklace safe from this Doto jerk."

The pure faith in those words made her want to believe him. Because he believed in Hatake. And Koyuki knew Hatake from years back. Back when he had to rescue her from her own home because it was no longer home. Days and nights spent helping her get to safety and as far away from Kazahana Doto as possible. And if he was that good all those years ago, then he had to be much better now that he had more experience under his hitai-ate.

With a sigh full of the utmost reluctance, Koyuki pulled the expensive object over her head and handed it over. "Be careful with it. It's worth more than my life."

The boy in her arms scoffed. "Sorry, but you're definitely worth more than a piece of fancy rock. You remind me of my nee-chan. She's a badass princess too. Anyway, she's always worrying about everything but herself and acting as if things hold more value than her own life. I don't know what it'll take to get you both to realize your own worth but I'm dedicated to helping you out!"

She blinked thrice, astonished by the declaration, as well as intrigued. He was just a kid, but he seemed to have a tight grasp on his sense of duty.

Also, she had definitely chosen right out of the new group. He had the cheerful demeanor without the over exaggeration of Rock Lee. And was nothing like the Hyuga brat who needed an ass kicking in the worst possible way.

Koyuki settled for a simple, "You can try all you want, gaki."

No one had managed to really help her so far, but who was she to deny him the opportunity.

They spent the night in the cold cave. Sasuke hated every moment of it. He hated how Naruto was bing clung to by some woman that none of them really knew. And he hated how Naruto was simply
sitting there, grinning as if all was right with the world.

The snow hadn't invaded the cave thankfully, but it was still ridiculously cold. And there was ice underfoot, which didn't make anything any better.

Their bedrolls didn't block out the cold, and they had to put their skills to the test, to keep themselves warm even while sleeping. The one and only upside to this entire situation, was when Naruto pushed his bedroll toward the princess and said he'd share with Sasuke.

Sasuke's was much nicer than Naruto's and could fit more than one body. He did not mind sharing with Naruto because it meant he got Naruto's attention over everyone else. And it had all been going so well in his mind!

Until Ino pushed her bedroll up against his other side, and the princess decided to practically mould herself to Naruto's side as well. And in a way it conserved heat, but it was still annoying.

A campfire was out of the question though, so he supposed this was okay. After all, it was Naruto sharing with him and no one else. Though he made sure to glare kunai at the princess just so his point was made clear. But unlike the Hyuga, who had been making sneered remarks about anything and everything, Sasuke kept his issues bottled up.

No need for him to ruin the already shitty atmosphere than he already was by brooding. Yes, he admitted to brooding. It was a last resort thing.

"Sasuke, you're really warm," Naruto whispered then, snuggling closer and pressing his freezing feet up against Sasuke's legs! "Like, it's great. -ttebayo."

"If you don't do the exercises you will freeze on one side all night," Sasuke said, shifting just a bit from discomfort. The parts of Naruto that were touching him would be warm, the rest would be cold as hell come morning, or whenever it was that their sensei decided was safe to leave.

Wisely, no one said a thing when they awoke the following morning to see Sasuke on top of Naruto, with the blond drooling in his hair. And the embarrassment didn't end there unfortunately. Ino had somehow joined the pile, with both of her legs flung over Sasuke's, while her top half was buried in her bedroll. Somehow. And the princess was plastered against their bedroll, her hair spilling onto Naruto's hand.

No one was cold though. That was the only plus in the whole mix.

He didn't appreciate Kakashi's knowing looks though. What would he know anyway?

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Naruto beamed. Kazahana Koyuki, who acted under the alias Fujikaze Yukie, and played the amazing Fuun-hime in the awesome movie he'd taken Hari to, was pretty cool on her own.

Despite her very low opinion of herself and other people, she seemed like the kind who wanted something to hope for. She had been let down many times before, and was kind of like an abused animal. They wanted to trust and wanted love, but were also scared of opening up and putting themself out there lest more hurt come their way.

Maybe in another world Naruto wouldn't have liked her attitude, but he could see things more clearly now. He understood why she was the way she was, especially after Kakashi-sensei had explained to their team what had happened.

She hadn't taken the hardship like Naruto had, and that was fine. Not everyone was capable of taking
struggle. Naruto even had his moments of bitterness that he tried really hard to not let out because he didn't want to be mean spirited and angry all the time. Not everyone walked away from trauma or tragedy with a smile and a desire to work harder and do better.

So Koyuki being so jaded and bitter made sense to him. Especially since her own family member was the one to cause her such strife. It was the worst sort of betrayal that resulted in her losing everything. She had a right to be angry.

And Naruto wasn't in the business of policing people and their reactions to suffering. But what he was invested in, was making sure that people who had problems of their own, weren't walking around thinking less of themselves just because something horrible happened in their past that scarred them in some form or another. And that they didn't project their opinions of their low worth because of what happened, onto people who didn't deserve it.

Gaara did it with viewing himself as a monster and wanting to kill everything so he'd be acknowledged as better. Hari-nee-chan did it in the fact that she cared not for her help most of the time and had an intense dislike of the villagers because they reminded her of her past. Kakashi-sensei even did it in how he emotionally flayed himself in Training Ground Three every morning and the way he watched everyone as if they were an enemy in disguise. And once again, Naruto had met another person who didn't seem to care about themselves all too much but viewed the world with such distaste.

It was frustrating to hear someone degrade their own worth. How did he go about convincing them that what they thought was wrong? That whatever their experiences had taught them was wrong? That whatever people had said to them over the years, was wrong? And that they shouldn't let the opinions of others become their truth? Nor should they punish themselves for what others did to them, or what happened to them?

Naruto just wanted everyone to be happy. Happy and safe, and living in peace. Was it too much to ask for internal and external peace?

He'd known from the beginning that this mission would be pretty awesome, and now he was even more sure of it. Especially since the princess had decided to hang around him because she thought he was the least annoying person around. No one but Hari had ever thought that about him before, and he intended to cheer her up somehow.

Now if only he could figure out why Sasuke was pouting so much. Then everything would be fine again.

Kakashi had placed the direct safety of Koyuki in Naruto's hands. Since she had refused to remove herself from the boy since they had arrived, it was the smartest decision. Also, Naruto could make thousands of himself to help protect her. And the first thing he'd done was make a Kage Bunshin and have it Henge into a kunai.

"You keep this with you no matter what," the blond had told her. "Should we somehow get separated to the point where you can't see me, take it out and throw it. It'll change back to a Kage Bunshin and should be able to defend you until one of us comes along."

The princess had eyed the weapon with a skeptical look, but had eventually nodded.

Naruto took his duty very seriously. He also made a Kage Bunshin copy of her necklace just in case. Before Kakashi had even considered asking him to, he'd already done it.
Once they informed Gai's students of the parameters of their mission, and made sure everyone had eaten something since they'd been hiding for quite a while before Kakashi's team found them, Kakashi lead the Genin from the cave in the direction that Pakkun had said Gai was.

Of course, that had to be the moment they were ambushed. Kakashi hated fighting in the snow, but then again, it was always good practice. And his students hadn't ever fought in snow before, so it was a nice challenge. He had faith in them, because they'd come a long way.

Sasuke had basically finished his Chidori training and was advancing in swordplay. Naruto found a way to cheat with the Rasengan by making a Kage Bunshin and having both of them focus on the different parts of creating a spiraling sphere of danger. And of course Ino's medical training was helping her a lot in their team training since she'd learned how to immobilize people by injecting her chakra into their pressure points from Tsunade-hime, and then she was improving with her sai.

And he wouldn't even tell them that he'd buy them lunch when they returned to the village. It would be a nice surprise for their hard work.

Their attackers were three familiar shinobi dressed in Yukigakura chakra armor. One wore metal wings of a sort that Kakashi was deadly certain she knew how to use. Another was standing on a metal board. Kakashi had already chosen to fight the last one, whose face and lavender hair were like a blast from an unpleasant past. Though his Bingo Book entry was nowhere near Kakashi's level of dangerous.

"Hand over Koyuki, Kakashi!" said Rouda, Kakashi's newest opponent. "Hand her over and we'll let you run away again, just like the green menace and the girl."

The Jonin scoffed, knowing he wouldn't even need his Sharingan for this. It was different this time. Things had changed and while Rouda and his little team had remained stagnant over the years, Kakashi's threat level continued to evolve. Enough to make him a choice for the seat of Hokage. "Naruto, Lee, Neji, take Koyuki to Gai. Don't look back, and don't stop for anything if you can manage it. We'll catch up to you."

He was immensely proud when Naruto didn't even argue and instead crouched so he could carry the woman off. And while both of Gai's students hesitated just a moment, they followed behind immediately. It was best to send the Hyuga along because his eyes would see through the horrible weather and alert them to incoming danger.

"Sasuke, Ino, choose your opponents. Rouda is mine."

And Kakashi was gone, Rouda barely intercepting his attack and trying to put distance between them as it was the smartest move to make. After all, Kakashi's speed had also grown with him, making him a blur to be reckoned with. He also wasn't being held down by ridiculous armor.

The sound of chirping birds echoed behind him and he was full of pride again. A glance back showed Sasuke standing guard over his teammate as she worked on her signature jutsu.

"You are nothing, Kakashi! The same as the last time we faced off!"

He sent the other shinobi a bland look and pretended to be distracted. "Did you say something?"

"ARHG!"

It felt good to be an asshole.
"Jutsu won't work on us!" the enemy kunoichi shouted, a mocking smile on her pinched face. Ino and Sasuke shared a look and then a nod, because neither were intimidated.

Sasuke's hands flew through the seals easily, and the lightning chakra sprung to life in his palm. Chidori ended up being a very easy jutsu to learn thanks to the Elemental Manipulation training they'd been put through, and he'd also learned that he could cleave a boulder in half with it. Enough hits would destroy anything, and with the training Kakashi had been putting them through in the past few months, his core had grown exponentially. Sasuke had nine Chidori he could use in a row.

Ino made her family's signature seal and yelled, "Cover me!" Her body slumped over immediately. The thing about the jutsu, was that her body used the chakra, while her mind was forced into another's. So in theory, she shouldn't be rejected from the kunoichi's mind because her own mind wasn't using chakra.

"What the hell is she doing?" the other shinobi demanded, watching as his ally slumped over for a moment, and then turned and punched him.

Of course, that was when something interesting happened. Both of their enemies jerked back as electricity seemed to erupt between them, where their armor made contact. And seconds later, the shinobi put distance between them as soon as possible, clutching at his chest and wincing in obvious pain.

Ino grunted as she sat up, "That hurt. I don't get what happened, but it really hurt."

Sasuke was eying the odd markings on the armor though. On both enemies, the odd lights were flashing repeatedly, where they had previously been dark.

"I think their armor can't come into contact with other armor," he murmured. "We should test this theory."

Ino jumped to her feet and nodded. "Even when Naruto isn't here, he's helping us," she said as she withdrew a handful of shuriken that weren't really shuriken. They were Naruto Kage Bunshin.

"Plan: Ambush. Version 14. Go!" Sasuke hissed as he threw several explosives in order to give them some cover.

"Everything seems so pointless. I don't know why you all try so much," Koyuki whispered as Naruto as his fellow Konoha shinobi ran full on toward his other Konoha comrades, the snow not stopping them in the least. "Why risk your lives for people you don't even know and who do nothing for you. I can't understand it."

The orange clad boy huffed a laugh. "Sometimes, I don't get it either. But then I think about how sometimes I, or even awesome people like me nee-chan, needed someone. It took time for me to realize that I had some people who helped me. And my nee-chan had to wait a long time for the help she needed, but she got it in the end.

"Still, things happened, that shouldn't have. Had there been a hero there for her early on, she wouldn't have trust issues, and half of the scars she has. And she wouldn't be such a pessimist. I don't want other people to suffer like that. And I've come to realize that being a hero is a big job that's sometimes thankless, but being a hero shouldn't mean helping people only because you want their thanks."

He sounded so wise for his age. He couldn't be older than fourteen, but he was speaking from a well of understanding.
"I used to want to be the Hokage so people would respect me. My nee-chan had to explain to me that having a position of power won't always make people like you. Her people forced her into a position of power and relied too heavily upon her for it. And when she didn't dance the way they wanted, they turned on her. She said fame is a fickle friend, and she's right. Having the top job won't get me respect or recognition, and I don't want to be the person who helped people just to make myself look better.

"I want to protect my friends and new family, and I want them to be safe. And if that means protecting the whole of Hi no Kuni, then I'll do it. I still want to be the Hokage some day, but I want to earn it the right way, not because I think people owe me something. Heroes are selfless and I would rather be a hero than anything else."

It was talk like that that made her want to believe and to not be such an asshole all the time. But Koyuki was just one woman, and there was nothing miraculous about her. How could she make a difference when she had nothing?

Her grip tightened on his shoulders. What could a princess without a crown or a country, do? What could a coward who ran away for years, from anything that reminded her of the life she'd had to flee, do for the world?

"Hokage-Jiji came to our class once, to talk to us. I didn't pay much attention because I was busy planning a prank, but the last thing he said did stick out to me. 'You only get one life. There's no need to choose an impossible path. It's fine to live as long as you like and die. However… protecting a precious person… you must not forget this no matter what path you choose.' Not everyone has to be a hero, Koyuki-hime. So long as you protect those precious to you, you're making a difference in your own way just by your example."

The actress frowned to herself, because she'd spent years pushing everyone away, and the closest person she'd had that she could consider a precious person, had been killed because of her bastard uncle. At the time she had felt nothing but vindication for being correct once again when no one had listened to her, and now she felt sorrow and regret.

Many chances had come and gone, and Koyuki had let them all go without a backwards glance. She didn't want to be bitter anymore, but when it was the only thing she knew for so long, how did she go about changing for the better?

And how could she gain precious people of her own? Those like Sandayuu who would gladly protect her with their everything? And how could she gain the bravery necessary to be like him?

"Hold it!" Hyuga Neji yelled suddenly as he stopped running, making bother Naruto and Rock Lee halt. The Hyuga was glaring into the falling snow. "He's returned. We cannot escape him this time. He is too fast for a group of Genin to keep up with."

Naruto could feel Koyuki practically shrink against his back, and he readjusted his hold on her. As if he was going to let some asshole scare him away. And he was a little annoyed that she had to fear someone she was related to. He hated the fact that there were families out there who hurt each other. He hated it even more that Hari had been in a similar situation at one point, with family who should have loved her and didn't.

If it came down to it, Naruto was going to kick Do-what's-his-name's ass.

A man descended from the sky at a speed almost too fast to track, causing snow to fly in every direction as he did nothing to soften his landing. Those kind of landings always hurt the knees, didn't
the moron know that? Even Naruto knew that!

"Hello, Koyuki."

She didn't respond, and Naruto smirked, deciding to do it for her. "Fuck off!"

Hyuga Neji sent him a glare that he sent right back. He wasn't going to be docile just because someone was more skilled than him. And he wasn't going to give up like the other just because the situation looked bad.

Doto didn't look amused. "Then die."

Before any of them could react, he was in the middle of their formation, Koyuki taken right from Naruto's back and the three Genin sent flying in different directions. Naruto could hear the young woman wailing his name, and only that had managed to wake him up from the shock of the attack. It also helped him react fast enough so he didn't slam into a tree like Lee and Neji did.

Flipping mid-air in order to catch himself on the bark so he could charge, Naruto yelled, "That won't stop me, jerk! I'll never give up or go back on my word! And I promised to protect Koyuki!"

Unfortunately, he missed his intended target because said target had taken to the air, not that Naruto would let that stop him. He wasn't one to give up. Making two Kage Bunshin, he sent them to check up on his temporary teammates, and leapt after the princess and her captor. Kakashi-sensei and the rest of his team would catch up to them later, he was sure of it.

It was a good thing that Koyuki was wearing a purple kimono because through the falling snow it was the easiest thing to track. The grey sky was ominous and the air smelled of metal, but not in a good way. And he couldn't trace Koyuki's scent from the distance between them. Rain and snow sucked in that respect. Also, the snow was a bit of a pain to run in, but his chakra made it easier and less weight allowed him to keep up with their retreating speed.

He kept on, because Naruto didn't give up for anything. And he really needed to thank Hari-nee-chan for making his shirt so warm because he was certain the princess was going to be freezing by the time this was over. And he could totally do the chivalrous thing and lend her his shirt!

Doto was a fool. If anything, he should have realized that Naaruto was still following them. And the thing was, they were moving at a ridiculous speed, but Naruto had kept up easily, not daring to give up on her despite the fact that he'd lost two teammates and things were looking more bleak as the sky grew darker with what appeared to be nighttime.

It made her think. His determination was admirable, even to her. And she wondered if over the years, she'd been mocking every time she saw it in other people because she knew she didn't have any of her own. Was she jealous?

"Soon, Koyuki," Doto began, drawing her attention away from her would-be savior. "Soon I will have unlimited access to the Kazahana Family Treasure."

'Treasure'? Koyuki was quite certain that they had been modestly wealthy but had nothing like treasure. A term like that was reserved for unique items and family heirlooms, of which they didn't have besides the necklace.

Her father had often donated to help fund the orphanage of Yukigakure, and he would host events to raise money for causes he felt were important. But when it came to treasure, there was nothing of the sort.
"In the Ice Rainbow Room we found a small slot that will fit a hexagonal crystal. It is the key to unlocking the hidden treasure, and I will have it. It will make us stronger than any other shinobi nation and elevate us to a position we deserve to have!"

He was monologuing. Koyuki had seen it done in movies, and had even had parts where she'd done it herself, but to hear it in a real life scenario was kind of... ridiculous. And it didn't make her want to take him seriously despite knowing that this situation was not a particularly safe one for her. The exaggerated villain role was poorly executed in her opinion.

Without his armor, he was nothing. Without his protection... he was weak. Koyuki didn't need to fear for he had no true strength of his own, and in the end, Kakashi had thought ahead of all of them, and had taken the real crystal. And Naruto... had given her a replacement that was also one of his weird clones. And when Doto found out that he couldn't open whatever treasure he was searching for, he would go mad.

Smart. And she was feeling burning glee rising in her gut over it.

They began to lose altitude, and Koyuki blinked, astonished to see everything as it once was. The ice was still thick, the snow just as high as ever. And she was dumped into a pile of it. Nothing had fallen. "Hand over the crystal, Koyuki."

She did so, making it out to be something she was reluctant to do, but she also wanted to see his failure.

The crystal was slotted into a spot on the dais, and for a second, bright light shone all around them, and then it suddenly went dark. Doto's jubilant face morphed into one of rage, and it was the first time since any of this started, that Koyuki felt true fear. But the fear was tinged with satisfaction knowing he'd failed, and that Naruto was right behind them, ready to cause whatever trouble he could.

"Were. Is. The. Crystal?" he demanded, turning to her with exaggerated slowness.

"Kakashi," was her simple, smug answer as the crystal exploded to reveal Naruto, standing above Doto with a smirk on his face.

"Surprise, baka!" the boy boomed.

Doto turned and punched the clone in the face, and with his attention diverted for that split second, two flashes of orange zoomed past Koyuki, a massive red ball of chakra held between them.

It was glorious. Naruto had never tried to make the Rasengan with the Kyubi's chakra before, but he'd figured that if he wanted to deal maximum damage as quickly as possible, then he couldn't wait. And he had to take risks. Kakashi-sensei said the armor strengthened the wearer's chakra and weakened other people's chakra. But what would happen if faced with Biju chakra?

As Sasuke had once stated, it was dangerous outside a Jinchuuriki's body and it was capable of melting the earth into goo. So a Biju-powered Rasengan that was four times the size of a normal one, coming at Doto from behind unexpectedly, was the best option.

Doto reacted a nanosecond too late, his hand coming up to block the attack. But that wasn't the smartest move, and said hand was obliterated. Along with the arm and the rest of him. It was a bit disgusting, but Naruto was proud to learn that he had such a back up should it be necessary at some point. And that Doto could never hurt anyone again. It also proved that his darling chakra armor, had its weaknesses, which meant his team would have been able to defeat those Yukigakure shinobi.
"Naruto," Koyuki sighed in relief. "Thank you. I knew you wouldn't give up."

The boy turned, ignoring the splatter of red in the snow, and grinned brightly. "Don't mention it, princess! It's what heroes do! I promised I would keep you safe and I never go back on my word. It's my nindo! -ttebayo!"

And in the distance, he could see familiar figures coming in their direction.

"Good job, Naruto!" Kakashi praised, his eye curved to show that he was indeed pleased. Meanwhile, Sasuke and Ino stood beside him, smiling and nodding their agreement. And then were his Kage Bunshin who were holding Lee and Neji, plus TenTen and her team leader, Maito Gai on their other side. Everyone was together. And no one was hurt!

Jiji was going to be happy. And the mission hadn't been as difficult as he thought it would be. Either that meant Team Seven was advancing quickly, or their opponents had been really weak. He'd like to think it was the former.

"Cut!"

They all flinched a bit at the sudden shout and Naruto gaped as something he'd never seen before, practically morphed out of the snowfall. It was nothing like a horse pulled cart, and seemed to be fashioned of metal. And it was moving on what looked to be enormous boards of metal. And there were people riding in the back of it, holding massive equipment and cameras.

"Have they been following us the whole time?" the boy wondered aloud, and got a response immediately.

"Yes!" yelled the man with the scarf and black glasses. "We couldn't pass up the opportunity! This film will be our best one yet! We just have to rework the plot a bit and everything will fall into place! Imagine, real shinobi in our film, and we won't have to use special effects too much! All the money we'll save!"

Meanwhile, Kakashi had finally handed Koyuki her necklace. "Protected as promised. Was it what he was after?"

She hummed, turning it in hand. "He said something about it being the key to the Kazahana Family Treasure. A treasure I've never heard of." And then her gaze trailed back to the odd dais. "I wonder..."

Naruto backed away a bit, to give her some space, and watched eagerly as she placed the crystal into the slot. This time it actually worked, and the large, ice monoliths surrounding them, began to glow white. Slowly, the ice splintered and cracked, revealing a rainbow of light within each. And the snow melted away in a large ripple, traveling across the ground and revealing the lush, green grass beneath. The storm disappeared, leaving only blue skies behind.

Naruto's was not the only jaw to drop. And one to the movie makers excitedly screamed about making their movie 3D now.

Koyuki sighed as she looked around and the flowers and the lake in the distance. The blue sky reflecting off the water and the clouds looking soft and puffy enough to touch. "He said the spring would come one day. This was what he meant. This generator was the 'treasure' all along."

Naruto looked around and gave a wave to get some attention. "I'm tired after five days of almost non-stop running and little hours of sleep between then, plus using my chakra to keep myself warm, plus that huge, Kyuu Rasengan. The princess is safe. Life is good. Good night."
The last thing he saw before passing out, was what he assumed was a tiny Koyuki, smiling and rambling on about being the best princess she could be.

Maybe she'd finally get a chance to do that.

"Hari, you should start packing for the capital, you're leaving tomorrow morning," Luna announced that evening at dinner. A dinner that she, Anko, Kurenai, and Shizune had shown up to. And it was a good thing that Hari was used to cooking a lot because two of them hadn't been expected, but were welcome all the same.

The young woman groaned when she remembered that yes, there was still shite to be done. "I hate all of this. But the revenge is worth it, you know? So I'll deal with the arse kissers if I have to."

Anko hummed and slugged back her sake. "I would know all about revenge. Kakashi will be so disappointed that he didn't get any cracks at our dear Aoi. He turned a delightful shade of blue yesterday and I made sure to get some photos because I want to remember this for a long time. And my students will as well." She looked manic and proud.

Now, the fact that she was so nonchalant over the fact that she was torturing someone under the allowance of the Hokage, should have unnerved at least one of the women in the room. Instead, they all shared a nod of understanding.

Hari wondered if that was a good or bad thing. It certainly displayed their flexible moral compasses a bit. And Hari still couldn't help but feel touched that Anko was going to such lengths in her honour. How she had changed to view someone getting tortured for hurting her, as something sweet, was beyond her.

"You have changed due to experience," said Death. "It is only natural."

True.

"What is this?" Shizune asked when Hari set her plate before her. "It smells fantastic, but it also kind of burns my nose. I've never seen anything like it."

"My curry. I changed a few things from the recipe that I learned, but it's still curry, don't worry."

"You'll need water," Luna stated, pulling a bottle from her trouser pocket. "And maybe tissues because your eyes will tear up."

Hari shrugged. "I like it when my tongue tingles." Or just burns. Either was great. Hence the adoration of Firewhiskey.

Once they were all served, she lifted her glass, yes, it was a glass, of sake and said, "Let's enjoy this night, because I have to go deal with idiots tomorrow and I don't know how long it'll take."

The women all toasted to an eventful evening, with Kurenai whispering encouragements under her breath, and Anko promising to ruin Sayori's life should she come anywhere near Konoha. Meanwhile, Shizune pretended she heard nothing possibly incriminating and simply smiled serenely.

Luna was busy chilling her water in order to prepare her tongue for their meal.

Hari couldn't remember a time where she had so many lady friends. It was nice to just be able to get together and fuck around. Too bad it took sixty plus years for it to happen, but at least it was happening.
"The generator isn't finished, but with how advanced our researchers are, I'd say we'll have it completely finished in no time. And soon Yuki no Kuni will become Haru no Kuni," said Koyuki, smiling up at the sky. "It used to just be a dream of mine that my father had supported wholeheartedly. But he'd managed to make it a reality because he wanted to surprise me."

Sasuke felt that spring was far more interesting than winter, and much easier to fight in, so the renaming of the country had his support.

"So Naruto, I was thinking that I should introduce myself to the nobility of the other nations, starting with your sister. She's got to be great if you're so sweet."

The blond flushed and kicked at the ground with his sandal. "Yeah, nee-chan is awesome."

"Her name is Potta Hari," said Ino. "She's really amazing and I think you'd get along well. She's a fighter, and the head of the Konoha Orphanage right now. And you won't have to worry about her judging you since she doesn't care much for decorum and will treat you like a normal person."

The young woman nodded in gratitude. "Then I look forward to meeting her in person at the upcoming Chunin Exams. I hope you all do well. And Naruto?"

He looked up expectantly, and Koyuki playfully ruffled his hair. "I hope you grow up big and strong! I can't wait to work with you when you become the best Hokage there has ever been!" Koyuki said with a wave of the book in her hand.

"-ttebayo!"

"That script," whispered Kakashi almost reverently, hand outstretched as the young woman retreated. "Koneko-chan will have to come with me when I go see it. It'll be a night to remember."

Naruto hummed, looking disgusted. "Did that say, 'Icha Icha'? Isn't that that crappy book series you and nee-chan like for some reason? The one Ero-Sennin writes?"

Suddenly, Kakashi's entire manner of stunned awe, morphed into a intense seriousness that none of them had witnessed before. He pointed a finger in Naruto's face. "Such blasphemous utterances will not be tolerated! It is great literature!" Kakashi was nearly hissing, and looked a bit crazy if truth be told.

Naruto merely scoffed and folded his arms in defiance as he watched the new Daimyo of Yuki no Kuni saunter away. "You want to take my nee-chan to see porn and still think you're not flirting? Suuuuuure."

Ino giggled into her palm.

He had a good point, and Kakashi made no move to respond, having gone suspiciously quiet. Of course, that didn't mean Maito Gai let it die down. Not when his supposed 'greatest rival'/best friend was having relationship issues.

"You wish to purse the fair Hari, Kakashi?! I knew it wouldn't be too long before you wished to settle down! Your flames of youth are burning brighter than ever since Hari-hime came to the village!"

Naruto's jaw dropped suddenly. "I forgot to ask for the princess' autograph! I'm so stupid! Baka! Baka! Baka!" He proceeded to smack his palm to his forehead repeatedly, cursing himself. "The dumbest person ever! -ttebayo! Shit!"
Sasuke grunted as Naruto complained over something that wasn't that important. Of course with all the hype lately, no one could blame him for forgetting. Thankfully, Sasuke was ahead of him. While he personally thought it was stupid, Naruto had really set his heart on it. And Sasuke wanted to see the look on his face once he realized what he'd been given.

"I took care of it," he announced quietly, fishing in his pocket for the envelope that he'd been holding on to for four days. "A late birthday gift," Sasuke murmured, handing it over. "Don't say I do nothing for you." He'd do anything for Naruto. And it was an uncomfortable realization.

Naruto accepted it almost reverently, opening it and gawking at the contents within. And his expression was just as amazing as Sasuke had imagined it would be. "She kissed my face, teme! And you got a photo and an autograph just for me!"

He was not prepared, but really he should have been. It was Naruto and Naruto loved to hug people after so many years of being unable to. So of course he should have expected to get his bones crushed because of the blond's excitement. And he should have also expected Naruto's whiskered cheek to rub against his own as he was almost nuzzled to death.

"Gai-sensei! Such exuberant friendship makes me feel like running a marathon!"

A sigh was withheld as Rock Lee hyped Maito Gai up with more talk of training. But it distracted him from asking about Kakashi's love life, so maybe it was for the best. Sasuke didn't want to hear about anyone's love life at present.

The Hyuga rolled his eyes and scoffed, while TenTen gave an uncomfortable laugh as the two got louder and louder with their promises of training. She was the only truly calm person on the entire team. Not even the Hyuga counted because his snappish attitude ruined the veneer of tranquility Hyuga usually affected.

Sasuke had to stop himself from glaring. He didn't like the Hyuga, and he wouldn't forget the way he'd talked down to Naruto's Kage Bunshin either. It was a good thing that the Chunin Exams were coming up, because Sasuke wanted to beat his ass into the dirt for his shitty attitude and unnecessary rudeness to Naruto who was just being friendly, and a decent person, instead of leaving that jerk's unconscious body on the ground for people to step on. That's what Sasuke would have done at least. There was no obligation to carry another person.

Albeit Naruto was a little too friendly, but still. There was no need to shoot down common decency. Just because he hated life didn't mean he had to spread that hatred to everyone else. No one asked to be subjected to such a poor attitude.

"Sasuke, you're the best!" Naruto announced, still squeezing the life out of him and making him force down a smile.

"Hn." His face was not flushing! He was stoic as always. Or at least he had to appear that way.

He was an Uchiha after all.

Such a stressful thing to have on one's shoulders when they wanted to hug someone back but couldn't ruin a carefully crafted image.

Ino rolled her eyes as Naruto got pulled into Rock Lee's weird training on their way back to the village. She'd learned some things about the other teen thanks to Sakura, who had come by practically squealing about being asked out and her spar with the older teen.
So far, Ino knew enough about Rock Lee's fighting style, to inform her teammates ahead of time. And if Naruto managed to keep talking so much, then they’d know even more in preparation for the Chunin Exams.

Anything would be a benefit in the long run.

The blonde paused he train of thought because she noticed that Sasuke was glaring very intently at Rock Lee, despite Lee having done nothing wrong beyond being incredibly loud.

Maybe he just didn't like green?

"Potta Hari, Head of the Potta Clan, please step forward."

Hari could feel the elation bubbling within as she spotted Sayori's face among the crowd of people who were gathered for the event of the decade. The woman's mousy face was pinched much like Petunia's used to get, and her plain features were showing a mix of anger, confusion, and wonder. And this was only the beginning of what was going to be a beautiful dressing down.

The Daimyo looked displeased with the overall situation, but shoudered through it anyway. Past the ridiculous clothing and make up, he was a leader first and foremost. "You are here to give a statement about your kidnapping and how it coincides with the accusation that Kurosaki Sayori is behind it. Kurosaki Sayori, Head of the Kurosaki Family, will step forward and may speak for herself on the matter. Be warned, I have an entire folder already filled with information about the situation and others that might pertain to it, so do not test me. This court will know everything by the time we are finished here, even if it takes several days."

Sayori's shock was delicious and Hari barely withheld the urge to smirk victoriously. Even if she somehow lost this whole thing, Sayori would never heal from the suspicion of being a murder suspect. Her life would forever be plagued by the events happening on this day.

Now all Hari had to do was play up her situation and make sure that her scars were perfectly visible. That what she'd gone through was exaggerated as best as possible when she told her story. And then how she and Sayori were connected already because the woman's daughter was refused a position at the orphanage because her attitude toward children wasn't a good one.

And acting out of jealousy was childish and would make the woman and her family look even worse! Maybe this wasn't so terrible after all.

*I am actually looking forward to this.*

"Try to remain level-headed. The Daimyo is already more on your side than Kurosaki's and you don't want to jeopardise that by getting too far ahead of yourself."

*I know, I know. I am going to drag this for whatever I can though. It's just like with Danzo's case.*

Tea would be served.

**A/N: Another is done!**

**How was it? Let me know!**

**Check out my other fics!**
Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

Chapter End Notes

Check out my many other fics!

Part of the 2017 Christmas Bundle.
Wish What You Will

Chapter Summary

The trial and more! Shit happens!

Chapter Notes

-More than half of this chapter takes place on the same day. I tried to make it not the case, but these things were very important to the plot.

-I had 17,000 words written already but couldn't get the last few sections finished because the wording escaped me. But I finally did it!

-Inuzuka mean 'dog hill' so when you get to their section of the chapter, I played on that with a pun of sorts.

-Some Kakashi/Hari fluff this chapter! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

The amazing lucife56 made FANART for this story! It's beautiful!

Sarutobi Hiruzen massaged the area around his eye sockets and took a deep breath to center himself. Some days he wished he could just go somewhere else and not have to deal with paperwork and the shinobi who ended up doubling it constantly.

"You defeated a tyrant and rescued not only Team Gai but also Koyuki-hime as well. It's impressive that no one received injury during your mission and it will go down in the mission log as a positive toward Team Seven's skills. However, Naruto-kun, using the Kyuubi's chakra was very dangerous when you are not yet trained on how to use it properly."

The blond huffed. "Jiji, I've been practicing off and on for the last few weeks on how to call upon the fox's chakra if I need to. And usually when I do it starts to heal whatever injuries I have. This
time I had no injuries and was able to focus it all in a Rasengan. We have this agreement that I get to use the chakra because all it does is sit around and sleep."

"That does not mean the creature will not attempt to harm you one of these times," the old Kage sighed. "You cannot let your guard down. This also means that Jiraiya will have to be called back from his mission. He was supposed to begin training you for this later on, but with the seal widening and you using the Kyuubi's chakra more frequently, we'll need to speed up your training."

Uchiha Sasuke seemed to take note of his meaning the fastest. "Naruto was always meant to be able to use its chakra, wasn't he?" the boy demanded, looking a mite worried, though his reputation as an Uchiha wouldn't allow such obvious reactions.

He almost smiled, but refrained in order to preserve the boy's ego. It was nice to know that Naruto had gained so many precious people who worried about him.

"Yes. The Fuinjutsu used specifically was modelled after the Uzumaki Clan's personal Fuin, with the Yondaime's personal twists on it. While Naruto's mother, and Mito-sama never made use of the Kyuubi's chakra, Minato believed it could be more beneficial if the bearer could use the chakra at their disposal, turning the body into a receptacle for the Biju's power."

Jinchuuriki had an whole other well of power in their bodies so it made sense that it should be used to their benefit. MInato was a genius through and through.

"I need you to promise to not experiment with the Kyubi's chakra unless you feel that the situation absolutely calls for it. You and Jiraiya were supposed to work on this at a much later date and it would be best to have someone of his skill level in Fuin to watch over you when you practice."

Though the blond looked annoyed, and certainly grumbled enough for them all to understand his frustration, he eventually nodded. "I promise, Jiji. But I feel it's necessary, the gloves are coming off! -ttebayo!"

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Terumi Mei eyed the shinobi gathered before her, with a stern frown. She was not displeased, but a leader had to put forth a particular front in order to keep the respect they'd earned. And she wanted them all to know that being the Mizukage would not take away her battle mentality.

"Everyone in this room was called for a very important reason," she told them as she folded her hands beneath her chin, resting her elbows on the desk that formerly belonged to Yagura.

Twenty-one shinobi were lined up in groups of three. All of her seasoned Genin. Her eyes picked Haku and Chojuro out easily, both standing in the very front of their groups.

"I realized that many of you are unaware of the reason behind my decision to give you all the rank of Genin. After your participation in the Rebellion, and the skills you have all developed, it would seem foolish to not grant you ranks above Genin. There is a method to my madness, however."

Mei reached down, and pulled a file from one of the desk drawers. It was tan, long, and unassuming. But it held the information on every Genin standing in the room. Their strengths and weaknesses. Their skills and Kekkei Genkai. Everything she needed in order to form the best teams possible for her village.

"Next month, Tetsu no Kuni is hosting the biggest Chunin Selection Exams in the past two decades." She eyed each and every Genin, noting how some seemed confused while others appeared contemplative. "Every shinobi village will be sending their Genin."
The silence in the office rang true as they took in that piece of information. It was an event unlike any other in their current lifetimes, so of course they'd be shocked.

"All of these villages are from nations who are very well aware of the civil war Mizu no Kuni was embroiled in for the past several years. Our Rebellion went so far as to importune many for assistance, and we were turned away by all but Konoha. They know we have been weakened and they know we only won with Konoha's aid."

Her fist slammed down suddenly, denting the wood and making some of the Genin jump. "We cannot allow them to think us weak! We are still one of the five great nations, even if our power level has diminished by half and we are just getting back on our feet in terms of trade agreements. If we send no one to the Exams, our country will suffer from their oppressive judgment. We are not some pusillanimous assemblage of the dregs Kirigakure has left behind, just barely getting by on our luck. We are still a force to be reckoned with!"

"Hai!" the Genin chorused with firm nods.

"All of you deserve the rank of Chunin," she admitted with conviction, "but I need for you to enter the Chunin Exams for me, and demonstrate the power our great nation still possesses. Prove to everyone that we will not forget how they treated us, nor will we remain silent any longer. We are still here! We are still willing to fight! And we will not take their persecution lying down!"

The Genin gave a loud cheer, and she knew they'd do her proud. And in the wake of the warmth in her gut, Mei knew that she'd love being a Kage no matter how much hellish paperwork there was.

"Potta-hime," the Daimyo began from his place high above the court, "Can you explain exactly what you remember from the moment you were kidnapped? Please include all the details you recall."

Hari nodded regally and stood so that everyone in the circular room may see her more clearly. She needed to be as imposing as possible, with also a healthy dose of fragility thrown in there. She needed to play to her strengths and play on the hearts of those listening and watching. This was a time for her Slytherin side to shine through and she was going to milk everything for all she was worth.

It was a good thing that she had come to understand what the body of people before her, valued. With those points in mind, she knew how to word her story as well as what to draw attention to in order to gain their favour. **Meaning:** high emphasis on her Kekkei Genkai and how it needs to be passed on, but how no one would want to marry her because she was so heavily scarred now. How her clan was helping Konoha so much with their Kekkei Genkai which would then explain why she was so valuable to Hi no Kuni, and finally, a bit of touching on how she only wanted to help the children and make their futures better.

All exaggerated of course to make her pity party seem more intense. Emotions were easy to manipulate if one knew the correct buttons to push.

"I had been on my way back to the orphanage, when I started to feel awkward. Like I was being watched. Hokage-sama has two Anbu stationed to guard me at all times however, so I assumed that I was being overly dramatic and that it was surely one of them. I hadn't even stepped inside the building before I was covered in sharp wire and everything went black."

Hari shook her head almost forlornly. "I am most disappointed in myself over that. Hokage-sama and I had been so careful in putting protections on the building so that the children would be safe. The building can withstand an assault from multiple C4 explosives, and would still remain standing."
There is even a replusion on the building so that anyone with ill intentions toward the children cannot enter. Unfortunately, we didn't consider that we'd have to expand the protection to a wider perimeter instead of just the building itself.

"That has been rectified by now, but I was so worried when I awoke because I realised that if it was so easy to be kidnapped at the doorstep, then the children weren't safe enough. And I felt as if I had been remiss and made a grave error in judgment." For added effect, Hari shook her head and looked to the ground in sadness.

In all honesty, she had been very disappointed in herself over that. Thankfully, Luna had taken up control over the orphanage and had begun the preparations for more Runes and Fuinjutsu to be placed around the building in order to protect the children more. So while she had been worried, she was layering on the pity to an extreme degree in order to make herself look even better in the eyes of her peers.

After all, no one among the group disliked her but Sayori. Many even wished to marry her for one reason or another. But Hari was into theatrics at heart and liked to put on a show so long as it got her what she wanted in the end. Also, everything had been pretty boring as of late and this entire situation was a way to entertain herself to some degree without getting injured or putting others in danger. Even if observing the social niceties annoyed the piss out of her.

One of the family heads stood to her left. He was a squat man with a long, white beard, though he didn't appear to be very old. On his head was a ridiculous red hat that matched his robes exactly, and gave her old time aeroplane vibes. "Potta-hime, can you explain what happened when you awoke? I am curious to learn how this entire situation somehow connects to Kurosaki-san."

Hari bowed to the man, showing him respect if only because she knew that Sayori was not the kind to bow to anyone and in the long run it would make her look better for respecting her elders. Hari honestly couldn't give a damn about him or his station.

"Certainly, sir. My kidnapper is one Rokusho Aoi. According to Hokage-sama, he is a nuke-nin of Konoha who many years ago, stole the Raijin no Ken which had belonged the the Nidaime Hokage. Some time past his defection, he became a shinobi of Amegakure and rose to Jonin status. He took the mission Kurosaki-san offered to him. I found the mission scroll within his pack."

Another noble stood. Another man, because women were not allowed to speak in this governing body unless addressed specifically. Something that still annoyed her and she hoped could be fixed some day if she was to remain in this world. "How did you escape? I doubt he handed his mission scroll to you for you to peruse." His every word practically dripped with doubt and Hari nodded in understanding so the man knew that Hari was being mature about his concerns.

After all, Hari was among the youngest members of the Daimyo's court. She was also the newest to be introduced and was effectively a baby in their eyes. She had to play to their rules and expectations, and kiss arse a little, in order to get somewhere, but so long as she observed the niceties, she would sail by smoothly, leaving Sayori in the dirt.

"My Kekkei Genkai, Yamamoto-san. It is not a common piece of information beyond Konoha's impregnable walls, and even then, only high ranking shinobi, and the other clans would know of it. My cousin and I have various abilities that benefit not only us, but Hi no Kuni as well. And everyone in our family had it because of how potent it is, so we will pass it on to our children some day.

"Aoi was not aware of my Kekkei Genkai nor what I am capable of with it. I used that to my advantage when I realised that he refused to part with any information about why I was kidnapped and about to be murdered so callously."
The Daimyo himself cleared his throat then, gaining all of their attention instantly, making several heads bow in deference. "Potta-hime, can you please explain in a bit more detail to this body of people, just what your Kekkei Genkai is capable of? I feel they might even need a demonstration in order to fully understand what sort of benefits the Potta Clan brings to Hi no Kuni."

She bowed once more, excited by the prospect of showing off just a bit. This would certainly turn opinions in her favour since these people cared so much about power.

"Each of the Potta Clan members had the same basic abilities. Levitation, elemental manipulation on a small scale, the ability to turn into an animal, teleportation, and we even have remedies that require our Kekkei Genkai in order to be made correctly. We supply those remedies to the hospital and they include a Blood Replenisher, which forces the body to replace blood lost at an almost alarming rate. Since we have started aiding the hospital two months ago, no one has died of blood loss.

"Additionally, some members of the clan might develop an extra skill. My cousin Runa is a Seer. I can speak to and understand animals. My godson, may his soul rest in peace, was also a cousin of mine and he could change his form at will, including his gender. These skills will be passed down to our children some day and they will develop their own unique abilities as they branch off."

Hari looked around, seeing all the baffled faces in the crowd. Many who didn't know about her additional usefulness to the country were now considering her differently. Her eyes landed on a large, marble circle on the floor in the center of the room. "If the people of the court will direct their attention to the center of the room, I will teleport there."

She Disapparated and reappeared exactly where she said she would, with only a small pop to announce her movement. The people broke into loud murmurs and whispers of amazement when they finally took in what she had done. She could practically feel her worth rising, and almost smirked. Almost.

It wouldn't do to break character now.

"I used levitation to slam Aoi into the wall of the dreadful house he'd taken me to." She shuddered, actually disgusted by the memory. This part was no exaggeration, she simply detested dirt and messes. "It was filthy and I would wish the experience on no one. I can't even call it a shack, it was that terrible, and the lack of cleanliness made it worse."

A shake of the head managed to return her mind to the topic at hand. Her not so petty revenge. "I teleported out of my binds, but it became apparent that the burning pain I was feeling all over my body was something to be immediately concerned about. I was bleeding excessively because I had been wrapped in ninja wire from neck to ankles, and it is much more sharp than I assumed it would be."

An uncomfortable laugh slipped past her lips as if she was embarrassed to admit this next part of the story. In a way she was. Only a little. "Tsunade-sama told me that Aoi had slung me over his shoulder, which forced the wires around my midsection," she explained, rubbing her stomach and waist, "to cut into my skin because of the additional pressure of my weight. She told me I was nearly bisected and that my intestines were almost ruined."

That part was very true, and her disgust over it was even more real. The gasps of fear from her captivated audience, let her know that they were feeling her tale to the depths of their very pampered beings that hadn't suffered so much as a chipped nail before. Honestly, she could have been an orator with how good she was with words.

"Unfortunately, teleporting when injured and losing blood isn't smart because it is disorienting. I
hadn't taken into account that I had been seated and that standing and moving around would be different. I was nauseated for several minutes and I knew I couldn't teleport again for fear of leaving a body part behind. Which is the biggest problem when training in teleportation, because if we are not careful, we can appear somewhere, missing a limb or two. Which is why it is advised to only do it in perfect health."

The people winced as they imagined what it would be like to appear somewhere, missing an arm or a leg. But by putting them in the mindset so they understood her list of injuries and why she couldn't just go home, Hari had gained their sympathy.

"I decided that I would start making my way back to Konoha, and I levitated Aoi alongside me. I figured if I stayed on the main road, then I'd eventually be found. Of course I found myself in Tanzaku Gai hours later, and knew that I'd either make it to Konoha first, or enough people seeing me would be able to get any trackers to me fast enough. I lost consciousness just after signing in at the village gates and Tsunade-sama was very unhappy with my condition."

She'd gotten a stern talking to from the woman and in a way, Hari felt like a child, but in another, she was annoyed because if only Tsunade knew that Hari was almost a decade older than she. Still, the woman was a friend as well as a doctor and of course she would be worried, so Hari wasn't as annoyed as she might be with other people.

"Hokage-sama told me they could not just take the mission scroll as proof, and he sent it to the Cypher Division whereupon they investigated and found that it was written in Kurosaki Sayori's hand, written with her family's specific ink, and that the instructions therein, on how to handle my dead body, resembled the deaths of many other nobles of Hi no Kuni over the last couple decades."

Immediately, all eyes were on Sayori, who had been seated the entire time, looking a cross between enraged and befuddled. The woman made no move to defend herself from the accusations Hari had brought up. She merely stared into space as if she had been under the influence of… something. Like an Imperius.

Death?

"She is currently trying to think of a way out and is finding there aren't many, if any, and is frozen in fear of what could happen to her family and their reputation. And actually incapable of movement but that's for another time. Pay attention, this is going to get good."

The Daimyo lifted the file in his hand and cleared his throat to have their attention once again. "This had been noted by Hiruzen-san, specifically with a list of the people our court lost in the past twenty years. All who turned up the exact same way Potta-hime would have had her attacker been successful in his mission. I shall read the list aloud for all to hear."

It was a very long list of people from all over the country. And almost every family in attendance on this day, had someone from that list that they had lost over a lengthy period of time. All but the Kurosaki family. By the time the Daimyo had finished, he leveled Sayori with a hard look. "I personally noticed that the people on this list had at some point, become well favoured in the eyes of my family, yet your family is the only one among this governing body to have not lost anyone in such a specific attack. What say you?"

Sayori continued to stare, and the guards stationed around the room all took a simultaneous step forward in warning. It would not do to ignore the words of their country's leader after all. And the disrespect would only further shame her family. But Death had done something to influence her behaviour. She wasn't going anywhere.
"No one kills my Mistress," was their ominous comment. "I may not be allowed to kill freely, but I am capable of my own manipulations that don't require permission, do not forget this."

Like with the Peverell Three. Yeah, she couldn't forget that. It was her luck that Death actually liked her for whatever reason.

"What I do not understand," another noble began, "is why Kurosaki-san would feel the need to attack Potta-hime in the least. She hasn't been among our number for even a year yet. They have had no contact save for Daimyo-sama's birth celebration. What connection could they have to warrant this?"

Hari shrugged, affecting a very confused face for his benefit. "I do not know, Sumimura-san. I met her daughter when she applied to work in the orphanage, but I refused her after our initial meeting because I deemed her attitude toward some of the orphans to be worrisome, and I felt that she didn't have the experience necessary after our discussion." More like she had been an absolute bitch when she found out that Hari had taken Naruto in and that the orphanage would reside in Naruto's building. She refused to put up with such a bigoted attitude and that was the end of Sayori's daughter.

"Jealousy," the Daimyo surmised easily. "That seems to be the reason behind all of these other deaths, Kurosaki-san. In preparation for this trial, I hired a shinobi and sent them to your estate."

That got a reaction finally. Sayori's wide eyes stared up at her leader in horror. She looked as if she was witnessing the end of the world and had a front row seat to the carnage. And from her perspective it was not beautiful. Hari obviously could not concur. It was fucking grand!

"Thanks to the efforts of one Uchiha Itachi, I now have all the proof necessary to convict you of several accounts of murder. A piece of advice, keeping the heads of your victims in a private room was not the smartest action to take. And treating your servants so terribly that they all willingly surrendered to my guardians and confessed everything the moment you left the premises on your journey here, was your undoing."

Hari had to hold back the urge to snicker. On the other hand, she had almost ended up gaping like the rest of the room at this most perfect turn of events!

She hadn't even been aware that other people were involved. It seemed as though she owed Sasuke's older brother something in return for his assistance. She wouldn't have thought the Daimyo would invade someone's privacy in such a manner. But apparently he was too angry to care about formalities and following proper procedures.

The pride she felt could not be matched!

Also… Sayori kept the heads of her victims in a room in her house! Hari could think of at least five different ways to go about such the same way, but without a chance of getting caught. Honestly, if Sayori was that poor at hiding her hobby, she deserved everything coming to her. Hari wanted to shake the woman and demand to know what she'd been thinking when she dreamed up her plan all those years ago.

A look around the room revealed the displeasure the audience was feeling. The Daimyo had pulled out a stack of photos and had passed them along so that each noble may see the proof. And families had to be faced with loved ones they long since lost.

"The common punishment for this type of offense, is death," the Daimyo stated firmly, glaring down at Sayori from his high throne, hand fan set aside. "But who among this body deserves the honour of
choosing your fate? The families you have forever changed, or the young woman that only managed to escape your wretched plans by having a secret beyond the knowledge of most?"

Hari raised her hands, forcing a frantic but reassuring persona easily to the forefront of her outer features. "Daimyo-sama, I am not so important as to take vengeance from those who truly suffered because of her actions. I had scars before this whole ordeal, and I simply have more now. Besides," she paused, pushing up her sleeves so they were visible, "I sort of resemble a tiger now. And tigers are powerful and beautiful, so it really isn't so terrible. I mean, finding someone who will want to marry me despite them will be a struggle, but it won't truly affect my life too much.

"I believe the families affected by the tragedies her actions brought on, should have a say."

There. She effectively drew attention to her 'disfigured appearance' and alluded to the fact that passing on her Kekkei Genkai would be impossible since who would want her now that she was so heavily marred, and people always cared more for appearances than anything. She also made herself appear as the 'better man' no matter how stupid of a phrase it truly was. In the end, she came out even more squeaky clean than before this whole thing began.

The Daimyo approved of her words, since he nodded and granted her a smile. She had a feeling that he understood what she'd done to an extent, and had found it amusing.

"He did," said Death from her right. "He may appear the fool who enjoys life's luxuries too much, but he has been playing this game for three decades and knows all the tricks. He understands what you've done this day. The rest underestimate you because you are young and not trained in the ways of nobility, so they do not think you'd be cunning enough to work them over as of yet."

Well then. That worked to her benefit so well! If only they knew that she was in her sixties instead of her twenties! But lying benefitted her so much as of late.

In the end, Kurosaki Sayori was imprisoned until further notice, because the noble families needed to have a conference to decide her fate and it was late in the evening.

Hari hoped that she could convince them that death was too easy and that Sayori should spend the rest of her days doing something she despised. Only then would she truly suffer for what she did. It was like what she'd wanted to do to the Dursleys. The only way to hurt them was to slaughter their reputations, and Sayori was the same way.

They were given a fortnight to go home, explain the situation to their families, and return with their suggestions. The court would then debate over what would happen.

Hari would never be more grateful for the fact that lawyers could not be contracted the moment the situation fell to the Daimyo's court. Basically, those involved had to appeal to the court on their own, because lawyers in this world only worked in the massive villages, such as Konoha and Suna. The Daimyo was the highest law in the land, which was why lawyers could not have a say in matters he was personally involved in.

She never thought she'd think this, but thank Merlin for backwards practices!

Sasuke was glaring, and he hadn't really had a reason to do so in such a long time, he realized. Things had been a lot better in his life since he'd joined Team Seven, and his brother was back and innocent, and they actually still had clan members around so the duty to repopulate wouldn't fall to them alone. He wasn't as stressed as he had been. So for him to be frowning so much, was a bit of a
shock to even himself.

And the reason for his bad attitude, was staring up at him from a three inch height different, looking completely confused because he didn't understand just what his offer meant.

It was Naruto, which wasn't a shock considering who his friend was. But still.

Naruto had been practicing his Rasengan and trying to obtain the focus necessary in order to do it single-handedly. Sasuke could understand wanting to better himself in time for the Chunin Exams, but it was an A-Rank jutsu already and Naruto being able to do it at all should have been enough for now.

And how had he chosen to practice? By having his Kage Bunshin turn on each other and impale each other with said attack. And then proceeded to tell Sasuke that he could use the Chidori on said clones if he wanted real practice using it.

Like Naruto actually thought Sasuke would feel comfortable with shoving a fist of lightning through his stomach? He couldn't even entertain such a thought. Not even to a fake Naruto, because it was an assassination technique and the mental image that popped up made him feel ill.

Thoughts of Naruto looking as Sasuke had during their training mission gone awry. Chidori was dangerous in general and using it on a comrade, his friends no less, was not okay. Kakashi had even explicitly told him not to turn it on a friend ever. That was the stipulation when he was learning it.

"What's wrong, Sasuke?" Naruto asked, blue eyes wide with confusion.

He was given a moment of pause to reflect on the fact that Naruto rarely called him a 'teme' anymore. Though Sasuke had stopped with the 'dobe', and 'usuratonkachi' was a long time ago he realized.

But back to his annoyance. "I'm not using your Kage Bunshin for that. Taijutsu sparring is one thing, but that is something that I absolutely refuse to do."

Naruto turned to look at Ino, who had been watching them, fidgeting under the mounting tension of Sasuke's bad attitude. She didn't seem to understand his disgust with the suggestion either. She had been helping Naruto with his training for the past year, using whatever against his clones. She wasn't the same as Sasuke and didn't have his experiences so it wasn't shocking that she didn't get it either.

Naruto could make very realistic clones. Even more than Kakashi's. Kakashi's could take a few punches and then poof away. Naruto's Kage Bunshin could get cuts that bled. What kind of damage would a single clone with an ass load of chakra in it, be able to take and then show to all watching?

Sasuke had seen enough dead bodies in his young life and he didn't want to be the cause of seeing Naruto's. He'd come close already, because of those Iwa shinobi, and he didn't want to know or come close to knowing, ever again.

"I'm not killing you and that's final. My training is doing fine on its own."

He couldn't even thank the blond because his gratitude was buried under his aggravation.

He was going to go and destroy a tree in order to get all of his emotions out in a relatively healthy manner. All so he didn't lash out at his friends in the near future.

Uchiha Itachi blinked at the rays of sun that had him sweating beneath his Anbu uniform. But he had to shadow Potta Hari's movements all the way back to the village, as the Daimyo had requested.
After finding the information necessary, he'd been ordered to keep her safe, and she didn't even know he was behind her.

She hadn't brought any protection with her save for her Kekkei Genkai. Since he'd been following her for hours without her even knowing, he'd learned that there was a very big weakness to it. It made him uncomfortable to know that she had such an opening around her at all times.

Now he could understand why Kakashi-senpai was so tense lately. He cared to an extent and it was dangerous to have feelings for people when in a profession like theirs. And the fact that she'd been kidnapped right under their noses and her Kekkei Genkai couldn't help at the time, made it worse.

And the Uzumaki boy hadn't been blind to the realization either, which in turn affected his team. Which meant that even Sasuke was on edge recently, which wasn't good. His little brother was a bit… of a brooder, and he could brood for days without issue.

So basically, with Potta Hari either unhappy or not safe, no one who knew her was happy.

That kind of power over others was dangerous, and she didn't know she had it. Itachi was not so foolish as to assume that their enemies would never find out about it either. It was only a matter of time before someone - perhaps even Madara - stepped up and decided to target her to get at one of them.

He wasn't looking forward to it.

Kakashi could honestly say that he thrived on pissing off people. There was just something amazing in annoying others and seeing them lose their composure, that he found it to be an entertaining pastime. Which was why he exaggerated his tall tales for why he was late to important meetings, and why he pretended to be ignorant of what was going on around him.

If only his friends and students realized what he was doing, then they would know not to overreact to everything he did. But luckily for him, they were none the wiser and he continued to have free amusement on a daily basis. It would be years before anyone but the Hokage caught on to him.

On this day, he had successfully frustrated no only his cute little Genin, but also Anko and Kurenai who had been making plans to visit the village gates in hopes of catching Hari's return to the village, and Asuma and Tenzo. Gai was fine with everything. Basically, Kakashi wanted to be the one to see Hari first, for a reason he hadn't yet managed to suss out, and he decided to mess with everyone in order to get his way and have a good excuse.

So he might have orchestrated a small competition between the Genin teams he had connections to through his friends, in order to get all of their attention on that while he slipped away. And he had a Kage Bunshin standing in for him, and no one had noticed, which worked well in his favor.

The annoyance came from his very sudden - to them at least - desire for a competition between the Genin in order to test their skills. Things usually went better when planned ahead of time but Kakashi had waited to inform anyone of his plan, so the last minute detail caused some frustration. And since a free team meal was on the line and everyone loved free food because for some reason it just tasted better, they all rushed to learn the details of his competition.

So Kakashi, Kurenai, Asuma, Anko, Gai, and Tenzo all informed their Genin of the competition they'd be partaking in. And of course the last minute notice made their kawaii little Genin angry.

It was glorious!
Basically, the competition wouldn't be so bad, if the details didn't involve the Shi no Mori and a simulation Chunin Exam modeled after an Exam Konoha hosted when Kakashi was a Genin. With Kakashi's own devious twists of course. Despite what everyone thought, he'd actually planned everything out already and had gotten Hokage-sama's permission to make the Genin suffer all in the name of training.

The Genin had forty-eight hours to transport a scroll to the tower in the center of Konoha's most deadly training area. In addition, they couldn't ruin it.

The only true problem in Kakashi's eyes was the fact that there was only one scroll, and that only one team would get it before entering the training area. They would have to battle it out in the forest, within the allotted time frame, in order to get their hands on the scroll and then get it to the tower where another Kage Bunshin awaited them. That meant maneuvering through the foliage and the dangerous sections full of man-eating plants, animals, and insects.

And Kakashi had decided to make it even more difficult by giving the scroll to Kurenai's team. This was done to help Hyuga Hinata train her Byakugan and also disadvantage most of the other teams because she would be able to see them coming and her team would have time to plan an attack. However, with Gai's team and her cousin as opposition, it also put them at risk because Hyuga Neji was a prodigy with better skills than the Hyuga Heiress.

Kakashi loved to cause drama.

No death or dismemberment or permanent injury were allowed though. All were an automatic forfeit and a demotion though he didn't mention that part. Certain rules were not to be disobeyed. He supported free-thought, but only to a point.

The losing teams would have to put in an amount of money so the winning team could go out to dinner. Kakashi might have cheated with his further rules though, because he'd basically made it so that they could not walk on the trees or physically touch them at all, and then each team would be tied together by extending rope that afforded about twenty feet of space between the member in the middle and their friends.

He'd already forced his Genin into training like this, so they had the upper hand already on how to work as a cohesive unit while being forced to follow his egregious demands. The other Genin weren't so fortunate.

There was plenty faith in Team Seven to win the challenge. After all, he'd been preparing them for scenarios such as this for months. It was the whole reason he didn't enter them in the last Chunin Exams. He also needed them out of his hair for a while and what better way than to distract them all?

And when Naruto got home, Hari would be there, no doubt with food on the table, ready to welcome him home.

It was the perfect welcome home present.

The lazy Jonin was casually perched in a tree near the gate that Hari preferred to use when she had to leave the village. He had been there for an hour thanks to Hari's cousin, who informed him that she'd been back within the next few hours and would be happy to see him.

He still didn't know how her being a Seer worked, but he was thankful. It had to be a dreadfully useful skill.

His ears picked up her gait before his eye did. He'd gotten used to her whisper-like walking and
noticed it immediately. When he looked up, his eye landed on the figure that was steadily growing larger and larger as it got nearer to the gate. And Izumo and Kotetsu called out to the young woman cheerfully, waving her on and asking after her health.

She came back uninjured this time. It was a beautiful sight to behold.

On the side, he made note of the presence not too far behind her, that flared its chakra briefly to announce itself to the shinobi at the gate. Itachi. Interesting.

Kakashi waited for her to sign in, before appearing at her side with a well-placed Shunshin. He also might have enjoyed how she jumped and lashed out in an attempt to smack the offender. Of course it was an attempt because he'd caught her hand before her strike could make contact, and smirked at her when the realization of her actions finally caught up with her. He so did love to fuck with people.

"Merlin, you scared the hell out of me, Kashi!" she sighed, shoulders heaving with obvious relief. He found himself missing when she teasingly referred to him as a puppy. But he also really liked that she had begun to say his name and had even started using a diminutive of it. Such a conundrum he found himself in.

"I figured you could use some company as the Genin will be busy for the next couple of days. Since they are training in preparation for the Chunin Exams, you get only my glorious presence for now."

She looked up at him, amusement sparkling in her green eyes. A shade of which that he'd never seen in anyone or anything else before and had difficulty describing. But it was unique and beautiful and he only just noticed how striking it was against her very pale skin and dark hair.

They could probably glow in the dark even. In fact, he was sure they could and wondered if he could test that assumption sometime soon.

Hari smiled up at him, all warmth and maybe even fondness. "That's a very generous offer. I'm shocked that you came up with it all on your own."

He shrugged and turned to allow her to pass him as she headed into the village. He followed right along of course, keeping up with her quick strides easily thanks to his longer legs. "Generosity is a skill I am well-versed in, Hari-hime."

The woman sent him a look. "You don't have to call me princess, you know. It may be a title of mine but I don't embody it in the least. And I would just prefer that you'd say my name as it is. It makes our communication feel more real and less like you're kissing my arse to get something from me."

Would it be odd for him to say that that topic totally came out of nowhere? Because it definitely did.

"Did something bad happen during your trial?"

She shrugged. "The usual crap with nobility. And it isn't like it was horrible or anything. I thrive on manipulation and using my cunning to get what I want. It's just the whole having to pretend for such lengthy periods of time is aggravating. I'm not as nice as people assume I am and having to act innocent and sweet for hours in front of a body of grown individuals who think I'm some ignorant lamb, was taxing in more ways than one."

Hari shook her head, eyes wide as she remembered whatever happened in Tanzaku Gai. "Sayori's nefarious actions spread over two decades worth of drama. And having to take the higher road in order to gain favor in the eyes of my peers, by giving away my chance at revenge, was in both parts ridiculous, and stressful."
"Basically, she had at least one person from each noble family in the court, killed. As such, with me giving up my desire for personal revenge, the families must discuss what punishment they think is necessary since there are so many to choose from, and then we will return in a fortnight in order to debate on which is best. Meanwhile, Sayori will remain imprisoned until her sentence is carried out."

He blinked a few times in order to make sure he got everything correct.

Hari's attacker put hits on members of the other nobles of Hi no Kuni's court. Hari gave up the chance to choose the woman's punishment to better her reputation among her fellows. She hadn't wanted to in reality but knew favoritism would benefit her later on, so she sucked it up and dealt with it.

She had to spend several hours in a courtroom, pandering to massive egos and political powers, and pretending to be delicate and basically the stereotype of women that people wanted to popularize. And she had hated every moment of it even though it got her something the end.

Another reason for Kakashi to hate dealing with nobles. It was always appearances to them. And Hari had played her part very well it seemed, since she came out on top.

"Since you seem a bit stressed, how about I treat you to dinner?" he offered. Food was good. It always worked to calm people down too. And her having to go home and cook for herself after all of that seemed a tad unfair.

She side-eyed him pretty hard. "Are you actually going to pay? I've heard enough of Naruto's complaining to know that you don't often pay for anything and somehow manage to slip away before the bill comes."

He pretended to be offended, and placed a gloved hand over his heart. Distantly, he realized that his hands were free because he hadn't pulled Icha Icha out once in the last hour. Interesting.

"I am appalled that you would not trust my generous offer, Hari," he said, making sure that her name came out clearly and smoothly as she had wished. "Did we not determine that generosity is practically my name and lifestyle?"

The Potta Head snickered and grabbed his free hand, tugging him forward insistently. "Since you're being oh so generous, I think I'd like to sample that new place in the upper district if you don't mind. Something about the entire set up fascinates me and I've only only been a similar establishment once before."

Kakashi did in no way mind the physical contact, and even approved of her choice of restaurant. He allowed himself to be towed along, amused by her attitude. And he was pleased to know that she had accepted his offered distraction so willingly. She most likely knew that he was trying to distract her to begin with.

And to think, he actually preferred this to Icha Icha.

Speaking of...

"I almost forgot to tell you, but there will be an Icha Icha film coming soon."

Her head snapped around - and he briefly was impressed by how she skillfully dodged people without even looking where she was going - and her eyes widened almost comically. "Are you serious?"

He hummed, thinking back to his team's last mission. "Team Seven’s last client is starring in it. The
same actress who played Fuun-hime in the film Naruto and Karin took you to. She's the Daimyo to Yuki no Kuni now and her real name is Kazahana Koyuki."

Hari faced forward again, resuming her tugging on his hand while she mumbled, 'badass' in an almost frustrated manner. As he thought, she was interested. So she would definitely want to see the Icha Icha film with him. Right?

"Sometimes I really think sensei has it in for us," said Ino as her team ran through the forest. "Why was this necessary?"

"There is a lesson to be learned in all of this," stated Sasuke softly. "The Chunin Exams will be similar in difficulty so we should familiarize ourselves with the objectives and requirements. Also, sensei seemed to be a bit preoccupied while explaining, so he probably didn't think everything through."

Naruto grumbled about how unfair it was and something about wanting to crush Kiba. And considering how they'd been very, very competitive in the Academy, it wasn't shocking to hear.

"Now we at least get to prove ourselves," Ino added with a pleasant tone. "He's been teaching us to deal with things like this so out of the teams here, we have more experience in the training as well as in dangerous missions. This should be a bit easier for us."

"True," her boys agreed.

And free food was on the line. Ino had slowly gotten over her reluctance to eat larger servings of food thanks to Hari-chan's cooking. And with all the work she was doing in training and missions, she needed to eat more. And food was better over those annoying pills, any day. Also, not having to spend their own money would be great!

"So why exactly are the kids going to be gone for a few days?" Hari asked once she and Kakashi were seated at Teppanyaki. And she had easily taken note of the fact that they were placed in a more secluded section of the building, out of the eye of most people, in the far back. Kakashi probably had privacy issues.

She could understand. She had then too, but probably to a smaller degree since she wasn't a shinobi.

Though having such a wide bar all to themselves and the single cook in front of them was a bit weird, but to each their own.

Kakashi, who had yet to pull out one of his many copies of Icha Icha, she noted, folded his arms atop the counter and huffed a laugh. "Drills for the Chunin Exams. Free food is on the line, so they and the other Genin teams are working their cute little butts off to avoid paying for a large bill for the winning team."

He was devious and she couldn't help but smirk. "And since you're the only sensei who has been giving them lessons on how to survive in Tetsu no Kuni, there is a high chance your team will be victorious."

His head cocked to the side almost like a dog, and she was struck by how cute it was. She didn't usually think of grown men as cute, but hey, there was a first time for everything. She couldn't even see his entire face and the action was still adorable! Weird.

"Now how would you know about that, Hari?" he asked teasingly.
"Naruto and Ino complain a lot," she murmured with a shrug. "Liberating objects from people, sneaking in and out of buildings unnoticed, breaking laws and not getting caught, how to fight for prolonged periods of time on water, Elemental Manipulation so early on, and of course the ever despised horizontal training they haven’t stopped whinging about."

The Potter Lady would swear up and down that the Jonin snickered. "Admit it. You're masking your protectiveness with cunning and apparently evil actions."

He made no move to deny her accusations, and she was amazed at how much emotion a single eye and eyebrow could convey even though the rest of his face was covered. That took incredible skill and probably many years of having to get used to it. She was impressed.

They broke eye contact in order to place their orders, cherry-picking everything they preferred. Hari was especially excited because she'd only seen a hibachi used once before and it was always awesome to witness people who were skilled at their chosen craft, in their element. Dinner and a show.

"Would you be able to do any of this?" she asked the man at her right, curious. He was a shinobi and they had all kinds of skills with blades.

She got a shake of the head. "I am not the best of cooks. I know the basics and prefer to stick to easy to make meals if I'm not eating out. To be honest there isn't much time to spend my time cooking all of my meals to begin with, so half of them are ration bars."

A frown spread across her face as she was filled with disgust. "So the only full meals you really get are when you and the team stay for dinner twice a week?" As in he was not getting the proper amount of food and nutrition on a daily basis?

"Um… you could say that," he admitted with obvious discomfort over how intently she was staring him down.

"I'll simply have to teach you some things that can be prepared easily if you dedicate enough preparation at the beginning of the week."

"You don't have to-"

She sent him a fierce glare. "Don't argue," she ordered. "I get that being a shinobi is a lot of time and energy but you honestly need to eat more than ration bars. They might replace food, but aren't enough to truly keep you healthy. Take it from someone who spent years without getting full meals, it begins to show, and fixing the side effects takes forever."

Ration bars had the vitamins and supplements the human body needed most, plus man-made energy supplements to give people a boost. Their contents were to be eaten with a cup of water and the water would be absorbed by the bar which would then swell upon contact and simulate a full feeling. It was dangerous to replace more then three meals with ration bars because they offered no actual nutrition.

She had made sure to check after Ino's initial revelation of her 'special diet'.

Kakashi didn't argue any further thankfully, though he did ask, "When would there be time?"

"We'll make time. You can't be on the clock all the time. You even have days off, so we'll handle it when it comes. Also, you can make Kage Bunshin too, right?"

It was a sound plan in her mind at least. And the look of bewilderment in his lone eye made her feel
smug. She'd get him eating properly soon enough.

Speaking of food. "The kids would like food after their time training, right?" Most people would.

"Are you going to feed all six teams?" Kakashi asked, sounding incredulous, not that she could blame him. That was a lot of people, but she'd hosted the same amount before.

She just needed permission from the other parents and guardians. Anko and Tenzo's teams already lived in the orphanage so they were accounted for. So that would leave Nara Shikaku, Akimichi Chouza, Inuzuka Tsume, Hyuga Hiashi, Aburame Shibi, Haruno Mebuki, and…

"Who are the guardians of Rock Lee and TenTen?" she asked upon realising that she did not know.

"Rock Lee is an orphan though Gai has taken up guardianship of him and Gai will gladly join your dinner. As for TenTen, her family owns Konoha's best weapons distributor. Her mother figure is Ren. None of them are related to each other but being close friends for so long, they call themselves family and when a child like TenTen is adopted into the fold, they are included immediately."

She blinked a few times. "Both are from outside Konoha, aren't they?" Otherwise there would be records of them in the orphanage and none such records existed, so they were adopted pretty quickly. Or… the idiot before Hari made no notes of anything.

"Yes, though Lee came with his grandparents. They passed on and Gai ended up taking over as his guardian so he wouldn't be sent to the orphanage. It was their dying wish that the boy be taken care of properly and Gai, who had been a friend, decided to help."

Aw. And suddenly Maito Gai shot up tonnes of points in her mental book. It would all explain why Rock Lee felt like imitating the man so much. And it was so sweet of him too!

"How are he and his team by the way?" If she remembered, Team Seven had to go and rescue them on their last mission. And rescues were not usually good things.

Kakashi was interrupted by the two plates set before them. They'd ended up missing the fun part because they'd been leaning too close, talking intently for several minutes. Damn it. Hari was intent on getting more just so she could see it next time.

"Itadakimasu!" they chorused, pulling their chopsticks apart. And yes, Naruto had taught Hari how to use them months and months ago. And she felt so proud over being able to pick up a single grain of rice. If she ever filled out another questionnaire, that would go under her list of skills, because she considered it one.

"Team Gai is fine. The mission went off without a hitch and things happened. Things involving Sasuke's little infatuation with Naruto, if you're curious."

"Oh, spill!" She made no comment about how quickly his food was disappearing. As for her kids...

They were growing up so quickly!

"Naruto didn't notice a thing, right?" After all, he was kind of dense and didn't realise that people liked him. Such as Hyuga Hinata. He hadn't noticed her feelings either. Hari had seen it within seconds of watching the girl watch her little brother.

Kakashi's firm shake of the head had her sighing. Of course. But she had hope! At least Sasuke seemed to be getting it and was acting accordingly. One step closer.
"He and Naruto ended up sharing a sleeping bag."

Merciful Merlin.

They were outside a large field, just within the bushes to keep as hidden as possible. It was the best cover they could find at present after Hinata had gone ahead and reconnoitered the area. They were in close together because the ropes wouldn't let them separate all that much.

Sakura cleared her throat. "Kakashi-sensei gave our team the scroll. That's in equal parts good and bad. Hinata can see everyone coming, but her cousin can also find us and his team is much older. TenTen is very good with weapons, and Lee is so fast he doesn't need to sneak up on you to surprise you. Another problem is that Shikamaru's team will no doubt find us fast as well because they have Kiba's nose, and the intellect of two of the smartest boys from our graduating class."

Hinata shivered as the reality of the situation hit them all. Choji simply looked annoyed as he slowly ate his chips. Probably because he once again did not have the amount of food necessary and he was hungry and was attempting to prolong the life of the bag in his hands. As she had learned, it was a part of the Akimichi blood to be like that.

"But then Ino's team has Sasuke who was the best of the boys, and Ino who was Top Kunoichi. Naruto can also make physical clones of himself and they can swarm or so I've been told. That is another problem. As for Karina's team, I don't know much about them other than the fact that they each possess amazing skills at something specific to them and Karina can regenerate people's limbs. And the Honda siblings are a mystery entirely so we cannot assume with them."

So what did they do when faced with these kind of odds? None of the scenarios her mind came up with, were good. The best thing she could think of, was to just rush to the tower and hope that Hinata could keep her Byakugan up the entire time.

But it was a draining technique, so it wouldn't be healthy to keep it activated for hours on end. What if it hurt Hinata in the long run?

"S-Sakura," the Hyuga heiress began, seeming only slightly panicked now, "We have each been growing stronger. I have expanded the radius of my Byakugan, and have finally learned Kaiten. Choji has worked closely with Ino and Shikamaru in these past few months, so he would know how to handle their fighting styles. And your Iryo-Ninjutsu has improved drastically when you apply it to your Taijutsu. We are not a weak team."

That was true. Sakura and Hinata had been taking Tsunade-sama's medical course and had been advancing really well for beginners. Ino was also in the class and was ahead of them, but Karina was also in the class and she was ahead of all of them thanks to prior medical experience. But this meant that they knew each other's abilities to an extent and could prepare accordingly.

And then Hinata had been training even more since their time in Mizu no Kuni. She'd been put on a sub-squad with Naruto and Sasuke and had spoken about her experience when fighting alongside them. And her crush on Naruto did not prevent her from explaining everything. Both were more of a threat than any of the Genin truly knew. They just didn't brag about it.

No one was going in completely blind here. Even though the Honda siblings and their sensei weren't well-known to everyone, Sakura had been able to tell that they were very skilled and should be avoided at all costs.

"Who would be the easiest team for us to fight should it come down to a battle?" Sakura asked, mind
trying to sort through all the possible moves they could make against each individual team.

"Shikamaru's team," said Choji. "He's my best friend, but he is lazy and he wouldn't care about a free meal. He'd probably hand over the money for it now if he could. And he and Shino got stuck with Kiba who never listens to anyone. Kiba's like a louder Naruto, with a puppy that's equally as rambunctious. Both are easy to rile up and breaking their team formation wouldn't be too difficult."

"Just keep an eye on Shino since his Kikaichu can eat chakra and you'd never realize it until you were drained," Hinata added.

"I suppose that's the best we've got," Sakura agreed peered through the hedges in front of them and taking in the surrounding area, eyes landing on the various plants scattered about. One such plant looked to be in a mini field of weeds, but the yellow bud at the tips said differently. "Hinata, is that a Sleeper I'm looking at?"

The Hyuga turned and looked to where she was pointing. It took her a second, before she nodded. "Yes. A lot of it actually. Perhaps Ino-san's family gets them here."

Sakura smirked then. After all, Sleepers were often used in sedatives for animals. It was especially strong when burned. "I know how to remove Akamaru from the fight should it come down to it. And in the long run, that will make Kiba useless to his team."

"You don't need to come with me," Hari murmured once they left the restaurant. And of course, Koinu-kun had decided to follow her instead of going his own way.

"And leave a beautiful princess to take care of herself at night? I shudder at the thought," he dramatically teased, touching the back of his hand to his hitai-ate for good measure.

She sent him a smirk, mind turning to a devious direction. "Good to know you think I'm beautiful, Kakashi. As for taking care of myself at night, I've been doing that long before you came into the photograph. And as we've yet to spend a night together, I can't miss what I've never had."

Her suggestive words and tone had done the trick. His footsteps beside her halted while she continued to move forward towards the Yamanaka Flower Shop. She knew very well that she had shocked him once again with her audacity and innuendo, and refused to turn just to get a glimpse of his widening eye. She could imagine it well enough, thank you very much.

After all, alluding to the fact that they hadn't slept together wasn't usually something people did in polite company. Of course Hari felt they were beyond that at this point. What with the visiting each other in the hospital, eating dinner together dozens of times, and bantering over their favourite Icha Icha chapters, they were no longer in the acquaintance stage of a friendship.

Within seconds he was beside her again, as if he had not taken seven seconds to process exactly what had transpired between them. His hands were still in his pockets, and Icha Icha had not seen the air since he'd picked her up at the village gates.

"I suppose you are correct, Hari."

And that was it. That was all he had to say on the matter. Of course it wasn't like he'd replied every other time she shot a sexual innuendo in his direction, but still. She'd been expecting a bit more.

She was also tempted to admit to herself that she was disappointed.

"So you want him to flirt with you?" Death asked from her other side.
Hari restrained the urge to glare and merely thought, *Bugger off!*

The rest of their walk was spent in silence and she still took note of the fact that it wasn't awkward in the least, and that he still did make a grab for his Icha Icha. She wondered what could have his attention so thoroughly and when she glanced to the side, she found him looking directly at her.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Yep. Nothing always lead Hari to staring at someone for a minute flat. Uh-huh.

The flower shop came into view and she breathed a sigh of relief. And without missing a beat, Kakashi was half a step ahead, opening the door for her and jingling the bell as they stepped inside. It took only a few seconds, before Inoichi appeared at the counter.

"And here I was ready to tell our visitors that the shop is closing in a few minutes," the blond stated with an easy smile. "What can I do for you, Hari-hime, Kakashi?"

Hari sent the man a deeply unimpressed look, and waited stubbornly until he sighed in resignation.

"Hari-chan," he amended.

"Good," she nodded approvingly. Her following comment was caught in her throat when a large group of people consisting of Ino's mother, and whom she would guess to be the Nara and Akimichi family heads. She forgot that they were all friends and tended to visit one another often.

"Hello, Hari-san," said Ino's mother, Yamanaka Ichiko.

"So this is the Hari who Ino-chan is always jabbering on about and who helped Choji's team months ago!" the large man with swirls on his cheeks damn near bellowed. "I'm Akimichi Chouza and this is my wife Akimichi Chizuru! Thank you for being so kind to our Choji and explaining healthier eating habits to him without making him feel terribly about himself."

She remembered the boy. He'd also come to Naruto's birthday party. He always seemed to have food on hand, and from what she knew of his clan, they needed to eat constantly because of their metabolisms. And he'd been no doubt picked on for his weight because people were arseholes. "He's a good kid and if he's physically healthy, his size shouldn't matter. I don't get why strangers feel like it's their business to know about another's weight or health to begin with."

Chizuru smiled a very calm and motherly smile that made Hari think of Molly. "It still means a lot. Anytime you want a good meal, stop by our restaurant, Yakiniku Q. Free of charge for our friends."

She was considered a friend and they didn't even know her very well. All because she showed common decency to a child. Merlin, that was sad as fuck.

The Potta Head turned her attention to Nara Shikaku, whom she had met briefly in passing a few times before thanks to her assistance in T&I with both Yakushi Kabuto and Hoshigaki Kisame. They'd had no connection beyond that, so this could technically be considered their first meeting.

"It's good to see you again, in a more serene setting," the man said quietly. He gestured to the brunette at his side, who looked very much like Shikamaru without the hairdo. "This is my wife, Yoshino."

Yoshino stepped forward and grasped Hari's hand firmly. "It's nice to know you. Shikamaru finds
you to be very interesting and Ino cannot stop regaling us with tales of your training together."

And that was what brought on the flush because Hari did not like to think about her training days because she was still a mess even if her tolerance and stamina had increased dramatically in the past few months. She could only imagine what Ino had told her family. And as for their son, why would he be interested in Hari at all? They’d met maybe once and hadn’t actually spoken at the time.

Ino talking wasn’t a shock since the girl came over for dinner at least once a week with her team. Also, she was still taking time to help Hari practice some hand to hand combat. Ino was exposed to Hari on the regular and probably had a lot to say.

"It's lucky for me that you'll all here. Kakashi decided to impose some special training on the recently formed Genin teams and they won't be finished until Friday. I wanted to get your permission to have your kids over for dinner since I'm planning to feed the 3 teams with kids directly under my care anyway."

She got a collection of nods and agreements.

"It would be good for the children to socialize more," said Chizuru with a small smile. "They all rarely see each other now that they have missions to go on and are rarely all available at once."

Yoshino nodded. "Shikamaru could certainly do with some exposure to other Genin besides those on his team. If possible, he's gotten even more lazy since he graduated." That of course got a range of amused grins from her friends.

Hari made sure to bow in gratitude. "Thank you. Do your children have any allergies I should be aware of?"

Shikaku and Yoshino shook their heads in tandem, while Choza looked at Chizuru expectantly. The woman sighed. "Choji can't have mangos, which is sad because he loves the flavour very much."

She would keep that in mind. "Do any of you know the address of Sakura-san's home? I need to ask her mother for permission next."

Ichiko fetched a pad from the counter and scribbled the address down for her, smiling kindly as she did so.

"Come for a visit any time," said Yoshino, elbowing her husband and sending him a look. He grumbled his agreement, looking too tired to care much about anything.

Yoshino rolled her eyes. "Do you play chess or shogi? Shikaku and Shikamaru love games that challenge your mind and they need a new challenge."

"I know chess," she admitted, proudly for once since she knew she had gotten better over the years. "It would be an honour to play you, Shikaku-sama."

He grunted, but nodded along with his wife elbowed him again.

"Thank you for your time." She turned, jumping when she found Kakashi standing almost directly behind her. "Good Circe, are you trying to give me a bloody heart attack?" she demanded, hand pressed to her chest, feeling her heart pounding in shock.

"I'm just standing here, forgotten, Hari. I have done nothing nefarious," the Jonin said with affected remorse. She was not fooled though. The twinkle in his eye gave him away.
"Uh-huh," was her disbelieving answer. "You can tell me which of the Inuzuka, Hyuga, and Aburame are easiest to deal with, in order to make it up to me."

They headed for the shop door, Kakashi moving once again to hold it open as he said, "The Aburame are the least annoying to deal with, but are very heavily steeped in logic."

"That's fine. I know how to deal with those kinds of people. And since you're so intent upon me knowing about how generous of a being you are, you'll kindly lead me to their compound, yes?" she asked as she slipped past the doorway, him following behind quickly.

"Of course. I could never leave a princess alone when on such an important quest!"

"Yeah, sure."

They continued down the street, and Hari had the oddest feeling they were being watched intently.

"So that is Potta Hari," Yoshino commented as she and Chizuru peeked through the blinds of the shop in order to watch the young woman and Kakashi walk down the street until they were out of sight. And both still watched long after they were gone.

Chizuru giggled, her orange-rimmed eyes crinkling at the corners. "It seems that Ino hasn't just been letting her romantic side take over and blind her. Those two have something deeper than what appears on the surface. Did you notice how he watched her the entire time?"

An affirmative nod came from all of them.

"Anyone notice that Kakashi didn't even have Icha Icha anywhere in sight, despite the fact that both he and Hari-chan apparently adore the series?" Inoichi added with a smirk, sending his wife a wink.

"The boy's got it bad," Ichiko surmised with a firm nod. "Finally. I thought it would never happen. And I might only know her a little, but I approve through what I've seen in person, and what you and Ino have told me."

Inoichi nodded, looking almost nostalgic. "Indeed. She's rather sweet."

"I find it interesting how she plans to ask the parents of all the Genin, for permission to feed them," said Shikaku. "What would make her assume that someone wouldn't be okay with their child getting a free meal after a hard day of work? She has enough trust to be in charge of the orphanage, so what affected her so much to make her think it necessary?"

That sobered all of them up immediately. Indeed. She seemed very intent upon getting permission over something as simple as dinner. She wasn't really a stranger considering her position in most of the Genin's lives. And she was trusted by the Hokage to have a level of control over the next generation of children.

Yoshino tsked, not liking the prospect. Had the young woman perhaps been on the receiving end of family not wanting others to feed her in return for her hard work?

Ino's proposal of childhood abuse didn't seem so farfetched any longer.

"Anyone notice how the two of them practically gravitate toward one another but don't overstep any boundaries?" Chouza proposed quietly. "For Kakashi, observing another's personal space isn't really shocking but for a civilian to be aware and thoughtful enough about it, is impressive."
“Hari-hime is very different from the usual civilian though,” said Inoichi with a shrug. "She understands human nature to an alarming degree and is very interesting to talk to on matters of the mind and emotion. Believe me."

Shikaku’s eyes narrowed but he said nothing. Meanwhile, everyone else sighed.

“What do you know about the Aburame?” asked Kakashi as he lead her to a more deserted section of the village. In fact, she could tell that there were less homes and more forestry than anything else. Apparently, the clan preferred to be surrounded by nature instead of people, not that she blamed them. People were so stressful and always had agendas.

Hari frowned as she wracked her brain for information on the clan in question. Except for the little bits involving how they joined Konoha, thanks to Death deciding to just inundate her mind with information once upon a time, she didn't really know anything. As such, she was displeased to reluctantly admit, "Not much."

Kakashi must have noticed her frown, because he proceeded to say, "Don't worry. Not even I know enough about them. They are a very private clan, both from being quiet thinkers, and from people misconstruing their purpose and livelihood. So they don't really get out much."

"Soooo… in other word, the villagers are judgmental arses for whatever reason," she surmised bluntly, earning a low snicker that she would remember forever.

"Precisely."

The trees seemed to thin a bit, and suddenly the long and winding road they'd been walking on, stopped at a very large, stone wall. The stones were grey and were very small, meaning it had to have taken ages in order to form the wall in its entirety.

"They much appreciate their privacy," Kakashi told her as he reached up and tapped a few times on one of the small stones jutting out toward them. Suddenly, a large portion of the wall sank into the ground and Kakashi motioned for her to step inside, where she could see houses that she could not see from the other side of the wall. And the wall was only around 20 cm. taller than she, and she was only 161 cm. in height.

Sending Kakashi a questioning look, he mumbled, "Fuinjutsu," with a shrug of the shoulder.

The property stretched out for several hundred meters, before ending in what appeared to be a rounded cul de sac. The homes were all of earthen shades and were more traditional in architecture. Each building had sprawling plant life that managed to be tidy in its own way, and also made her envious. She suddenly wanted a full-sized garden very much. And Hari was pretty decent at Herbology thanks to years of working on Petunia's garden.

Her attention was taken by a small tickle on her left hand, and peering down, she found a small beetle-like insect with dark blue eyes.

Since she was Hari Potter and never did the expected, she reached over and trailed her finger over its bumpy spine, causing the insect to wiggle. And oddly enough, her magic reacted to it. It took maybe three seconds for her to realise that she was leaking magic and the beetle was eating it.

What kind of bugs eat magic?

Her internal musings were cut off when she noticed a black form descending onto Kakashi’s back. And Kakashi was only about a foot in front of her so she found herself face to face with a very large
arachnid. An arachnid that had been in the tree they'd walked under. An arachnid that she would swear was eying her beetle up like it was dinner.

Glaring, she scooped the small creature into her other palm in order to shield it from the eight-eyed gaze of a would-be predator. "Don't even think about it."

Both the spider and Kakashi responded though with different answers.

While the spider gave a few clicks of its pincers in annoyance, Kakashi turned to look at her and asked, "What?"

"Not you, the spider."

There was a second where he said nothing, but did stop walking, making her almost kiss said arachnid from nearly bumping into him.

"Spider?"

"Yeah, the one on your back. I assumed you noticed since the body is as big as my palm." Literally, it was bloody huge.

"Ehhh…"

She smirked then, wondering if perhaps she'd just gotten some dirt on the normally aloof shinobi. "Do you not like spiders?" As in, was he terrified of spiders?

Kakashi settled for, "I don't hate them." Though it was very quiet, so she was certain he was actually scared to an extent.

Taking pity on him, she held up her free hand and sent the creature a stern look. "I will be displeased if you do anything beyond crawl on me, you hear?"

There were some clicks, but the spider departed, plopping into her hand and proving that the damn thing was indeed heavy and she had to wonder how Kakashi hadn't felt it land on him. It also felt like mini needles were stabbing her with every step it took.

When Kakashi caught sight of what she was talking about, he turned a little more pale from what she could see of his skin. Considering most of his face was covered, it wasn't much to go on. "How?" he asked almost blandly.

She shrugged, remembering days when all she had as entertainment were dancing spiders in her cupboard. "I simply had creatures of the many legged variety visiting my room a lot when I was little. We can continue on now, I'll keep you safe because I am just that nice."

He made a noise of agreement and started walking again, hands still in his pockets in what appeared to be perfect calm. If his slight twitching every few seconds didn't give him away, she'd have been fooled.

Finally, they came to the largest house at the very end of the cul de sac, where several people in coats were scattered about. She only met Aburame Shino once, and hadn't made any assumptions about his family from there. Apparently the sunglasses and heavy coats that obstructed their appearance was a clan choice in clothing. To each their own. Though she had to wonder if they were dying of heat since Hi no Kuni was nothing but hot all the time.

"Kakashi-san," said a man who stepped forward. His voice was raspy instead of deep. The collar of
his coat covered up to his sparse mustache and his glasses were thin and had a small tassel dangling from the left side. His hair was short and spiked in every direction and from what she could see of his face, he looked strict. "It isn't often we have a visit from you."

The Jonin gave the man a nod of recognition. "A friend of mine wanted to meet you, Shibi-san. This is Potta Hari, Head of the Potta Clan," he said with a flourish of the arm, stepping aside so Hari could be in full view. Hari, who was holding a large arse spider like it was a party favour and probably looking nothing like the head of any clan should look after walking back to the village all day in the sweltering heat of Hi no Kuni's coming winter temperature.

"Hello, Aburame-sama," she began awkwardly, wondering how to word her request without sounding creepy or looking mad. "So… Kakashi made all the new Genin go into the Shi no Mori for a simulation Chunin Exam for the next two days, and I'm planning to make a large dinner for all the teams involved, but I wanted to get your permission for your son to come."

Yeah, that sounded decent. Also, it put partial blame on Kakashi just in case. She knew how to play the game even if it was troublesome at times.

The man's glasses seemed to flash and made her feel like she was being studied under a microscope. There was silence between them for what felt like forever, before he gave an almost imperceptible nod of agreement, his spiked hair jiggling a bit. "That would be acceptable, Potta-hime."

She beamed at him and bowed deeply from the waist. "Thank you! Does he have any allergies?"

"Honeydew."

She winced in pity. Poor kid would never get to experience the wonders of the melon. At least it wasn't something super delicious. Like honey.

Some clicking got her attention and she glanced down at the spider still in her palm. Said spider was looking up at her as if waiting on her to do something. "Well what do you want me to do?"

More clicks.

"Sorry, but almost fifty children are under my purview and none of them like anything with more than four legs, and you have twice that amount. It would be a recipe for disaster."

Aburame Shibi stepped forward then. "Do you actually understand him?" the man inquired, his perfect - seriously, it wasn't fair! - eyebrows arched in what she assumed was shock.

"Yes. It's an ability that randomly crops up in my family. Some members get more than the usual Kekkei Genkai and speaking to creatures is just another skill. My cousin is a Seer. My other cousin was able to change her physical form at will. It's all very random on when it appears in the line."

"Interesting."

Hari then tugged on the collar of her shirt and called, "Alright everyone, I have to leave now so you need to go home."

She knew she hadn't been imagining the wisps of her magic that seeped out despite her tight control, draining away. And she was proven correct in her assumption when several little beetle creatures flew out from under her shirt and swarmed on Aburame Shibi, who somehow managed to look shocked even with his face covered so much.

"It was nice meeting you, Aburame-sama. Kakashi, should we deal with the Inuzuka or Hyuga
next?"

Kakashi, who seemed thrilled to finally be acknowledged again, shrugged. "It depends. Rowdy canines or silent judgment from afar?"

They shared a look and then nodded together. "The dogs."

As they left the Aburame Compound, she had to ask, "Do you think I'd be allowed to pet any of the dogs?"

"Maybe. They are ninken or ninken in training though, so it might not be preferable."

Fooey!

"I didn't know what to expect from Potta Hari, but Shino's description did not do her justice," Shibi murmured to his nearest clansmen, who was nodding fervently, which was the closest thing to excitable that an Aburame could get. While not vocal about it, they still showed their emotions well enough.

"She is unorthodox at best," Shiki stated, his glasses flashing in the light of the sun. "She did not move to kill any of the Kikaichu, despite knowing they were inside her clothing and most likely touching her."

Indeed. She also handled the spider as if it was a common occurrence for her to be confronted with eight legged beings of that size. And she proceeded to speak to the insects as the intelligent life forms they were, instead of just common nuisances like most people did.

His son had described Uzumaki Naruto's birthday party as very different from all others he found himself invited to. There were actual games. It was geared toward making the children and teens happy instead of pleasing decades of ridiculous tradition and old people. And Potta Hari had made sure everyone got to participate.

Uzumaki had been relentless in making sure his former classmates all had a good time, meaning Shino was dragged into every game they played, got to interact with his peers who didn't think ill of him simply for what his clan was known for, and actually enjoyed himself for the sake of fun. Rarely did the important clans do anything for fun during celebrations. It was always posturing and pandering depending on who you spoke to.

Potta Hari did not use it as an opportunity to brag about her clan's wealth or status. Despite attending the Yamanaka Heiress' birthday celebration and showing up everyone with her strange gift, she did not play the same game when it was her own charge. Meaning she knew how to do it and when to do it, but didn't think it important. It spoke volumes of her character.

And that was why she had added, 'no need to brings gifts' on the RSVP for Uzumaki's party.

People brought them anyway, according to Shino, but the thought was what mattered. Neither Potta nor Uzumaki were materialistic, nor did they place value in things outside of affection and companionship.

All of these points, and what he and his clansmen had observed in those few moments, aided her image. She'd gone from mysterious, to mysterious and respected.

Her reaction to the insects touched them all the most. And her thoughtfulness on making sure she didn't accidentally feed their heir the incorrect food, touched them even more so. And to know that
"I saw which team has the scroll," said Neji as he and his team made their way through the thickness of the forest, dodging tree roots at the like. "My cousin's team was entrusted with it, and it'll be easy to remove it from their care. The other teams are concerning however. Uzumaki single-handedly defeated Kazahana Doto whom we could not win against. Tenzo-sensei's team is unknown. The Nara is brilliant no doubt. Potta Karina is apparently a good enough medic to heal mass injuries in seconds. If we get the scroll fast, we can hurry ahead to the tower and avoid all of them completely."

"Yosh!" Lee bellowed, earning force glares from both he and TenTen. "We shall defeat our youthful comrades and demonstrate the power of Gai-sensei's teachings!"

TenTen huffed and murmured blandly, "Yeah, sure. Youth and stuff. Woo."

Neji's Byakugan had a wide distance for his age. He could see everything without a two kilometer radius from his position, though the further out things were, the more fuzzy they became. Still, it was a good distance and definitely far more than what Hinata could accomplish, he was certain. She didn't have his drive to better herself and she was weak.

He could see the tower at the very edges of his vision and knew that if they ran through the night they'd make it easily. Then they'd plan an ambush. They could most likely handle anyone who came at them. It was a shame the trees were off limits.

"TenTen!" Lee called, "is that ninja wire?"

And all of a sudden Neji's eyes noticed the very small and thin pieces of metal up ahead, surrounding the trees. There wasn't enough to impede normal vision, but it was growing darker so spotting them was more difficult. But they were there, and they continued on for quite a ways into the dense leaves.

TenTen looked around, stopping in order to catch her breath and give the area a better look over. Wires were spread here and there, but no weapons appeared to be visible. If it was supposed to be a trap, it was a poorly done one in Neji's opinion. A Doujutsu user wouldn't be so easily fooled by such abysmal planning.

His teammates eyed the wires closely, and TenTen reached out to run a finger along one. It came away wet and a bit greasy.

"It's covered in oil," she breathed in a cross between confusion and awe.

And that was when Neji spotted a rock in the distance, turning into Uchiha Sasuke.

"Run!" he screamed.

It was too late. A stream of flames escaped the Rookie's mouth and every wire was set ablaze immediately in a flaming web of destruction, making Team Gai scramble in order to get away as that whole section of the forest was destroyed.

Damn. So the trap wasn't as poor as he assumed as he deactivated his Byakugan to save his eyes from the brightness. The newbies weren't playing around either.

"Fireworks! YES!" Anko roared in triumph, throwing her hands up in a big cheer. Her mad cackle followed soon after as she watched a section of her favorite training ground light up so beautifully. At least the Genin took it seriously.
She licked her lips, unable to withhold the urge to gloat. Her Genin were training in there specifically, so they had the advantage over all of them. She might even have shed a tear of pride!

And maybe she'd get some when this was all over as well.

"So are they cute dogs?" asked Hari as she and Kakashi neared the Inuzuka Compound.

He gave a shrug of the left shoulder. "It depends on what you'd consider cute. Some are larger than humans, some are incredibly small. Some have smushed faces and others have very long snouts. Each person has a preference so it's hard to say. Just don't pull any tails or ears you see and it should be relatively peaceful as far as excitable animals go."

Hari was rather fond of canines. Resisting the urge to pet them would be hard, especially if there would be as many dogs as she imagined thanks to the clan's preferred fighting style.

The Inuzuka didn't live too far away from the Aburame, but they were also outside the scope of the main part of the village. She would assume it had to do with their superior senses. Loud noises and bad smells probably permeated the air a good ways in every direction, so they probably distanced themselves as a precautionary action.

What if they had their ninken pee on every tree in the area? She glanced around, noting that there were an arse load of trees to pee on. But if they did that, would it help them drown out all the other scents that were unpleasant?

The compound was a lot different than with Aburame. The first big difference, was the lack of a wall. The entire area was open and full of all sorts of plants and grasses. Just wide, open fields for ninken to train in. It was perfect.

The houses were not like the Aburame homes had been either. In fact, that main building seemed to be at the very top of a large hill that was sort of shaped like a dog, and the rest of the homes were scattered further down and among the plain. And she could see dogs everywhere the closer they got!

So many breeds and she barely withheld the urge to squeal. Kakashi's advice rang through her mind though, and she refrained from going after any of the adorable faces she saw, or the wagging tails that demanded attention she could obviously provide.

Hari had met Inuzuka Kiba when she'd talked to Asuma's team, and then briefly at Naruto's birthday party, and the boy had been decent. He was rambunctious, but had manners when the situation called for it. It was just that most situations didn't call for manners, and she really didn't care all too much so long as he wasn't deliberately rude.

His ninken Akamaru had been adorable too.

"I don't think I've mentioned this, but I hate hills," she said as they began to ascend toward the main Inuzuka residence. She understood the reason for its placement, but it was killing her. Walking on a flat surface for hours was far more preferable than having to walk up an incline of any sort for any amount of time.

"You might be shocked to hear this, but I kind of picked that up months ago," said Kakashi, voice light and amused as he easily strolled along beside her. For just a split second, she envied his shinobi training. But only for a second, because then she remembered what else it entailed and decided she was good as she was.

Any further comment was halted when a massive, black and white hound appeared on the hill before
them. She could assume, based on the speed of the manoeuvre, that it was a ninja hound. And the
fact that it wore an eye-patch meant it wasn't a normal dog. Unlike the other ninken she'd seen thus
far, this one resembled a wolf. And it was missing the left ear, the poor thing.

Kakashi bowed a bit from the waist and greeted the canine. "Hello, Kuromaru. This is Potta Hari of
the Potta Clan. She has come to ask Tsume a question in regards to her son."

The yellow eye of the creature narrowed, never once leaving Hari's face. She felt as if she was being
evaluated, and was certain that the dog understood human language very well.

It stepped closer, until Hari was forced to look it directly eye to eye. The top of its shaggy head
reached her collarbone, and the eye was unnerving when in such close proximity. She could see
stripes of orange in the various striations within.

Kuromaru took several deep breaths through the nose, going through Hari's scent.

"She checks out," came a deep, rumbling voice from the canine.

Her jaw dropped. The dog could talk. Talking dogs were a literal thing here! Everything just got so
much better!

The urge to hug said dog was difficult to ignore. While she didn't hate other animals or anything,
Sirius had made her a bit biased to dogs in general. And here she was, surrounded by them, and she
couldn't pet any of them! It was torture!

"Come on," Kuromaru ordered, setting off for the house at the top of the hill.

"Can you please just Shunshin us there?" Hari asked, turning her instantly watering eyes on Kakashi
and making sure to let her lip stick out a little more than necessary. Her puppy dog eyes were
something to be admired, even at her age. Why should she stop doing it just because she was older?
It still got her what she wanted in the end and was useful.

Kakashi became her favourite person for that second as he placed his arm around her waist and told
her to hold on to him. A nauseating second later, and they were at the top of the hill, surrounded by
more intense-looking dogs than before, that did not attack on sight. Probably because they heard her
ask him for help.

"My hero!" she simpered, patting his arm and stepping back a bit. "I'll make you something as
compensation for your troubles."

"Helping beautiful princesses is what I do," he sighed dramatically. "I've seemed to develop a talent
for it."

"Well what do we have here!?"

Both straightened at the commanding tone, though Hari could tell Kakashi wasn't doing so out of
necessity, but respect. Hari on the other hand, felt compelled to listen to the woman coming toward
them. She looked a lot like Kiba, but with longer hair that seemed to defy gravity like a massive
mane. Her markings were much longer than her son's though, and her lips were tinted magenta.

Kuromaru followed behind her, keeping to her left side and not bothering to sit when they came to a
stop.

"I'm Inuzuka Tsume, Head of the clan. Sorry about not getting a chance to officially meet you before
this."
She reminded Hari very much of Anko. They were the same height, and had similar temperaments. Wild, unabashed amusement at the world around them. Probably had the same sort of ferocity that was barely contained for the sake of others.

Hari bowed deeply. "I'm Potta Hari, and I am just as guilty of not coming to see you sooner. Apologies."

"Nah, it's all fine! What can I help you with?"

She appeared to be more laid back and didn't observe the same formalities that Hari had come to expect when dealing with higher ranking individuals, be they civilian and shinobi alike. It was very obvious that Kiba got his attitude from his mother and liked to emulate her, and Hari found that to be adorable.

"Kakashi here, decided that he was going to put the rookie Genin through a simulation Chunin Exams in the Shi no Mori. I'll be making a big dinner for everyone, and wanted to get permission from the guardians of the children before just assuming they can come along."

Tsume's slitted eyes trailed over to Kakashi, who shrugged. "It'll prepare them for Tetsu no Kuni. And there's a free team meal on the line for the winning team, in which the others have agreed to pay."

"I like it!" Tsume announced with a sharp nod. "It's good for them to get some experience beforehand. Good work, kid."

Hari was not oblivious to the fact that Kakashi was of a much higher rank than any of his fellows, save for the Hokage, but it was still hilarious to see someone treat him just like a teen. But that also meant that Tsume probably viewed Hari as a kid as well.

"Kiba can go, though I should warn you, the kid can put an Akimichi to shame if you give him the opportunity."

"Thank you. Does he have any allergies?"

"None, and will gladly eat anything from a cow, so long as it isn't piquant. Our senses of taste and smell are ridiculously heightened, so we have to be careful when eating."

She'd have to keep that in mind for later. "Thank you, Inuzuka-san."

"Eh, call me Tsume, Hari-san. All these formalities are so boring." She then turned her piercing gaze upon Kakashi. "As for you, Hatake, I haven't seen your ninken in a while. They need check ups."

Hari's head whipped around so she could glare at her friend. "You have dogs?" she asked accusingly.

Kakashi gave an uncomfortable laugh and nodded.

"Canine companions?"

"Yes."

"Furry friends?"

"Yeah?"

"And this never came up, how?"
He had dogs all this time and never said anything about them! She was feeling a cross between betrayed and excited.

"There was never a reason to mention them" the silver-haired man shrugged, looking a mite uncomfortable. "It isn't like I knew you had a thing for dogs."

Okay, she could give him that one because it had never come up before either. "I want to meet your dogs."

"You will," he promised, eye curving into that familiar smile unique to him alone. "I have a pack of eight."

EIGHT!

She gave and gave, and now she'd get to receive!

"She smells of cat," Kuromaru remarked once Kakashi and the young woman were too far to hear them speak. And by that, she meant that the two were no longer in the Inuzuka family's territory. Kakashi's hearing was on par with the best trackers in their clan, so one had to be careful when talking around him.

Tsume smirked though as she thought about the two as they walked away. They'd seemed very cozy in her opinion and this could finally mean that Kakashi was in a relationship, or at least about to enter into one. And he'd picked someone good too!

"I like her!" Tsume announced. "Cat scent aside, she's pretty interesting. She and her clan actually. Judging by what we know of them, I'd say the future is going to be very interesting with them around."

"She didn't touch the pups either. Most civilians rush in head first the moment they see something they think is 'cute', with no consideration for the creature's feelings. I could see that she very much wanted to pet some of us, but managed to control her urge. It's admirable."

True. And if her reaction to learning of Kakashi's summons was anything to go by, then she really liked canines.

"I get why Anko likes her so much. She's very accepting of shinobi life and practices."

And if Kakashi of all people decided that he wanted to spend time with her, and he was as paranoid as they come, then she had to be a decent person. Also, Hokage-sama wouldn't allow someone who was dangerous to the children, to maintain control of the only orphanage in Konoha.

Kuromaru huffed. "They'll make good pups one day. Very strong. They'll teach them right."

She threw her head back with a cackle. "I couldn't agree more!"

She could imagine little silver-haired twerps with bright green eyes rushing around and it was a glorious vision!

Karin's team was currently fighting Naruto's team and the power level was pretty even. Considering the fact that Shin and Sai had special training from some old Konoha faction, that was impressive.

Ino had taken to Sai immediately, leaving Sasuke to choose Shin, and the Uzumaki cousins to fight it
The problem was that Karin would have done better against Ino because they were both girls meaning they naturally had less chakra in their bodies. Both Sasuke and Naruto were chakra powerhouses and would be able to overtake her easily.

This meant Karin would need to use her medical knowledge to her advantage, but the problem was that Naruto had very high levels of pain tolerance. He could take it and take it and his injuries healed within minutes of him getting them so all she was doing was tiring herself out in the process.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Sai’s ink birds as they tried to surround Ino who was grounded and unable to use the trees to her advantage. But the blonde wasn't letting herself get cornered because she whipped out a barrage of kunai attached to ninja wire, which wrapped around all the ink creatures Sai was sending her way. In seconds she set the entire cluster on fire, destroying her multitude of adversaries and forcing Sai to create more.

It was basically a race. Would Ino run out of chakra before Sai ran out of ink, or would it be the other way around? And with the limited space of their rope, they could only remain at a certain distance.

Shin and Sasuke were using Kenjutsu only and seemed to be pretty evenly matched.

"Hey, Karin! Pay attention to the fight! -ttebayo!"

A fist buried itself in her stomach, sending her flying. That didn't mean Naruto and his many clones were letting up on her though as they all charged the place where she had landed roughly.

Taking a deep breath, Karin lashed out with a foot, but only managed to destroy a single Bunshin in the process.

Some teams just had an unfair advantage. She had to remind herself that this did not mean her own team was weak. It just meant that the pairings of the battles were most unfortunate and should they go up against one another again, they'd need a different strategy.

"Fuck you, Naruto!" she hissed, flipping to her feet, willing to keep trying even if she knew it was futile. At least if Team Seven was busy here, then they weren't anywhere near the scroll. The best she could hope for, was to keep them all occupied long enough to give them trouble later on.

Karin was nothing if not brilliant.

"Hey! No need for such crass language!" Naruto chided, though his grin was too wide to be serious.

"As if you give a damn!"

The orange clad shinobi cackled in agreement and they two lunged at one another again.

Hari's personal meeting with Hyuga Hiashi was very different than all the other meetings she’d had. She had once gestured to the man from across a crowded market, but she had never actually spoken to him and just getting an audience with him all so she could ask a damn question was annoying.

First, she and Kakashi were told to wait while a clan member went to inform him of their arrival. Hiashi would decide if he was accepting company at present and if so, he’d tell the person to bring their guest to his study, which was what had happened thankfully.
But the air around the Hyuga Compound was more stifling than the other clans. People were not outside enjoying the warm evening. She could feel them all inside and more secluded than anything.

The entire place had her subconsciously standing taller because Kakashi hadn't been joking when he'd described them as judging from afar. The entire clan basically had super X-Ray vision and she was certain they were being watched from every angle. And the way they were watched was with a small degree of cockiness.

Hari could tell immediately that a Slytherin mentality was the most needed sort in a place like the Hyuga Compound. She wondered how the Hinata girl could handle it seeing as she was such a sweet kid and these people seemed… anything but sweet.

At least she knew that Hyuga Neji's attitude wasn't singular to him alone and therefore she could not blame him entirely for it. He learned by example and the example he'd been given wasn't a pleasant one. The poor kid was a mess and she wanted to smack some people into fixing his attitude before he ended up like Snape had.

Hiashi's family observed the more traditional sense of dress, decor, and architecture known to Asian territories. It was the most fancy place she'd been in save for the Daimyo's Palace. In fact, it felt like she was visiting a second Daimyo or a lesser known lord, which in a way, she was.

The man was shorter than Kakashi by a few inches, but still taller than Hari, which left her feeling a little disgruntled. He had a severe look about him that made her think that he wasn't going to age with grace. He had the common pale lavender eyes like the majority of his clansmen, and looked like he was barely withholding a sneer.

And the games they had to play when they introduced themselves. Hari had to be demure and thank him for allowing his children to attend Naruto's party. Hiashi had to take her words as if he cared and offer apologies for not meeting her in person until then. Their smiles were faker than fake could be.

She could feel Kakashi's discomfort even though outwardly he seemed unaffected by everything and was reading Icha Icha to pass his time. She'd had a feeling that he wasn't actually reading though, since he was a little too rigid in place for her liking.

"Hinata and Neji may partake in your dinner but only if you are the one to cook the food, and only if you give them whatever has the least oil. We Hyuga have a strict diet plan and do not consume pinguid foods for personal reasons."

Hari had nodded. While she didn't really like Hiashi all that much, she didn't know enough about the clan to say anything. Also, ignoring someone's personal request would be rude. Though she did wonder why greasy foods weren't okay for their diet, but wouldn't pry.

Death huffed from her left. "**Ingesting too much oil of any sort actually causes them migraines. It has a weird effect on their vision which becomes distorted and forces the Byakugan to activate so not even closing their eyes gives them relief for they'd see through their eyelids easily.**"

That was unfortunate. Hari would be especially certain to not serve greasy foods just to be safe.

The visit consisted of small talk, tea, and a lot of pretending, but Hari had gotten what she wanted in the end, and that was good enough.

Hyuga Hiashi's opinion of the Potta Clan Head was still full of uncertainty. She was an odd one and it was obvious that she knew how to play the political game, but hated every minute of it. She'd done
a splendid job at keeping her composure in his presence even when he could tell he'd begun to annoy her.

But it was a necessary evil. How else was he to determine how worthy she was as an individual if he did not push her to her limits?

On the other hand, during her admirable performance, Hiashi had taken note of Kakashi's displeasure. The younger man had picked up easily on what was going on. Kakashi too knew the game very well but he just didn't care enough to observe the rules. And he was of the station where he could get away with such an attitude, which was why Hiashi didn't even bother being offended.

Kakashi had a deeper connection to Potta Hari than what was on the surface. The two leaned into one another a lot more than they probably realized, and looked to each other every few minutes for no reason other than to assure themselves that the other was still there.

He could understand the Potta Lady doing it since she wasn't a shinobi and didn't have the hearing and sensing abilities like a ninja would. But Kakashi doing it had been a shock. The man was one of the best the village had to offer and was a candidate for the position of Godaime Hokage. He shouldn't have to rely on his eyes to tell him what he should already know.

But Hiashi could understand to a point. Potta Hari was unnaturally quiet. Even her heartbeat was almost too low for their trained hearing to pick up on. She smelled like a forest and would blend in outdoors. When she walked it was on the balls of her feet and she made mere whispers. She didn't fidget even when she was kneeling for an hour.

It could be easy to forget she was there if she put in the effort to remain hidden or unnoticed.

But even if he could understand to an extent, he knew that their little thing wasn't just that of a friendship.

Hiashi's minor plans to possibly get one of his clansmen who didn't have their venerated Kekkei Genkai, to marry the woman, were buried. It appeared as if Kakashi had staked a claim even if neither had noticed that there was a claim in the first place.

Potta Hari's cousin was not romantically involved with anyone, or so his sources said. Perhaps marrying someone to her would offer a better chance for an alliance between their clans?

A knock startled him from his thoughts, and he had to compose himself quickly. "Yes?"

"A letter has arrived for you, Hiashi-sama," Kosuke said from the other side of the door.

"Come."

The letter was handed over within seconds, and Kosuke was gone immediately.

When he finally got to the message however, he had to smirk in amusement. He should have known that making plans about a Seer wouldn't go as expected.

Dear Hyuga-sama,

No.

Respectfully,
Potta Runa.

---
"How did this happen?!" Kiba demanded loudly, making Shikamaru wince at how loud he was being. The brunet huffed and looked around, spotting the issue easily.

"Akamaru was put to sleep by that plant," he said, gesturing to the burning plants a ways off. "Ino's family has a lot of them. Your sister would be familiar with the sedatives made from them. My money would be on Ino setting this trap if I didn't know how poor she was at waiting. Also, her teammates are the kind to just rush in with fists ready so I doubt they'd manage stealth all that well."

"Sakura then," said Shino. "Other than Ino, she would be the only other person against us, to have that kind of knowledge on flowers."

"What a drag!" If Sakura's team had set such a trap for them, then it meant they were at least within range of Hinata's Byakugan so they could determine the team's next course of action. He didn't know how far Hinata could see, but he'd assume at least a kilometer which was a considerable distance on foot. And with Akamaru incapable of scenting them out now, they'd take forever to catch up.

Kiba was good, but not good enough to rely on only his nose yet. Besides, the Sleeper had a very sweet scent to humans and it was pretty strong to Shikamaru, so he could only imagine what it was like for Kiba's heightened senses.

"When we catch up to Sakura's team, I'm going to ram her head into a tree," Kiba promised, voice barely above a growl. "No one targets Akamaru and gets away with it!"

Both Shino and Shikamaru sighed in aggravation. Kiba's attitude had only gotten worse since entering the forest. And with his worry over Akamaru, he'd only become even more annoying.

"Thank you for escorting me all evening despite not having to."

Kakashi sent the young woman a smile that he knew she couldn't see, but she managed to understand the gesture anyway. "I was bored, you'd be lonely, and I figured everything is better in pairs."

Hari snorted. "I'm pretty sure you aren't the type to want company in general so I'll call that a fib if I ever heard one."

She wasn't wrong exactly. Kakashi would have never willingly joined anyone on anything a year ago. But things were always more entertaining when Potta Hari was involved and he liked seeing her reactions to things she didn't know or understand. Because they were always different. Like the whole Aburame Kikaichu hiding under her shirt and her not batting an eyelash over it.

"When you are one half of the pair, everything is better," he amended.

Of course he hadn't expected her to go wide-eyed and then a dark blush to spread across her cheeks, but it did. And it was because of that reaction that he realized just how... romantic his words sounded. And he found it a little terrifying that not one part of him wanted to take his words back, nor did any part of him regret saying them.

"I can tell you didn't get that line from Icha Icha," said Hari, flush disappearing as a little twinkle sparked in her eyes. "Jiraiya should take notes."

Taking the offer for what it was, Kakashi huffed a laugh. "I always did feel like I was more romantic that the characters in his books. I cut a much more dashing figure as well."

"Most definitely," agreed Hari with an amused grin.
And for a second he'd thought that would be it. That she'd go inside and he'd return to his apartment and the night would end as it always did. But then she did something unexpected.

She leaned forward and kissed his mask-covered cheek. "Good night, Kashi."

She was inside a second later, and Kakashi was frozen in place for several minutes as his mind replayed everything over and over in slow motion so he could recall every detail from the way her lips puckered to the warmth practically seeping from them when they connected with his cheek. How she has nearly whispered the new nickname for him before pulling away completely. And how he liked hearing it when she wasn't doped to the gills on medication while laying in a hospital bed.

Oh dear. He was fucked.

"I'm really tired," said Ino as she and her team camped out at the tower. And they weren't really camping since that would alert everyone to their position. She meant it more in terms of them waiting in a specific spot as they surveyed the area.

Naruto had booby-trapped the entire space surrounding the tower and no matter which direction someone came in, they would run into something horrible. Even in the river! His past as a prankster really came in handy with the trap-making and evasion skills he'd learned, she had to give it to him. He knew what to do to make someone's life hell.

"Eat a soldier pill," Sasuke suggested in clear monotone.

She shuddered in revulsion, not wanting to stoop to that level all because her eyes were a little droopy and her limbs felt like dead weight. "I'm good."

"I want ramen. -ttebayo!"

"Shush!" Ino hissed, looking around the surrounding forest to see if anyone would attack suddenly, but the coast was clear.

Sasuke wasn't annoyed though and merely rolled his eyes, much to her shock. He'd been a lot more open recently. Ever since coming back from Mizu no Kuni. "You always want ramen, Naruto."

"Because it's good. Duh!"

Any further comment was stopped by Sasuke suddenly standing and staring out at the forest. From their vantage point at the very top of the tower, they could get an idea, even in total darkness, what was coming their way since each took a direction to watch.

"What is it?" Naruto asked.

The Uchiha smirked. "Kurenai-sensei's Team has reached the tower. Let's pay them a little visit if they survive Naruto's Death Gauntlet, shall we?"

Ino would be proud to admit that she was only a little creeped out by Naruto's mad cackle.

What actually creeped her out were the very sudden explosions that wracked the area and the screams that erupted from below because of them.

Orochimaru of the Sannin gritted his teeth in a cross between a snarl and a sadistic grin. One one hand he was very pleased with the progress of his minions, but on the other he was still pissed off
over losing an arm and having to go through the hell of regrowing it back. And it wasn't just the arm, but the entire failed invasion of his former home village and the deaths of his shinobi.

He had fled the scene when Kabuto was taken out as if it was a simple sporting event, and he hadn't lightened up ever since. Otogakure was now down a considerable amount of military power and he lost his right hand man in the process, which made everything more stressful.

With the Chunin Exams coming up again, he had a new plan. So many people gathered together to test themselves, would surely giving him more variety in terms of his Cursed Seals. He could monitor those he was most curious about, and decide who to test when those moving on to the tournament, won their matches.

The drastic setback from Konoha's Exams was still felt deeply in Otogakure, and many were ready for some revenge on the Tree Huggers. And Orochimaru had many young shinobi that he wanted to use as experiments against those not marked by him.

His new right hand, Kimimaro, would be joining the Genin. His failing health aside, he was the perfect soldier. And Kimimaro would push through beyond his own limits should Orochimaru desire it of him.

It would be a shame when he finally lost his usefulness, but thankfully, Orochimaru had more Kaguya at his disposal. The boy just didn't know it. In the end, Orochimaru still won no matter what.

Sarutobi-sensei would pay, and he'd destroy whoever got in the way of his ultimate victory.

Luna blinked into consciousness and shook her head. The snake fellow really needed to take a hint and not bother the world any longer.

She had to speak with the Hokage and Hari.

A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLYFELLON.

Chapter End Notes

CHECK OUT MY MANY OTHER HARRY POTTER FICS! ^-^
Magic, Madness, Heaven, Sin

Chapter Summary

Preparations of the Chunin Exams are coming to a close and curiosity is piqued.

Chapter Notes

-There is a lot going on in this chapter from a lot of different people. So be prepared for the POVs to flip from person to person. I don't even think Hari has the most sections in this. Maybe some of the longer ones but not the most. We don't spend our whole time in Konoha, that's for certain.

-NEXT CHAPTER BEGINS THE CHUNIN EXAMS! WE ARE FINALLY HERE! I CAN FINALLY GET TO THE OUTLINE I STARTED FOREVER AGO! I AM SO HAPPY TO GET TO IT!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

The amazing lucife56 made FANART for this story! It's beautiful!

Anko groaned when she saw the familiar bird. It was Runa's bird. Somehow the blonde had trained an owl to deliver letters specifically to people no matter where they were. Considering that Anko was on the outskirts of the Shi no Mori as she awaited the results of the mock Chunin Exam, she was shocked the damn thing had found her at all.

She wasn't even being very obvious with where she was!

Since you won't be going home tonight, meet me at the dango shop when the training ends. I've got a new book to show you from my home. You'll like the different positions. Most I know you have not tried before. I have though so I'll be nice when I teach you. I've even devised a reward system!

Think of this as payback for not telling me what's going on. I
That was just evil to just mention sex when Anko couldn't even partake in anything yet! And it was no doubt done as punishment for the fact that Anko hadn't at least given warning to the fact that she wouldn't be able to meet Runa for dinner with the whole training thing going on.

And she probably had known but had waited to See if Anko would do anything. The future wasn't set in stone after all. One decision could change everything and she hadn't even thought to warn Runa, which left her to imagine what the woman was talking about, and nothing more since masturbation in broad daylight was apparently rude or some shit.

Dating a Seer was only meant for the brave of heart. Luckily, Anko had a spine of gold to go with hers!

Kakashi might just have invited himself over that afternoon because he knew that Hari would begin food preparations early and he might have been bored. The challenge for the Genin ended at noon the next day and she was the kind of person to want extra parts out of the way and not spend her entire morning doing unnecessary work.

Of course coming over whenever the woman was cooking, was basically an agreement to help her prepare for the meal in question, which was how Kakashi ended up with a cutting board and a kitchen knife, mimicking her movements until he was chopping the exact same way she was. He also found it to be more efficient than what he'd been planning to do.

"You have a terrifying skill with a knife," he remarked, unable to help himself. For a civilian, she was very adept at handling sharp objects meant for cooking usage alone. He was certain she'd be able to go toe to toe with a civilian threat just fine. Anything could be made into a weapon. Even a vegetable peeler like the purple one he'd seen in the drawer when she'd gone to fetch him a knife of his own. It all depended on the person's imagination and the level of desperation they'd reached.

"It's all the cooking experience and potions preparations," she said, lifting her board and emptying the contents into a massive bowl. "Potions are very specific. Deciding to mince when you're told to dice only, can ruin whatever you're making so you have to be mindful of your knife-work. Sometimes that small change can cause an explosion. As such, I've learned to pay close attention when working with blades."

There was no hesitation in her movements. She was entirely sure of herself and Kakashi had appreciated that. It was always interesting to watch people in their element, but he also made sure to remember that no skill just came perfectly and that it no doubt took the individual years of work to get to the level they were at.

"Since I told you I would teach you how to cook, I'll impart some information on you now," the woman began as she stopped by the sink to wash her hands. "Knowing the difference between chopping, dicing, and mincing is very important."

Hari held up the pieces of green pepper she'd been handling. "I diced these. As opposed to the garlic. What is the difference between them?"

"The garlic is smaller."

She nodded. "Mincing is just super fine dicing. You mince things like garlic and onion because do you really want to eat a piece of garlic the same size as this piece of pepper?" Hari asked, holding up
handfuls of both.

He in fact, did not. Garlic could be a very pungent flavor.

"Also, when cooking, onions will reduce because the water is being cooked out and when fried in a pan with butter or olive oil, they will caramelize. That turns the onions sweet in the end."

Kakashi watched as she dumped onions, peppers, and garlic into the large bowl.

"Now to demonstrate the proper use of the knife. Chopping equals normal pieces." She proceeded to demonstrate on a large, daikon radish. "Dicing equals more manageable pieces." She sectioned off half of the radish and proceeded to make even smaller portions. "Mincing is dicing to the extreme." Finally, she rendered another bit into a fine mess.

All three had different knife-work. And all three sections she’d done were cut to a different size each.

Hari quickly went ahead and minced the rest to make it all even, adding them to the salad afterward.

"Perhaps I should teach you how to use a kunai just in case," he murmured aloud for her benefit, curious to know what she thought of the idea.

She snorted, head thrown back with her mirth. "The important part is that the pointed end doesn't face me. What does it matter if I know how to do it right or not?"

"Because it'll make me worry less," his mouth said without his brain's permission. Internally, Kakashi was setting everything on fire because he was so very annoyed with himself for even daring to let such a thing slip to the woman he considered a friend. His newest one in nearly a decade even.

Hari seemed to realize the importance of his words, but didn’t draw out the topic of conversation or try to tease him over it. She merely moved on to other things.

"About this Icha Icha film that's coming soonish..."

Thank the Sage that the woman knew something about the word Mercy.

"Got any idea which book it's based on? You know, so a woman can prepare herself."

"Well I'm no genius," he began, ignoring her playful scoff of disbelief, "but I'm certain it's-"
the scroll. With all the copies, acquiring the original would be incredibly difficult for any of the other teams. Especially since the real one was inside a fake one and they'd each hidden about fifty scrolls around the tower just to make it harder.

And only Ino knew the location of the true scroll.

TenTen hadn't really considered Team Seven much of a threat until the Koyuki mission. After Uzumaki Naruto slammed Kazahana Doto into nothing but a spatter of blood on the snow, and his teammates managed to go up against the team that had caused her own team such troubles, she couldn't continue with such thoughts because they could put her in danger.

So when they finally caught up to the team who were waiting at the top of the tower looking surly and aggravated, she knew it was going down. And she knew that all three members of the team could be relentless on their own to different extremes. Each had a particular method of fighting and planning.

Uzumaki had cut the rope binding he and his teammates while saying, "Fuck it! Sensei didn't say we had to be connected the whole time we're in here! I refuse to be held back by this! -ttebayo!" As of that action, TenTen quickly disconnected she and her own teammates just to be safe.

The problem was that TenTen's team was a more Taijutsu-based team, and Team Seven was more Ninjutsu-based team. One required short-ranged attacks, and the other could do short, mid, and long-ranged attacks. Usually Team Seven would be pushed as front liners because they came at you hard with their Ninjutsu in order to mow down the opposition. TenTen's team was more for support to wear down the enemies that somehow managed to be still be up after the first assault.

Neji was the best at Taijutsu in their graduating class. Uchiha Sasuke had been the best of his. Both had Dojutsu to help them even. She had expected both Rookies to square off, but instead... the Uchiha focused on her, his hand already rummaging through his pouch to procure some ninja wire that he had no doubt learned a lot of techniques with. The Uchiha were known very well for fighting with wire.

The Yamanaka Heiress was staring Lee down in a manner that spoke of her determination to defeat him. There was no way she was faster than him or a better Taijutsu user, so TenTen was unsure of what she hoped to accomplish.

And Uzumaki Naruto was already coming at Neji without any hesitation.

Her attention was caught in three directions, wanting to know the outcomes to the other battles as well as keeping an eye on her own opponent. It was a foolish attempt. Going up against an Uchiha in Shurikenjutsu was considered suicide because they had a special fighting style all their own, and according to Gai-sensei, the Sharingan would aid him exponentially along with his Katon Jutsu. And if the wire trap in the beginning of the mock exam was anything to go by, he wasn't playing around.

Basically, pitting her against him wasn't the best option for TenTen. And they both knew it.

Neji glared at the orange-wearing atrocity that dared call himself a shinobi. He wasn't fond of the Uzumaki brat because he was loud, annoying, and didn't seem to take anything seriously. He was also worse than Lee had been in the Academy, and a Dead Last would never prosper. He was simply fighting fate and would lose eventually. He may have won the battle known as the Graduation Exam, but the War of Life was far from over and the outcome already decided.
He refused to see sense as well.

When Neji tried to tell him to just give up, the blond had scoffed in his face, and proceeded to create a dozen Kage Bunshin.

They were all the same. Not one difference between them, and the chakra split between all thirteen of the blond ninja was even as well. He had so much chakra that a technique like this against a Hyuga was actually impressive, though it wasn't because of Uzumaki himself.

When one charged, Neji snapped out a leg to kick it in the chest. It was knocked back, but didn't dispel like normal Kage Bunshin did. He frowned in confusion, not seeing how they could be anything different. Uzumaki had used the proper hand seal as well. Gai-sensei had explained Naruto's fighting style to his team so they may understand him better. He relied heavily upon overwhelming his opponent to make up for lacking Taijutsu skills. He was more of a street brawler than a practitioner of finesse.

"Nice try, Hyuga-teme, but these are a result of my training and are harder to get rid of now!"

All thirteen descended upon him in a flurry of fists and loud screams. They were too fast for him to go toe to toe with strangely, so Neji pulled out something he hadn't wanted to unveil yet. Something he had hoped to save for the Chunin Exams. Hakkesho Kaiten.

The Hyuga prodigy spun in place, chakra seeping from his tenketsu in equal measure, forming a rotating dome of chakra around him and protecting him from their assault. All the Narutos were knocked away, but to his dismay, none were destroyed and merely flipped to their feet to begin their bombardment for a second time.

Neji kept on spinning, the chakra dome kept its shape, and the Uzumaki boy kept on attacking.

Five swarm assaults later, and twelve Narutos poofed from existence. That was when Neji finally stopped, shaking his head a bit to center himself.

Unfortunately, with the blond's chakra reserves, he had Neji moving again when he brought his hands up in that damned sign and created twelve more Kage Bunshin who proceeded to surround him on all sides and unleash a barrage of C-Ranked Futon jutsu. His rotation was too fast for the jutsu to have any effect on him, and he found himself glad the boy hadn't used a Katon jutsu instead. He didn't have that particular Chakra Nature.

They went through several repetitions of this before his opponent finally decided to speak up.

"It's a race to see who runs out of chakra first! -ttebayo!" one of the Narutos yelled. "Me, who has twenty times your amount of chakra naturally, or you, with only one twentieth of my chakra capacity that you waste quickly as you force chakra from your body constantly to keep up your fancy shield?"

He'd been played! Neji's chakra was already half gone and Uzumaki - none of them, to be specific - didn't look tired! He'd been forcing Neji to keep his distance because he knew the other was a superior Taijutsu user, and he'd also managed to get him to waste energy unnecessarily during the entire five minutes they'd been facing off.

Halting his rotation, Neji jumped forward, intent upon unleashing his Juken without remorse. Only... spinning for so long was not a good idea as his world tilted dangerously, giving the other Genin a chance to attack him openly with his Kage Bunshin, who held nothing back. He'd forgotten about the fact that he couldn't control the liquid in his ears that helped keep his balance and now he was suffering for it.
Just because his eyes perceived everything around him easily while spinning, didn't mean the fluid in her ears wasn't a weakness. As such, he couldn't move straight until it settled, leaving him open for the blond's oncoming assault.

His face was on fire from the punches aimed his way, and the blond got nine good hits right across the eyes before Neji had enough sense to respond, using his Taijutsu to destroy each Kage Bunshin in mere seconds. The flesh around the eye sockets throbbed unpleasantly from the attempts at blinding him.

The boy whistled, standing pretty far away as he watched. "Pretty good. You should know though, my body just re-absorbs the remaining dispelled chakra from my clones, meaning I'm not losing much chakra and you're still working on much less than before."

Neji glared. "You will not be laughing once your tenketsu are closed and you can't access your chakra at all, failure."

The blond scoffed. "That's what you think."

He was a fool!

Ino breathed carefully. She'd been told to wear Rock Lee out in any way she could. So she decided to practice the new Doton Jutsu Kakashi had given her a while back. It allowed her to meld into rocks and practically disappear into them and travel from one to the next without being discovered thanks to the stone muting her chakra. And the area near the tower, that she had gotten Lee to chase her toward, was basically a gorge. Meaning she had the advantage so long as she played it cool.

And her teammates were all using the same idea. Wear their opponents down without doing much work by their own definition. Older shinobi tended to have more experience in fighting and when you didn't know enough about them to form a plan, wearing them out was what was best.

So Ino melded into a boulder the first second she was out of Lee's line of sight, and proceeded to play mind games with him, appearing behind him and making a noise, only to appear elsewhere to make another noise.

She'd gotten him so frazzled that he was running in circles around their designated battle space.

Once she had him here she wanted him, she used her family's jutsu and let the rest work itself out.

Lee had no mental control, meaning she was easily able to set his body up in a cage of explosive tags and boulders, and when she released him, she told him to pay attention because if she finished the one seal necessary, he wouldn't get away unscathed.

And that was how Ino managed to force him into subjugation.

It would never work on him again, she realized, but it was worth it. She hadn't given away any of her actual techniques and still had them saved up for the Chunin Exams.

Hinata froze, making her teammates look to her in worry. "Naruto-kun's team just defeated my cousin's team!"

Both Choji and Sakura shared a look of despair. Team Gai were a year older than them and had more experience. And if Team Seven had managed to defeat them, then that meant bad things for anyone who tried going up against them. Which would essentially mean that it would be a bad idea
to try and fight them at all.

Hyuga Neji was a prodigy for a reason, and defeating him was something extraordinary for a green Genin. Hinata couldn't do it. Hanabi, who often defeated Hinata in spars, also couldn't do it. Neji was a class above the both of them when it came to skill, and he'd been taken down by Naruto, who was known far and wide as the 'Dead Last' of his Academy year.

"Who beat your cousin?" Choji asked, uncharacteristically serious.

"Naruto-kun," she whispered in both reverence and horror.

"Am I the only one that doesn't want to fight them?" asked Sakura, looking worried.

They could simply mind their own business for the time being. It wasn't like this was absolutely necessary to their training. It was a mock exam for a reason and they were certain the odds would be much better when there were more people involved in the real Exams.

It was the bellowing of the boy she viewed as a little brother, that alerted Hari to his arrival. And honestly she was too happy to see him to spend time thinking about his lack of finesse or subtlety.

"HARI-NEE-CHAN!"

Naruto had a talent for hugs. He put his whole being into them and held nothing back. So when the boy was what he considered to be a good distance away from her, he launched his entire body toward the witch without hesitation. Hari was caught around the middle, and blond head practically buried in her bosom as he squeezed for all he was worth.

"It's been forever!" his muffled voice cried dramatically.

"More like ten days, squirt, but I get what you mean." She patted his head and looked up expectantly, seeing both Ino and Sasuke standing by politely.

"Is Naruto the only one happy to see me?"

That got a response as Ino grabbed onto Sasuke's collar and dragged him closer for a big group hug. The Uchiha came without struggle and this time he didn't protest. Hari made sure to give them all a tight squeeze before letting go, not wanting to suffocate Sasuke too much or make him feel anxious being in close quarters with others.

"Kakashi-sensei?" Ino asked in confusion once she had enough space to see her teacher standing not too far behind Hari with the usual Icha Icha in hand. "Weren't you just…" She turned around, making Hari look up to find what she was staring at. And indeed, there was a Kakashi standing not too far away, eyes trained only on his Icha Icha as he waved a dingle hand.

"Yo!"

He then poofed from existence.

"It was a Kage Bunshin the whole time?!" demanded Naruto, looking annoyed. He wasn't the only one though. The other Genin and Jonin sensei who had gathered outside the forest as well, were also looking like they were about to throttle Kakashi who did in no way appear repentant.

"You cunning bastard," was Anko's only remark. She let her glaring do the talking for her. That kind of glare usually promised pain to people but Kakashi wasn't bothered.
The real Kakashi snorted. "My parents were married, not that it matters. I simply had something more important to devote my time to and didn't have the time to be here in person. That's all."

Hari whipped around to send him a look of pure confusion. "You've practically been up my arse since I got back two days ago. What bull are you spouting?"

Naruto made a loud, choking sound that was echoed by both Anko and Kurenai.

The silver-haired shinobi merely sent her one of his eye smiles and fixed his attention on his copy of Icha Icha.

shrugging it off, Hari opened her arms wide. "I made lunch for you all! And your guardians already gave permission, so take a seat at one of the tables we set up and I'll set the food out."

"I'll help, nee-chan! -ttebayo!"

"HOW YOUTHFUL!" Gai and Lee bellowed.

Hari turned her attention toward the food, absently listening as Inuzuka Kiba, who had stopped glaring at Haruno Sakura finally, asked one of the Honda siblings where they had been the entire time the mock exam was taking place.

"We… ran into some trouble with a swamp that was quite difficult to free ourselves from," one the siblings said succinctly.

Hari could tell that Naruto and Ino were both cackling in response to that even if they were making no noise. She probably shouldn't have equipped her little brother with some prank materials that she'd gotten from WWW.

"Tuck in!"

Sasuke eyed his teacher and his teammate's sister. The two had decided to sit together. Or rather, Hari had seated herself once she was certain everything was placed properly, and Kakashi had sat next to her before anyone else could move. If that wasn't enough to tell them of the man's interest in the woman, there were plenty other things such as the nicknames, the teasing, or even his light stalking that he thought he was being sly with. And Hari-san remained completely unaware of his interest.

And throughout the meal, Kakashi was constantly pilfering food from her plate, but he was doing it very obviously. Not when she was watching of course, but slow enough for a civilian's gaze to catch, meaning everyone else at the table noticed easily what he was doing but had chosen for whatever reason, to remain silent on the matter.

Eventually, Hari did catch on and sent him an exasperated look that wasn't quite stern. "You have an entire plate full of food, why do you keep filching mine?"

The Jonin hummed. "Your plate looks full to me. How could I possibly be stealing from you?"

She was not actually offended despite her tone. Her gaze was far too playful and bright to be full of anger. He would even say it was bordering on flirtatious. "I've noticed that there are a lot of beef cutlets on my plate when I didn't serve myself any. And suspiciously, all of my shrimp is gone even though it was mostly what I served myself. Would you happen to know why, Kashi?"

Hari had a new nickname for him now. Kami-sama above, he could only imagine what Kakashi
would come up with now.

Not one bit of Kakashi looked remorseful for his actions, though he didn't admit to them. Still, they all knew what was going on, and still, no one said anything about it.

The fact was, Kakashi-sensei and Potta Hari were flirting even more than they usually did, and Sasuke wanted to turn and retch at how gross they were being. Usually it was very subtle but the sappiness of the smile on Hari's face and the curve of Kakashi's eye were just disgusting.

He'd never been one for public displays of affection and probably never would be.

The quieted slurping from Naruto's direction, made him look away from the two adults.

The blond was next to him, because Sasuke had planted his ass down to Naruto's left the moment he'd taken a seat across from his sister. Naruto was much more preferable to be with than the rest of their graduating class save for Shikamaru or Shino, and both were next to each other and stuck between Kiba and their sensei. So it was Naruto or no one. Yeah, that was the only reason why Sasuke had sat beside him at all.

Naruto was staring down Kakashi and Hari, his chopsticks halted midway to his mouth as his eyes narrowed. From the look on his face, he was putting the pieces together and he wasn't thrilled by the realization.

It was like that time in Yuki no Kuni when Kakashi had made mention of taking Naruto's sister to see the porn movie and Naruto had gotten very defensive.

Sasuke bumped elbows with the blond and shook his head minutely so it wasn't noticeable by anyone but them. Naruto obviously wasn't interested in subtlety but he conceded without putting up a struggle.

They could talk to sensei about it later. And by 'talk' he meant interrogate.

The days were closing in. Hari had been mentally preparing herself for it for the past several months. And honestly, it wasn't even something that bad, but she'd become a bit attached to Naruto and Team Seven and having them gone for another month was just horrible to think about. She didn't necessarily like being alone even if she could admit that sometimes it was necessary.

Sure she had all the kids in the orphanage to mind, and there would still be Luna around, but with the upcoming Chunin Exams, all of her new friends would be going because all of their Genin were entered into said Exams and the sensei needed to be there personally for formal reasons. Laws and shite.

And with them not around to pay attention to, she'd have more time to work on Kabuto since she and Luna hadn't had much time to dedicate to him recently with her kidnapping and then the trial which was still not officially over because it became a trial about something else entirely by the time she left the capital.

Kabuto was almost finished.

Merlin, she hated referring to him as if he was a project and wasn't human. He was fucking human being that they had been working extra hard with or the past several months in order to return him to an acceptable mental state where he could still be allowed to live, as well as serve his home country again.
She considered him only about \(\frac{1}{4}\) to blame for all of his actions, because it was the inattention of certain individuals, plus the manipulations of other individuals, that got him into the situation he'd been in when they'd brought him in thanks to Luna's interference. Kabuto wasn't given any other examples and as such, became a product of his masters, and it ended up doing more harm than good.

It was tasking to try and recreate memories. Extracting the true memories and then reshaping them into suitable ones that would make sense if he decided to connect whatever mental dots he had. Things that would in no way make him suspicious. They had to account for every skill he had obtained if they wanted him to still have those skills so they could be put to good use.

Fabricating memories with a foundation was easier than just making shite up off the tops of their heads. Hari was thankful that that was not the case with Kabuto, but it still took a lot of effort and magic in order to situate things properly.

And it also meant more of Luna coaching her through the process that she was still no better at. And because of that little fact, she took even longer to do the job. If someone like Snape had been told to do it he'd have gotten this shite done a long time ago because he was just that good at it. Hari wasn't talented like Snape had been.

She didn't have to feel too bad though. Inoichi said they'd had a similar technique but with less assurance of success and it was also a lot harder to accomplish and took longer to prepare for.

So no. She was no expert, but she was doing pretty well at least.

But she'd be dedicating a lot of her upcoming time to this job and there would be no Naruto or Kakashi or even Anko to lessen the pain! To distract her from the stress building up!

The one good thing about the Exams was that she would get to travel herself to go and view them for the Third Exam because it was a tournament. No matter if the first two exams changed, the third would always remain the same for bragging purposes. And Hari was going to watch within a month or so.

Now all she had to do was go back to the capital, watch as Sayori got to suffer, and wash her hands of the whole ordeal once and for all.

So he might have had a bit of a dislike for public places. Some of it had to do with the fact that he was still treated not as warmly as he would like even with most of Danzo's actions aired for the general public to hear. Another reason was that a lot of people had resumed their desire to saddle him with a romantic partner. This had gone on ever since he was five, and it hadn't stopped even when he became a big bad Anbu.

Itachi was Asexual. He was not interested in the pleasures of the flesh and wasn't looking to change that fact any time soon. He was also very much annoyed by people in general and didn't often like being around them in mass quantities. And being alone with someone wasn't preferable either because their attention was aggravating to him. For most people at least. Being the sole focus of a single individual was no better than hundreds focusing on him.

As a nuke-nin or not, Itachi was still hounded for marriage offers and the like. His duty as Clan Head extended to providing three children to bring the clan back from near-extinction. Currently, there were over thirty living Uchiha in Konoha, and they would all have to produce three children each, with members outside of the clan but still of good breeding. But technology had come far enough for Itachi to not have to be married for that particular necessity, nor for him to have to participate in sexual intercourse either.
Artificial insemination was a thing that was becoming rather popular as of late. A lot of people didn't want a romantic relationship even if they wanted to do their duty to their clans. Times changed though and no one but the elders of the village cared about whether or not someone's parents were married before the child was born. It was honestly one of those archaic rules that had become obsolete as time passed because not everyone had time for marriage or relationships.

Itachi, as the new Head of the Uchiha, had already reworked a few in-clan laws he thought were stupid. And no one could argue because it was a clan matter and the members save for Sasuke, were currently conditioned to follow his orders within a certain limit. They would not deny any of his actions nor question him.

He was very well aware of his duties both as a shinobi and as a Clan Head, even if he was too young to take on the duty *required* of a Clan Head. He'd been groomed for this specific purpose since childhood and he was taking back the narrative in his own way.

That meant no, he would not be indulging in romance and sex, and all those things he felt no interest in. And he would not require marriage of his family members because he had dreaded the potential partners the elders had chosen for him back when he was eight. He couldn't force others to marry all for the sake of a clan who had been manipulated so thoroughly and proved they were easy to misuse and abuse.

Botan, the Thestral that Potta Runa had introduced him to, nudged his shoulder and he sighed. They were in the courtyard of the Main Estate, and had been sitting there for hours simply watching the wind rattle the trees. Itachi was thinking hard and Botan was simply resting beside him, keeping him company with her soothing presence.

She could understand his annoyance and mounting tension as he thought about all of his problems both past and present. She helped stop him before he could get into the more aggravating facts and the ramifications of certain present situations.

"I forget myself sometimes," he confessed to the creature. "It is difficult under all this stress and duty." Sometimes he wished he hadn't become a shinobi so he wouldn't be like this. Itachi was a warrior because it was required of him, not because he wanted to be one.

He was still a shinobi and he had a job to do on top of all the work as a Clan Head. And if he'd decided he didn't want to be Clan Head because he didn't like extra work, then Sasuke would get saddled with everything, and Itachi couldn't put that stress on his little brother. Sasuke needed to have some semblance of a childhood. Something Itachi never got to have. It was the least he could do for the little brother whose life he helped ruin. Sasuke didn't need to know the full details just yet because he was young and relatively innocent and should stay that way for as long as possible.

Itachi sucked up his feelings for Sasuke's sake, because he adored his little brother and wanted him to be happy.

Botan nudged his shoulder again.

"Apologies."

She had a remarkable understanding of how his mind operated. It must be the bond that Potta Runa said would grow between them in time.

He was getting a sense of calm from her. As if she was forcing her good mood into him through their connection. And he felt warmth from it. Like a hug.
Uchiha Itachi hadn't been hugged in over a decade. His mother had stopped hugging him once he became a Chunin because she thought he was too mature. At least he was certain that was the reason since he could find no other. Fugaku never hugged his children. Itachi was lucky he could even remember what a hug was.

And he meant a hug, not a flying leap/choke attack from a hyperactive six year old.

Botan nuzzled her way under his arm so she could rest her head on his thigh. It had also been years since he'd participated in something so delicate. Too long had Itachi been exposed to violence and finally, his life wasn't filled with it every single day.

He deserved to have some peace. He served his country as was expected of him. He worked incredibly hard. Surely he could get a few minutes to serenity now and then after everything he'd been through.

Thank Kami-sama there were no wars currently. Sometimes Itachi wanted to sleep and never awaken.

Tsunade huffed and glared at her old sensei, though everyone in the room knew it really held no malice. Beside her was Hatake Kakashi, who was busying himself with his shitty book from Jiraiya. And Jiraiya was not in attendance because he was still in Amegakure investigating suspicious rumors and happenings.

The lucky bastard. He somehow always managed to not be around when the shit went down and Tsunade had never been more jealous of his ability to just wander wherever.

"You both know why you're here," Sarutobi stated plainly, fingers linked beneath his chin. "It's been a long time coming and there is no way to avoid it."

Both Tsunade and Kakashi sighed in resignation because yes, they all knew why they were there. And the both of them had been trying to avoid this particular event for weeks. Doing anything they could to avoid it even. Disappearing suspiciously the moment it seemed like it would come up somehow. But not this time!

"I am getting old. I will be turning seventy soon. In a recent medical evaluation with Tsunade, we've determined that my chakra capacity is lowering far too quickly. My age is finally catching up with me not just in body. I can still fight if it comes down to it, but I won't be as capable as I used to be and that is not what this village needs in the coming years with new threats circling our borders."

Her sensei wasn't able to fill his vast reserves as much as he used to. His chakra network was aging a lot faster than it should for some reason, and he was therefore at risk if he moulded chakra for especially dangerous jutsu. He would need to be careful if he tried using A-Rank jutsu, and no S-Ranks were allowed any longer for the sake of his health. The body wouldn't be able to handle it otherwise and it could possibly start to deteriorate from the inside. It was difficult to come to terms with the fact that someone so strong, who had helped raise her when he family kept dying around her, was literally dying himself. The Kami no Shinobi was literally dying.

"Not many know that I have been considering Kakashi as a candidate for Godaime. In fact, most think Tsunade will be the next Hokage sitting in this chair and wearing this hat. That is not an entirely incorrect assumption to make, but I have worked this idea to all of our benefit."

Uh-oh. He had been scheming and that didn't always mean good things for everyone else involved.

Sarutobi smiled. It was an old one that showed many lines and wrinkles in his pock-marked face,
around his cheeks and on either sides of his eyes. He had crow's feet. Even in their profession and the world they lived in ravaged by war every two decades, the man still found something to be happy about in order to get such markings on his face. And to think Tsunade spent her whole life terrified for obtaining such marks, but surprisingly they looked good on her sensei.

"Our village is going to be the first with dual Hokage."

Kakashi dropped his porn and Tsunade dropped the sake bottle she'd been holding. Both items were completely ignored as they hit the floor, in favor of just staring at the Sandaime like he was a madman who should instantly be committed.

"You both are still Anbu, though Tsunade can no longer participate actively outside the village. Kakashi is the Anbu Honsho and his skills cannot but lost yet, plus he has a Genin team, so he will be needed in the future. And Tsunade has her work in the hospital. But I've worked out a method you will use."

Oh dear.

"Tsunade," the man said, staring her down. "You will take up the duties of Hokage when Kakashi is either out on a mission, or hospitalized. Kakashi, you will take on the duties of Hokage when Tsunade is indisposed at the hospital. This will come into effect after the Chunin Exams. You may decide at some point in the future that one of you will take up the mantel fully, but I will leave that up to you."

Both shinobi groaned but didn't fight the decision. It at least meant that they wouldn't have to do all the work all the time. But it also meant that they would have to confer with one another a lot in order to make certain they were on the same page and that their decisions didn't end up making problems for everyone else let alone each other.

"I figured this would work best for you in many ways. Especially when it comes to the Hokage's Council."

Ah… that made sense. Neither Tsunade or Kakashi were pushovers like Sarutobi. And while she loved and respected her sensei to the afterlife and back, he tended to let his long time friends walk over him in the decision-making department. Kakashi didn't care to follow social niceties, and Tsunade just didn't like the two old bastards.

There was no way that the older generation that should have died off years ago, would get to continue their old ass, useless traditions with Tsunade and Kakashi in charge. The two of them against the old fogeys would make a splash.

Kakashi hummed and retrieved his book from the floor where it had only barely managed to miss the puddle of spilled sake. "At least I can make a Kage Bunshin to help me do all the work, so that's a plus."

And that was when dead silence prevailed in the office as both Tsunade and Sarutobi stared at him in shock and horror.

Kakashi blinked twice. "Am I the only person to think of using Kage Bunshin to get paperwork done faster?" the not-so-ex-Anbu asked, eye curving upward in amusement.

At least Tsunade was now also aware of this lovely method and would employ use of it as often as possible.
Jiraiya had never thought it was possible that a place could rain so much all the time, but honestly, he shouldn't have been so surprised. Yuki no Kuni had snowed every day for literal years before they created some machine to control the weather patterns.

However, the difference was that Amegakure was raining with chakra rain. He could feel it when it touched his skin. He could even smell it in the air. None of the residents questioned it though. They'd gotten used to it after years of it raining down on them, filling the river that surrounded the whole village.

Ame was very... industrial. Futuristic in a sense. Konoha was considered very forward in terms of technology, being at the very forefront of the five great nations. Ame seemed to be a lot like that, but everything was either powered by electricity or steam. All the buildings were made of a metal of some kind. No two buildings looked the same, and massive pipes connected everything.

Amegakure came about because it resided on a piece of land unfortunately caught between three of the great five nations. Often it served as the battleground during wars and it left many homeless. Amegakure took those homeless people in and trained them up to become ruthless shinobi. There was a reason Ame was often known to take up assassination missions such as the one set on Potta Hari.

Jiraiya had heard about Akatsuki's connection to Ame and had decided to infiltrate the village to get more information. He'd planned to just go under Henge, but then he'd learned about the chakra rain. Someone using a technique like that meant they were constantly watching. Waiting for an attack. He'd be found if he'd simply gone in under Henge.

So he'd made used of Hari-chan's special 'potion' known as Polyjuice. It was undetectable by chakra and literally turned him into the civilian whose hair he stole. The civilian had been calmly knocked out a few miles outside the boundary of the Ame, and Jiraiya had then added his hair to the potion.

It had tasted horrible, he remembered. Describing it was even more difficult to do. And it had felt strange watching as his body changed from the giant he usually was to the short, slightly balding merchant his victim was. The potion had a large enough dose to last him twelve hours if he drank it all at once. One hour a sip if he paced himself. He'd chugged the entire thing, having no patience to pull it out and drink now and then.

And so he found himself wandering without even a suspicious look cast his way. The gossip was heavy. The civilians talked reverently about someone named 'Pein'. They acted as if he was a god. Said the rain was because of him and that they couldn't wait for Sunday when he would come down to the village from his tower, and let the rain cease for a day. Sundays were the best days to visit it seemed.

Black cloaks covered in red clouds hadn't been mentioned. Akatsuki was nowhere on anyone's tongue. No familiar names of rogue shinobi being passed around.

But his source from Yugakure had told him to check Ame because it was the perfect place to hold a crime syndicate. Getting into the country was difficult because of how paranoid the residents all were.

It hadn't been a wrong assumption considering the general attitudes of the shinobi from Amegakure. But his source had specifically stated headquarters, even if the members don't necessarily reside there all the time.

"Do you think we'll hear from Konan-sama today?"
Jiraiya's head snapped around at the familiar name, instantly paying closer attention to what was being said around him. He knew that name. It wasn't a very common one.

"I hope so. Pein-sama's tenshi is beautiful," another merchant sighed dreamily. "She always comes down from the sky in a flash of paper wings and and serenity. I could stare at her all day."

Suddenly, Jiraiya's interest spiked, and his heart thudded unnaturally.

It couldn't be the same Konan he'd trained all those years ago. Right?

"You know," began Kakashi quietly as he observed something happening behind Hari's back, "I think they're serious."

Hari looked up from where she was trying to eat her kabob without dripping anything on her clothes. She turned in order to find what he was looking at, and saw Anko and Luna's backs moving away from them. They were walking close together and Anko's hands were gesticulating madly as she told Luna about whatever caught her attention at the moment. Luna was nodding along serenely but was obviously invested in what her girlfriend had to say.

"Yeah," the witch agreed without hesitation. "They've been hanging out for quite a while. Runa and I both fiddled around with Anko a few times, but I stopped accepting Anko's offers when I noticed them beginning to spend more and more time together whenever possible. I saw it happening well over a month ago. I'm a genius."

Kakashi snorted but he looked serious. "I'm... happy for Anko. Civilians don't..." he paused as his eyes landed on Hari. "Normal civilians," he amended, "don't really bother to get to know us all that well. And Anko has some unfortunate past experiences that make a lot of people distrust her. Her general reception from the village is no better than Naruto's is and she hasn't known much happiness outside of her circle of friends."

That made Hari frown. She hated to be reminded of what terribly limited people resided behind these walls. And she despised the lot of them with every fiber of her bloody being!

"Shinobi who aren't important clan members, don't often get married because it is dangerous. Relationships can be used as blackmail. You have to be sure your skills and your partner's skills, in order to chance such a thing, because your enemies can find out from whatever mole they have planted within your vicinity. And there is always a mole," he insisted darkly, his aura shifting around him ominously. "Anko has been alone for a long time and one night stands aren't good enough at filling the need for companionship that friendship doesn't always manage to give. And Anko already has few friends as a result of her past."

Poor Anko. She didn't deserve that shite.

"Therefore I think it's a good thing that she's found someone special in your cousin," said Kakashi. "She's happier than she's ever been and smiling more than I've ever seen her smile." He sounded wistful.

That was actually very sweet of him to say, and Hari beamed at him with pride. "Who knew you could be such a softy under that mask?"

"I have many layers, Hari," the man teased with an eye smile. "And they aren't just my masks."

She didn't know if he meant literally or figuratively, but she still found it funny all the same.
"Sounds like you're asking me to strip you of them."

He didn't even miss a beat in replying, "Maybe I am."

Could she start physically? Kakashi had a nice arse. She wouldn't mind getting a good look at it.

Luna smiled to herself, pleased with how things were going as of late.

"What's got you smiling so big?" asked Anko as she slung an arm around Luna's shoulders. "You look like some scheme of yours just unfolded to your exact specifications and I have been made aware of no such thing taking place."

"Nothing like that. Just thrilled at how things between Hari and Kakashi-san are going."

Anko snorted. "Meaning they've finally noticed they're into each other?"

"Yes."

"Enough to actually act on it?"

"...No."

"Damn it."

Luna had to agree, but she could understand. Neither Hari or Kakashi had been in romantic relationships before. The most either had done was participate in some one night stands with no strings attached.

For Kakashi, he was in a dangerous profession and a partner would become a target. A partner would need to be strong enough to protect themself as well as any family they might raise together. He also had trust issues from the various forms of trauma that had amounted upon his shoulders over the course of his young life. Opening up to new people was difficult for him and a romance would require that.

On Hari's side, she hadn't had time in their teen years for love and the like. Sure there was that time she took Parvati to the Yule Ball and then that date and messy kiss with Cho, but she'd never gotten to do anything more than that during school. Too much had been happening at the time to care about dating people. More important things to focus on than some 'silly girl romance' as it had been called.

And then the war ended finally and the suitors came out of the woodwork asking for her hand, but not because they wanted Hari. They wanted the Girl-Who-Lived. The Woman-Who-Conquered. The Potter and Black Lady. And every other title she'd gained during that time. They didn't actually care about Hari.

Add on the fickle hearts and minds of the people and it became obvious that she couldn't trust anyone in Magical Britain as a possible romantic partner. And muggles were always a risk when it came to exposing them to magic.

Hari too had issues with opening up to other people. Both she and Kakashi were messes. But they were learning how to do this together, and that was what was important.

"So long as nothing gets between them, they'll eventually make that step on their own," said Luna with surety, taking hold of Anko's hand in order to link their fingers together. "It'll be good for them both."
"Thank Kami-sama."

"So it's just a delivery to Takigakure and then back?" Ino asked.

"Yes," the Hokage agreed.

"No murderers after this letter?" said Sasuke questioningly.

"No."

"And no chances of us being attacked by any miscreants?" Naruto inquired.

Ino beamed at him. "Miscreants! Good word!"

"Thanks! Nee-chan taught it to me!"

And all the while, the Hokage's answer remained a firm 'no'. There was nothing remotely fishy about this mission. The chances of something bad happening were below 1% which was great.

"Then I guess we're going on a common C-Rank. It'll be nice to have just a nice and calm, normal C-Rank."

"Normal C-Ranks suck!"

Literally nothing was happening. They'd already made it to Taki, delivered the scroll to the person who needed it, got the reply, and were on their way back to Konoha. At a leisurely pace!

The sky was blue and filled with puffy clouds that looked like cotton balls. The temperature was mild compared to the usual weather. No suspicious puddles when it hadn't rained in days. No substitution rabbits that were bred in winter and kept indoors. No randomly injured people who were apparently on the verge of dying despite no blood surrounding their body. Nothing at all.

"Mah! You all were so interested to see what a normal C-Rank was like. You'd been talking about it for weeks if I recall correctly," Kakashi said as he turned a page in his porn book.

"Well maybe we're just adrenaline junkies, sensei," said Ino. "We've come to expect certain things by now and this is the first time a mission has gone exactly as it should from start to finish. It's unnatural."

Their sensei shook his head and sighed. "One day you'll wish you were put only on these kinds of easy going missions."

The three Genin looked at each other and simultaneously had the same thought.

No way!

It looked just like any other house. It was a small, efficiency apartment. Meant for only one person instead of the two that actually lived there. And the one slept on a pillow in the kitchen so the Jinchuuriki could keep his bedroom to himself.

Obito had expected more when he'd used Kamui to get into the room, but he was feeling a little underwhelmed.
Clean and orderly. Something like stew was cooking on the stove and it smelled better than anything he'd eaten in the last decade.

It felt comfortable and lived in, which was something he didn't get much as a child.

He'd been observing Potta Hari a lot recently, trying to gauge just how important she was to the people around her. He'd determined that she was vital to the happiness of many, including Kakashi himself. He who slaughtered his own friends.

Kakashi seemed to be slowly falling for the woman and the feelings just might be reciprocated. But she didn't know him fully. Didn't know of everything he'd done. Didn't know what he'd been like in their youth. She wouldn't want him then, Obito was certain.

Friend Killer Kakashi wasn't someone anyone should start a relationship with.

His senses tingled and he disappeared to a more safe location to watch from afar as the woman of his thoughts entered through the front door, holding a large, plastic platter that was empty.

She hummed to herself as she went to check on the stew and froze right in front of the stove. She turned slowly, eyes trailing back and forth over every inch of the room. Window and then door, and back again repetitively, in search of something.

Him, he realized a second too late. She'd noticed that someone had been in the apartment. He didn't know how but from how she was examining the odd markings around the doorway, he had a feeling she'd done something to add protection to the room. Maybe the whole building.

She looked mildly concerned but not enough to get help.

Finally, she placed a hand on the doorway itself and the pattern glowed blue for a second, much like Fuinjutsu would when activated. She'd done something more to ensure her own safety, and he suddenly needed to learn more about her to understand everything.

How she became so vital to Konoha so quickly was beyond him, but he intended to find out. He wasn't sure if her death was a necessity yet, but he found himself more interested in keeping her alive.

Pein might not like that.

He would have to learn to deal.

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So who the hell was in here? Hari was focusing on Death, who had been summoned from the dimensional void because she was feeling aggravated. And she could feel the lingering energy in the air even if nothing was disturbed.

"Probably one of the biggest threats in the elemental nations," said Death nonchalantly as if that wasn't an alarming thing to tell someone!

And who the hell is that? she demanded, feeling ready to cut a bitch.

"His true name is Uchiha Obito, but he goes by Tobi to some, and uses the name Madara as a smokescreen to others."

Why does that sound familiar? Like, really familiar. As in she was certain she had read of him before.
"Uchiha Madara helped create Konohagakure alongside the Shodaime Hokage. He is the one who controlled Yagura, the Yondaime Mizukage and forced him to order the Bloodline Purge in Mizu no Kuni. Uchiha Itachi knows him as Madara and he was the one to help Itachi kill the Uchiha years ago."

Well shite.

That was not good. This guy had literally been inside Naruto's house while she wasn't there! He'd gotten in and had been there for who knew how long, and none of the wards had stopped him! Probably because he'd meant no ill intent.

Now she would have to rework the damn wards again!

"His Sharingan's ability 'Kamui' allows him to become intangible even while leaving an afterimage of his body in plain sight. Anyone and anything would be incapable of interacting with him because he sends his entire body or at least a part of it, to another dimension forcing objects to pass directly through what appears to be his body."

Now that really sounds familiar!

"Kakashi has the other half of the Sharingan and therefore the other half of 'Kamui'. Obito was on Kakashi's team in his youth, under he direction of Namikaze Minato. Officially he died on a mission during the last war, having been crushed by a boulder and giving the Sharingan of his safe eye to Kakashi as a present for becoming a Jonin before the mission began."

Wow. Talk about kindness and dedication.

"They were not friends. Kakashi was much like Sasuke used to be, and even worse in attitude, only abiding by the Shinobi Code of Conduct and shunning anyon who broke the rules. That mission helped turn his mind around, and the very sudden death of the boy who he'd only just come to think of as a friend, left him traumatised, especially as the death had been as a result of Obito saving Kakashi."

Damn. No wonder Kakashi is an emotional mess. He was literally lucky he was able to function so believably, but that was literally how mental illness worked. It wasn't obvious on the surface and many assumed it didn't exist at all.

"You'll eventually learn more about his past at some time. The point of now is that Obito did not die. He was saved by an otherworldly being and brought before the real Madara, who was an old man at the time. He was manipulated thoroughly and ended up seeing Kakashi kill their other teammate, not knowing the full details behind why. She had been kidnapped by the real Madara while under the guise of a Kiri shinobi, and turned into the Jinchuuriki of the Sanbi with a seal that was faulty and meant to disintegrate in the middle of Konoha, releasing the Biju within to cause mayhem. She realised what that would mean, and begged Kakashi to kill her. He didn't understand and refused claiming that he promised Obito to protect her. When he moved to attack their opponents, she threw herself onto the attack. Obito witnessed it, causing his Sharingan in both him and Kakashi to fully mature through the trauma of the event since he'd loved her."

Nothing was ever simple when it came to shinobi.
And what? He now hates Kakashi and Konoha by extension? That was usually how these stories ended.

"Yes. And the being whispering in his ear lies about what had happened, so with the manipulative Madara and this additional being telling him tales and their plans to control the world, he decided to join them because in his mind this is the right thing to do."

Was Danzo literally the only bad person in this world who was bad naturally and not because he had some unfortunate upbringing, was bullied, or was manipulated into being bad?

"There are plenty people who are horrible simply because they can be, they're simply not important enough to ever come across your notice."

If you say so. Why was Obito in Naruto's house though? Why here of all places? pretty sure Kakashi lives elsewhere.

"Learning more about you and what makes you so special. He does not want you dead if that makes you feel better."

A bit, yeah.

"He does want Naruto dead."

NOPITY NOPE! Fuck him! He'll die before he can even try it!

"He is the secret leader of Akatsuki, the group of mercenaries who plan to collect all the Biju. Extraction usually kills the host, but Naruto would probably just be drained, not that they know that. Uzumaki Kushina lived after extraction because Uzumaki possesses immense longevity. She was weakened, but still alive and capable of fighting."

This just gets worse and worse.

"Yes. Obito plans to follow Madara's plan which involves resurrecting Madara and using the Biju to place the entire world under a Genjutsu as some false imitation of 'peace'. They really think it'll work as they expect it too."

I am so sick of people wanting to conquer worlds with their weird views. How much free time do these people have?

"A lot."

And how come you never tell me anything and I have to wait?!

"YOU NEVER ASK!"

"I did it!"

Hari jumped only the slightest when Naruto burst through the door, yelling at the top of his lungs. And boy did her have some powerful lungs on him. His ability to project sound was almost enough to pierce the ear drum.

Behind the blond were his teammates and sensei who were all much more calm than he. Though both Ino and Sasuke were looking excited for Naruto's accomplishment. Whatever it was.
"Take a deep breath," she told the whiskered Genin.

He did so obediently, before the words came spilling out of him without control. "I finally managed to do the Rasengan without a Kage Bunshin, nee-chan! Observe!"

The teen put his hands together and then turned them in opposite direction before pulling them apart to reveal a blue ball of chakra that swirled dangerously. She hadn't actually seen him do the technique before, so she was understandably impressed by it alone, but also by the fact that his training had gotten him to that moment. He'd spent much time complaining about needing a clone to do it, and he'd managed right before the Chunin Exams.

It was an improvement worth celebrating since Naruto wasn't naturally talented like Sasuke and Ino were. He had to work extra hard to get the same results as them, which meant having the ability to create a bajillion copies of himself was useful if a little taxing on his mind and his chakra network.

Naruto allowed the chakra to dissipate as he looked up at Hari expectantly.

"Can that tear through anything?" was all she could ask as multiple vivid images were coming to mind.

Kakashi was the one to answer with a shrug. "We haven't seen it not be able to tear something apart yet."

"So like, can you make different sized ones too?"

Naruto frowned. "I haven't really tried that yet. I was more focused on getting it just by myself. Why?"

Hari cursed herself for not learning more about guns. How was she going to explain her idea otherwise?

"Okay, so my home has these ridiculous metal weapons that you hold in your hand. There is a long cylinder where you place other bits of metal that are shaped specifically for this weapon. There is a trigger that you pull, which releases some kind of mechanism inside, that causes a spark to ignite some combustible powder necessary to make it work. The metal bit is propelled by the explosion, down the cylinder at a speed far too fast for the human eye to track, and the metal bit can penetrate relatively anything depending on the size and shape and the version of the metal weapon in use. Very dangerous. They are called handguns."

It was the best she had considering she knew next to nothing about guns.

Naruto appeared to be completely confused, but Kakashi was already nodding along, connecting the dots in her poor explanation with ease. "You mean for Naruto to make miniature Rasengan in his palm or perhaps his fingertips, and then force them out like those bits of metal, with his chakra. The arm could act like the cylinder of the weapon, and then forcing the chakra down like a reverse vacuum could be reminiscent of Futon Jutsu applications, which is luckily Naruto's Elemental Affinity. A similar principle is used in Tsunade-sama's Taijutsu with her chakra. We can try it out later."

That got Hari to smirk. She was a genius even if she didn't know exactly what she was talking about!

"Got any ideas for the Chidori?"

They all turned to gape at Sasuke, since he rarely ever decided to speak when among a large group of people. He sometimes grunted or nodded along, but he wasn't a very verbal individual.
Hari looked to Kakashi. "It's the one that looks like my scar, right?"

He gave a quick nod, proving that yes, he had seen the famous scar of hers before. She was surprised he hadn't asked about it, actually. A lot of people were usually curious about it.

"All I can think of is shaping it into a web. Some spider webs are shaped like big domes, and those can be used as barriers to keep things in or out." She was obviously using Aragog's Hollow as inspiration for that line of thought. "And some spiders craft intricate webs that they use to spring down from above and trap creatures within." She forgot which one, but had seen it before.

A brief second of contemplation, before the teen nodded in gratitude. "I'll try that."

Ino folded her arms with a huff. "I don't have anything for you to advise me on and it isn't fair."

Her sensei patted her head thrice, ignoring the glare she sent his way. "Mah! You wouldn't really be the one going out to fight since you're the team medic. You need more defensive tactics, Ino. You need to stay alive so you can keep them alive."

Anko was beaming as she, Runa, and Hari stood in front of the mirror of the interrogation room that Ibiki had sent Yakushi Kabuto's unconscious body to. After months upon months of work, he'd been deemed ready to awaken.

Neither Runa or Hari were exactly happy about this situation, since it mostly went against their morals to begin with, but it was a big stride in adding to the village's protection.

The official story that Kabuto had been slowly fed through falsified memories, was that his team had met Tsunade-sama once and the woman had given him a few tips on how to improve his Iryo-Ninjutsu. And he'd taken her words to heart and was working at the hospital. Since Kabuto had indeed been working at the hospital before the whole Invasion, they didn't have to fake his relationships with his peers.

Kabuto was sent on a mission and his teammates hadn't made it. He was the only survivor and was hospitalized for quite some time due to injury.

His new back story was elaborate and unquestionable. And it proved what an amazing asset Runa and Hari were to the village to be able to do such things in conjunction with the Yamanaka Jutsu.

Kabuto was going to be sent to therapy to make certain he wasn't fucked up mentally, as was the requirement after every A-Rank mission. Nothing would give the truth away according to Inoichi.

It was all finally finished, giving all three women more time to do other things.

Hari stared at the pug that was sitting on the windowsill. The fur was light brown but was dark around the mouth and ears. And it looked absolutely adorable!

But it was wearing a Konoha's hitai-ate like a collar so that meant it was a ninken and she was advised not to just up and touch one. Which sucked epic bullocks because he was so cute and fluffy and she wanted nothing more than to squeeze!

The last time she'd touched a dog was when Sirius had turned into one for a laugh. Around fifty years ago.

Merlin it had been so long.
The dog sighed, no joke, and said, "Go on and pick me up. We both know you want to."

First off, his voice was really deep for such a tiny animal and it was amazing and hilarious at once. Second, he was one of the talking ones! How was that even possible though? They didn't have the same vocal chords as humans did.

Still, she was given an offer that she wouldn't turn down for the world and had the pug in her arms in seconds, squealing as quietly as possible to not offend his ears. He gave a long suffering sigh but did not fight her hold and even let her scratch at his chin.

The tail began wagging and Hari knew she'd gotten his favourite spot.

"I'm Pakkun," the dog murmured into her shoulder.

"Bull!"

Hari jumped as a massive, black bulldog in a spiked collar appeared in the kitchen. Around his front left foreleg was a Konoha hitai-ate.

Another dog landed beside Bull, with white and light brown fur. There were darker markings around the eyes and the hitai-ate was much like Pakkun's. She couldn't tell the breed though because the tuft of fur on the crown of the head made it a bit confusing.

"I'm Urushi!" the new dog exclaimed. "Shiba is next!"

"Idiot, I can introduce myself!" said the newest dog who was basically a Shiba Inu but with a mohawk. And he was grey and white. "Hey," he grunted.

From behind Bull stepped a dog even smaller than Pakkun. It had the same colouring as him though, but with thinner, floppy ears and big rings of dark brown around the eyes. They reminded her of her old glasses. The kanji for 'shinobi' was in the middle of his forehead and she wondered if it was paint.

"I'm Bisuke, lady. You smell good."

"Thanks." At least she didn't smell bad. Just how many ninken were going to join her?

A nudge on her right leg had her whirling around to see the next dog that had crept up on her without her hearing. It was tan save for the strip of white that started at the brow and trailed down to the muzzle. Also, it wore a pair of black shades. "I'm Akino," he said stiffly.

He reminded her of Ibiki actually.

"I'm Guruko, Potta-hime! Hi!" A dog nearly identical to Bisuke but without the markings on the eyes, and a white muzzle instead, greeted her as he jumped high enough to be eye level with the witch. He had whiskers just like Naruto!

"How many of you are there?" she asked, feeling a bit overwhelmed.

Pakkun sighed. "One more. Uhei. He probably fell asleep already."

Bull moved aside to show her the last dog, which had indeed curled up near the window and was fast asleep. He was an auburn greyhound and his head and chest were covered in white bandages.

All of the ninken shared one very common thing. They all wore a bright blue vest with an odd marking on the back.
"Why the sudden visit?" asked Hari, confused over random dogs just coming by. She doubted it was for some cuddles which honestly, she kind of needed after the last year she'd had and the stress she still had to face back at the capital.

"Kakashi said you wanted to meet us," was Pakkun's succinct answer.

It did many things at once. Her first reaction was involuntary. Simply her body warming up suddenly. And then a small smile stretched her cheeks because Kakashi had lived up to his word and he'd sent his ninken pack to greet her and it was very sweet of him. He didn't have to let her meet them, and she knew it very well. Promise or not. They were probably like his family and were important to him.

Somewhere between being touched at the gesture and thinking of paying him back somehow, things changed. It was a happy moment but for some reason Hari was tearing up little by little. There was that telltale stinging in the corners of her eyes and she blinked rapidly in hopes of stopping it before it began.

"Are you okay?" Guruko asked quietly, stepping closer in obvious concern.

Hari managed to nod quietly even as her throat constricted. She was crying for no reason! There was literally no reason for her to be crying right now, so why was it happening? It made no damn sense!

Somehow she ended up sitting on the floor as the dogs who were awake, surrounded her.

"I'm sorry," she murmured into Pakkun's fur, which smelled clean. She couldn't explain herself very well and she knew it. Happiness, sadness, longing, and something not exactly foreign but unfamiliar too, invaded her emotions.

She had a lot going on in her life. So much had changed and she'd just gone along with it all. But maybe it was time to sit back and just absorb it all and let herself deal with everything. It had been years since she truly let it all out in a good cry.

Not since Sirius.

Who also happened to be a dog like the ones surrounding her.

Suddenly she understood why she was crying, but didn't feel like explaining herself. The moment was too precious to ruin.

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Kakashi had originally had every intention of joining his ninken in their surprise of Potta Hari, but the scent of salt water had halted him.

She was crying. He'd never seen her cry he was certain. Never heard her cry either. Foolishly, he'd assumed that she simply couldn't cry. She'd been kidnapped and cut up and hospitalized and hadn't cried the entire time any of these things had happened to her. Sometimes it was too easy to forget that she was just a civilian.

He didn't even know what made her cry either, but a peek in the window showed her seated in the center of the small kitchen, her face buried in Pakkun's fur and the little pug looking put out but accepting of the situation.

Kakashi wasn't very good with people's emotions. He tried to be a good friend who was supportive, but emotions were not his specialty. Not even his own. He emotionally flayed himself every morning he could when visiting the Memorial Stone. He was obviously not someone to come to in times of
emotional upheaval because it would do no one any good. He might even end up making it worse in the end.

But he wanted to help. He didn't want to just leave her there crying and wallowing. And wasn't that a first for him! Usually Kakashi fled at the first sign of tears and yet here he was, sticking to the wall outside of Hari’s kitchen, trying to think of something useful that could help.

Nothing came to mind. He cursed himself for being so socially stunted on top of emotionally stunted. Being a natural genius and becoming a soldier early on in life did him no favors in adulthood.

Would Kurenai know what to do? He was certain Anko wouldn't. Kurenai seemed the most put together of all the active Jonin. She'd been a Jonin the shortest out of all of them, and had been in less dangerous situations, plus she grew up in a nice home without any drama. She had the best background on her side too.

Perhaps she'd be able to help?

Then again, did Hari really want someone's help in the first place? She wasn't even talking to the dogs or unloading her problems onto them. Pakkun was just being used as a pillow while the others practically cuddled right on up to her despite never doing such a thing with anyone else save for Kakashi.

"You can come in, you know," Hari murmured, lifting her head in order to look at the window where he's perched himself at some point. She'd known he was there the whole time. He forgot how good she was at doing that. Another reason why it was easy to forget her civilian status.

"I didn't want to interfere," he told her quietly, unsure of what to do.

Her smile was more of tired acceptance instead of happiness. "I was just thinking. I really like dogs because my godfather could turn into one. But then I got thinking about how he died because of me. And then it went from that to how I haven't cried or pet a dog or been taken care of since he passed away years ago. And yeah, like a hill, it just kept escalating and the tears began to flow."

That was… sad. Hari was a very strong person. She could take a lot of stress without breaking. But even the strongest of people didn't always want to be strong. Sometimes they wanted to be taken care of too. Being strong all the time was impossible.

She was an orphan and all she'd had was her godfather for however long she had him. She wasn't raised with love in her childhood. She'd been alone for some time and had to raise herself as best as she could. It was a lot of work having to constantly be strong for everyone else in your life.

Of course she'd just want a moment to herself where she could be taken care of instead.

And he couldn't really comfort her in this situation because he didn't know the intimate details of what had happened to her godfather and how she was involved in his death.

This was what it was like to care about someone but also be unable to help them truly. It was fucking stressful and humbling to know he couldn't fix everything.

Hari sighed. "Thanks for letting me meet your family."

She got it. A lot of people, fellow shinobi included, didn't understand exactly what it was like. The Inuzuka had their ninken and they were raised together. Like siblings. The Aburame had their kikaichu which were introduced to their bodies from a very young age and were always with them no matter what happened.
Kakashi had raised his ninken all by himself. They'd, for a time, been the only company a lonely boy had. They were indeed his family and he was proud that Hari understood that and respected that.

"They've met all of my friends so it was only right that they'd meet you to commit your scent to memory just in case," he told her, trying to shrug off the immense gratitude she was aiming his way. It made him feel self-conscious for some reason.

She smiled, looking far more happy than before. "It's too bad Luna isn't here. She likes dogs too."

"I am present."

Every head in the room whipped around toward the front door where Potta Runa was standing, holding a big paper bag in between her dainty hands. She'd gotten in without anyone's notice, which wasn't all that unexpected. She shook the bag thrice, and just like that, every canine was at attention, tails wagging. From what Kakashi's nose told him, it was a bag full of dog treats.

She'd already known what was going on and had come prepared.

Of course she did.

Hari's laughter made everything better. Seeing her smile again was enough to make him smile too.

Meditation. It was supposed to help people find themselves or some such nonsense. To help their achieve inner peace. He knew there were other applications for it, but Sasuke had never been the kind to just sit still and think for hours. While he was nowhere near Naruto's level of energy and exuberance, he too was a hyperactive child.

Still, Kakashi had said something a while back about meditating in their chakra to better understand their own bodies. Where their chakra came from specifically. He wanted all of them to occasionally meditate and pinpoint their body's tenketsu. To determine that everything was flowing properly and evenly and if something was amiss, to go to the hospital immediately.

Apparently, many shinobi could have things like chakra poisoning and never know it, which was odd. Because they didn't know how to investigate their own chakra network, they wouldn't know until it was too late or almost too late to fix anything.

Naruto obviously struggled the most with it because he wanted to be physically working. Thankfully he had Kage Bunshin to still rack up experience for him even as he had to remain still for hours at a time. Naruto seemed to never not be working. But it was good for him to learn how to meditate now so he wouldn't have to learn later on. And he was slowly getting better and better at remaining patient.

Ino picked it up pretty quickly. She had the remarkable ability to be patient when it was required of her. Her family jutsu had to be taught through patience because it could be dangerous to not only the victims, but the users. So she was used to meditation. More so than the rest of them. And finding her chakra network was easier since she had the least amount to work through.

Sasuke's was like a blue gas cloud and he was standing directly in the center, trying to find the individual holes where the gas was escaping from. And the gas was warm and inviting, and made him want to rest instead of work, which was difficult to fight through. It was like he was tired and being lulled to sleep and he had to fight to stay awake.

The human body had exactly 361 tenketsu. Finding every single one was a hassle. Certain ones were opened more than others and tended to overtake the ones nearest them. Like little beacons of light
outshining others in their vicinity and making it difficult to see past them. They were just so blinding they were hard to ignore.

But ignore he did. Without an in depth search, Sasuke had managed to locate 64 of his tenketsu immediately.

Technically he knew where the tenketsu were and the names of each. He'd read a medical text once that had a diagram he'd memorized because he'd thought it was necessary. He knew where all the tenketsu should be, but not everyone was built exactly the same. So while the ones over the heart were a certain place on him, they might be half a centimeter to the right on another person.

He couldn't just rely on a diagram from a forty year old book to tell him something that could vary from person to person. Everything was in the general area on each body but without a Byakugan it would be impossible to tell exactly where someone's tenketsu were located.

Distantly, Sasuke could hear Naruto cussing up a storm because he'd gotten distracted again, and he couldn't help but smile. The blond was such an idiot sometimes, but that's what made him so likable.

"Hey mom."

Ino was grabbed the second she got her greeting out, and yanked into a bone-crushing hug by her mother who decided to, as always, take her time. And normally her hugs included patting Ino's hair, sniffing her a few times, and then squeezing her some more because she acted like Ino was never around when that was literally so far from the truth it wasn't funny!

"You've been working so hard lately! It's almost as if you're never around!" her mother practically wailed as Ino had expected of her.

"I saw you just this morning, mom." Seriously. Ino had even been the one to make her own smoothie while her father made breakfast.

"Where only a few days ago you had been in another country, far away from home, and having to sleep on the unforgiving ground every night!"

Ino looked past her mom's shoulder to find her father watching from the kitchen table, amusement on his face. He was more concerned with sipping his perfectly brewed tea than helping his only child with her suffering. The nerve!

"Have even been eating enough with all this training you're doing?" Yamanaka Ichiko asked with a borderline pout.

She nodded. "Hari-chan packs Naruto with extra food every day just in case. She's really big on making sure we eat, probably because she didn't get to eat much when she was a kid." Poor Hari. Thinking about all her strange mannerisms and the possible events that caused her to develop them, pissed Ino off to no conceivable end!

Her mom sniffed and stepped away finally. "I never had a doubt. She seemed very inclined to taking care of other people. A fine young lady to emulate should you feel the urge."

"Hari-chan is awesome," Ino agreed. "She and Kakashi-sensei seem to finally be getting with the program. I haven't seen them flirt this much before, but I'm excited for what it could mean in the future!"

Her parents shared a look of amusement, making her realize that they knew more about the situation
than they were letting on. "What do you guys know that I don’t?" she demanded, offended at being kept out of the loop!

"Oh nothing!"

It was certainly something if it had her grinning like that! Ino always knew everything about everyone! She had to know about this too!

"I’ll do double shifts on my days off," she offered as slyly as she could managed.

Inoichi snorted. "Nice try."

Damn it!

"Like this?" Naruto asked expectantly.

Shizune stepped forward to correct Naruto’s hands and then nodded. "This is the proper way to apply pressure to a bleeding wound. Are the rest of you paying attention?" She looked to the rest of the room, which was literally just a swarm of Naruto’s Kage Bunshin all trying to learn the same basic medical skills.

When Hari had told her that both Sasuke and Naruto wanted to learn the basics of Iryo-Ninjutsu, she’d been a bit skeptical. Naruto was a good kid but he would never be able to be an Iryo-nin because of the Kyuubi. Bijuu chakra was toxic to anyone but their hosts and if even a bit leaked in while he tried using the Shosen Jutsu, it would cause damage in the long run. He would be incapable of healing injuries because of it.

As for Sasuke, his Sharingan would essentially help him cheat through the basics of the course and move him on to the levels in no time. While not as capable of seeing chakra as the Byakugan, the Sharingan was still formidable. And it would help him get through the levels enough to become a field medic if he practiced hard enough.

Hyuuga tended to be doctors and Iryo-nin because of how beneficial their Dojutsu was. It was a shame that Uchiha had decided to merely stay as basic shinobi or police officers. They would have been useful as medics too.

Anyway, because both boys wanted to learn just in case they ever needed to prevent another traumatic situation where near-death occurred, Shizune had volunteered to see them through private lessons. Hari was paying her on the side even though she’d told the other woman it wasn't necessary. Teaching ninja how to save their comrades because they begged for help out of sheer honesty and desperation, shouldn’t be treated like some exchange only based on money. Shizune was going to add the money to the hospital’s funds.

Naruto's chakra control was decent for the amount he had. He would probably never amass perfect control because there was just so much in him alone. Creating one hundred Kage Bunshin for the express purpose of training with them proved it. Having them all do the same thing was equivalent to Naruto doing it one hundred times which would stick in his mind faster.

He and Sasuke were on the same level. Sasuke because he had the Sharingan and it afforded him good chakra control and understanding of the way chakra moved, and Naruto because of him spamming Kage Bunshin. Naruto was not a genius or a prodigy like Sasuke, but having the Kage Bunshin at his disposal gave him a fighting chance.

Shizune was certain that if both were given the same jutsu to learn, they’d master it at the same time.
Sasuke because of natural skill and Naruto because he could practice one thousand times at once in order to gain experience.

She wondered if the blond truly understood just how much he could do with his Bunshin. So far he'd been rather tame with it but if he put his mind to it, it could be a way for him to power up very quickly.

Or perhaps he knew already? Maybe he wasn't allowed to use it to its fullest potential yet? He was only thirteen.

"Alright, I'm going to teach you all how to properly tend to a wound once you staunch the bleeding. Some plants can stimulate cell growth. If you crush them and then mix them with water, and then rub the mixture into the wound, it'll force the body to heal the wound faster. You won't always have Hari-chan's potions on hand so you must learn how to do this properly."

The blonds all nodded, faces serious.

Shizune proceeded to unroll a scroll and released the seal on it, revealing several plants lined up neatly.

"I've been told that you like to garden, so you should know some of these plants already."

The rest of the demonstration continued on like that. The lessons would serve dual purpose. Not only would he know how to set an open wound, he would also learn which plants across the nations, were safe to consume if he ran out of food. Shizune always tried to have multiple lessons rolled into one if she could manage it.

This was going to save lives some day.

"So it turns out that making tiny Rasengan is actually much harder than making big ones. Expanding the size of a Rasengan gives me more space to work with, but shrinking the size reduces the amount of space and makes the rotation a lot harder than I thought it would be. How to get all that chakra to rotate in such minimal space is a struggle."

Naruto decided to demonstrate for his teammates since he needed for them to understand where he was coming from.

Taking a deep breath, he created the standard Rasengan. It was about the size of a common water balloon and was perfectly ready to tear through a tree. He proceeded to add more chakra to it and expand the rotation, forcing it to grow in size, as if filling a water balloon with more water. It was really easy to do that.

And then, he started pulling his chakra out and confining the rotation to a smaller space, it started to slow down a bit. And when he tried to stabilize it, the smooth surface of the 'ball' became lumpy. He managed to get it small enough to where it was no wider than his palm, but it disappeared if he tried to make it smaller.

"You'll need to do more chakra control exercises," said Sasuke, his Sharingan activated. "You should make nine hundred and ninety-nine Kage Bunshin, so your chakra will be evenly spread out and you each will have a small amount to work with. And then you will practice with each other on how to manage the shape and rotation. You provide the chakra and the Bunshin shapes and rotates it into as small a shape as you can make it."

That made sense.
Ino patted his back and smiled. "You'll get it. You always do."

"Well, I wanted to show you guys something else."

Something he'd been working on in private because he was curious to see what would happen. Naruto had been adding his Wind Nature to the Rasengan because the notes he'd been given from Ero-Sennin said it was technically incomplete because he dad had wanted to see how it would do when mixed with Nature Chakra. So Naruto decided to take that step himself and adding wind chakra to some chakra that was already spinning at massive speeds seemed like a good idea.

He created a Kage Bunshin and they got into position to create another Rasengan while Naruto focused on drawing upon his Wind Chakra.

It took more work and concentration that the mini Rasengan training did, but eventually, the piercing wail he'd become familiar with started up, and the Rasengan went from blue, to white.

Both Sasuke and Ino covered their ears as they watched the white ball grow four sharp edges, much like a shuriken. The noise grew louder, and the Naruto Bunshin jumped back, taking the upgraded Rasengan with him and slamming it into a nearby tree. Where the normal Rasengan would have torn at least a decent-sized hole through the trunk, the new one expanded upon contact and obliterated the entire thing as well as the Kage Bunshin that had attacked it, him getting caught in the explosion and poofing away from the strain.

Naruto turned to his friends, waiting for them to say something. "Cool huh?"

"That," Ino began, her voice shaking just a bit, "is a very dangerous jutsu, Naruto."

Sasuke was nodding, his face a mask of concern. "I would say you shouldn't use that on anyone you aren't willing to kill, because that is some intense shit and if you perfect that, it could be even more dangerous. You should really be careful when using that."

"Right you are, my kawaii little Genin!"

The three whirled around to find Kakashi leaning against a nearby tree, one of his Icha Icha held tight in his hand, though it wasn't open.

"It's impressive that you've already begun working on this on your own, Naruto. You're also doing really well in your personal training, but I'm going to tell you what I told Sasuke when I started teaching him my Chidori. You do not use this on any of your comrades or fellow Konoha Shinobi. If they aren't nuke-nin from this village, you should not use that on anyone from Konoha. And save for truly dangerous situations, you shouldn't use that version at all unless you absolutely have to."

Well that sucked!

Their sensei stepped forward and patted Naruto's head, his visible eyes curving upward. "Sensei would very proud of your accomplishments with his jutsu, Naruto. He always believed in growth and would have supported you one hundred percent."

That suddenly made it all better! "Awesome! I'll perfect all of his jutsu then! -ttebayo!"

"I believe it."

Because Naruto never went back on his word.
"We'll say he received a field promotion to Chunin is being considered for the position of Jonin. Someone of his talents would be difficult to convince that they're still a Genin."

Hari had nodded along with the Hokage's words, but her mind had been elsewhere. Specifically in a discussion with Death and trying to determine if everything was going well with the man's plan.

*Are you sure this is going to work out?*

"Yes." They told her. "*You didn't rush in and make a mess of everything. You took your time and it has paid off. No one currently living in this world beyond you, could undo what you've done.*"

*But there is someone not currently living who could?* She asked, catching his meaning.

"*Yes. The chances of them being resurrected are slim however. So long as everyone plays their part correctly, Kabuto will question nothing.*"

That was good. She hadn't wanted to simply kill him when he could live a fulfilling life in the end. But she was still torn over taking and messing with his mind and free will. But murder wasn't right either. Morals were such a hassle sometimes.

"*You consistently refuse to listen to me when I tell you to ignore them, so this is your own fault,*" Death said smugly.

She chose to ignore their snark completely.

"*Rude!*"

*Shut up!*

"You sure you don't want to come?"

Karin shook her head, but smiled at the woman. "No thanks. I'm not feeling like going to the movies tonight. Kinda wanna finish this book for my training. Anko-sensei said we should memorize it front of back because it'll be important in the future."

Hari frowned. "I know she wouldn't want you to spend all your time training. Even Anko knows how to have fun now and then. You don't have to rush."

"I know, but the torture techniques are fascinating in their effects on the body and I want to get through this so I can begin practicing on those lifelike dummies we've been given!"

While Hari looked a bit grossed out by her reasoning, she didn't question it. "Want me to stop by Ichiraku and order you takeaway? This is supposed to be a treat for the kids every month. You technically are my ward you know."

"Sure."

Hair nodded. "Salt Ramen?"

"Yep! With extra menma and eggs please?"

"Got you covered! Have fun learning how to torture people!"
And that was why Hari was awesome. She just accepted the shinobi way of life and didn't think they were weird or crazy for the work they put in. She also literally took the entire orphanage on monthly trips to the movies just to give them something else to do, in return for them taking those first aid classes.

It was a mandatory thing expected of the orphans and there had been no payment in the past. Since the village had overlooked the children for so long, none of the taxes going to pay for the orphanage had actually gone to where they were supposed to go. So in a way, this was a better arrangement.

In times of crises the children would be put to work for the betterment of the villagers. It didn't hurt to reward them for diligence now and then. They'd been helpful during the invasion after all.

Hari would be an awesome parent because she just seemed to get things. She understood what kids wanted and she treated them like people with opinions. Whatever she'd been through in her life had lead to her being probably one of the best adults Karin had ever met.

There was a way to be a leader without being a jerk. There was a way to take care of people without being oppressive. There was a way to parent without being controlling. She found the perfect middle ground in these situations and none of the kids thought she was annoying. And that was why they all behaved whenever they went out every month, and why they never got into trouble.

Being good had its benefits. And kids would much rather obey someone out of respect than out of fear. By fostering a good relationship with the kids, Hari had ensured a smooth relationship for the future.

And she'd limited the chances of rebellion down to zero.

Obedience born of fear lead to hatred and frustration. Enough of both would cause someone to act out once they lost any care for their own well being. Because what would they have left to lose in the end? Obedience out of mutual respect left all parties sated and content.

"Have fun with the kids, nee-chan!"

In the meantime, Karin was going to learn exactly how to extract someone's intestines through their anus.

"Your teams will be representing us in the upcoming Chunin Exams. You are to show no mercy, is that understood?"

"Hai, Orochimaru-sama!" the two teams before him nodded.

"You will be on the look out for outstanding shinobi. You will take notes on what you notice and report back to me with your findings. If I am to obtain new jutsu I need only the best of the best."

"Hai, Orochimaru-sama!" the teams repeated.

"And furthermore, you will do your absolute best to get me Uchiha Sasuke, alive and well. Are we clear?"

"Hai, Orochimaru-sama!"

When training on her own, Hinata felt more confident. At home, she was always pitted against Hanabi or Neji, and both were more talented than she was to the naked eye. And sometimes she
would have to fight her father who was better than all three of them so in the end she never appeared to be successful in anything. And when that happened, she would get the looks of discontent from the Main Branch members.

When alone, or training with her team, she felt much better. Kurenai-sensei specifically noted her improvements in everything. Not just Juken. Hinata had come to her and asked for assistance in learning another Taijutsu style to have as a back up in case she couldn’t use her family’s style some day. Her eyes pretty much gave away her relation to the Hyuga Clan and people would expect the Gentle Fist off the bat and were properly wary of it.

She wanted something extra to surprise her opponents. She’d been working really hard with the help of both Sakura and Choji. Choji, when making use of his family’s Hiden techniques, could take a lot of hits without feeling anything, and he allowed her to practice on him. Sakura had been training with Neji’s Genin team member Rock Lee recently. Lee was a user of Goken and he’d been advising her on how to perfect her own Taijutsu. In return, Sakura was imparting knowledge onto Hinata and Choji as well.

Their team wasn’t a Taijutsu team at all, but just because they were geared toward one specific thing, didn’t mean they shouldn’t work toward other aspects of the shinobi life. A well-rounded shinobi was a shinobi that survived. Survival was very important.

Hinata could Track and Heal. Sakura could Heal and Sense. Choji would Sense and Defend. Each had something they were pretty good at. But they wanted to do more.

On the side, Hinata had also been improving her abilities with Juken. Fiddling with the application and trying to improve upon that. Why did Hyuga always resort to the same moves? Why not make new attacks as well? The other clans of Konoha were always improving their Hiden techniques and Hinata didn’t want to be predictable! Even if she couldn’t stand toe to toe with Neji in the present time, she could still predict what he would do because Hyuga rarely deviated from their teachings.

That was why she’d started to learn Katon and Raiton Jutsu. Unlike the rest of the Hyuga who never bothered to learn justu outside the basic three taught at the Academy, Hinata was different. She was aiming for more and had higher aspirations than the box Hyuga often confined themselves and their family members to.

When Kurenai-sensei had learned that Kakashi-sensei had already started Team 7 on chakra natures months ago, she had rushed to her own team and had them find out their own natures. Hinata had come out with equal strengths Fire and Lightning Affinities.

With her Byakugan, she had an advantage over her teammates in that she knew her own chakra network perfectly. She could see her own chakra. Could feel it deeply. She knew how to measure it for learning new jutsu. Trial and error was cut down significantly because of that.

Nature Chakra was a bit different in application and once she got the hang of using it, she’d begun to work on how to use it in a fight.

One thing she’d come up with, was inspired by Sakura’s new fighting style. Sakura would build up chakra in a certain place and then eject it upon contact to create devastating damage whiel she used Goken(Strong Fist). Hinata was doing a similar thing, but it was focusing nature chakra instead.

By focus Lightning Chakra into her fist, her entire hand would begin to spark until the chakra became visible and crackled around her fist in blue and yellow bolts. And then if she expelled it upon connecting with her target, it would not only blast the target away, but also electrocute it as well. And if she used Fire Chakra, it would be a fist of flames that would burn the target.
Even if they weren't considered full jutsu yet or didn't seem all that dangerous at a glance, Hinata had plans for them. Shaping and Transforming Nature Chakra took a lot of work and Nature Chakra was more dangerous than common chakra used every day. If applied correctly and in the best scenario, she could do real damage, especially as a surprise.

And if she managed to learn enough control to mix her Lightning Nature in with her Juken, she'd be dangerous.

Forcing their own chakra into their enemy's tenketsu was the point of the their whole style of fighting. Forcing Lightning Chakra in would cause significantly more damage. If she had Wind Nature, she'd probably be capable of cutting the connections between each tenketsu and rendering them useless.

There was potential and she wanted to see it recognized!

Her hands were bandaged from all of the training she'd been putting herself through lately. She'd already broken some fingers. Applying Goken and Juken at different times would do that because both focused on different forms of fighting.

But it was worth it.

Taking a deep breath, Hinata took her stance and ran through the Hakke Rokjuuyon Sho in slow motion. She was capable of hitting 64 tenketsu at common speed. Only 32 at the required speed. She already knew where to strike, it was just training her body up to get used to the speed that was necessary.

The dummy she was using, had been set up at the training ground by Kurenai-sensei. Each team member had one to practice on if they came by to train when no one else was around. Hinata wanted to work on her Juken away from the prying eyes of her family members.


Neji could do all 64 as well as Kaiten despite the fact that he was a Side Branch member who wasn't allowed to see those scrolls. But he was a prodigy and learned by observing. Hinata hadn't mastered Kaiten yet and it would be some time before she did. She understood the general application and could do it standing still. The spinning brought on new challenges that she wasn't capable of handling yet. But she wasn't giving up!


And again. And again. And again until her fingers began to throb.

"Wow, Hinata! You're doing really good! -ttebayo!"

She slipped, overshooting her last strike and falling backward, landing on her butt. Naruto was there. He was casually walking toward her while his hands were in his pockets.

And Uchiha Sasuke was not with him!

It was like the greatest thing to possibly happen to her! Alone time with Naruto!

"N-naruto-kun! What are you doing here?"

"Wandering," he shrugged. "I wasn't feeling up to intense training today, so I've just be walking around. But I saw your awesome training and decided to come and say hi."
He wanted to say 'hi' to Hinata. She could die happy.

"Have you eaten yet?"

Was this what she thought it was?

"No."

"Then let's get some ramen! I feel like I never get to see anyone from our graduation class anymore."

Lunch with Naruto. Something she'd been too scared to propose in the Academy.

"Sasuke asked me to meet him at Ichiraku's for lunch. You should totally come with us!" said Naruto with a bright grin that ruined Hinata's hopeful mood.

It was time to finally admit it to herself because denial was doing her no good. Hinata's biggest competition for Naruto's heart, was Uchiha Sasuke. May the best shinobi win. AKA Hinata.

Getting glared at by Hyuga Hinata wasn't something he expected when he'd gotten up that morning. He'd gone to train after sharing breakfast with Itachi who had made him tomato okonomiyaki. It wasn't as good as Hari-san's were but was still decent.

He'd told Naruto to meet him for ramen around lunch time the day before, and that was it.

When he arrived, it was to see both Naruto and Hinata waiting for him. Naruto was gesticulating madly as he retold a story from one of their annoying D-Rank missions that had seen Naruto dangling over a waterfall, and Hinata was staring at him like he'd hung the moon.

And then they noticed him and while Naruto brightened immediately and wrapped an arm around him once he got close enough, Hinata sent him the equivalent of a death glare.

They'd never quarreled before, so he wasn't sure of why she was so hostile toward him, but he sure as hell didn't just let it go.

So while Naruto was busy ordering ten bowls of Miso Ramen with double toppings on every bowl, the two Dojutsu users stared one another down.

If it was possible, the air would be sizzling.

The sun was scorching as always, and as always, Gaara fashioned himself a sand umbrella to protect his deathly pale skin.

He was looking forward to the upcoming Chunin exams, even if he wasn't necessarily looking forward to the drastic change of temperature that would come with it. Tetsu no Kuni snowed a lot. Gaara had never been to a place where snow existed. Temari had told him, in quiet trepidation no less, that he would need to choose a new outfit meant for warmth.

Walking into a shop to personally buy his new wardrobe had been filled with the usual. People skirting around him to get to the exit. The workers all looking like they wanted to be anywhere else.

Even though he hadn't had an issue ever since Potta Hari had done something to Shukaku, they were still wary. Even though he literally got to sleep every single day now and didn't feel as if he was going insane, nor did he suffer from any headaches, they were still wary.
Sometimes he wondered if there would ever be a change to the things around him. Gaara had changed from just his Biju being muzzled. Surely everything else would change eventually too?

The shaky leadership of their nation was a mess. The village had no leader and the Daimyo of the land was the world's biggest pushover. Getting anything done was up to the council who couldn't seem to agree on anything. Baki was driven to his wit's end.

Their village would be participating in the next Chunin Exam, but they would only be sending one team. Their output of shinobi was the least of all the five great nations. Even worse than Kirigakure. They currently had no Genin worthy of sending to the Exams this time around, and judging by how they weren't progressing, not the net time around either.

He stared up at the wall, upon which hung a various selection of clothing meant for other climates. Red and brown. That was all he wanted. Some dark red and dark brown clothing. Suna was all tans, whites, and golds. The general population dressed in those specific colors to blend in with the landscape as well as the blowing sand should it be necessary in the event of an invasion. Gaara had always preferred to stand out in opposing colors. Ironically, Temari and Kankuro did too, choosing light purple and pure black respectively as their outfit colors.

Annoyed at how little of a color range there was to choose from, Gaara just grabbed the darkest colored items he found and brought them to the register.

The transaction was completed quickly and he took his leave before the worker passed out from terror.

His first order to business was to get used to his new outfit now.

He was going to look ridiculous. But at least it wasn't kill-me-orange. Admire Naruto he may, it did not stop him from acknowledging his friend's horrible taste in clothing.

Sakura, Ino, Hinata, Naruto, and Sasuke, were standing in a line as Tsunade-sama handed them each a scroll saying they had passed the Basic Course on Iryo-Ninjutsu which was necessary to be allowed to do any type of Healing in Konoha. Furthermore, she then handed each of them a badge to show which level they were at upon completion and what exactly that level allowed them to do.

Naruto was Level 1 and would remain as such. He could only set injuries and clean and wrap them. He was not allowed to use his chakra on others at all for some reason.

Sasuke received Level 2. It was basic first aid, which included healing minor abrasions and contusions. He didn't have enough skill yet to be granted anything higher than that.

Ino was above him at Level 3, which was basically the same thing with a bit more trust in her chakra control to allow her to heal sprains as well.

Sakura was granted Level 5, which meant she could heal additional things such as phalanges and the nose. Those types of breaks were usually very simple to deal with and took little time.

Hinata earned a Level 7 badge. She received all the former allowances, plus the right to treat broken bones the size of the radius and smaller. The larger the bone the more resistance it gave to prompted healing from outside sources, meaning more chakra control was necessary.

Karin had already reached Level 10 ages ago. She'd been in the medical business much longer than all of them and had far more experience in Iryo-Ninjutsu. She was trusted to heal any kind of bone and even had the right to perform minor surgery if she felt it necessary.
With this, Sasuke, Ino, Sakura, Hinata, and Karin were allowed to work shifts at the hospital should their skills be required some day. Their Levels would determine where they would be placed and what they could be trusted with handling.

Personally, Sakura thought it was great that even the boys were learning. The ratio of female medics to male medics was ridiculous because so many shinobi families acted like Healing was a woman only thing. The sexism was ridiculous. Learning how to save a life should not be determined by gender. Everyone should be learning these things.

"Congratulations on passing the required course," said Tsunade-sama. "If you wish for additional training you will have to sign up for Leveled Courses. They are considerably cheaper than they used to be and can be paid for with 5% of each check you earn. If you file the paperwork, the Mission Assignment Desk will be notified and remove the payment automatically from your check until you officially pass the course."

Sakura planned on signing up. Her team had been taking more and more C-Ranks lately and they’d been getting more money too. Five percent of her share of a basic C-Rank with no additional fees was like 150 Ryō. Basic C-Ranks were 12,000 Ryō and were split four ways. She would still get a lot at payment time, which was nice. And the pay for the classes went to the hospital as a whole and not the instructors because they felt they shouldn't be paid for teaching people how to save lives.

It all worked out in the end.

The blonde medic released them all then, leaving the group to do whatever they wanted for the rest of the day.

"Let's go get some lunch!" Naruto insisted.

"No ramen!" both Ino and Sasuke yelled, making his face droop instantly.

"Not even a litt-"

"No!"

Naruto turned his watering eyes on both Hinata and Sakura then, as if seeking their assistance. Hinata's face flushed red and she began to stammer. Sakura decided to take action. "Naruto, you're always eating ramen. Eat something else for once. Yakiniku Q is really popular and you can cook your own meat at your table. Let everybody else have what they want now and then. It's only fair."

Surprisingly, the blond sobered up immediately. "Sorry, guys. I've been eating their ramen my entire life because they usually gave me discounts unlike other places. I got used to eating there and it's a nice atmosphere compared to most places."

Being reminded of Naruto's terrible childhood just made Sakura feel bad for never truly noticing what was going on in his life at the time. She'd been too busy fawning over Sasuke to care.

But she could care now!

"It's fine. Just tone it down a bit and come hang out with us somewhere else now and then, yeah? My team and Shikamaru's team head to Yakiniku Q a lot. You guys should join us."

"You bet! -ttebayo!"

"One last hurrah before we all go our separate ways!" Anko cheered as she help up her glass of
whatever that was just a mix of ten different kinds of alcohol.

"It's literally the Chunin Exams, Anko," said Kurenai. "And Hari will still end up with us in the end."

"Yeah, but it'll be like a month or so until that happens so we need to get the girls' night out now before we're all bogged down with annoying ass work!"

Hari, Luna, and Shizune had to agree. Tsunade was just inhaling another bottle of sake. She didn't even pour it out and just took it straight from the bottle.

"I will be representing Tsunade-sama," said Shizune. "With Kakashi out of the village, she will have to remain behind."

The blond grumbled at that and rolled her eyes. Saying something about a 'decrepit old bastard' but she didn't bother to elaborate. "Missing out on all the good bets, You better place some good ones!"

"You should not be gambloling, Tsunade-sama!"

"What's the point of going to those things if you're not doing it to make some hard cash?"

The rest of the table burst into laughter as poor Shizune had to deal with her shisho's greed and blase behaviour.

Hari literally loved her friends and was so glad to finally have women she could be around who were supportive and awesome.

"By the time I get back, you'll already be off to the Chunin Exams, so I need all the kisses and hugs I can get for now because you'll be gone for like a month and I'll be so alone," said Hari as dramatically as she could manage, placing her hand over her brow as if she was about to faint.

"Nee-chan, you're silly."

"Yeah, Hari-chan! You'll be coming to see the Third Exam anyway so we'll see each other sooner than you think! And you'll get to watch us mop the floor with everyone!"

"Hn."

She moved to pull both Ino and Naruto into a hug because she knew they had no problem with hugging. The offer was extended to Sasuke however as he still has issues with physical contact and personal space. He took the offer more readily than he had any other time, even if he didn't wrap his arms around her like the other two did.

"I know that once you're in the exams you can't accept help from outsiders, so I decided to prepare you ahead of them. Under Naruto's bed is a brown satchel. It's filled with potions of all sorts. Each kind to a different shaped bottle and all are different colors. There is a small list explaining what they can do and how they should be used. Not everything is available at the hospital either. We only had to give up a few of our clan secrets, but not all of them. Some of these things are not shared knowledge at present. Make sure you don't lose the bottles though, okay? And I've made it so only you three can get into the bag, so be careful with it."

The Genin all became dead serious at her explanation.

"We'll be fine, nee-chan. -ttebayo!"
"And yet I'll worry anyway."

Turning to Kakashi, her jaw dropped when instead of her having to argue with him just get a damn hug before a departure, he actually pulled her in first. Hari liked hugs from people bigger than her who weren't aiming to stab her in the back. She had a weakness for them.

"I figured I could be generous this time," he told her, sounding amused. And this time, unlike all the other times, his arms had embraced her in return. Usually he was just stiff and held his arms out a bit so she could fit between them, but this time there was full on contact between them. He was also ridiculously warm and it was nice.

"Well we have established that generosity is basically your name and lifestyle," she said teasingly as she stepped away. "You think they're ready for this?" she asked, voice pitched a lot lower than before.

"Most definitely. I've put them through specific hell training just to prepare them for this. If they don't come out Chunin by the end of this, I'll be horrified."

That was a good assurance. Kakashi himself, who was probably one of the most powerful shinobi in the entire village, believed they would all succeed as well as gain a promotion. All that training had been for an express purpose.

"Alright then. Wish me luck in dealing with all the decrepit old fogies at the capital. Do I look like someone to pity on first glance if you were a civilian?"

She was deliberately dressed in a sleeveless green qipao, to show off her scarred arms so the reminder would be fresh in everyone's minds once she arrived. Hari was not above playing on people's emotions in order to get what she wanted out of them. And if pity was going to get her her way, then so be it. She wasn't too proud to acknowledge how useful it could be if handled correctly.

"You'll get the desired effect, don't worry," he said, voice a little tight from his built up, unnecessary guilt over her having them at all.

"Thanks!"

"Good luck, nee-chan!"

The Daimyo's courtroom was as it had been the last time. Save for Sayori being tied up and guarded by several shinobi as she was forced to stand in the center of the room so they may all watch her. The room was circular and had many levels stretching upward, much like Naruto's Academy classroom had.

Hari sat bedecked in a ridiculous formal kimono in various shades of green for the occasion. Her hand fan was held in front of her face like all the other Ladies in the court. This was the part she hated the most. The whole being unable to talk if she wasn't addressed was aggravating. She got to watch as the bitch who tried to put a hit on her, got her due comeuppance!

After some time waiting for everyone to situate themselves, the trial continued as it should. The long list of crimes held against Sayori were read out in order to unnecessarily refresh their memories. It was also done for the sake of drama. While the trial was definitely meant to gain closure for their families for what Sayori had done, they also liked their little bit of pomp here and there in order to make themselves feel superior.

Lords and Ladies couldn't do anything by halves, right? Their lives would be too banal otherwise.
The various punishments that the assorted Lords and Ladies were proposing were impressive to say the least. Hari hadn't been this proud of the ruthlessness of humanity in a long time and that was saying something! Just all of them united in the common goal of making Sayori suffer for what she'd done. It was a beautiful moment.

"Hari-hime, have you and your cousin given thought to what you wish her punishment to be?" the Daimyo asked form behind one of his ridiculously glamourous and glittery fans.

Hari stood and gave a serene smile to the court. "We have indeed. Unfortunately, my imagination could not dream up anything worthy of her actions, and my dearest cousin believes those far older than us would be able to choose a more fitting punishment. All I can request is that she not be killed."

More like Luna told her what would happen already and that it would not be any punishment Hari had suggested really.

"May I ask why?" the Daimyo inquired, looking a bit shocked.

"I view death much differently than many others, sir. To a warrior or someone with a terminal illness, a quick death is a blessing. But to a criminal on trial for atrocities that can't even bear repeating, it's the same thing and doesn't hold the weight of justice in their eyes. Capital Punishment ensures a quick and easy way out for them, where they don't have to spend time making up for their actions. Whereas a lifetime sentence to a single room or community service would see them suffering for the rest of their days.

"She is nothing like Danzo-san was. He was a fully trained shinobi with designs on the seat of Hokage. He had agency and control over a private force of unwilling shinobi he controlled with an iron grip. He was not someone who could be left alive because he posed a danger to the world as a whole. Kurosaki-san is a civilian with no extraordinary talents in anything, and no one loyal to her. Leaving her alive to work off the debts she has placed her family in would be the best course of action in my opinion."

Death was an easy way out for most criminals. Danzo however, was not the kind to be left alive because he would pull something out of his arse and escape and they couldn't risk it.

"Very insightful, Hari-hime. We shall keep your words in mind."

As she'd been made aware. She was actually really glad with the punishment Sayori would be getting. It was poetic in a sense.

"You know, I keep forgetting that we're not the only Genin in this village," Naruto said as he watched the various teams bound for the Chunin Exams, all line up outside the North Gate. And the grouping was massive! From what he counted so far, there were twenty-three teams. That was sixty-nine Genin so far, and they weren't scheduled to leave for another hour at least.

"Understandable," said Ino as she sat up in a tree, eating a sugar free ice pop. "We don't get to go on joint missions so we've only really been by ourselves save for that mission to rescue Team Gai."

"And none of us have been randomly added to another team's mission either," Sasuke murmured. "Itachi told me that it's a thing that can happen in the Hokage thinks your skill set would better benefit the mission."

Naruto was glad that hadn't happened to them! He liked his team very much and didn't want to work with other people. While those in his graduating class weren't horrible or anything, he didn't know
any of the other shinobi in the village besides them and their Academy sensei.

Maybe he should look into fixing that though? He wanted to be the Hokage and what Hokage didn't even know their soldiers? How could he be trusted to lead people if they didn't even get to know him in return! It was a two way street here!

Being Hokage wouldn't get people to acknowledge who he really was. He needed people to acknowledge him so he could become Hokage.

"Maybe doing joint missions would be a good place to start," Naruto said in consideration. "And we can learn the strengths and weaknesses of our fellow shinobi while we're at it. And it'd be nice to train against someone else for once."

The other two nodded in agreement.

It was finally decided! Though Hari had already known about it, it was nice to hear the words said aloud. She was a shady bitch after all and liked to watch her enemies crash and burn!

Kurosaki Sayori was to spend the rest of her days in servitude. After speaking with the woman's former servants, the Daimyo had drawn up a list of her least favorite activities that fell under physical work. She would move from family to family each month for the rest of her life, fulfilling the requirements of her punishment.

She hated insects. Her job, when spending her month serving the Ito family, would be to pick the insects off of every plant on their massive farm to keep the vegetation safe and healthy.

She hated sunlight. Her job, when spending her month serving the Saito family, would be to plow the fields every day for hours. And the Saito family provided a lot of produce to various communities in Hi no Kuni, which would mean a lot of work on her part, and the number of fields extended to the dozens.

She hated nature. Her job, when spending her month with the Watanabe family, would be to help them cut down trees for lumber.

The list went on and on. She would be monitored to make certain she was working and her health would be kept up perfectly so she couldn't escape her punishment through death by infection or some such nonsense.

It was beautiful and ensured she would work until her fingers bled for the rest of her life.

Hari loved it when justice actually worked!

"Hey, sensei, how long will it take for us to get there?" asked Naruto because he was bored.

The journey to Tetsu no Kuni would obviously be done on foot, but they wouldn't be running once they reached the ocean. They'd be stuck on boats for however long it would take. Team Seven had been warned not to train in anything on the way to the exams because they had to keep up surprises for their competition. And yes, even their fellow Konoha shinobi were their opposition and couldn't be trusted until the Exams were over.

Naruto had wanted to work on his Mini Rasengan but had decided against it because of how many people their company was comprised of. Sasuke had brought a book about chakra, and Ino was reading a romance novel. Naruto was literally bored to tears.
The sun was out, like usual for Hi no Kuni. There was absolutely no wind and the only relief came in the form of what they got from displacing air with all their running. And anyone trying to attack a group of like one hundred and fifty shinobi that had like thirty-five Jonin mixed in, was practically asking to get their ass whooped relentlessly.

So that wouldn't be happening any time soon.

"Mah! About a day and a half to the ocean if we keep up our current speed. We don't want to wear anyone out since you all need to be in top form for the Exams. Five days on the ship then, and another two days of travel inland to reach the border."

"It's like going back to Haru no Kuni!" he noted. Going literally in the same direction even. They'd be leaving from the same port too.

"In a way."

And in Haru no Kuni was Koyuki, which would be coming to see the finals of the Chunin Exams where Naruto intended to introduce her to Hari because he just knew they would get along!

Suddenly he was even more excited than before!

But he still had nothing to do and an additional five days on a boat were going to be hell. But... that boat would all groups who showed up for the Chunin Exams, meaning he might run into Gaara if he was there alongside the others since Suna shinobi had to cut through Hi no Kuni to reach the port if they didn't want to go the long way around.

Things were looking up!

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A/N: Another is done!

How was it? Let me know!

Check out my other fics!

Ja ne! :D

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

Chapter End Notes

CHECK OUT MY MANY OTHER HP AND NARUTO FICS! ^_^
Meet Me in Tetsu no Kuni!

Chapter Summary

The first few days of Team Seven being in Tetsu no Kuni.

Chapter Notes

-I had the majority of this finished for a while but it still felt like some of the sections were missing something so it sat around for a while.

-Making a whole new Chunin Exam that no one has ever done before is some next level shit tbh. Like, there is so much stuff that goes into it. And I'm pretty sure this isn't new because we're all human and no idea is truly original anymore. But at least I think this is rare enough to work. And this is only the First Exam.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A/N: Hello, people!

I don't own Naruto or Harry Potter.

I have no beta.

ENJOY!

CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR. HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.

The amazing lucife56 made FANART for this story! It's beautiful!

"Yahoooo! We're gonna kick everyone's ass in the Chunin Exams! Right Akamaru?!

Arf! Arf!" the puppy agreed.

Shikamaru sighed and turned away, unable to deal with Kiba's annoying energy so early in the morning. By the look of him, Shino was of the same opinion. Though it was often difficult to understand what was going through his head at any given time, Shino was easy to read after a while of getting to know him. You're not a team for almost a year a pick up nothing from each other after all.

Together, they left the Inuzuka to himself while they chose to relocate to somewhere… less troublesome.

The ship was a massive one that was used to transport cargo usually, but because of the Chunin Exams, the company who owned said boats wanted in on how lucrative the Exams would be and
decided to rent out a few of their best vessels to everyone who would be traveling. Getting from one end of the massive ship to the other took ages. Shikamaru almost regretted not staying in their Team's designated room, just because the walk took forever and there were so many people who wanted to talk to complete strangers for some reason?

They ended up coming upon Team Seven in the canteen, which was a relief strangely. The ship was so massive that it could fit an entire room meant for taking meals alone. And the owners were able to sell foodstuffs on the ship as well, in case people didn't bring their own food. Just another clever way to make a profit off of the Exams. He couldn't fault them for it, even if their outlandish prices were done only for the sake of skinning their new type of cargo of its fleece.

Still better than nothing.

Not everyone aboard was a shinobi after all. Other people were making use of the transportation offer while they could. It was only a limited time thing and best to get in on it before it was over.

Naruto was seated between his teammates at a table of their own to the far left of the entrance. His new, bright orange hoodie was too easy to pick out amidst the collection of people. His hair had grown out quite a bit, the longest strips reaching his collar bones while the rest continued defying gravity. Before him was a massive bento that he and his teammates were dipping into without hesitation as they people watched. Shikamaru had seen that particular bento before. Naruto's sister-figure had used it many times for many occasions.

Sharing a look with Shino, they both nodded and decided to join the other Konoha team they were familiar with. Naruto had mellowed out a lot since graduation, and while he was loud and still chose to wear orange of all colors, he still knew when to keep better control of himself. Especially since he no longer needed attention like before Potta Hari came along. Now he had positive attention and he didn't have to act out and be obnoxious. Before, Naruto had just wanted acknowledgement, whether it was good or bad, and now that he had it he didn't need to be so dramatic all the time. It made him less troublesome too.

"Shikamaru!" squealed Ino upon spotting them, almost too loud for his tolerance. She gestured wildly for them to come over as if that would get them to move any faster. Shikamaru liked going at his own pace, thank you very much.

"Hi, Shino! Shika!" Naruto bellowed, thrusting his arm out to madly wave at them as well. Shikamaru wasn't oblivious to the slightly pleased hum Shino gave at being not only remembered but included as well. Naruto had that ability to just make everyone feel like they belonged. For a kid who hadn't belonged for most of his life, it was a miraculous feat.

Ino was rifling through her bag and pulled out a storage scroll. From it, she unsealed a chess board and placed it on the table in front of her. Instantly, Shikamaru knew he was to sit opposite her and play. He appreciated it. Ever since she'd been put on Team Seven, Ino had also matured considerably compared to the beginning of their last year in the Academy. It was something he hadn't expected until she'd reached her twenties and gained a harsh understanding of the world, but it seemed like her exposure to Naruto's sister had been a big help.

Potta Hari seemed to helping a lot of people in her own way, whether she knew it or not.

When drilling their Ino-Shika-Cho formations with Choji, Ino's head was always in the game, and she was less loud and controlling. Even though she was the self-professed leader of her own team, she still wasn't a jerk and had been less troublesome as of late. It made him wonder what she would have been like if the Hokage had put Ino on his team instead of Naruto's.
Having Naruto and Sasuke to worry about constantly seemed to be just what she needed though. And her crush on the Uchiha… that seemed to die down more and more as the weeks passed them by. And not for any problems between them or Sasuke becoming unappealing suddenly - he still looked exactly the same and was even stronger now - it was just that her interests just seemed to be changing. And she might have picked up somewhat on Sasuke's crush on Naruto. Just a bit maybe.

How it wasn't blatantly obvious to everyone, Shikamaru had no idea. Sasuke deliberately oriented himself around the blond at all times. Glared at anyone he so much as assumed was romantically interested in him. Or abnormally interested at least. Stopped using the minor-insulting nickname he'd given Naruto ages ago. Always looking to Naruto first to see his reaction to pleasant events. Always looking to him first the moment something dangerous happened because his concern got the better of him. His priorities were kind of obvious and how no one noticed was beyond the Nara Heir.

Uchiha Sasuke fancied Uzumaki Naruto. Not something Shikamaru would have ever thought to be possible considering their turbulent history in the Academy, but never say never and all that rot. Seemed like being around each other every day for months had had its own affect on all of Team Seven.

"How've you guys been?" asked Naruto, looking between he and Shino. He was eating ramen, not like a pig like he used to, and looked expectant. Shikamaru decided to let his teammate do the answering while he and Ino began their game. It was just less work for him to do.

"Asuma-sensei had decided to send us on more and more C-Rank missions. Why? Because he wished to raise our level of experience in preparation for these particular Chunin Exams. The last Exams he'd entered us in had been to give us new experiences as shinobi, but he admitted to us not being ready. Now he has faith in our skills," Shino said in his usual, frank and monotone manner.

"The missions have been a drag," Shikamaru added. "Sixty-seven D-Ranks and thirty-one C-Ranks and one A-Rank. Ugh! What about Team Seven? What've you gotten to do so far?" He was only a little curious.

As one unit, Ino and Naruto looked to Sasuke for the answer. The Uchiha glared playfully at them - yes, Shikamaru wasn't exaggerating a bit on that, the Uchiha was even smiling a little - and said, "One hundred and seventeen D-Ranks, sixty-one C-Ranks, four B-Ranks, and three A-Ranks."

The table went quiet as both Shikamaru and Shino processed those words. He was trying to make sense of what could have happened to turn normal C-Rank missions into B and A-Ranks. Because that was the only logical choice. No matter how talented they all were as a team, Team Seven was full of newly minted Genin and could not legally be allowed to go on A-Rank and above missions unless one of them was an Iryo-nin with Level 10 skill. That amount of ability was simply too good to withhold from active duty no matter the rank of the mission.

So what had happened for Team Seven to find themselves on missions that had to be upgraded midway? And what were they getting paid?

"Your team is troublesome," Shikamaru decided, fixing his attention back on the board and reaching for a piece finally. He'd already calculated one hundred and ninety-three different outcomes from his first move. That number would obviously change once Ino made her first move.

Naruto sputtered, "We are not! It's everyone else who can't just leave our clients alone! -ttebayo!"

His teammates nodded their agreement, looking defiant.

Team Seven attracted danger. Shikamaru knew for a fact that Team Eight hadn't experienced any of their missions escalating in rank. And while it wasn't unheard of for things like that to happen, it
rarely happened to the same exact team multiple times in a row.

He wasn’t one for superstitions or putting faith in things unproven, but he was willing to consider that maybe it was possible to be cursed. All the extra work that came from being on a more difficult mission than what was originally expected, made his brain hurt just thinking about it.

"Hey, where's Kiba at?" asked Naruto, several minutes after them meeting up. As if he just remembered the boy's existence.

Shino’s sunglasses gleamed beneath the lights overhead. "He was being his usual rambunctious self, and we felt the need to get away for a while. He had Akamaru to keep him company of course."

Neither felt bad for ditching their teammate as Kiba thought them to be boring when they were around one another for too long. And if they didn't leave, he eventually would have. It was a mutual understanding between them. They didn't hate each other, there was just only so much they could all handle of one another at one time.

"Kiba will sniff out the food eventually and join us," Shikamaru murmured around a yawn. "Of that I have no doubt. So hide that bento while you can or you won't get any more of its contents. He packs it away like Choji and his ninen can really eat a lot too."

"Hi, Gaara!" came a familiar, bellowing voice that almost upon him. "I missed you!"

The redhead blinked twice before turning in time to see a flash of orange heading in his direction at a speed almost too fast for him to catch with his eyes. His body certainly hadn't prepared itself for the flying leap hug from Uzumaki Naruto, but he was getting used to it so it wasn't as bad as the last time it happened. And he was still pleasantly surprised when his sand did not immediately rush to block the blond from touching him. Naruto was a friend.

Naruto was short, much like Gaara was, so when he hugged the Suna shinobi, his face ended up pressed right against Gaara's. It always baffled him how Naruto was so tanned and Gaara wasn't even though he lived in the middle of a desert and the sun beat down upon him all the time no matter how much he tried to stop it or block it out. But no, Gaara ended up being the fair-skinned one between them.

"I missed you so much!" the other Jinchuuriki said, nuzzling his friend's cheek. "It's been forever. -ttebayo!"

"We saw each other less than three months ago," the redhead felt compelled to point out, because it was true. They'd been on a joint mission and had spent an entire week together, teaching each other Jutsu and learning more about each other. It had been… one of the best times in Gaara's life. he would never forget it.

"As I said, forever," the blond enunciated slowly and dramatically, blinking his bright, blue eyes at Gaara. "So much has happened in such a short amount of time too!"

Yes. Even on Gaara's end things had begun to pick up considerably. Despite having their own struggles going on, the world kept turning every day.

"Where's the cat cosplayer and your sister?" asked Naruto, looking around the deck for signs of Gaara’s unfortunate siblings. Only Gaara had wanted to see the ocean though, so they remained in their shared room for the time being. Suna did not have much water and they'd never formed an interest in it personally. Gaara was drawn to how calming it could be one minute, yet how deadly it could be the next. The duality of its inherent nature was always fascinating to think about and lead to
internal arguments about moral aptitude.

"Down below in our room," he told the blond. "I… like water more than they do."

A sand user loving water. It was almost unheard of seeing as it was the element that would slow down his attacks and defense the most. But ever since learning that Suiton Jutsu to better help Sunagakure, he'd been around it a lot more lately. The people who managed Suna's wells seemed to no longer be terrified of him, too focused on the fact that he was helping provide their village with a natural resource they were short on. The economy was the most important thing. Their fear of him was fading with every day.

He also managed to teach the Jutsu to two others as well. Their chakra wasn't like his, and they couldn't perform the Jutsu multiple times in a row like he could, but it was still improvement. They now had three shinobi instead of one, capable of helping the village. Help was something anyone would be foolish to ignore, no matter who it came from.

"You excited about the Exams?" asked Naruto as he pulled away a bit. The blond was still clinging to him like a limpet. Or an octopus.

"Tetsu no Kuni snows constantly. I am not looking forward to that part of it. Anything else will have to be considered upon arrival. I try not to judge a place before seeing it myself."

"I'm looking forward to the snow! We don't get any in Konoha, and I plan to rain all hell down on Sasuke in a snowball fight of epic proportions! -ttebayo!"

"Using snow against a Katon user seems counterproductive," Gaara felt the need to point out. The Uchiha were known for their Shurikenjutsu and incorporating their specialized Katon Jutsu into their attacks to make them more deadly. The snow would be melted before Naruto even had a chance to do anything remotely threatening with it.

"Maybe," Naruto conceded with a nod, "but hitting him in the face with even a single snowball will make it the best thing I've ever done. So it's worth the effort to try."

"If you wanted to surprise me with this, you shouldn't have said it out loud."

Both Jinchuuriki turned to find the Uchiha standing there, looking a bit surly, hands shoved deep into his pockets. His Sharingan was activated and he was staring at Naruto's arms, which were still wrapped completely around Gaara despite the small distance between their bodies.

"I'll get you even if you're expecting it, teme! -ttebayo!"

The Uchiha scoffed. "I doubt it. I have better skills at dodging than you do if you recall."

"That don't mean shit! I'll hit you smack dab in that smug face of yours when you least expect it! -ttebayo!"

Gaara got to watch as his friend devolved into a childish battle with his teammate, and found himself slightly warmed by it in a sense. This was what camaraderie was. He hoped to have it himself some day.

Luna smiled. In the training ground of choice, Hari had brought the orphans out for a fun day. And all of them who were available had showed up because water balloon wars, swimming in the river, and a massive picnic, was something most sane people wouldn't pass up. Food and fun on a hot day was always a good way to cool down. There was even a Genin team hired to make sure everything
was safe, and yes, they took got to partake in the event if they wanted.

Hari had put a little more effort into this outing because she was trying to ignore how much she was missing Team 7 and the rest of their new friends. She had enlisted Luna's help to cook up all the food ahead of time, and Luna couldn't help but eye the roasted daikon that the kids kept passing up. Hari had used some oil and basic herbs and, like all other vegetables she roasted, it came out perfect.

She was trying to determine if anyone would miss the radish if she happened to disappear all of it by herself. She didn't want to be greedy.

As if sensing Luna's thoughts, Hari deposited the entire platter of roasted daikon onto the blond's lap and smiled. "Apparently the melons are a bigger hit today since they're sweeter and colder, so have at it."

"Probably because of the heat and them containing so much water which will keep them hydrated," Luna noted as she took up a large slice of radish and bit down. *Oh, it was the greatest!*

"And kids are really taken with those decoratively carved bowls I made out of the melons themselves."

That too. Too bad they didn't have the time to do this every day. Unfortunately the world outside of their little pocket of paradise was still spinning and dastardly plots were still being undertaken at every second. Too many for even Luna to keep up with all of them. Soon Hari was going to be dragged into many situations far bigger than all of them, and soon her decisions were going to affects more people than she'd realise.

"You're going to be a great parent," Luna decided to say instead, eying Hari up from beneath her pale lashes.

The woman gave a small smile and turned back to the kids. "Kanna, that is not what we do with the water balloons! They are to stay outside of our shirts! Tsubaki, you can't have all of the chicken for yourself, other people would like to have some as well!"

It was a nice day. The sun was high above them and the clouds remained puffy and welcoming. For winter, Konoha sure had some lovely weather.

Getting into Tetsu no Kuni was far easier than getting into any other country, as far as Naruto's experience told him. There was no gate to walk through or a station to exchange papers to inquire about intentions. Tetsu was on an island shared with like three other countries that he didn't remember the names of.

Of course it was the village itself that was a lot harder to gain entrance to. It was run entirely by samurai who did not favor shinobi and their way of handling business at all. Still, they'd agreed to host this particular Chunin Exam for a reason, and that meant all visiting shinobi had to abide by their particular rules and laws or face the embarrassment of being kicked out and bringing shame to their village.

So when they got to the village entrance, their entourage was halted by a large group of armored men bearing swords. Samurai. He'd never seen a real one in person before. They looked cool and threatening. Like they could actually kick a ninja's ass if they truly gave it their all. Sasuke had told him that they could also use chakra but to different capacities.

"You are the Konoha delegation?" the man in the center asked, voice stern and face set like literal steel. His hair was long and greyish blue, and his eyes were dark and had a blank stare. He looked
like he wanted to be anywhere but there. Naruto could understand as guard duty sucked the biggest ass out of most shinobi jobs.

Kakashi stepped forward and nodded. "Yes. We have with us Forty-nine three-man squads and forty-nine Jonin sensei."

The Samurai looked toward another and they shared a sharp nod.

"I am Hideo, and I am a lieutenant under Mifune-sama sent to greet entrants to our village. You will line up by team and show your documentation to Eiichi here. You are not to fight outside the designated Exams times. You will not cause disruption to the hard won peace of the village. If you wish to participate in ridiculous squabbles between yourselves or members of other Elemental Nations, you will remove yourselves from the village and handle the issue outside our borders. Avoid all places you are not welcome. Respect each other, even if you do not get along due to past grievances, when not in the midst of an Exam."

Kakashi nodded. "We understand, Hideo-san." The rest of the Konoha contingent all bowed simultaneously afterward to show their agreement. It also made them look more cooperative, playing on the idea of Konoha residents being 'Tree Huggers'. But hey, if people wanted to underestimate them, then that was fine. So they preferred peace first, so what?

The entire company had already gotten their passports out and had lined up by their sensei and then oldest to youngest students. Kakashi, Sasuke, Ino, and then Naruto for Team Seven specifically.

They trudged through the snow and into the village one team at a time, and Naruto was completely blown away by the size of the enormous ass mountain at the very center of the population. He wanted to climb it.

"Don't even think about it," said Sasuke with a knowing look.

"But what if I-"

"No."

"But I could total-

"No."

"Hmph!"

There was no way Sasuke knew was he was going to suggest! He didn't know Naruto that well!

Right?

Looking upon the landscape, Shikamaru shivered and wrapped his scarf extra tight around his face. He probably looked ridiculous, but he couldn't help it. It was cold. Still, no one looked as ridiculous as Shino.

Shino was literally a living hive. His body had to maintain a certain temperature so his kikaichu could remain healthy and living. So he was bundled up even more as he couldn't use his chakra to constantly warm himself since the insects were eating a good portion of it and he didn't want to be weakened too much before the Exams started.

As for Kiba... he hadn't changed his clothes at all. He remained int he same thing and simply kept
moving. His boundless energy was going to give Shikamaru a headache.

Asuma didn't look too affected by the temperature in the least. None of the Jonin did. Team Seven was also among the few Genin squads who looked perfectly at home in this environment.

Snow was a drag, he'd decided.

At least no one was verbally complaining about it though. One thing Konoha shinobi weren't, were whiners. Specifically, verbal whiners in the presence of clients, officials, and people of great importance. Shikamaru could think unpleasant things all he wanted but he sure as hell wasn't going to shine an unflattering light to Konoha by voicing his thoughts aloud. He knew how these types of political games were played. He knew what these things meant.

He was nowhere near his father's level when it came to matters such as this, but he was decently prepared. The Chunin Exams had always been about showing off for your village and earning the attention of more clients. Acting like whiny children was not going to be appealing to anyone sane of mind.

If only such measures didn't have to be taken, but of course he wasn't that lucky. Politics were practically the cornerstone of everything in the shinobi world. Seeing underneath the underneath applied to political stuff perfectly. Too bad most shinobi ended up being bad at politics.

"I wanna climb that mountain!" announced Kiba, gesturing the massive rock formation at the center of Tetsu No Kuni.

Akamaru, who was bundled inside his furred coat, barked in agreement.

"I'm not going near it if I don't have to," said Shikamaru with finality.

Hiking in snow was a drag.

Samui sighed as once again, Karui and Omoi got into an argument. Somehow, Omoshiro managed to sit back and just watch them go at it without any remorse either.

Karui's red hair was beginning to stand on end from her frustration with Omoi always second-guessing himself, and Omoi was a cross between bored and anxious and telling Karui to mind her own business. Omoshiro was grinning like a loon up at the snowy sky, his blue hair in a spiked mess around his head.

"Can you hurry it up?" Samui demanded of their small company. "I would like to be in Samurai territory before nightfall."

She then broke away from their loose formation at a moderate run, forcing them to chase after if they wanted to remain in some semblance of a group.

They indeed reached the samurai village with an undisclosed name before the sky darkened to a more storm grey than a blue-grey. Apparently the weather blocked the sky too much for them to see it fully. Kumogakure had sent along only five teams to compete in the Exams. Their recent output of shinobi hadn't been much and they had so few who were worthy of promotion yet. They merely had to showcase their strength with what they had now. As Kirabi wasn't allowed to leave the village at present, Samui, already a Chunin, was the stand-in squad leader while Omoshiro was added to the team to make the squad even.

She handed over her passport to the required Samurai and was given directions to their lodgings.
while visiting. The building they'd be in would be shared with Sunagakure and Kirigakure shinobi. Apparently they had the least amount of teams out of the big five nations. Konohagakure, unsurprisingly had the most participants, followed closely by Iwagakure and they would be sharing a building alone. She could only imagine the heated arguments that could be happening between them.

The remaining shinobi villages, with much smaller populations and forces, would also share a building.

Putting Konoha and Iwa in the same building was like putting Konoha and Kumo in the same building. Not smart.

Or perhaps it was smart. The rules they were given as guests graciously allowed into the secretive village, said no fighting was allowed. And the Five Great Nations had a very sketchy history when it came to treaties and betrayal. The relationship between Konoha and Iwa was, if the pun be excused, rocky at best. Maybe this was a way to test the shinobi from opposing nations to see if they could put aside their differences in order to achieve their similar goals. It was no secret that samurai did not approve of the shinobi way of life.

"Do not start any fights," Samui warned her team, sending local hothead, Karui, a dark look. "I don't care if you think someone's looking at you the wrong way or that they've disrespected you. You will not jeopardize this for us and you will not bring shame upon our village."

The redhead rolled her eyes but didn't argue for once. "Can we just go find out where we're sleeping already? I want food."

Haku smiled at all the snow. It had been some time since he'd seen any and associated it with a good memory. But everything was better now. He was legally a shinobi and once again a proud member of Mizu no Kuni. His Kekkei Genkai was considered an amazing talent that would be used to protect his precious people. Zabuza-sama had taken to training him even harder than before in order to prepare him for Jonin status. He had an apartment to stay in and didn't want for food or warmth or clothing.

Things were so much better now compared to all those years ago. And he was looking forward to the Exams even though he knew they'd be ridiculously easy at his current level.

It'd be like a mission of exploration. Seeing a new land, meeting new people, and taking notes on everything he laid eyes on. Trying to understand the world and the new people who for the most part weren't civilians, but weren't shinobi. A new way of life to try and understand.

The unfamiliar sights were nice.

The familiar ones were even more nice if what he thought he saw was truly what it was.

There was a shinobi sitting in an open restaurant, wearing a kill-me-orange cloak and had a blue hitai-ate wrapped around his spiky, golden hair. Beside him were two people in tan cloaks with red stripes across the bottoms, also wearing hitai-ate. They looked more like those who would blend in though.

"Naruto-kun," Haku called quietly as he came up behind the group. He was unable to keep his fondness from his voice. It was nice to meet up with friends again and see that they were doing well.

The blond whipped around, showing that his mouth was stuffed full of noodles. In seconds, all noodles were gone and he was launching himself into Haku's arms. How he could manage from when he was sitting ¼ of a second ago, was impressive. He threw his whole self into the embrace
"Hi, Haku!"

How a shinobi could be this endlessly filled with energy and joy despite their profession and the things Haku knew the younger Genin had seen, always amazed him. It was as if there was this innocence inside Naruto that not even the most harsh realities of war could taint. Haku hoped that it would never be tainted, because people like Naruto were rare. Naruto was someone that could lead by example, always finding the good in things even amongst all the bad. Pessimism was such a downer at times and finding happiness where none seemed to spawn would be a relief.

"When did you get here?" he decided to ask, sliding into the chair beside Naruto's at the long, sparsely-filled bar.

"This morning. Kakashi-sensei wanted to be prompt and early. Familiarize ourselves with the environment and stuff. Take in whatever we could in the time we have here."

It made sense. The Exams didn't start for another three days. Anyone who came just on time or even a bit late would be in for a tough time of rushing about to find their rooms and where to get food.

Haku took a quick glance at the menu above the bar and told the man behind it he'd like a bowl of udon, house style. He didn't even know what it contained but he just wanted to eat something not fish-related for once. Kiri resided on an island and the most common meat available was always seafood and the main items to export had to do with anything related to seafood. Haku was sick of sushi and had never tried crab or lobster as he was allergic to shellfish.

"I can't believe you're here," said Naruto around another mouthful of noodles. "You're like, a Jonin already. An Anbu even! You're super good and awesome, so why'd you have to come here?"

Yamanaka Ino shook her head and rolled her eyes, but it was done with friendly exasperation instead of annoyance. "It's a power play, Naruto. Kirigakure has been in dire straits for the last decade or so. Everyone in the Elemental Nations knew about the civil war going on, but not the details. And no one offered to help the Rebellion's quest to overthrow the Mizukage, so they all know that things weren't looking too good, and now Kiri is down on its shinobi force."

Naruto merely squinted at her, his confusion obvious.

Uchiha Sasuke picked up where his teammate left off without hesitation. "Basically they didn't promote anyone yet because they want them to all show off in this Exam and prove to the other nations that Kirigakure is still a threat and isn't to be taken lightly. It'll also bring in more customers when they see how reliable Kiri shinobi seem to be."

"Oh. I guess that makes sense. You're definitely getting promoted though, right?" Naruto asked, returning his full attention to Haku, who smiled calmly in response. "I mean, it wouldn't be fair to you when you've done so much and you're so awesome already."

"Mei-sama has said all of us at least deserve the rank of Chunin. Some may receive higher promotion should she feel they deserve it. I am one of those fortunate few."

"Then that's okay. I'm getting promoted by the end of this too! I can feel it! -ttebayo!"

Feeling warm inside, and pleased with their easy camaraderie, Haku nodded. "Of that I have no doubt, Naruto-kun."

Haku was certainly not imagining the hard look Uchiha Sasuke was sending his way, right?
"I am simply not a person who is meant to be alone," Hari remarked easily and without hesitation as she lounged unevenly in her borrowed chair.

Inoichi stared at her over the top of his notebook in which he kept all personal notes of her that he'd decided were important. No one but him saw the notebook and he'd only ever show the Hokage if ordered to. It was private. He actually took the Doctor/Patient confidentiality thing seriously, unlike the people she'd been exposed to before coming to Konoha.

"Like, when I was younger it was super easy to be alone because I was always forced to be alone. And then I got friends, and I began to care, and it became harder. And yet I pulled back when it became necessary, they all separated to the four winds basically to escape the growing terrorism from within our community, and I was alone again. But it wasn't as bad as it could have been. And now I have people again and the moment they're gone, I'm a wreck."

"Perhaps I'm too clingy."

"Or maybe," Inoichi began, "you're a human being, feeling human emotions, and you don't want to be lonely. A common desire among many, I assure you."

There was nothing wrong with wanting companionship no matter the kind. How one went about acquiring it was a completely different situation entirely of course, but it was perfectly normal to not want to be lonely. There were vast differences between being alone and being lonely.

"I'm also a bit worried you know. I have this unfortunate luck on my side that negatively affects everything. When I start to really care about people, they die on me somehow. It's happened to a lot of people and I keep waiting for something horrible to happen because I can never just have something nice for once."

She was so fatalistic. It was concerning and not even because of suicidal tendencies. She wasn't suicidal at all. She was however, a bit superstitious and lumping that together with her supposed bad fortune, and she had a very real fear before her at all times. It reminded him a bit of Tsunade-sama's own issues. But worse.

"Everyone experiences anxiety in some way, shape, or form, Hari. And when you've been through dangerous situations, it isn't unheard of for PTSD to form."

The young woman huffed. "I bawled over my past last week, in front of Kakashi."

That was new.

"He's really awkward around people when they're emotional, but it was okay because he had let me meet his pack and he tried his best to just be there even if he didn't know what to do. It's a lot better than what many people have ever managed for me."

How very interesting. For a moment he cursed doctor/patient confidentiality because he wanted to tell his friends so badly! Then again, Shikaku would probably be able to guess it anyway since he was so damn observant. But Kakashi was opening up emotionally in his own way and it was a massive step in the right direction for him. Deciding to help another with their emotional problems was helping him as well whether he understood it or not.

"I thought I was over this stuff by now," said Hari, obviously feeling grumpy. She folded her arms in a childish manner at pouted at the wall. "I cried and screamed and blew things up years ago so why am I still getting emotional over it all now? It's over and done with. I've accepted it all. I've moved on. nothing can change what has already happened."
"That may be," Inoichi agreed hesitantly, "but the effects will live on in you forever, because they helped shape who you are as of right now."

Green eyes rolled toward the ceiling, but nothing was said in return.

Inoichi was simply glad she'd begun to open up on her own. That was a step in the right direction. No longer avoiding answering questions and being willing to explain herself was a good thing.

"How would you say the foreigners are handling their surroundings thus far?" Mifune asked his personal council which consisted of many elder and younger Samurai and general administrative workers in their village. He wanted to know how things inside his village were going considering all the extra noise they were surrounded by.

"Iwa shinobi are uncomfortable in all the snow. Coming from a land surrounded by earth constantly, it doesn't make this a surprise," said Mirai, a young woman in charge of the Administration Block. "They haven't made any complaints but it's easy to tell by how they interact with the landscape that they don't like it here. They're rather short-tempered."

A chorus of nods filled the room.

"The Konoha shinobi are almost as out of their depth save for a few teams here and there who seem perfectly comfortable, meaning they've most likely prepared special training on how to regulate body temperature with chakra. It isn't surprising that one of these teams is Hatake Kakashi's team."

Yes, even Samurai were familiar with the 'best of the best' in terms of ninja. They had a Bingo Book from every shinobi nation just in case they ever needed to identify a threat. Hatake Kakashi was one of the most expensive bounties in the Elemental Nations, and his statistics had raised even more recently, raising his bounty as well. Almost beyond the ability to pay it even.

They all knew of Sharingan no Kakashi, the ninja prodigy, student of the Yondaime Hokage and one of the best soldiers to ever come from Konoha. He had a Flee On Sight order in every one of his Bingo Book entries.

"Hatake's squad has been seen in the company of two squads from different villages," said Shinra, adjusting his box-like glasses as he looked over the information he'd written out. "The Yondaime Kazekage's children from Sunagakure and Zabuza Momochi's squad from Kirigakure."

Interesting. It seemed implausible that such teams would get along at all, but perhaps there was more involved than they personally were aware of.

Uarakaku slid a file across the desk. "Kiri shinobi are all quiet and seem resigned to the weather. Kumo shinobi are pretty much the same. Ame, Kusa, Oto, and Tani shinobi are so few in number that keeping up with them is actually difficult when they all have similar shinobi uniforms compared to the great five nations and their shinobi."

As expected.

"We have a total of 216 teams registered to compete in the Exams and more than half are from the big five," said Okisuke.

That was 648 Genin. Mifune was certain they would see that number cut in half at least by the first Exam's end.

"Any errant actions from our visitors?"
"No, sir. They've been following the rules which I'm honestly surprised by," Okisuke admitted almost begrudgingly with a smattering of agreement from the rest of the room.

"You forget how important this is to them," Mifune told them all. "Shinobi are quick to do battle and declare war and this in a way, is their own method of handling aggressions with each other while preventing another World War from cropping up so soon. It's a warning to all other nations what your people are capable of and a way of telling them to threaten you at their own risk. It is a power play first and foremost."

It was always a power play no matter what it was in life. Power simply held so much control over everyone and everything that many things would always come back to the concept of power and the control it has over men's hearts.

"Keep an eye on everyone of interest. I want to study exactly how shinobi of opposing nations handle being in close quarters outside of diplomatic missions," Mifune told them. "The key players of each village will suffice."

Hari slugged back an entire glass of Firewhiskey. She'd decided to dip into her diminishing stash because she was annoyed. Naruto was off in a country not even on this continent, getting into Merlin knows what, and she was stuck in the village doing boring shite now and then. A lot of paperwork mostly. And only one chance to go to the cinema.

Unless she went out to train, which wasn't an everyday thing, there was nothing to do. Sometimes stuff happened and she had to dedicate time to those pursuits instead, but for the most part, everything was dull. And those other pursuits weren't all that great either.

Such as the Academy having some sort of special day coming up for parents and this meant that none of the orphans had anyone to bring. She didn't like the idea of that, or at least the wording of it. Not every child had a parent or even an adult that looked after them. The general idea of the day was interesting but it also served to exclude certain children and further shove them away from their classmates because they couldn't participate, but they had to go to school anyway or be marked as absent/tardy.

She flicked a hand out, and the kettle lifted off the tray and poured water into her mug. The tea bag unfolded itself from its packet and dipped inside, and an additional wave of the hand saw the water steaming suddenly. She didn't have patience to go and reheat the kettle and then wait for it to warm up on its own.

How was she going to handle a group of kids who would no doubt be sad about having the fact that their classmates had loving family members and they don't, shoved into their faces?

She'd seen things like this before in primary. Vernon had come for Dudley, not Hari of course, and he'd talked about drills and the like. As if his job was interesting. It wasn't and the class had proven that by practically falling asleep on him.

Hari'd gotten beaten for that happening when Vernon insisted that it was her fault that no one listened to him. The dumb reasons he always came up with just so he could lay hands on her or punish her somehow, were pathetic. Sometimes Hari wished she had just left them to face Voldemort and not bothered to get them protection of any sort. Ages ago she would have been horrified at the thought but no longer could she care such abusive pieces of shite.

So what was the right choice in this scenario?
"That is a predicament. I've never considered that before," the man admitted, looking put out by the fact that he'd overlooked a rather glaring issue in his own classroom.

"I suppose we could call it Parental Figures Day. This demonstration has to happen, it's been going on for the past three decades. It gives the children examples of different professions in the shinobi and civilian sides just in case they need it. A parental figure isn't necessarily a parent, just someone a person views in a parental light. Such as you for Naruto."

Hari nodded. It was a much more pleasant wording in her opinion.

"If I was to come in as Aiko and Akari's parental figure, would that be fine?"

"Certainly! You're a figure of interest in the village. You'd have interesting answers for the children I'm certain," Iruka smiled, the scar across the bridge of his nose wrinkling a bit from the action. It was grin she often saw on Naruto's face. He'd picked up a lot from his Iruka-sensei and it was adorable.

"Thanks. This was stressing me out so much."

The man's grin softened. "You're a good guardian and the children are lucky to have you, Potte-hime."

She sighed. Eventually she'd get everyone to drop the bloody 'hime' business.

"Is it me or that Iwa team really glaring holes into my head?" Naruto asked Ino quietly, though not quiet enough for Sasuke to miss it.

The Uchiha's head snapped up, Sharingan activated as he looked around to find the source of Naruto's discomfort. They'd known it could be a possibility that one of the Kumo or Iwa shinobi would recognize Naruto's features. Once their team finally learned about his parents and saw a photo of the Yondaime, it was pretty obvious who Naruto was the son of. No one else in Konoha history had the man's unique coloring. He was an orphan so no one knew where his roots hailed from either.

They couldn't expect everyone to be dunces obviously. And after their last experience with Iwa shinobi and how that whole training mission went, he could understand Naruto's discomfort. Being attacked just because he looked like someone was fucked up. And the method used had been done with intent to torture. Being drawn and quartered was one of the more messed up ways to go.

They'd attacked Naruto's Kage Bunshin simply for looking like the Yondaime Hokage. They had assumed, quite right as well, that he was the son of the Yondaime. For all Team Seven knew, Iwagakure forced their shinobi to commit Namikaze Minato's photo to memory so they could push their hatred for him into the future generations and then gave them the go ahead to attack anyone who had so much as a shred of a similarity to Konoha's legendary Kiiroi Senko.

When his Sharingan alighted upon the team in question, he made extra certain to memorize their attire and choice of weaponry, categorizing the best ways to take each teammate down.

If it was possible, Iwa had made enemies of most shinobi villages save for Kumo. They gone to war with the other big three and had Kage who personally battled the other Kage. Iwa was not known as
a very friendly place and Sasuke's experience with them made him dislike them on principle. It probably wasn't fair to judge them all, but if a squad of Jonin illegally entered another country and were perfectly willing to murder a child because he resembled someone they hated, then something had to be messed up about the entire village of Iwagakure. Jonin were supposed to be the most mature shinobi in the ranks. That was the point of being promoted to such a status.

Ino clucked her tongue in disappointment. "Is this going to be something we're going to have to deal with every damn time we run into Iwa shinobi? It's getting very old very fast."

Sasuke scoffed. "You could easily handle the one in the red hakama. He's favoring his left leg over his right despite being a right-sided individual. He has an injury that has long affected his performance, and his chakra is relatively low with no seals on his body. I could take the one with the sword. Kakashi's been training me and applying Sharingan techniques and Raiton Chakra has helped me advance in a timely manner. And Naruto, if it comes down to it, you'll take out the redhead. He has the most chakra but looks to be the least trained."

"Got it," the blond nodded. "Overwhelm and then surge."

A common fighting style for Naruto actually. It worked for him better than it would for anyone else.

Sasuke would absolutely destroy anyone who so much as came at Naruto with intent to kill. He hadn't been able to help the last time it had happened, but Sasuke was stronger now. He was doing better than before. He was capable of going toe to toe with Chunin of Kiri if the Rebellion mission was anything to go by, and that was months ago. He wouldn't let his teammates down this time.

To make certain his dislike was obvious, Sasuke glared at the group across the street, making certain they got his message clearly as he fingered a kunai.

The three stiffened for a second, before glaring right back at him.

At least he could say the Exams were going to be interesting.

"I know you like befriending people, Naruto, but don't try to befriend Iwa shinobi," Ino said in a low aside. "They aren't worth your effort or kindness. You're too good for the likes of them."

"You don't know that. Not all of them are judgmental pricks I'm sure."

Sasuke sighed and turned his attention back to his idiot teammates. "You're too nice for your own good."

"I just try to remain optimistic. After spending so many years being unhappy, I'd rather look at the positives. It's far more conducive to a happier future that way," the blond said, sounding too mature all of a sudden.

"Conducive, nice one," Ino nodded with an impressed grin.

"Yeah! I got that one from Iruka-sensei! -ttebayo!"

"How are things doing today, Tsunade?"

The blonde woman sagged in her seat as the Potta Head entered her office at the hospital. She had a Kage Bunshin stationed in the Hokage's office, so Hari bringing it food would technically be pointless and Tsunade didn't want to waste the girl's resources. Instead, the young woman had enough foresight to know to bring lunch to the hospital.
In her hands was a brown basket that smelled of fresh bread that would most likely still be warm. And she could pinpoint honey, rosemary, and some form of meat. Tsunade hadn't gone into Tracking, but she liked to think her sense of smell was well-honed. Being a medic who had to often combat poison usage made her intimately familiar with all kinds of flora.

"The day has been hell, Hari," she told the young woman. "Heart surgery is never something to take lightly and we had an emergency this morning. Essentially there was a tear in the aorta and it had to be repaired immediately. It's classified as an emergency situation. It happened to the patient on a mission and went undiagnosed officially until they arrived this morning. The surgery is called Aortic Dissection Repair, and a very small percentage of people ever manage to live through it. The shinobi in question seemed to understand something even more grave than their other injuries was afoot and did a patch job of trying to heal their heart personally. They had enough medical training to pinpoint where the issue was and force as much healing as they could into that particular area, prolonging their own life in the process to slow internal bleeding."

The Chunin was brought into the emergency room, her teammates screaming about multiple injuries in the chest cavity. Her hand had been pressed against the center of her sternum, glowing green as she struggled to breathe through the pain of her broken ribs.

It was an impressive feat for one without a license to practice Iryo-Ninjutsu. Whatever she had learned was self-taught and not gleaned from the hospital or any of its Iryo-nin. She'd helped save her own life as she had correctly administered advanced medical healing to herself.

The surgery still took forever though. Thankfully, because they had the benefit of Blood Replenishers from the Potta Clan, the patient hadn't bled out like others would have mid-surgery. But it was still a trying time for all of them. Yet it was a relief when their patient managed to join the mere 5% who managed to make it through the surgery itself.

"Is the patient expected to make a full recovery?" asked Hari as she set up the place settings she'd brought along, on Tsunade's desk.

"From the heart surgery, yes. From the rest of their injuries… perhaps. The heart was the most concerning thing, but the newest round of Iryo-nin are working on the resetting of the bones still. The ribs were a mess the last time I checked. But your Skele-Gro will surely be helpful in the end, so once again, your family has proven why it's so important to us here in Konoha."

Before her, was set an elaborately crafted bento full of sushi. Tsunade didn't often eat sushi, but she did admire Hari's. And instead of sake, or any other kind of alcohol, Hari presented her with a thermos of hot tea.

At least the tea was good. And avoiding alcohol on the job was probably for the best. Not that anyone could really do anything about the Head of the Hospital imbibing liquor on the clock.

"I have some food set aside for Shizune as well."

Shizune's shift would be over in the next few minutes. Hari was always startling when it came to her awareness of time and schedules. It was possible that Shizune had told her of course, but there was just something about how Hari went about things that had Tsunade certain she was just instinctive. Or perhaps her cousin had been helping out with the future.

Tsunade accepted her own bento with a smile, missing the time in her life where she got to have them on the regular. Hari meanwhile, was busy cutting a long loaf of bread into three sections. Bread and sushi. Not exactly a common meal choice, but it worked at the very least. And the bread was indeed warm and Hari had brought along all manner of spread for it. Tsunade chose the persimmon
'jam' because it was homemade and Hari was a great cook.

The office door opened to reveal Shizune, looking haggard and drained, eyes puffy from need of sleep. Her dark eyes lightened considerably when she saw them seated at her shisho's desk. "Finally something different! We only just finished the rest of the surgery on Fujioka-san."

Hari waved the woman forward, shoving the bento and the piece of bread she'd set up, toward her portion of the table. "Take a much needed break and gossip with us."

A chair was retrieved and the three set to enjoying their meal together.

"Do you think they made it to Tetsu No Kuni by now?" Hari asked after a few minutes.

Both medics hummed, but Shizune answered, "Yes. If the ships were created in Yuki no Kuni, they will be far more capable than common ships. They seem to be a very technologically advanced nation and have been sharing their innovation with the world at large."

"Yes," Tsunade agreed. "Other than them, I believe Amegakure is also very advanced, though we don't have many people capable of talking about it. They're very secretive. Jiraiya is actually on a mission there at present and will be using some of those potions of yours to infiltrate the village and get some good intel for us."

The bastard always ended up with the sensitive missions. She hadn't wanted sensei to send him there, but what little information he'd gotten had been too valuable to ignore. Hari supplying their Recon division with an unnaturally large amount of her 'Polyjuice Potion' had been a real help in recent months.

So long as he attuned his chakra accordingly, the disguise wouldn't fall even with the introduction of pain. Even if he was cut into, the disguise wouldn't fall, which was what made the potion so valuable to Konoha now. The Potta Clan would be hailed as geniuses in the future. Their assistance in the various shinobi arts and trades would never be forgotten or overlooked.

"I hope Ero Sennin's okay," said Hari. "He annoys me sometimes, but he's a good bloke overall."

Tsunade waved off her concern. "That idiot is far too persistent to die on such a mission. He'd laugh in Death's face if he could."

For some reason her attempts are reassuring the young woman worked, leaving her with an amused grin that was full of understanding Tsunade didn't comprehend.

"They've been monitoring us closely," observed Kurenai as she reclined in the room several of the Konoha Jonin were sharing. "I can't tell if it's just because they don't trust us to behave, or it's because they're trying to dissect the shinobi around them."

"Yes," Kakashi chose to reply. It was most likely a mix of the two reasons. Samurai avoided ninja like they were a plague. They could barely tolerate the shinobi way of life, so they didn't expose themselves to shinobi all that often. This would be the perfect opportunity to study the Five Great Shinobi Nations at once and in relatively close quarters.

Asuma hummed around a senbon. Smoking was not allowed in the building, but he hadn't wanted to stand outside in the cold, so he has to satisfy his oral fixation some other way. Too bad Genma wasn't around to see it. "Good thing I came prepared."

He proceeded to pull a scroll out of his pouch and released a shogi board from it. "Who am I beating
"Today?" he asked, tone cocky.

And because he felt like being an asshole, Kakashi plopped down in front of his friend of many years, nose still shoved in his recent copy of Icha Icha. "It'll be a pleasure to defeat you," he said pleasantly. The ratio of wins to losses against Asuma was in Kakashi's favor. And Kakashi never played a game where he wasn't reading Icha Icha at the same time. If he put all of his attention on the game itself, Asuma would never win. But playing with a disadvantage was a more fun challenge and it annoyed Asuma to not be taken seriously.

Kakashi made a living as a troll and he loved it.

The unimpressed look the Sandaime's son sent him, made Kakashi grin beneath his mask. "Something the matter, Asuma-kun?" Kakashi asked, using the very voice and address the brunet had always hated when growing up. Fangirls screaming it at him had been a real turn off. As such, his friends never ceased ribbing him over it even to this day.

"I simply wanted to play a nice, rousing game with Kurenai, Koinu-kun."

Kakashi flicked the other shinobi's nose before he could even process what had happened. "Only Hari gets the privilege of using that nickname. You'll have to use your lacking imagination and come up with something different."

"Oooh!" Anko appeared in the doorway then, hands full of baskets of food to share. She was beaming in a way that screamed Victory. "Something extra special between you both, huh? Sounds kinky to me!"

He sighed, willing away the flush that seemed intent upon coloring his face. He would not give her the pleasure of seeing it. "Why must you take everything to the sexual level?"

"Because I have to be away from my girlfriend and if interfering in the love lives of my best friends is the best way to get some good entertainment, then damn skippy I'm doin' it! The twerps are off exploring and aren't around for me to mess with so you'll have to do."

There wasn't a love life for her to interfere in when it came to Kakashi. He and Hari were just friends. Just a grown man of decent physical attractiveness, being friends with one of the most uniquely beautiful people he'd ever met that he constantly was reminded of his attraction toward. That was it. Nothing special about it. Nothing special would come out of it either. At least he had no plans to make anything special out of it.

Anko's baskets ended up being filled with, and it wasn't very difficult to guess if someone knew her well enough really, dango. Just dozens upon dozens of packages of dango sticks. "They don't have a dango specific shop or anything in the town central, so I had to clean out three mini-marts to get all this shit, so be grateful and no one touch the green tea ones or I will skewer you alive so well, Genma would shit himself."

She proceeded to pile up all the packages she wanted for herself - fifteen of them to be precise - and pushed the baskets toward Kakashi. He contemplated the baskets for a moment, before picking out two packages of Hanami and passed the baskets behind him to Kurenai who was lounging on one of the beds. Yes, the Samurai equipped the rooms with actual beds and not futon. To be honest, he felt a little spoiled by it.

Asuma finally made his first move after what felt like forever waiting for him, and Kakashi too moved a split second after, disappearing dango with finesse while reading his porn without blinking. His nonchalance was already getting to his opponent. Asuma was so easy to mess with and it would
never get old. He wasn't explosive with his frustration like Gai was, but it was still humorous to watch him lose his shit.

Shinobi life was stressful and full of darkness and sorrow. They had to find amusement somewhere in a controlled manner that didn't harm others. This was simply Kakashi's chosen method of coping. Far healthier than some of the other coping methods he'd been witness to.

Click. Clack. Click. Clack. The pieces went down in rapid succession for the first few minutes. Kakashi went through sixteen pages of reading and polished off the rest of his dango in that time span.

Finally, they came to the point where true strategy finally came into play. Where Asuma had to stare at the board in contemplation and plan the possibilities from his possible moves. Kakashi, who had always been quicker on the uptake than his peers, had already categorized the next dozen moves and the dozens of consequences of those moves, which lead to even more consequences that he'd already worked out.

"You should totally teach Hari how to play this," said Kurenai from behind his right shoulder. She was looking at the board and seeing just how quickly Asuma was getting played and he didn't even realize it.

Anko groaned. "She doesn't seem the type to be into this crap. It's so much sitting and staring and that shit's boring."

"It's mentally stimulating," countered Asuma as he finally chose to move a piece exactly where Kakashi wanted him to.

A scoff was the kunoichi's response. "I can think of a ton of things that I'd consider to be 'mentally stimulating' and shogi sure as hell doesn't fit on the list."

"That's because shogi is for those of a higher mental aptitude, Anko," Kakashi teased, flipping a page and moving a piece at the same time. He also easily caught the kunai she'd thrown his way, as opposed to leaning back and allowing it to embed itself into the wall. There were no jutsu for fixing walls and he didn't want to make Konoha look any worse in the eyes of Tetsu no Kuni.

"Mah! Such rudeness, attacking a comrade."

"Fuck off."

Kakashi loved pissing people off. It was practically his calling!

"We have a problem."

Obito's attention was caught instantly the moment Zetsu appeared, seemingly sprouting right out of the ground, the black and white halves stark against one another and joint mouths spread in a grotesque grin that actually appeared to be frowning.

On the other side of the room, Pein straightened, his Rinnegan locking onto Zetsu's position instantly. The bright purple color of his eyes and the black rings that overlapped the minuscule pupils were unnerving. "And what could possibly be so bad that it would have you so alarmed?" he asked, voice deep and resonating. It was one thing Obito could respect. The ability to command wasn't an easy one and many people weren't capable of it, but Nagato, as Pein, surely managed. He sounded like someone who should be followed.
"Amegakure has been invaded by Jiraiya of the Sannin on a secret mission to find the headquarters for Akatsuki."

Immediately, both Obito and Pein were alarmed. How was it possible? The entire village was under constant surveillance! They would have known about him coming anywhere near the village!

"Upon a little investigating in Konoha, we found out that Sandaime Hokage, Sarutobi Hiruzen sent his former student on a reconnaissance mission here, following a lead given to him elsewhere. And he used means provided by the new Potta Clan of Konoha, to get in undetected. When we tried acquiring the same means, we were unable to cross whatever barrier was set up to protect the items in question."

Potta Clan. Meaning that Potta Hari, who seemed to be involved in everything in Konoha these days, was also involved somehow. Her clan's contribution to the village gave them a spying technique so useful it couldn't be detected? And now Ame, formerly heavily protected fortress that it was, was now potentially revealed to all enemies should Konoha feel generous enough to share its newfound knowledge with anyone else.

Obito did not like the way things were going.

"Hinata, are you memorizing the different streets?" Sakura asked as she looked around the restaurant their team was seated in. Her fur-covered clothes were warm because it was warm indoors, making her almost regret wearing them at all. But outside it was snowing and she knew the fur would be needed eventually. She was cold just thinking about all that snow.

Her teammates had wanted to get food first. Or rather Choji was hungry like he always was, and the girls went along with him out of curiosity over Tetsu no Kuni's casual fare. Hinata's Byakugan had been activated for half an hour as she eerily stared ahead while her near-360 vision let her get acquainted with their surroundings. If anything, she'd be able to lead them around if something unfortunate happened at any time while they were in the village.

The Hyuga Heiress hummed her agreement. "I can see Rock Lee in Building B if you feel like visiting him, Sakura," she said, voice teasing even as her near-stoic expression didn't change in the least.

Sakura's face tinted pink like her battle dress. "I don't know what you're talking about, Hinata."

"You have a crush on him because he is a patient Taijutsu instructor but gets fired up like you do and encourages you to break things with him," Choji clarified around his chopsticks.

A scoff was her response.

"That wasn't a disagreement!" he sang around a mouthful of pork.

"Eat your damn food before I make it so you can only use a straw for the next month." As a medic-in-training she could follow up with that threat too.

Hinata giggled a bit as the veins protruding around her eyes receded and she blinked for the first time in thirty-three minutes and seventeen seconds. It was creepy but also cool in a way.

"I hate you both," Sakura groused, taking up her tea to hide her face behind the cup.

Choji continued shoveling another… something that was wrapped around a bit of meat and then fried three times, into his mouth, a grin on his face the whole time.
Sakura didn't care which room Lee was in. Eventually he would somehow find her no matter what. He was just that good at spotting people he liked. She didn't have to worry at all. And she didn't have a crush on him either! Sakura was too busy for crushes now! She was a full-fledged kunoichi and future Chunin, dammit!

Wait a minute. "Hinata, you said he was in his room, which is in a building half a mile down the main street. Were you looking into every building along the way?"

The other girl hummed.

"And has that special Dojutsu of yours ever possibly given you a front row seat to events that are considered too adult for us young folk to be faced with according to our parents?"

Instantly, Hinata's face went hot pink. Like it did whenever she thought about Naruto, or Naruto looked at her, or Naruto spoke to her. The embarrassment was thick around their table as the girl 'eeped' and looking down at her food which had remained untouched until now.

Well then. All those times Sakura had lamented over not having a Dojutsu, ended up being ridiculous and unnecessary. There were some consequences in having near-360, X-Ray vision.

"So what exactly is the game plan for tomorrow?" asked Ino as she lounged on their bed. Yes, the whole team was sharing the big ass king bed that came with their room. Naruto had insisted upon sleeping on the sofa, but then Sasuke insisted on joining him, and Ino eventually got annoyed with their bickering and told both that they'd all share or else. She'd fingered her sai meaningfully while doing so, just to get the point across.

They were unsurprisingly agreeable after that.

Since the team had shared sleeping bags before, this wasn't such a big deal. They had come too far for this to be what unnerved anyone. Ino had seen Naruto's naked behind before, and yes, his skin was the same shade everywhere, it wasn't a really a tan. There wasn't much more that could bring them any closer. She was pretty sure one of them had gotten a eyeful of her young and developing body and at the time it had been a horrifying thing to think of but now she didn't care. Too many actually important things to worry about now.

"We don't let anyone who doesn't know us already, in on the truth about our skill sets," said Sasuke as he flicked at a strand of Naruto's spiky, blond hair. The blond playfully glared up at him, but he wasn't paying attention. "That means I won't be using Kenjutsu, anything beyond a couple Katon jutsu, or the Sharingan if I can help it. Naruto is to not use his Chakram, Summons, Rasengan anything, fuzzy buddy, or Fuinjutsu. And you won't be doing any Iryo-Ninjutsu, Elemental jutsu, or mental jutsu. Unlike the tournament matches, we keep under the radar as much as possible and then surprise everyone with everything we've got in the Third Exam."

She liked the idea of that. It would give future opponents less of a chance to prepare for a match against anyone on Team Seven. Having surprise on their side was important in any scenario. Being underestimated used to be really annoying, but now she fully understood what a boon it was and intended to use it to her advantage as much as possible now.

"I hope the first two exams don't take forever, I wanna go and kick some ass! -ttebayo!"

Sasuke flicked the blond's forehead. "That won't happen any time soon. There's a month of time between the Second and Third Exams. Enough to let everyone plan for their possible opponents."

"The hell are we gonna do in that time frame? Can Kakashi-sensei really teach all three of us in so
"He's been doing it for months," said Ino with a shrug. "Even managed it during the Rebellion mission."

Sasuke was nodding along. "Though I think Itachi wants to… teach me some more about the Sharingan during that time frame. And Ino's dad wants to teach her more about their family's Hiden techniques."

"What about me?" the youngest member of their team demanded.

"You have a Sannin godfather on your side."

"Oh yeah! But do you think he'll be around for a month to train?"

"Of that I have no doubt. He wouldn't leave you without even a small bit of help."

Naruto grinned and burrowed further into the sofa and subsequently, Sasuke's lap here he'd been resting his head. "Even though he's a great, big pervert, he's a pretty awesome guy. And nee-chan seems to finally like him now."

"Hari-chan can hold a grudge like no one's business," commented Ino.

"Yeah. She's kind of terrifying like that. But it was on my behalf, so I'm more touched than anything else."

Naruto deserved to have someone like that in his life. Ino was glad they had found one another, however it had happened.

The morning the First Exam was to take place, the Genin were all instructed to meet up in the first floor of the Administration Building which was located at the very center of the village. It was big and red, standing out against the bright white snow and darkish, stormy sky above them. There was literally no way to mistake it for anything else and if someone got lost... why were they even a shinobi in the first place if they were that inept?

The teams had until noon to make it to the specified room, otherwise they could not enter. No one had gotten lost and everyone ended up making it, filling the room with dead silent children and young adults all waiting for some kind of notice over what was going to happen to them.

And that was when Mifune, the leader of the secret village, stepped into the room with his right and left-hand men. As rehearsed, there was a considerable distance between them and the Genin.

"Good afternoon," he told the gathered shinobi. Most remained silent, but a few rumbled a greeting in return and a boy in orange waved madly, a wide grin on his face. "My name is Mifune, and it is by my allowance that you are taking the Chunin Exams here. Tetsu no Kuni is neutral and has always been neutral in the face of the other nations. We are not shinobi and do not look favorably upon the practices of shinobi, however we understand the necessity of the Chunin Exams, and have agreed to monitor this particular one."

No one spoke. Not even a single cough or a sniff, all simply too fixated on his words to say anything. There was a tenseness to the air that got thicker and thicker by the second.

"In this first Exam, you will all be faced with the same duty in a Team Exam. Your objective is to gain entrance into the Second Exam, and it's only by completing a certain number of steps together
that you can do that, so listen carefully and commit each word I say to memory. You can only fail or pass as a team."

The shinobi all straightened to attention once it became obvious that things were going to get serious.

Mifune gave the signal nod, and Jonin shinobi flooded the room, passing off plain, white boxes to their squads. The boxes were not tampered with as promised if they wanted their team to remain in the Exams and not bring shame upon their village. The value of a reputation was something all shinobi seemed to understand so the threat had worked.

"As you see, your sensei has handed you a box. Each box contains three vials, each vial contains three scrolls with a different piece of information inscribed thereon. The only way you are allowed to get the scrolls is through consuming the contents of one of the vials. No matter what happens, someone must drink what is inside of the vials. And only one vial from each team may be consumed, by only one person. Each vial contains the same information so it doesn't really matter which you choose in that regard."

The Genin began to murmur between themselves as they peered into their boxes in curiosity.

"The green vial is a poison, the red and blue vials are the antidote," Mifune told them plainly.

Confused faces all around.

"The antidote must be taken in a certain order after taking the poison otherwise it will turn and attack the body as the poison it is meant to cure will. So to properly counter the effects, it would be green, red, and then blue in order to stop the poison entirely."

Protests finally erupted, but the Iwa shinobi were not at the forefront. In fact, it was the Kusa shinobi with only a few teams, that made the most noise out of the gathered Genin.

"That isn't very Samurai of you!" someone yelled.

"We observed shinobi practices to compile the requirements for these Exams," was Mifune's simple answer accompanied by a shrug.

Eventually the bustle all died down, allowing him to continue.

"You will only have an hour to accomplish this task. The scrolls are necessary to be allowed entrance into the next Exam's area. If you don't have them, you will be disqualified. There is one scroll for each team member. You may not destroy the box nor the vials either or you will be disqualified. When finished, you will present yourself before me and we will determine whether you move to Room A or Room B. Both rooms are the same, we simply don't have another room big enough to fit so many of you at once. Your hour begins now."

And… as instructed by Mifune, the Jonin sensei, standing at the very back of the room and out of their students' eye-line, put their hands together and placed a detailed Genjutsu he'd described to them, over the room. Those who didn't manage to free themselves by the end of the hour would fail.

He was curious to see the reactions once the hour was up.

Team Seven huddled together and stared down at the open box in Ino's hands. It was a devious plan, making it so someone would be poisoned no matter what they did. Only one vial could be consumed and it didn't matter which because if not taken in the proper order, then they all did the same thing basically. Though they weren't told what exactly the poison would do, which was a big problem too.
And there was no time for Ino to set up a station and experiment.

Sasuke felt a tingle and looked up, noticing several blank faces and others not so blank. Genjutsu.

He quickly tapped Ino and Naruto to snap them out of it, but motioned for them to remain quiet as he quickly signed, **Genjutsu**.

They nodded in understanding and returned their focus back to the vials. Sasuke's mind replayed what the Samurai leader had said.

'Someone must drink' had been what Mifune said. He didn't say, *by one of your team*.

That meant they could feed a vial to another person. And nothing said anything about taking another's vial either. The thought of poisoning someone all for a promotion didn't make him feel good, but there were enough under Genjutsu for some to not notice their vials going missing until it was too late. So he'd take his team's green vial, plus a red and a blue from two other teams to lessen the number who would move forward, and force someone else to go through all three so they didn't die if that was what the poison did at all.

Placing a finger to his lips to show them that silence was necessary, he took up the green vial and surveyed the area for nearby teams who were open. Itachi had taught him how to layer on Genjutsu with the Sharingan, so he knew how to get through this quickly and quietly.

His target ended up being the rude ass Iwa team that had been giving Naruto the stink eye the other day. While he didn't like them, he wasn't so low as to simply kill them for no reason. They hadn't really done anything truly offensive yet, and now they weren't going to. He swiftly and effortlessly stole the vials he needed from two other teams and made his way over, slinking through the groups between him and his prey.

Sasuke uncorked the vials and made eye contact with the redhead who looked to be the leader. The Sharingan's effect took hold, mirroring the three tomoe in the other's eyes. Sasuke handed over the green vial first and waited for the teen to consume it. His body was immediately wracked with spasms and Sasuke forced the red and then blue vials down his throat in quick succession.

Once he determined that the poison had been negated, he burned the red and blue vials' scrolls with his Katon Chakra and headed back to his own group.

Naruto and Ino were gaping at him as he presented them with their vial and scrolls.

**Badass**, Naruto signed in appreciation, making Sasuke flush a bit. For no obvious reason.

Looking at the scroll, they read the instructions. *Present this to an official in charge of the second Exam when the Exam is set to begin, and you will be allowed entry.*

The made their way toward Mifune, the first team to do so.

"Give me your scrolls" the man ordered, hand outstretched.

Sasuke's eyes narrowed. The First Exams hadn't finished yet. So the Second Exam could not officially begin.

"No."

"Then you will go into Room B and await further instruction."
Without even saying a word, he gestured to Room B and his teammates followed him without question. The scrolls said to give it to an official when the Second Exam began. He was doing the right thing.

Getting through the Exam had been easy. Genjutsu did not work on Gaara, and Temari and Kankuro were good at deflecting it altogether. Poisons also didn't work on Gaara, so him taking the poison had absolutely no effect whatsoever. It also saved Kankuro from having to try and make his own antidote in so little time. He was decent at concocting poisons, but not anywhere near a genius yet.

His siblings were horrified when he'd taken up the main poison and drank it in a single gulp. He felt a small twinge of pain, but then the familiar burning of Shukaku's chakra filled him, and he knew it wouldn't work as it was intended to.

From what he'd observed of Naruto's team, the blond did not know that poison didn't work on Jinchuuriki because the Bijuu inside them had incredibly deadly chakra and would burn it out of their systems quickly. He felt like that piece of information should be shared as soon as possible.

Their team ended up joining Naruto's soon enough, much to the blond's excitement. Gaara made certain to relay the information he had instantly.

"It never said a member of our team had to consume it, just that it must be consumed," Chojuro pointed out, shifting his glasses somewhat nervously.

Haku smiled calmly and took up the necessary vial. "Give me a moment."

His target ended up being an Iwa team, simply because they were known to be quite hotheaded, which was ironic since they weren't even from Hi no Kuni. And the Konoha shinobi were very calm in response actually.

Also, Iwagakure had refuse to aid the Kiri Rebellion despite having former alliances with Kiri in the past. Mei-sama was very displeased with the village as a whole and wanted their displeasure to be obvious and unavoidable.

On the surface, their only allies in this exam were Konoha. That was how it had been during the war, and so that was how it would be in the Exams. Mei-sama had ordered them to leave any Konoha shinobi alone as payment for Konoha's assistance. Until a part where they ended up in one on one battles, Konoha was to be aided at all costs.

And it was just so fortunate that Iwa shinobi were glaring heavily at Naruto's team, making them a threat that should be expunged. Haku did not like people threatening his friends. Now that he had people who were precious to him, he had vowed to keep them safe.

Still, even if he wasn't fond of Iwa as a whole, Haku wasn't cruel. He wouldn't kill anyone when lethal force wasn't even necessary. Haku didn't like violence all that much and preferred things to be handled as peacefully as they could be.

So no, Iwagakure was not suddenly short three of their shinobi.

Chojuro gave him a shaky smile when he returned to their team with the necessary scrolls in hand. "Do you think they did something to the scrolls to keep them from getting wet?"

"Probably Fuinjutsu."
Sealing could do anything and had more applications than he could even think of.

In no time at all, their team joined the room Naruto's team had gone in. The blond welcomed them with a mad wave and an excited air. Other shinobi were treating the Exams like they were some kind of life or death mission. Stone-faced and callous in the face of whatever was to come. Naruto treated it like some kind of journey of discovery.

How someone could remain so positive even in times of trials, Haku would never understand, but he liked the boy's attitude. Now if only he could understand why Uchiha Sasuke looked like he'd swallowed a particularly tart lemon whenever Naruto looked away from him.

Karin huffed a laugh as she'd finally had enough time to consider the directions they'd been given and the possibly meanings therein. "I know exactly how to separate this from my skin," she said, holding up the vial with the poison. "It's a medical technique. Either of you got shinobi oil on hand to make this a bit easier on me?"

Shin nodded and pulled out a small container he often kept attached to his hip. She'd never bothered to ask about it before since he'd always carried it. Karin took a quick swig to coat her mouth, and then popped off the cork of the green vial. From the scent filling her nostrils and mouth, she could tell it attacked the muscles and inflicted intense amounts of pain and spasming. Probably a Hellebore base to start off with and then building upon that to make it worse.

She pooled her chakra into her mouth, mixing it with the oil to make certain nothing of the poison would touch any part of her body and therefore couldn't seep inside upon contact. It was one of those unavoidably deadly kinds that would be absorbed through skin and eyes if it was made into a gas, so a mask would just be pointless.

The poison wasn't swallowed so much as it was swirled around in her mouth and the chakra and oil surrounded it in a protective bubble that began to slide down her esophagus. She guided it along with her chakra, careful on how she moved it through the upper and lower esophageal sphincters. Having such exact control over her own bodily functions was something she'd worked years on.

This maneuver was a self-care kind for Iryo-Nin and poison specialists. Sometimes the two went hand in hand. It was best to know how to handle these sort of things and took intense chakra control, and muscle control to manage. Karin had been training as a medic for a long time against her will, and only recently because she desired to put her gathered knowledge to good use. She knew this technique very well.

Once she felt the bubble reach her stomach, she kept it in place and gestured for them to move along with their scrolls. They had limited time before the bile would destroy the oil coating entirely, so they had to move quickly.

When they ended up joining Team Seven in Room B, and the door closed, Karin finally deemed it safe to stop.

Rummaging through her bag, she found an empty bottle and promptly spit out the poison, which
when mixed with the brown of the oil, turned a murky green color.

There were a few seconds of silence before Naruto said, "That was badass! -ttebayo!"

Karin flushed and smiled. Being an Iryo-Nin was not a waste of her potential. It was nice to have that proven now and then.

"Thanks, Naruto. It's an advanced technique and takes a lot of effort to work through but it was the best I could think of at the time, so I went with it."

"Will I get to learn that?" asked Ino, looking damn near starstruck.

"After you pass Level 10 and can be trusted to have enough control to do it, yes."

"Awesome," the blonde whispered in awe.

"We got beat by Konoha of all villages, hurry up!" Karui hissed to Omoi who was still busy trying to decide whether he should make an Iwa Bunshin or a Mizu Bunshin to deal with the poison business.

"It doesn't matter which one you make, just make it and the drink the damn poison!"

"But what if i-"

"Just do it!"

An hour passed a lot faster than any of them expected it would. One by one, Genin would enter the room with them, but sometimes they weren't even in groups of three as teams. Some came in alone, without teammates. And always, they would be holding a scroll in their hand.

When the time finally was up, Mifune entered the room and cleared his throat. "I specified that this is a Team Exam, to be passed together. You can only pass if your team is together at the very end. If your team members ended up split between both rooms, then every member of that team is disqualified."

"WHAT?!!" a blue-haired girl from Kusa demanded, looking ready to split hairs with her katana. She'd come in alone, looking surly the entire time as she stood off in a corner by herself.

"Furthermore, it is specified on your scrolls that they can only be given to an official of the Second Exam in order to gain entrance to said Exam. This Exam was not pronounced as over and was still continuing. If any member of your team gave me their scroll outside, the whole team is disqualified. It behooves you to pay attention to even minor details. A lesson I'm certain will benefit you in the future.

"If your whole team is not in this room, please exit through the door you came in, and thank you for participating. Your sensei will be awaiting you. Everyone already outside that door failed and will be going home."

The room cleared of excess ninja quickly, leaving, from what Mifune could see, fifty-seven teams left. Out of 200+ that was a considerable drop. Forty-seven teams in total hadn't even managed to free themselves from the Genjutsu. That didn't look very good on the Shinobi villages as a whole.

So far, the standing had Konoha with 23 teams, Iwa with 9 teams, Kumo and Kiri with 7 teams each, Taki with 3 teams, Hoshi with 2 teams, and Suna, Ame, Oto, Tani, Yuki, and Kusa with 1 team.
"Congratulations to those remaining, for passing the First Exam. You’ve proven that you understand the details of the instructions given to you even when there seem to be impossible odds weighed against you."

He’d personally taken note of the Uchiha boy’s desire to not leave his victim poisoned. He went, did the job he was supposed to without harming his own teammates, and had enough kindness in his heart to make certain the Iwa shinobi, his natural enemy based on their opposing history, didn’t suffer for too long. There had been no rules that said death wasn’t allowed after all. It was something worthy of note.

Others demonstrated extraordinary means to move on in the Exam, but the kindness was what impressed Mifune the most.

It gave him hope that shinobi weren’t as dishonorable as they always seemed to be. That they could indeed be trusted.

"You will return here tomorrow and present your scrolls to the official in charge of the gate with same color strip as your scrolls. Only then will you be allowed entrance. Have a nice evening."

"That was a lot easier than I thought it would be," Naruto said the moment they were freed from the building. His arms were folded behind his head as they walked. "I was expecting something like a written test and I was nearing a mild panic from it."

Every knew that written exams were not Naruto’s specialty. Ever. Even when he managed to graduate middle of the class after drastically improving his overall scores. He just wasn't that kind of learner. They were the bane of his young existence.

"I’d heard it was supposed to be a psychologically challenging exam," Ino told them. "But that didn't feel like it at all."

"I think it was in a way. A lot of the details were seemingly inconsequential. For those of us who noticed them just fine, we were okay, but I'm certain the rest who failed all the steps weren't having such a good time. I broke the Genjutsu before any of us could see what it was supposed to show us, so for all we know it was a bad one," Sasuke said.

And that was true. Naruto was also really terrible at noticing Genjutsu. It was his weakest skill with a literal 0 while everything else was at least a 2 or 3. If he realized he was caught in an illusion, he knew how to cancel it, but beyond that he was hopeless. Naruto sucked at realizing and would have been one of the idiots trapped if Sasuke's eyes weren't so fancy.

"What was your First Exam like, Kakashi-sensei?" Ino asked, sending the quiet man an expectant look.

"A written exam."

"Ugh!"

"That was basically a front so the officials could see us cheat without getting caught and then determine if we were willing to risk it all for the sake of the mission by taking the final question which would supposedly leave us Genin forever if we failed it."

Ino nodded. "Now that is psychological horror. This one seemed kind of pointless."
Kakashi closed his Icha Icha. "There was a point and it was to determine how good each Genin was at the most basic of shinobi skills, which is paying attention and planning. Many shinobi fail in missions for failing to take in details around them. That includes interpreting the instructions correctly and then dispelling the subtle Genjutsu. In a similar scenario like that on a real mission, the way Sasuke handled it would have saved all of your lives and gotten you back home. Karin's method was also very advanced and would have saved her own life on such a mission should she have gotten captured by the enemy."

That made more sense actually. And Samurai were different than Shinobi. They had different values and tended to believe that Shinobi held no honor or respect for other living beings. So making the aim of their First Exam different from how a ninja village would handle it, made perfect sense.

On the Shinobi side it sounded like it was more about personal gain and finishing the mission no matter what happened to you. On the Samurai side it seemed more like keeping your comrades alive was more important in the long run.

He actually really liked that and he could tell just by looking at Kakashi, that he liked it too, even if he wouldn't say it aloud.

"I have returned!"

Tsunade glared at him from her seat behind the Hokage desk. "You fucking asshole. You got out of this and I hate you for it."

Jiraiya was given pause as he took in everything. The interior of the office had changed a bit. Enough for a cabinet to be installed inside and he was certain it contained all amount of liquor Tsunade could get her addicted hands on. It even smelled of sake to a small degree.

There was now a rug beneath the old desk, which gave the room a bit more life with it's cobalt and cream stripes. A few wall scrolls that matched were now hanging up. He was surprised she hadn't made everything green, considering how often she wore the color.

"Sensei finally gave you the hat?" Meaning Jiraiya didn't have to hear about becoming the Hokage anymore? Finally? After so many years of trying to avoid the topic entirely he was free of it?

"Not exactly," the woman grumbled. "He practically split it in half between the Hatake gaki and I and since he's not in the village, I'm getting acquainted with the duties personally. And I'm just a Kage Bunshin. Boss is back at the hospital dealing with training the newest medical course pursuers."

His jaw dropped and he wasn't sure which part shocked him more. He ended up asking, "Who came up with the idea to use Kage Bunshin?" And how come it had taken this long for the idea to come about?

"Hatake Kakashi," she growled in a familiar tone that said someone was going to lose a limb. "And when he gets back and his team becomes Chunin, we'll both be officially announced as joint Kage of Konoha and we can split up this shit job between us. The fucking paperwork never ends! I finish shit and someone comes in with a new stack of shit! And half of it is ludicrous and shouldn't need my attention in the first place!"

For once Jiraiya was super glad that he had a job as a Spymaster, otherwise he would have to be doing what Tsunade was doing now and then. And sensei had thought of a good way to split the responsibilities two ways and if Jiraiya had been in Konoha, no doubt the man would have split it
three ways just be an asshole. And then he would also be trapped with paperwork. No, he did not envy Tsunade in the least.

"Well I can at least tell you that I've collected some valuable information about Amegakure and the terrorist cell known as Akatsuki. More than we could have hoped for when going into this mission."

Her eyes narrowed at the name and she waved him forward while also signing for the Anbu to extricate themselves from the room until five o'clock. The privacy seals activated and then they were alone. Too bad it wasn't for fun reasons.

"This is the group after the Jinchuuriki, yes?" Tsunade asked as she removed two large bottles of sake from the desk and passed one over. She was a Kage Bunshin but that didn't mean she wouldn't partake in her vices.

He accepted the offering, deciding that it was just what he needed. "Yes. They are using Amegakure as their headquarters even though the members technically don't reside there. Only two seem to perpetually spend their time in the village."

His face slumped a bit at the thought, and Tsunade caught it.

"What happened?"

He sighed. "Some time ago, Akatsuki formed for a completely different purpose. And it was through the actions of Hanzo and Danzo collectively, as well as what seem to be outside manipulations, that twisted the original purpose. Or maybe their purpose is still the same and they're going about seeing it through differently?"

Jiraiya wasn't exactly sure how to describe what he'd learned.

They'd extracted much information from Danzo when he was alive. His brain was still being studied actually. And his manipulations of the shinobi world as a whole extend back decades. Back to their days before becoming the Sannin. There were just so many layers to sift through when it came to him.

"It seems the two Akatsuki leaders in the village are called Pein and Konan, and Konan is the same one from all those years ago. And Pein resembles Yahiko but with Nagato's Rinnegan."

Tsunade's hold on her sake slackened, and the bottle dropped to the desk and rolled off. Neither bothered to catch it as the glass was too thick to break from such a fall.

"Your former students run a terrorist organization?"

"It seems that way," he reluctantly admitted, taking a swig of sake to sooth his tense muscles and mild discomfort. "Ame is thriving under their direction. Better in the past two decades specifically, and the inhabitants owe this success to Pein-sama and Konan-sama. Near worshipful of them even."

"Did you find out why they want all the Bijuu?"

"No, but I can guess from what I know. If the rest of the countries don't have access to creatures capable of ultimate destruction, they can then hold them over the heads of the rest of the shinobi nations. Theoretically a threat of that magnitude could stop all fighting and bring peace. Which is obviously a false dream and not how true peace could ever be obtained. I'm not certain all the members of the group understand that this is their purpose either. Itachi and Kisame surely didn't know enough even with how long they'd been in the group."
Orochimaru was certainly not looking to bring peace to the world in any capacity. He’d joined the group probably in his quest to obtain more Jutsu and become all-powerful. He probably hadn’t even realized what he was signing up for in the end. He’d left for personal reasons too.

Jiraiya reached into his clothes and retrieved a scroll he’d labored over. "I mapped out the entire village of Ame over the week I was there recently. I know the names of all the merchants and the Chunin level and below shinobi. Hari-hime's Polyjuice really helped on this mission." He was the first person to successfully invade the village in the past two decades, and all because of a concoction made by a special clan that was generously passed on by its Head.

He handed over the map he’d painstakingly sketched and took another drink of sake to loosen himself up some more.

That was the most information that any other shinobi nation had ever managed to get on Ame. Jiraiya had basically hit a goldmine thanks to Hari's potion. And because only Hari and her cousin and anyone blood related to them could ever create those potions, and it would take a genius not in the know to figure that out, there was no true fear that other nations could ever get their hands on such a creation. Konoha was the farthest ahead and no one even knew it.

"Impressive," Tsunade murmured as she looked the map over, taking in the tallest buildings and their descriptions. "Would have been useful to have all this back in the great war, huh?"

"Don't I know it. But at least we have this information now."

That was better than having nothing at all.

The Sage stood, keeping the sake in hand. "I'm going to go and bother Hari-hime now. She's bound to be all bored and lonely now that most of her friends are all in Tetsu no Kuni. I could keep her company," he said with a suggestive brow waggle.

Tsunade pretended to gag and waved him out of the office, the privacy seals dissolving the instant he slipped out the window.

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Hari's head was bobbing as she sang along to the music in her head. It was nice to relax when cooking and she couldn't help but pull out a classic from her long memory. "I see a little silhouetto of a man, scaramouch, scaramouch will you do the Fandango? Thunderbolt and lightning, very, very frightening, me! Gallileo, Gallileo, Gallileo, Gallileo, Gallileo, figaro, magnificooooooollllllllllllllllll!"

"Your voice is off pitch."

She 'eeped' far louder than she would ever admit to, and her spatula went flying. Thankfully, Jiraiya's super ninja reflexes from hell managed to catch it before it hit the ground.

"And your reflexes aren't so great either," the man observed with a roguish grin.

Hari was filled with the urge to smack him with the very spatula he'd saved, but then she'd have to wash it and didn't feel like walking four steps toward the sink just to do it. "Ever heard of a bloody door?" she demanded, gesturing to the wooden contraption which just as easily lead to the kitchen, as the window did.

"Doors are for people without imagination."

At least nine people had told her a variation of that line before. It had to be some kind of secret ninja code. It would explain why all of them, spanning various ages and rankings, would say the exact
"Uh huh. I see you didn't die on your super secret mission. Naruto will be thrilled." She refused to admit that she too was also thrilled. Human mistakes aside, he wasn't a bad person overall. And he wasn't a manipulative dick either, which was a plus. It would be sad if he got killed. His books were nice and his brand of humour was tolerable.

The large man plopped down at the kitchen table and folded his hands. "How've things been around here? I see some new scars that weren't there the last time I was here and I'm curious to find out exactly what happened."

She shrugged and went back to stirring the pot of stew she was making. Stew could last a week if she spaced the portions out appropriately and she wanted to do as little cooking as possible leading up to her trek all the way to Tetsu no Kuni. Since she was a civilian, it would take her longer to get there for the Third Exam, than it would a shinobi going the same path as her. She'd never been to the country in question so she couldn't just Apparate there yet.

"I got kidnapped. I knocked my kidnapper out. I levitated him back to the village while I was bleeding out. He nearly bisected me according to Tsunade. I got fixed up but I'll be forever scarred. They got the info they needed from my kidnapper who apparently stole the Nidaime's fancy sword a couple years ago, so that was returned to the village. The origins of the mysterious deaths of people in the Daimyo's court, spanning back twenty years was revealed. The woman who put a hit on me had at least one member from every family killed out of jealousy. She's been brought to trial and has received her punishment which is various types of menial labour for the rest of her life."

It was a lot to say, but she got it all out in record time and a single breath. Naruto would be proud. He was the king of long-winded rants.

Jiraiya was quiet for a moment before huffing. "Nothing is ever calm around you."

"No," she agreed. Her whole life, Hari seemed to attract danger and drama from every angle. She didn't ask for these kinds of things to happen, but happen they did. It had to be that famed Potter Luck that followed her around from birth. Which was also more popularly known as Murphy's Law in case anyone was curious.

Sometimes Hari felt like Fate's bitch.

"Fate does not exist!" said Death, coming up out of nowhere to intrude.

_I know that! It's an expression, you twat!_  

"It isn't my fault that you tend to respond to certain information like a sieve!"

And yet this is one of those things I have yelled at you before! You even tried to tell me it was real, I refuted that statement, and then you explained why it wasn't real. I'm not stupid despite what my class scores from Hogwarts might tell you!

"Hari-hime, are you okay?" asked Jiraiya after she'd gone silent for too long.

"Just fine, Ero-Sennin."

He hummed. "So what's cooking and when can I have some?!"

She angled the spatula at him. "The meat is about to finish cooking, and then I'll be adding it to the pot. Everything in the pot has been simmering for hours. It'll fill you up good along with the
homemade bread I made. And you will eat everything!"

"Hey! I have been mercilessly teased with the fact that I still haven't gotten to try your 'delicious food'. Of course I'm going to eat everything I get!"

Oh yeah! She hadn't even noticed that fact.

The night between the end of the First Exam and the beginning of the Second Exam, was long. The Samurai leaders were busy compiling all the data they had gathered from the First Exam, shoving papers of observations around as recorded footage played on one of their largest television screens for them all to watch. It was being rewound multiple times so they could focus more.

They were going team by team, analyzing their dynamics and how they acted, paying far more attention to the teams who passed compared to the teams that didn't. There was no point in wasting energy on teams who wouldn't be around in the future of the Exams.

A lot of Konoha teams had proved themselves to be ones to watch. Certain teams from Iwa had proven to be concerning however, and some from the smaller villages as well. There was a considerable amount of darkness in the hearts of Kusagakure's shinobi. They were glad most of the village's teams hadn't made it through to the Second Exam.

However, in the end there were a lot less bloodthirsty shinobi than originally had been expected. Only some had been unnecessarily cruel and the number had been far lower than anyone has postulated it would be, which was a nice surprise for them all.

Using the preferred methods for shinobi in their exams hadn't gone over well with about half of the Samurai in charge, but eventually Mifune had gotten through to all of them. Using their own rules and examples meant they couldn't complain about unfairness should one of their own die in the process. And yes, there had been a few deaths in the First Exam because of that aforementioned cruelty displayed by certain shinobi who had entered the Exams, but it was a lot less than what usually happened in the other villages and nations when they chose to host the Exams.

"I believe that the assessment of Konoha being the "Tree Huggers" of the shinobi world, is correct," one of the generals stated, fixing his spectacles. "Reviewing what information we have on their histories and the structure of their military, they handle things differently than the rest of the shinobi nations do."

Mifune hummed. "Yes, they typically do multi-manned squads even well into their Anbu missions. They have the lowest casualty rates out of the Elemental Nations' combined military forces."

"Yes, they also prefer to have a medically-trained person on each team, which is useful in keeping their shinobi alive. I know we've all heard the various insults about Konoha being too kind and forgiving and gentle, but considering what we know of them, it's a far preferable ninja village compared to the others."

"And they have never been the ones to declare war, and have also been the ones to give their enemies chances to pull away up until the very last second," said Seiji.

"They also handled the revelations of Shimura Danzo's duplicity with expedition and an iron fist so to speak," added another General.

In the most basic description, Konoha was the most preferable shinobi village. Should anything ever become so terrible that Tetsu no Kuni had to break their long-time neutrality with the other nations, Konoha would be the best out of all their options. Not just because they were the most powerful
among the shinobi nations, but because their Hi no Ishi, the Will of Fire, seemed to hold them to higher standards.

**Population 5/5**

**Military 5/5**

**Economy 4/5**

They had the most people. The most military power, even after the failed invasion orchestrated by Oto and Suna. And even a booming economy, with Kumo coming up behind them in a very close second on the last note.

It was best to keep an eye on the shinobi of Hi no Kuni specifically, for the duration of the Exams.

"How are the Iwa shinobi holding up?" Mifune asked, turning his attention to the next group. He'd noted that many of their teams had been automatic targets, most likely due to their attitudes being so unpleasant and no one wanting to deal with them.

"Many of their entrants are above Chunin level," one of the Generals in the back noted.

"The same with the Kiri entrants. A power play obviously," someone else stated. "I don't fancy our village being in the middle of one."

"There is always a power play," said Mifune, stroking his mustache. "These are shinobi after all."

It had been a while since Hari had to go to the Academy in person. Not since Naruto was still in school and that honestly felt like forever ago. The halls were exactly the same as the last time she'd been there since it was a ninja school and not a magic school, and Iruka's classroom was just as she remembered it being. He really had a thing for inspirational quotes taped to the walls too.

In the room, she was directed to the seat Aiko and Akira shared, both looking at her with dropped jaws. She smiled at them and placed herself directly between them, waiting patiently for Parental Figures Day to begin.

It was interesting to see what walks of life these people came from. Not every shinobi-to-be had a shinobi parental figure in their life.

A parent who worked in the growing film industry. An Aunt who owned a restaurant in the upper district of the village. A cousin who had a meat-packing industry providing meat to the various businesses of Konoha. It was nice to know that even if being a Shinobi didn't work out for some of the kids, they'd still have something decent to fall back on in order to make a living.

"Up next is Potta-hime," said Iruka after a quick glance at his clipboard. He sent her an encouraging smile and waved her forward.

Hari made her way to the front. For that morning, she'd chosen a qipao in the shade of emerald green with black trimming. Her untamable, black hair had been plaited into a fishtail and she wore a simple, red lipstick. Her arms were bared to the room, showing off her scars and no doubt raising questions. Which was the entire point of this.

"Hello," she said, giving a small bow to the room. "My name is Potta Hari, I'm the Head of the Potta Clan as well as the Matron of Konoha's orphanage. I am Aiko and Akira's guardian."
Hands shot up instantly and she chose one of the boys right up front. His face bore the similar markings of the Inuzuka clan and he looked borderline feral like Kiba did. He was without a canine companion however.

"How did you get those scars?"

She'd expected it and Iruka's offended sputtering was calmed by Hari's dismissive hand. She'd always been a weird one, finding certain topics less taboo than others would.

"I got kidnapped by an Ame ninja who had taken a mission to get rid of me and he wrapped me in sharp ninja wire that cut into my skin everywhere."

All the kids leaned forward immediately, their eyes wide with interest. More hands raised as a result.

"You're not ashamed of your scars?" one of the girls in the back asked, looking baffled.

"No. I had some pretty bad scars before it happened and now I just look like I'm cosplaying a tiger all the time."

That got her some giggles and even more hands.

"What other scars do you have?"

She showed them her upper arm and the Basilisk fang scar which hadn't been ruined by the ninja wire. "A big snake bit me here when I was twelve. It was about 25 meters long."

Gasps of horror all around. "Yeah, its body was taller than me and terrifying. I killed it with a sword through the roof of the mouth."

She turned to present her back to give them an idea of where the injury had been. "A… feral dog left claw marks across my back spanning from right shoulder to left hip. It took time to heal."

"Did you cry?" a boy asked.

"Yes," she said firmly, earning a confused look. "It's a natural reaction to pain stimulation when you aren't used to it yet. So at the time I did cry. I did not cry when I was kidnapped by the Ame shinobi. By then it was more annoyance at the inconvenience of being kidnapped and the rudeness of him not murdering me in a clean room."

The whole room looked a cross between amazed and horrified. Including Iruka.

"Can you fight?"

She shrugged. "A friend of mine has been teaching me Taijutsu just in case. I'm not that good but could hold my own against a civilian just fine. I tend to rely on my Kekkei Genkai though."

And then spurred on dozens of questions of a different nature entirely.

"What does your Kekkei Genkai do?"

"Are you married?"

"Will you pass it on to your children?"

"Are you looking for a wife?"
"Could you fight a ninja even if you aren't trained as a ninja?"

Eventually, and it was a good thing this whole event took the entire school day and not just a single class period, Hari got around to explaining her and Luna's contribution to the hospital. She told them about how she made certain the children were all trained in first aid and that a lot of the village's orphans could go on to medical jobs in the future, be it as normal Doctors or Iryo-Nin.

Hari's occupation wasn't anything particularly amazing compared to some who were blacksmiths or shinobi, but the kids seemed reasonably impressed. And to top it all off, she'd brought them biscuits to snack on as well. It had worked on Naruto's class and it would certainly work this time as well.

When all was said and done, Hari felt as if she'd done a good job at representing her kids, and committed herself to similar duties in the future for the younger children as well.

All Sasori wanted was to get on with his business without any interruptions. However, it seemed as if some of his biggest projects had fallen apart and he was not thrilled by it.

First, his little mole in Orochimaru's clutches had stopped sending intel months ago. He practically disappeared off the face of the Earth. Kabuto was one of the major ways the Akatsuki gathered information outside of Zetsu. The creature couldn't be everywhere at once even with their special skillset. Kabuto had filled the void by being a proper spy.

Now he was gone.

Itachi and Kisame were also gone. Itachi having been a mole himself, for Konoha, in which he was no longer a rogue. And Kisame somehow willingly returned to his home village where he was welcomed with open arms as if he'd never left.

And then Sasori's contacts in Hi no Kuni went blank. Specifically Kurosaki Sayori's family and their entire business. For years they'd been supplying him with bodies for puppets and for years he, in return, would give them information on their rivals in the Daimyo's court. It was a system that had worked just fine for so long and for it to suddenly stop was annoying.

Of course word spread fast once the ball got rolling. Sayori usually hired Sasori to dispose of her biggest opponents, but this time she had deviated from the norm because he'd been too busy to answer her summons. And instead of simply waiting for him to have free time, she went and hired some A-Rank shinobi from Amegakure to do the deed. And the idiot failed.

To make it even more interesting, the target had been none other that Potta Hari, the newest civilian to Konoha and the guardian to the Kyuubi Jinchuuriki. Her clan was apparently very old, very powerful, and very wealthy. They contributed considerably to the hospital according to what Zetsu had managed to gather personally. And they made the security stronger somehow. Infiltration techniques unlike any ever seen before.

A wealth of knowledge and worth helping Hi no Kuni to prosper as the greatest of the Five Great Nations. Of course the Daimyo would favor her and her clan member over the others. They brought something especially worthwhile to the land. And Sayori had gotten jealous as usual.

So now Sasori was down two informants/workers. Of course he had more, but now he had to find replacements for those two and Kabuto had actually been someone of impressive skill. His use was far above all the others under Sasori's employ.

To make things even worse, with Itachi and Kisame gone, Pein was being a pain in the ass ironically. They had Sasori, Deidara, Tobi, Konan, Hidan, and Kakuzu left if the leader was
excluded. As Pein and Konan never left Ame, it was up to the rest of them to hunt down the Jinchuuriki now and see the plan finished. That meant more work for Sasori.

The immortal duo were a single team. And he and Deidara being art-loving fanatics got to be another team. It was all basically designed to make Sasori suffer no matter what. This left Tobi, dumbest of the dumb who could barely function like a normal person, without a teammate of his own. Basically two teams to hunt down nine Jinchuuriki. It was all a mess. How the hell they'd manage it he had no idea.

The teams themselves weren't the most coordinated. They all tended to argue more than get any work done. And the thing was, even if Sasori was paired with one of the other ones, it wouldn't be any better. Hidan's mouth was annoying. Kakuzu's greed was annoying. Deidara's artistic views were stupid. Tobi himself was just stupid. No matter what, Sasori would be fucked either way.

Konan was simply not an option. She wasn't exactly Pein's partner, but she wasn't anyone else's partner either. Zetsu never worked in a group because the last time he did, he ate his partner and no one wanted to deal with that. He didn't have many skills beyond gathering information so he'd be pretty useless in the long run.

This whole mess with partners and such wasn't how he wanted to spend his day. And now Sasori had to be the one to tell Pein that something had happened to Kabuto.

He sighed. He didn't want to do it at all.

Konan regarded him blandly when he entered the room. She was standing closer to Pein, but not close enough to touch. She tended to hover near him at all times, Sasori had noticed. As if waiting for something to happen. Like a protective guardian.

"What news do you bring, Sasori?" Pein asked, his deep voice calm but his Rinnegan shining with malice.

"Kabuto has gone dark on me. All attempts to contact him have been met with silence on all ends."

The resulting crack in the floor was expertly ignored by all three of the room's inhabitants. Pein's eyes remained unnervingly open and intent upon Sasori's puppet body. "Is that so?"

It was rhetorical of course, and Sasori knew that. He was so glad his body was no longer a living organism or he'd no doubt be susceptible to the treacherous thing know as a heartbeat and a pulse. No doubt both would be thundering away in fear from the look Pein sent him.

Thankfully, he was simply a glorified weapon now and didn't have need of fear since he felt no pain itself.

"I suppose we'll need to send Zetsu to find out what happened."

That didn't mean Sasori couldn't be aggravated of course.

Orochimaru, in his newest body from one of his faithful shinobi, surveyed the surrounding Genin, looking for Uchiha Sasuke. The boy was nowhere near Itachi's level so getting a hand on him would be easier.

Getting into Tetsu no Kuni had been relatively easy even if him and the small amount of teams he'd traveled with were given a very clear threat about their time in the village. Oto's hand in the invasion of Konoha did not go unnoticed even by the samurai.
He had one team left in the Exams. Kimimaro, Tayuya, and Kidomaru. The others of the Oto no Shinobi Yonin Shu hadn't lived through the Konoha Invasion. Though Tayuya had to get a lung transplant thanks to the noxious fumes she'd breathed from that massive cheetah summon.

Kimimaro was sure to not lose. He was the strongest shinobi in Oto now, right behind Orochimaru now that Kabuto was gone for good. If he lost to anyone, that would be someone Orochimaru should consider for a mark.

Still, his main target in all this was still to acquire the Sharingan and he needed Uchiha Sasuke to do that.

Of course there were also two Byakugan users available too and perhaps he could plan ahead just in case. He'd have to think more on it later as that dojutsu had never been too terribly interesting.

The biggest problem he was facing, was the fact that despite the Konoha Jonin sensei being given their own quarters to share, Hatake Kakashi had chosen to linger outside his team's room all evening and Kakashi's stats showed to be on par with the Sannin by now. Maybe even better in some aspects than each of them.

He'd just have to use the Second Exam as the chance to get to Sasuke. It wouldn't be that different from the one in Konoha he was certain. In the survival test, Team Seven wouldn't have anyone to hide behind. It was just a matter of tracking them down and then getting what he wanted.

A stray thought hit him out of nowhere. What if Uchiha Sasuke didn't even have a Sharingan? He had nothing noted that he had it. If he didn't it would explain why he was nowhere near his brother's level of power.

First order of business. Test the boy before bothering with the mark.

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**A/N: Another is done!**

**How was it? Let me know!**

**Check out my other fics!**

**Ja ne! :D**

**CHECK ME OUT ON TUMBLR, HELLY-WATERMELONSMELLINFELLON.**

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**Chapter End Notes**

**CHECK OUT MY MANY OTHER HARRY POTTER FICS! ^-^**

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**End Notes**

**How was it?**
Works inspired by this one: "The cold never bothered her anyway." by lucife56

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