Whoever said death is nothing to be afraid of have likely lived a full life. Though, I suppose the same could be said for the reverse. Those who fear death have never truly lived, but I'm getting a little ahead of myself. My name is Kasa Mon, the idiot who doesn't know how to die properly. OC Self-insert

I've been avoiding writing SI's like a plague, but after reading such wonderful fanfic like Dreaming of Sunshine by Silver Queen and a hilarious one like My Life as Ishikari Mayu by TFK-fan118. I couldn't resist. Not sure if I could match up to either authors, but thanks for reading!
Umbrella in the Rain

Whoever said death is nothing to be afraid of have likely lived a full life. Though, I suppose the same could be said for the reverse. Those who fear death have never truly lived, but I’m getting a little ahead of myself.

My name current name is Kasa Mon, the idiot who doesn’t know how to die properly.

And let me tell you one thing. Dying hurts, not sure if it would still hurt when you’re completely dead, but seeing that I’m too stupid to die properly… Yeah, I’m going to have to get back to you on that. Where was I? Right, dying and hurting. Yeah, try not to die if you can, but if you do—friendly advice—stay dead. Trust me, you don’t want to come back.

I won’t bore you with the details of my first death because who really cares? This is not that story. Nope, this one is way better. What? I’m not lying! Don’t believe me? Stick around a bit longer.

Remember I said I’m too stupid to die properly? Keep that in mind, that’ll be important. Here’s the thing about death. Everyone have their own interpretations of what would happen after they die. Those who are religious end up in heaven, hell, purgatory, nirvana or whatever place they believe they’ll end up in. Atheists and others who don’t believe in anything… well, they’ll end up wherever they think they’ll end up after death.

Sounds like a pretty good deal if you have high hopes for the afterlife. Of course, there are those who don’t want to die or aren’t willing to move onto whatever they think the afterlife is. Now, those people become spirits, demons, vengeful souls and so on and so forth, typical horror story origin. Where do you think the stories come from?

Now, Kasa you ask, where are you going with this? Remember when I said I was too stupid to die properly? Death is pretty straightforward, if one believes they go to heaven, they will. If they think they deserve hell, they go to hell. You get the point.

Here comes the big question: What do I believe in?

To answer that, let’s get to know me a little better shall we? Don’t worry, this still isn’t going to be that story, but bear with me a little. Before I died, I was normal—well, as normal as the average person I suppose. I was single with a typical family: parents, siblings, and aunts, uncles the works. Graduated with a normal college education, got a normal job. Nothing worth noting…except, the fanatic side that’s obsessed with Japan, games, books and countless other fandoms.

I’ve lost count how many there were over the years, but when I died there was one I was particularly obsessed with. That’s right, Naruto.

Before you jump to conclusions and roll your eyes, this little trip is hardly a fan’s dream come true. Heck, a nightmare would probably be a better description of what this is. Who in their right mind would want to live in a world filled with dangers at every turn with demons, wars and murderous organizations obliterating villages and towns like they were playing god-mode in Sim City?

Okay, I’ll admit the idea of throwing elemental jutsus of mass destruction around like a badass is pretty damn cool, but hell what are the chances of me being able to do that? Not to mention I had no clue what the rules of death was when I arrived—No, back up a bit, forget the rules of
death, I didn’t even know where I was!

One moment, I was screaming in pain and terror from my previous death and the next, I was screaming in terror at the gigantic hands holding my cold and wet body. Where the hell was I? I wiggled and squirmed, but it didn’t seem like my body wanted to listen. My vision was clouded, my hearing was muffled, it was almost as if I was drunk.

Except, I wasn’t. My mind was clear, but my senses were dull. At first I thought the long years of fanaticism had finally snapped my mind. Why else would I be tended and cared for by giants? Giants that speak fluent Japanese of all things. Even the Japanophile in me is shaking her head at the blatant wrongness of western mythological creatures uttering Japanese. It took all of six months before I realized my mistake.

Why six months? Because it’s hard to keep a coherent thought when anyone sleeps for sixteen hours a day and more so when they have a depth perception of eight inches or less. The lack of motor skills and control over my bowel movement and bladder was enough to drive me mad. Anytime I was awake, I was doing whatever I can to get any semblance of control. Not that I ever get far, the rain always lulled me back to sleep. It always rained.

During this time, I learned that the names of new my parents, Somoku and Tesuri, the Japanese giants. Why am I still harping about them speaking Japanese when it’s obvious they’re not really western mythological creatures? The reason, my mother has red hair, natural red hair. Don’t get me wrong; I love red heads. In my previous life I wished I had red hair, but here, it made no sense whatsoever.

Why would she be speaking Japanese when she obviously looked European? Even if this were a figment of my deranged mind, why isn’t it in English? Instead it’s in Japanese, a language I barely know aside from basic greetings and questions.

The weirdness doesn’t end there, far from it. My father has an even more bizarre color, blue. Who has blue hair? What was he? An anime character? The thought was almost enough to throw me into a giggling fit. Keyword: almost. Why didn’t I? Because when I tugged his hair, checking whether or not his roots were blue, I noticed it was covering something.

I have no clue how I looked when I saw that metallic plate against his forehead. My jaw must’ve dropped because he chuckled at my expression and pinched my cheek. There was no way anyone in this fandom that cannot recognize a ninja hitai-ate on sight. Oh, and remember what I said about nightmare? He wasn’t wearing a Konoha hitai-ate.

Four lines, it was Ame, the symbol of the Hidden Village of Rain. The village of civil wars and the base of Akatsuki… Guess what my first word was in this world?

“Shit.”

To say my parents were upset at my first words was an understatement. Most kids start with mama or papa, but I started with shit. And boy was that word perfect for my predicament. Newly born to the dangerous ninja world, I have a scant clue where I am, but no clue when here is. The only upside I had, my father was a ninja. So the chances of being able to use chakra were in my favor.

I can’t say I know much about either of my parents aside from their odd coloring. Although, Somuku, Kaa-san, seems to be very good at calligraphy. The times when I’m awake and not eating or getting cleaned; she would have her scrolls and brushes out. Let’s be realistic, I’m a grown woman in the body of a toddler, I’ve potty train myself before I could walk. I could go without
having someone fuss over me constantly. It’s bad enough I took away their expectations of their baby’s first words. She deserves some time to do what she enjoys.

“Do you want to try?” asked Somuku with a soft smile.

I returned with a gummy smile, having only had two teeth on top and one tooth on the bottom. Finally, something to do!

Somuku picked me up from my chair and sat me on her lap. She took the thinnest brush from her collection and held it against my tiny hand. I did my best to concentrate as she guided the brush and my hand over the scroll. For the most part, I could understand what she said, when she talked, but whether or not I could respond with the same proficiency is another matter.

“That’s a good girl,” murmured Kaa-san as she made each stroke with hypnotizing grace. “Do you know what word this is?”

I stared at the character and shook my head. It looked like someone bent the handles of a pogo stick with tire marks underneath the handles. “What?” I asked with my one-word vocabulary.

“That’s Kasa,” answered Somuku.

“Me!” I blurted out and stared at the character again with a grin. She was teaching me how to write my name.

“Yes, that’s your name,” she cooed. “Do you want to know why it looks like that?”

I nodded. One thing I loved about Somuku was her kanji lessons. While she’s not my mother, I could still love her. It also helps that Kaa-san sound nothing like mommy, ma or mom. I could easy just treat that term as name rather than a title, same goes for Tou-san I suppose.

She took my hand again and guided the brush to the inkwell before gliding it across the scroll again. “Do you know what Kasa means?” asked Kaa-san.

I shook my head. How could I? With Japanese there were so many words that sounded similar that it could have multiple meanings. Kami could mean god, hair or even paper. Of course, it also made it easier to make bad puns.

“It means umbrella,” answered the woman.

I scrunched up my nose. Seriously? Is this their sense of humor? They have a child in the village of rain, and named her umbrella… What the hell? I suppose it was better than getting named after food. She guided my hand through three strokes, two up top and one straight down the middle. It looked like an arrow.

“Now, this is an umbrella,” she continued and moved beneath the arrow’s head. “Remember what the character for person looks like?”

I nodded. Hito, two strokes attached to one another. Somuku’s previous lesson taught me it was written that way because it looks like a person standing in a wide stance. It’s kind of cute that each kanji could be explained like a pictogram.

“Now here, underneath the umbrella, you have four people hiding from the rain,” she murmured softly as she drew two characters on each side. “But you don’t want them to get wet,” she dragged the brush across the line beneath the characters of hito. “So you have a floor for them to stand on while they wait for the rain to stop.”
“Mmm.” I nodded as she finished.

“Do you know why your name is Kasa?” asked Somuku.

I wanted to answer because you and your husband have a poor sense of humor? But instead I pointed to the window. “Rain lots?”

Somuku laughed at my answer. “Yes, it rains a lot here, but that’s not why.”

I tilted my head back, looking up at her in question. “Why?”

“Do you know what do umbrellas do?” asked Somuku.

Keep you dry? What’s the word for dry anyway? “Not wet?”

She patted my head. “Yes, it keeps you dry, but do you see the people here?” She pointed to the characters of hito in the character. “Did you notice, that this umbrella doesn’t only have one person?”

Okay?

Somuku must’ve noticed the baffled look on my face when she held me closer. “Umbrellas are meant to protect people, to shield them from the cold and harsh world.”

Oh…

“Do you know why the umbrella is so big here? And why the people are so close together?” Somuku continued as she pointed at each part of the character.

Because it’s looks better aesthetically? I shook my head.

“It’s big so you can protect more people,” murmured Kaa-san. I glanced at her in surprise. “And when you protect people, they’ll grow close to you and in turn support you. Do you understand?”

I nodded slowly.

“All right! Let’s move onto the next character then!” chirped Somuku as she unraveled the scroll some more and smoothed it out on the table.

It was strange that Kaa-san gave me such a deep lesson. There was no reason for her to do something like that especially for a two-year-old that would probably forget half the things she said before even turning four.

What I didn’t know at the time was that Ame was in the midst of a civil war. Somuku rarely took me out of the house if she could help it because of this, but the rare few times she did, I noticed the despair that permeated through the village and its people. I don’t know how much money food normally cost, but at the amount of zeros I see, the war was hitting Ame hard. The towering buildings and never-ending rain didn’t help the despondent mood either.

As time grew on, I saw less and less of Tou-san. Kaa-san explained that he was at the hospital helping the sick and injured. I’m guessing he’s a medic, an iryo-nin. At least, I know he’s not out fighting against the rebels.

I wish I had more information on what was going on. I can’t tell whether the Second Shinobi war just ended or if we were well on our way into the Third Shinobi war. Then there was also the
matter of the Ame Orphans. Were they a part of the rebel group yet? Or are they still training under Jiraiya? I shudder at the thought of Tesuri facing them. They would utterly annihilate him before he could move.

By the time my third birthday came, I grasped onto enough of the language to hold a childish conversation and basic writing. It’ll take a few more years before I could read anything longer than a children’s book and let me tell you, that is torture. As a fanatic, reading was the best pleasure I got from life, aside from gorging myself with delicious food like the glutton I am.

“Kasa, come here. I’m going to teach you a game,” said Somuku.

“Game?” I perked up at the word and stumbled my way to her. “What game? I wanna play a game! GAME!” I can’t help but cheer.

The gamer in me was dying from boredom, by this point I would’ve been happy to play monopoly or scrabble by my lonesome if I could. There was nothing to do in Ame. The village was so poor that toys were a luxury and children were often kept indoors to avoid catching a cold in the rain. Not that Kaa-san would’ve let me out if there were kids out either way, but my point is that there’s nothing to do here.

She chuckled at my enthusiasm and patted the seat next to her for me to sit down. “Now, now. Calm yourself, you’re not going to be good at this game if you’re this excited.”

Not going to be good? Is that a challenge? I plopped down next to her unceremoniously. “What game are we playing Kaa-san?” I asked.

“It’s a very simple game,” explained Somuku as she pulled out two feathers.

“Huh?” I responded dumbly. What game can you play with feathers?

As if reading my thoughts, she placed a feather on each of her hands and showed me. One hand remained facing up with the feather and the other turned facing down. However, the feather on the one facing down didn’t fall and the one facing up was steadily hovering above her hand. My eyes widened. This was a chakra exercise. She was going to teach me how to use chakra!

“How are you doing that?” I gapped in awe as I peeked under her hand to see if it was sticking to her hand or if she was pinching it between her fingers.

“Chakra,” answered Somuku with a grin. “You can do it too with a little practice.”

“Yeah! How do I do that? I wanna do that!” I tugged at her arm excitedly.

This was better than playing a game! Somuku chuckled before flipping her hand back and releasing whatever chakra that kept the feathers sticking and repelling to and from her. As always, her lessons were fun and informative with a little backstory to each thing she taught. If I had her for a professor in college, I wouldn’t have fallen asleep so often in class.

“Did you find it yet?” she mused.

I scrunched up my eyes in concentration before slumping my shoulders in defeat. “I can’t find it.” Just what am I supposed to find? I know chakra is an energy that flows within the body, but what the heck is that supposed to be like? Maybe I’m not meant for this? “I’m not good at this!” I huffed in annoyance.

“Don’t give up,” soothed Kaa-san as she placed a hand on my shoulder.
“But I can’t even feel it.” I complained and glanced up to her with a pout.

“Relax, don’t rush. It’ll come to you. Just look for your center. The light and warm will find you,” she answered.

Grumbling, I closed my eyes against to concentrate. Center, center, how the hell am I supposed to find my center?

“Hold out your hands.”

“Huh?” I opened my eyes in surprise and glanced towards Kaa-san.

“Face forward and keep your eyes closed. Trust me and hold out your hands,” she advised.

Puzzled, but I did what she said without question. I closed my eyes and held my hands out in front of me. I felt Somuku move away from behind and kneeled in front of me. Grasping my hands into hers.

“Kaa-san?” I asked in confusion before I saw a spark. I jolted in surprise, but dare not to open my eyes less I lose that spark. “Is that?”

“You found it?” asked Somuku cheerily as I grasped onto her hand and the warmth slowly moved from the tips of my fingers and onto my palm.

“It’s… so warm…” I sighed happily as I held onto the chakra.

“Open your eyes,” whispered Kaa-san.

I did as she told and glanced at her. I blinked in surprise when I noticed our hands were glowing in a barely noticeable serene blue light. “Your hands weren’t glowing before when you were touching the feathers.”

“That’s because you couldn’t feel what chakra was before,” explained Kaa-san as she gently pulled away. “Now that you know how it feels, you know where to look for it.”

I smiled brightly as she pulled her hands away. My hands didn’t glow as much as hers, but a faint light could still be seen lingering on my hands. “It’s still warm!” While not as warm as it was with her hands on mine, chakra was beautiful. No, more than beautiful, it was safe and comforting.

It took weeks for me to get the hang of using chakra to stick feathers to my hands and a full month before I could repel it. Of course, knowing how to use both was not enough. Somuku kept me with these exercises until I could change directions without a thought while singing or carrying on a conversation. Even though it was hard, it never felt like a chore.

Actually, it was a ton of fun, Kaa-san made sure something new occupied me whenever it looked like I was getting bored. From chakra control to singing and dancing, she taught me how to breathe, how to move and most important, how to dodge. There was no doubt Somuku was a ninja before having me. Her movements were limber and light. She wasted no energy from one movement to the next.

The calligraphy and kanji lessons hadn’t stopped either. Though, it might be because my horrible handwriting. While her words always looked like masterpieces, mine always looked like deformed chicken scratch. Hell, my handwriting in the previous life wasn’t all that much better. More than half the time people made jokes about how I should be a doctor since no one could make out what the heck I wrote.
On the bright side that also meant I could read almost any form of bad handwriting. It made reading Tou-san’s medical notes all that much easier… after I figured out what sort of short hand he was using. Had anyone asked me before then if I would ever be interested in the field of medicine, I would’ve answered with a firm “hellz no!” with emphasis on the z.

I’ll be honest; I’m not the sharpest crayon in the box. Math and science were the bane of my existence. I’m not kidding, I could do basic arithmetic and algebra no problem, but beyond that I’m hopeless. The only reason I bothered putting myself through pre-cal four times, despite failing it three times was that it was a core requirement for graduation. As for science, the only branch I was decent in was biology and only because it didn’t have math.

Now, where was I again? Oh right! The field of medicine. Yep, definitely not high on my priority list considering the amount of study and extensive knowledge needed in biochemistry. Memorizing a shit ton of scientific names for all known form of medications, the chemical breakdown and all its adverse affects alone and in conjunction with when should any of them be applied. Oh and don’t forget the side affects and what other medication can be used to reverse the effects, but then those have a ton of side effects too. It sure sounds like a blast! Gee golly, I can’t wait!

Can you hear the enthusiasm dripping from my words?

Not that medicine here was much different. There were still a ton of herbs and natural remedies in use, along with complicated surgeries and various treatments for diseases and poisons. None of which I’m particularly interested in. No—what I’m interested in were the near mystical healing jutsus used on the field. The magical cure all for all physical injuries, not that that’s what it was. I’m sure there are more involved aside from a glowy hand and a instant heal, but as a big fan of J-RPGs like Final Fantasy and Breath of Fire that was equivalent of being a freaking white mage! How awesome is that?

To quote all gamers, “Don’t fuck with the white mage!”

The days Tesuri was home were days Somuku let up on our daily routines. On those days, the three of us would sit together and Tou-san would tell stories about the current affairs. Tales of gore and bloodshed normally should not be told to children, less they were looking to traumatize them for life.

However, don’t forget this is the world of ninjas. Desensitizing children had to start from somewhere. Not… that I need much desensitizing. Gore and violence hardly bothered me, I’d freak out if I had to kill someone, but dealing with someone bleeding to death or stabbing someone in self-defense, I could do with no problem. I’m a violent person by nature and no, before anyone say it’s because all the violent video games I play or whatever, violent people are attracted to violent things. Someone who was not predetermined with such a trait, I would have a hard time finding them being violent because of a game. Hinata is an example where even though she was trained to fight and possibly kill, she’s still the nicest person around. I doubt she’d ever lash out without good reason. So no, that’s my stand on violent games… that and they’re awesome! Come on, admit it, everyone loves a good explosion.

Of course, violent stories weren’t the only things I learned from him when he was home. Tesuri was an awesome cook, better than Somuku. He could skin and fillet a fish with a cleaver. A cleaver! That thing’s like a butcher knife, and he could do such delicate work that non-chefs would need a specific knife to get the same results. He was also skilled at sewing and embroidering, though I shouldn’t be surprise by either skill. Since he was an iryo-nin, he would need to know how to handle a blade against flesh and how to stitch it back up after he was done.
Let me tell you, learning from Tesuri was a thousand times harder than learning from Somuku. The things Somuku taught didn’t need perfection, only concentration and determination. Even if I screwed up, it could be fixed. The things Tesuri taught, needed patience and a steady hand. Screwing up meant ruination.

“…It’s not that bad,” chuckled Tesuri as I scowled at my uneven slices of daikon.

“I could see through yours,” I huffed, puffing my cheeks.

“You’ll get it eventually,” he rubbed the top of my head before lifting me from the high stool I was standing on. “Why don’t you work on your embroidery?”

“…It’s ugly,” I said in a deadpan.

“How about you go ask your mom to do something with you?” chirped Tou-san as he placed me on the ground with a grin.

I blew out the air I used to puff up my cheeks. “Okay…” I relented and raced out of the kitchen and into the living room.

Kaa-san had her calligraphy set out, but she wasn’t writing. Next to her, there was a neat pile of scrolls labeled and color-coded.

“What are you doing?” I asked as I pulled out a chair and crawled up on the seat. I hate being so small; it made everything so much harder.

Somuku smiled at me as she turned the scroll for me to see. At first I thought it was a drawing of something, but with a closer look, there were symbols around the edges of the paper in almost a circular design. Kaa-san knows how to make seals?

“What is it?” I asked. I know it’s a seal, but she doesn’t know that. And even if I knew it was a seal, I have no clue which one it was. They all looked like wiggly lines to me.

“It’s a seal the makes healing easier,” answered Somuku. “It’s for the hospital.”

“Does it do what Tou-san does?” I asked curiously.

She shook her head. “What your dad does is complicated and very hard for most people to use.”

I tilted my head. “And this doesn’t do that?”

“This, let’s you see where someone is hurt,” she answered.

“…How?” I frowned in confusion.

Somuku grinned as she tapped above my right eye lightly. I blinked when I felt chakra rushing to that eye. After a moment of distortion, I saw a faint green glow over Kaa-san’s body.

“You look green,” I pointed at her, but then noticed my fingers glowed specks of yellow. I paused and glanced at my hand with great interest.

“What do you see?”

“There are yellow dots, but everything else is green,” I rubbed them together wondering if it’s just dirty. I jumped when I felt a slight throb from all the pinpricks I made while embroidering.
“Oh! I’m hurt! That’s why it’s a different color!”

“Very good!” she clapped encouragingly. “Do you want to learn how to make seals?”

“Yes!” I nodded quickly. Making seals was probably the closest thing to modern technology and it wastes less chakra compared to jutsu. Anyone with a brain would learn that if given the chance.

Except… I have no talent whatsoever in making seals. Remember what I said about my calligraphy skills? Yeah, apparently, you need to be really and I mean really good at writing neatly. I can’t even color in the lines to save my life much less write in a straight line. However, it doesn’t mean I can’t use seals made by other people. Most of Kaa-san’s weaker seals, I could activate without much hassle. Found that one the hard way when I nearly blew up the living room with an explosive tag.

Good thing Kaa-san noticed in time and canceled it or else it’d be bye-bye Kasa in this lifetime. After that, Kaa-san placed me through seal tests with heavy supervision. Turns out, even though I can’t make a seal to save my life, I have the inherent ability as an activator, as long as the seal was well made. Of course, that means nothing if I don’t have the chakra capacity to activate them with or seals to use. So unless I find a seal master in the future as my partner, my natural talent was useless.

By the time I turned four, the civil war ravaged the decrepit remains of Ame. Never before was I so glad that violence and gore didn’t bother me in the least because that was the year Tou-san and Kaa-san decided we need to leave Ame. The separate factions tore the village apart. Either they declare loyalty to Hanzo or they join the rebellion, no neutral parties were allowed. Tesuri as an iryo-nin was invaluable for the dying shinobi and Somuku as the only sealing expert in the village was in high demand for her storage seals and explosive tags.

It was obvious that Hanzo was considerably stronger than the rebels, but at the same time his ruling was not in the best interest of Ame’s citizens. If they joined one side, it was a death warrant from the other. Their skills would benefit whichever side they joined greatly and it was tactically not allowed. Fleeing was the only option.

However, since they sided with neither faction they became the enemy of both.

“Somuku, take Kasa and run!” shouted Tou-san as he and Kaa-san weaved through the forest.

“Don’t be stupid! You’re an iryo-nin! They’ll destroy you!” argued Somuku.

I stayed quiet as they yelled at one another. What could I say anyway? We were being pursued; any distraction I make would mean the end of us. It was bad enough that I needed to be carried like a sack of potatoes.

“I’m not going to let you and Kasa die here like this!” snapped Tesuri as he shoved me into her arms. “You are taking Kasa and that’s final!”

Her eyes grew tense as she stopped on a branch.

“What are you doing?” shouted Tesuri as he caught himself on the next branch over.

“I have a better chance of surviving than you. And if Kasa gets hurt, you are the better healer,” she reasoned quietly as she placed me down on the branch.
“Somuku, please!” begged Tesuri, but his pleads was unheard as more Ame-nin approached.

“Kasa,” she whispered, her lips pressed against my forehead as she held me tightly.

“…Kaa-san?” My voice wavered as she bit back a sob.

“Be a good girl and take care of your dad and yourself okay?” she whispered. “I won’t be around anymore.”

“Kaa-san.” I whispered, a lump catching at my throat making it hard to say anything else.

“You remember how to write your name right?”

I looked at her in puzzlement and nodded.

“Good. Remember it and you’ll never be alone.” My face grew wet as she grabbed onto my arms. “I love you my little Kasa.”

“I… love you too Kaa-san,” I murmured.

“Somuku! They’re here!” Tesuri shouted as he raced back towards us.

“Stay strong Kasa,” said Kaa-san before her hands grew hot against my arms.

“Kaa-san what are you—” I never finished when a scream ripped out of my throat from the searing pain on my arms.

“Transcript Sealing: Memory Transfer!” She shouted, burning a black seal permanently onto my arms. “Tesuri! Take her now!”

I couldn’t even cry when she shoved me into his arms.

“Somuku——”

“I love you,” she pressed a kiss against his lips before planting a hand on each of us. “Uzumaki Hijutsu: Jikukan Kekkai!”

The world grew dark as the last image of my mother turned to face the oncoming Ame-nin.
“*I love you.*” Those were the last words my mother said before she promptly shot our ass with a family special teleportation jutsu. And how cool is it that she’s an Uzumaki? I should’ve see it coming with the calligraphy and everything… but you know I’m like awesome and…

Who am I kidding? This wasn’t cool. It’s not even funny. So what mom was an Uzumaki? So what if she was a seal expert? Why does it matter? I’m not going to see her ever again. Why did she have to say I love you? They’re such clichéd last words. Definite and final…

Damn it, I hate goodbyes.

Albeit, not as much as I hate the darkness. My senses were dulled, if not useless. I could barely hear, barely breath, barely move. Only the searing pain on my arms kept me from slipping into sleep. I had no clue where I was and I couldn’t tell if Tesuri was still with me. Pain was all I knew. The pulsing, the burning, it felt like it was eating away at my arms. Oh, what’d I give to stop this pain!

“It hurts…” I whimpered, sobbing as I curled into myself.

“Hey,” whispered a soft voice. “Don’t cry.”

I flinched, but I couldn’t see anyone.

“Are you lost?” asked the voice tiredly.

I know I shouldn’t trust strange voices, but his… sounded nice.

“I don’t know where I am. I don’t know where Tou-san is.” I felt my voice waver as it threatened to crack into another sob. I don’t care if I’m being a crybaby. “It’s dark, I can’t see anything! I want mom! I want Tou-san! I want to go home!”

“Shh… Calm down, can you do that?” he hushed gently as I fought back tears. “I know you’re scared. It could be very scary in the dark. I can’t see anything either, but you know what?”

I hiccupped. “What?”

“It’s not as scary when you have a friend right?” He asked.

“Friend?” I asked warily, a disembodied voice offering friendship. Who would ever question that? That’s totally legit, I’m serious. Don’t believe me? Yeah, I don’t believe me either.

“Yeah, you want to be my friend?” He asked.

“…Mommy said I’m not supposed to talk to people I don’t know. Stranger-danger.” I said childishly. There’s not much I could do regardless if he decides to do something.

He chuckled, wheezing with his weak laugh. He sounded like he was in pain. “How about we get to know each other? Then we wouldn’t be strangers right? We’re not going anywhere soon and talking makes the pain hurt less right?”

I paused, he was right. My arms didn’t burn as much.

“How about we start with an introduction?”
“Introduction?” I raised a brow, not that he could see it.

“You know, like where you’re from, likes and dislikes, hobbies, dreams, stuff like that.”

I kept quiet. Likes, dislikes, hobbies and dreams? Why does that sound so familiar?

“Ignoring me huh? How about I start first and you can go afterwards?” He offered before promptly going into his self-introduction. “I’m from Konoha, a chunin. My hobbies include making people smile and helping seniors.”

I stiffened at those words as I tried to find the source of the voice.

“I have a girl I liked for the longest time, still do. Kind of wish I could’ve told her that…”

Why would he be here? I should still be in Ame territory. How far did mom’s jutsu shoot me? And why was he here? Did that happen already?

“I dislike stuck ups and people who betray their friends and comrades.”

Shit, what do I do?

“My dream?” He chuckled weakly. “Well, I had one. It was kind of nice.”

“…What was your dream?” I ended up asking lamely, not knowing what to say. I knew who this was, but what do I do about it? What could I do?

“Tsk, tsk, no cheating.” He teased. “You have to tell me something about yourself.”

“I’m four,” I mumbled.

“Four?” he said in exaggerated amazement. “Your mommy must be so proud that you’re a big girl now!”

“My mommy’s dead,” I said in a deadpan. I don’t need his babying right now.

“Oh,” murmured the voice quietly. “What about your dad? He’s still around right?”

“I dunno. Tou-san was with me before we got separated.” I answered truthfully.

“Maybe he’s—” a violent cough tore through him, leaving him groaning in pain.

“Are you okay?” I asked quietly, knowing full well he was probably more hurt than he was showing.

“Don’t worry about it,” he rasped after catching his breath. “Hey, you’re not scared anymore right?”

“No… but where are you?” I asked, crawling onto my knees.

There wasn’t much space for me to move. I’m probably stuck under whatever rubble he’s surrounded in. That would explain the darkness. I could feel the dirt under my hands and hear the gravel grinding beneath my shoes. Definitely not a forest in Ame, it’s too dry and smelled nothing like the humid forests constantly drenched in rain.

“Probably under a big rock. I wouldn’t look for me if I were you. I’m not very pretty right now.” He joked with a weak laugh.
“That’s okay, you still have a pretty voice,” I replied, crouching low trying to follow his voice.

“Pretty voice?” He mused. “Listen, why don’t you go find your dad? You can’t help me. Half my body’s crushed.”

“Tou-san is a iryo-nin, he can fix you.” I retorted stubbornly. I could hear him, but I can’t tell where he was.

He chuckled again, his voice growing weaker with each wheeze. “Even the best iryo-nin can’t… put me… back… together…”

“Hey!” I cried out in alarm at his fading voice. “You’re not going to leave me alone are you?”

Silence.

No, no, no! Was he taken? Was he dead? How am I going to get out of here? I don’t want to die here. I sniffled loudly as I felt a lump gathered at my throat. Don’t cry. Crying won’t help.

“Some friend you are.” I hiccupped, wiping my drippy nose on the shoulder of my shirt. “Leaving me alone in the dark.”

“Heh,” a weak laugh caught my ear before a familiar blue light lit up the cramped space. “I wouldn’t do that.”

“You’re still here!” I said in surprise as I crawled towards the light. I was lucky I was so small or else I wouldn’t be able to crawl through the tight space between the rubble.

“I’m not that mean,” he rasped weakly when I finally made my way to his side. He was charging chakra to his hand to illuminate the darkness, it was weak compared to what mom and Tou-san could do. He must be near death by now.

“You didn’t answer me when I called out.” I huffed, taking note what he looked like for the first time.

Surprisingly, he wasn’t really under a big boulder. At least not anymore, the boulder that crushed him was propped up by an uplift of earth. Mostly the work of a jutsu I supposed. I grimaced at the sight of his body, half crushed and missing an eye.

“Sorry,” he whispered with a wheeze. “It’s a bit hard to talk when you have one lung collapsed.”

“…Does it hurt?” I asked, scooting closer to him. The light from his chakra faded and we were in darkness again.

“Dunno, can’t really feel much.” He mumbled before he chuckled. “You cheated.”

“Huh?” I tilted my head in confusion, not that he could see it.

“You didn’t tell me anything about yourself.” He quipped.

I gapped in disbelief. We’re trapped in a pile of rubble with one severely injured and neither certain how to get out of this mess. And this guy wants to go through common pleasantries? I
“Hey, it’s not that funny.” I could hear the pout in his voice.

“My name’s Kasa Mon. I’m from Ame.” I answered, deciding to save him from the indignity.

“You’re from rain and your parents named you umbrella?” I don’t need light to see him raising an eyebrow at that. Somehow, I just know my name’s going to be a running joke for a while.

I puffed up my cheeks. “Like your name is any better!”

“Of course my name is awesome! I’m Obito Uchiha! The most badass ninja of Konoha!” He boasted.

“…You’re trapped under a pile of rocks.” I replied in deadpan.

“…Minor setback.” He retorted before another round of coughs wracked his body.

We sat in silence as he struggled to control his coughs. I wrapped my arms around my knees and curled into myself feeling both helpless and useless. It sucks being a child.

“Hey,” he croaked, his voice destroyed from the violent coughs. “Give me your hand.”

“Why?” I asked, my voice muffled against my legs.

“Come on, don’t you trust me?” He said gently.

I shrugged, sliding my hand against the ground, blindly reaching for his. His hand found mine with ease as he gripped it comfortingly. It was rough with cuts and callouses, but warm.

“Sorry.” He murmured.

“For what?” I asked.

“For being a horrible friend.” He said with a sheepish chuckle. “I’ll try to keep it bright for as long as I can for you though.”

“…You’re dying.” I mumbled.

“Yeah,” he answered softly, surprisingly, without an ounce of fear in his tired voice. “Sorry for leaving you alone.”

The comforting warmth of chakra covered my hand as he lit up the small space. I was terrified, he was dying and that meant Madara was coming. He had reason to save and help Obito, but I doubt he’ll have any for a girl he knows nothing about. What do I do? My arms burned. I bit back a whimper as I grasped desperately for any form of comfort.

I ended up grasping chakra, not Obito’s, but mine. The burn on my arms grew unbearably hot. With my free hand, I pressed it against the left seal. I didn’t want to let go of Obtio’s comforting hand.

What I didn’t expect was a barrage of images of my mother performing various acts of healing, most through seals and delicate chakra manipulation. All useless, considering I have no clue how to channel chakra or draw seals. Just as I was ready to give up hope, there was one among the barrage that didn’t require channeling chakra or medical knowledge.
“Obito, open your mouth.” I grunted through the burning pain.

“What’s the matter? Are you okay?” He asked weakly with concern.

“I’m going to fix you.” I wheezed. The images were slowing, but not yet abated.

“How? I told you even the best iryo-nin can’t—” I cut him off, shoving my hand into his mouth. He bit down in surprise, not expecting me to do something so sudden.

I grimaced at the bite as he started to glow green. His eye widened as the crushed half of his body slowly inflated and healed. I felt my body slump against his at the rapid drain of my chakra. I doubt it would completely heal him, since a child wouldn’t be able to produce enough chakra to do so, but it should be enough to keep him from dying. I think…

“Kasa?” Obito spat out my hand when the glow was gone.

“Tired…” I murmured in a sleepy slur. My eyes drifted close as he shifted to his knees, cradling me in the narrow space as he moved. From the sound of his breath, he was still winded and in pain, but from his movements, he could at least use all his limbs.

“Hold on, I’ll get us out,” murmured Obito. The muscles on his arms twitch, shifting around me as he made his hand seals. I didn’t catch what jutsu he used before I drifted into unconsciousness. I sorely hope Madara doesn’t kill me while I’m asleep. It’d suck to die again before I could do anything fun.

When I woke again, it was to the wet morning dew and the smell of a burned out campfire. It brought back camping memories in my previous life.

“Looks like the sleeping princess is awake,” teased Obito playfully next to me.

I sat up with a grimace, rubbing the crud out of my eyes as I blinked the sleep away. It was morning; sunlight peeked through the forest foliage. My arms were bandaged carefully with special attention to the hand where I was bitten. The small fire pit was on its last embers when Obito buried it with the pile of dirt that was likely dug from the pit.

His face was bandaged, covering the empty socket that was his left eye. The sleeve to his right arm was gone, used to tie a splint to his leg right leg. Probably still broken, but at least not crushed. His right arm was heavily bruised, covered in purple and blue. His hands were red with cuts and scratches. He must’ve run out of bandages after covering his eye and my arms.

“How are you feeling?” asked Obito with a friendly smile on his face.

“…You’re still here.” I said in surprise. Where was Madara?

“Did I give you that bad of a first impression?” whined Obito. “You think I’m going to leave you after you saved me? No way! You’re sticking with me until you find your dad.”

“…But I don’t know where he is.” I mumbled.

“Hmm…” He hummed, holding his chin with a thoughtful expression. “Then you’ll just have to come back with me to Konoha!”

I stared at him in surprise.

“You can stay with me and wait for your dad to show up.” He grinned with his arms
behind his head. “I’m sure we’ll find a way to contact him eventually.”

Why was fate so cruel to someone as nice as Obito? He was selfless in sacrificing himself to save a teammate and even gave up an eye in his last moments to ensure his survival. How is it fair that he keeps facing one horror after another?

“What do you say?” His grinned never faded as he waited through my silence.

“…Sure,” I answered with a weak grin of my own.

“Great,” he ruffled my hair. “Konoha’s a great place. You’ll love it there!”

I moved to get up, but my legs gave way and I hit the ground flat on my face. My stomach growled loudly. Blood rushed to my face with heated embarrassment as I pushed myself off the ground. Obito took all of two seconds before he cracked up laughing at my predicament.

“Shut up!” I grumbled, rubbing my nose.

“Sorry! Sorry!” He said between laughs as he rummaged through his pouch. “I have some ration bars, they’re not tasty, but that’ll have to hold you over until we reach a Konoha outpost or a village.”

I took the bars, glaring at him. “You’re still laughing.”

“You have something on your nose.” He sniggered and picked up a sturdy looking stick he likely found earlier to use as a crutch.

“Hey!” I retorted childishly.

The ration bars weren’t that bad, I’ve had worse. No really, I’ve had worse. Ever try rotten shark meat? It’s beyond putrid. It feels like putting death in your mouth. Why would I even know what that tastes like? Call it curiosity or stupidity if you want. However, it did make me appreciate food that doesn’t taste like death all the more. Though, the bars were a bit on the bland side.

“So, what was that thing you did back there to heal me? A jutsu? A kekkai genkai?” asked Obito as we traveled. He moved slowly with his limp, grimacing every now and then. He tries to hide it whenever it happens, but it’s hard not to notice when we take breaks every fifteen minutes.

“I dunno, what’s a kekkai genkai?” I lied.

Kekkai genkai wasn’t common knowledge outside of families that did have them. At least I don’t think so. I know the healing bite is one of Karin’s skills and she’s an Uzumaki decent, but I’m not sure if it’s restricted to them. They’re probably the only clan in this world who has a high enough vitality to pull it off and use it in battle. Not surprising considering how much of a drain it takes. Man, how does Karin do it so often? I’m exhausted.

“Ah… Never mind then.” He waved it off, not wanting to get into a long explanation.

By mid-day, we couldn’t have gone more than seven miles by foot. Sad, considering I could’ve walk that in less than two hours in my old body. Obito must be in really bad shape.

“Do you want to bite me again?” I asked when I saw him wheezing and leaning against his makeshift clutch.
“No,” he declined firmly and gave a weak laugh and teased. “You could barely keep up yourself. If I bite you again, I might just have to carry you for the rest of the way. Do you want a piggyback ride that much?”

I puffed up my cheeks indignantly. How many years of this babying am I going to have to live through? However, as much as I hated the babying, he was right. I could barely keep up myself. It was a hassle to put one foot in front of the other as it is. I needed the breaks just as much as he did. Even if my old body was used to activities like hiking, my body right now was one of a child. A child that’s never done more than an hour’s worth of walking in the market and needed mommy to carry her back on the ten-minute walk home.

“We’ll take a break before we move on. Thirsty?” He offered his water bottle. We managed to pass by a river in the forest.

Any competent survival instructor would tell you to never drink untreated water, less you want to get sick and face a nasty case of the runs. Fortunately, Obito’s pack had water-purifying tablets. I’m guessing that’s the equivalent of iodine drops here. His pack got considerably smaller with each ration bar we ate. Not that it was big to begin with. I don’t think he has any storage scrolls on him either. I hope we get to a town or something before we’re out of food.

“Look it here, a Konoha-nin all alone with a little brat,” drawled a smug voice. A glance at his hitai-ate noted he was an Iwa-nin.

Shit, scratch worry about running out of food. We need to worry about surviving. Obito pushed me behind him as he stood his ground, holding his makeshift crutch like a staff.

“You think you can take me on?” said Obito confidently. “I’m Obito Uchiha! I could take you on any day with my arms tied behind my back!” He was so bluffing.

The Iwa-nin laughed, not buying his bluff. It’s not hard with the amount of bandages on Obito’s face, his horribly bruised arm and limping leg. Really, if you’re going to make a bluff like that, do it when you don’t look like you just crawled out from death’s door.

“An Uchiha huh?” drawled the man. “That means you have the sharingan right?”

Not sure if I should do a face palm or bash my head into the nearest tree. His bluff, not only did it fail, he also let slip he has the freaking sharingan. Genius!

“Well, Mr. Big-Shot. Looks like you lost one of your eyes. I’ll be nice and even that out for you!” He promptly threw shurikens at us.

Obito slipped an arm around my waist and carried me like a sack of potatoes as he dodged out of harm’s way. He gritted his teeth through the pain with each step. No doubt running on adrenaline by this point. Using his stick, he deflected what he could, but his bruised arm was slow to respond.

It didn’t take long before a stray shuriken grazed him arm and his was forced to drop his crutch. The Iwa-nin took the opening and closed the distance with a drop kick from above. Obito pulled me to his chest as we dropped to the ground like dead weight.

“You okay?” grunted Obito through the pain as I scampered off him.

“Obito get up!” I pulled at his good arm, but he was spent. He couldn’t move.

“Kasa, you have to run,” hissed Obito as he pulled my arm off him.
“No!” I shook my head stubbornly and pushed my hand out to him. “You can bite me again! If you’re healed, you can fight right?”

“Kasa!” warned Obito angrily as he shoved it away. “Run! You’ll die if you stay.”

“No!” I snapped back.

The Iwa-nin laughed loudly. “Isn’t this sweet, you’re squabbling in your last breath.”

I glanced at him, my heart racing and my body shaking in exhaustion and fear. We’re going to die. He’s going to kill us. We’re going die. He’s going to kill us.

“Help.” I squeaked out pathetically begging for anyone out here to help us, even Madara would be welcomed at this point.

“No one’s around kid. Shout all you want,” said the Iwa-nin, but stopped when Obito pulled out another kunai and pressed it under his remaining eye.

My body trembled, a lump caught at my throat too. I was terrified to say anything. Obito slipped his arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. My vision blurred with tears threatening to spill. He kept a comforting hand at the back of my head.

“Let her go or I’ll destroy this eye,” interrupted Obito, no doubt red with the sharingan. He was haggling for my life. “If you want it, she goes free. No tricks.”

“Really?” drawled the Iwa-nin. “No tricks?”

“None. Just let her go,” bargained the Uchiha.

“Hmm…” hummed the enemy ninja as he pretended to think. “No. I don’t think I will.”

Before Obito could gouge out his own eye, the kunai was knocked out of his hand and a figure hovered over us defensively.

“Ninja Art: Poison Mist!” shouted a familiar voice as a billow of purple cloud shot towards the Iwa-nin.

A second later, both Obito and I were scooped from the ground and dashed away from the spreading cloud of poison. The Iwa-nin gasped, gagging and choking to death in the poisonous mist before he hit the ground. He won’t be following us.

Obito sighed in exhaustion as he gripped his arm around me tightly trying to calm my tremors. I clung onto him whimpering, fighting off the desire to bawl and sob hysterically.

“It’s okay Kasa. I’ve got you,” soothed a familiar voice. I glanced up unable to see through the blur of tears, but I could recognize the familiar shade of blue hair.

“T-Tou-san?” I hiccupped.

“It’s okay honey, I got you,” whispered Tesuri as he adjusted his grip on Obito and myself.

Relieved, I cried my heart out, clinging to Obito and drenching his shirt. The Uchiha pressed a comforting hand behind my head and allowed me to cry into his chest.
Two days ago, I lost Kaa-san and got separated from Tou-san. While I was lost, I made friends with Obito, the future evil villain of the world, under a pile of rubble. I somehow figured out how to activate the seals, left by my possibly dead mother, on my arms and learned that I have a unique healing ability that permanently scars me for life each time I use it. I then found out, I’m… not a really good healer as Obito was still half dead when we got out from the rubble.

Once we were out, we made happy plans to skip back to Konoha hand-in-hand only to get assaulted by an evil Iwa-nin. The evil ninja kicked our ass and tried to steal Obito’s eye. Oh, he also tried to kill us. Luckily, Tesuri found us and killed the bastard in cold blood. Then he proceeded to heal Obito and we all lived happily ever after in a land of sunshine, unicorns and fairies.

No, before you say I’ve finally lost it, I haven’t. I am still perfectly sane. I’m the sanest person in the room. Super sane even. Still don’t believe me? Fine, think what you want. I’m still going to mentally repress the trauma of this event in the form of a children’s coloring book, drawn with neon crayons and rainbows…with stickers.

Joking aside, we didn’t get to Konoha immediately after defeating the Iwa-nin. How could we? We’re at the border of the Land of Fire. It would take a week to get there by foot with sufficient supplies. At the moment, not only do we not have supplies, we also have an injured Uchiha that happens to have a valuable kekkai genkai that’s worth stealing.

To top it off, that’s not even the worst news. The worst would be that the Iwa-nin, Tesuri took out, was a scout from a bigger team of Iwa-nin. You know the saying where if you see one roach, there would be many more in hiding? Yeah, this is exactly that situation. If they were unaware of us, we could’ve at least hide and wait it out. Unfortunately, this wasn’t the case and we were pursued with barely any time in between for rest or healing.

“Kasa, keep quiet and stay out of sight,” whispered Tou-san after healing what he could on Obito. “I’ll draw their attention away.”

I move to argue against the bad parody of mom’s last moments, but he held a hand over my mouth, stopping my protests.

“None of that right now. I’ll come back for you, but until then. Stay alive,” said Tesuri as he rummaged through his pockets and pulled out what looked like a strange string of charms and tied it around my neck. “Don’t lose this. This will keep you safe.”

“Boy, can you hear me?” He directed the question to Obito, who nodded tiredly without opening his eye. “I saw what you did back there for Kasa. Thank you. Please keep her safe for a while longer.”

“Heh,” chuckled Obito softly. “No prob, but I’m not in the best condition to do anything.”

“If worst comes to worst, Kasa will know what to do,” replied Tesuri.

Wait, what? What do you mean I know what to do? Do what? I wanted to ask, but his firm hand remained clasped over my mouth, preventing me from doing so.

“Remember, stay quiet, stay safe. I’ll find you again,” promised Tesuri as he planted one last kiss on my forehead before leaving the hollow tree and covered the opening with various shrubs from the surrounding area.
I wanted to scream after him and ask what the hell did he mean when he said, ‘I would know what to do,’ but the words never left my mouth as everything grew silent around me.

“Don’t worry,” whispered Obito reassuringly. “Your dad will be fine.”

I sighed. He’ll be fine, but what about us? You know, at this rate I should be developing some separation anxiety issues with how often I seem to keep get left behind. I hugged my legs to my chest as we listened to the pursuit outside the safety of our hideout. Neither of us said anything as we silently tried to count how many Iwa-nins there were.

One hour, two and eventually it started raining.

“I think they’re gone,” murmured Obito.

“Can you move?” I asked. “Tou-san healed you didn’t he?”

“Not at the moment,” grunted Obito as he tried to shift his weight. “While iryo-ninjitsu is amazing in healing injuries, there’s a draw back that it eats a lot of chakra from both the medic and patient. I can’t do much until my chakra stores recover. Might take a while.”

I rested my chin on my knee. “So, do we just wait?”

“Yeah, and hope the rain keeps them from finding us,” noted Obito.

I nodded quietly as it grew quiet between us. Even though I should be thankful for this downpour, I still hate the rain.

“Hey, Kasa,” started Obito.

“Hmm?” I glanced at him and noticed he held his hand out.

“Give me your hand.” He grinned despite the exhaustion on his face.

I found myself smiling as I grabbed onto his hand. Unlike last time, his hand didn’t glow with chakra, but that didn’t make it any less warm and comforting. This was his way of saying everything will be fine. Any other time, I would be skeptical with that sort of belief, but with Obito… it doesn’t hurt to indulge on a little hope.

The rain continued on with Obito drifting to sleep, lulled by the pitter-patter of raindrops. Normally, I would succumb to the rain’s lullaby, but something about what Tesuri said earlier bugged me. I tugged on the rustic looking necklace and stared at the odd looking charms dangling from the string. Five different charms, all evenly spaced.

Don’t lose this. This will keep you safe.

What did he mean by that? I studied each of the individual charms with interest. They seemed a bit random in design, what with wings, balls and a circle plate? They were evenly spaced, attached to the string by different colored rings. There must be something special about it, why else would he give it to me? I stared at it a bit longer hoping to find something, but there was nothing to be noted.

“Maybe it’s one of those luck charms from the temple or shrines.” I muttered under my breath and dropped it back around my neck. “I wonder how long this rain will last?”

Eventually, the rain lulled me to sleep too.
“Come on Kasa,” said Obito as he pulled me out of our hollow tree the next morning.

His complexion looked better, but not by much with his arms still covered in various shades of purple and blue. On the bright side, the limp in his gait was gone. Tesuri must’ve fixed it before he left, thinking it was better to have a fully useable leg to run away than a half healed body in an uneven fight.

Despite his bruised arms, he scooped me up and raced through the treetops. Logically, that was the safer option considering my current pace would be slower and raise a higher chance of running into enemies. Still, it must hurt to have me pressed against all those bruises and jostling around each time he jumped.

“There should be a Konoha outpost near here. If we can get there, we should be fine,” noted Obito he raced through the trees.

I must say, I’m impressed with his depth perception given it couldn’t have been more than two or three days since he lost his eye. Or maybe he was using his sharingan to compensate? I glanced up at his eye, still dark, not the sharingan then.

“What do you want to do first when we get back to Konoha?” asked Obito offhandedly to pass the time.

“Huh?” I glanced at him, confused.

“Since your dad left you with me, you’re coming back to Konoha with me. So, what do you want to do first when we get back?”

… We’re not even sure if we could make it to the outpost alive yet and he wants to make plans back at Konoha? Was he delusional or just optimistic? Seeing the grin on his face, he might be both.

“I don’t know.” I shrugged, regretting it a little when I saw him bite back a wince. “What do you want to do?”

“Hmm… good question. What should I do when I get back?” pondered Obito as he jumped pass a tangle of branches and headed upwards for another tree. “I should probably find my team and tell them I’m alive.” A snigger escaped him as he lingered on the thought. “Can you image their faces when they find out? Oh! Or maybe I should prank them and pretend to be a ghost or something.”

“That’s mean.” I bit my lower lip, resisting the urge to crack up laughing.

“But funny,” quipped Obito with a wink. Probably not the best thing to do while running on treetop, considering he only has one eye. “Whoa!” He tripped, clenching to me tightly as he resist the urge to flail and drop me. He stuck his feet on the tree using chakra and did a weird worm wiggle to catch his balance.

I covered my mouth to stifle the chortle that escaped. This guy was too much.

“Whew! That was a close one!” He grinned sheepishly, not all that embarrassed by his foul up.

I lost it and cracked up laughing.

“Now that’s much better,” chirped Obito. “We’re almost there, no more frowns okay?”
I reined my uncontrollable laughter down to a snigger before nodding. It wasn’t until much later that I realized what Obito managed to do what even Tesuri and Somuku couldn’t. He made me genuinely laugh, utterly winning me over. Despite the fact he nearly killed me with his clumsiness earlier and the possibility of becoming the murderous Tobi, I can’t help but like him.

Man, I do not look forward to facing him as Tobi.

“Identify yourself,” ordered the outpost guards defensively with their kunais in sight.

Obito made sure his hitai-ate was shown clearly as he placed me down on the ground next to him. “Obito Uchiha, chunin, I was separated from my team several days ago after an ambush in the forest, 40 kilometers northwest. I have a civilian with me.”

“Uchiha?” The two guards raised a brow, not all that surprised. Maybe his death wasn’t common knowledge yet?. “Do you have identification codes?”

“Code?” Obito blanched at the question and rolled his eyes skywards in annoyance. “Ah crap! Minato sensei and that bastard Kakashi usually dealt with those!” He groaned, resisting the urge to drop to the ground and sulk.

The guards stood cautious, raising their kunais at the ready.

“Obito?” Why did he have to choose this moment to be an idiot?

The Uchiha muttered a mantra under his breath as if reciting something from memory. He was reciting another verse before he snapped his fingers in realization. “I’m an idiot! Duh! I’m an Uchiha, can’t believe I could finally use this stupid code. The crimson moon sets upon a sea of blood,” recited Obito, flaring his sharingan to life.

I bit back a grimace. Really? The term red moon was a part of the Uchiha identification codes? How lazy can Madara get, using his old village’s identification code for his new organization? Then again, being such a badass and having a dangerous group of S-Class missing-nins on his side... I’ll be quiet now.

The guards didn’t relax. “…You don’t act like an Uchiha.”

Obito nearly planted his face to the ground. “You’ve got to be kidding me!” snapped the one-eyed Uchiha. “Of all the—I finally get my sharingan as proof to use that stupid code and you say I don’t act like an Uchiha? What kind of bull shit is this?”

“Do you have another code?” asked the guards.

“This is harassment!” griped Obito.

The guards slipped into a defensive stance.

“Okay, okay!” Obito held up his free hand defensively as he wracked his brains for an answer. “Uh… uh…?”

“How about you tell me why you’re late again instead? Obito-kun,” interrupted a feminine voice.

Obito’s eyes lit up as a bright grin crossed his face. I followed his line of sight and noticed a familiar shade of red hair. Kaa-san? No. Not her, but she had the same shade. I couldn’t help but stare. “Kushina-san!” shouted the Uchiha in relief.
The woman smiled, but it wasn’t a genuine one. “You didn’t answer my question Obito-kun. You were so late that Minato told me that your team now knows you as the late Obito Uchiha.”

Had I been less sensible, I would’ve said, “Ooh, nice word play.” However, my desire to stay alive was greater than the desire to crack wise-ass jokes.

Obito scratched the back of his head sheepishly. “Sorry, sorry! I kind of got lost near the end of the road of life, but then I came across this cute little girl here and she helped me find my way back. She got separated from her parents you know. I couldn’t very well just let her wander alone without a friend right?”

... I stared at Obito, completely dumbfounded. Did he just explain what happened to him in the last three days with a why I was late excuse?

Kushina stared at him for a moment before glancing briefly at me with a curious eye. “He’s cleared,” said the redheaded kunoichi as her stance relaxed and her fake smiled soften to a genuine one.

The guards glanced between her and Obito before they stood down their guard. “Next time remember your codes,” suggested the guard in mild annoyance.

“Will do!” said Obito as he tugged me along and hurried after Kushina. We went as far as ten feet before the woman turned to Obito with the most frightening of smiles.

“Obito-kun,” purred the woman dangerously. Her crimson hair took a life of its own as it flailed wildly behind her like demonic limbs. “Don’t get lost at the end of the road again.”

“K-Kushina-san?” He shrunk under her scrutiny with a comical look of fear on his face.

“Because next time, I’ll personally go there. Drag you back in the most gruesome manner possible and eviscerate you piece by piece with my bare hands until you wished you never took a step towards that part of the road.” Her smile never faded, but she grew more and more terrifying with each passing second. “Do I make myself clear?”

A horrified squeak escaped the Uchiha’s throat as he hastily nodded, too terrified to utter a single word.

“Good, I’m glad we’re clear,” said the woman with a deceptively sweet smile. Her demonic hair settled back down and she patted Obito’s trembling form with a fondness that was commonly used for young children and pets.

I stared at her with growing admiration. Never before have I heard such a beautifully carried out death threat. “You are so… cool...”

Kushina pause in surprise, no doubt, not expecting that response from me.

“How does your hair do that? Can you teach me? It’s so pretty!” I wonder if I could learn it? I’ve never seen Kaa-san do it, so it might not be a Uzumaki thing, but how cool would that be to scare the crap out of people by having your hair look like it was possessed?

Obito turned to me in disbelief as if asking what the hell was wrong with me.

She grinned wryly as I tugged at my hair, doing a mock imitation of what hers did. I’m not exactly sure how genetics work in this world, but I can’t seem to make sense of the gene inheritance when it came to hair color.
Normally, if you had parents with different hair colors, you either get one or the other depending on the roulette of recessive or dominate genes, but here, it seems like if you had parents with bizarre hair, you end up with even stranger hair. Using Sakura as a prime example, her mom has blond hair and her dad has this weird dark lavender hue and somehow she ends up with a bright pastel pink color. I on the other hand have a mother with bright red hair and a father with pale blue hair and I end up with this weird blend of dark red and plum.

How does this make any sense?

“Who is this, Obito?” asked Kushina curiously when we reached the living quarters. We were both given a hot drink and something to eat.

The one-eyed Uchiha grinned as he gave me a fond hug; I stumbled to not spill my drink and sent him a glare. “This is Kasa, my little life savior.”

“Life savior?” Kushina raised a brow.

“Yep, if not for her I’d be dead,” noted Obito proudly.

Kushina frowned. “Explain.”

Obito rubbed the back of his head awkwardly as he tried to piece together his thoughts. “Uh… what do you know about what happened?”

“Not much. KIA was as much as I got from Minato when I saw him yesterday,” answered Kushina.

“They were here?” His eye widened, startled by the news.

“They were coming back from finishing the mission. They looked terrible, especially Kakashi,” murmured Kushina quietly.

“Oh.” A guilty look crossed Obito’s face.

“What happened?” asked Kushina again and glanced at me with a studious eye. I hid behind my cup. Crap, I was so busy worrying about dying, I hadn’t thought of how to deal with interrogations.

“We were ambushed, Rin got kidnapped. Kakashi and I had a fight… things happened, but eventually we went after Rin.” Obito scratched the side of his face, uncertain how to continue. “We managed to save Rin, but…”

“But?” questioned Kushina.

“We ended up getting trapped in an earth based jutsu,” grimaced Obito. “Kakashi injured his eye earlier and he didn’t notice a boulder coming at him… so I pushed him away.” He laughed sheepishly. “I ended up getting crushed under it instead. Silly huh?”

Kushina’s eyes widened. “What?” snapped the woman in disbelief. “What do you mean you were crushed?”

He shrugged. “Crushed, half my body was flattened, I couldn’t move or feel anything. We were trapped and they couldn’t get me out.”

“… Obito…” Kushina’s voice grew quiet.
The Uchiha continued. “I told Rin to give Kakashi my eye. It’d be hard for them to escape otherwise if he couldn’t fight. He managed to take the guy out, but there were more of them.” His eye darkened momentarily as he trailed off.

“They… didn’t abandon you did they?” Kushina sounded almost angry.

Obito snapped out of his thoughts and turned to her indignantly. “What? No! I told them to leave me. I made them! If I hadn’t they would’ve been buried along with me! They could’ve died!”

“You could’ve died!” snapped Kushina. “What were you thinking?”

“I wanted to protect them! What else could I do?” argued Obito. “To me, they’re the most important people in my life along with you and Minato sensei!”

Kushina grew silent for a moment, touched by his words before turning her attention to me. “So where does Kasa here come in?”

“I’m not all too sure what happened. I was close to giving up when I heard her crying,” admitted Obito. “She was terrified, said her mom was dead. That she was lost and separated from her dad. I couldn’t do much at that point aside from talking to her. One thing lead to another and she ended up healing me enough for me to get out of that mess.”

“…You said you were crushed under a boulder and practically buried… How did she get there?” asked Kushina with a confused frown.

“The boulder did shift off when I was buried… Maybe she got pulled in?” A thoughtful look crossed Obito’s face. “But that doesn’t make sense either… We didn’t see her before the ambush… Hmm… How did you end up there anyway, Kasa?”

I shrank under both of their gazes. “I don’t know.” I lied, there was no way I could explain everything without them asking more questions that I know I can’t answer without seeming suspicious.

There was no way a little kid can know as much as I do and furthermore, I’m from another village. Despite my young age, they could still suspect me as a plant or a threat. Tou-san was an Ame iryo-nin and Kaa-san supplied them a great deal of seals. Either piece of information could land me a trip to T&I... I have no interest in finding other whether or not Ibiki joined their ranks yet.

“Where are you from Kasa?” pried Kushina.

“She’s from Ame,” answered Obito. “Her dad’s an iryo-nin.”

Damn it, Obito!

“You said she healed you… Did she use iryo-ninjitsu?” asked Kushina, her brows knitted together as she tried to make sense of the story. “She’s a bit young…”

“No, that’s the odd thing,” waved Obito to oppose against her suggestion. “It’s nothing like the iryo-ninjitsu Rin uses or anything. She didn’t use any jutsus or anything. All she did was shove her hand in my mouth and made me bite her.”

The red-haired woman froze. “You bit her?”

“She shoved her hand in my mouth!” protested Obito. “I didn’t do it on purpose!”
“I’m not berating you,” interrupted Kushina before she turning to Kasa. “Are you sure that’s what she had you do? What happened afterwards?”

The one-eyed Uchiha scrunched up his face in annoyance. “Yes, I bit her! But it was strange. The instant I bit her, it was as if a wave of iryo-ninjitsu flooded my body and fixed the half that was crushed. It was far from completely healed, but enough for me to use the Earth Style: Hidden Mole to get out of there.”

Kushina nursed her lower lip as her eyes shifted rapidly, going through her thoughts a mile a minute. “Kasa, do you still have the bite mark from Obito?”

“Kushina-san!” whined Obito exasperatedly. “You’re not going to report me are you? It wasn’t even in my control.”

“Obito, shut up for a moment,” snapped Kushina before asking again. “Kasa-chan, do you still have the bite mark?”

“I don’t know. Obito wrapped it up.” I answered hesitantly and raised the arm that was covered with bandages from my hand to my elbow.

“May I see?” asked Kushina.

I was reluctant. While she was considered family by blood, technically my parents were both in Ame’s service until recently. If memory served me right, in the previous shinobi war, Ame and Konoha were not the best of friends. The fact Obito let slip that Tesuri was an iryo-nin was already against my favor. If they find out my mother was an Uzumaki capable of fuinjutsu… I don’t want to know what’d they do to me.

Unfortunately, I didn’t have any excuse as to why I couldn’t show her my arm. I feared for the worst as I stretched my hand over to her. Kushina made quick work of my bandages and unwrapped it until she saw the bite. A frown crossed her face as she placed a hand over her right eye. A familiar seal danced over her skin before she studied my arm.

It was the diagnostic seal. The same one Kaa-san used on me once to show me how seals worked. Ah crap, she’s going to notice the seals. This will not end well. True to my prediction, Kushina took no more than a passing gaze at before her eyes widened and she hastily unraveled the rest of my bandages on both arms.

“These… These are Uzumaki seals! Where did you get these?” demanded Kushina as she gripped onto my arms tightly.

I grimaced, not expecting anger. “Ah!” I cried. My arms burned from where she gripped the marked skin.

“Tell me where did you get these seals,” repeated the red haired woman.

“Kushina-san, you’re hurting her.” Obito grabbed her hand when her grip seemed to tighten more, but she didn’t let go.

“Kaa-san put them on me!” I shouted when the pain grew too much to bear.

“…Your mother?” Surprise crossed her face as her hands slipped from my arms. I pulled away rubbing the tender skin. “What’s your mother’s name?”

“Kushina-san, stop scaring her,” warned Obito as I scooted back a little. I wasn’t scared, I
just didn’t want her grabbing me again… though, it’s not like I could do anything to stop her if she decided to do it again.

“What is her name?” She asked again, staring into my eyes… There I noticed, she wasn’t angry. She wasn’t even annoyed. She looked…hopeful? Longing?

Then it clicked. Her home village was gone. Her family and everyone she knew before she left for Konoha was either dead or lost to the four corners of this world. She was hoping to find family, people who shared her blood. She was a jinchuriki, it was hard for her to find people like Minato who won’t judge her for what she has to do for her duties.

I ducked down my head, breaking her gaze. Whatever seals Somuku placed on my arms have already damned my situation. There was no way I could get out of this staying silent, but what do I say? I really don’t want to end up in T&I. I won’t last ten minutes under torture. I hesitantly took a second glance hoping I could think of something, but when I saw her eyes, all thoughts of excuses left my mind.

She looked so sad and hopeful. The logical part of my mind screamed that she only has two or three more years left and that I shouldn’t take any stupid risks outing myself. There was no point in gaining her support when she won’t be around long enough to do anything. Yet, every argument I made was moot the moment I saw her eyes.

“Kasa, can you tell me what your mother’s name was?” asked Kushina again.

I mentally sighed, so hopeful, so sad… I never stood a chance. “Kaa-san’s name is Somuku… Somuku Uzumaki.”

Her face frowned not recognizing Kaa-san’s name, but lit up when she heard the Uzumaki name, but grimaced when she remembered something. “Obito said your mother was…” She trailed off, unwilling to finish it. “Were there any other Uzumakis? Grandparents, aunts or uncles?”

“I don’t know. It was always just Kaa-san and Tou-san before…” I trailed off, realizing for the first time how small my current family was. I hadn’t noticed earlier because Kaa-san always kept me distracted with all her lessons and activities… but she was gone now and Tou-san… I don’t know where he was, but he wasn’t here. “I’m… alone.”

Surprise crossed my face before I realized I said it out loud. In moments, Kushina held me in her arms as if she was trying to shield me from whatever that was going through my mind. Even Obito looked solemn as he watched quietly with his single eye. I sat there dumbfounded, not knowing what to do. It wasn’t as if I was immune to the feeling of loneliness. It’s there, but I was a grown woman; I could deal with a bit of solitude.

Not to mention, there was the fear of getting hauled off to an interrogation session with T&I hanging over my head. Wasting time wallowing in the thoughts of loneliness was not at the top of my priority list. Don’t get me wrong, I do appreciate their sentiments, but I had no clue how to respond in these situations. Do I say something? Say nothing? What do four-year-olds normally do in this situation?

My mind drew blanks before I finally decided to lean into the hug. It seemed like Kushina needed this more than I do. Not that I mind, it was always nice to be held and wanted. Though, I do wonder if this world would be a nicer place if everyone just got more hugs? I raised my arms to return the hug.

It doesn’t hurt to try right?
Welcome to Konohagakure

The trip back to Konoha took a full week alongside Kushina. It was fortunate that we made it to the outpost when we did; she was on the last day of her border patrol rotation. If we were a day later we would’ve missed her altogether and the situation with the guards would’ve ended poorly.

Joining us on the trip back were Tsume Inuzuka and her ninken Kuromaru, Kushina’s temporary team. I’m guessing it was for the matter of safety, considering Obito has yet to fully recover and the addition of having to lug a civilian like me around a warzone.

I’m not exactly sure what protocols Konoha-nin abides by during times of war, but I boy am I glad that we had an Inuzuka in our group. Not to say that Kushina and Obito can’t handle themselves, but I do feel a lot safer sleeping at night knowing Kuromaru, the menacing wolf-looking dog, stood guard. It also helped that Tsume was just as intimidating, if not more.

Though, it might be psychological since I do have an absurd amount of fondness toward dogs and dog lovers in general. Resisting the urge to hug and pet the monstrous dog was possibly the hardest part of the entire trip. How could anyone not want to pet that soft fur and hug that fluffiness? He was beyond cute and I had a hard enough time not gushing on the spot and squealing like the little girl I am.

“Are you not terrified?” asked Kuromaru at one point during the week when we stopped for camp and he was left to guard me. The group had separated in order to perform the necessary tasks before evening set.

With Kushina setting up camp and etching protection seals around the vicinity, Obito was off gathering wood and hunting our dinner, while leaving Tsume to patrol and scout the area for threats. I offered to help, but Tsume immediately shot it down saying it would be faster for them to setup and clear out in the morning if they did everything.

Ultimately, Kuromaru was left to babysit me and possibly keep me out of trouble if I decided I was bored. Though… who could be bored with a talking dog?

“I didn’t know you can talk.” I grinned, not the least bothered by the close proximity where he sat. Must resist urge to pet doggy…

“You do not find it strange that I can?” drawled Kuromaru, dubious of my level of comfort around him.

“Should I?” I asked tilting my head up to look at him. “All ninkens can do that right?”

The Inuzuka ninken towered me even while sitting. I’m guessing he would reach six feet or more in height if he ever stood on his hind legs. Any sensible person would take one look at the massive size this dog before turn-tail and run… but as you can see, I’m not the sensible type.

“Some, not all,” snorted Kuromaru. “Not all of us are inclined to learning the human tongue.”

“Then how come you learned?” I asked.

Kuromaru looked as if he raised a brow. Could dogs do that? “Do you find it amusing to play charades each time you want to get a message across?”
“…I guess not.” I replied, glancing at his soft fur. My hand twitched, but I kept it to myself.

“What are you staring at?” asked Kuromaru when he noticed me stealing glances at him.

Resist! Must resist! I can do it! I can… I can… “…Can I… pet you?” I asked, completely defeated by my fondness for big fluffy dogs.

Kuromaru stared at me for a second before he threw his head back in an uproarious laugh. “You’re a strange child.”

“I know…” I puffed up my cheeks dejectedly, slightly red from embarrassment.

That seemed to make him laugh even harder.

“What’s so funny?” asked Obito curiously when he came back with an armful of twigs and broken branches.

Kuromaru still shook with laughter when Kushina and Tsume returned.

“He’s making fun of me.” I said childishly, drawing raised brows from both Kushina and Tsume.

“Kuromaru?” questioned Tsume, no doubt wondering what caused her ninken to be in such a state.

The ninken collected himself and gave a wolf-like grin. “This is an interesting child. I suggest you keep an eye on her in the future,” said Kuromaru in bemusement as he stood on all fours and made his way back to the Inuzuka kunoichi.

“Hm?” Tsume glanced between Kuromaru and me curiously. I curled up, hiding my face behind my legs. Great, more unnecessary attention, I’m doing such a wonderful job keeping low-key. A raspy chuckle escaped from the woman as she rested a hand on her hip. “You like dogs don’t you?”

My face flushed red. Geez, and I tried so hard not to be obvious.

“You’re so cute Kasa-chan,” laughed Kushina softly with her bell-like giggles.

“It’s not funny.” I sulked, but found Obito slinging an arm around my shoulder fondly.

“You know, that bastard Kakashi has quite a few ninkens, maybe you can meet them when we get back to Konoha,” suggested the Uchiha with a bright grin. “That sounds fun right?”

It was hard to keep pouting when his smiles were so infectious. Obito had a way with making people smile and even Tsume, with her stoic personality, wasn’t immune to his smiles either. Most nights, I slept with Kushina until it was her turn for the guard shift. Other times, I snuggled with Kuromaru when it was a bit chilly. His fur was so soft. Tsume gave him an amused look whenever I did, but he never bothered with a response.

Things got… interesting when we reached Konoha. One thing for sure, I hadn’t expected to see the teen version of the infamous closet pervert standing guard at the gates of the village. That’s right, you know who I’m talking about.

“Obito Uchiha? You’re alive!” said the sunglasses-wearing chunin as he jumped up from
his seat. His partner glanced lazily at us as we approached. At least I think they were chunin, having a jounin or a genin at such a post would either be a waste or stupid.

“Yo Ebisu, Genma!” replied Obito cheerily with a wave. “How’s it going?”

“How is it going?” said Ebisu in disbelief. “Your team came back saying you were KIA and you waltz in here days later asking how’s it going? How are you alive?”

Obito grinned, puffing up his chest boastfully. “Because I’m awesome! Not even death can take me!”

Genma sighed dully, twitching the toothpick in his mouth. “More like even death doesn’t want deal with you.” He turned to greet the two amused kunoichi. “Uzumaki-san, Inuzuka-san. It must’ve been a hassle dragging his sorry ass back here.”

“Hey!” retorted Obito, miffed.

Kushina raised a hand to cover a giggle. “Maybe a little.”

“No fair, you guys are ganging up on me,” complained Obito. I grinned ear to ear as I watched, but he soon caught sight of me and sped over placing his hands on my shoulders. “But at least you’re on my side right, Kasa? You and me, we could take them all on!”

I held my sides laughing when he knelt down with one arm around my shoulders and pointing a finger dramatically in challenge.

“Idiot,” muttered Ebisu as he pushed the sunglasses up the bridge of his nose.

Genma smiled wryly as Obito jumped up indignantly. “You might want to get your ass to the office and clear your current status soon. From what I heard, the Uchiha clan is causing grief for Kakashi and the rest of your team.”


“Don’t know,” shrugged Genma. “Just saying, you might want to get it done soon. I heard they’re going to drag Kakashi to some council hearing sometime this week or something.”


Kushina placed a hand on his shoulder before he could fly off the handle. “Why don’t we go settle things at the office and then go ask Kakashi himself?”

Obito reluctantly nodded and backed down. “Fine.”

“We need to settle the matter concerning Kasa while we’re there as well,” continued Kushina as she turned to smile at me.

Ebisu glanced at me for the first time since the conversation started. “If you don’t mind me asking Uzumaki-san, who is this little girl?”

The red-haired woman smiled brightly as she placed a fond hand on my head. “Family of mines. She’ll be living with me once we get the paperwork done.”

I glanced up at her in surprise. I’m going to live with her? That was unexpected. I thought I would end up staying with Obito or dumped in an orphanage if anything. Though, I guess it makes sense, since she technically was family.
“Come on, let’s get a move on. We’ve wasted enough time here,” prompted Tsume impatiently.

“Yeah, we should get this stuff done ASAP!” said Obito as a beat returned to his step. “I’ll catch up with you guys later maybe. Come on Kasa, I’ll give you a tour of the village and introduce you to everyone when we’re done!” He held out a hand for me to grab.

“Don’t go traumatizing the poor girl, Obito,” drawled Genma as I took the offered hand.

“Whatever man!” said Obito as we continued on.

I grinned a little when he waved bye to us and I returned the sentiment with a wave of my own. As we moved deeper into Konoha, I was greeted by an interesting experience. In my old life, I lived in a city towering with steel structures and covered in concrete. In Ame, it wasn’t much different aside from the endless rain and miserable atmosphere. Here in Konoha, everything was bright, the buildings, the people and most of all, the sky.

It was a refreshing change after the week I’ve been through. If I didn’t know any better, I would have thought Konoha was a pleasant place to live. The lack of skyscrapers would throw me off at first, but I think I would have enjoyed living here. I took childish glee in staring at everything. Compared to Ame, Konoha was a freaking rainbow with the amount of bright colors everywhere.

I felt like I walked into a fairytale with how everything looked and sounded. All the while, Obito gave commentary of nearly everything of interest we passed by. I nearly squealed when I recognized the familiar ramen stand. I am so going there one of these days! What can I say? I’m a glutton. Maybe I should’ve been reborn in the Akamichi clan instead?

Even with Obito’s impromptu commentaries, we quickly made our way to the administrative office. Kushina and Tsume made a beeline in signing in, noting their return to Konoha from the borders before we moved on to settle Obito’s KIA status. To say the process was funny was an understatement. I lost count how many times someone raised a brow when Obito requested to change his status from KIA to active.

Fortunately, for whatever reason, Obito omitted the fact that I was the one that brought him back from the brink of death. Of course, that didn’t last long when we were redirected to the Hokage himself for questioning. It wasn’t a common occurrence for someone noted as KIA to come back alive and reinstate himself for service. Let’s hope I don’t end up in T&I after this conversation.

“Heya, Hokage-sama! How’s it going?” greeted Obito cheerily when he caught sight of Hiruzen Sarutobi. The Third Hokage looked amused as we stepped into the room.

“Obito Uchiha,” mused the old man. “I didn’t expect to speak with you again. Your team was quite downtrodden when they returned with news of your death.”

The Uchiha scratched the back of his head sheepishly. “Yeah, that sucked. They’re not taking it too badly are they?”

“Depends what your definition of badly means,” humored the old man.

Obito grimaced. “That bad huh? Well, if you can reinstate me as a ninja that’d be great. I’ll go and tell them the good news about me being alive.”

Hiruzen chuckled. “Of course, of course, but before we do that. I need you to answer some questions.” He grinned wryly when Obito slumped dejectedly. “I’ll try to be quick. Can you recount what happened on your mission before you were separated from Minato and your team?”
I stood silent next to Kushina as Obito repeated the story again for the second time. He’s going to get sick of retelling this story over and over again real soon. Heck, I’m hearing it for the second time and I’m already bored with it. The only thing keeping me from yawning was the fact that I was a part of the story and I could possibly get tortured for this.

“So you managed to save Obito did you?” Hiruzen directed the question to me.

I did all I could not to hide behind Obito and Kushina like a little coward, but I still ended up clinging to Obito. “Y-yes?”

The Third Hokage smiled warmly. “No need to be afraid. I just have some questions for you. That’s all. Obito said your name is Kasa Mon from Amegakure?”

I nodded silently, cautious to keep my eyes focused on his despite how desperately I wanted to look away. I can’t let myself show obvious signs of lying and I’m really bad at lying.

“Can you tell me how did you heal Obito?” asked the old man.

“I had him bite me?” I squeaked. Please let him think I’m terrified and not hiding anything, please let him think I’m terrified—wait, what am I saying? I am terrified!

“Can you explain to me why you did that?” asked Hiruzen patiently, obviously aware of my distressed state.

Shit, my throat clamped up.

“Kasa-chan?” questioned Obito quietly when the world started to shift around me. Kuromaru made his way next to me and nudged my hand onto his snout. The wetness of his nose and the softness of his fur calmed me slightly as the world stopped spinning.

“Hokage-sama, if I may?” interrupted Kushina when I remained silent. “I could explain the rest for her if you don’t mind.” Thank all that is good in the world for Kushina! My hero and savior!

Hiruzen raised a brow. “You can explain Kushina?”

The red-haired woman nodded. “This girl is descended from the Uzumaki line. The ability she used to heal Obito with is one of the various manifestations of the high vitality carried in the Uzumaki bloodline.”

“Uzumaki?” said Hiruzen with a raised brow. “This girl is your kin?”

Kushina nodded. “Her mother is Somuku Uzumaki. Most likely, she fled to Amegakure after the destruction of our village. The two sets of seals on her arms is proof of her mother’s adeptness in the sealing arts. Quite possibly a master from what I’ve deciphered.”


“Information, possibly whatever vestige left of Uzushiogakure and the Uzumaki clan,” said Kushina.

I blinked at that. You’re shitting me right? Kaa-san turned me into a human flash drive?

“…I see,” murmured Hiruzen as he puffed on his pipe in deep thought. “Can you confirm the information that’s on those seals?”
Kushina shook her head. “The information is privy to only Kasa.”

Hiruzen blew out a breath of smoke as he studied me. I squirmed where I stood wishing I was anywhere but here. “Kushina, I know why you brought this child here, but you are aware of the current laws.”

The red-haired woman grimaced. “Yes, I’m aware we are in a state of war, but I will take full responsibility of Kasa.”

Confusion crossed my face. Did I just miss something?

“I trust you Kushina. However, I cannot bend the law on your words alone. Unless you can find out what sort of information is on those seals, we cannot risk having someone, even a child, wandering in the village with information we know nothing about. It would take too long to train her how to activate such seals.”

“It’s an information seal, there are no coercion commands drawn into it. Kasa isn’t a sleeper agent,” argued Kushina.

Oh, so that’s what they’re arguing about. Well… that’s another can of worms that just opened up. So, not only do I have to be terrified that T&I might make an acquaintance, I also have to be terrified that they might gut me incase they thought I was a sleeper agent. Wonderful, just wonderful.

“Be as that may, unless I have solid proof, I cannot protect her from the council if they ask for her ejection from the village.” His features softened sympathetically. “I know you want to protect what’s left of your kin Kushina and I don’t want to send any child away during times of war.”

Shit, things are going down hill. I need to do something!

“Are you kidding me Hokage-sama!” snapped Obito. “Kasa’s four and a civilian! She doesn’t have an ounce of formal training yet or anyone to turn to, if you kick her out of the village, she will die!”

“Hokage-sama, I implore you to reconsider. I can and will vouch for her!” begged Kushina.

Hiruzen stayed quiet as they both protested for my sake, but his eyes kept trained on me the whole time. My hands felt clammy against Kuromaru’s fur and I desperately wanted to take a step back and run away, but before I could, Kuromaru nudged his head against me. I glanced next to me and noticed the stern look in his eyes. As if he was telling me to say something, to defend myself. Kushina and Obito already did what they could. It was up to me now.

I let out a shaky breath before I let go of Obito’s hand and took a step forward. Kushina and Obito grew quiet as I gripped onto the hem of my shirt and shuffled uncomfortably in front of them.

“I-I could tell you what information is in the seals.” I stuttered out.

“Oh?” Hiruzen took the pipe back into his mouth as he waited for me to continue.

“I’m a natural activator. Kaa-san had me tested months ago.” I wet my lips, why was it suddenly so dry? “She said I can’t make any seals, but I could activate any seals made by others as long as they weren’t faulty.”
“And you’re sure you can activate the seals on your arms?” asked Hiruzen.

I nodded slowly, resisting the urge to fiddle with the sleeves of my shirt. “I-I’ve already activated it once before. When I first met Obito.”

“What was in it?” pressed the old man calmly.

“Medical fuinjutsu.” I frowned trying to remember. “There was a lot of information on how to treat injuries. I don’t understand most of it, but I don’t think it was all of it either.”

“You can tell?” asked Hiruzen.

I nodded, more confidently this time. “I remember being scared and Obito was dying. I really wanted to help Obito, but I couldn’t. I didn’t realize I activated the seals until the burn grew on my arm. I saw images of Kaa-san using fuinjutsu to heal. One after another, there were different seals to heal different things, but I couldn’t use any of it because I can’t make seals.” I said almost frustrated.

Hiruzen nodded understandingly, likely reminiscing his fair share of moments where he felt utterly useless. “The healing bite, did you know you could do that before? Or was that from the seals?”

“The seals.” I answered truthfully. “It was the only one that I didn’t need to know how to use.”

“Can you activate the seals now?” inquired Hiruzen.

I glanced at him with a confused frown. “I think so. Do you want me to?”

“Hokage-sama! You can’t ask her to activate the seals now! Who knows how much chakra is required to activate them?” argued Kushina. “She’s barely trained. It could—”

“Kushina,” interrupted Tsume. “Hokage-sama is reconsidering Kasa’s admission into the village. Are you sure you want to refute that?”

The red-haired woman grew silent. I glanced back and saw her looking worriedly at me. Tsume on the other hand looked calm and collected. She gave me a wolfish-grin instead.

“Go ahead kid. Show Hokage-sama what you can do,” encouraged the woman. Kuromaru gave a smirk of his own as he stood by her.

I gave a weak grin in return before facing the Third again. Taking a deep breath I grasped at my chakra and pulled it to the palm of my hand. It took some time, considering I don’t normally pull chakra to my hands. The feather exercise Kaa-san had me do could hardly be used to mold chakra. It was more like an exercise in practicing summoning chakra from the core.

I waited for a full minute before I felt there was enough chakra on my hand and I planted it on one of my bandaged arms. It was hard enough to summon enough chakra to one hand, much less for both. In an instant, the images barraged my mind again. Last time, I was worried about Obito dying so all the images there involved healing or anything related to the medical arts. This time, I didn’t have any specific thoughts in my mind other than proving to the hokage that I could do this.

Big mistake.

Hundreds if not thousands of images rushed through my head, varying from history to

...
faces of leaders, of elders, to families upon families of redheads, to images of Kyubi transferring from one jinchuriki to the next before finally the utter ruins of a waterside village. I felt blood dripping from my nose before I hit the ground.

My hearing was clouded as the dull beats of steps and people talking surrounded me. I vaguely felt someone lift me from the ground and patting the side of my cheek. I could see Obito panicking, Kushina screaming what looked like my name and Tsume grimacing with Kuromaru frowning by her side.

The images didn’t stop, wouldn’t stop. I could barely make out what any of them were saying. My body seized as my mind slowly overloaded with information. Eventually, Hiruzen made his way into my vision and pulled my hand away from my arm, the images slowed. His hands gripped tightly onto my wrists as I felt something warm pushing against the insides of my arms.

Chakra.

The images finally stopped before I finally took a breath, coughing as my lungs drew in much-needed air. I must’ve stopped breathing at some point. The ringing in my ears grew louder and louder before finally everything came back.

“Kasa!” shouted Kushina, her voice breaking through the ringing. Her arms held me carefully as I wheezed for a breath.

“She should be fine now,” said Hiruzen grimly as he moved to stand.

I had no clue what urged me to do so, but I darted out of Kushina’s arms and grabbed onto his before he could get up. “The Uzumaki clan is the only know clan to host as the Kyubi’s jinchuriki due to the high vitality of its bloodline. Uzushiogakure was destroyed by their hubris and expertise in sealing. A seal master could easily replicate any known ninjutsu and genjutsu capable of equivalent efficiency. Masters of the Uzumaki styled fuinjutsu can—”

“Stop,” commanded Hiruzen as he grabbed onto my hand. I stared at him in a daze as he planted my hand back on my lap and patted it gently. “You don’t need to prove anything anymore. You are welcome to stay in Konoha with Kushina, but on one condition.”

It felt like my eyes glazed over as I stared at him blankly, was he sending me to T&I?

“I didn’t activate that seal again until you’ve had proper training and only with supervision by a seal master or an iryo-nin. Do I make myself clear?” asked the man.

I nodded blankly. Did I make it? Was he not going to toss me to T&I?

“Good, Kushina you may want to take her to the hospital to get her looked over. I’ll have someone deal with her paperwork,” noted the hokage as he stood up. “I’m sorry your first impression of Konoha ended as such.”

Really? I’m scot free from a painful and traumatizing interrogation? The smile from the man melted the fear clinging to my heart. Hope and relief flooded through my body as I slumped down against Kushina with a smile. I don’t have to face T&I! Awesome! A giggled escaped my lips as another thought slipped through my mind.

“Kasa?” whispered Kushina worriedly.

“Does that mean I get to be a Konoha ninja in the future?” I asked, slightly delirious from the giddiness of not needing to go to T&I.
Hiruzen smiled warmly. “If you ever wish to join the shinobi ranks, you may apply to the academy whenever you feel you’re ready.”

“Yay!” I cheered weakly.

“What sort of ninja are you aspiring to be?” asked Hiruzen, the mirth twinkling in his eyes. I wonder if he was amused by my high state or the fact that I wanted to be a Konoha-nin despite nearly frying my brains out because he dared me to.

I grinned brightly. “Iryo-nin.”


My eyes drifted as I snuggled closer to Kushina. “Then I could heal me and people and not get bitten for it… Because that hurts…” I slurred. “…I don’t like getting hurt. It’s not fun…”

A chuckled escaped the old man. “I see. I see.”

“Hokage-sama, I’m going to take her to the hospital now,” said Kushina with a bow as she hauled me off the ground.

“Very well,” nodded the man. “As for Obito Uchiha, you will be reinstated once the hospital clears you of your injuries.”

“What?” complained Obito. “I need the hospital’s approval? That’ll take forever!”

“Quit exaggerating. They would keep you for a week at most,” inserted Tsume before bowing briefly to Hiruzen. “We will take our leave Hokage-sama.”

The man nodded. “Very well. Welcome back.” He paused briefly before turning to me with a smile. “And welcome to Konoha.”

---

**Village Name:**

**Uzushiogakure**- Whirling Tides Village
Bring It On!

One thing I quickly figured out after a trip to the hospital was that healing chakra was the best feeling in the world. Think hot bath, massage and eating ice cream all at once while enjoying the best movie or book in the world. That was how I felt the instant an iryo-nin touched my brain with healing chakra. I was in heaven. No other feeling in the world could match it.

Screw drugs, I’d take a brain massage with healing chakra any day. My treatment finished in half an hour. According to the medic, the injuries I’ve suffered from the seal’s info dump wasn’t severe, it was more like my brain was exhausted and needed a round of healing chakra. My body became jelly by the time they finished.

Not that it mattered; we ended up having to wait for Obito anyway. Unlike me, he had fractured bones, broken bones, a missing eye, borderline chakra exhaustion and a list of other things that I couldn’t begin to comprehend. How he even managed to convince his attending iryo-nin to let him leave the hospital while bandaged to the point of looking like a mummy was beyond me. The boy has a way with words I suppose.

“Come on!” urged Obito as we left the hospital. “I want to go find Minato sensei and the others. Can you image the look on their faces when they see me?” He sniggered.

Kushina sighed with a roll of her eyes. “Really Obito? You died in front of their eyes and the first thing you want to do is show yourself like nothing happened?”

Obito scratched the back of his head sheepishly. “I guess I wasn’t thinking.”

“Exactly!” Kushina propped a hand on her hip in a disappointed manner. “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

The Uchiha ducked down his head in embarrassment. “Sorry, I—”

“You should totally prank them instead!” cackled Kushina with glee. “Let’s make them crap their pants!”

I glanced up at her in surprise. She’s suggesting to prank them?

Obito’s face lit up like a child at Christmas morning. “I knew I liked you for a reason Kushina-san!”

“Of course!” She raised her nose in the air with pride. “How could you ever doubt my awesomeness? Life is not worth living without good pranks!”

“How foolish of me!” declared Obito. “Please teach me more Kushina-sama!”

“That’s what I like to see!” nodded Kushina. “Now listen closely, this is what we’re going to do…”

I resisted the weak laugh threatening to escape my lips. Eerie how the two of them almost mirrored the image of Gai and Lee in the future. Not sure should I be terrified or worried that there might be a sunset background at some point of their conversation. The thought sent chills down my spine.

Don’t get me wrong; Gai and Lee are not bad guys, but their eccentricity and energy could
use a bit toning down. I shuddered at the thought of legion of self-proclaimed green beasts of Konoha invading the streets. Smiling green and orange clad ninjas giving the nice guy pose… Now that is a terrifying sight.

“I am not worthy!” Obito bowed before Kushina comically raising and dropping his arms to express his unworthiness.

… I totally just missed what the heck they planned, didn’t I?

Kushina turned to me with a grin. “Kasa-chan, you’re going to help us!”

“Huh?” I barely managed to get out before they dragged me along towards the training grounds. Why do I get the feeling that I’m not going to like whatever they planned?

Ten minutes later, we arrived near what I later know as the Third Training Ground. Sound familiar? It should, considering it was the preferred bell-test exam location for nearly every hokage in existence. That and the memorial stone.

Hidden in the shadows, Kushina made quick work in hiding our presence as she and Obito searched for their targets. It didn’t take long for them to spot a stoic silver-haired teen standing at the memorial stone. No doubt grieving for the recent lost of his friend. A sensible person would leave him in peace to grieve, but of course, Obito was always one to break the mood.

“Man, oh man,” murmured Obito quietly from where we hid. “You’re killing me Kakashi.”

I resisted to the urge to facepalm at his choice of words.

“Don’t worry, after we’re done, he won’t stay like that,” grinned Kushina in turn.

“… Can I not do this?” I whispered quietly, unknowing copying their hushed voices. “That’s just mean.”

“You so totally got to do this!” whispered Obito excitedly. “It’ll make my entrance all the more awesome.” He pressed his hands together. “Pretty please Kasa?”

I bit my lower lip, if he planned to dye Kakashi’s hair pink or rig his apartment with pies and humorous traps I would join him in a heartbeat. However, when it came to hurtful jokes that is where I draw the line. One of my greatest pet peeves in my previous life were idiots prank calling their family and friends telling them they were gravely injured in an accident and dying at a hospital.

I don’t understand how anyone could find traumatizing the people they love funny. Not to mention how hurtful it was to have their trust in them broken for something so stupid.

“Kasa-chan,” said Kushina softly. “If you feel uncomfortable about this, you don’t have to.”

Then why the hell did you include me in the first place?

“But this prank will help Kakashi more so than hurt him,” said the red-haired woman.

My frown deepened. How does that make sense?

“You don’t know Kakashi,” answered Obito, as if reading my mind.

“What do you mean?” I glanced to him in question.

“Kakashi is a stoic bastard,” explained Obito, as if that answered everything. “He may look
cool and all, but knowing what I know about him now, the bastard is probably blaming himself.”

Hello? Close friend and teammate dying saving his ass, I’m quite sure he has good reason to feel the need to blame himself.

Obito huffed. “He is totally ignoring my sacrifice to save his sorry ass! He should be living, not guilt tripping himself into misery!” Surprise crossed my face as he continued with a grumble. “Kakashi could be bastard when it comes to his own emotions, always bottling it up and being an ass to everyone because of it.”

“Oh…” I murmured. Obito was more thoughtful than I thought.

“That’s why I need you to help me on this okay? We need to fix him,” said Obito before he crossed his arms with a frown. “That and if I showed myself this early, he’s just going to get emotionally constipated and totally ruin my dramatic return.”

And now he’s not. Resist the urge to smack him upside the head, Kasa. Resist it. I took a deep breath and released it in the same instance. Well, I did say I will try to make this world a nicer place. I supposed this was as good as a place to start as any.

“Oh, and get my goggles back for me if you can,” whispered Obito as he lowered me to the ground with a grin.

Kushina did her best not to crack up laughing as I rolled my eyes and made my way out of the trees and bushes. The trek took some time as Kushina and Obito kept their distance to avoid detection by the silver-hair teen. I wonder how can they tell whether or not the stoic teen and sense them. Young Kakashi doesn’t seem like the type to broadcast his awareness of stalkers. Heck, he doesn’t seem like the type to take notice of you even if you stood next to him.

They must know him pretty well then. As I drew closer and closer, I could faintly hear him talking, but it didn’t last long. He must’ve sensed me coming and stopped. If I didn’t know he was the sneaky type I wouldn’t be able to tell if he was talking at all in the first place by the time I reached him.

He didn’t bother giving me a sideways glance when I reached the stone. So quiet and stoic, none of the nonchalant air he carried as an adult. I stood quietly for a moment next to him, feeling rude for invading his personal bubble and interrupting his grieving. I’m surprised he didn’t disappear the moment he sensed me.

“What are you staring at?” asked the silver hair teen when the silence grew awkward.

Crap, what did Obito and Kushina want me to say?

“You look sad.” I blurted out instead. Damn it, ugh… Just go with it!

“Is that so?” said Kakashi quietly, his eyes never leaving the memorial stone.

“You know, he’s going to be sad too if you stay that way.” I continued.

His body stiffened, but it disappeared almost as quickly as it came. “Is that what they told you when you lost someone you care about? You do know those words won’t change a thing. They’re still gone,” said the teen bitterly.

Wow, you’re a douchebag Kakashi. If I wasn’t four, you might’ve made me cry saying that. Screw being nice. He deserves whatever prank Obito and Kushina planned for him.
“No.” I answered. “Your friend told me.”

Kakashi turned to me with a frown. “Friend?”

“Yes!” I nodded clasping my hands behind my back childishly, leaning sideways to look up at him. “He said he’s angry at you for being a bastard and wasting his sacrifice.” I paused before adding. “And he wants his goggles back.”

His face was indecipherable. Was he surprised? Confused? “Who told you to tell me this?” said Kakashi with a darken voice.

Uh-oh… I took a step back and he followed suit with a step forward. “Not if you’re going to be like that.” I said trying to lighten the situation, but failed horribly when his glare darkened more.

“Tell me who told you to tell me this,” demanded the silver-haired teen, cold anger lacing his words.

Not good, I just had to go an piss him off didn’t I?

“Eep.” I squeaked out as I turned tail to run, but he caught me in seconds without difficulty and hauled me up by the back of my shirt.

“I’ll ask one last time. Who told you to do this?” growled Kakashi as he turned me to face his dark glaring eye. “Tell me.”

Panic set in as I started to flail and scream. “Obito help! He’s going to kill me!”

“Obito?” said Kakashi, eye widened and startled.

In seconds, a shadow blurred to our side. Kakashi dropped me out of instinct. I took the chance to distance myself as he blocked a blow to his right and swiftly grabbed the arm of whoever that attacked him. A grip, a shift and the silver-haired teen chucked his attacker over his shoulder and pinned him to the ground with a kunai in hand. What he didn’t expect was a familiar face staring back at him.

“Oww… what the hell Kakashi!” whined Obito. “This was supposed to be my badass return!”

“…O…Obito?” croaked out Kakashi weakly, but he shook his head with vehemence, pressing his kunai into the Uchiha’s throat. “You’re not him! Who are you? What the hell are you doing here?”

“Hey, hey! Watch where you’re pointing that! I just got out of the hospital! I don’t want to go back there again!” protested Obito as he tried to inch away, but his teammate had him firmly pressed into the ground.

“Who are you?” growled Kakashi before he glanced up to me with a glare. “Who are either of you? Did the Uchiha send you to do this?”

“Uchiha? Why would they do that?” frowned Obito, but Kakashi kept his eye on me rather than Obito. “Hey, I’m talking to you, bastard!” snapped Obito before he shifted a leg out from the knee Kakashi used to pin him and kicked him off. The kunai managed to nick the side of his face. A hiss escaped his lips as he raised his sleeve to press against the cut. “Why is it always the face? Man, that stings.”
Kakashi reoriented himself in the air before he landed in a fighting stance. “Your genjutsu skills are good to be able to maintain the illusion even after taking damage. Show me your true face.”

“This is my true face dipshit!” shouted Obito. “For a prodigy you’re freaking stupid if you haven’t notice that I’m not dead!”

“I don’t believe you,” glared Kakashi.

“For the love of—” Obito threw his hands up in the air. “You know what? Screw this! If you want a fight bastard, you got one! Jounin or no jounin! I’m going to kick your ass! Kasa-chan, take cover. I’m going to teach this bastard a lesson!”

“As if you’ll get the chance,” growled out Kakashi as he charged forward.

“Bring it on!” roared Obito as he too pulled out his own kunai and charged.

Well… that escalated quickly. Sounds of metal against metal striking one another echoed in the air. I glanced around wondering where Kushina went. She’s not going to let them fight was she? I get that Kakashi probably needed to vent out his frustrations, but Obito has barely recovered. Fighting so soon, the idiot’s going to get himself hurt, that is if Kakashi didn’t kill him first.

When I spotted no sign of my newly found relative, I sighed and moved a safe distance before I sat down to watch the fight. If they were going to duke it out, I might as well enjoy the show. Kind of made me wish that I had something to snack on while watching them trying to kill each other. Interestingly enough, Kakashi limited himself only to taijutsu. He made no move to shoot off any of his more lethal attacks.

My brows furrowed in thought. That’s a little strange. Was it that he didn’t want to? Or he couldn’t? How long does it take for someone to adapt to a sharingan transfer? I seem to recall him using it almost immediately, but then again I also have a vague memory of him collapsing not long after… Hmm… that’s something to mull on.

“Shit,” wheezed Obito ten minutes later. He and Kakashi were at a standstill. “Had enough yet?”

The stoic teen didn’t fair any better, he too was out of breath. “You?” rasped Kakashi with his grip tightening on his kunai.

“Ha!” coughed Obito. “I’m just getting started! But uh…” He rested his free hand on his knee as he caught his breath. “If you want to give up, I’m totally cool with that! You know, uh… because I’m generous like that!”

I bit back a smile. He really needs to work on his bluffing skills.

Kakashi stood still, his breathing evening out as he studied the other. Unlike Obito, his stance stood firm. Even in exhaustion, he didn’t let himself waver. His brows remained furrowed in thought as if he was trying to make sense of a puzzle.

“You can’t continue, can you?” murmured Kakashi.

“What?” snapped Obito as he stood up again. “You want to go again? Come on! I can do this all day!”

The silver-haired teen stared at him for a moment longer before he sighed and pocketed his kunai. “You’re an idiot, Obito.”
“You want to say that to my face again bastard? I could—Hey wait, you said my name!” said Obito, completely distracted from his initial thought.

“Yes,” confirmed Kakashi as he brushed off the mild layer of dust on him, gathered from the fight.

“About time bastard!” A bright grin broke out on Obito’s face as he pocketed his kunai.

“What changed your mind?”

Kakashi stared at him in a deadpan. “Only an idiot like you would bluff an enemy while exhausted and obviously defeated.”

Obito huffed. “I could’ve so continued the fight!”

Kakashi gave a snort as he turned his attention to the trees. “Sensei, Kushina-san, you guys can stop hiding.”

“Ah, he caught us!” said Kushina unabashed as she jumped out of hiding.

I blinked in surprise when I spotted a blond man following suit. Kakashi called him sensei, which meant this man was…

“Eh!” screamed Obito in astonishment. “Minato sensei! When the hell did you get here? I was totally going to go surprise you next! No fair!”

Minato gave a warm smile. “It’s not very nice of you to tell us you’re alive with a prank.”

“Sensei, you know he was alive?” asked Kakashi, mildly annoyed.

“Not a clue,” chirped their blonde sensei. “I didn’t find out until a couple of minutes ago, myself.”

“Kushina-san,” whined Obito, rubbing his bruised and bandaged arms. “You could’ve cut in at least. Kakashi is a beast when it comes to taijutsu. My arms are killing me!”

Kushina huffed before turning a glare at Minato. “I would’ve cut in earlier to explain everything, but no Minato had to stop me.”

“If I let you cut in, Kakashi would’ve been even more furious that you two decided to play such a mean prank on him,” reasoned Minato before giving the deceptively friendly smile. “Then it would be much harder to drag both of them to see Rin. I’m quite sure she’ll be happy to know both of you avoided her for and entire week.”

Obito’s jaw dropped in horror while Kakashi’s body tensed up at the mention of their teammate.

“Minato sensei! I wasn’t avoiding her! I was nearly dead! It took me a week to get back!” protested Obito.

“Hmm,” hummed Minato thoughtfully. “But the first person you came to see after coming back wasn’t her or me, but Kakashi. I wonder what would she think?”

Oh, this man was good. No, more than good. He was evil, pure evil and I have no issue with that whatsoever. Here, I thought Kushina was the prankster of the pair. However, it turns out, Minato’s brand of vindictive humor suits my taste much more.
“Argh!” screamed Obito as he grabbed onto the hair peeking out from under the bandages wrapped around his head. “I’m so stupid! I should’ve gone to see her first! She’s going to kill me! Kakashi this is all your fault!”

“My fault?” said Kakashi in disbelief. “You’re the one that wanted to prank me when I thought you were still dead!”

“You’re the one that’s emotionally constipated! And what’s this about Minato sensei saying you’ve been avoiding her for a week? What the hell man?” accused Obito.

“You’re one to talk, Mr. I’ve come back from the dead!” snapped Kakashi.

I found myself rolling on the ground in a giggling fit before either of them could go on any further. I don’t know how Obito does it, he managed to turn a possibly tear jerking reunion into a slapstick comedy worthy of Groucho Marx. Ah, you probably don’t know who that is so just forget it. I laughed so hard; I hadn’t realize anyone approaching until they were literally two steps in front of me.

“Hello, and who are you?” asked the gentle voice of Minato.

I saw a vague figure squatting in front me as I blinked through the tears of laughter. I managed to gather my giggling fit into something more controllable before I caught sight of the prettiest blue eyes I’ve ever seen. “Hi, I’m Kasa Mon!” I greeted with a grin. “What’s your name?”

He grinned a little; Kushina must be the luckiest woman in this world because Minato is an Adonis with that smile. “Minato Namikaze, I’m Obito and Kakashi’s sensei.”

“What do you belong to Kushina-san?” I asked deliberately, taking note the surprised look crossing his face at my awkwardly phrased question. Ah, the joys of being a child. You can say the weirdest and most embarrassing things in the world and no one can do anything about it.

“Aw, she’s so cute and smart!” gushed Kushina as she swept me into her arms. Behind her I could see the still forms of Kakashi and Obito, beaten to the ground. No doubt, her handy work. They’ve must’ve gotten out of hand. “She knows whose boss in this relationship.”

I know I’m a suck up, but I’m going to live with this woman, so I might as well get on her good side. Call me a sell out all you want. The boss of this relationship is not the man it’s the woman. A woman by the name Kushina. This jinchuriki is one you do not want to mess with. So, listen up boys and girls, don’t pissed off the woman in this relationship or you will die a very slow and painful death.

Minato gave a sheepish grin attempting to brush off the weirdness I just instilled. “Kushina, who is this girl?”

My new guardian grinned brightly as she lifted up my oddly colored hair as if it was supposed to prove something. “I picked her up from the border! She’s going to stay with us! Isn’t that great?”

Wait… back up! Us? They’re living together already? I didn’t know that… Ah crap, the awkwardness just went up by tenfold… oh well.

“…Kushina… You do know you can’t go kidnapping other people’s kids. Right?” reasoned Minato slowly.

“Of course!” retorted Kushina brashly. “She’s not just anyone’s kid! She’s family, a
descendent from the Uzumaki clan! Her mother was an Uzumaki. I’m not about to leave her all alone!"

The expression changed on Minato’s face almost immediately. The awkward hesitation turned into sadness, then understanding before he slipped back to the gentle smile he started with earlier. I never knew how expressive he could be without saying a single word. I guess Naruto takes after his mother’s personality more than I thought.

Sadly, Naruto probably won’t get much of his dad’s brain. Considering the man most likely came to a conclusion about my background in the time span it took for his face to shift through the various expressions. If I wasn’t used to people watching, I wouldn’t have picked up all the micro expressions the man made.

Though, that does make me wonder. As a trained ninja, he would know how to hide all those expressions from his face. However, in this instance, was he showing me these expressions purposely? Or was he just comfortable in the presence of his beloved students and girlfriend to let it slip? Maybe I’m overthinking this a little bit too much.

“Nice to meet you Kasa-chan,” said Minato with a inviting smile. “I look forward to getting to know you better.”

Oh Konoha, if I didn’t know you better, these nice people would’ve tricked me into believing your outward sweetness. Minato, Kushina and Obito were all genuinely nice people and overall pleasant to be around, but it was so easy to forget the threats that lurk deep in the village. Danzo, ROOT, the council and so many others.

“How would you like to make some more new friends?” asked Minato, distracting me from my ghoulish thoughts. “We could go meet Rin. Obito and Kakashi’s teammates.”

The two boys twitched on the ground at the name.

“You would like her Kasa-chan, Rin is an iryo-nin. Just like what you want to be when you join the ranks,” quipped Kushina.

“Iryo-nin huh?” noted Minato in good humor. “We could always just more iryo-nin, especially if Kakashi and Obito keeps getting hurt, right?”

I nodded. “Yeah, Obito gets hurt a lot.”

“I do not!” protested Obito from the ground.

Minato chuckled wholeheartedly. “Come on, let’s get these boys to Rin,” said Minato before he made his way over to haul both Obito onto his shoulder and Kakashi under his arm like a sack of potatoes.

“She’s going to kill us,” muttered Obito.

“More like she’s going to skin us and torture us,” returned Kakashi.

The two look comical in Minato’s grasp. They were like two children in trouble and on their way to their punishment corner.

“Rin should be by the lake today. I’ll meet you there,” grinned Minato with a playful salute. Kushina giggled pleasantly as Minato took off ahead of us with a flash. “Just you wait Kasa,
you’re going to love Rin!”

I wonder if I will.
Friends and Family

Meeting Rin was… interesting to say the least and trust me when I say that, because I have life experience and all… Yeah, you’re not buying that. While it wasn’t the first time I saw this reaction from someone, this could probably be the most frightening one.

Let me tell you, Rin can quite possibly be the most terrifying person to be around when she’s torn between the spectrum of emotions from jubilation to guilt-filled sadness and ferocious anger. Even Kushina’s demonic hair can’t match up to the eldritch onslaught of emotions from this girl. The whiplash from it alone could probably snap your neck like a saltine cracker.

With that noted, it is with great mercy on my part to start from the battered half-corpses of Obito and Kakashi at the girl’s feet. Sakura temper has nothing on this girl.

“No message, no letter, no nothing! You were alive and you didn’t even think to drop a word back to us?” snapped Rin as she re-bandaged Obito’s injuries.

“There were no messenger birds at the outpost free for something like that!” defended Obito. He yelped when Rin tightened the bandages over his bruises. “Ow, ow, ow! Sorry! Sorry!”

“Next time you do that to us again, I will kill you myself!” threatened Rin.

“Yes, ma’am!” squeaked Obito before she loosened the bandages.

“Defeats the purpose of encouraging him to survive,” murmured Kakashi offhandedly.

“Don’t you dare start Kakashi! I haven’t gotten to you yet!” growled the girl. “You’ve been avoiding me since we got back to the village. I didn’t even know you had trouble with your chakra until Minato sensei told me! I thought we were teammates! Why would you keep something like that from me?”

Obito glanced at Kakashi curiously. “You’re having trouble with your chakra?”

“It’s nothing,” murmured the silver-haired teen as he turned away.

“That’s not nothing!” retorted Obito. “How are you going to continue to go on missions if you can’t even defend yourself?”

Kakashi said nothing.

By now, the whole situation escalated to something uncomfortably awkward. Minato and Kushina sat out for most of their little reunion and I, as the outsider of this group, had no place here. The level of emo-ness seeping into the air was torturous. There was something wrong with this world if every prodigy they have runs on self-loathing and emo-ness. Though, I guess they have nothing on an Uchiha when it comes to the mystical arts of emo. Oh boy, that’s another can of worms I’m not touching.

Growl

My face flushed when all eyes turned on me. Damn child metabolism!

“Kasa-chan are you hungry?” asked Kushina, interrupting the ongoing soap opera.

 “…I can wait.” I muttered quietly. “Until Kakashi admits he needs a hug, it might be
dangerous to go eating with him… He might just try to hurt himself with the splinters on a chopstick.”

All eyes turned to me as Kakashi glared at me with vehemence. I didn’t mean to say the last part out loud, but what the heck. Just wing it!

“Whoops, you didn’t want them to know that?” I said innocently. The look on his face said he would get his revenge on me in the near future. I’m not at a good start with the future Copy-nin, but screw it. He needs hugs and lots of them. Who knows if he’ll suddenly go nuts or something if he doesn’t get that? Ha, look at me, fixing the emo-problem with one hug at a time!

“Kakashi needs a hug?” grinned Obito, gleeful that he found something to torment his stoic teammate.

The silver-haired teen turned to him with a glare. “No, I don’t need a hug!”

“Aw!” gushed Obito teasingly. “You were being such a bastard because you just needed a hug?”

“Don’t you dare Obito!” snapped Kakashi as he backed away from him.

“I believe he does need a hug,” added Rin with a grin as she joined Obito’s efforts. “Should we give you a hug?”

“No, I don’t need a hug!” snapped Kakashi as he turned to Minato. “Sensei, tell them to back down.”

Minato hid a smile behind his hand. “No, I agree with them. I think you do need a hug.”

Kakashi’s eyes widened, surprised that even his trusted teacher betrayed him.

“Get him team!” shouted Kushina enthusiastically before the silver-haired teen turned tail and ran.

Had Kakashi been at full strength, they would’ve never gotten close to him. However, since he neglected his health, his chunin teammates had no issue pinning him down to the ground with hugs. I felt a hand planted on top of my head before I glanced up to Minato’s grinning face.

“Good job Kasa-chan,” said the man. I found myself grinning back.

The assault on Kakashi lasted for ten minutes before Minato decided to take pity on the stoic teen. Even then, both Obito and Rin didn’t release him until after giving the threat of more hugs if he fails to take care of himself. I watched the whole exchange with morbid fascination. This Kakashi acted more like an Uchiha than their resident Uchiha teammate.

Can you image how terrifying it would be if Madara somehow managed to steal Kakashi away and have him be the new Tobi? The world would end with how efficient that jounin is. Yeah… That’s a scary train of thought to venture of to. Let’s not go there.

“All right, I think Kakashi has enough hugs for today.” The silver-haired teen looked grateful for the assist, at least until Minato smiled. “You can give him more tomorrow if you want.”

Kakashi shot him a look of betrayal and grumbled under his breath.

“It’s been a taxing day for everyone and we should all go home and get some rest, but how
about I treat you all to dinner before then? As a celebration for Obito’s return,” said Minato.

“Serious?” said Obito excitedly. “All right! Let’s go for yakiniku!”

“Too heavy, pick something lighter,” noted Kakashi.

“I thought this was to celebrate my return?” grumbled Obito.

“How come you guys get to pick?” retorted Rin. “I say we go for dango and anmitsu!”

Just as another outbreak threatened to start, Kushina interrupted. “Kids,” said the woman sternly. “If you guys can’t make up your mind, I get to choose.”

Obito huffed. “But you always choose ramen!”

If I could sweat drop, I would at this point. Somehow it turned from an argument between three teammates to a war between them and Kushina. The loudness of the group was starting to get to me as I resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of my nose. Hell, I hope it doesn’t end up like this every time they meet up. They’re worse than a room filled with four-year-olds.

“They’re a lively bunch, aren’t they?” grinned Minato. This guy must have the patience of a saint; I’ve already pressed my knuckles into the bridge of my nose pretending to rub my eye.

“Are they always like that?” I asked, kneading away the headache with only my thumb.

“Every time,” chirped the man before Kushina’s demonic hair flared to life and snared all three of Minato’s students. “You’d think they’d learn not to fight her by now.”

“Ah… so we’re having ramen, I’m guessing?” I grimaced as Kushina gave the trio a good pounding. If that’s her taking it easy, I really don’t want to see what she do to people when she’s serious.

“Yes,” chuckled Minato.

“Come along Kasa-chan,” chirped Kushina as she rolled her arm in triumph. “We’re going for ramen.”

I glanced at the twitching trio on the ground. “Coming!” Better them than me I suppose.

At Ichiraku’s, I learned that Kushina was the envy of all women. How she manages to down ten bowls of ramen and still keep that killer figure of hers was an enigma. No doubt, Naruto’s obsessive love for ramen stemmed from this woman.

“How do you like it?” asked Kushina as I slurped up my share of ramen. I finished only half my bowl while she was on her fifth.

“It’s yummy!” I replied. I’m a big fan of savory foods. Though, got to admit I favor pho more… I know, blasphemy! How could I not love ramen? Good thing Kushina can’t read thoughts. She might kill me for soiling her heavenly ramen.

“So what do you have planned tomorrow Minato sensei?” asked Obito as he finished off his bowl. “Hokage-sama said I can’t go on missions until the hospital clears me with a clean bill of health, but my attending iryo-nin said I could still join in for some light training as long as I don’t push myself too hard.”

Kakashi’s stiffened over his empty bowl of ramen. He finished ages ago when his bowl
Minato gave a sheepish grin. “No team meeting tomorrow I’m afraid.”

“Eh? Why not?” asked Obito, unaware of his teammate’s discomfort.

“Kakashi and I are going to meet with the council tomorrow in regards to your promotion gift,” answered Minato as Kakashi turned his face away.

“Huh?” frowned Obito and turned to Kakashi. “Why would you need to go do that?”

“…The Uchiha are adamant in its return, I don’t deserve it,” said Kakashi quietly. “It’s not mine to begin with, nut since you’re back. You could take—”

“Bull shit!” snapped Obito, cutting off his stoic teammate. “Why the hell do they get a say in this? It’s my freaking eye! I could give it to whoever the hell I want!”

“But I—” Kakashi never finished.

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence,” growled Obito. “I gave that to you as a gift! And I’m damn well not taking it back. Oh so help me, if you offer to return that eye again I will personally kick your ass so hard, that stick up your ass will come flying out of your mouth.”

Kakashi stayed quiet as Obito continued his ramble.

“When is this council meeting tomorrow? I’m so going with you to give those old farts a piece of my mind!” vented Obito. “Minato sensei, I can come along right?

Minato grinned in good humor as he turned an idle eye toward his students. “I don’t think that would be a problem. What do you think, Kakashi?”

“…As if he’ll be any help,” muttered Kakashi. “You’re hardly threatening in your current state and that promise of an ass-kicking won’t ever come to light. If you show up tomorrow, they’re just going to make it worse and then you’ll have to face the scrutiny of your clan. Think this through your head before you make it these declarations.”

“I’m trying to help you bastard!” grumbled Obito with a shaking fist. “One of these days, I’m going to—”

“But if you do come, I won’t stop you,” murmured Kakashi, startling Obito out of his train of thought.

It took a moment, but eventually a grin slipped onto Obito’s face. “I guess that’s the best I’ll get from you. So what time?”

“…Knowing you, you’re going to be late,” drawled Kakashi.

“Kakashi!” growled Obito. “I’m just trying to be supportive and you’re—”

“…Thank you,” whispered Kakashi.

“Uh… You’re welcome?” said Obito in puzzlement. “So yeah, what time? I’ll try to be early.”

“The world will end the day that happens,” drawled Kakashi.
“Hey!” huffed Obito.

Aw, isn’t this sweet? I watched as the two exchanged their bantering. Pity, Obito didn’t notice at all. Kakashi wasn’t thanking him for supporting him at the council. He was thanking him for forgiving his mistakes. Obito would probably never realize this, but from the looks of Rin and Minato, they clearly noticed and hid the knowing smile from their clueless Uchiha.

“Thanks for the meal sensei!” chorused Minato’s three students.

“Get home safe,” replied Minato as they took off separately. Once out of sight, he turned to Kushina and me. “Should we head home as well?”

Living with new people for the first time was always…weird. You know that feeling where you sleepover at your friend’s place when their parents are around? Take that situation and multiply it by two. Sure, you can argue you know them and their family, but even then it’s awkward and it’s near impossible settle down comfortably.

Not to mention, the instant we made it back, Kushina declared Minato kicked out of their room until the office is turned into a second bedroom. I struggled against the mortified look that threatened to spill onto my face. Hell, I was expecting to take the couch for however long it took for them to decide what to do with me. I didn’t expect Kushina to bunk me with her. Seriously, I feel like I just stole the man’s girlfriend.

“You don’t have to do this. I could take the couch.” I suggested uneasily as Kushina and Minato pulled out spare blankets and pillows.

“Aw, you’re shy!” gushed Kushina as she pinched my cheeks. “Don’t worry, Minato here doesn’t mind a bit. Right?”

Minato smiled warmly as he hauled out the futon. “Just treat this as your home Kasa-chan.”

“But, but!” I puffed up my cheeks to keep myself from cursing like a sailor

It’s not the matter of shyness! It’s the life and existence of Naruto! Who knows how long I’m going to be sharing with Kushina if I let this go on? If these two don’t get a moment to do the hanky-panky I’m risking the life of the most important person in this universe! Who knows what would happen without Naruto around? What would happen when Suna and Oto invades? What happens when Gaara goes ape-shit and there’s no one to take him down? What happens to all the people he subsequently influence during his lifetime?

“You need to share a room!” I argued childishly, stomping my feet for added effect. “You just have to!”

The two stopped momentarily and glanced at each other in puzzlement. They seem to share a silent conversation between themselves before Minato knelt down to my eye level.

“Why is that Kasa-chan?” asked the blonde man, his tone exuding levels of patience and understanding. He would’ve made a great hokage, heck maybe he could’ve protected Konoha if he still lived.

“That’s because…” I trailed off as the thought hit me.

*Maybe he could save everyone.* The only reason Kyubi managed to break free in the first place was due Kushina’s pregnancy. If Naruto wasn’t born, if Kushina never gets pregnant… Then they wouldn’t die; there might be a better chance at changing everything for the better. As long as
Kakashi doesn’t end up killing Rin, Obito might never end up as Tobi. I could essentially change everything…

What the hell am I thinking? This is *Naruto’s* universe! What would happen if he ceased to exist? The world might collapse on itself. I’m not a god or a super being. What the hell am I supposed to do if everything turns for the worse? No, I have to ensure the blond idiot’s existence.

“Kasa-chan?” said Minato gently pulling my attention back into the present. My eyes focused and guilt shot through me when I saw his sadden, sympathetic blue eyes. “You don’t have to keep everything inside. I know you probably don’t want to talk about what happened, but you can always come to us and tell us what’s bothering you.”

“We’re family now,” said Kushina. “No matter what happens, we’ll be here for you.”

I bit back a grimace…If only you knew what I thought moments earlier, neither of you would still think that way… I should probably redeem myself and ensure Naruto’s survival here.

“… Kaa-san and Tou-san promised me a little brother if I slept in my own room.” I lied. “They said I could only get a little brother if only two adults shared a bed.”

The reaction wasn’t immediate, but when it did happen, both Minato and Kushina flushed red. The blond man quickly covered his embarrassment behind a cough and tried to leave the room.

“Kushina, I think I’ll—” He took no more than a step before his redheaded girlfriend grabbed him by the back of his shirt and yanked him back.

“You’re not leaving me with this conversation!” hissed Kushina.

“But you’re so much better for this one,” reasoned Minato light-heartedly, but at the presence of the demonic hair, he quickly changed his tune. “But it’s always good to have another perspective of things.”

The two traded another silent conversation with subtle hand gestures hinted at their argument to who would broach this embarrassing conversation. The conversation took no more than a couple of seconds. When Kushina ended up talking first, I was surprised that Minato somehow won.

“Kasa-chan, I know you really want a little brother, but um… babies don’t work that way,” started Kushina awkwardly.

I trembled my lower lip. “…I can’t have a little brother?”

Any other time, I would’ve laughed my ass off at the look of panic crossing their faces… Heck, I might still laugh my ass off in private later. Good god, I never thought I’d get the chance to pull the I-want-a-younger-sibling conversation. I wish I had a camera. The reactions on their faces were priceless!

“That’s not what we meant,” reasoned Minato as he raised his hands trying to settle my quivering breaths and keep me from crying.

“But…” I sniffled and rubbed my eyes as they began to water. “You said babies don’t…” My breath hitched and I started wailing in that high pitch whine that has yet to reach all out bawl. Slow enough to traumatize whoever’s watching, but not rough enough to seem like a tantrum.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how you abuse the tears of a child.
“K-Kasa-chan, don’t cry okay?” stammered Minato as he set the futon aside and tried to settle down my sniffles and hiccups. “We didn’t say you wouldn’t get your little brother.”

“Minato!” Kushina’s face flushed, even redder than her hair.

“What I meant to say,” amended Minato hastily. “It takes some time for little brothers and sisters to get ready before you can meet them.”

I down played my sniffles. “But,” I hiccupped. “If I sleep alone they will come faster right? That’s why Kaa-san and Tou-san said I should sleep alone right?”

Minato glanced at Kushina, desperate for help.

“Y-yeah!” answered Kushina after another silent exchange. “Baby brothers or sisters don’t always come quickly. They’re not very fast with their little feet. Sometimes you have to wait.”

“But if I’m really good, they will come for my birthday right?” I asked, making sure I tugged at the right heartstrings. I’m a bastard when it comes to this. “With you and Minato-san, we’ll be one happy family, right?”

A wistful expression crossed her face as Kushina digested my words. “Maybe,” murmured the woman. She must be longing for a family more so than I thought.

“Maybe huh?” grinned Minato wryly as his embarrassment faded and he glanced at her with sly interest.

Startled green eyes met mirthful blue, Kushina realized he heard her answer and flushed a deeper red.

“Why don’t we go clear up that office and set up the futon there?” She darted past him and changed the subject.

“Sure,” grinned Minato, amused. He turned to me a moment later with a softer smile. “So, little brother huh?”

I nodded brightly. “I’ll be the best-est big sister ever!”

Minato chuckled and patted my head. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Whew, close save. That was one way to twist an awkward situation into my favor. Hell, it was a miracle that I managed to divert that situation at all. Maybe I got some of that Uzumaki luck from Kaa-san. Ugh, let’s hope that luck holds out and not turn into a disaster like Naruto’s first C-rank mission bumping all the way up to an A-rank. I don’t think my heart can take a threat like that.

Early next morning, Minato left the apartment to join Kakashi and the rest of their team to face the village council on the matter of Obito’s sharingan gift. I have no clue what’s going on that front, since Kushina decided we had better things to do than waste our time at a meeting filled with old farts and pretentious clan heads. Things like catching up with old friends and setting your four-year-old relative on a play-date with your best friend’s son.

Oh, what the hell? I thought we were going to go sight seeing! Well, it could still be considered sight seeing I suppose. I knew next to nothing about the layout of Konoha aside from the snippets the story revealed whenever pertinent to the plot. The village was bigger than I expected… Not good, I better get a map at some point or I might end up spending the next few years getting lost
and trying to find my way around.

“Where are we going?” I asked, giving up trying to piece together just where the heck Kushina was taking me.

“We’re going to visit an old friend of mines. I haven’t see her in ages since she got married and settled down,” said Kushina as she tugged me along by the hand.

“Is she a ninja like you?” I continued the conversation as I wondered who it might be.

I don’t recall the story giving much information on Kushina’s life before her death. Sure, there’s the sappy love story where she fell in love with Minato and snippets of her hot temper as a child due to her hair and her outsider status. Aside from those, I don’t recall much if at all about her life outside of being a jinchuriki and Naruto’s mother.

“She was,” nodded Kushina. “But she retired after she got married and had a son. If I’m right, he should be about your age now.”

Wonderful, I have a play-date with a snot-nosed brat. Good lord, it’s going to be hell! I haven’t seen another kid close to my physical age since I got here! On my lonesome, I’m quite sure I could pass off as a child, albeit, an odd one, but at least then I was alone. Now, if I’m going to stand next to an actual child while keeping up this horrible charades… I’m so screwed.

“Something wrong?” questioned Kushina when my steps slowed.

“I… uh…” I stumbled over my words in a fluster. “What if they don’t like me?” Really? That was the best I could come up with? Oh, go kill yourself, Kasa.

Kushina giggled as she tugged me along. “Don’t worry, I’m quite sure they’ll love you!”

There was nothing else I could’ve said to get out of this situation. I had no good excuse to pull out my ass. I’ve already used that up the night before. Instead, I settled following Kushina grimly as she dragged me through the unfamiliar streets of Konoha.

One thing I noticed were the abundance of people walking around wearing… the Uchiha clan’s fan symbol? Huh? Oh right! They’re not dead yet, maybe in another decade or so… I resisted the urge to frown. Even if they’re not dead yet, there’s an awful lot of them walking around. Did the Uchiha have that big of a clan to have so many people mingling with the rest of Konoha?

No, the clan wasn’t bigger than any other main clans. More like, we were walking in the heart of the Uchiha district. Wasn’t that district exclusive only to the Uchiha? I thought they would police the comings and goings of non-Uchiha more strictly than that.

“Here we are!” chirped Kushina as we stopped at an antiquated house. “Hello! Anyone home?”

Judging by the size, whoever lived here must have quite a position in the Uchiha clan… Either that or they were just rich. I didn’t get to ponder more on the thought when a dark haired woman came out to greet us. At first she showed the typical stoic front that all Uchiha put up in front of strangers and whomever they thought was beneath them. However, the instance she saw Kushina. Her face lit up with an uncharacteristic Uchiha smile.

“Kushina!” greeted the woman excitedly as she drew my red-haired guardian into a hug. “I haven’t seen you in ages! What brings you here?”
“Just thought I visit,” grinned Kushina as she dragged me forward. “Also, I want you to meet Kasa-chan. My new little addition to the family.”

The woman’s eyes widened. “You and Minato…”

Kushina’s eyes widened and flustered embarrassingly. “What? No! Kasa’s an Uzumaki descent. I found her at the border a week ago along with Obito.”

The woman’s eyes widened. “Obito? Obito Uchiha? He’s still alive?”

“Yeah, it’s a long story,” sighed Kushina.

“Come in, come in. You can tell me all about it,” said the Uchiha woman as she ushered them in.

“…Pardon my intrusion.” I murmured quietly.

I probably don’t have to worry about manners much if I’m hanging around Kushina, but I rather not get on any Uchiha’s bad side at the moment. Who knows what the hell they’d do to me if they think I’ve crossed them? Heck, these bastards are going to outlive Kushina for at least half a decade. I rather not they decide I’m a nuisance and off me in a heartbeat.

“Oh yeah, didn’t you have a son? Why don’t we introduce them and let them play on their own while we catch up?” noted Kushina.

“Great idea!” clapped the Uchiha woman in agreement.

“Would you like to make a new friend, Kasa?” grinned Kushina.

Do I have a choice?

“…Sure.” I returned with a weak smile.

Dear lord, I’m going to have to deal with some snot-nose Uchiha brat. Someone kill me…

“Come along sweetie,” said the dark haired woman as she led us deeper into the house and out to the back garden.

Given the chance, I would’ve whistled at the size of the place. However, any admiring thoughts of the scenery or architecture were quickly abandoned when we came close to the sounds of shurikens hitting against wood. When we came close enough, I spotted a practice log, dressed with a targeting board and the shurikens have all, if not nearly all, embedded itself at the center of the bull’s eye. Impressive, typical Uchiha standard I suppose.

I bit back a groan. Great, I get to talk to a pretentious prodigy instead of a sniveling four-year-old. Better thicken my skin to take whatever insults he throws at me. The abundance of prodigies popping up in this village was ridiculous; someone needs to maintain the status quo here. Regardless of what I thought, nothing could’ve prepared me for what came out of from the Uchiha woman next. No seriously, nothing could’ve prepared me.

“Itachi! We have guests, take a break and come over to say hello,” said the woman.

I stood stunned as I watched the stoic little boy pull back from his throwing stance and turned to face us. He regarded us with a quick eye before giving a polite bow.

“Pleasure to meet you. I’m Itachi Uchiha,” greeted the boy.
Oh, fuck all kinds of duck.
As a former adult, there were many things I could tolerate that as I child I probably couldn’t. Solitude was one of the things that don’t bother me in the least; I could deal with being alone, no problem. Shit storms like explosions and medical emergencies, no problem! I’m the calmest person in the room. I take can charge and get whatever needs to be done, done. I may be a goof, but I can handle a bad situation with a level head if need be.

What I can’t handle are awkward silences and non-life threatening social activities. Seriously, I’d rather be held hostage with a gun pressed against my head at point blank any day than to sit through a civil conversation. Hell, I think I rather face Itachi’s Tsukuyomi than deal with his long unending silences. I swear, if there’s a Guinness World Record in holding awkward silences in the company of others, I think this kid would win it.

“… You must be a riot to talk to.” I murmured after we spent all of five minutes in silence. Five minutes was a record for me. Unless I’m alone or watching a movie with someone, it’s near impossible to keep me quiet for long. The silence would drive me nuts.

Itachi said nothing as he gave me a passing glance.

“Are you always this quiet?” I asked. “Or are you just doing that thing where children or seen but not heard thing? Because that is a horrible practice and you should totally go into your rebellious phase right now and prank the crap out of everyone. I’ll help, it’ll be funny.”

Silence. If you listen closely, you could hear the condescending crickets in the background. I hear you, you bastards! Stop mocking my existence! I’ll end you and all your descendants! I’ll kill you all! Kill you with fire! Yeah… this silence is getting to me. I’m totally losing it.

I swung my legs back and forth over the edge of the garden-facing veranda. There wasn’t much I could say as an icebreaker. This world simply didn’t have a lot of things kids could bond over. No cartoons, no video games, ugh no internet, man do I miss the internet… In short of talking about the weather, the only other thing I could do now was to spam the kid with a ton of questions and hope he’ll answer one of them.

“I saw you practicing shurikens, how do you become a ninja here? Do you have to go to some school or something? Or do you parents teach you? Kushina-san said your mom used to be a ninja, is your dad a ninja too? What is Konoha like? I’ve never been here before.” I rambled on and on.

From one topic to the next, to whatever the hell pops up in my head. Hell, I even talked about the weather and the squirrel that passed by, to the point that even I was getting sick of hearing myself talk. Ten minutes of non-stop talking later and the boy still said nothing.

Good god, can I get a single word from this guy? Anything! Even the typical, you’re annoying or would you shut up, would do. My throat was parched and I would like more than nothing to stay quiet for the rest of the day. When was the last time I spoke this much?

I can’t remember.

In the last four years, learning and understanding the language had priority over everything else. I knew, if I were to survive here, I had to know how to talk, how to read and most importantly, how to listen. The thought never occurred to me that I could have a normal conversation with
anyone. How could I? I’m a woman in a child’s body. What could I talk about?

Oh, hi Somuku and Tesuri, I’m not really your daughter. I’m actually a full-grown woman from another world that somehow got reborn into your only child. Not only that. I have intimate knowledge of your world that could very topple the entirety of the shinobi world and end all life, as you know it. Yeah, that’d go so well during snack time, right next to me trying to get them to let me out of the house for booze and parties.

I sighed in frustration, giving up the conversation with Itachi and plopped backwards onto the veranda floor with my legs still dangling off the edge. If he’s not going to respond, I’m not going to bother either. From the veranda, I could see the blue skies, littered with white clouds. Come to think of it, I never lay outside and stared up at the sky even once during my time in Ame. I couldn’t have. It always rained.

Speaking of rain… My thoughts drifted to Somuku and Tesuri… Kaa-san and Tou-san… The couple that loved and raised me as their own, not knowing I was a stranger. Not knowing that I might very well have replaced their real daughter, the real Kasa. They protected me, did whatever they could to keep me safe, to give me a chance at living. They were wonderful parents… Yet, all this time, I greedily took it all without ever giving back to them even once.

Guilt gnawed at me. Somuku was dead. I couldn’t repay her even if I wanted to. And, as much as I joked about everything and everyone, I couldn’t humor the thought that she was still alive. I couldn’t, not when I heard the finality of her goodbye and saw the desperation in her eyes as she gave Tesuri that final kiss.

When I found out what the seals she burned into my arms were, I couldn’t even lie to myself and pretend that she was still alive, somewhere out there. Someone who was certain of their survival wouldn’t pass down their knowledge in such a manner. My arms were permanently scarred with these seals. Somuku would never use such a method if she weren’t pressed for time.

She was patient; she had a way with teaching and making me understand whatever she taught. For her to use such a seal on me was an act of finality. No doubt, she knew this would scar me and mark me for all who were familiar with sealing, but this knowledge was precious, more precious than any secret or technique. She desperately wanted—no, needed me to carry on this knowledge.

Are you familiar with the phrase, your memory lives on through your children? From what I managed to piece together from activating the seal, the knowledge passed onto me wasn’t simply a collection of Ushiogakure’s history or the Uzumaki clan’s sealing arts or dangerous techniques. Rather it held the very essence of the clan’s people. What Somuku wanted me to carry was not her family’s skill, but their memory. These seals were the equivalent to a family album.

I took a deep breath as I felt an uncomfortable lump at the back of my throat, but it hardly mattered when a hot pressure built behind my eyes. I released a shaky sigh as I pressed the back of my arms against my eyes, desperate not to make a sound or curl into a ball. Why was my body choosing now to deal with this? Why couldn’t it have done this when I was alone?

I know it usually takes some time for trauma to set into my mind. I have a bad habit of repressing and ignoring things that bothers me for long periods of time. My last memory of doing something like this was after my dog passed away. It took a month before one day I just woke up crying. Probably not the healthiest way to cope with the string of things, but it is what it is.

Think of something else. Just think of something else.
What about Tesuri? Was he okay? Did he manage to get away? No, don’t think about Tesuri either. Thinking about him would just get me worked up again. Stop thinking. Just stop thinking!

“You’re a strange one,” murmured Itachi, his voice pulling me from my thoughts. “You rambled endlessly on things you could care less about, but when you quiet down to your own thoughts, you look like you were ready to cry.”

“I’m not crying.” I retorted childishy. I didn’t dare lower my arms, I’m quite sure my eyes were red by now.

“What were you thinking about?” asked Itachi.

“Why should I tell you?” I grumbled. “You ignored everything else I talked about.”

“You weren’t interested in talking to me,” replied the boy.

Okay, he got me there. I wasn’t being fair, talking just for the sake of talking. It’s not like I tried to make friends with the kid or asked about his thoughts and interests. Can you blame me? You and I both know very well whom he is and what the hell he’s going to do.

Sure, he did it for the good of Konoha, but he also created the very person that betrayed Konoha and help bring about the Fourth Shinobi War. I don’t care if the little prick has a change of heart later, it doesn’t change the fact he’s an asshole that led the pain and destruction of his own village. No amount of emo backstory will excuse him and his actions.

“Then why are you talking to me?” I asked. Lowering my arms slightly, I peeked at his reaction. His attention stayed on the garden in front of us, not giving up anything on his face. This kid had one heck of a poker face.

“You don’t like the silence,” answered Itachi without a sideways glance.

“…Huh?” I couldn’t help but voice out in surprise. “What are you talking about?”

“You don’t like the silence,” repeated the boy. “That’s why you kept talking. To keep away whatever you don’t want to think about.”

I gave up all pretense of peeking and openly stared at him. I just got ousted by a child, a genius child, but a child nonetheless. Was I that obvious?

“There are better ways to keep the silence away, if you can’t stand it,” noted Itachi.

“Like what?” I asked, shifting my arms to my forehead instead to get a better look of him.

“Training,” answered the Uchiha boy.

I rolled my eyes. How typical, the Uchiha were adrenaline junkies. I swear if they weren’t stoic assholes, they would fit in very well with the extreme sports fanatics. Can you imagine Itachi or Sasuke screaming, “Dude! To the extreme man! I’m totally rocking this bro!” Like that would never happen. Hell would freeze over first.

Yet… I found myself fighting a giggling fit at the thought. I pressed a fist against my lips to silence myself. My body shook as I curled up on my side, desperately trying to stop the roar of laughter threatening to spill from my lips. Oh god, I think I’m going to die.

“Do you want me to get Kushina-san for you?” asked Itachi, his voice tinged with a hint of
worry as he tried to pull me out from my thoughts again.

“No.” I squeaked out, gasping desperately for air as I fought against the urge to laugh.

“…Do you want me to do anything?” offered the boy, his placid voice showing signs of concern.

I fought against a smile as I bit my lower lip. Should I have him do it? He might not do it… but it doesn’t hurt to suggest it, at least.

“C-can…” I took a gulp of air to keep my voice stable. “Can you say the words to the extreme?” My voice cracked near the end.

“Would it help?” asked Itachi, sounding very puzzled at the request.

I gave a jerky nod, biting my fist, not trusting myself not to die laughing at this point.

“…To the extreme,” said the boy in the most deadpan manner I’ve ever heard.

Nothing could’ve stopped me as I burst out laughing like a maniac. My chest heaved with each laugh. My body shook as I tried desperately to stop laughing. I couldn’t help it; my fists pounded the ground, my legs flailed in the air. I laughed till I cried, I laughed till I couldn’t make a sound. I laughed so hard that I’m quite sure everyone in the Uchiha district could hear me. There was nothing I could do to end this. And there was nothing I wanted to do to end this.

“Oh gods, you’re killing me!” I laughed, clenching at the pain in my chest from laughing so hard. “That was so awesome!”

“What exactly was so funny?” asked Itachi, unmoving from his spot as he watched me with a confused frown. “I only repeated what you asked me to say. How is to the extreme hilarious?”

“You are a riot!” I giggled uncontrollably, still rolling around on the ground like the idiot I am.

“Kasa-chan?” Kushina’s confused voice came from down the hall before she and Itachi’s mother, Mikoto turned around the corner.

“What happened Itachi?” The Uchiha matron frowned in confusion at the sight of me laughing my ass off.

At the lost expression on Itachi’s face, I found myself dying in another fit of laughter. He really had no clue what the hell is going on with me.

“…I believe Kasa-san might be crazy,” noted Itachi. The bluntness of that statement nearly threw me into another fit.

“Kushina-san, save me!” I wheezed between my giggling fits. “He’s trying to make me laugh to death.”

Mikoto’s brows rose in surprise at my words, probably the last thing she expected to hear about her son. “…Itachi?”

“I did no such thing,” retorted Itachi, the confusion still clear on his face.

“Kasa-chan, you need to calm down,” suggested Kushina as she gathered me into her arms.

“Can you do that?”
“I—I’ll try.” I gulp in air as I struggled to calm down, but I cackled as she kept me propped up against her lap. Good god, I can’t even sit up on my own with how hard I’m laughing.

“Why don’t we settle down with a nice cup of tea?” suggested Mikoto when it didn’t seem like I was going to stop. “Itachi, why don’t you come help me with the snacks?”

The boy nodded before getting up and giving me one last odd glance. He followed his mother to the kitchen while I continued to laugh my ass off. By the time I managed to calm myself, I found it was near impossible to wipe the grin stitched to my face.

“Are you calm now?” asked Kushina as she brushed away the sweaty locks that clung to my face from laughing.

“Hehe, yeah.” I grinned back up at her.

“You had fun,” humored Kushina. “What was so funny?”

“You won’t get it, it’s an inside joke.” I answered as I pulled myself into a sitting position. Oh man, my sides were in stitches.

“Oh? Something only between you and Itachi?” teased Kushina.

“No?” I said in puzzlement. “I don’t think he got the joke, but it’s still funny!”

“Hmm? Do you like Itachi-kun?” hummed Kushina in amusement.

I stared at her confused before the sly grin registered in my head. Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me!

“Don’t give me that look. Kasa-chan has a crush doesn’t she?” teased Kushina.

What the hell is wrong with you, woman? Do you know how many levels of wrong is this? Fine, I’m physically four and she doesn’t know I’m mentally not, but Itachi, really? I’ve already dealt with one trauma today I don’t need to deal with feeling like a cradle robber.

“Do you think Mikoto-san would give me Itachi as a brother? Or are you and Minato-san going to give me a little brother?” I chirped in retaliation.

Don’t you dare set up some weird shit, like arranged marriage or whatever! I swear I will make you and Minato’s life a living hell if you dare!

Kushina’s face flushed red. “Kasa-chan, I thought we agreed that little brothers and sisters take some time to get here.”

“Yeah, but until they get here, Itachi could be my temporary brother right?” I reasoned.

I rather not have any closer contact with the kid, but if Kushina is going to push on the matter of crushes and whatever traumatic possibility in the future, I might as well use this as a chance to snip it in the bud right now. Really, not interested in joining the Uchiha. They’re all crazy, crazier than me and that’s saying something!

“We’ll have to ask Itachi’s mother about it,” answered Kushina as she pulled me to my feet. “Come on, let’s go help them with the snacks and drinks.”

One thing I learned to like about the Japanese culture in this new body, I love their short tables. As a child, the height was perfect. Well, as perfect as you can get I suppose. I don’t have to
worry about falling off a chair, at least.

What I grew to love even more from my previous life was the tea. Not a big soda fan to tell
the truth. I am a tea addict through and through, and a nightmare to every dentist I’ve ever seen.
Really, it’s become that bad that they scold me every single time I go because I always show up with
tea-stained teeth. Good thing I don’t like sweets or they might just murder me for any cavities I get
on top of staining my teeth.

“So Kasa-chan, how do you like Konoha so far?” asked Mikoto as she served tea to each of
us.

“It’s fun.” I answered as I accepted my cup. “Itachi’s really funny.”

“I wasn’t being funny,” noted Itachi.

Mikoto gave an odd look between the two of us before she shook her head with a smile. “I
heard you wanted to become a iryo-nin. Are you going to the academy anytime soon? Itachi started
classes already.”

“Can I?” I asked glancing over to Kushina. “I thought I couldn’t be a ninja until I got older.”

My red-haired guardian patted my head. “Remember what Hokage-sama said? You can join
the academy whenever you think you’re ready.”

Serious? I thought I would have to wait until I was a bit older or something since I’m
technically not a legitimate Konoha citizen… Well, not yet anyway.

“Wooh! Can I join now? I want to join now!” I bounced in my seat.

Getting trained early would be a major advantage. I could ask Kushina and Minato for
tutoring and help if I get stuck. Heck, I could maybe get them to make some custom seals or
something before they hit the grave. I’m sure as hell not going to find another seal master anytime
soon if that happens. Hey, don’t judge me. I don’t know how long they’re going to live, not with
Obito around now. I need to prepare for the worst if it happens.

“We can get you enrolled later today if you want. There are no classes at the academy today,
but there should be some administrative workers there to deal with the necessary paperwork,” said
Mikoto. “You’ll probably share classes with Itachi.”

What were the chances of that? I’m quite sure there is more than one class per age group.
Kyubi hasn’t decimated the village; there shouldn’t be an issue with admissions.

“Oh right, wasn’t there something about a lower admission rate this year or something along
the lines of that?” asked Kushina.

Mikoto nodded as she pushed the plate of snacks forward. “Not a lot of civilian families are
registering for the academy and with the current war and state of affairs, there aren’t many shinobi
raising families. I think Itachi and Kasa are probably the few in their age group.”

“Right, right…” murmured Kushina as they continued on with their own conversation.

Well, that conversation was... convenient. I almost forgot about the war. Geez, a day inside
of Konoha and I forget the world exists outside of this village. I’m not going to survive very long
with my attention span. Man, why do I keep slipping back to such depressing thoughts? Was the
high from my laughing fit wearing off? Oh, that’s going to suck…
The sound of ceramic sliding across a wooden table snapped me out of my thoughts before I noticed a plate with an innocently looking Sakura mochi in front of me. I blinked in surprise as I glanced towards the retreating pale hand. Confusion crossed my face as the boy picked up his tea acting as if he never offered me the treat.

“I don’t like sweets.” I murmured quietly, not to interrupt the adults’ conversation. Ha, adults. Man, it’s going to be a while before I could call myself that again.

“It’ll keep the silence away,” reasoned Itachi. “I rather not have you in another laughing fit again.”

I found a grin sneaking onto my face. Aw, isn’t he a little sweet heart? I guess the Uchiha clan has a heart… somewhere… buried beneath the mountain of emo and brother issues… Hmm… technically, Itachi is an only child at the moment and Obito doesn’t have any siblings right?

Maybe the emotional constipation doesn’t affect Uchiha children with the only child status. Huh… that’s an interesting thought. Though, not that I could do anything about it, it’s not like I could enforce a one-child rule with these assholes. Can you imagine the shit storm that would come up if anyone tried?

These self-entitled bastards were ready to stage a coup because they thought the village was repressing them. What do you think would happen if Konoha regulated their reproductive rights? A civil war is the least of your problems. You’re going to have other tight-ass clans like Hyuga joining in and good lord; it’s going to be ugly.

When that chapter of Konoha history is written, it’ll be titled “Clash of Emotionally Constipated Geniuses.” I’m totally serious, that should be the title. Silliness aside, I should probably not indulge on these thoughts too often. I think I might’ve scared the Uchiha matron with my laughing fit. A smile rose up from the thought of a traumatized Uchiha woman. However, before it went any further, I felt a hard tap at my forehead.

“Ow!” I retorted with a hand to my head as I snapped out of my thoughts. It took a second before I realized what happened. Did Itachi just… I glanced up at him, in time to see a retreating hand with two fingers pointed out.

“Itachi!” scolded Mikoto.

“Itachi!” scolded Mikoto.

“Sorry, she was going to laugh again,” said Itachi as he backed away from my end of the table and sat down.

Kushina snorted and cracked up laughing, I puffed up my cheeks in annoyance. Oh, that bastard. Of all the things he could’ve done, he did a forehead poke on me! A forehead poke! I’m five —no, six times this kid’s age and I got forehead poked as if I was his self-entitled little brother! What the hell?

“You know this means war, little boy.” I muttered quietly under Kushina’s mirth and Mikoto’s disbelief.

Itachi picked up his own Sakura mochi and started munching away without a care in the world. Somehow… it feels like I just lost to a four-year-old… And he doesn’t even seem to care… this is sad.

Kushina and I left the Uchiha household sometime later after tea and snacks. Mikoto was friendly enough to invite me to come visit again if I ever felt like it. Not likely I’ll take up on that. I
had enough Uchiha for one day and would prefer not seeing another one for sometime… unless they’re Obito, because he’s Obito, the least Uchiha-like person in his clan.

By mid-noon, I was enrolled in the Academy, my first class starts in two days’ time. For the rest of the day, Kushina decided she wanted to use me as a living doll… Did I mention shopping was my worst nightmare? Oh, don’t get me wrong I love buying stuff! What girl doesn’t? Give me an unlimited card that I don’t need to pay back and you’ll find a hefty amount of clothes and other useless junk I probably don’t need.

So, why was shopping considered a nightmare? Good question, and the simple answer is… I shop online only. I don’t like crowds, I don’t like pushy salespeople and I don’t like waiting on line. I like to skip all that hassle if possible and shop at the comfort of my own home. Not needing to lug the crap back on my lonesome was a bonus.

The fact that this world didn’t have internet was enough to make me cry and subsequently, no online shopping made me want to scream. I abhor interacting with people when I don’t need to. Call me anti-social all you want. I’m not; I’m just selectively social, thank you very much.

“What’s your favorite color Kasa-chan?” asked Kushina as she held one shirt after another over me in front of the mirror.

“Uh… red, green and blue?” I muttered the three colors I wouldn’t mind wearing. It’s not that I hate any of the other colors; I just preferred not to wear them. Gods, what I’d give to be able to sit in front of a computer and just click away…

In the end, I gave Kushina full freedom of picking and choosing whatever the hell that’s going into my new wardrobe, it doesn’t matter what the hell I wear as a child, as long as I’m not a walking target. I could always buy clothes I like when I get older. Less of a hassle and I won’t have someone fighting against me about any piece of clothing I decide on. That and I wanted to get out of shopping pronto.

Being at the height of an ankle biter is enough to give anyone claustrophobia in a clothing store with racks and racks of clothes towering over you. I was ready to cry when we stopped by the administrative building to meet up with Minato and his team for lunch.

“Hey Kasa-chan!” greeted Obito before I latched myself onto him. He gave a chuckle as he patted my head. “Missed me much?”

I nodded and hugged him tighter. “Kushina-san took me shopping.” I wailed. “It was horrible!”

“It wasn’t that bad,” said Kushina as she rolled her eyes before she turned to Minato. “How did the council meeting go?”

“They’re discussing it now, we’ll have a verdict some time later today or tomorrow,” answered Minato with a weary expression. “But considering what Obito did, I’m not quite sure what the outcome would be.”

“What did Obito do?” Kushina tilted her head curiously.

Kakashi said nothing as he looked away. Rin and Minato grimaced before giving the Obito a look.

“What?” snapped Obito as he threw up his hands. “So what if I renounced my relations with my clan? What I do is none of their business! Their main argument at the council was that I am a part
of their clan and any action I take reflects on them. I don’t know how exactly giving my eye to
Kakashi affects the clan in any manner, but if I’m not longer an Uchiha, they can’t claim that it’s a
clan issue."

“You renounced your clan?” said Kushina in disbelief.

“It’s not like anyone will miss me anyway,” shrugged Obito. “Before I could activate my
sharingan, they never gave me the time of day. I don’t see what the big deal is!”

“They’re your family,” murmured Rin.

“Well, my family was ready to rip out the eye I gave Kakashi on the spot and punish you for
putting it there in the first place,” reasoned Obito. “So, excuse me if I don’t think this is a big lost on
my part.”

“Obito…” started Kakashi quietly.

“Besides,” a bright grin plastered over the former Uchiha’s face. “You guys are closer than
my family anyway. Hell, you guys might as well be my family.”

His teammates looked startled at his declaration, not convinced over his words. Minato and
Kushina shared a sad glance as they held their tongue over the matter. This was something Obito and
his teammates needed to resolve on their own… but that doesn’t mean they have to do it here and
now.

“Does that mean I could have Obito as my big brother?” I changed the subject when no one
spoke.

Obito grinned at the change in topic and picked me up. “Of course! If you don’t mind having
a someone like me as a brother.”

“Yay! Then when Kushina-san and Minato-san have a ba—” A hand quickly covered over
my mouth as I was yanked away from Obito’s arms.

“That’s enough Kasa-chan,” said Minato pleasantly as he held me in his arms, hand still
firmly planted over my mouth. “I’m quite sure Obito is happy that you want him to be your big
brother.”

The group stood still as they stared at Minato and Kushina in fascination.

“… Sensei, what is this about you and Kushina-san having a baby?” drawled Kakashi with a
hint of mirth hidden in his voice.

“Kushina-san, are you…” Rin covered her mouth in shock as she glanced over to the
woman’s stomach.

“No!” Kushina’s face flushed red and blurted. “Kasa-chan just really wants a little brother!”

“Little brother huh?” Obito waggled his brow. “Something you want to tell us, Minato
sensei?”

Rin squealed excitedly. “Oh, are you two going to get married? Or are you going to just start
a family?”

“We’re not having a baby!” said Minato, utterly flustered by the barrage of questions from his
“I thought we were your cute little students, sensei. How could you hide this from us?” quipped Kakashi in mock hurt, his amusement clearly showing through despite having nearly his whole face covered.

If Minato didn’t have a hand over my mouth, I would’ve been evil and demanded to know why he and Kushina lied about giving me a little brother. However, since I’ve already accomplished my mission in diverting the tense atmosphere, I’ll let them off for now. No promises for the future if they’re unfortunate enough to do something that’s torture worthy. All in all, this was a good second day in Konoha. I think I’m going to like living here.
Ripples from Raindrops

Going to ninja school! Yes, I said ninja school, be jealous. I’m going to learn how to use kunais and throw shurikens and how to use chakra. I’m going to be a ninja god! Believe it!

Kidding, kidding, no need to grab the pitchforks and torches to end my second existence.

The academy’s not that awesome or all that cracked up to be. Most of the classes at this point were all out of textbook, strictly theoretical, boring and uneventful. Don’t blame them; I wouldn’t trust a bunch of kids with sharp, pointy weapons either. Not when a good number of them won’t even graduate to genin. Thirty-three percent rate passing? Yeah, it’s not going to happen for most people.

Me? I’m going to damn well pass. No way, in hell, am I staying a freaking civilian in this world. If I’m going to die, it better be due to my own stupid mistake. Not because I couldn’t defend myself… I’d like to say that… but…

“…You’re not very good in math are you?” noted Itachi when we got our quizzes back.

“Shut up.” I retorted, glaring at the neat hundred on his paper. Damn child prodigy.

I hate geometry. Why couldn’t it have been algebra instead, I could totally tell you what the value of x is. Why do I need to know geometry? If they argue that I need to know how to calculate this shit in order to throw a freaking kunai, I will take that kunai and shove it up their ass. Who the hell will have time to do this bullshit during a fight? This sort of work is for mathematicians with too much time on their hands.

And before anyone argues that it will help make setting traps easier, I say screw you. I’ve played freaking Worms Armageddon and Angry Birds. I will muscle memory that shit. Tell me I can’t hit something, and I’ll show you what I can do. The first time I went paintballing, I managed to hold three members of the other team at bay before the ref gunned us down because some idiot on the team accidentally shot him...

Okay, I’m the idiot that shot him, but that’s not my point. The point is that I’m not going to remember how to calculate this shit on the field without a calculator! Why the hell do I need to learn it? Since I can’t draw seals to save my life, the argument of learning it for the sake of seals was also moot point!

“Whoever failed the quiz, you will need to take remedial lessons and take the retest next week,” said our instructor. “This is mandatory.”

BANG!

I dropped my head on the desk with a whimper… Sadly, that wasn’t the only thing I’m bad at in the academy. The kunoichi lessons weren’t much better from the standard classes.

“…Kasa, that’s not how you put on eyeliner…” said the kunoichi instructor, her eye twitching as she graded my performance. “Unless you were aiming to look like a panda…”

Yeah… I wasn’t very good at putting on makeup in my previous life either. Though, I didn’t need those lessons to know I’m not particular strong in book smarts or subtle kunoichi arts. Theory is not my thing. I’m more capable of understanding things in practice. I’m what they know as the hands on sort of girl.
I can’t name every plant by its textbook name, but I could recognize them by sight and smell and note how many ways it can kill someone whether alone or in conjunction with another, but it’s near useless for the theoretical exam because I can’t identify have the damn names.

If someone told me that I was going back to school again, I would’ve shot them and told them not a chance. I really hope we start the practical lessons soon. I’m dying here!

“… You do know that glaring at your textbook doesn’t help with studying right?” commented Hana Inuzuka as she ate her bento that afternoon.

She was a year older than me, but that hardly matters since the admission rates were so low. A good number of shinobi hopefuls were lumped into the same classes, making life hell. You think high school drama was bad? You’ve never seen ninja school drama… Preschooler Edition! You’d be surprise how terrifying these little monsters are.

Good thing for me… or bad, depending how you look at it. I have no interest in joining their little social circle. Good because I don’t have to deal with the drama, bad… well, it’s not that bad, bad because I’m pretty much ostracized by nearly every girl close to my age. Let’s just say I don’t take well to being bossed around by tiny little Prima Donnas. Seriously, if any of you bastards try to drag me into a soap opera drama I will find out where you live and I will end you.

If I have to work with any of these Prima Donnas in the future, I am utterly screwed. I can’t even pretend to be pleasant around these hellions. Good lord, if they existed in my old world, they would definitely be the type to join the child beauty pageants or terrorize their peers in high school. Nothing against girls like those, they can do whatever they want. Even if it’s to be an utterly miserable human being, they’re free to do so, just give me no part in their drama. Ignore me and I’ll ignore you, live and let live.

Of course, in every group there is an exception. Hana, being Tsume’s daughter was one of the biggest. Unlike the other girls, she kept to herself and her three ninkens. Sure, they tried their little soap opera stunt with her, but I think she’s pretty much on the same boat as me where we won’t tolerate their little popularity game.

It wasn’t hard to like her. How could I not when she has not one, not two, but three ninkens? Did I tell you I’m a major sucker for dogs? Yeah, I totally had to be her friend just so I can play with them. Just kidding, that’s not the only reason… Though, it is one of the many.

I whimpered and smashed the book on my face, laying flat on the academy grounds. “I can’t remember any of it!”

The instant I hit the ground, Hana’s three ninkens decided it was fun to play tug of war with my hair. I couldn’t be bothered to shoo them away as I groaned desperately under my book.

“You’ll get it eventually, how’s your diction coming along?” asked Hana in between bites.

“Ugh… Don’t talk about diction class. If I have to recite another floral line of poetry, I’m going to hurl.” I groaned miserably.

Compared to Tsume, Hana was less intense and less terrifying, but still just as capable. She probably had the highest grade in the kunoichi classes and trailing by a couple of others behind Itachi in the joint shinobi classes. I think there were one or two boys and one girl that ranked higher than her in the joint classes.
Me? Uh… I’m somewhere at the bottom… All right, I’m dead last, but only because I’m horrible in the theoretical work. I swear, once the practical exams start, I’ll get better! Honest!

I stayed at the bottom of class rankings for three months. It was the worst three months of my life. In addition to classes and exams, were seal lessons from Minato and Kushina. Why did I have seal lessons with them when I couldn’t make a single seal to save my life? Thanks to my natural activator inclination, I could activate any given seal given I have enough chakra.

With that said, it also meant I’m a walking catastrophe if I ever go near seals. Given how easily I could activate them, a simple brush of my hand could have several explosive tags go off without warning. See the problem there? Let’s say someone has a storage seal, if I happen to brush up against it, I could open it and spill out everything that’s sealed into that scroll. Yeah, I’m banned from going near Kakashi until I get that under control. Who knew he carried so many storage scrolls.

These lessons meant to teach me to identify a seal on sight and control my chakra well enough to avoid unintentional activations. Let me tell you, memorizing hundreds of squiggly-lined patterns and the list of commonly used fuinjutsu kanji is not fun. Depending how it’s drawn where it’s placed, the seal could do completely different things or blow up in your face.

Thank goodness, my activator ability doesn’t automatically activate faulty seals. Kushina reasoned that it could be because faulty seals wasn’t as efficient as complete seals and couldn’t process the chakra I unintentionally sent to activate them. Though, if I forced it, I could probably still activate the faulty seals.

Ugh… I’ve managed to understand… maybe half of whatever they made me memorize. If I want to use pre-made seals in the future, I better brush up on my studies with them because I really don’t want to have anything blow up in my face. Learning how to deactivate seals would be useful too… It’d suck if I activated a seal and had no way to turn it off before it drained every last ounce of chakra in me.

Yeah, death by chakra exhaustion, definitely not fun… What was I talking about again? Oh right, it sucks to stay at the bottom rankings for three months. During that time, I became the butt of nearly all jokes and the target for bullies. What is it with children and their tendency to lean towards cruelty?

Oh don’t worry, they haven’t scarred me from life… though, I don’t think I’d ever want children in the future because of them…

“Ka-sa, Ka-sa, Kasa the umbrella!” sung the children in slight harmony to the neiner-neiner-neiner melody. Some were more off key than others.

“What’s wrong with your hair dead last? It looks dirty, like someone puked on it. Don’t you ever shower?” said another, mocking my hair mainly because it was a weird color.

I got one of each at least three-four times a day. Most of the time I ignore them. They’re just stupid little kids. They’re harmless little taunts. What am I going to do? Beat them senseless? Well… I could, but then that’ll just be letting what they say get to me. As long as they don’t get physical, I don’t think I’d care.

Unfortunately, with my luck, it always escalates. Nearing the end of three months, someone decided it would be funny to put gum in my hair. Any other time, I would’ve just ignored it, but after three months of this bullshit, enough was enough.

“All right, who’s the dipshit that put this in my hair?” I sighed in annoyance as I glared at
the offending piece of gum tangled in my hair. It was impossible to get out without cutting it.

“Did you see anyone putting that in your hair dead last?” drawled generic Bully Number One. Yeah, I didn’t bother remembering their names. Why bother when I’m trying not to hold a grudge over stupid little kids?

“You probably got it from being so dirty. Don’t blame us,” retorted Brat Number Two.

“Ha-ha, hilarious.” I droned. “No seriously, who put this in my hair?”

“You did that to yourself. I don’t know what you’re talking about,” huffed Boy Number Three.

I closed my eyes taking a deep breath. They’re just kids Kasa, let it go. I really was going to let them go… Really I was. However, one of them had the smart idea of shoving my head down and smearing the gum further into my hair.

Guess what I did! No really, guess.

I grabbed the brat’s hand the instant he pushed off the back of my head and twisted it behind his back. With a violent kick behind his knee, the boy was on the ground and I pushed his arm back further and further. He shouted in pain as I sat on his back with his arm firmly in my grip.

“Do you like that you little brat?” I growled.

“Ow! Let go! You’re going to break my arm!” snapped Brat Number Two.

“Why don’t you make me? What can’t take on a dirty little girl?” I retorted, smashing his head into the ground. “Come on!”

“Hell you’re crazy! Let go of me!” shouted the boy, but I had a firm grip on him.

Hanging with Hana, playing with her ninken was a regular pastime. With the three dogs, tug of war and grappling became the typical games we played. And let me tell you, when you play that rough with ninkens, you gain quite a grip.

“Why don’t you and your little friends make me?” I cut through his protests with the most condescending tone. “What, is this dead last beating you?”

“Guys! What the hell are you standing there for? Help me!” shouted Brat Number Two.

Bully Number One and Boy Number Three didn’t take more than a second to move when their friend called for help. When they grabbed my arms, I released the brat and grabbed Bully Number One’s arm and hauled him over my shoulder, smashing his face into the ground. Boy Number Three was a little smarter and looped his arms under my arms and pulled me back, keeping my arms away from grabbing anything.

Too bad for him, I’m in a foul mood and when I’m in a foul mood, I play nasty! I pulled my legs up using the extra weight to drag him down before I planted my feet on the ground using it as a kick off to knock him on his back. I landed on him, knocking the air out of his lungs and forced him to let go of my arms.

By then, Brat Number Two and Bully Number One recovered and made their way back to me again. No doubt, they’re pissed that a little girl like me was kicking their sorry ass. Man, I wished Hana was here, her ninken would’ve deterred these idiots, but no, she was out sick today.
I'm not sure if I should be glad that we haven’t learned much taijutsu yet or angry. At the moment, this was nothing more than a schoolyard brawl. I probably have a bit more fight in me to knock down another one of these idiots, but being a child and a girl, none of my attacks have much punch behind them. No doubt, the instant all three of them recover, I’m going to get my ass kicked.

Do I regret letting anger get the best of me?

“Take this you stupid brat!” I said before I punched Brat Number Two square in the nose.

Nope, not at all. I regret nothing!

“Get her!” shouted Bully Number One as he and Boy Number Three charged towards me. Brat Number Two was down for the count due to the nosebleed I just gave him.

You may be wondering why there were no teachers around to break up this scuffle. To tell the truth, I don’t know either and at the moment, I wish I did. I could use some adult intervention right about now. Bully Number One tackled me to the ground and started yanking at my hair and Boy Number Three joined in with kicking my side. Just wait till I get older, I’m going to murder all three of you in your sleep!

“Our three against one is hardly fair,” interrupted an unfamiliar voice. “And against a girl?”

I huffed in annoyance as I turned to the voice. Black hair, dark eyes, and pale skin… Don’t recognize him, but I do recognize the Uchiha symbol on his shirt. What is with the Uchiha slapping their clan crest on everything they own? Do they think someone’s going to steal their clothes or something? Geez, just how many members of the Uchiha clan am I going to run into?

Not exactly sure how old he is, but he looked at least a good two to three years older than me, if his height was any indication. No hitai-ate, so not a genin yet.

“What, you want to help the dead last?” snorted Bully Number One.

The Uchiha looked thoughtful. “Hmm… it looks like she’s handling herself pretty well,” murmured the boy. “You know, calling her dead last isn’t very nice since she could take all three of you on.”

“What did you say?” snapped Bully Number One.

“Just because you think you’re an Uchiha that you’re a hotshot?” growled Boy Number Three.

… Is he helping me or trying to rile them up further to kick my ass? Never mind, they’re distracted; this is as a good as a time as ever to play dirty. Bully Number One still had my hair in his grip, but a firm kick to the loins was more than enough to loosen his grip. The boy whimpered a protest as I yanked my hair out of his hand and scrambled to get away from them.

Ouch, I hope my side doesn’t bruise; Kushina’s not going to be happy to see that. Boy Number Three roared as he charged after me, but before he could grab my leg, I was scrambling on the floor, the Uchiha stepped in and sent a roundhouse kick to his face.

“Again?” grinned the Uchiha before the three boys scrambled to get away.

“We’ll get you next time Mon!” snapped the boys as they fled.
You cannot believe the relief I felt as I let myself drop to the ground like jelly. I don’t even care that I’m face flat on the dirt with gum in my hair. Man, that was exhausting. I have a lot of work ahead of me, if I’m going to get this body up to standards. Balls, I hate exercise.

“Hey, you still alive?” asked the Uchiha… The hell, he’s still here?

“What do you want?” I sighed in exasperation and sat up, running a hand through my hair. Shit, it’s really in there. I could’ve gotten away with just cutting the surface before, now I really have to cut it. Damn it, I really wanted to learn the demonic hair trick from Kushina.

“Why didn’t call for help?” asked the Uchiha curiously.

“I can handle it.” I answered as I got up and pat the dust off my clothes. “Besides who would come help the dirty little dead last?”

“I think Itachi would,” replied the Uchiha.

I paused and glanced up at him. “Itachi?”

“If you asked that is,” added the boy as he pocketed his hands and glanced up to the tree not too far from us. “He’s not really good with talking to people. Most of the time he just ignores them, but I heard from Mikoto-san that you got him quite riled.”

“Riled and Itachi, in the same sentence?” I guffawed at the thought. “That’s a first.”

“Well, you’re definitely the first girl that he managed to talk to without boring them away,” grinned the Uchiha.

“I’m also the first nut to declare war on him, but he totally ignored my challenge.” I grumbled.

“War?” The Uchiha raised a brow.

“For poking me in the forehead!” I snapped. “I was in the middle of a funny thought and he totally knocked me out of it.” Well, that was one of the excuses… the main one was just indignation that I’ve been bested by a child a sixth of my age.

“You mean like this?” said the boy before he tapped my head with two fingers, in the same exact manner as Itachi.

“What is with you Uchiha poking my forehead? Is there a poke me sign on there or something?” I gave a low growl rubbing my forehead.

The boy sniggered. “More like I’m the one who started this in the first place.”

“How?” I started, puzzled. Who is this guy?

“Aw, Itachi!” gushed the boy as he directed his comment to the tree he stared at earlier. “I didn’t know you looked up to me that much to emulate my affections towards others! I’m touched!”

What?

“I’m not emulating you Shisui,” retorted Itachi as he jumped out from hiding. “I was stopping her from going into another psychotic laughing fit.”

Wait a sec, that little bastard was here the whole time? What the hell? And he just sat
there watching? The little prick, wait until I learn how to use chakra and jutsus because I’m going to—Did he say Shisui?

“You went out of your way to stop her that means you care,” grinned Shisui. “Oh, little Itachi is growing up so fast!”

“Shisui, you sound like an old man,” deadpanned Itachi.

“That just means I’m wise beyond my years,” chirped the older Uchiha.

…What the hell is going on here? Did I slip into some weird alternative universe or something? Itachi’s being… a kid for a change. Isn’t there a rule somewhere that says he has to act like a mini-adult at all times? Wait! Don’t tell me this is the Road to Ninja reality! Oh good god… What weird shit am I in for?

Did I ensure the survival of Menma? Shit! Konoha’s going to get blown up! Calm down Kasa, calm down. Don’t panic, you’re overlooking something. Kakashi’s a stoic bastard; he’s not the happy go lucky idiot. Minato’s badass awesome, he’ll become the Fourth Hokage, you’ll see! You’re safe, Konoha’s safe. But what the hell is with this social Itachi? Breathe Kasa, breathe! Oh gods, I’m going to hyperventilate, someone get me a paper bag!

With all these thoughts were running through my brain, my body stayed perfectly still on the outside. I don’t think I register what happened while I was having a mental breakdown, but before I could pass out from my inner turmoil, I felt another annoying tap to my forehead.

“Stop dazing off,” said Itachi as he snapped out of my thoughts with another poke.

“Poke my head one more time and you will come to school looking like a duck tomorrow!” I threatened. “I know where you live!”

Shisui whistled. “That’s quite a threat Kasa-chan. You’re going to be able to carry that out?”

“I can—” Another poke.

“I accept your challenge,” said Itachi as he lowered his arm.

“Itachi,” chided Shisui with mirth.

“You’re on!” I roared.

When classes were over, I made my way to Obito’s apartment. On days that Kushina and Minato were out in missions I stayed with Obito. He no longer lived in the Uchiha district since his denouncement of his clan, but with his chunin salary, he managed on his own. The council accepted his decision and approved his actions in giving Kakashi his sharingan. Fugaku was not happy to say the least.

Obito stayed with us in Minato and Kushina’s apartment for a short duration until he found his own place. The other reason was that Minato wanted to keep an eye on the former Uchiha in case Fugaku and the clan wanted to pull something in retaliation of Obito’s actions. None of this was told to me directly, but I’ve managed to piece together the picture from the snippets of conversation I managed to overhear when they thought I wasn’t listening.

“I’m home!” I shouted as I crashed into Obito’s apartment. “Obito! Are you here? I need help pranking a Uchiha!” I kicked off my shoes at the door and darted into the living area. “Obito!”
No one was home. I huffed, slightly miffed that he wasn’t home yet, but there was a note on the dining table. I dropped off my backpack and picked up the little note.

“Emergency mission? Not back till when?” I said in disbelief. “You’ve got to be kidding me! How is it possible that I get ditched so often? What the hell?”

If I were a real kid, I’d probably cry about abandonment and freak out about living alone all by myself. However, since that’s not the case, let’s skip over that crying fit and move on. First thing’s first, I need to deal with the gum in my hair. Plotted the utter embarrassment of the Uchiha heir can wait. I rather not have gum that was in someone else’s mouth stuck to my hair.

Gods, I hate gum, it’s disgusting and it’s not even delicious. I know I’m not a big fan of sweets to begin with, but gum is just a culture for germs in someone’s mouth until they spit it out.

“Let’s see… where are his scissors…” I muttered to myself as I dug through his cabinets for a pair of scissors.

Turns out, Obito doesn’t own a pair of scissors. He has a stash of kunais, shurikens and kitchen knives, but no scissors. Grumbling in annoyance and grabbed a kunai from his stash and went into the bathroom. I’ll just work with what I got. How hard can it be to cut your own hair without a proper pair of scissors?

… Bad idea.

“Well… that could’ve ended better…” I muttered at my own reflection with kunai in hand. My hair was an uneven mess. The front was long and the back was too short and the cuts were jagged and uneven. “…Maybe I should get some feminine help…” I grumbled.

Who can I go to? Kushina’s out on a mission, Rin was probably with Obito if they’re on mission. I could probably go to Hana, since Tsume probably won’t mind, but I have no clue where they lived… There was one other person I could go to…

“Ugh…” I groaned, banging my head against the mirror. “Maybe I should just go to school looking like this tomorrow.” The only other person I could possibly go to was Mikoto in the Uchiha district and I really didn’t want to see Itachi again, unless it was to prank the crap out of him.

Yes, I have a grudge with a four-year-old. I’m petty, deal with it.

I glared at my reflection. Screw what the hell the kids say; I’m going to be annoyed with this uneven mess on my head. I need symmetry or at least asymmetrical hair. This wild mess is unacceptable! Grumbling, I cleaned up the mess of hair I made on the bathroom floor before making my way to the Uchiha house.

My hair gained quite a few stares, but I didn’t bother hiding the messy mop. Why bother? It’s too hot to be wearing a hoodie. Konoha was in the dead of summer and it is hot. Maybe not as hot as a desert since there’s an abundance of shade from all the trees, but still hot enough that no one wants to wear more than a tank top and shorts.

“Hello Mikoto-san! Anyone home?” I called out at the entryway.

“Kasa-chan?” I hear Mikoto’s voice coming from the hallway before she appeared around the corner. Her footsteps were so quiet I barely heard her coming. I guess even retired, she still retained her skills as a shinobi. “What a surprise, Itachi didn’t say you were—Oh my goodness! What happened to your hair?”
I gave a sheepish grin. “I got some gum in it. I tried to cut it myself, but Obito didn’t have scissors at home. Can you help me fix it? Kushina-san is out on a mission and won’t be back for a while.”

Mikoto made her way over to me as she ran her hand through my plum-red hair. “What did you use to cut it then?”

“Kunai.” I answered.

“Obito gave you a kunai?” snapped Mikoto in disbelief. “And Minato let you use it without supervision?”

“Actually, Minato-san is on a mission too. I was supposed to stay with Obito, but he got an emergency mission and left a note saying he’ll take a couple of days. I found the kunai in his room.” I answered.

“They left you alone!” roared Mikoto. “I am going to have a word with Obito when he gets back! Uchiha or not, that was irresponsible of him to just leave you! Kasa-chan, you’re staying with us until they come back.”

“Wait, what?” I protested. “I can take care of myself! I know how to cook and everything!”

“No, you’re staying,” refuted Mikoto. “After I fix your hair, we are going to go get your things and you’re coming here.”

“Uh… I think I’m just going to go to school like this tomorrow! See you Mikoto-san!” I shouted as I tried to dart off, but the woman was fast. She grabbed onto the back of my shirt and hauled me into the house.

“Come here Kasa-chan! You’re not going anywhere looking like that!” said the Uchiha matron firmly.

I sulked as she lugged me through the house like a kicked puppy.

“…You came through the front door?” Itachi raised a brow when he spotted me in the hallway. “What happened to your hair?”

“Oh shut it!” I grumbled with a pout.

“Itachi, go prepare the guest room. Kasa-chan is staying with us for a while,” said Mikoto as she adjusted her grip on me.

The little prodigy tilted his head in question at me, but said nothing as he went off as his mother requested.

I didn’t get to turn Itachi into a duck as I promised. Mikoto had an eye like a hawk and made sure I kept my manners during the entirety of my stay. Apparently, she was more than familiar with Kushina’s incurable prankster days and the fact that my first impression on her was less than stable, she made sure I didn’t fall into any laughing fits either. Oh, did I mention Fugaku is a total hard-ass?

We barely just started shuriken lessons in school, but the man already had Itachi on advance shuriken techniques in conjunction with wire strings. I have a feeling that there might be some chakra techniques behind it as well.
“If you’re going to watch, you might as well join,” grunted the man during the third morning of my stay.

“Really?” I was surprised he offered at all.

Though, after several sessions, I’m quite sure he only offered just to see how much more awesome his own son is in comparison. I’m not complaining a free lesson is a free lesson. It’s not like Kushina and Minato are going to be back anytime soon… It does make me wonder, where did they go off? And Obito too, he didn’t say how long his mission was going to take.

How is the war going? No one really talks about it in the village and the sensei at the Academy keeps it hush-hush as if they’re afraid of spooking possible new recruits… I guess that makes sense if the admission rates were down.

“Again!” snapped Fugaku when two of my shurikens missed the stump altogether. Hey, six out of eight isn’t bad!

Of course, Itachi got eight for eight each and every time. By the end of the first week, I’ve managed to get all the shurikens on the target, while not on the mark; it was at least hitting something. How the heck are you supposed to aim these things? The accuracy hit-percentage is total crap on these things. They’re more useful as a distraction unless you find someway to get a hundred percent accuracy. Seeing Itachi’s shuriken hitting the targets dead center only made me a tiny bit jealous.

Remember I said Fugaku was a hard-ass? Yeah, aside from shuriken practices, he also had us going through taijutsu katas and basic chakra molding exercises. Itachi being the genius he is, excelled in everything he was taught, absorbing everything like a sponge. I on the other hand got a nasty tongue lashing from Fugaku every time I stepped out of place.

“Kasa! You’re doing wrong! Start over!” snapped the grumpy man.

I fought a groan and whine as I restarted from the first stance. Obito, where are you? Come back already! I don’t want to stay with the stuck up Uchiha Clan! They won’t let me sleep in late and they won’t let me wear tank tops even though it’s so hot!

Oh yeah, I totally didn’t tell you about the tank top thing! There’s something about old clans or just traditional families in general that utterly freaks out when you show a little bit of skin. Mind you, I’m only four, there’s nothing worth looking at and a tank top is hardly indecent. Even so, Mikoto insisted I wear a tee shirt or something that covers my shoulder whenever I’m around Fugaku.

That is beyond ridiculous! I can’t wait for Kushina and Minato to come back and then I could go home and wear whatever the hell I want. They totally have no problem with me wearing tank tops. There shouldn’t be a damn problem with me wearing tank tops!

“How’s living with Itachi?” grinned Hana wryly. “You’ve been there for how long? Like two weeks?”

“Two and a half.” I grumbled darkly. Where the hell were Obito, Kushina and Minato?

“Is it going to be permanent?” teased Hana. “The other kids are saying that you might just get—”

“Finish that sentence and I will end you.” I growled. What is with the kids in this world? They are in serious need of TV and violent video games!
Hana sniggered as her ninkens napped next to us. They’ve gotten bigger since I first met them. Before they were tiny little darlings, now they’re about the size of a typical medium dog. If I guess their breed right, maybe huskies, they could get fairly big. Though… I don’t think they’ll get as big as Akamaru after the time-skip, but man, that’d be cool to be able to ride them like a horse.

“Your grades are improving, you’re not at the bottom of the rankings anymore,” noted Hana. “Did you get some tips from Itachi?”

“No.” I puffed my cheeks. I got tips from his dad instead.

Surprising to say, Fugaku’s not a bad teacher. A hard-ass taskmaster, but he knows his stuff. It also helped that there were more practical lessons nowadays. So far, my favorite class was taijutsu, mainly because I get to beat the tar out of every single one of these snot-nosed brats. Hey, I girl’s got to vent. Even so, I can’t beat Itachi.

I’m getting the feeling that I won’t be able to catch up to him at all, if ever.

“Grr…” growled Hana’s ninkens as they jumped to their feet. The hair on the back of their neck flared up as they circled around us and stood guard protectively.

“Hai, Ma, Ru?” said Hana with a frown. The ninkens were known as the Three Haimaru Brothers, but Hana calls them each by a part of that name.

“What’s wrong?” I asked and stared off towards the direction the dogs growled at.

BOOM!

We let out a yelp as the ground shook. Screams went through the grounds as a good number of students stumbled and fell in surprise.

“Kasa!” shouted Itachi as he and Shisui made their way towards us.

“What’s going on?” I asked as I pushed myself off the ground.

“We need to get to the shelters,” said Shisui as he grabbed my hand and helped me up.

“The shelters? Are we under attack?” I asked turning my attention back towards the direction the ninkens were looking at. I don’t remember about any mention of a direct attack on Konoha during the Third Shinobi War. What’s going…on?

“Shit.” I hissed out when I saw what was at the distance.

“What is that?” whispered Hana as she stared at the huge creature in the distance.

“It’s a demon,” said Shisui with finality. “We have to move now! Grab whoever you can and drag them with you to the shelter. We need to clear out so the jounins and chunins could have a fighting chance. If they have to defend us while fighting, we’re all going to die.”

“Why… is this happening?” I stared at the tailed beast raging in the distance.

“Kasa! We need to go!” Hana grabbed my arm and dragged me along.

My eyes stayed glued to the flailing tails as the beast crashed into the village over and over again. The screams, the destruction I could hear it so clearly.

“Why is this happening?” I found myself repeating, trying to make sense of the whole
situation. My face paled when I realized what was wrong. “I changed something.” I stopped in my tracks.

“Kasa!” snapped Hana as she yanked at my arm, trying to get me to continue.

I changed something… and now Konoha’s under attack by a tailed beast, the three-tailed turtle, Isobu.

“What… have I done?” I croaked.
Screams coursed through the air as panic and chaos reigned. My mind shut down the instant I saw and recognized Isobu, the three-tailed beast. Everything happening to Konoha right now is my fault. Before my intervention, this attack on Konoha would never happen because he would never have gotten close enough to the village. Kakashi would’ve killed his jinchuriki long before it made it here.

What changed? What did I change? I saved Obito. Do you know what that means? Rin who was kidnapped and made a jinchuriki against her will, won’t die. Obito won’t let that happen, he swore to protect her. Konoha is under attack because I saved him... this was my fault. What happens if the parents of the Rookie Nine died because of this? What happens if the key players are gone?

I felt the tears weld up in my eyes. What should I do? What could I do? What about Kyubi’s attack? How many more people are going to die there? Would the village be standing if that happens? Did I make a mistake? Is everything going to end here and now? My hands shook as I clasped them against my forehead, desperate to still them.

I'm scared.

“Tou-san, Obito… Kushina-san.” I whimpered quietly, wishing they were here.

“Kasa,” whispered Itachi, drawing me out of my thoughts again. “You’re letting the silence get to you again.”

“So? I don’t feel like talking.” I sniffled. We sat in the dimness of the shelters in the Hokage Monument as the sounds of fighting continued outside.

“I could keep the silence away for you if you want,” offered the boy.

“How?” I rubbed away the unshed tears at my eyes.

“Focus on my voice,” started Itachi as he turned to face me directly. “Think of this like our meditation training exercise.”

“I don’t think listening to you giving me training tips would help.” I grumbled childishly. I don't feel like being strong right now. I want to cry.

“Just listen,” said Itachi firmly. “Block out everything else. The echoes in here, the fighting outside. Make sure the only thing you can hear is me.”

“...That kind of defeats the purpose doesn’t it? You don’t really talk and it’ll just be silent again.” I joked, but the mirth didn’t reach my voice or my eyes.

“Listen to me,” repeated Itachi patiently. “Only my voice and nothing else. Can you do that?”

“Sure, why not?” I said as I took a deep breath and blocked out all the other distractions. Hear just his voice and only his voice, nothing else.

“Am I the only thing you hear?” asked Itachi.
“Yeah.” I nodded, with my eyes still closed.

“Good, now listen closely Kasa. I’m only going to say this once,” warned Itachi. “If you miss it I won’t say it again.”

“Okay?” I frowned. I felt him shift closer until I could feel his breath on my ear… Hey! Personal bubble space Itachi… What the hell are you doing?

“Listen closely,” whispered the boy.

I resisted the urge to back away.

“To the extreme,” said Itachi with the most deadpan voice possible.

What?

A snort escaped from my lips when I register what he said. I quickly slapped my hands to my mouth before I fell over laughing. Oh god, this guy! I tried my damnest not to fill the shelter with my laughter, but I’m quite sure I’m failing and getting many odd looks.

“Itachi, what did you do to her?” asked Shisui when he broke away from his classmates and made it to our side.

“I just said a couple of words, that’s all,” noted Itachi as he shifted back into his seat.

“…What did you say? I’ve never see her laugh so hard,” said Hana in bafflement. Her ninkens stared at me oddly with the tilt of their heads.

Itachi remained quiet, he probably still doesn’t get why I find that so hilarious.

“Oh goodness, I needed that.” I gasped out after gathering my breath.

“You gave us a scare when you froze up at the academy,” said Hana.

“Yeah, I just had… some bad thoughts, that’s all.” I scratched the back of my head.

“Are you feeling better though?” asked Shisui.

“…Not really, I’ll feel better if that thing outside stopped attacking.” I murmured, rubbing my bandaged arms.

Don’t misunderstand me, I’m not into the bandaged look, hell it’s a pain in the ass to wake up in the morning to wrap my arms everyday, but Kushina insisted I hide the seals. I would get those arm thingies Sasuke used, but that tends to slide compared to bandages.

“Yeah, I wonder how they’re doing out there?” murmured Shisui as he glanced towards the small glimpse of sunlight peeking into the shelters. “Wish we could do something to help.”

I sighed dejectedly as I curled up my knees and rested my chin on top. How did things turn for the worse so quickly? I might have stopped Madara from taking Obito, but with the things going the way it is, he might still get Obito if Rin dies in this mess. With this attack, key players might not exist for when he comes back as Tobi. I’ve made such a mess of things.

To make things worse, Kushina and Minato, the village’s best seal masters weren’t even here! I need to fix this somehow! But how? I can’t do anything! I’m not a seal master. Hell, I’m not even a genin! How the heck do I take down a demon that’s the size of a skyscraper when even
seasoned jounin have trouble with them?

Think Kasa; you know the situation better than anyone else here. There must be something you can do that no one else here can. I gnawed on my lower lip in thought. I have foreknowledge, great, but I have no power to back that up. Oh, what I’d give to get some power right now then I could…

I blinked, glancing down at my arms, Kaa-san’s seals. I have a freaking cheat code here and I’m not even using it! A frown crossed my face, but I don’t know if I could use it. The last time I activated the seal, I got sent to the hospital. The hokage and Kushina made me promise not to use it unless a seal master or an iryo-nin supervised me, but then again I did have training… With the chaos outside, I don’t think I have much of a choice.

“Kasa,” interrupted Itachi. “What are you planning?”

“Nothing.” I said innocently.

“I know that look on your face,” noted the boy.

“What look?” I feigned cluelessness.

“You have it every time you realized you decide on some prank you want to do with Obito,” said the boy dryly. “It’s very obvious.”

“Really?” I asked before realizing I just ousted myself.

“What are you planning?” asked Itachi again.

I tried to think of ways around this, but the look of no nonsense on his face told me it’d be hopeless. “I want to help.”

“Kasa, you’re an academy student. You can’t help,” said Shisui firmly.

“But I can! I think…” I protested lamely.

“How? You can’t even beat Itachi. How are you going to go up a demon?” asked Shisui. “This isn’t a game Kasa.”

“I’m not treating it like a game!” Okay, that’s a lie; I’m totally going to cheat code the crap out of this thing. “I know I can do something! Or at least buy enough time for someone to do something!”

“How?” Hana asked.

“That’s the issue, I need to find the answer first.” I said, scratching at my bandages. I should probably remove them before I activate the seals.

“The marks on your arms,” remarked Itachi. “They’re seals aren’t they?”

I shouldn’t be surprised he figured it out, living nearly three weeks with him; he’d seen me wrap them in the morning. “Yeah, they’re knowledge seals. Maybe there’s something in there that we can use. If we can’t we could at least tell one of the sensei.”

“Are you sure?” frowned Itachi. “Have you even used them before?”

“Yeah!” I retorted with a huff. “I know how it works. Kushina-san and Minato-san had
been training me!” Another lie, they’ve been training me in seals recognition and controlling my activator skills.

“Kasa…” He didn’t look like he believed me.

“I’ll be fine!” I waved it off. “Though… get sensei if something goes wrong.”

Their eyes widened. “Something goes—”

I didn’t give them a chance to finish as I charged up chakra in my hand and slapped it down over my bandages, no time to unravel them now. I need to do this before they get someone to stop me. The familiar rush of information hit me as I concentrated solely on how to deal with tailed beasts and how to contain them.

There were a number of seals that could be used for creating jinchuriki and a number to restrain the beast to buy time. All I couldn’t use, because I can’t make seals. I gritted my teeth as I delved deeper into the information. I need something I could use without needing to make seals! I need something that would keep Rin alive!

Rings.

“Rings?” I frowned. “What the hell does rings have to… oh…”

“Kasa! Let go of your arm right now!” Shisui’s voice snapped through the haze of information as he and Itachi yanked my hand away from my arm.

“Kasa-chan! Are you all right?” asked Hana as she pressed a tissue to my nose to stem the stream of blood.

My eyes blinked rapidly as the images slowly faded. This wasn’t as bad as last time. I could still move.

“Kasa! Kasa, can you hear us?” snapped Itachi. He sounded almost angry.

“I got it.” I whispered.

“Kasa?” repeated Hana worriedly.

“I totally had it!” I whooped for joy as I jumped away from them and darted out towards the entrance.

“Kasa Mon! Where do you think you’re go—”

“Sorry sensei! I got to go to the bathroom!” I shouted as I darted under him and zipped my way out.

I’m such an idiot! I had it all along! I knew there was something special about it! I just didn’t know what it was! Oh man, this is going to be the best cheat code ever! Well… sort of. If I fail, I’ll probably die a painful death. If I succeed, I’ll probably live about a decade or two shorter than what I’m supposed to, but who cares? Either I lose a couple of years near the end of my life or I die by the paws of the tailed beasts. Like I said, if I’m going to die, it better damn well be by my own mistakes!

“Kasa! What the hell are you doing out here?” snapped Kakashi when I made my way to the scene.
“Where’s Obito?” I asked.

“Kasa, go back to the shelter! It’s not safe here!” ordered Kakashi.

“But I could help!” I retorted.

“This isn’t a game Kasa! Go back!” The silver-haired jounin glared at me.

“I’m not playing! I can stop it!” I snapped back. Screw secrets, we’re short on time.

“That’s Rin-san up there right? I can save her!”

Kakashi stopped. “…How did you…?”

“I just need to get close enough! I can stop it and save Rin-san. If you won’t tell me where Obito is, then you have to get me close enough!” I said.

“There is no way I’m—”

“We don’t have time for this! The longer we take, the more of the village it destroys! Obito said you’re a genius and prodigy! Well use that genius brain of yours! If we don’t stop it now, they’re going to kill Rin-san to stop this!” I argued.

Conflict rushed through Kakashi’s eyes in both his normal and sharingan eye before he eventually gave in. “How close do you need to go?”

“Get me to the closest tail first. Then get ready to go to the next after I’m done.” I said as I yanked down my collar and pulled out the string of charms Tesuri gave me before he left. I yanked off the five rings dangling on the charms and slipped all five onto my index finger.

“You better know what you’re doing.” said Kakashi as he picked me up and darted towards the ginormous body of the three-tailed beast. It’s going to be hell to get to all the necessary points with the distance between them, but we have to try I suppose.

It took Kakashi ten minutes to race through rooftops to the first tail of Isobu. The tailed flailed so violently it was hard to focus on it.

“Can you get onto that tail?” I asked as we drew closer. “I don’t have enough chakra to set it off at this range.”

“On it,” said Kakashi as he body flickered his way to the tail and attached his feet to the tail. “Hurry up, I can’t hold this position for long.”

“Got it!” I said as I slid the ring off with my thumb and pressed it against the tail. With a pulse of chakra the ring glowed and sunk into the tail. A roar came from above as the beast stopped moving forward. His other tails still thrashing and struggling to make the one I disabled, move. “Next one!”

“Hold on,” murmured Kakashi as he body flickered once more. It took three flickers before he managed to the next tail.

I was a little green by the time he landed on the tail, but kept down the urge to hurl as I slid off the next ring and repeated the process on the second tail. The ring glowed and sunk into it just like the last one. “Next——” I covered my mouth, swallowing down the bile that rose up.

“You okay?” asked Kakashi.
“Just keep going!” I said before he flickered again. This time it was a bit harder, Isobu was flailing and thrashing like a rampant elephant, nearly flipping onto its back. “Hurry up Kakashi! We got to get the other one before he flips backwards onto the village!”

“I’m going as fast as I can!” snapped the silver-haired jounin as he flickered towards the last tail.

The instant he landed I slipped off the next ring and slapped it onto the tail with a pulse of chakra. The ring glowed and sunk in.

“What is this?” roared Isobu furiously.

“Three down! Let’s get one of the arms before heading towards the head. That should keep it still enough for the last one.” I said.

“I can’t believe this is working,” murmured Kakashi as he flickered once more. I wonder how many more of those could he dish out? He’s practically running the length of the four corners of Konoha with the size of Isobu. Let’s hope we can stop him completely before he gets any further into the village.

“Hurry up Kasa!” shouted Kakashi as he landed on the arm.

I slapped another ring into the arm with a pulse of chakra.

“No!” roared Isobu as he thrashed wildly with his remaining arm. “I will not succumb to you!”

“Can you keep going?” I asked when he started running up Isobu’s arm instead of flickering. He must be exhausted.

“Just one more.” He gritted his teeth.

“Kakashi!” roared Obito. “I’m not going to let you kill Rin!”

“Shit,” hissed Kakashi. “Obito! You have to listen! We can—”

Too late, Obito caught him square in the jaw with a punch. Kakashi lost his grip on me.

“Obito!” I screamed as I began to plummet towards the ground.

“Kasa?” The former Uchiha snapped out of his anger.

“Damn it Obito! She was going to save Rin!” shouted Kakashi.

“I thought—”

“Obito!” The rest of the conversation was lost as I screamed. Shit, I’m going to fall to my death! What the hell do I do? WHAT THE HELL DO I DO?

“Kuchiyose no Jutsu!” shouted a rough voice from a distance.

I strained to turn my head as the wind pressure as a large cloud of smoke faded and a giant toad stood in its place. A studded tongue shot out of its mouth and snatched me out of the air.

“Oh god, this is disgusting!” I can’t help but scream.
“Jiraiya, you better teach this child some respect or I will eat her,” warned the toad boss.

“Hear that little girl? That’s not very nice, Gamabunta saved you,” chided an amused voice as the tongue dropped me on top of Gamabunta’s head. I stumbled before a hefty hand caught me by the shoulder. “Okay there, kid?”

I glanced up and my jaw dropped. Spiky white hair, red stripe markings, cocky grin. “Jiraiya…” I said in awe.

“Ha!” chortled the man. “Glad to know I’m still famous with the younger generation! Small talk aside. What were you doing up there little girl?”

I snapped out of my awe and glanced down to the last ring on my finger. “I need to get to the top of his head! He won’t stop unless the last seal is on him! Please, can you get me there?” I begged.

“Seal?” Jiraiya raised a brow.

“My mother is an Uzumaki, I’m staying with Kushina-san and Minato-san. I can answer any questions you want, but we need to stop that first!”

The man took one glance at me, then the tailed beast. “I’ll hold you on that,” said Jiraiya before he turned his attention to Gamabunta. “Give us a boost old friend, and if you can, keep that arm of his busy, will you?”

Gamabunta snorted. “You better bring some high quality sake the next time you summon me!”

“Of course, of course. Have I ever walked out on a promise?” chuckled Jiraiya as he picked me up. “All right little lady, here we go!”

I really hate getting hauled around like a sack of potatoes. Gamabunta shot us towards the tailed beast and Jiraiya made quick work of latching onto the spikes on Isobu’s head.

“Hurry up kid,” said Jiraiya as he lowered me to the beast’s face.

“HUMAN!” roared Isobu as I sent the last ring into his eye with a chakra pulse. “NO!” He screamed before his body completely stopped.

“Done?” asked Jiraiya.

I gave an exhausted sigh. “For now. I need to do one last thing, can you put me down, near his eye?”

“What exactly are you doing?” asked Jiraiya as he swung us over to Isobu’s eye.

“Getting whoever’s in there, out.” I answered. “Whew… I hope I have enough for this…” I pressed my hands against the eye and took a deep breath before sending another pulse of chakra through.

Oh yeah, I should probably explain what the hell I’ve been doing all this time. Remember the string of charms Tesuri gave me way back when? Apparently, those charms were seals. Who knew right? I sure as hell didn’t! I thought it was some stupid trinket.

Anyway, there are ten in total, I have no clue what the other five does, but the five rings I
just used? Yeah, those are elemental seals, five in total. Sound familiar? It should, because Orochimaru used it once on Naruto. These five seals could do the same exact thing as the Five Elements Seal when used in conjunction with one another.

That’s right, this baby is a power disruptor. As long as I can get all five on fairly vital areas, I can disrupt the shit out of his chakra core. No chakra, no control, no movement! Game over sucker! Now is the hard part. Since I set each of the seals separately rather than all at once. Each seal could do only so much on its own.

If I want to knock Isobu off its ass and have Rin back in control, I need to connect all five seals, which means I’m going to have to exert a lot of chakra to reach the far corners of this fat ass. Remember what I said about possibly losing my life earlier? Since I don’t have the necessary amount of chakra needed to pull this stunt off, I’m doing a conversion. Trading years for energy.

The whole process will take a while to explain, so I’ll spare you the majority of the details. Thank god the conversion method is intuitive for activators because there was no way in hell I could pull this off after seeing it once.

Rather than bore you, I’ll give you the short version. Natural activators have the bonus of converting their life energy into chakra for immediate use. The trade off, depending how much you convert, that energy takes away years from your total life span.

Say, I’m supposed to live to a hundred, if I use the conversion method, like say to shoot enough chakra through a freaking beast, I would have spent about ten to twenty years of my life to do so in my current skill set and chakra reserve. So instead of a hundred, I’ll live till I’m eighty… given I don’t die before then.

Of course, if I screw up, it’ll suck out everything I have and I’ll just drop dead here, but haha what are the chances of…
Uh… I think I’m dead… but I’m not sure… I’m really bad at this dying business. I hope I don’t get reborn into another brat again. Seriously, I don’t think I can handle another set of parents and dealing with growing up a third time. Do you think the shinigami would give me a frequent decease card? Ooh, maybe I get a free ice cream cone for every ten deaths I go through.

Yeah, I should really find a way to cope with that joking thing. It’s becoming a habit whenever something bad or traumatic happens I start throwing out really and I mean really bad jokes.

I wonder how everyone is doing. Hopefully, I managed to knock out enough Isobu’s chakra for Rin to regain her body and maybe Obito doesn’t go completely nuts and join Madara. That is if she’s still alive. Do I want to know how badly I screwed up? Kushina will be furious when she finds out about the stunt I pulled. At that thought, maybe it’s a good thing I’m dead. She can’t kill me if I’m already dead right?

Man, I should stop thinking about such depressing thoughts. This place is already pretty dark and quiet… I don’t really need such a downer mood. Oh well, I said it before right? If I were going to screw up and get myself killed, it’d be my own mistake… Kind of wish that I survived it though… I didn’t even get to see Naruto and the others.

“Kasa…”

Hmm? I peered through the darkness. Was someone calling my name?

“Kasa-chan…!”

It was! Someone was calling my name! I tried to look, but I couldn’t move. Panic filled me as I struggled, why couldn’t I move? Move! My breath hitched as I struggled, but then a low whisper hushed me. Slowly, warmth touched my head and gripped me by the hand, seeping into my very bones. I let out a sigh as I melted at the warmth.

So warm… it was like… healing chakra? Wait, what? I’m not dead?

“Kasa-chan’s waking up!” exclaimed a familiar voice, but I couldn’t make it out whose it was.

I furrowed my brow before breaking through the darkness. Blearily, I blinked away the fuzz as the scent of antiseptic hit my nose. Ugh… was I at the hospital again?

“Kasa! You’re finally awake!” cried Kushina’s choked up voice. It sounded like she cried.

I blinked some more before everything cleared. “…Hey, you’re back.” I said weakly. “Did I screw up?”

Kushina cried as she held onto me tightly. I tried to raise a hand to pat her on the back, but realized someone was holding onto my hand, pulsing small amounts of chakra into me. It was so warm… I craned my head slightly and saw it was Rin holding onto my hand.

Oh good, she’s alive… that means Obito is still around…
“Kasa-chan, why would you do something so reckless? I thought we told you, you can’t use those seals until you’re better trained!” screamed Kushina. “And on top of that, you used a high level seal without supervision! What were you thinking? You don’t even know how to cancel seals yet. If Jiraiya-sama wasn’t there to cut you off, the seals would’ve killed you!”

Jiraiya? Oh right, he’s a seal master too. Lucky for me because I seriously forgot I didn’t learn how to do cancel seals yet… Whoops, I guess the down side of using Somuku’s seals is that I think I could do what she could, but in reality I have no clue. Yeah, I better make of list of things I can and can’t do before using those seals next time.

“Kushina-san, she helped save me and the village,” said Rin quietly.

“And she nearly got herself killed doing so! We were supposed to be the ones protecting the village! We should’ve been able to handle a tailed beast, not her,” snapped Kushina before she noticed the guilty look on the girl’s face. “…Sorry Rin, that’s not what I meant. It’s not your fault.”

Rin raised a hand to press against the side of her face as she fought back tears. “No, it’s my fault. If I could’ve convinced Obito and Kakashi to kill me before we got back to the village, this would’ve never happened.”

“Don’t say that Rin,” interrupted Minato. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“I was the one that got captured! I was the one they turned into a jinchuriki! If it wasn’t me, Kakashi and Obito would have had no problem killing me and stopping this from happening!” argued the distraught girl.

“Rin, I know you love the village and you would do anything to keep it safe, but it’s not your fault. You couldn’t have controlled this,” said Minato firmly.

“But the village…” whimpered Rin as she wiped her eyes against her sleeves.

I’m so sorry… This isn’t her fault at all. It was mine. I was the one that changed things. She shouldn’t be holding all this guilt and blaming herself. I need to fix this, but how? Her tears continued to pour, but her hand never released mine, still steadily pulsing chakra into my body… There’s that I suppose.

“Rin-san…” I tugged at her hand. “You’re a big fat liar.”

“What?” She snapped her attention to me.

“Kasa!” scolded Kushina, but I ignored her.

“You promised you were going to teach me iryo-ninjutsu… If you died who’s going to teach me?” I whined, but it didn’t quite make it to my voice with how tired I was.

“Kasa-chan…” whispered Rin. “You almost died because of me and you still might.”

“But I didn’t. You’re keeping me alive, right?” I asked raising our hands. “You have iryo-ninjutsu. Even if someone gets hurt, you can save them. Who’s going to save Obito and Kakashi when they get hurt?”

“Kasa’s right Rin, you need to stick around,” joined Minato, seeing what I was trying to do. “Knowing those two, they’re going to be completely lost without you. Can you imagine the fights they’ll get into with each other?”
“But I…” Rin choked back more tears. “I’m a danger to the village. It could happen again. The tailed beast can come loose again and I’ll put everyone in danger.”

“That learn to control it,” said Kushina.

“I don’t know—” She started, but the red-haired kunoichi planted a hand on her shoulder.

“I’ll teach you,” declared Kushina with a grin. “You’re not the only jinchuriki here.”

Rin’s eyes widened. “Kushina-san, you’re…”

“Yep! I’ve got the biggest and the baddest right here,” boasted the woman as she patted her stomach. “If I can control Kyubi, you can control the measly Sanbi. Of course, Kasa-chan is going to help too.”

What? I glanced up tiredly at them. How the hell am I supposed to help, woman? I nearly died! Hell, I might still be on my deathbed right now!

“Are you sure you want to include Kasa-chan on this?” asked Minato.

“Knowing her,” started Kushina, giving me the stink eye. “She’s going to keep pulling off these dangerous stunts regardless what we say.”

I shrunk into my pillow. She’s going to kill me… I should’ve stayed dead…

Kushina sighed before a sheepish grin reached her face. “Even though she doesn’t share my name, Kasa’s an Uzumaki through and through. She’s not going to back down if she thinks there’s something she can do. Why try to keep her from danger when she’s going to keep finding it?”

She’s… not going to kill me?

“I guess not,” sighed Minato with a chuckle and a headshake. “I think we should pass on the message that Kasa-chan’s awake now. Everyone’s been worried sick.”

“She’ll need plenty of rest too,” added Rin, clasping her other hand over mine. “You can go on, I’m still in the middle of a chakra transfusion. I’ll be here for a while.”

Minato nodded before he turned to Kushina. “Come on, we should let Kasa-chan rest,” said the man.

Kushina pulled me into another hug before pressing a kiss to my forehead. “Feel better okay? We’ll come visit you real soon.”

“Bye…” I whispered with a wave before they both left. Rin and I sat in silence for a brief moment before I decided the silence was unbearable. Even in exhaustion, I can’t stand the quiet. “Rin-san, how’s Obito? He looked really angry at Kakashi earlier.”

The girl jumped at my question, but settled down after hearing my question. “He was here until a couple of hours ago. Kakashi dragged him off to eat something and get some rest.”

“Hours?” I frowned. “How long was I here?”

“Days,” murmured the girl quietly.

“Days!” My eyes widened. Just how many days?
“We all thought you were going to die. Your heart stopped several times,” answered Rin.

My heart stopped how many times? Holy shit, I’m really bad at dying! Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

“Actually, she should be dead,” said a deep voice.

I glanced towards the speaker, surprised that they came in without Rin noticing.

“Jiraiya-sama!” greeted Rin.

The man gave a slight wave before turning his attention to me. “Hey little girl, how you feeling?”

I rolled my eyes as if he really needed to ask. He chuckled at my response and took a seat at the foot of my bed.

“So, have you looked in the mirror recently?” asked the man.

I frowned. The mirror? What, did I disfigure my face or something?

“She just woke up, Jiraiya-sama. We haven’t gotten a chance to tell her yet,” said Rin.

“Tell me what?” I asked looking between her and Jiraiya.

“Well, let me enlighten you then,” grinned Jiraiya. “You little girl, should be dead.”

Oh, geez thanks, that’s nice to hear. I wanted to spat out, but I held my tongue. There’s something odd about this whole situation.

“But you’re not, because I’m awesome,” boasted the man.

“Huh?” I got nothing.

“Take a look for yourself,” said Jiraiya as he pulled out a mirror and flipped it open.

I weakly grabbed the mirror in his hand and lifted to my face. I don’t see anything different. Same face, same nose, same green eyes, same plum-red hair and same purple dia—wait a sec, there’s a purple diamond tattooed to my head!

“What is that?” I frowned, adjusting the mirror for a better look.

“A Yin seal,” answered Jiraiya. “Took me ages to figure it out how Tsunade made it, but when you were dying everything became so clear. I’ve got to thank you for that kid!”

“Uh… Your welcome?” What else could I say? And what the hell is with people tattooing seals on my body? The hell man? At this rate I’m going to have more seals than skin!

“So kid, do you know what exactly does that seal do?” grinned Jiraiya.

“No?” It sounds vaguely familiar; doesn’t Tsunade use that to heal or something? I don’t remember. It’s not like she takes the center stage for fights often.

“It stores energy that you could use at a later time. It’s an ingenious seal if you ask me. Keeping it as a backup incase you ever run low on chakra,” continued Jiraiya. “Which, you do need considering you just took off twenty years in your life.”
“…But…” I frowned. “Don’t you need to store chakra before you can use it? I thought I ran out…”

“You did,” said Jiraiya with a serious look. “Like I said, by all accounts you should be dead.”

“Then why aren’t I?” I asked.

“My stupid student and his girlfriend had been teaching you about seals right?” asked Jiraiya. “You can recognize most of them on sight and by feel?”

I nodded.

“Good, that’s not the only seal on you,” said Jiraiya.

“I know that.” I answered and raised my free arm to show him.

“Not that one,” said Jiraiya before he placed a hand on my stomach and sent a pulse of chakra into my stomach and I felt the familiar squiggly lines moving against the surface of my skin.

Oh, hell no! With great emphasis on the z. Another fucking seal? What the hell? What is this one for? I know I’m not a freaking jinchuriki because we just had this conversation. Rin is Sanbi’s jinchuriki and Kushina made it quite clear that she’s still the Kyubi’s jinchuriki. So what the hell? What the hell did they put on me?

“Can you feel that?” asked Jiraiya.

“…Yeah, but what is it?” I asked.

“This is the Four-Symbol Seal,” explained Jiraiya. “It works in conjunction with the Yin Seal on your forehead.”

Yeah, that tells me a lot. “What does that mean?”

“It means, the reason you’re alive is because we sealed half of Sanbi’s chakra into you. The yin half to be exact,” answered Jiraiya. “So like I said, you should be dead, but you’re not. Aren’t you lucky?”

“Okay?” How is that lucky? And why is he telling me all this? Shouldn’t this be considered classified or something?

“Kushina said she will train her along with you right?” asked Jiraiya to Rin. The girl nodded. “Good, now listen up kid. Here’s the deal, under no circumstance you are you tell anyone about your new seals or talk about what happened that day with Sanbi. So that means no bragging to your friends what you did.”

“Uh…okay?” So they’re telling me to get me to shut up? How does that make any sense?

“People know Rin here carries Sanbi, but they know nothing about you carrying the other half of its power. For your safety, do not share this information with anyone and I mean anyone. Not your friends or your sensei,” cautioned Jiraiya.

“Then why tell me? If you didn’t tell me, I wouldn’t have known.” I said getting the question everyone wants to know out of the way. Playing dumb here is not going to help me.

“In any other situation, you would never be informed about this, but since Kushina and
Minato started training you in the sealing arts,” grimaced the man. “You would’ve eventually figured out the new souvenirs you picked up from this mess.”

“Right…” I murmured. I guess that makes sense. “I could keep a secret. I’m good with secrets!”

Jiraiya chuckled and ruffled my hair. “Good, now that’s over. I have some questions for you.”

I scrunched up my face. Really? You drop a bomb like this on me and you’re not going to give me a moment to rest?

“Don’t give me that look, you said I can ask you anything if I helped,” countered the man.

“Fine.” I huffed. It’s not like I have much of a choice.

“How did you know Rin was the one inside of Sanbi?” asked Jiraiya. “I spoke with Kakashi, he said you specifically noted that it was Rin in there to get him to help. Now, how did you know?”

I tensed up. Shit, how am I supposed to explain that?

“I’m waiting little girl,” drawled the man.

“…” What should I say? “I don’t know…”

“You don’t know? Or you don’t want to tell me?” said Jiraiya calmly.

“…I don’t know how to tell you?” I squeaked.

“Why don’t you try then?” said the Sannin with a raised brow.

“…” Come on think Kasa, don’t blow your cover! They’re totally going to ship you to T&I if you screw up now! “I see things… and hear things…?”

“Hmm?” hummed Jiraiya.

“They’re not very clear all the time though…” I murmured trying to force myself back into the silence. If I could get that lost in thought look, I could pull this off. “Sometimes, when I see people I see an older version of them and things they might or might not happen.”

“And? Did you see Rin when you saw the Sanbi?” asked Jiraiya.

“…” I murmured, mentally sweating a waterfall as I weaved lies with partial truth. “I saw something else.”

“What do you mean?” frowned Jiraiya. “What did you see?”

“I saw Kakashi-san. There was a lot of light on his hand and it was chirping, like birds.” I answered. “Rin-san jumped in front of it and it went through her chest… I think… she was supposed to…” I trailed off when Rin’s breath hitched.

“Rin?” Jiraiya turned to the girl.

“I tried… I tried jumping in front of Kakashi’s chidori,” croaked the girl as she stared at
me. “Obito dragged me out of the way, but how… How did you…?”

Jiraiya frowned and turned back to me. “Do you see or hear these things often?” asked Jiraiya.

“Sometimes?” I supplied awkwardly. “I can’t really control it. It just happens, not around everyone, just some people.”

“Like when you saw me?” asked the man.

I couldn’t stop my body from reacting and my mind running through everything I knew about the man. Every good and bad thing the man’s done. Every victory and lost he gained and suffered. I couldn’t stop remembering everything.

“What did you see when you saw me?” asked the man.

“I saw…” My mind stopped at his final smile as he sunk into the watery depths of his grave. I found a lump at my throat as I choked out my answer. “…A great teacher.”

Jiraiya grew quiet, no doubt coming to his own conclusions by my reaction. I’m really bad in the art of deception. Even now as I’m lying to them, I’m telling more truth than anything else. Considering the occupation I’m interested in going into, it’s really bad that I wear my heart on my sleeve the way I do.

“I see… Anything else that I should know about?” asked Jiraiya, the mood in the room grew somber. I don’t like seeing him so serious… I like him as the big goofy pervert that he is.

“Yeah, you peek at the woman’s bath a lot to write naughty books and become super rich.” I sniggered. “You’re a super pervert!”

The room grew silent as Rin stared at me in horror.

“Kasa-chan!” chided the girl. “That’s rude! Say sorry to Jiraiya-sama!”

“What? He is a pervert! He said so himself. He’s not just any pervert. He’s a super pervert! A super duper one!” I retorted as Rin became more flabbergasted.

“Kasa-chan!” hissed Rin before Jiraiya bellowed out in a hearty laugh.

“A super pervert eh?” grinned the man.

“Yes!” I chirped, liking the smile on his face more than the frown.

“How rich are we talking about?” asked Jiraiya with a sly grin.

“Jiraiya-sama!” snapped Rin.

“Are you going to buy me presents if I tell you?” I asked childishly. Hey, I might as well get something out of this.

“I could always find out on my own,” grinned the man as he waved off Rin’s scolding.

“Cheapskate.” I pouted.

He gave another hearty laugh as he ruffled my head. “I’ll think about it, but can you do one more thing for me?”
“What?” I tilted my head curiously.

“Can you see if you see anything with Rin now?” asked Jiraiya.

I glanced over to Rin for show before turning back and shaking my head. “The image with Kakashi-san is the only one I could see. There’s nothing pass that one…”

“I see,” murmured Jiraiya with a thoughtful hand rubbing his chin. “Interesting.”

“What’s the matter Jiraiya-sama?” asked Rin.

“Minato,” started the man slowly and stared directly at my eyes. I braced myself for whatever he’s going to ask next. “Did you happen to see anything when it came to Minato?”

Shit, I knew this was coming.

“What did you see?” asked Jiraiya.

“Minato-san…” Should I? I could possibly save Minato if I did this, but… without the Kyubi, would Naruto still be the Child of Prophecy? Things already ended pretty badly with the attack on Konoha by Isobu. Should I risk handicapping the one person that could save everything?

“What happens to Minato?” asked Jiraiya.

Sorry…

“He becomes a hero… He saves everyone.” I said with a fake grin. “Minato-san is so cool!”

Jiraiya let out a breath before chuckling. “So it’s him huh?”

“Jiraiya-sama?” question Rin in confusion. “What are you talking about? How does Kasa-chan know… these things?”

The man ruffled my head again. “It looks like we have a little oracle on our hands.”

“What?” Rin’s eyes widened. “Are you saying she can predict the future?”

“Not really,” answered Jiraiya. “What she sees isn’t set in stone, you are the proof of it. She saw you dead, by Kakashi’s hand, but here you are. However, we could take it as a warning.”

Shit… I’m going to T&I aren’t I?

“The more you see, the more things change, right?” asked Jiraiya. I nodded hesitantly, not exactly sure how to respond. “Then keep this a secret, the both of you. Let no one know about her foresight. If they know what’s to come, they might change matters for the worse.”

“But what if there’s something bad that happens to Konoha? To the people we care about?” argued Rin. “She has to keep silent and not do anything even then?”

“Did she do nothing when Sanbi attacked?” asked Jiraiya.

Rin grew silent.

“Considering she didn’t see Sanbi’s arrival or your death until after he arrived, she has little to no control to when or what she sees,” reasoned Jiraiya. “And the fact that she has to see...
Dear lord, did I do it?

“We have no idea what she knows at any given time. So whether or not she takes action, is up to her isn’t it?” grinned Jiraiya as he stared down at me, his hand still on my head. “But, I trust you’ll know what to do when the time comes. You’re going to grow up to be a great kunoichi kid.”

Holy shit… If I could, I would totally drop my jaw at this point. I made it! I got passed another threat of visiting T&I! THANK YOU UZUMAKI LUCK! I don’t care if I nearly died because of you so many times! Thank you, thank you, thank you! I found the brightest and biggest grin on my face before I tackled him with a hug, pulling Rin along with me as I hugged the man.

“Thank you!” I said. “I’ll do my best!”

“Well, now. I best go on my way. I have things to do and books to write,” said the man.

Oh, yeah! I almost forgot.

“Jiraiya-san, did you write your first book yet?” I asked.

“It’s getting published soon, why?” The man tilted his head in question.

“Can I get a signed copy of it?” I asked brightly. “I want the very first copy!”

A soft smile touched the man’s face before he bellowed out laughing. ‘I’ll sign it if you buy a copy.”

I puffed up my cheeks. “Cheapskate!”

He patted my head before detaching himself from my hug. “All right, I got to go. I’ll see you around kid.”

“Bye Jiraiya-san! I think you’re the coolest ninja ever!” I shouted after him.

He chuckled as he waved his goodbye and body flickered out from the window.

“Kasa-chan,” started Rin when the room grew quiet again. “You said there was nothing after the image of me dying by Kakashi’s hand… does that mean, I wasn’t supposed to survive?”

I glanced over to the guilt-filled face of Rin and resisted the urge to sigh. I don’t know what to say here. When I saved Obito, I hadn’t thought about saving her at all. Heck, I wasn’t even sure when in the timeline was she supposed to be kidnapped. It’s not like I could’ve done anything to stop it. The fact that she’s alive now would probably change a lot of things. No clue what things, but let’s hope it’s for the best.

“Rin-san, I think it probably means that you’re not bounded anymore.” I suggested. She glanced at me curiously. “It’s not a bad thing I think. It means you can choose to do whatever you want and there’s nothing there to say that you can’t. Maybe you’ll be the next hokage or something! Wouldn’t that be cool? The first female hokage!”

Rin giggled. “Don’t be silly Kasa, as if there will ever be a female hokage.”

Oh man, wait till you see Tsunade, girl. She will be amazing.

“You never know, it might happen.” I grinned.
“Oh yeah, what are you going to tell your friends when you get out of the hospital?” asked Rin. “They’ve been coming to visit almost everyday. Especially those two Uchiha boys.” She grinned slyly. “Is there something you want to share with me Kasa-chan?”

Oh dear lord no, not her too!

“Boys are icky!” I said childishly trying to find a way to divert this. “And Itachi and Shisui are dumbasses always poking at my forehead!”

Rin’s laugh sounded like bells. “You’ll think differently when you get older.”

“No,” I grumbled stubbornly before fighting back a yawn.

“Why don’t you rest a little? I’m almost done with the transfusion. I’ll wake you up if Obito or your friends come by,” suggested Rin.

“Okay…” I mumbled drowsily as she tucked me back into bed. “Good night Rin-san…”

Come to think of it, what am I going to tell them? Sigh…
Reunion

“You are never going to do that to us again!” snapped Hana furiously, tears filling her eyes as she yelled at me. This was probably the first time I found her as scary as her mother. “Itachi and Shisui tried to run after you, but they got caught by sensei and tied up before they could. Do you know how scary it was to find out you were in the hospital? You almost died!”

“But I didn’t.” I said apologetically. “See? I’m perfectly fine.”

“You better not!” sniffled Hana.

“Your heart stopped four times!” shouted Shisui, putting his two cents in when Hana backed away to wipe away her tears.

“Only four?” I said in surprise. “I thought it was more than—” I broke off with a sheepishly laugh when they glared at me. “Okay, okay! I’m sorry! I won’t do it again!” At least not for a long while, I hope.

“You better not!” sniffled Hana.

“What happened anyway?” asked Shisui. “Did you ended up helping?”

“…Not really… I kinda got knocked out by a falling sign ha…ha…” I lied with a weak laugh. Rin and Kushina made sure I had a good cover story before they let the kids visit.

“A sign?” said Shisui in disbelief.

“Yeah, they said it was pretty heavy and was crushing my chest. The reason why my heart stopped so many times was because it was almost collapsed when they got me to the hospital. Amazing what iryo-ninjutsu can do huh? Now I’m double hyped in aiming to be one.”

“…Only you can take nearly dying this well,” grumbled Hana.

“Itachi, you’re not going to say anything?” asked Shisui when the young Uchiha said nothing.

“You might as well join in.” I added. “They’ve already reamed me good for the last ten minutes.”

Itachi said nothing; his arms remained crossed as he sat in his seat.

“Oh come on! The silent treatment?” I whined. “It’s bad enough you don’t talk normally already! If you keep being quiet, you’ll end up mute.”

Itachi sighed through his nose as he stood up, if I didn’t know better I might think he’s a little ticked. Did I get under his skin? His eyes glued to me as he made his way to my bedside with his hands at his side.

“All right, bring it on.” I said with an exasperated sigh, but he didn’t say anything. “Well, aren’t you going to say anything?”

He continued to stare at me with those dark eyes of his. I might be intimidated if he was older, but as a four-year-old, he just looked adorable.

“If you’re not going to say—” I got cut off as I felt a rapid jab at my forehead over and over again. On the same exact spot with the same two fingers. “OW! What the hell was that for?” I
swatted his hand away and rubbed my head. What the hell was he, a woodpecker?

Shisui snickered as he planted a hand on the younger boy’s head. “Aw, isn’t Itachi-chan cute? He’s upset!”

“Grr…” I growled rubbing my head. “The hell?”

“Next time you do something stupid, I’m coming along with you,” said Itachi.

“Huh?” I glanced at him, hand still covering my forehead. “Why?”

“Because the new mark on your forehead makes it really easy to poke,” answered Itachi.

I grabbed a pillow and chucked it at his face. He easily caught it and tossed it back into my face. “One of these days Itachi! I swear I will turn you into a duck!” I roared.

“Still waiting on that,” retorted Itachi.

“That’s it!” I jumped at him, but Shisui easily caught me and held me back. “Let me at him! I’m going to beat that stoic face in!”

“Kasa! Calm down! You’re still recovering!” said Shisui as he shoved me back into bed. “You can try your futile attempts at maiming Itachi when you get better.”

“They’re not futile!” I fumed with a pout.

“Sure, they’re not,” said Shisui as he humored me. “So how long before you can leave the hospital?”

“Uh…” I paused to think. “I think maybe another couple of days? Yeah, I think they want to double check to make sure my lungs don’t suddenly collapse since my heart is fine now.”

Lies, more like they want to make sure the yin energy doesn’t fry my body before letting me go. Man, I want to leave already. Hospital food sucks!

“Can’t wait to see you back at the academy,” grinned Hana. “It’s going to be funny watching you catch up to the kunoichi classes. We just started painting and calligraphy.”

“Why did you have to remind me Hana?” I whined. “This is supposed to be my vacation! I’m not supposed to think about classes!”

“Too bad,” droned Itachi as he dropped my backpack on the bed. “I brought you your homework and the notes from class.”

“… I hate you… you know that?” I grumbled and glared at the backpack.

“Dully noted,” said Itachi as he flicked my head one last time before turning to leave.

“Would you stop doing that?” I snapped and chucked another pillow at him. The door closed before the pillow made it through.

“You know… I’ve never seen Itachi that upset before,” commented Shisui.

I turned to him surprise. “That was upset? How the heck can you tell? He looks like that everyday!” Shisui held out two fingers and I quickly slapped my hands over my forehead. “Don’t even think about it!”
The older Uchiha chuckled. “I’m not going to poke you, I’m just making a point. Itachi doesn’t talk or show much, but the little he does show, is usually though physical actions.” He tapped his forehead lightly. “I did this to him every day for about a week before you showed up. At first just to tease him and see if I could annoy him to do something, but of course it’s Itachi and he never rise to the bait.”

“And?” I grumbled.

“Well, Itachi knows me and I’m not doing it to be mean. It just sort of became an affectionate tap I used to greet him. I’m surprised he used it on you at all. He must like you,” grinned Shisui.

Hana squealed. “How cute! He must like you a lot if he tapped you that much.”

Oh, good god! I’m quite sure she didn’t mean what she said, but ew! I am not tapping that! Argh! Where’s the brain bleach? I need to bleach my brain! I need a therapist! This world will be the end of my sanity!

“Hey you don’t have to look like that,” said Shisui with a mocking gush. “Itachi-chan would be so sad that you don’t like him!”

“After I get Itachi, I’m getting you next Shisui! I will duckify all Uchiha!” I growled.

“…Duckify isn’t a word,” said Shisui.

“I’m making it a word!” I snapped back.

“Kasa, you’re so silly,” giggled Hana before she glanced out the window. “I should probably get going too. I need to get home before it turns dark.”

“I’ll walk you home,” offered Shisui.

“Ooh! Is there something you two want to tell me?” I grinned shooting their joke back at them.

“Nope, I’m perfectly fine. What about you Shisui?” replied Hana cheerily.

“Haaaaanaaa!” I whined. “You were supposed to get embarrassed! Or freak out in disgust or something. No offense Shisui.”

“All offense taken,” grinned the boy before he added teasingly. “Besides I think I like you more.”

I spluttered indignantly! I’m old enough to be your mother, boy! Well, a young mother, but that’s not the point! Gods, these kids will end me!

“You’re too easy Kasa,” laughed Hana. “Okay, I have to go. See you tomorrow maybe!”

“Bye…” I grumbled as Shisui left with Hana laughing.

I really should get over this thing about people teasing me about crushes and whatnots, but it’s a bit alarming whenever anyone does. Seriously, I’m a fangirl at heart and the idea of pairing off with anyone freaks me out like no tomorrow. These characters are awesome and godly! I’m just a weirdo that somehow ended up in their world.

Don’t get me wrong I don’t have self-esteem issues. With how hot Kushina and Somuku
looked, I’m not worried about my looks department. Not an issue there, I’ll fill out once the awkward
teen years come. If I don’t kill myself first that is. Seriously, every since leaving Ame, I almost died
like four or five times already! Not counting the times my heart stopped this past week.

Anyway, relationship… Yeah, not seeing it happening at least not in the foreseeable
future. I might humor the thought if I can’t find someone that’s closer to me in mental age… but then
I’m immature so that kind of defeats the point of saying mental age. Ah screw it. I’m not going to
bother thinking it at all. Knowing my luck, I’ll die before that happens! Yep, that’s the plan; I’ll die
before I have to worry about dealing with those relationships!

“…Why do you always make such weird faces when you’re thinking?” asked Obito.

I glanced up in surprise. “Obito! I didn’t hear you come in.”

“That’s because you were lost in thought. I brought bentos,” said Obito as he raised the
plastic bag. “Hospital food sucks, so I thought you’d like a change of taste.”

“Yeah! You’re the best!” I cheered as he placed the bag on the sliding table and went to
pull up a chair.

“So what were you thinking about that had you make such a face?” asked Obito as he
passed me a box of inari sushi and grilled salmon.

“Squee! Inari sushi!” Yes, I squeed. “Oh, nothing, just something silly. It’s never going to
happen. Itadakimasu!”

“Silly? What kind?” asked Obito in good humor as he cracked open his own bento.

“It’s boring. Ooh! Did you go on a mission today? Was Rin-san and Kakashi-san with
you?” I asked, quickly changing the subject. I really don’t need him to put in his two cents for my
sanity’s sake.

“Oh, the mission today was awesome. Let me tell you…”

My remaining days at the hospital became a routine visit from the kids, Team Minato
when they weren’t on missions and Kushina to check on how my seals were doing. When I was let
out, the first thing I did was run down the streets of Konoha screaming much to the displeasure of
many.

“FREEDOM AT LAST! NEVER AGAIN WILL I BE CONFINED!” I cackled the
whole way back to the apartment. The amount of odd stares I’ve got cannot beat the euphoria of
breathing fresh air and feeling the warm sun.

“Kasa-chan,” said Kakashi in a deadpan as he snatched me half way back. He was in
charge of escorting me home since everyone else was busy. Though, I’m quite sure they’re planning
a surprise party back at the apartment. How do I know? Obito’s horrible at keeping secrets. “You’re
disrupting the peace.”

“But it’s so nice out, Kakashi-san!” I giggled with glee. “Do you want to go to the park
with me? It can be a date! Then we can go to the movies and—” He dropped me faster than hot coal
and I was off cackling again.

“Sucker!” I cackled. Yes, I know, I’m completely insane right now. You’d be too if they
locked you in a room for a whole week.
“Kasa-chan! Stop running! You’re going to crash into someone!”

“I’m not going to—Oomph!” I crashed and toppled over a small boy.

“Ow...” said a soft voice.

“Kasa! Told you not to run!” snapped Kakashi as he hauled me off the boy. “Are you okay?”

“Oww...” I complained before taking a good look at the person I knocked over and saw his glasses some distance away after I crashed into him. Ack! I ran over someone with glasses! “Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!” I shouted as I jumped out of Kakashi’s grip and helped him up before running off to retrieve his glasses. “I’m so sorry! Are you okay?”

“Y-yeah...” said the boy quietly as he clapped himself clean. “My glasses.” He squinted, trying to look for them.

“Here!” I handed it to him. “They don’t look broken, it should be fine right? If not I’ll ask Kushina-san if she could buy you a new one. I’m so sorry!”

I had bad experience with glasses. In my previous life, I was practically blind if I didn’t have them and contacts were beyond horrible since they dried up your eyes like a freaking desert. Yeah, let me tell you losing your glasses when you’re nearly blind is horrible! Especially if you’re driving! How I managed to lose my glasses while driving, I will never tell you. That moment was traumatic enough as it is.

“No, it’s okay. They’re not broken,” said the boy as he slipped them back on. Something about him looked familiar. “Is something wrong?”

“Do I know you?” I asked. I can’t put my finger on it, but he looks awfully familiar.

The boy looked puzzled. “I-I don't know.”

“You look familiar though... What’s your name? I’m Kasa!” I introduced myself.

“I’m…”

“Kabuto!” shouted a woman dressed in a shrine maiden’s uniform. “There you are! I was looking all over for you, how did you wander this far into the village?”

Kabuto? As in Kabuto Yakushi, Orochimaru’s psychopathic minion? I found myself staring at him with wide eyes. Shit... he’s so... so... adorable! Who knew evil could look so cute? Ah damn it, don’t forget he’s the most dangerous person in the world Kasa, just saying.

“I got lost,” murmured the boy as the woman sighed and placed her hands on his shoulders.

“You’re still recovering, you can’t go wandering off like that,” chided the woman. “Why are you so dirty?”

He turned his gaze to me and I gave a sheepish laugh.

“Sorry, that would be her fault. She was running around without looking,” said Kakashi as he placed a hand over my head and forced me to bow.

“Hey!” I complained and flailed under his grip and fought to get free. “I can say sorry
myself!"

“It’s fine,” murmured the almost timid looking Kabuto. “I wasn’t hurt and she said sorry already.”

“Very well,” sighed the woman again. “Be careful next time young lady. Come on Kabuto.”

Kabuto and I shared one last look before he followed the woman away. Shit, I didn’t know he was that close to Itachi in age and since he’ll eventually end up in ROOT, there was no chance of me seeing him in the Academy. Oh man, it’s just one thing after another isn’t it? My awesome mood is totally ruined now.

“Are you going to stay here all day or are we going back?” drawled Kakashi.

I blew a childish raspberry and took off again. This time, taking more caution where I ran off. Running into one major villain is bad enough already. Let’s avoid the rest shall we?

“I’m home!” I shouted as I crashed into the apartment and immediately, the lights flickered on and confetti flew everywhere.

“Surprise!” shouted Obito and Rin along with Minato and Kushina.

“Wow a party!” I shouted happily.

Yeah, this is way better than running into villains.

In the months that followed, I avoided the area that I knew was the orphanage where Kabuto stayed. I know, I know. I should probably find some way to get rid of him before he becomes a major threat… but I can’t. I have a thing against hurting and killing kids… even if they grow up to be world-dominating destroyers.

Sure, I’ve joked about killing the hellions that annoyed me, in their sleep, but I was never going to do it. It’s just a thing I say in the heat of the moment. How do I explain this? Ugh, I don’t know… Kids just have a place in the no-kill zone part of my brain. I just can’t do it.

You can argue that these brats act nothing like kids, but I can tell you otherwise. Even if they were raised to be cold-blooded killers, inside they’re still little babies calling out for their mommies after a bad nightmare. How do I know? Because I still cry out for Somuku every now and then when I get a bad nightmare.

Never mind, forget I said anything about that. It’s not like I have the power to do anything to him now anyway. I’m still a brat myself with little to no skill whatsoever.

“Again Kasa,” snapped Fugaku.

“Okay.” I said, almost whining as he made me go through another round of katas. Good lord, this man is such a hard-ass.

Why am I still having training sessions with Fugaku when I’m no longer living at the Uchiha house, you ask? Why not? It’s not like the man said, “Get the fuck out,” when I showed up. I could use all the training I get with my luck. The academy’s basic taijutsu was fine I suppose, but I need a little more if I’m going keep my ass alive on the field.
Among the main clans in Konoha, the best in taijutsu were probably the Inuzuka, Hyuga and Uchiha. I didn’t know any Hyuga, so asking them to teach me would be pointless. That and I don’t have the byakugan, so I can’t really use their fighting style. I could ask Hana and Tsume if I can learn from them, but their style requires a ninken and at this point in time, I can barely take care of myself much less a dog. Since Fugaku didn’t kick me out when I came back for training, I don’t see why I shouldn’t keep coming back.

Though… there was a draw back…

“Kasa-chan, that’s not very lady like! Sit up!” scolded the Uchiha matron when I found myself sprawling on the ground after getting my ass kicked by Itachi.

“Yes ma’am.” I groaned, pulling myself into a sitting position. The amused twitch at Itachi’s lips made me grumble as he turned away and resumed his training.

If it wasn’t training with Fugaku, it was training with Kushina and Rin.

“Get up Kasa!” snapped Kushina.

I was face flat on the ground whimpering. This training wasn’t much better either.

“If you want to get better, you have to keep practicing,” said the woman. “Now mold your chakra into shape.”

“Okay…” I groaned, pushing myself off the ground and clapped my hands together in concentration.

Oddly, I found clapping my hands into a prayer works better than most other hand seals… or it could be that I’m really bad at memorizing seals… What’d I give to be the Full Metal Alchemist right now rather than a ninja. Then I could just clap and bam! Instant attack! Or hell, just give me a Final Fantasy menu list for me to input my commands. Ninja lessons suck balls. I can’t wait for when I can just do this without thinking about it.

THWACK!

“Kasa, pay attention!” said Kushina as she smacked me upside the head with her chakra chain.

“Ow…” I whined, rubbing the back of my head.

Remember how I said Fugaku is a hard-ass? Yeah, he has nothing on Kushina. She’s one scary BAMF. For the less incline with abbreviations, she’s one badass motherfucker. And you do not want to mess around with her lessons. Sigh, I really miss Somuku’s lessons. At least she doesn’t try to kill you when you mess up.

“Come on Kasa, I’m waiting,” said Kushina.

“Meep.” I squeaked out and quickly molded my chakra into shape. I can’t get it to look like her chains. Mine look more like threads than anything else, but I guess it’s better than nothing.

“Good Rin, you’re doing great!” cheered Kushina.

I glanced over to Rin and spotted her neatly made chains wrapping around her arms like snakes. It’s expected that she would do much better than I would. After all, she’s a trained iryo-nin. They need precision and control in order to perform their medical jutsu. Am I jealous? Yeah, a bit,
but she had a head start.

I sighed and stared at the chakra threads on my hands. Maybe I’m not fit for this sort of thing… Hmm… Out of boredom, I started messing around with the threads and started weaving them piece-by-piece until it wrapped and tightened against itself. I grinned as it slowly took shape, this was kind of fun.

“Kasa… what are you doing?” asked Kushina when she came to check on me again.

“Look! I made a cat’s cradle!” I lifted my hands for her to see. “Wanna play?”

Kushina gave another sigh before smacking me upside the head again.

Before I knew it, time flew by in a flash. Haha, I make a joke, get it? Flash? Like Minato? Yellow—ah forget it. The Third Shinobi War came to a close. While the attack by Isobu was unexpected and there were some casualties, it was mostly in the civilian districts. The number of ninjas lost in that attack wasn’t substantial and Konoha came up on top once again.

I don’t know who was exactly lost, but hopefully when the time comes it’s not anyone important. Yeah, sorry unimportant people, you’re the necessary sacrifice. Your lives will be forgotten and never remembered. May you rest in misery. Yeah, what are you going to do about it dead people, come back to life and kick my ass? Like that—Oh wait, they can do that here…Damn it! Sorry dead people! Forget what I said!

A month before my birthday, two months before I’ve reached a full year living in Konoha, I was summoned to the hokage’s office. Why? I don’t know. I haven’t pranked anyone lately and usually Obito or Kushina takes the blame for the pranks. I don’t know why I would be called to the office.

“Kasa!” waved Obito when I arrived. I lit up as I jogged over to his side.

“Did you get caught for a prank?” I whispered conspiringly.

“Nope, not that I know of anyway,” grinned the former Uchiha.

“Does that mean you have one underway?” I grinned back.

“You’ll find out later,” whispered the older boy with a wink.

The two of us sniggered before the door opened and Kushina walked out with a distressing face. The two of us looked puzzled when she smiled sadly towards us.

“Kasa-chan, you’re here,” said the woman softly.

“Kushina-san? Is something wrong?” I asked quickly running to her side and grabbing her hand.

“No, everything is fine sweetie,” answered Kushina as she patted my head, running her fingers through my short hair.

“Then why are you so sad?” I asked.

“I shouldn’t be sad really. Well…” Kushina trailed off and stepped aside so we could see into the hokage’s office. “Why don’t you see for yourself?”

“Huh?” I tilted my head and glanced into the office. Inside, along with the Third Hokage
was a familiar man with blue hair. A shade of blue I haven’t seen in nearly a year. “Tou-san?” I said in surprise when I recognized who it was.

“You’ve grown so much Kasa!” grinned Tesuri before he held out his arms. “What? Are you too old to give your dad a hug now?”

“Tou-san!” A smile broke out on my face and I dashed forward and tackled him in a hug.

“Kasa, I missed you so much!” Tesuri caught me in mid-tackle and swung me into his arms in a tight hug.

I hugged back just as tight before whacking him furiously. “Where have you been this whole time? You said you were going to come find me!” I snapped.

“It’s a long story,” laughed Tesuri as he pulled back from the hug. “Oh, you’ve grown so big! What happened to your hair? I thought you liked having long hair.”

“Long story, tell you when we have the time.” I retorted with a roll of my eyes.

“Which, we’ll have plenty of time to catch up on,” said Tesuri.

“Hem,” coughed Hiruzen, interrupting our little reunion. “I believe we have a matter to attend to.”

“Right,” apologized Tesuri with a humble bow. “Sorry Hokage-sama, I was just so excited to see my daughter again. I apologize for my rudeness sir.”

“Understandable,” puffed out Hiruzen as smoke escaped from his mouth and pipe. “Do we have everyone pertaining to this matter here? Or are we waiting?”

“No, after Uzumaki-san, Obito-kun is the last one,” confirmed Tesuri.

Confusion crossed my face as I looked at him and then to Kushina and Obito. What’s going on? Why would we need them specifically?

“Kasa, as you know, you came to Konoha nearly a year ago,” started Hiruzen as he nursed his pipe. “And in that year, you’ve done something very amazing that Konoha will be very thankful for, for the generations coming.”

“…Okay?” I said in confusion. The old man chuckled at my response.

“Your charmed bluntness will be missed,” said the man wryly. “However, if you wish to return, you’re welcome to do so at any time.”

Missed? What does he mean missed? I glanced at Tesuri.

“Tou-san, what is he talking about?” I asked.

“Kasa, the war is over. We don’t have to worry about running away from Ame anymore,” said Tesuri.

“So?” I frowned.

“So?” repeated the man in surprise. “We can go wherever we want now. We can leave Konoha today and see the world. Wouldn’t you like that? It’ll just be you and me.”
“Leave… Konoha?” I gapped at his words.

What? WHAT?
Stages of Grief

WHAT? Leave Konoha? What the hell Tesuri?

“I don’t want to go.” I shoved off from his hold and scrambled over to Kushina. “I want to stay here in Konoha! I want to stay with Kushina-san.”

“Kasa… Uzumaki-san is not your mother,” said the man evenly.

“I don’t care!” I snapped. I was angry “I want to stay here with Kushina-san! I want to stay here with Obito and Minato-san and everyone else! I don’t want to go!”

“Kasa, we are leaving,” said Tesuri, almost annoyed by my reaction.

“No!” I stomped my feet. “You left me for an entire year! I don’t want to go with you!”

“Kasa Mon, I am your father and you will listen to me. We. Are. Leaving,” said the man firmly.

I clenched onto Kushina’s pants as I hid behind her. I can’t leave now! I won’t leave! Things are changing! If I don’t keep an eye on things, who knows what would happen?

“Kasa-chan, you can’t be like that,” said Kushina softly as she knelt down to my level. “He’s your father. You should listen to him.”

“Why are you standing on his side?” I grounded out. “I don’t want to leave Konoha! I like it here! I like going to classes with Hana and Itachi. I like playing pranks with Obito! I like training with Rin-san! I like annoying Kakashi-san and I like living with you and Minato-san! Why can’t I stay?”

“Kasa, I know you like it here. I know Uzumaki-san took good care of you, but you don’t belong here,” said Tesuri. “You’re not wanted in Konoha.”

“But…” I looked between him and Kushina before lastly on Hiruzen. “But I thought you said I could be a Konoha shinobi…”

Hiruzen sighed. “I did say you could, but the issue lies within the council.”

“What?” I whispered. The council?

“After the attack by Sanbi, the council have decided it would be too dangerous to have both Sanbi’s jinchuriki in the village. It would be too easy for the unstableness of the yin energy you carry to trigger the release of Sanbi from Rin.”

No… I shook my head, denying every word coming from his mouth.

“Given your young age, you haven’t the skill or control to maintain the yin energy that’s within you. I would send Rin away on a long mission until you’ve gained control, but you are aware of the war has just recently ended. There were many casualties and a good number of our shinobi are injured.”

No. I don’t want to believe it.

“We need Rin’s expertise, we’re short on iryo-nin. It was a difficult decision, but you must
understand Kasa-kun, there was no other choice.”

“NO!” I shook my head. “I promise I’ll train really hard! Harder than ever! I’ll control that chakra! I’ll do whatever you ask me to! Please, don’t make me go!” I cried, feeling the tears soaking my face as I begged to stay.

“I’m sorry Kasa,” said the man somberly.

“How about putting more seals on me?” I suggested. “If you seal it up really good, they it won’t be a problem right? I was kidding about not wanting more seals! I love seals! Seal me up!”

Kushina placed a hand on my shoulder. “Kasa-chan, you already have a lot of seals on you,” reasoned the woman. “If we put anymore on you, it’ll disrupt the ones that’s keeping you safe from Sanbi’s energy.”

“What about the seal rings I used on Rin-san? I could use those, right? It would do the same thing, right?” I was bargaining.

“Those rings would ruin what little control you’ve managed. If you use them for long term, you can never be a ninja,” said Kushina sadly. “Kasa-chan won’t be forever, just until you get hold over that energy. You made progress the last couple of months. With hard work, maybe you can come back in two years.”

“Two years?” I croaked. Would she even be alive in a year?

“Honey, I know this is a lot to take in,” started Tesuri. “But it’s for your own good and the safety of Konoha. You don’t want to end up hurting Konoha, right?”

I turned to Obito for help. “Obito, I don’t want to leave.” I sobbed.

The older boy looked torn as he walked over and pulled me from Kushina’s arms. I buried my face into his shoulder and cried. He hushed me gently and brushed the back of my head soothingly. “I’m sorry Kasa… I can’t do anything.”

“I’m sorry,” repeated Hiruzen. “You may take the rest of today to say your goodbyes. Tomorrow, I will have ANBU escort you to the village gates.”

“Tesuri-san, you could stay with us tonight,” suggested Kushina.

“It’s all right, I can find a hotel,” murmured Tesuri. “I don’t think she’ll want me to take away the last night she has here.”

“I understand… I wished you could’ve stayed longer. I would’ve loved to talk more about Somuku Uzumaki.”

The man smiled sadly. “I would’ve liked that too.”

“Do you want me to take you to see Hana and Itachi?” whispered Obito quietly.

I fought back the sniffles as I stepped back from his hug. “N-no.” I hiccupped. “I can do it on my own.”

“You sure?” asked Obito. “If I take you, it’ll be faster and you’ll have more time with them.”

I shook my head. “I want to walk around Konoha a little bit.”
Obito planted a hand on my head. “All right. Take all the time you need.”

I wiped away my tears and ran off without another look at Hiruzen or Tesuri. I don’t want to talk to either of them. As I made my way out of the administration office, I ran faster and faster. Pass the stores, pass the people, pass everything! The tears in my eyes made it a little hard to see, but I angrily blinked it away as I made my way into the forest.

I didn’t look for Hana; I didn’t look for Itachi or Shisui. I didn’t want to say goodbye to anyone! I don’t know how long I ran or how far I went into the forest, but by the time I tripped and fell flat on my face, I was opening bawling. This was probably the saddest thing you’ll ever see. And I don’t mean sad like Bambi’s mom getting killed, I mean sad like a lame sports fan crying over their losing team.

I’m a grown woman, but I’m bawling like a spoiled little brat that got her toy taken away. What the hell is wrong with me? Did I really think that everything would be this easy? This isn’t a game! Things don’t just magically go your way because you know certain things.

Yet, never before have I wished that were the case so I could stay here. My bawling turned into sobs, and eventually slowlyed to a sniffle. I lay on the ground fighting the hiccups as the last of my tears stopped and my nose was completely stuffed. I’m not a very pretty sight to look at right now.


I rubbed my nose with the back of my sleeve. March was still a tad bit chilly for short sleeves even in Konoha. I glared down at the bandages peeking out from under my sleeves.

“Too bad you don’t have a cheat code for special event situations. A training montage and time jump would be pretty damn convenient right now.” I fought back the hyperventilating breath that lingered from the crying. “Fat lot of use you are. Can’t even skip the stupid cut scenes.”

“Do you always talk to yourself?” asked a soft voice.

I jumped at the voice and looked for the source.

“Up here,” said the voice.

“Kabuto?” I glanced up in surprise.

Geez, what is with my luck? I don’t want to see anyone and the person I least want to see show up after months of avoiding him. What the hell?

“What are you doing up in a tree?” I asked.

“What are you doing down there crying?” returned the other.

Touché. For the longest time neither of us said anything, he stayed up in the tree and I stayed sulking on the dirt. It was an okay silence. I’m surprised that I didn’t mind it at all.

“What are you doing up in a tree?” I asked.

“What are you doing down there crying?” returned the other.

Touché. For the longest time neither of us said anything, he stayed up in the tree and I stayed sulking on the dirt. It was an okay silence. I’m surprised that I didn’t mind it at all.

“T’ll hiding,” murmured the silver-haired boy.

“…Me too.” I replied, kind of weird that we’re talking like this.

“What are you hiding from?” asked the boy curiously.

“Everyone.” I muttered. “You?”
“Same,” replied Kabuto, his leg swinging idly from the top of the branch. “They’ll come looking you know. They always do.”

“I know.” I mumbled. “Why are you hiding if you know that?”

He shrugged. “No reason. Do you have one?”

“…No.” I gave a weak laugh. “At least not one I could use anyway… It kind of sucks being a kid. We can’t do anything.”

“Yes we can,” replied Kabuto. I glanced up at him, almost hopeful at his declaration. “We can make everything difficult.”

“Difficult?” I raised a brow.

“Difficult to take care, difficult to make money, difficult to live,” said the boy quietly. “We could make everything harder for everyone, but… that’s not really good either.”

“Yeah…” I murmured, curling up into my legs. “Hey, Kabuto. Do you like living here? In Konoha, I mean.”

The boy shrugged. “I don’t know. It’s okay I guess.”

“I love it here. It’s so bright and warm.” I murmured quietly. “Wish I could stay.”

“Why don’t you?” asked Kabuto.

“Can’t, I’m getting kicked out of the village tomorrow. I can’t come back until…” I trailed off. “Never mind.”

“Do you want me to hide you?” asked the boy.

“How? They’ll come looking for me. You said so yourself.” I pointed out.

He shrugged again. “They can look, but it doesn’t mean they can find you.”

“What do you mean?” I frowned.

“They are the leaves that bathe in the sun,” started the boy.

My eyes widened as I resisted the urge to scramble away. They got him already? This soon?

“Hide somewhere the sun won’t reach and they can’t find you,” murmured the boy as he glanced down at me. “I could help you stay in Konoha if you want, but you’ll probably won’t be able to walk around like you are now.”

He’s talking about ROOT, about Danzo and Orochimaru. My chest constricted, I couldn’t breathe. Calm down Kasa, he’s a child right now. He can’t do anything yet, but what if he’s not alone? Stop thinking Kasa. Just get up and run. Get up and run!

“But… it doesn’t look like you would like that very much,” sighed the boy as he jumped down from the tree and landed softly on the ground. I can’t even land that softly from that height. He took a step forward before squatting down in front of me, with his arms resting on his legs. “You don’t look like you like to hide at all.”

“…Do you like to hide?” I forced the words out of my mouth. Why am I scared? Why am I
scared of this child? I’ve nearly died facing the freaking Sanbi and I wasn’t scared! Why am I scared of him?

“Not really,” murmured the silver-haired child. “But I’m really good at it. What are you good at Kasa-san?”

I felt my skin crawl as he said my name. Why am I so bothered by this kid? He hasn’t done anything yet!

 “…Ru…n…” I croaked out.

“What was that?” frowned Kabuto. “I didn’t catch that.”

“RUN!” I shouted before I forced myself off the ground and darted away.

My heart raced as I fled from the boy. I don’t care about the look of surprise on his face when I shouted. I don’t care about the hurt expression crossing his face when I got up and ran. I want to stay in Konoha, but not in the shadows of ROOT. I had no clue where I was going; I just kept running.

Trees, trees and more trees, I don’t even know where I was anymore. Shit… I turned and turned, but I couldn’t make sense of anything. Giving an exasperated sigh, I plopped down on the ground and sprawled onto my back, staring at the cloudless blue sky.

“Two years…” I muttered under my breath. “Can I get back before then? Would Kushina…”

I took a deep breath and sighed. If they’re going to eject me out of the village, there’s nothing I could do. There’s nothing I could offer. Hiruzen was right that they needed Rin more so than a little girl that could barely do anything.

I frowned, rummaging through my thoughts. What’s the age difference between Itachi and Sasuke? Five years? Six? He’s about four now, but he’ll turn five in a couple of months. I don’t recall Mikoto showing any signs of pregnancy, so Sasuke shouldn’t be born this year. Which means Naruto won’t be here, this coming October. How much time do I have before then, if I leave with Tesuri?

From now to next October that’s nineteen months. I have to gain mastery over Sanbi’s chakra and make it back to Konoha before then.

“I can do this.” I whispered in acceptance. “I will do this.”

Determined, I got up and tried to find my way back. Except… I am totally and utterly lost.

“Argh… minor setback! I can do this!” I snapped, stomping my way through the mazy forest.

However, the further I went, the more lost I got. My irritation grew with each step and by sunset, I was murderous.

“What the hell is with this freaking forest! I’ve finally settled with my issues and the forest is keeping me hostage! Damn it! Let me get out of here or I will fucking level this place and turn it into ground zero!”

Of course, yelling at the forest as if it was a sentient being was pointless. Trees can’t talk after all and that only made me more and more upset. To the point I couldn’t even see straight anymore. I couldn’t see, I couldn’t hear. It was like drowning in the silence. I found myself screaming myself
hoarse as I burned with frustration.

Only… that burning wasn’t from frustration. It was from chakra. In my anger, I latched onto Sanbi’s chakra and it bubbled to the surface around me. I couldn’t think, I only felt the burning chakra, scorching and ravaging me from the inside out.

“Kasa-chan!” shouted Minato’s voice through the haze. “You have to calm down!”

I screamed, unable to form any words, thrashing as I hit the ground in a fit. My hands clenched onto my head as I tried to calm down, but the raging chakra made it difficult. Stop! I want it to stop! Stop the burning! The echo of ringing chains broke through the haze as I felt my arm and legs restrained.

“Stop fighting us! Kasa! Can you hear me?” shouted Kushina. “Kasa!”

I couldn’t see, I couldn’t move. I could only hear my own screaming against the clashing chains.

“I’m sorry Kasa.” Who said that?

My world turned black.

You know… I should probably learn out to keep my emotions in check. Considering the tailed-beast chakra is activated by strong emotions. I totally screwed up… Man, I hope I didn’t cause any major damage or it’ll be really hard to come back to the village… That is if I’m not permanently banned from entry… Damn…

“Awake?” whispered Tesuri softly by my side.

“Yeah.” I whispered back, my voice was hoarse. He stayed silent. It didn’t seem like there were anyone else around. “Tou-san?”

“Yes Kasa?” asked Tesuri.

“I’ll leave Konoha with you…” I murmured quietly.

“Of course honey,” murmured the man as he ran his hand through my hair. “We’ll leave first thing in the morning.”

We stayed in silence for a moment.

“Tou-san?” I whispered again, dipping my face under the covers.

“Hmm?” He patted my head soothingly.

“…Are they mad at me?” I asked, afraid of his answer. “I couldn’t control the chakra and made a mess of things… Do you think… they will let me come back?”

“No, they’re not angry at you.” Tesuri sighed as his hand stilled over my head. “It’s been a trying day for you Kasa. Why don’t you go to sleep?”

He didn’t answer my question.

“…I’m not allowed to come back… am I?” I asked dejectedly.
“…Get some sleep Kasa. We’ll talk in the morning,” murmured Tesuri as he pecked my head and tucked me in.

I bit back tears as I hid under my covers. I messed up… I want a reset! Where’s my save state? Even a saved file will do! I don’t like this outcome! I want… I want to stay…

The next morning, Tesuri gave me a quick healing session to soothe my throat before we left the hotel. No one was there the previous night because Tesuri had decided to take me to the hotel with him. The sun was barely up, a bluish hue covered the sleepy village as we made it to the village gates. We didn’t say anything the whole way there.

I didn’t want to talk. My throat still stung after the healing session and there really wasn’t anything I want to talk about. I kind of wish I didn’t waste that time running away and went to say good-bye to Hana, Itachi and Shisui. I wonder when’s the next time I’m going to see them?

On a more morbid thought, how many of them would be alive the next time I see them? If I’m banned from coming back to Konoha… when will I ever see them again? I bit my lower lip forcing myself to hold back tears. Crying’s not going to help, suck it up! You’re pathetic Kasa! Some woman you are, you’re crying like a four-year-old!

“Kasa,” nudged Tesuri.

“What?” I didn’t bother looking up from the ground.

“Don’t you want to take one last look?” asked the man gently.

“Why?” I grumbled quietly.

“I think you’ll want to,” said Tesuri as he lifted my chin with a finger.

“Kasa-chan!” shouted Obito.

I stopped, startled by his voice before I took a closer look.

“Kasa-chan!” shouted Hana and Shisui as they waved. Kushina and Minato were there, so were Itachi and Rin, even Kakashi came.

“What are they…?” I trailed off, lost for words.

“Come on, Kasa. You want to say goodbye at least right?” said Tesuri as he grabbed my hand and tugged my along.

When we came close enough, Hana broke from the group and tackled me with a hug. “Kasa-chan! That was mean! You were going to leave without telling us?”

“What are you doing here?” I asked, baffled by their presence.

“Kushina-san told us!” said Hana as she backed up from her hug. “How come you didn’t tell us about you being sick?”

“Huh?” I barely managed and glanced at Kushina. She smiled and raised a hushed finger.

“Yeah, you were going to leave with your dad for treatment and you didn’t tell us? That’s not very nice,” chided Shisui. “Who knows how long before you come back? You are coming back right?”
“Coming… back?” I croaked out.

“The treatment only takes about two years right?” added Hana. “You should be back long before the genin exams. That is if you keep up with your studies.”

“…Exams?” I glanced up to Tesuri, who smiled warmly.

“That’s right, once Kasa feels all better, she’ll come back to Konoha. She can take the genin exam and make her way to becoming an iryo-nin,” said Tesuri. “That’s what you wanted right?”

“I can come back?” I asked, choking as I glanced at Kushina and Minato for confirmation.

“As soon as you get better,” agreed Kushina. “We’ll be waiting for you.”

“But don’t take too long,” interrupted Obito. “We still have a ton of pranks to pull and I totally have to show you the pictures of the prank you missed yesterday.”

Kakashi punched him over the head. “You had pictures!”

Rin giggled. “Though, Kakashi might kill Obito first if you take too long.”

Minato grinned slyly as he crossed his arms. “Or maybe, when you get back, you’ll get your cute little brother.”

“Minato!” Kushina’s face flushed red as she smacked him in the arm.

“I can come back…?” I found myself laughing in tears. “I can come back!”

“Kasa-chan? Why are you crying?” asked Hana as the tears poured down my face.

Hana, Itachi and Shisui, they have no clue why I was leaving.

“N-nothing, I just have some sand in my eyes,” I lied, grinning as I rubbed away the tears. Obito smiled. “I’m totally going to get better before then!”

“If you don’t,” started Shisui with a snigger. “I think Itachi’s going to get more moody without his favorite forehead to poke.”

Itachi gave an uncharacteristic harrumph and turned away with his arms crossed. Grinning I ran over to him a hug and a hug to everyone else following after him. The Uchiha heir’s eyes widened when I did so, but everyone else gracious accepted theirs.

“I promise I’ll be back really soon!” I said.

Itachi gave me one last stare before sighing. “You better.”

I grinned giving them a two-finger salute before snatching Tesuri’s hand and followed him off pass the gates. “I’ll be back in less than two years!”

And that’s a promise I’m aiming to keep.
Anger

“Tou-san, so where have to been all this time?” I asked as we traveled. My mood hadn’t gotten any better since we left. There was something going on with Tesuri and it’s outright pissing me off. “We have time to talk now right?”

“Of course,” grinned Tesuri. “Let’s see… After I left you with Obito-kun, I diverted the Iwa-nin away from you two. I managed to lose them in a few days, but it became a bit difficult after that.”

“Why?” I asked, my hands busying themselves with the chakra chain practice Kushina taught me. Why waste time when I could practice and walk? Multitask! Though, at this point I could only make threads and only enough into a cat’s cradle… not exactly useful.

“I got accosted by Konoha-nin,” said Tesuri. “They thought I was an enemy and dragged me off to interrogations.”

I paused. He was dragged off to T&I? Was that why he was gone for so long?

He noticed me stopping and gave a reassuring smile. “I wasn’t there for long. Maybe a month?”

A month? How are you still alive? Who’s on interrogations right now? Ibiki? No, that can’t be, he’s probably around Kakashi’s age… Was T&I less scary before Ibiki? Or… My eyes widened. Oh my god, my father in this reality is into BDSM! Man, I would totally not expect it with that blue hair and nice disposition! Tesuri you weirdo!

“Kasa?” questioned Tesuri. “Are you coming?”

“Uh… Yeah, coming.” I said as I jogged to catch up. “Um… what did they do to you there?” Oh hell, why the hell am I asking? I do not want to know Tesuris’s weird kinks!

“Nothing much really. I cooperated, so they didn’t really need to do much, but they kept me there as a prisoner until they could clarify what I said. Overall, it wasn’t too bad,” said Tesuri.

…I don’t know should I take his word for it… or wonder if he’s lying to protect my innocent mind. If it is the latter, thank you Tesuri, you are a good man and a kind father… just a little freaky. Holy shit, does that mean Somuku is into that stuff too? Oh gods, and if she knows the chakra chains like Kushina… I shuddered.

“Are you cold? Do you need a jacket?” asked Tesuri.

“No! I’m fine! Absolutely fine! Should we continue?” I laughed sheepishly and trailed after him. It was then that I notice his hitai-ate was missing. “How come you’re not wearing your hitai-ate?”

“That’s because I’m not an Ame-nin anymore,” said Tesuri.

“Oh… are you a missing-nin then?” I asked with a frown. Are we going to get hunted down?

“Not exactly.”
I blinked… not exactly? What does that even mean?

“Interrogations found out I am an iryo-nin and decided they could use me. I’m technically considered a missing-nin by Ame standards, but the Konoha-nin decided I was more help to them in the field than shipping me back to Ame for a bounty. “

“So…” I frowned. “What are you now?”

“I’m on probation with Konoha,” grinned the man.

“Probation?” I repeated before it clicked. “You’re a Konoha-nin!”

“Not yet,” laughed Tesuri. “Like I said, I’m on probation. I have a couple of things to do before they rank me.”

“…So taking me away from the village…?” I trailed off.

His blue eyes drooped and he patted my head. “Sandaime Hokage-sama really tried to convince the council to let you stay with Uzumaki-san, but when you weren’t improving as much as they wanted, they decided you needed less distractions and a stricter regime. I have to say, I’m a little happy about this.”

I frowned, glancing up at him in question.

“I wouldn’t be able to see you otherwise.” He smiled sheepishly. “If you had stayed, I probably wouldn’t have seen you for another year at least.”

I stared at him curiously. “Why?”

“I have to prove my loyalty to the council first. I’m supposed to be on a two-year probation, helping the villages affected by the war with their sick and injured along with any Konoha-nin I come across. I wouldn’t have been able to see you, since I wouldn’t be in Konoha.”

“How does that work?” I frowned.

“Huh?” Tesuri looked confused by my question.

“How come they want you to help the affected villages? Do they charge the villages for your services? And are you the only one they’re sending?” I asked. “If that’s the case, how do they know you did your job at all? You could’ve just said you done it while going off doing something else.”

The one thing I missed about being around Tesuri was that I could ask him almost any question I could think of without worrying. He won’t think I’m weird or anything, just super curious.

“The villages supplied the Konoha outposts during the war and sometimes hosted the injured shinobi. Due to that, they become targets for enemy shinobi. Not every village is willing to put up with that risk. The ones that do, Konoha tries to send out as those they could spare to help with the relief effort. It’s their way or repaying them for assisting during the war. When you get older, you’ll understand more of the politics.”

“Oh…” I don’t really need to get older to understand it; I just need to know what’s going on to piece everything together.

“So how was living in Konoha? I saw you had quite a few friends” said Tesuri.
I grinned. “It’s great! They’re all awesome!” I said as I recounted my year with him.

To tell the truth, politics was not my thing. People backstabbing one another to get ahead, not something I like to join in. I’m not really good with indirect conflict. Call me a simpleton if you must; direct conflict is more my style. Playing the game he said, she said would just confuse me. I’m better off with the fight me here and now mentality.

Yep, if you ask me whether I want to fight Danzo or Pein, I would choose Pein even though it’s certain death with that guy. At least he doesn’t screw around in the background.

“What village are we going first?” I asked around midday.

We managed to catch up almost completely with what we each did during the year. Surprisingly, I didn’t expect Tesuri to be so open with some of the stuff he talked about, but then again I was his own family left. Who else can you trust besides family? Close friends I suppose, but he doesn’t seem like to have many, considering he practically jumped ship and left his own village. I felt kind bad for him.

“Not any of the affected village currently. There’s one place your mother wanted to show you when you were older, but…” He trailed off, but recovered a moment later with a smile. “She would’ve loved to go there with you.”

I said nothing as I grabbed his hand.

As we went on, Tesuri gave me lessons from the Ame curriculum. Unlike Konoha that focused on a large variety of subjects like the various subsections in the kunoichi classes, they focused on specific areas. Children looking into becoming Ame shinobi were given aptitude tests to see which field they were most suited for.

For the most part, they were encouraged to follow their most compatible skill set. However, if they choose to follow another was up to them if they managed to pass the genin exams. Tou-san had me tested and found I was actually not suitable for the three main categories. Taijutsu, ninjutsu and genjutsu, all three I would not excel in compared to others who had more leaning towards them.

Instead, he found I was more inclined to the enforcer skill set. What’s that? Let me back up. Remember that tidbit about me being a natural activator? Yeah, I know you’re sick of hearing that already, but bear with me. Unlike the three main jutsu types, the enforcer skill set is very different.

As you know, I could use seals no problem, but I can’t ever make them myself. Here’s the reason why. Enforcers as the name points to, supports and strengthen things, creating things doesn’t go well with it.

Ninjutsu and genjutsu are creation type techniques, where blowing fire and creating illusions can be done with a little chakra. While enforcers can still use them, it eats up more chakra than necessary and overall becomes useless and wasteful.

Now, you would think enforcers would be perfect for taijutsu because it sounds sort of like Lee’s issue with not being able to use ninjutsu and genjutsu, but here’s the problem. Taijutsu, while not required to mold chakra like the other two main types, still manipulates chakra to change and enhance the body with training and time. Enforcers don’t do that.

What they do, do. Now pay attention here, is take something in existence and strengthen
it. Like say if an enforcer charge chakra through a knife it’ll be sharper. Or a punch would make it harder. But Kasa, you say, that sounds like it will go well with taijutsu.

No, it doesn’t. Taijutsu with time changes the body, making it stronger, turning it into a weapon. If an enforcer tried it, the body won’t change. Sure, there will be a minor boost in power during that fight, but it’s temporary and will not improve the body with continuous use. If you’re a card game person, think of it as a quick play card. Yeah, next round you’re screwed if you haven’t taken them out.

So, how exactly is this thing useful at all if I can’t use it in conjunction with the other jutsu types? The hell do I know, I’m kind of pissed off I got the short pick of the straw. No wonder I was having so much trouble with Kushina’s chakra chain exercise.

“Kasa, it’s not so bad being an enforcer,” said Tesuri. “It just means you’ll work very well as a iryo-nin.”

I blinked. “Really?”

“Hmm…” Tesuri paused as he pondered how to explain it to me. “If I am to heal someone seriously injured right now, it will take me a week. You would probably be able to do it in half the time when you’re a certified iryo-nin.”

“How does that work?” I frowned. “Wouldn’t it take a lot more for me to use the same iryo-ninjutsu as you to heal them…? That doesn’t make sense.”

“Think of it this way.” His hand glowed slightly to catch my attention. “You know how healing chakra works.”

“Yeah…” I nodded.

“After a healing session with an iryo-nin, the healing chakra stays in the system for quite sometime before it gets absorbed into the body,” started the man.

I nodded again.

“Say, you just gave a patient a healing session. The chakra’s already in the system and you can’t add anymore to it until the body absorbs it. However, with your skill set, you can condense that chakra allowing you to pump in more healing chakra. The body will absorb it in the same rate as the initial input, but with the saturated amount.”

“So…” My brows furrowed as I tried to find an example to match what he’s saying. “If I have a explosive tag with the range of… let’s say ten feet? With my ability… the range be the same, but the intensity of the blast becomes stronger? So… if the normal tag blows up the ten feet range, the people would get scorched and maybe third degree burns… but with the enhanced tag…”

“They would be incinerated,” finished Tesuri with a grin. “Of course, you could also increase the range instead of power, making it useful against a large group of enemies instead.”

My jaw dropped. I seriously think Tesuri should not tell his four-year-old daughter that she could possibly incinerate someone with her skills, but this is flipping awesome! It kind of sucks that I can’t throw jutsus of mass destruction at whim like Naruto or Sasuke, but who cares? I have other ways to blow shit up!

“Of course, it’ll be a long while before you can do any of that. You can barely control your chakra as is. In order to take advantage of your enforcer skill set, you need to be able to refine
his chakra control to maximum accuracy, which you need to do anyway since you want to be an iryo-nin right?”

“Yeah!” I agreed enthusiastically.

The lessons grew slightly better after finding out my natural inclinations. Before, back in Konoha, I always felt that I wasn’t meant to do any of this stuff, since I wasn’t good at ninjutsu, genjutsu or taijutsu. Now that I know the reason why, I’m more determined to do this.

In a way, this was a little fair. I started off in this world with a pretty good hand. Foreknowledge, a ninja family and the Uzumaki luck, that thing was a double-edged blade, but more often than not, it’s on my side. So, I guess I shouldn’t be griping about needing to train more than the other characters to match up.

Nearly a week and a half later, we made it to the waterside ruins of Uzushiogakure, the village where Kushina and Somuku were born. Tesuri was starting to grow more and more unbearable with each passing day… was he always this irritating? Forget it, where was I? Oh right, I can’t say I felt much about the place. Sure, it should totally invoke something, but I feel rather detached. Maybe it was because I’ve never been here before? Or the fact I don’t know anyone here aside from Kushina and Somuku… with the both of them, the first village that comes to mind were Konoha and Ame.

“Your mother always talked about this place,” said Tesuri as we stared out to the river. On the other side of the bank were more ruins. “It’s beautiful.”

I wanted to sigh; I get the feeling I’m going to get a really long flashback story from him… It’s only appropriate given the location and all, but I really don’t want to hear a sappy love story right now.

“She hated it with a passion,” laughed Tesuri.

I did a double take, not what I expected. “Hate?”

“She complained about how there’s always fighting. The people of Uzushiogakure were very quick tempered, especially the ones from the Uzumaki clan. She said it was quite common for them to randomly fire off a seal and launch someone thirty feet into the air when they’re annoyed,” chuckled Tesuri.

I would sweat drop at this. Apparently, the hot-bloodedness runs in the clan if Kushina was any indication.

“Come to think of it, the first time I met your mother, she did the same exact thing to me,” laughed the man.

“… Kaa-san sounds scarier than Kushina-san.” I frowned that doesn’t sound like Somuku at all. “I remember her being very nice. Are you sure?”

Tesuri patted my head. “That’s because you haven’t upset her even once when we were still together. Your mother was a frightening woman when she put her mind to it.”

“… Can she do that demon hair thing Kushina-san does?” I asked.

“Demon hair?” Tesuri raised a brow.

“Yeah, when Kushina-san gets angry her hair flairs up into the air like flames and she
looks like a total demon! It’s really cool! I tried asking her to teach me, but she just laughed it off.” I grumbled.

Tesuri stayed quiet for a moment. “Kasa, do you like Uzumaki-san a lot?”

“Yeah, she’s really nice and fun!” Before grimacing at the memory of her training. “But she’s could be very scary if you get her angry.”

“… I see,” murmured the man quietly.


“Kasa… Do you miss your mother?” asked the blue-haired man.

Oh, so that’s what this is about.

“Sometimes.” I answered truthfully.

“Only sometimes?” pressed Tesuri.

“Tou-san, I didn’t replace Kaa-san with Kushina-san.” I said bluntly, startling him that I knew what he was thinking about. “Kushina-san is nice and fun, but she’s not Kaa-san. I know that. You don’t have to worry about me forgetting what she looks like.”

“… You asked Uzumaki-san and Namikaze-san for a little brother many times…” noted the man.

Ah… right, there’s that… How do I get out of this one?

“… I didn’t want to sleep with Kushina-san.” I answered after a moment and he gave me a questioning look. “I said it so I wouldn’t have to share a bed with her.” I gave a shrug. “I like Kushina-san a lot, but she’s not Kaa-san. I couldn’t think of anything else to say besides that. Her and Minato-san turned so red! You should’ve seen it!”

He didn’t really smile. Did I say something wrong again? Argh, what do you say to a man that’s been widowed and terrified that his daughter might find a new family more desirable than staying with her sad old dad?

“Are you mad at what I said in Hokage-sama’s office?” I asked, deciding to get to the point. If I pussy foot around, it’ll be dark by the time we’re done.

“Are you mad that I was gone for nearly a whole year?” He returned the question tiredly.

I puffed up my cheeks. “Stop it! Just stop it!”

Tesuri looked at me in surprise. I know I should let the man have his space and grieve over his dead wife, but right now I feel like being an asshole. I’m going to be traveling with him for the next year, maybe two if I’m unlucky and I am not putting up with his internal crisis. I have enough on my plate as is!

“Kaa-san’s not around anymore and I can’t even go back to Konoha until I learn how to control my chakra! It’s not fair that you’re mad at me!” I snapped. “I haven’t seen you in a year and the first thing you do is take me away from Konoha and then you get mad at me because of it!”

“Kasa…”
“No! Kaa-san said I have to take care of you and me! And I can’t do either if you hate me! Stop hating me! You’re not supposed to hate me!” I growled before pressing a hand to my head. Why the hell is it getting fuzzy?

“Kasa, calm down,” ordered Tesuri.

“NO! I’m not going to listen to you!” I snapped back, my hand pressing harder into my head. Damn this headache! “You’ve been horrible all week! And now you’re jealous of Kushina-san and Minato-san just because I miss them! I liked you better when Kaa-san was around! At least then you weren’t a jackass!”

“Kasa, you have to calm down,” urged Tesuri. “If you get too riled up…”

I blacked out… This is getting old…

Okay… apparently I’m not allowed to get angry anymore or else I turn into Hulk, minus the green skin and ripped clothes… Well, that sucks. I wonder if it’s the chakra that’s making me angry or my anger is triggering the chakra to surface? Argh, I wish I could do something about all this anger! I’ve never felt so angry in my life! I don’t like feeling angry!

Calm down Kasa! Calm down! Think happy thoughts. Ignore everything negative. Ignore… Ignore… Ig… FUCK IT ALL!

I screamed and thrashed.

“Kasa! Please calm down,” begged Tesuri through the haze.

Where the hell am I? I wanted to say something, but it came out in growls.

“This is why I hate children,” sighed a woman’s voice.

Who was that? I couldn’t see.

“Calm down!” snapped the woman before I felt a hard flick to my forehead.

Again with the forehead! Why is it always the forehead? Is that why ninjas wear hitai-ate on their foreheads? So they could stop people from flicking their head? Seriously, this is like the third person to do this! Is this some weird ninja fetish? Forehead flicking?

However, unlike the previous flicks, there was a surge of healing chakra behind it. I found a familiar warmth wash over my mind as my brain turned into jelly from the brain massage. A soft sigh escaped my lips as I slumped into waiting arms. That was nice…

“What idiot put this seal on a child? There’s no way she could handle the stress from it!” snapped the woman. “I’m surprised she hasn’t gone insane yet from the sheer amount of demonic chakra saturating her brain.”

“Tsunade-sama, I don’t think this is the time or place for this,” whispered a timid woman.

Tsunade? I cracked open an eye and saw a hazy figure hovering over me. She tugged at my lower eyelid forcing it to open for a better look.

“Her pupils are dilated. Shizune, get her to our room. We’re giving her treatment right now,” ordered the woman.
“Yes, ma’am,” replied the woman before I was hauled up into the air and rushed to who knows where.

“I knew today was going to be a bad day when I won twenty thousand ryo this morning,” grumbled Tsunade before I completely faded.
Counting Down the Days

My brain feels so fuzzy and warm. I wonder when was the last time I felt this way? With what happened in the past week and half, it felt horrible. It’s like a dam building up in my head and it suddenly cracked and burst open. I’m not sure what happened after I blacked out the second time, I haven’t woken up even once since then. Right now, I’m kind of stuck in limbo and the quietness is boring me to tears.

The only consolation is this awesome brain massage. Seriously, you guys got to try this if you ever get the chance! It makes me feel so giddy and happy! I don’t even remember why I was so angry with Tesuri in the first place…

I hope my brain isn’t degenerating into a child mentality because that would totally suck balls. Can you imagine? The mind of a child with the knowledge of everything that’s going to happen to the world, the possibilities were frightening. Adding to the fact that I was an evil child in my previous life. Seriously, I rooted for all villains until high school. You don’t want me here as an evil child.

I wonder if there are any precautions I could do to keep me from turning to the dark side. I know they have cookies, but I kind of don’t want to lurk in the dark like a sparkling vampire. Ugh… Kill all sparkling vampires! KILL THEM WITH FIRE!

Okay, I’m not going nuts again; I was just trying to be funny… I guess it’s not working out very well. I seriously need to find my mojo and get back into the groove.

A pulse of chakra went through my mind, this time it was less gentle than the healing chakra. I found myself gritting my teeth and I shot up holding my head.

“Oww…” I whined.

“Good, you’re awake. How’s your head feeling?” asked a firm voice. I glanced above me and found a busty blonde woman hovering over me. Hello, nurse! Yeah, I’m kidding there, I don’t like chicks, I prefer dudes.

“It… doesn’t hurt?” I said in confusion rubbing my head. “Where am I?”

Tsunade raised a brow. “You wake up to a stranger and you ask where you are?”

“Why not?” I shrugged. “You don’t look like you were going to kill me.”

“… Okay,” shrugged the woman, completely fine with my explanation. I like her. “Want to tell me who’s the dumbass that put that there on your forehead? It nearly fried your brain.”

Ooh, only nearly? I’m getting better! I was expecting the, you almost died, speech again.

“Uh… he said it was to save me.” I answered, not really wanting to oust Jiraiya. She’s totally going to kill him if she found out.

“Did this man happen to have long spiky white hair and red streaks under his eyes? Named Jiraiya?” droned the woman.

Ah shit, she knows. I gave a silent nod.
“…I’m going to kill him,” growled the woman as she rubbed the side of her temple. “Do you know what that seal on your head does?”

“Sort…of? It stores chakra… but I’m not allowed to use it yet until I learn how to control chakra. Kushina-san said it would be too dangerous to use it.” I answered truthfully.

“Kushina?” frowned the woman. “As in Kushina Uzumaki?”

I nodded. “She was supposed to teach me how to control my chakra and how to use all the seals on my body.”

“…There are more seals?” grounded out Tsunade livid with the thought. I could feel anger rolling off her.

“Uh…” Nice knowing you Jiraiya. “Kaa-san put two on me, and Jiraiya-san put two on me.” I’m a little surprised she didn’t notice the other three or was she busy with keeping my brain from frying. “They were supposed to help—”

“Show me!” demanded the woman furiously as she smashed the nightstand next to the bed.

“I need an adult!” I shouted the first thing that came to mind as I jolted back, surprised by her outburst.

“I am an adult!” snapped the woman.

“Pfft—” I slapped my hands against my mouth to keep myself from giggling. Good lord, I really need to stop doing this in the most inappropriate times.

“Stop laughing and show me the seals girl,” repeated the crossed woman.

“Yes ma’am!” I replied, quickly unraveling the bandages around my arms.

She grabbed my arms, giving the seals a close look before nodding to herself. “These are done by your mother?”

I nodded rapidly, not wanting to cross her. “The other one done by Jiraiya-san is on my stomach.”

Tsunade frowned. “Did he tell you what seal it was?”

“Yeah, it’s the Four Symbols Seal. He said it’s to…” I bite my tongue; I’m not supposed to talk about Isobu’s chakra. In the village if I let it slip, worse comes to worse people don’t like me. Out here, I let it slip and something much worse might happen.

She moved forward brushing my shirt up and sent a pulse of chakra into my stomach. I grimace at the forcefulness of the chakra before the squiggly lines made its way to the surface of my stomach. Her eyes widened.

“A jinchuriki?” She frowned. “No, you’re not, but this chakra… demonic.” Revelation crossed her face as she looked into my eyes. “You said Jiraiya placed these seals on you to save you. Why? What happened that made him decide to put demonic chakra of all things into you?”

I grimaced. “I ran out?”

“Ran out?” said the woman in disbelief. “What were you doing that you would run out?”
“Uh… Activating the Five Elements Seal?” I shrunk back when she stared at me.

“I… don’t even…” Lost for words, she pressed a hand against his face and muttered to herself. Completely forgetting I was in the room with her.

“Um… If you don’t mind me asking… Where’s Tou-san?” I squeaked out.

“Out, he was triggering your break downs. Until we deal with the seal on your head, you’re not seeing your father,” grumbled the woman. “What is your issue with him?”

“Uh… I don’t have any problem with him really…” I mumbled.

“You do,” said the woman. I glanced at her curiously. “You were quite vocal about it during your break downs.”

I scratched the back of my head. “Uh… he’s not angry is he?”

She raised a brow. “I’m quite sure we’re talking about you being angry at him.”

“Well… I’m a little upset that I have to leave Konoha and the fact he left me for a year or so… but I got over it… I think…”

“Are you sure now?” asked the woman.

“What do you want me to say?” I grumbled. “I’m super mad and don’t ever want to see him again? Or that I was never angry with him to begin with? Why can’t I be in the middle?”

She raised a finger and I shut up almost instinctively. “Interesting…”

“Huh?” I tilted my head, puzzled.

“Someone must’ve flicked your forehead a lot,” grinned the woman. “You’re conditioned to calm down and focus when you’re aware a finger is raised. You stopped rambling.”

What? Damn it! Itachi pulled a Pavlov’s dog on me!

“That makes things a little easier,” said the woman as she pressed two fingers to the seal on her head. “From now on, this action will be your focus, if you lose yourself or your temper, fall back on your focus.”

…Tell me I’m not the only person that thought she might teleport somewhere with instant transmission with that move. No? Never mind then.

“Why?” I frowned. How does that even work?

“Your issue isn’t with your father, it’s with your focus. The instant you get diverted from your focus, you start losing yourself,” answered the woman with a raised finger. “Before, when I started asking you questions you were confused and anxious, but your mind was alert and assessing everything I did and said.”

I found myself focusing on her finger’s movement despite trying not to.

“However, as we moved on, your mind started drifting. By the time I got to questioning you about your father your mind diverted. Even though you started civilly and have no anger towards you father, but once the thought of uncertainty was introduced, you completely lost focus and your outbursts occur.”
“Oh…” I scratched the back of my head glancing away from her when she dropped her hand.

“Until you learned how to control your chakra and maintain your control over the portion of yin chakra sealed in you, you have to maintain your focus. If you let yourself get overwhelmed the chakra will spread and seep deeper into your brain, deteriorating it until you become nothing more than a feral mess.”

My eyes widened. “You mean I’ll turn into a monster?”

“Eventually, if you lose yourself often enough,” answered Tsunade.

Well… Shit… That’s not good.

“The next time I see that damn pervert, I’m going to kill him,” growled the woman. “The Yin Seal was originally meant to convert demonic chakra and nature chakra for safe use. It was only meant for someone with precise and expert chakra control and went and placed it on a child!”

“Um… I’m learning how to control my chakra if that’s any help?” I added lamely.

“Kushina-san taught me some exercises and Tou-san was walking me through some basic iryo-ninjutsu earlier this week.”

Tsunade raised a brow. “You’re interested in learning iryo-ninjutsu?”

“Yeah!” I nodded. “I think ninjutsu is pretty cool, but even the best ninjutsu user can’t do anything if they’re hurt and being an iryo-nin means everyone has to listen to you! How cool is that?”

A wry grin touched the woman’s lips. “Being an iryo-nin is a lot of work and a good number of times they can’t see their family and friends because of the demands for their skills. They’re either always at the hospital or out on the field as support. Are you okay with that?”

“Hmm…” I pondered over her words.

I’ve never thought about that. Ever since I’ve gotten to Konoha, all that mattered was surviving and maybe change the future for the better. I didn’t expect to make friends with the kids or Team Minato. If I do become an iryo-nin, I might not seem them at all, even if I remained in Konoha.

“That is true… I haven’t seen Tou-san in a year because he was doing that… and it wouldn’t be fun to not see my friends…” I murmured.

Tsunade sighed slowly through her nose, probably a bit exasperated with dealing with a child. “It’s just a thought, you still have plenty of time to decide—”

“Nah.” I cut her off before she could finish and gave a bright grin despite the startled look on her face. “I still want to be one! Just like Tou-san.”

“What? But you said…” She trailed off as I shrugged.

“If I become an iryo-nin, I’ll just make sure I’m on a team with my friends if I’m on the field and keep them alive. And if I miss Tou-san, we can both work at the hospital then that’ll solve that problem. Since we’ll both be iryo-nin then we’ll never be home anyway. The hospital can be our second home.” I finished.

Not that I could control where the heck they’ll send me after I get my certification as an
iryō-nin. This is just the hopeful child in me talking. There’s nothing wrong with being hopeful right? Hell, I’m already trying to be hopeful that I haven’t screwed up this world too much already. What’s one more to the list?

“You hear that Tesuri?” said Tsunade with great amusement. “Sounds like your daughter still idolize and love you very much.”

I blinked in surprise when the door opened and I saw Shizune patting Tou-san on the shoulder as he pressed a hand against his eye with a weak chuckle.

“I’m such an idiot,” said the man as he made his way into the room. “Nearly thirty years of age and I’m jealous that my daughter might like someone else aside from me.”

“…Tou-san you idiot.” I grumbled, raising my arms up to demand a hug. I have enough of getting upset. I need a hug! Hugs make everything better, though not like sprinkles, because sprinkles suck. They get stuck in your teeth.

The man smiled weakly and scooped me into his arms into a tight hug. “Sorry Kasa.”

“Well,” grinned Tsunade. “I’d like to see what happens when your daughter begins to have suitors. It seems like there’s someone already.”

Good lord not this again. I resisted the urge to sigh, but blinked in surprise when Tesuri tightened his grip.

“Someone?” said Tesuri almost possessively before turning to me. “Kasa, which one of those Uchiha boys is it?”

I stared at him in disbelief. He’s one of those dads… “What are you talking about Tou-san? What’s a suitor?” I feigned ignorance.

Tesuri held me possessively. “Don’t ever grow up.”

Too late Tou-san, I’m already grown up. I wonder how he’s going to take it when I physically grow into a teenager? Somuku and Kushina were both hot and come to think of it… wasn’t Tsunade also an Uzumaki descent? Oh well, not my problem anymore! Good luck Y-chromosomes of this world! Have fun with this overprotective closet BDSM father.

Nothing you say will convince me otherwise that he came out of T&I without a scratch or mental scar without being into BDSM.

Tesuri managed to coerce Tsunade to give me two weeks worth of training. How he did so… I don’t know and I don’t think I wasn’t to know with how Shizune clammed up so quickly. It’s probably for the best for my sanity that I don’t question what the heck Tesuri does behind the scenes. I might be scared of what I find.

In the two weeks of training with Tsunade, I learned that any woman descended from the Uzumaki Clan was insane! Even Somuku, from Tesuri’s stories, that woman was just as equally mad as Kushina and Tsunade. You would think since I need chakra control, they would just drop me in front of a tree or a big puddle of water and be done with it. No, no, no! That was not what this woman did at all!

When Shizune suggested I learned how to do the tree-walking exercise, Tsunade scoffed and said it would take ages through trial and error for me to do so. Not to mention if I lost focus, I would snap at a moment’s notice. Instead, she sent me through a sink or swim routine, keeping me at
a constant flight or fight response.

I’ve never been more focused in my life. What she made me do was an equivalent of playing Electric Bar Maze with less than a centimeter of space to go through. Too much chakra and I get electrocuted by the surge. Too little and the whole thing blows up in your face because there’s not enough chakra maintain the dividers. I have to direct the chakra through the seal as quickly as I can without getting electrocuted or blown up.

Oh, it won’t kill you, but it’ll still feel like diffusing a freaking bomb each time you fail. Seriously, that thing hurts like a bitch! It’s like stubbing your toe in the dark, jumping into a lego, barefoot and crashing down the stairs… yeah, I know I’m being oddly specific. It happened, laugh all you want. You can see why I don’t like this exercise.

“It’s an incentive to make you learn faster,” grinned Tsunade as she downed a glass of sake as she watched me shakily practice over the scroll she gave me. Now I can see why time-skip Sakura was so traumatized by Tsunade’s training. “Once you get that down, we’ll move onto the next scroll where you have to adjust your chakra output accordingly.”

Where does anyone get seals like that? Who makes these seals? Why would they make such seals? Oh wait… the Uzumaki Clan are full of pranksters… Freaking trolls… wasting their time making such evil seals. It doesn’t help that any seal I touch gets strengthen a bit due to my enforcer ability.

“HOLY SHI—!” The scroll blew up in my face, knocking me halfway across the room. I groaned pathetically as I pushed myself up. Now, I kind of wished that I was good at dying… Geez, I swear my hair must be sporting a fro by now.

“Get up girly. You still have other training to do,” grinned Tsunade sadistically.

Why doesn’t this world have child protective services? I could totally use that intervention right now.

In between bomb diffusing lessons, yes I’m calling my charka control lessons bomb diffusing, were theoretical lessons on iryo-ninjutsu. That totally went over my head. Don’t forget, I technically have the vocabulary of a four-year-old in this body. So half the stuff she says I have to ask what the hell it means because my brain hasn’t figured a way to translate the new words yet.

Hell, if it’s anything like my old world, there’s going to be a shit ton of scientific names no one gives a shit about. I have enough trouble trying to remember poisonous plants by name as is. Now I have to remember the name of every freaking bone in the human body? Children have maybe around 270 bones or so and when they grow into adults some bones fuse and the count becomes 206 bones. How the hell am I supposed to remember everything if they freaking fuse?

I sorely hope no sad bastard needs me to mend bones in the near future or they will sorely regret it. Thank god the pressure points and chakra points were less of a nightmare, they’re identified by number and region like a good map that lists the streets from one to a hundred, a to z. Not the crap maps with a different name at every freaking street.

Halfway through the second week, I’ve managed to move onto the third bomb diffusing seal after blowing myself up a number of times, much to Tsunade’s amusement. In addition to maintaining and adjusting chakra, this one requires adding chakra blocks and opening passages. This one isn’t so bad once I got the first two scrolls down, mainly because it felt like the Unblock Me puzzle game. If it weren’t so exhausting, I would’ve found it fun.
Seriously, this world has no games worth playing. Shogi and go weren’t bad per se, they’re similar to chess in some ways, but good lord I have no patience for such games. My brain will fry if you have me strategize over a hundred moves in advance and adjust if shit goes wrong. I’m not that smart! I’m a follower, not a leader and I’m not ashamed to admit it.

“I’m surprised you managed to get through the third scroll,” said Tsunade by the end of the second week. “I was expecting you to hit the wall several more times.”

I scowled, sadistic woman… She patted my head grinning at my obvious annoyance.

“Am I going to be okay now?” I asked. The reason why I bothered working so hard was to keep from turning into a mindless monster. Can’t do much if your brain is on smash mode permanently.

“For the time being, it’s enough, you’ll have to keep up your training. The tree walking and water walking exercise will build up your control further.”

I paused. “Wait, I thought you said this was supposed to help me learn how faster.”

“Yes, my method is faster and you are quite skillful in your chakra control, but you still lack focus and stamina. You can’t control your chakra without forcing yourself can you?”

I shook my head. She’s right on that, I can control my chakra well, but it hasn’t become second nature yet. In the ninja world, every split second counts in a fight.

“Work with those two and eventually, you won’t even have to think about how to control it,” said Tsunade with a raised finger. She made it a habit to do so if there was an important point that I must remember. “I can’t promise you that it’ll stop all your outbursts. It’s up to you to control those on your own. If you lose focus, you’ll lose yourself. Don’t forget that.”

Fair enough. “Do you think I could become a good iryo-nin?” I asked.

With how badly I did the last two weeks, I have a sinking feeling that becoming one might be impossible. In all the games I played before, a white mage was never my first choice or even considered for the most part, just because you can’t blow shit up and kill things. Who wants to play support when there are easier roles to play? However, in this world, a healer could make a great difference because there’s no such thing as re-spawning here. You die and it’s game over.

“Your theoretical skills could use a lot of work,” noted Tsunade as she rested a hand on her hip. “But your father could probably bring you up to speed on his time. I see potential, but unless you work hard, all the potential in the world won’t help you in the least.”

“Then I can start learning iryo-ninjutsu?” I asked excitedly.

“I wouldn’t recommended it until you’ve perfected your focus and control,” said the woman. I sulked. “But starting on theory shouldn’t be an issue.”

A dark cloud loomed over my head. I’m never going to get to learn.

“Kasa-chan, you’ll get it soon enough,” consoled Shizune as she patted my shoulder.

“Where are you heading next, Tsunade-sama?” asked Tesuri. No doubt, he respects the sannin greatly. She was the most highly noted iryo-nin in the world. There was no one out there that could match her skill. “If you don’t mind me asking that is. I didn’t expect you bump into you near Uzushiogakure. I hadn’t had a chance to ask earlier since… well, Kasa’s training takes priority.”
The woman shrugged. “I was coming back from the hot springs in the Land of Hot Water. Thought, I stop by Uzushiogakure to see the ruins. No plans for anywhere specific yet.”

“I see,” nodded Tesuri pensively. “We will be heading towards the west villages that were affected by the recent war. If there’s a chance of us running into one another again, I would like to have another chance to speak with you again regarding to Kasa’s training regime.”

The woman waved it off. “Teach her what you want. If the girl is stubborn enough, she’ll eventually get it. I rather not involve myself with any more ninjas and village politics.” She glanced at me. “I’d say don’t get yourself involved in the shinobi world unless you’re looking to get hurt. The life of a ninja is not for everyone.”

I wanted to protest but she raised a finger to silence me.

“But considering who you are, I doubt you’ll take my advice,” grinned the woman wryly. “I hope you’re ready for what’s to come kid.”

I grinned back. “Don’t worry, I’ll be able to handle it!”

In the months to follow, Tesuri and I fell into a routine. Traveling to one village to the next, stay for weeks to a month at a time to treat the sick and slip in whatever lessons he could when we weren’t mobile. I spent my fifth birthday with him delivering a baby. Whoever said the miracle of life is a beautiful thing is a fucking liar and should be shot.

The birthing process is not a beautiful thing. The soon-to-be mother always screams bloody murder in pain and fear. The father, not any better, freaks out and needs a serious ass kicking to shut the hell up. By the time that baby finally comes out, it comes screaming, coated in blood mucus and whatever the hell is in the placenta. Oh and don't forget the placenta comes out too.

If I ever make iryo-nin, I am never dealing with delivery or working in the maternity ward. Screaming mothers and babies, I can only deal with one or the other, but not both.

“You did well Kasa,” complimented Tesuri after the delivery. “You were calm throughout the process.”

No shit, as if panicking would help the situation. Only a dumbass father would panic. What a stupid—I pressed two fingers to my forehead and centered my thoughts, I lost myself and drifted again. These childish breakdowns are getting ridiculous! I can’t remember ever having so many tantrums in my previous childhood.

You know why? Because my parents would’ve beaten the sass out of me the instant I gave them any sort of lip. That’s right, it’s an ass beating with coat hangers. If I was lucky, they’d use a slipper, but either way, if ever a slipper or a hanger was spotted at hand your ass was in for a beating. My former parents would’ve had me over their knees in a split second and spanked me to tears until I said sorry.

Tesuri’s smile dropped a little at my action. I really didn’t want to worry him, but it’s going to be a while before I could focus without doing that thing. Tsunade was right, it did help a lot, but I can’t rely on it forever.

“Thanks.” I replied with a reassuring grin. He has enough on his plate already dealing with traveling from village to village to deal with the sick and whatnots. I don’t need to add more grief to his life.

Three months into our trip, Tesuri had me helping for the first time in dealing with
patients. Nothing major, mainly just minor cuts and scratches, first aid and stitches, the basic stuff that everyone should know. I’m not doing any diagnosis, just treatment and preparing whatever he decides to prescribe to the patients.

There weren’t even any chakra or jutsu involved in these. I wasn’t allowed to practice any healing techniques involving with jutsus, not with my current level of control and concentration. So far, I’ve only completed tree walking and moved onto water walking. My control has yet to reach an instinctive mastery.

Each attempt I made in water walking exercises always left me exhausted both physically and mentally. Often unconscious by the waterside until Tesuri or one of the villagers find me. You would think I’d take precautions being what I am now, but nope, I didn’t. There was no need really, the villages were small and the villagers were mostly quiet people that kept to themselves.

Had the population been more than a hundred people, I might’ve been more worried, but that might be my carelessness talking. Though, I doubt I have to really worry. Tesuri generally kept a firm eye on me for the most part.

“Kasa, you need to take a break from training,” said Tesuri after he found me asleep out in the open after the third time. “I know you want to head back to Konoha as soon as possible, but you’re still growing and if you want to become stronger, you need to take better care of yourself.”

I’ve heard that speech at least a hundred times by the time I managed to get water walking down. By then, another three months passed. At first, I was quite worried that it took me so long to get these basic exercises done. Sasuke and Naruto seemed to be able to get it down in a week, Sakura with even less time.

However, if I calculated my current age, the amount of useable chakra and my lack of former training, it was almost forgivable… keyword, almost. I spent the last six months since leaving Konoha dealing with the most basic of practices and I haven’t even learned a single jutsu yet. Sure, I’ve gotten plenty of theoretical lessons on how these things should work, but Tesuri never gave me a live performance or tips on how to do them.

Well, if he won’t teach me… I still had one more ace up my sleeve… quite literally. I glanced at the bandages on my arm. If I really was desperate enough, I could always consult the cheat code and see if there were any tips to how I could learn this stuff… My chakra control has gotten better. Maybe it won’t be as bad as the previous times.

Let it be known, I am not the smartest crayon in the box. With a hand glowing with chakra, I slapped it on one of my bandaged arms and thought nothing more than basic iryo-ninjutsu and academy-leveled jutsu. The familiar rush of information hit me as I slumped against the wall in my room. I watched as the information flickered through my eyes.

Examples and performances played over and over by various members of the Uzumaki clan. I was almost lost in the information until, I felt myself roughly ripped from its hold.

“Kasa, what are you doing!” snapped Tesuri. His hands glowing with chakra as he gripped my arms and forced my chakra back, away from the seal.

I blinked rapidly as I willed away the lingering images. “Training?” I said dumbfounded as I touched the bottom of my nose. No blood this time. Did I get better? Or did Tesuri stop me before that happened?

“Training?” roared Tesuri. “You could’ve killed yourself being so reckless!”
“I had training in the sealing arts. I know what I’m doing.” I argued.

“You are far from being a master in the sealing arts. You’ve barely got through the basics to control yourself! If I wasn’t here what would’ve happened?” snapped the man.

“You wouldn’t teach me! You wouldn’t let me try!” I blew up. “I’ve gotten all the control exercises down, but even then you kept me to theory work! I’m sick of memorizing numbers and text! I want to learn something I could use!”

“Kasa, you’re too young, your body can’t handle—”

“Bull shit!” I cut him off with a snarl. “I’ve spent the last six months learning and practicing! I could totally—”

SLAP

I froze at the stinging feeling on my cheek, staring at Tesuri. He looked almost mortified at his own hand, as if not believing what he just did.

“You… slapped me…” I whispered.

“Kasa, I’m sorry,” started Tesuri with his excuses. “I didn’t mean to—”

I took a step back.

“Kasa, please…” begged the man as he took a step forward.

I took another step before turning my heel and ran with my palm pressed to my forehead, fingers won’t be enough to keep my focus this time. Damn it, another one! Stay down! Stay down! I thought I got this part down already! What the hell?

Clear your mind Kasa! Stop being such a baby! You’re a grown woman, so act like one! You’re not going to be lucky and have Tsunade around to save your ass like last time!

“Kasa, wait!” shouted Tesuri as he caught my free arm.

I flailed and fought against him, but eventually I dropped to my knees hissing. He pulled me into his arms in seconds, pushing his hand under mine that was covering my head. A soothing burst of healing chakra pulsed into my head, forcing Isobu’s demonic chakra to recede from my mind.

“Tou-san, it hurts.” I whimpered.

“I know. I’m sorry,” choked out Tesuri as he continued to send a steady burst of healing chakra into my head. He kept whispering reassurances over and over again until Isobu’s chakra completely receded.

“Tou-san… I don’t think I could keep doing this…” I murmured in exhaustion when my mind settled.

“This is just a minor setback,” said Tesuri as he dropped his hand from my head. “You just need some more practice. You’ll get it eventually. Remember what Tsunade-sama said?”

“…What if I’m…?” I trailed off as he held me close and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“You’re Somuku’s and my daughter. You’re as stubborn as they’ll come. Just be
patient,” said Tesuri.

Let’s hope you’re right… What’s today’s date anyway? That's right… it’s October tenth… Three hundred and sixty-five days left…
When New Years came about it’s been nearly eleven months since I left Konoha with Tesuri. Interestingly enough, in this world, their New Years follow the lunar calendar rather than the western calendar. Why I say interesting, because this world uses the western calendar, but they celebrate their New Years by the lunar calendar.

Even after six years, I still found this confusing. There’s no consistency and New Years seem to land in late January or early February. I suppose the reason why they use two calendars was because they needed consistency and simplicity, but they still require the stages of the moon phase for ritualistic or traditional nonsense. I’m totally making it up? Okay, you got me on that one. I have no clue why they use both.

However, New Years here was probably one of my favorite holidays. Why? Because of the amount of delicious New Years food! I am a glutton and I’m proud! Though, I kind of miss Kushina’s osechi. Her cooking was simply divine. Not that Tesuri’s cooking was bad, it was still delicious as I remember from Ame and much prettier too with his presentation.

I’m getting carried away with the talk of food. Let’s get back to what’s going on. From when we left Konoha, Tesuri and I were making a slow and full rotation around the Land of Fire. We started east of Konoha, where the ruins of Uzushiogakure sat and made our way around the border of the Land of Fire. From Uzushiogakure, we moved past the Land of Waves, then down towards the border to the Land of Tea, stopping at every village listed in Tesuri’s mission log.

Eventually, we made our way towards west and hitting villages at the border of the Land of Rivers. The time spent traveling the southern portion of the Land of Fire while tending to the sick and injured took nearly ten months, including the various hiccups during my training that forced us to stay a bit longer till I recovered.

If we stayed on schedule, Tesuri would finish his rounds around the Land of Fire before my personal set deadline to return to Konoha with time to spare. Fortunately, the northern region of the land was considerably smaller compared to the southern territory. However, whether or not I’m ready to handle the shit storm that’s to come was another story.

By now, Tesuri started my iryo-ninjutsu training. My practice patients didn’t go beyond a fish. I’m not allowed to use iryo-ninjutsu on people until Tesuri cleared me. Although, I would have to question the person that would let a six-year-old perform possibly dangerous medical treatment without a question. Even so, I’ve managed to keep the fish alive and resuscitate it a number of times. I’ve nearly mastered the Mystical Palm Technique, though it’s probably easier to call it a healing jutsu or a cure spell.

Tesuri was so proud. With my current reserves, I couldn’t heal severe injuries, but minor lacerations and puncture wounds I could handle no problem. Can’t help you if a harpoon skewers you or you crushed your internal organs. For severe injuries like those, I think the healing bite might work better compared to my current skillset.

Of course, the healing bite completely wipes out my stores and leaves a permanent scar, if my experience with Obito was any indication. I really don’t want another bite mark if I could help it. Seriously, I don’t want to look like a vampire’s plaything that’s just freaking gross.

“Kasa, we’re going to reach the border of Ame soon,” said Tesuri somberly as the weather fluctuated and the sun shown less. It looked like it was going to rain soon.
“Will we be okay?” I asked quietly. It’s been nearly two years since we left Ame. I wonder if the civil war was still going on.

“We should be fine,” noted Tesuri as he patted my head. “Just keep your eyes open and stay close to me. If you’re going to train, don’t go too far.”

In my repertoire of skills and arsenal of tools, I learned one iryo-ninjutsu technique, partially mastered due to my current limited stamina, one healing bite technique that drains my chakra completely to work, the basic Uchiha-styled taijutsu, un-mastered, barely passable shuriken throwing skills and a string of seal charms. Of course, I only know how to use the Five Elements seal rings and none of the remaining charms.

Kushina and Minato couldn’t tell me what they were; neither could Tesuri when I asked. The only way I could find out was through using the seals on my arms, but after my last stunt, I was banned from using them until I had more training and he kept a close eye on me whenever he thought I would. This was a major setback in my plans.

If I can’t build on my skills or knowledge, what can I do to save them? Warn Tesuri? He’s not going to believe me. I know nothing about his life that I could use as proof of my so call oracle powers. Even if he believed me, what could he do? He’s not even a formal Konoha-nin yet. He was still on probation.

I grimaced. Tesuri was an iryo-nin, which meant his role belonged in the sidelines and away from battle. While it’s true his natural skill set leans towards ninjutsu, Tesuri’s arsenal carried very little offensive techniques from what I’ve seen. More likely than not, he won’t be able to pull off what Tsunade and Sakura manages to do with their strength. Compared to him, they fell closer to the taijutsu skill set. Odd, I know, considering most iryo-nins had the taijutsu skill set regarding use of chakra to repair and strengthen the body.

He was already at a disadvantage going into a field that’s not of his specialty. Telling him was out of the question. He couldn’t do anything even if he believed me. I scowled, glaring at the rain coming down. Great, I’m wet and stuck. Stupid rain, stupid border town.

I was ready to turn back and return to the village, but suddenly the rain stopped. I don’t mean it stopped raining. It was still raining, but it wasn’t hitting the ground.

“What the hell?” I murmured as I glanced around. Before I could decide what to make of this, the floating droplets burst into a fine white mist. Surprised, I stumbled back trying to find my way back to the village.

However, before I could take two steps, an unfamiliar voice shouted, “Water Prison!”

Suddenly, I was drowning in a sphere of water. I couldn’t scream or move. Hell, I can’t breath. I managed to stay awake a minute longer before I passed out from the lack of oxygen.

I have no clue how long I was out, but I didn’t have the luxury to wake up naturally. A sharp jolt of chakra woke me violently.

“Get up,” said a booming voice.

I coughed, hacking out the remaining water from my lungs. Hair clung to my face, as I lay on the ground wet and cold from being in the water prison. My mind was hazy as I glanced through my plum-red strands. The room was dim, no not a room, a dungeon? Where am I?
“This child is a joke, Hanzo-sama. There is no way she is a jinchuriki. Danzo must’ve crossed us!” declared another voice. There was a dark patch of skin covering the top right corner of his face, covering his eye.

Danzo? What does he have to do with this? I struggled to get up, but kept down at the sight of a scythe smashing down in front of my face. I stared up at the owner of the scythe and felt my heart stop. The frightening mask, the unrelenting stare, it was Hanzo. The very man Tesuri and Somuku fled from. The man even the Sannin had trouble facing even together.

Fuck.

“Tell me child, do you carry a part of the three-tailed beast?” asked Hanzo as he pulled the scythe out of the ground and rest it over my head. “Answer carefully or I might just end you here and now.”

I didn’t dare slip out a wisecrack. Unlike the other characters, Hanzo won’t humor my lip and disrespect. He would end me here and now, giving me no chance to ever come back. His ruthlessness was scarier than any demon. My body quaked at his threat.

“Hanzo-sama, end the child. We should stop wasting time here and eliminate that rebel group Akatsuki. Once they’re gone, we could take on Konoha, they’re already weakened by the three-tail’s attack,” noted the other man.

What?

“Konoha does seem to be producing a number of nuisances,” muttered Hanzo.

No! Konoha can’t take another attack! Not again and not before all the essential players are born. They can’t attack Konoha again. I felt my breathing hitch as my chest constricted. This isn’t happening. I’ve screwed up.

“Those traitorous rebels have lived long enough. Once I eliminate them, this would be an excellent time to eliminate——”

“STAY AWAY FROM KONOHA!” I roared, the fear for my life disappeared as a billow of chakra escaped, blasting away the scythe.

“Hanzo-sama!” shouted the man and his guards, moving to guard their leader.

A grin crossed the man’s face. “Looks like Danzo haven’t lied after all. This child is a jinchuriki. Born from Ame, yet so loyal to Konoha. Tell me why is that.”

“I don’t have to tell anything to a warmonger like you.” I snarled, dragging myself to my feet as the chakra pulsed around me angrily. “Touch Konoha and I will end you!”

“Warmonger?” bellowed Hanzo with laughter. “We live in the world of shinobi. That is a compliment, there is no such thing as peace!”

“Shut up!” I snapped. “As if I give a damn about peace! This world can burn in hell for all I care! There are people I care about in Konoha! And I’ll be damned if I’m going to let you hurt any of them!”

Where did that come from?

“Such bright hopefulness,” chortled Hanzo. “We’ll see how long you’ll last when I’m
through with you.”

I growled, my vision hazing again before I charged forward…

I lasted all of three seconds before he knocked me flat on my ass with a violent punch to my stomach. I coughed violently as I clung to my torso in pain. I think he ruptured something… The chakra flare from the seal died off as I dropped to the ground unconscious once again.

Not exactly an epic fight… or a fight for the matter. Seriously, did you expect me to be able to take this guy on in my current state? It took Nagato to become Pain to kick this guy’s ass. No amount of foreknowledge can help me in this situation.

Akatsuki being the rebel group against Hanzo was clear of that. Even without Obito, somehow that organization still lived. I’ll admit, my memory of the series is a bit scattered considering it’s been five years, almost six in a couple of months, since I’ve arrived. I didn’t dare write down anything, considering my luck someone might find it.

I know, I should write it in English or my personal short hand, but even then that’s considered a code that could eventually be broken. The safest place and the easiest place were both in the mind and away from prying eyes.

Though, this does make it a bit depressing. If my changing things don’t change anything for the better, what exactly is the point of doing any of this? Akatsuki still lived, which meant Madara found his way to them even without Obito and the hunt for tailed-beasts and the atomic bomb jutsu, yes, I’m calling it that, was certain in fifteen to sixteen years.

“Kasa… Kasa…” croaked a familiar voice.

My eyes snapped open to rain and ruins, all I saw was the dark raining sky. What happened while I was out? Where was Hanzo? Or… did the demonic chakra take over again?

“Kasa…” whispered the hoarse voice again.

Who was calling me? I crawled out of the rubble, dust and debris sliding off me as I moved. I could hear it so clearly. Why did these ruins looked so familiar?

“Hello?” I called out, stumbling as I got to my feet.

“Kasa, over here…” It was a woman’s voice.

I nearly tripped as I ran towards the source. I knew that voice! There was a large amount of rubble in the way. I started grabbing pieces of the debris, yanking and kicking away what I could, trying to make my way through the rubble. Eventually, I found a pale hand and I doubled my efforts.

“Hold on! I’ll get you out!” I said as I pulled more and more broken pieces of wood and stone from the pile, but the hand caught mine and gripped tightly. “Hey! Let go! I’m trying to help!”

“Kasa… my darling little girl,” cried the voice.

I froze, finally remembering why the voice sounded so familiar. “…Kaa-san? Is that you?”

She said nothing.

“Kaa-san!” I shouted. “It’s you right? Say something!”
Again, silence.

“Kaa-san, you have to let go or I can’t help you!” I struggled to unlatch her hand from my arm, but to no avail it didn’t budge. “Say something! Let me know you’re alive.”

Again, nothing.

“Damn it! Kaa-san, don’t do this to me!” I shouted. “Say something!”

“…Kasa,” whispered the woman weakly. “Why…?”

“What?” I said in confusion before the grip tightened. “Kaa-san! That hurts! Let go!”

“Why did you let me die?” screeched the woman. “You and Tesuri both abandoned me!”

More of the pale hand appeared as a decrepit body emerged from the ruins. A gasp escaped my lips when I saw what came pooling out as she dragged her kunai-speared body out. Calligraphy brushes, spools of thread, needles and handkerchiefs pieced and stuck to her blood and ink-stained body. Her beautiful red hair was dirty and matted with clumps of dried blood. Aside from the hand that was still grabbing onto me, almost every inch of her body was covered in oozing gashes.

“Kaa-san.” I cried desperately. “Tou-san and I would never do that! What did they do to you?”

“What did you do to me, you mean?” snarled the woman. “I birthed you, fed you, loved you and fled a country for you! And you turned out to be a liar! You’re not my daughter! You killed my daughter and stole her place!”

“I…” I stuttered, not knowing what to say.

“Do you think it’s fun? Coming into our world as if it’s a playground?” snapped Somuku.

“No, but I—”

Somuku yanked me up by the arm, face to face towards me. Glaring with those cold eyes. I wanted to cry. Never before did she ever look at me that way.

“You think because you know what would happen here and that allows you to change whatever you please?” snarled the woman. “Do you think you’re god?”

“Sorry. I’m so sorry!” I whimpered.

“Sorry is not going to cut it!” snapped the woman. “You are nothing more than a monster! The reason you never tell anyone the truth because you know they will hate you! Hate you for bring the Sanbi to Konoha. To decide on whether or not someone should live or die because what you fancied.”

I grew silent.

“You know you will be alone forever if you did that,” said Somuku. “No matter what you do, if anyone ever finds out, they’ll hate you and shun you. Even more so than the jinchuriki, you’ll be forever alone here in this world.”

I bit my lower lip.
“You hate being alone don’t you?” hissed Somuku as she drew closer to my face. “The silence, it’s maddening isn’t it?”

“No…” I choked out.

“No?” drawled the corpse. “It doesn’t drive you mad? Or no, please stop?”

“No…” I repeated lowly. “…You’re wrong.”

“Oh?” said the woman dully. “What makes you say that?”

“Because I remember how to write my name.” I answered with a glare.

The corpse-like woman laughed. “You remember how to write your name? What is your name? Kasa? Kasa is a name you stolen. You’re not her.”

“Kasa is my name just as much as any name from my previous life.” I snapped back. “This world is just as much as mine as everyone else! As long as I care for them, they’ll care for me. Kaa-san said I’d never be alone as long as I remember how to write my name.”

The woman clicked her tongue in annoyance.

“You’re a fake!” I snapped. “And none of this is real! Kaa-san is dead and this is all a genjutsu!” I clasped my free hand to my caught hand and flared my chakra. “KA!”

“Kasa!” Tesuri’s voice broke through the illusion, his hand pressed against my head. I could feel the warm pulse of chakra pulsing through to chase away whatever genjutsu I was trapped in.

“Tou-san?” I said before I notice we were in the midst of a battleground. “What’s going on?”

“Tesuri, you got your daughter, now let’s go!” snapped a blue-haired woman as she shielded us with paper wings.

Wait, blue hair? Paper wings?

“Thanks Konan, I owe you,” said Tesuri as he scooped me up and dashed from the battle. I vaguely spotted an orange-haired man and a red-haired man fighting against Hanzo.

However, before I could get a better look, Tesuri body flickered away from the area. I didn’t know he could do that. He did say Konan right? I’m not hearing things am I?

What the hell was with my luck here? I want a freaking character reroll for better luck! Oh, why do I bother? There’s no point asking about why the hell this shit happens anymore. It’s the Uzumaki luck.

“Tou-san, what happened?” I asked when he seemed less tense.

“We’re leaving as soon as we rendezvous with Konan and her team,” said Tesuri.

“…Who’s Konan?” I asked.

Tesuri grew quiet for a moment before he decided to answer. “…She was the one that tried to recruit me and your mother into the rebel faction, Akatsuki, against Hanzo. We had to leave Ame because of her.”
…What?

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“…It’s none of your concern right now,” murmured Tesuri.

One thing about Tesuri, he was incredibly tight-lipped if he wanted to be. I found out nothing from him about his interaction with the Akatsuki… this annoyed me to no end. Why the hell was Tesuri associating with them? He wouldn’t even let me stay awake while he spoke to them, knocking me out with a medical jutsu. Somehow, I found myself sulking in the rain again… I hate this goddamn rain…

“Rain, rain, go away.” I sung under my breath. “Come again, I’ll make you pay. Don’t you stray or delay. Rain, rain, go away.”

“… I’ve never heard that song before,” said an amused voice.

I jumped in surprise and quickly turned to the source. I found an orange-haired man with a familiar black cloak with red clouds. He sat several branches above me, swinging his leg idly.

“What do you want?” I grumbled, slightly uncomfortable at the sight of the cloak.

I don’t understand, how was Akatsuki still around? Obito wasn’t Tobi now; there was no one to convince them… Did I get something wrong? Were they going to create Akatsuki regardless of Obito? When does Yahiko die and Nagato become Pain? Damn it, why are the matters about Akatsuki so fuzzy? I could remember other details of this world so well, but this one, I can’t seem to remember much at all aside from who the members were and what motivated them. Even then those were getting hazy as well.

“Nothing much, only to change the world,” mused the man. “You don’t have to be scared of me. I’m not going to do anything to you. I just thought you were singing an interesting song.”

I stared at him, confused. “…Thank you?” I think…

“That song is a bit violent though… What’s your name? I’m Yahiko,” chirped the man as he dismissed his first thought.

I stared up at him, noticing the hitai-ate on his head had four lines, but not scratched across, but I suppose that the rebels still saw themselves as Ame-nin, they just don’t like their leader.

“Hmm… not the sociable type huh? Man, what’s my luck in running into stoic people. As if Konan and Nagato weren’t serious enough,” grumbled Yahiko.

My eyes drifted to the clouds on his cloak. Red clouds, why was it always, red clouds? Akatsuki means red moon doesn’t it? Or did I totally read it wrong to begin with? I thought it was supposed to be the red moon in the Tsukiyomi.

“Hey, you there?” He snapped his fingers, dragging me out of my thoughts. “I asked if you were aware of what your old man did with our group.”

I shook my head placing a hand to my head. “Tou-san won’t tell me anything about it.”

“Well, that’s mean of him,” said Yahiko. “You know, your dad is actually a pretty good fighter, it’s a bit of a waste for him to stick to iryo-ninjutsu.”
“Huh?” Confusion crossed my face. Tesuri, a fighter? He’s kidding, right?

“Though, I got to say, he’s not that bad of a medic either,” grinned Yahiko. “He’d saved us quite a few times already… but family above all else I guess.”

“… What are you talking about?” I asked with a frown.

Yahiko grinned. “Your father was a part of our group, Akatsuki, until you were born.”

…the hell? Tesuri an Akatsuki member? You’ve got to be shitting me. What kind of a twist is this?

“Looks like you don’t believe me,” sighed Yahiko.

“Why does that matter?” I asked. “If he quit already, it doesn’t matter.”

“Well,” started Yahiko as he adjusted his perch on top of the branch. “I was wondering if you could ask your father to rejoin us. I’m not kidding about changing the world to a more peaceful place… But it’s kind of hard to change anything if you die from injuries. Of course, you can come too! If you’re anything like your father, you’ll be a great iryo-nin and with some work, you might be a pretty good fighter as well.”

Confusion set in again… The hell? He’s trying to recruit us? I’m freaking five! Not as bad as four, but still pretty freaking bad! Who the hell recruits five-year-olds?

“Hey, don’t look at me like that!” huffed the orange-haired man. “I’m being serious!”

Good lord, if this guy is serious, I’m Snape… Ha! Get it? Okay, not the time to be making random Harry Potter references when it wasn’t even a good one.

“Why would you recruit me?” I asked cautiously. “I’m five.”

It’s strange, just what kind of a person was Tesuri? I always thought since he was an iryo-nin, he wasn’t suitable for fighting. Never once have I ever seen him us an offensive jutsu. To me, he was always the white mage, the kind healer. Looks like I know nothing about him after all… You know, my claim of him being a closet BDSM man is becoming more and more logical with each new thing I learn. I resisted a shudder. Stay away from those thoughts Kasa.

“I’m an opportunist,” grinned Yahiko. “One, you’re young, but you’ve managed to do iryo-ninjutsu much easier compared to some adults, from what I saw anyway. Two, if you joined maybe Tesuri would come back too. And lastly… I need to recruit some girls, Konan is scary.”

I was ready to face-plant into the ground right then and there. I keep forgetting there were so many characters that acted like Naruto before Naruto was around… Albeit, this one will end up dead, and the one I saved, ended up evil. You would think that someone might pick up the pattern at some point and realize, shit these happy-go-lucky idiots are fucking world changers or just outright deadly!

“What do you say?” chirped the cheery man.

“No.” I rejected his offer bluntly without a second thought and continued with a childish rant, I don’t want to join Akatsuki. “I’m not even an iryo-nin yet! If I join, I’m not going to be able to do anything and you’re all going to bully me! You big dummy!”

“Dummy?” Yahiko sighed dejectedly shoulders slumped. “Well, I tried… If you ever
change your mind in the future, we could always use an awesome iryo-nin!"

You’ve got to be kidding me! How desperate is this guy? I know I should take my own advice about these dangerous idiots… but I can’t help it. He’s a freaking idiot!

“And how would I join?” I decided to humor him after a moment.

“Oh yeah… Hmm…” Yahiko pondered over a moment. “I would say just tell anyone wearing this cloak that I gave you an invite to join… but Nagato and Konan isn’t going to accept that… heck, I think they might kill you if you did.”

…This guy isn’t really good with recruiting…

“Oh! I know!” said Yahiko giddily.

He rummaged through his cloak before he pulled out… something… I can’t tell from this distance. With a splash, he was gone and reappeared in front of me, body flicker. Interesting, Konoha-nin disappear with either a puff or a swirl of leaves. Yahiko does it in a splash… I wonder if this was an Ame thing or it’s him…

“Here, give this to Konan or Nagato and said I gave this to you as an invite,” said the man as he placed it in my hand.

I glanced down and noticed it was a paper moonflower and the first thing that popped into my mind was the kunoichi lessons back in Konoha. Specifically, the flower arrangement classes where we were required to memorize flowers and their meanings to use as code, it was meant for communications while under cover. I remember the moonflower specifically because it was the odd one that bloomed only during the night.

The flower meant dreaming of love… poor Konan… this idiot is giving away your confession. Good lord, she might kill me if I showed her this thing.

“I think you might want to keep it.” I said handing it back to him, but he shook his head.

“No way, you’re totally going to join us when you become a legit iryo-nin! It’ll be fun! You hate all the fighting right? Imagine lending a hand and changing that. Wouldn’t that be cool?”

I’m already changing things and it’s totally not cool! It’s stressful as hell!

“…Fine.” I muttered, pocketing the origami flower, not wanting to bother arguing. I’m tired.

“Oh yeah, what’s your name anyway? You still haven’t answered me yet,” said the man.

“I’m—”

“Kasa!” snapped Tesuri’s voice. I flinched and turned to the source.

“Pfft,” sniggered Yahiko. “Umbrella? You’re from rain and your name is umbrella?”

I rolled my eyes. Sure, laugh it up. Tesuri appeared in front of me with a protective hand blocking my view.

“I told you and Konan that I want nothing to do with Akatsuki,” snapped Tesuri. “Those days are behind me.”
“Yeah, I know,” shrugged Yahiko. “We could really use your help though.”

“I refuse, now leave,” demanded Tesuri.

“I got it, I got it,” Yahiko sighed with his hands up defensively before grinning at me. “Hey, Kasa! Take some time and think about it. When you become a real iryo-nin, you could always come join us. We have cookies!”

“Get out of here!” snapped Tesuri.

With that, Yahiko was gone. I stood stunned, staring at where he stood… I can’t believe it… I was totally right! The dark side does have cookies. He totally tried to bribe me with cookies! Huh…? I wonder what cookies they have… I like raisin oatmeal.

“Kasa, are you okay?” asked Tesuri as he turned to look me over.

I snapped out of my cookie thoughts and nodded. “Just fine.” I said.

“Come on, we’re moving to the next village,” said Tesuri as he ushered me forward.

“…Tou-san, what’s Akatsuki?” I asked, wondering if I could weasel some information out of him. “He said he was going to make the world a more peaceful place. Can they do that?”

“…It’s nothing you should concern yourself about,” said Tesuri and he left it at that.

We returned to our previous routine… Wait… How long was I gone? Shit! Are we behind schedule? How much time is left before the Kyubi attack?
We were behind schedule by a week and to add to my frustration, Tesuri started ninjutsu training rather than let me assist with healing the villagers. Our progression slowed even further.

“Tou-san, you can train me when we’re done and back in Konoha. Let me help! I could deal with minor injuries now!” I grumbled as we stood in a clearing by a lakeside.

“No,” said the man bluntly. “Not after what happened back in Ame. You are going to learn how to defend yourself. I realized I can’t always be there to protect you, but I could teach you how to protect yourself.”

“But I’m not going to be able to beat anyone anytime soon!” I complained. “Wouldn’t it be better we get this over with and go back to Konoha? It won’t be dangerous with so many people around.” Yeah right, there’s totally going to be a freaking demon rampaging through it soon enough.

“We’re still some ways away from Konoha, even if we hurried. Stop whining and pay attention,” said Tesuri.

I huffed and crossed my arms with puffed cheeks. Childish, but at least that’ll keep me from cursing like a sailor.

“Pout all you want Kasa, this is for your own good. Today’s lesson is going to be a bit different. I’m not going to teach you academy-leveled jutsu. At this point and time, those are useless if you are attacked by a shinobi. You won’t stand a chance,” stated Tesuri.

“Then what exactly am I learning?” I asked, interested peaked by the notion of learning something that’s not part of the standard curriculum.

“What you’re learning today, is normally meant for someone at least advanced genin-level or higher, but considering our options and your previous training. I think we could skip ahead.” Tesuri reached into his pocket and pulled out a small wooden casing.

“What is that?” I asked, curious as he opened the casing and pulled out two small square sheets of paper.

“Chakra paper,” answered Tesuri. “We’re going to find out what elemental affinity you have before I start your ninjutsu lessons. Your mother and I have the same affinity. Logically, you should too, but that's not always the case. I want to check before I teach you or else it might hinder your training.”

…Holy shit, I get to learn elemental attacks? This is freaking awesome! All thoughts of rushing back to Konoha slipped my mind as I pushed down the urge to skip in place in glee.

“Elemental affinity?” I squeaked in delight. “Am I going to learn how to spit fireballs or throw bolts of lightning?”

Tesuri chuckled. “Neither I nor your mother have an affinity towards those elements, so not likely.”

“Poo.” I blew out a puff of air. “So what affinity do you and Kaa-san have?”

“Let me show you.” He grinned and lifted the square sheet of paper with two fingers.
One pulse of chakra and the paper slumped over wet. Water elemental, not surprising, considering one came from Ame and the other from Uzu.

Ooh, does this mean I could possibly become a water-bender? Ooh, ooh! Or better yet! A blood-bender! That would be so freaking awesome! I know it’s totally the wrong show, but how awesome is that? Turning humans into puppets and make them dance! I nearly cackled at the thought before Tesuri held the sheet under my nose.

“All right! I’m totally going to be a water-bender!” I cheered as I grabbed the paper.

“…Water-bender?” said Tesuri in confusion.

With a pulse, I charged the paper and waited…one second, two, ten…thirty…

“Uh… Tou-san I think the paper’s broken. It’s not doing anything.” I said dumbfounded, while still charging it with chakra.

Tesuri frown as he grabbed the paper from my hand and sent another pulse of chakra into it. The paper moistened and wilted. Confused, he reached into the wooden casing again and pulled out another sheet for me to try again. I grabbed the paper again and sent chakra into it. However, it failed to respond again.

“What does that mean?” I asked in confusion. “Why doesn’t it do anything? What element is that?”

“How is this possible?” murmured Tesuri as he picked up the sheet again. “I feel your chakra on this, but the paper’s not reacting at all.”

“What’s the normal reaction?” I asked, not remembering how the chakra paper worked. I knew wind affinity splits it, but I can’t remember much else.

“Normally, if your affinity is towards fire, the paper would burn. Wind would cut, lightening would wrinkle, earth would turn to dirt and crumble and you saw what water does,” said Tesuri as his frown deepened. “…I don’t think you have an affinity.”

I sulked. Aw man, I’m not a bender of any kind! That blows, I don’t want to be Sokka!

“Is it because I don’t have any inclination to the basic skill sets?” I asked, depressed.

Tesuri shook his blue head. “That shouldn’t be a problem, enforcer types could have elemental affinities; in fact they’re quite strong with their elemental affinities.”

Balls. So even other enforcers are more useful than me.

“But on the other hand,” said Tesuri thoughtfully. “It means you don’t have any elemental weaknesses either. You could learn any elemental jutsu without having a setback compared to having an affinity. It won’t be as strong as someone who’s inclined to the element, but it should be enough for you to learn what I want to teach you.”

“What exactly are you going to teach me?” I asked grumpily before he placed a hand on top of my head.

“Kasa, I know you’re upset, but the sooner you learn this, the sooner we can move on, okay? I promise you can help me with the patients once you’ve covered these,” said Tesuri.
I glanced up to him. “You promise?”

“I promise,” answered Tesuri. I raised a pinky, daring him to go back on his word. He chuckled and hooked his around mine and shook on it. “Now that, that’s over. Let’s get started.”

“All right.” I nodded, listening intently to his instructions.

“These shouldn’t take you that long to learn, since we have an abundance of water ready to use around us. However, make note, in drier places like in the Land of Sand or even the Land of Fire, it would be harder to pull off, unless you have a ready supply of water with you.”

I nodded. Makes sense, can’t water-bend if there’s no water.

“For now, none of the jutsu I plan to teach you will be offensive. They’re purely supplementary techniques,” said Tesuri.

“…But I thought a good offense was a good defense.” I said.

“That’s only if you have any offense to begin with,” noted Tesuri. “Also, it would take too long to teach you an offensive technique when these supplementary ones would work just as well.”

“I guess.” I muttered.

“I thought you wanted to go back to Konoha sooner,” grinned Tesuri. “I could teach you offensive techniques instead, but it’ll probably take twice as—”

“No! I want the supplementary ones!” I shouted. No way, in hell, am I going to let him drag on our trip. We seriously need to get back to Konoha ASAP.

“The first one you’ll be tackling will be the Hidden Mist jutsu. If you can’t fight, then hide and run. If you can blind or confuse your enemies, you have a better chance of fleeing,” said Tesuri. “I’ll cover fleeing tactics once you’ve mastered this jutsu.”

Surprisingly, it didn’t take me all that long to get the jutsu down. It took a week to completely master it. I had the chakra and the necessary control to pull off the move, but it was ultimately the hand seals that tripped me up. A little practice remedied that issue, but it made me miss my nimble fingers from years of typing and gaming.

These stubby child fingers are slow compared to my previous one. If I tried to pull off a special combo or button mash, I’d totally lose with this body. The hair-trigger reflex just wasn’t there. I wonder what can I do to regain that? Maybe learn to play an instrument? The koto looks like something that could help.

Following the Hidden Mist Jutsu, Tesuri went into great detail of the various tactics I could use when fleeing. Setting decoys, creating false leads and hiding methods. I was rigorously tested on the days we traveled between villages. He caught me five out of eight times, not bad for a beginner won’t you agree?

Once I mastered the previous jutsu, the Hiding in Water Jutsu followed. A good jutsu, if there was a lot of water or rained recently, but not all that useful if the enemy figures out the puddle was you. Tesuri stepped on me quite a few times to show that it’s not the smartest thing to use when I’m the only puddle around… Yeah, I’m definitely not the sharpest crayon in the box as you can tell.

However, the best jutsu of the three he taught me was definitely Hiding in Rain Jutsu.
Using skills from both Hidden Mist and Hiding in Water jutsu, the required prerequisites, Hiding in Rain made it highly useful with its mobility. Unfortunately, at my current skill level, I can’t use it without natural rain. I don’t have the skill yet to create enough coverage for a rain shower to use it without the assistance of Mother Nature.

Although, considering we were still somewhat near the border of Rain, natural rain was not a problem. Tesuri noted that I only needed to master these jutsu while we were still near the border. Once we were cleared of having Hanzo’s men pursuing us, I don’t need to worry about hiding and fleeing.

Several rough weeks later, we finally left the border of Rain and made our way north, passing the border of Kusa and Taki, the Grass and Waterfall lands. From there, to make up for lost time, I dove into helping Tesuri with any and all patients that came to us for help. By the time we reached the Valley of the End, I was adept in dealing with most basic-leveled healing techniques and preparing a number of medicinal remedies.

If Tesuri decided to dump my ass in the wild right now, I think I can handle keeping myself alive until I found food and shelter. Of course, food would have to be whatever I can forage: nuts, berries and plants. I’m not particularly good at hunting or fishing and I don’t really have the patience for it either. Not to mention, setting up a fire to cook the meat would draw too much attention.

By the time Tesuri cleared and passed me, summer was long over and our rotation around the Land of Fire was coming to an end. The countdown to the shit storm that was coming was maddening. No matter what I did, Tesuri wouldn’t let us hurry back to Konoha.

“What is with you Kasa? You’ve been so desperate to return to Konoha nowadays,” noted Tesuri. “You’re outright jittery at times because of it.”

“I-I’m not jittery!” I argued, a nervous tick twitched at the bottom of my eye as my fingers moved with a skittish flutter, desperate to do something. Maybe I shouldn't have drank all that tea, caffeine worked different with this body than my old one. In my old body, caffeine actually relaxed and calmed me, it seems like it has the opposite effect here.

“That’s it, you’re taking a break,” concluded Tesuri.

“But I’m fine!” I shouted. “I really just need to go back to Konoha! I’ll feel much better once we’re back in Konoha! Let’s go back to Konoha! KONOHA!”

Tesuri sighed as he placed a hand over my head and pulsed a relaxing stream of chakra into my system. My agitated nerves settled as I slumped against his hand. “No more tea or sugar for you today. You’re sticking to water until you’ve calm down.”

My eyes drooped lazily when he pulled away. “…How much longer before we can go back Tou-san? I don’t want to travel anymore…” I grumbled.

“Soon Kasa, we have one more village and we can head back to Konoha,” answered Tesuri as he grabbed my hand and lead me forward.

We finished with the last village at the end of September, leaving ten days to get back to Konoha before the shit storm happens. From the eastern border, the trip took at least a week if not more. We might make it back by the skin of our teeth.

Unfortunately, with all that time I spent worrying about getting back to Konoha in time, I
haven’t thought of a single plan to prevent anything from happening… Bad foresight, I know, but between training, healing and worrying, I completely forgot about planning something. By the time I realized this, we were at the gates of Konoha on October tenth.

“We’re almost back in Konoha. How are you feeling? Excited?” grinned Tesuri in good humor.

“Y-yeah.” I murmured quietly as my brain raced to recap what the hell was supposed to happen today.

Kyubi was ripped out of Kushina today and sent rampaging through Konoha killing countless Konoha-nin and ends up killing both Minato and Kushina, making Naruto into the next jinchuriki for the Kyubi. Tobi, or rather Obito, was supposed to be the instigator of this, but since he never met Madara, logically the Kyubi attack shouldn’t happen.

However, Akatsuki was still around despite not having him around, so there was a possibility that the Kyubi might still get free with or with his interference. I gnawed on my lower lip as we neared the gates. Childbirth for a jinchuriki meant the weakening of the seal, making it much easier for a tailed-beast to break free from their prison. The reason why Kushina died was because of the sheer exhaustion from three things, childbirth, Kyubi breaking free and the need to chain Kyubi down long enough for Minato to seal him.

If I could stop either the Kyubi from breaking free or Kushina from expending all her energy in chaining the beast down, I could possibly save her, but what was the chance of me doing that alone? Then there was Minato. He died because he used the Demon Consuming Seal. Why can’t he use the Four Symbol Seal like what Jiraiya used on me with Isobu’s Yin chakra, I wasn’t sure.

Maybe it had something to do with age. Both Kushina and Rin were made jinchuriki at a young age and I was sealed at even a younger age than them. Minato was at least in his thirties if not older. His chakra coils were probably too developed to handle the excess amount of chakra from Kyubi. If I want to save him, I have to stop him from doing that, but what would happen to Konoha?

My best bet was to stop Kyubi from breaking free in the first place, but how do I do that? I can’t handle it on my own and who is going to trust me if I tell them about this?

“Kasa, are you okay?” asked Tesuri when my breathing became irregular.

“Yeah, fine. It’s just a little hot.” I lied with a rasp.

“Here, have some water,” said Tesuri as he pulled out a canteen and passed it to me.

I took off the cap and knocked it back, taking a long swig. The cool water helped calm my nerves as I released a loud breath.

“Better?” asked Tesuri as I handed him back the canteen.

“Better.” I agreed as we made our way to the gates.

It’s late in the afternoon now the sun was about to set, which meant there were still a couple of hours at best before Kushina goes into labor if she’s not already in labor. If I’m right, she might already be at the hideout. Damn it, I don’t know where that is! Tesuri and I passed the gate guards and headed into the heart of Konoha. In all that time, not a single plan formed in my head. I have no fucking clue what to do!
“Kasa-chan! I didn’t know you were coming back today!” said a cheery voice.

“Rin-san!” I snapped up. That’s right! Konoha has a second jinchuriki. Rin and I were both trained to restrained tailed beasts and she was definitely way better than me at it. She would believe me and help! Now the problem was how to phrase it.

“Are you on break?” asked Tesuri pleasantly, starting a conversation with her as the gate guards checked our papers and identification.

“Sort of, I’m just helping Minato sensei and Kushina-san buy some supplies,” said Rin.

“Supplies?” asked Tesuri with a raised brow.

Rin turned to me with a big grin. “It looks like you’re going to get your little brother after all, Kasa-chan.”

“I want to go see Kushina-san right now.” I blurted out in a hurry.

Tesuri sighed. “Kasa, I know you’re excited, but we have to report to Hokage-sama first about our return.”

“That’s right Kasa-chan, if you want to become a ninja, you have to follow procedures,” noted Rin brightly. “Besides, I think you would want to meet our new Hokage-sama.”

I wanted to open my mouth to say something, but Tesuri interrupted me.


I tried again, but Rin interrupted me next.

“He retired about half a year—no, maybe seven months ago? About a year after you left,” answered Rin. “I bet you’ll be surprised when you see—”

“Minato-san won’t be hokage for long if we don’t find Kushina-san right now!” I snapped, startling both Tesuri and Rin.

“How did you know Minato sensei is…” Rin’s eyes widened in understanding.

“We have to find them now, Rin-san! If we don’t warn them, both Minato-san and Kushina-san are going to die!” I shouted.

“Kasa, what are you talking about?” asked Tesuri.

Rin’s face paled as she looked down at me. “…When did you see this happen?”

“I can tell you on the way, but we need to find them now! It’s going to break free tonight if we don’t do something!” I said desperately.

“All right,” said Rin as she turned. “Tesuri-san, I’m going to have to take Kasa-chan with me.”

“What is going on?” asked Tesuri in confusion. “What are you two talking about? Why would Namikaze-san and Uzumaki-san be in danger?”

“Sorry, no time to explain, you can head off to check in with Minato sensei. Please tell him to find us and meet up with Kushina-san!” said Rin as she hauled me onto her back in a
piggyback manner.

“But—” Tesuri never finished as she darted ahead.

“Kasa-chan, explain to me what’s going on now. I’m going to head to Kushina-san and Minato sensei’s apartment to see if she’s there.”

“I’ll try…” I gnawed on my lower lip as I came up with the story on the spot. “It happened a couple of months ago when Tou-san and I were at the border of Rain. We ran into some strange shinobi wearing black cloaks with red clouds on them. The next thing I knew, I saw Minato-san on the giant frog Jiraiya-sama used during Sanbi’s attack, fighting against Kyubi.”

“What happened?” asked Rin. “Why was the Kyubi free? What happened to Kushina-san?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know! All I saw of Kushina-san were chains enveloping Kyubi then she and Minato-san were both impaled by its claws! I really wanted to come back and warn you, but Tou-san was still in the middle of his mission and Jiraiya-sama said I should keep it a secret. I really tried my best to get Tou-san to come back to Konoha as quickly as possible.”

Was that vague enough to pass as an oracle vision? I really hope so or else it’s a trip to T&I for Kasa.

“It’s not your fault Kasa, you did your best. We just need to go find Kushina-san and hopefully, Minato sensei will be there too when we find her,” said Rin grimly as we raced through Konoha and towards the apartment.

**Knock, knock, knock!**


No response.

“No good, she’s not home! Where could she be? She should be due anytime now,” frowned Rin as she thought over our options. “Should we check the hospital? Where else could she be?”

“Did Kushina-san go to visit her friends?” I asked vaguely remembering Kushina seeing Mikoto and baby Sasuke at some point before heading off to the hidden location to give birth. “Maybe Mikoto-san?”

Rin glanced at me briefly. I’m not sure if she’s trying to decide on whether or not my suggestion was an oracle vision or a random guess. “We’ll check the Uchiha district,” muttered Rin as she darted off again. Looks like she took it as a vision.

As we darted about the Uchiha district, we quickly made our way to the main Uchiha house before we spotted a familiar woman walking through the streets with a baby in her arms.

“Mikoto-san!” I shouted loudly, disrupting the peace, much to the annoyance of the rest of the Uchiha.

“Kasa-chan?” said the woman startled as glanced back. Rin landed a step away from her as I clung tightly to not fall off. “I didn’t know you were back.”
“We don’t have time for pleasantries Uchiha-san. Do you know where Kushina-san is?” asked Rin desperately. “We need to find her as soon as possible.”

Mikoto blinked in surprise. “I saw her about an hour ago with Biwako-sama heading towards the northern sector of Konoha. They seemed to be in a hurry somewhere.”

“Can you think of where they might be going?” asked Rin.

“I can’t say I do,” said Mikoto with a shake of her head. “What’s the matter? You two looked like you seen a ghost.”

“Thanks Uchiha-san! We need to get going!” shouted Rin as she took off again.

“Come visit me when you get a chance Kasa-chan! I’m sure Itachi would be glad to see you!” Mikoto shouted after us as we disappeared out of sight.

“Northern sector, the northern sector is huge! She could be anywhere!” said Rin desperately.

“What do we do Rin-san?” I asked, worried, as the skies grew dark and the moon shown brightly in the night sky. We don’t have much time left.

“Rin! Kasa!” shouted Obito voice before Rin stopped in her tracks. He dropped down from a near by balcony with a bright grin. “Hey! Where are you guys going in such a hurry? Geez Kasa, you couldn’t even stop by to say high and tell me you were back?”

“Obito! We need to find Kushina-san!” I shouted. “Do you know a way we can find her?”

The former Uchiha blinked with his one eye, his other was under a squared bandage eyepatch. He refused to tilt his hitai-ate like Kakashi, saying he didn’t want to look like his stoic teammate. I guess he decided to go for the bandaged look instead.

“Okay… Want to fill me in on what’s going on?” asked Obito with his hands behind his head.

“We don’t have time! Do you know or not?” snapped Rin, the dark-haired teen raised his hands up defensively.

“Minato sensei would probably know where she is, but he left the office ages ago. I just came from the admin office to hand in my mission report,” said Obito. “What’s going on?”

“Kasa-chan, are you sure it’s going to be today?” asked Rin.

I nodded my head rapidly. “Positive!”

“Do you know how much time we have left before—”

BOOM!

Too late. A pulse of dark chakra washed over us as the explosion took place. Screams filled the air as Kyubi crouched over Konoha snarling and flailing its tails violently under the moonlight.

“What the hell?” whispered Obito as he stared up at the giant beast. “Is that… Kyubi?”

“I…” My tongue grew numb as uncertainty set in. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” said Rin in disbelief. “What else did you see? You have to know something!”

“I don’t know!” I snapped back. “I don’t know what’s changing and what wouldn’t change! I can’t control this!”

“This is not the time to be arguing!” interrupted Obito as he pushed us along. “We need to get moving and do something.”

My mind ran through the limited options we had. I don’t know if we could still Minato, but we still had a chance with Kushina.

“Head towards Kyubi! Minato-san is going to be there! We could get to Kushina-san if we find him.” I shouted.

“Head towards it? Are you crazy?” retorted Obito. “We don’t even have a plan on how to deal with this and if you think you can pull of that stunt you did with Sanbi again, you’re crazy!”

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot about that. Thanks Obito!” I said with a grin.

Obito threw up his hands. “Rin, tell her no!”

“Kasa-chan…” grimaced Rin, doubt clear on her face.

“Nothing is set in stone Rin-san.” I reminded her, we really don’t have time for doubt. “We could either let things go as they are or we change it. That’s what Jiraiya-sama said wasn’t it?”

Rin stayed quiet for a moment as her expression switched from troubled to sad amusement. A soft chuckle escaped her. “This is a little sad. I’m getting advice from someone half my age.”

Technically, I’m almost a decade older than her, but let’s just let that go for now. “Your fate changed, which means we can change Minato-san and Kushina-san’s fate too. Come on Rin-san!” I urged.

“Rin, I have no clue what either of you are talking about, but please don’t tell me I’m the only sensible one here!” said Obito.

“You’re right,” murmured Rin.

Obito sighed in relief. “Finally.”

“We can change this,” agreed Rin. “We can save Minato sensei and Kushina-san.”

“Wait, what?” said Obito completely lost at what just happened.

“Then no more wasting time and let’s go!” I shouted before Rin darted off.

“You two seriously need to explain this to me when we have more time,” grumbled Obito as he chased after us.
“We’ll try to get to the Kyubi as close as we can,” decided Rin as we raced towards Kyubi. “I’m not exactly sure how Kakashi did this with you last time, but maybe we could—”

We made all of two blocks before two jounins stopped us in our tracks. Damn it! Of all the times why now?

“Orders are to clear all civilians away from this area! Why are you bringing a civilian child here?” snapped the older jounin.

“Never mind that, we have orders to gather all young shinobi and put them inside the protective barrier,” said the other jounin.

My eyes widened. I forgot about this part! If they get us behind that barrier, we won’t be able to help Minato and Kushina! Shit! How could I forget this?

“Obito! We’re moving!” shouted Rin. “If they put us behind that barrier we won’t be able to save sensei and Kushina-san!”

“Ah damn it!” said Obito as he bolted.

“This is insubordination!” snapped the jounin as the two young chunin darted around them.

“Get them!” shouted the other jounin.

Unfortunately, we didn’t manage to get far as the two jounins used chakra-enhanced rope to tie us up and hauled us away from the battleground.

“Let us go!” I screamed and flailed, but they had a firm grip over me. Rin was beside me shouting along the same lines as me.

“You can’t do this! We need to save Minato sensei and Kushina-san!” shouted the girl.

“Quiet!” snapped a stern looking man as we were tossed into the barrier. “This is not your battle.”

Kakashi was already there along with what seemed like the rest of the future jounin sensei. He managed to catch both Rin and I before we hit the ground.

“Kasa? When did you get back?” asked the stoic teen-jounin as he untied us.

“Let us out!” I shouted as I ran towards him, only to bounce against an invisible barrier. “We need to help Minato-san and Kushina-san!” I pounded my fist against the barrier.

“The kid’s right, what do you mean this isn’t our battle?” snapped a red-eyed girl. “Father, this village is just as much as ours as yours! We have the right to defend it!”

“Kurenai,” said the man firmly. “This is not war, but an internal village conflict. The life of a shinobi is short and this is not where you and your peers will die. You are all the future of Konoha, you must survive to bring about the next generation and continue the will of fire.”

“I don’t care about your will of fire!” I snapped. “I want to save Kushina-san and Minato-san!” I pounded the barrier. “Let. Me. Out!”

The man glared at me. “Such an insolent child. Why is this civilian here?” snapped the man.
“Sir, she was with the two chunins when we brought them in,” said another. The man continued to frown.

“Make sure the barrier keeps hold,” ordered Kurenai’s father as he turned to leave.

In a distance I could hear the explosion of a large summon and the delighted cheers of shinobi at the arrival of Minato.

I double my efforts banging at the barrier. “Please let me out! If Minato-san faces the Kyubi he and Kushina-san are going to die! Please! Please let me out so I can help them!” I begged desperately, but none of the adults heeded my pleading.

“Kasa-chan,” whispered Rin as Kakashi untied her and Obito.

“Yes! Let me make something right for a change!” I begged, my pounding hands slowed against the barrier when the angry snarls of Kyubi disappeared. Damn it, Minato took him! We’re too late! I dropped to my knees in tears, face pressed against the barrier as I forced back the sobs.

“…The Kyubi is gone,” whispered one of the other younger ninjas.

I couldn’t tell who said that, but it hardly mattered. Minato and Kushina were good as dead. Why was it every time that I try to do something for the better either I make it worse or I can’t change a goddamn thing?

“Even after nearly two years, you’re still the same brat as always,” sighed Kakashi as he walked up behind me.

I ignored him. I’m not in the mood to defend myself or talk to anyone. What’s the point? They’ll know soon enough their beloved Yondaime Hokage-sama will be dead soon.

“You would think even a brat like you would grow up a bit after a long trip like that, but I guess I was being too hopeful,” sighed Kakashi.

“Shut up Kakashi.” I sulked, rubbing away the tears.

“Looks like Obito rubbed off on you more than I thought. You crybaby,” said Kakashi.

“Hey!” retorted the former Uchiha.

You know what? I’m going to ignore this bastard! He hasn’t faced the hardship of losing Obito and Rin; he wouldn’t understand what the hell was at stake here! The stupid little pissant! If he ever gets into the Icha Icha series I’m going to steal his entire stash and burn it in front of his eyes. I’m going to learn a freaking fire-styled jutsu just to shoot it in his face!

“You can still activate any seal you touch right?” asked the silver-haired jounin, cutting through my thoughts.

“Yeah, why?” I sniffled, what’s with that question? Of course, I could still activate a seal at the touch of it. He knows better than anyone, I released a shit ton of his storage seals before.

“Do you still want to go save sensei and Kushina-san?” drawled Kakashi.

I snapped up at those words and whipped around to face him. In his hand was Minato’s special kunai marked with the seals that was required for the Hiraishin no Jutsu. There’s no doubt
Minato had another one on him just like that, we could use that to track him.

“But… I don’t have enough chakra to use that.” I said dejectedly. I didn’t dare to attempt activating Sanbi’s chakra, who knows what could happen with Rin around. I might set off Isobu as well then there would be no chance of Konoha recovering.

Kakashi raised a brow. “You’re forgetting our sensei is. Rin, Obito and I, we were all trained to be able activate this together. Our only issue, we can’t choose which kunai we end up at. Sensei planted plenty of his special kunai throughout Konoha.”

I stared at him with my mouth gapping open.

“If you can redirect us to the right kunai that would be a lot of help, I much rather we get this in one go rather than waste chakra with multiple attempts. We are going to need it to save him and Kushina-san are we not?” drawled Kakashi.

I laughed wiping away my tears. Kakashi, if you weren’t such a prick, I could kiss you right now!

“Are you all crazy?” shouted Ebisu. “This is going against all orders!”

“You’re going to get a civilian kill,” said Asuma. “Not going to look good on your record.”

“That’s very unlike you my hip rival!” said the bowl-haired youth, most likely Gai. “To so blatantly ignore the rules.”

“Yes, it’s very unlike you,” agreed Kurenai.

Kakashi sighed. “Well, we all know the saying, those who break the rules are trash. However,” he glanced over to Obito. “I’ve learned that those who abandon their comrades are worse than trash.”

Obito and Rin grinned brightly at those words.

“ Took the words right out of my mouth,” said Obito with his arms resting behind his head.

“We better hurry then,” said Rin.

“Hn,” Kakashi glanced over to me with a smile that resembled very much of the future Kakashi that’s to come. “Shall we?”

“Yeah! Let’s go save Minato-san and Kushina-san.” I cheered.

Kakashi passed me the kunai as he, Rin and Obito surrounded me in a circle, much like how the Hokage Guard Platoon did so to transport Tsunade to safety in the future. Minato had passed his skill onto his personal guards in case they needed to use them in the future. I didn’t think he passed it onto his students since he hadn’t with Kakashi in the original timeline… but then again, Rin and Obito weren’t around, Kakashi had no one to use this jutsu in tandem.

All right, enough with the compare and contrast analysis. Let’s go change the future!
Hiraishin no Jutsu gives the biggest high of all time! Either that or the rush from actually being able to do something was making this thing my absolutely favorite seal of all time! If I ever get a chance, I’m totally asking Minato to make me some of these when I’m older.

From point A to B it took no more than a second. The instant the seal activated, I saw the lines towards every special kunai Minato planted throughout Konoha with a brief image of the final destination at each kunai. I’m not sure what Minato or other people see when they use this, but this thing is freaking awesome! It’s like a game menu to select the battle stage.

I quickly ignored the images that led to houses and the main administrative building and shuffled through the images until I found an image of Kyubi in a mountainous wasteland.

“Found you.” I whispered before the jutsu completed and dragged us completely through.

The instant we landed we were greeted by the sight of Kushina on the ground, breathing heavily as she struggled to keep hold of the chakra chains enveloping the Kyubi. Obito and Kakashi were quick to reveal their sharingan in preparation for battle and Rin was already rushing to Kushina’s side to assist her. When I managed to gather myself, Minato was already in the midst of performing a jutsu.

“Minato-san stop!” I screamed, trying to stop him before he set off his jutsu, but I was too late. He completed the seals.

“What is that?” whispered Obito as he watched as an apparition appeared behind Minato.

“Reaper Death Seal!” shouted Minato. The ghostly figure behind him thrust a violent hand through his back, escaping from his stomach to latch onto Kyubi. He let out a scream as the reaper ripped away Kyubi’s chakra and sealed it into his stomach.

“That’s…” Kakashi’s eye widened in horror and realization. “Sensei!” He screamed, racing to catch the man as he stumbled forward.

Kyubi roared in pain and fury, as it grew smaller after his chakra was sealed into Minato. It snarled and cursed violently at the blonde hokage. I quickly got to my feet as I raced towards Minato and Kushina. Rin was already by Kushina’s side, adding her own layer of chakra chains to the mix to keep Kyubi from breaking free.

“Kakashi, Obito, Rin… Kasa?” whispered Minato as he righted himself. “How are you all here?”

“Never mind that! Why would you use that?” snapped Kakashi angrily. “You do know what happens when…” He couldn’t even finish his words.

Minato chuckled lightly as he patted Kakashi’s head. “If you know then let’s not waste the little time I have left. Actually, I’m a little glad you’re all here… Maybe with you here, I won’t have to seal Kushina into Naruto along with the Kyubi.”

“Seal…” started Obito he stared in disbelief at the altar and small bed Minato summoned. “You were going to seal Kyubi and Kushina-san into your son? Are you out of your mind? She’s your wife and he’s your son! Why would you do such a thing?”
Minato laughed weakly. “Sorry, I really don’t have the time to explain.” He turned to me briefly with a grin. “Sorry, I can’t be at your welcome home party Kasa, but I got you the little brother you wanted.”

“Sensei,” called out Rin worriedly as she kept Kushina upright, but she was having trouble.

“Minato,” wheezed Kushina as she coughed and kneeled over.

“Kushina!” shouted Minato.

The instant he moved, everything followed.

“NEVER AGAIN WILL YOU MORTALS SEAL ME!” Kyubi roared as it fought against its chains and swung its claws towards Naruto.

“Minato!” screamed Kushina.

“Sensei!” shouted his students.

Instead of screaming in a panic like the rest of them, my body moved, grabbing onto the first thing I saw… which so happened to be Kushina’s chakra chains. The instant I touched them, my body instinctively knew what to do and immediately sent out a large pulse of chakra.

“What?” roared Kyubi in fury and pain.

I had no clue what was going to happen when I did so, my body just moved. The chains enveloping around Kyubi thickened and tightened around the tailed-beast. Compared to the chains just moments ago, the amount leeway Kyubi had in moving was spacious, but now, he looked like someone just strung him up like holiday ham that’s ready to go into the oven.

From where I stood, it looked almost as if the chains were too heavy for the beast to resist. I could feel the continuous drain on my chakra. On my own, I wouldn’t be able to create these chains. The most I’ve ever managed were threads, but working in tandem with Kushina the chains were thicker; stronger… was this, the skill of an enforcer?

“Kyubi stopped,” whispered Rin as she stared at me.

No one moved, wondering if the new chains would hold over the beast. Kyubi growled under the shackled as he tried to move, but the weight bearing down on him made it near impossible.

“Kushina,” whispered Minato as he brush a strand of Kushina’s red hair back and pressed his forehead against hers. “Thank you for everything.”

“Minato,” whimpered Kushina as tears poured from her eyes.

“Kakashi, Obito,” started Minato.

The two stood erect as they listened intently to their sensei.

“From here on out, your orders are to protect Naruto and Kushina to the best of your abilities. I won’t be here once the sealing is done. I’m trusting my family to the two of you. Do you think you can do this?”

“Yes sir!” replied the two of them.
Obito’s eye watered with tears, but for once he didn’t cry. Instead, it was Kakashi that let his tears flowed, both his eye and Obito’s sharingan poured with tears.

“Rin, Kasa,” said Minato as he turned to us. “What I’m asking of you is not an order from your hokage, but a favor. I would like the two of you to assist and help Kushina to the best of you power. I could tell Naruto is going to be a handful and Kushina is going to have a hard enough time as it is. Please, could you keep an eye on my son?”

“Sensei…” Rin wiped away the pooling tears at her eyes. “I will do my best! I’ll make sure Naruto grows up to be a strong and healthy shinobi!”

I huffed, pressing a hand against my eye to keep myself from crying. “You’re totally cheating Minato-san! You were supposed to be around after giving me a little brother! How are we supposed to con you for candy and training lessons?”

Minato gave a weak laugh. “Sorry Kasa. I really wished I could stay long enough for you return party.” He grunted as he felt the reaper grow impatient. “Sorry, my time is ending soon. I have to finish this…” He wiped away a stray drop of blood from his lip and hastily summoned a small toad.

“GWA!” screamed the toad when he saw Kyubi. “What the hell Minato? Why the hell is the Kyubi here?”

“Sorry Gerotora, I don’t have much time left,” said Minato before the toad realized the situation and quickly unfurled the scroll on his stomach.

The blonde man made quick work in imprinting the seal onto the surface before the toad rolled up the scroll. “… I need you to deliver a key seal to Jiraiya sensei. Tell him to keep this safe until the time is right.”

“… It was nice knowing you Minato,” said the frog grimly before he disappeared in a puff.

Minato gave a weak sigh as his steps became unstable. Kakashi and Obito moved to help him, but he raised a hand to stop them before moving to kneel down over Naruto, who was wailing at the top of his lungs at the small bed on the sealing altar. A sadden gaze crossed his face as he lingered a hand over his crying son.

“Be strong Naruto,” whispered the man before he planted his hand over the baby’s stomach. “Eight Trigrams Seal!”

Kyubi roared in fury in its last moments as it was drawn into Naruto’s stomach and locked away by the Eight Trigrams Seal. I watched, holding my breath, as Minato dropped to his hands to the ground breathing heavily. The instant Kyubi was gone; the chain fell limp against my hand and disappeared. Kushina had reabsorbed the chakra from the chains, looking a bit healthier than she was before. She’s going to make it… right? Kakashi was by Minato’s side in an instant.

“One last thing,” breathed Minato with a humorous chuckle as Kakashi helped him roll into a sitting position. “Don’t let Jiraiya sensei corrupt my son too much okay?”

“Minato,” cried Kushina as she reached out for his hand and Minato caught hers in his gently.

“Love you, take care of Naruto…” said Minato before his eyes drifted close and the reaper sliced away his soul.
“MINATO!” screamed Kushina in anguish, as his hand grew limp in hers.

“…Sensei…” whispered Minato’s three students, as they stood over his body grieving.

I stood watch as they all grieved. Somehow… I felt like I was intruding. I didn’t deserve to stand here to share this moment with them. I failed to stop Kyubi’s release. I failed to save Minato. I gnawed on my lower lip. I barely did anything.

I watched as Kushina grieved over her husband’s body. I watched as Rin did her best not to cry as she healed Kushina’s injuries. I watched as Obito covered his only eye to keep himself from crying. I watched… as Kakashi’s sharingan change shape.

Minato’s death triggered the Mangekyo sharingan. It’s really sad that the sharingan required such a sad and painful method to release its full potential. My eyes drifted over to Naruto’s crying form. With everyone grieving, the poor thing was left crying his little heart out. He must be feeling lonely. I felt numb as I dragged my feet towards him. He was completely bare without a strip of clothing on him.

“Shh.” I whispered gently as I carefully cradled his neck and drew him into my arms. “It’s okay, you’re not alone. You won’t be alone. You’ll have a ton of people around you this time. I promise.”

His crying didn’t cease, if anything it grew even louder. He didn’t want my comfort. He wanted his mom and dad’s. I don’t belong here. I wrapped him in my arms the best I could before I moved over to where everyone grieved.

“Kushina-san… I think he wants you.” I said quietly before she looked up at me through tears. This must’ve been a tough night for her, giving birth, getting Kyubi ripped out of her and losing her husband all in one swift moment.

“Naruto,” cried the woman as she reached out for her baby. I carefully handed Naruto over to his mother before I took a step back.

At least, I managed to stop Kushina’s death. This time, Naruto won’t grow up alone here. He’ll only grow stronger and better. I’ll end anyone who tries to take that away from him.

“Kasa-chan? Are you okay?” asked Rin when the silence grew.

I blinked away the thoughts as I grinned sadly at her. “I’m fine, will Kushina-san be okay? She’s not too bad off is she? I could let her bite me if that’s the case.”

Rin shook her head. “She’ll be fine after a week of rest, as long as she doesn’t try anything strenuous with chakra. Her stores were nearly depleted. If you hadn’t done whatever it is you did with her chains, I don’t think she could’ve made it.”

“Oh good… I didn’t know if it was going to work.” I murmured as I swayed with each step I took. “…Too bad I couldn’t save Minato-san as well. I really wanted to. I should’ve been faster.”

“Kasa-chan?” questioned Rin worriedly.

If she said anything after that, I didn’t hear it as the world spun and I landed face first into the ground. Looks like I overdid again. Who knew reinforcing chakra chains could be so exhausting.
“Awake?” asked Tesuri when I regained consciousness.

“Yeah.” I rasped out, staring at the familiar ceiling of Kushina and Minato’s apartment. A pleasant surprise, I expected to wake up in the hospital again.

“The hospital’s full,” noted Tesuri as if reading my mind. “Anyone who wasn’t severely injured was to stay home and rest. Uzumaki-san offered to house us since the nearby hotels were all trashed during Kyubi’s attack. She and Naruto are resting in the other room.”

Hers and Minato’s room…

“Ah…” I hummed out in confirmation.

“…You knew this was going to happen. That’s why you wanted to come back so desperately,” said Tesuri.

I said nothing. I did a poor job in hiding my foreknowledge in the panic of trying to save Minato and Kushina. Whatever I’m going to get for this, I’m ready. T&I? I’m not scared. Let them try to torture the information out of me. The only thing they’ll get is a bad improv rendition of every song I know.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” asked Tesuri.

“…You wouldn’t have believed me.” I murmured. “…If you did, you wouldn’t let me come back to Konoha.”

Tesuri grew quiet. “…You really do love Uzumaki-san don’t you?”

“I’m not replacing Kaa-san.” I said tiredly. I really don’t want to start this insecure argument again.

“I’m not saying you are,” said Tesuri. “I just wish you would trust me enough to come to me for help.”

I said nothing, he was right. I didn’t trust him.

“I told everyone I was the one that told you Minato-san and Kushina-san was in danger,” said the blue-haired man.

I blinked, turning to him in surprise.

“I spoke to Sandaime Hokage-sama while you and Rin-kun were off looking for Namikaze-san and Uzumaki-san,” said Tesuri. “I warned him that someone was after the jinchuriki in Konoha and that they might be in the village already. I told him, I accidentally let the information slip around you and you were running about trying to stop everything on your lonesome with the help Rin.”

“But how? Why would you…?” I trailed off in disbelief.

“Uzumaki-san made it quite clear when I was here last time in Konoha that she was jinchuriki and that she was more than capable enough to train you to handle your new status,” started Tesuri. “The fact that Rin-kun looked so distraught at your news told me it was something bigger than what a jinchuriki and a hokage could handle.”

I gapped at him.
“Since you haven’t spoken to Rin-kun or Uzumaki-san for nearly two years. It couldn’t have been something you spoke about before you left. What’s more, your anxiousness over the last several months only started after our trip in Ame after you were kidnapped. I put it off as the stress from the genjutsu they’ve placed you under for over a week, but that wasn’t it,” said Tesuri.

How did he manage to piece it together? I didn’t let anything slip during the whole trip with him!

“For the longest time, I couldn’t understand why you could be so at ease with people you’ve never met before in your life, strangers that were shinobi and dangerous on their own right. Obito, Tsunade-sama and even Yahiko,” murmured Tesuri. “It became clear when we came back to Konoha and you spoke with Rin-kun,” murmured Tesuri. “You act the way you do because you knew. You don’t always, but the times you do, you face it head on with a look as if the weight of the world was on you.”

I was speechless. I always thought, one of these days a Nara would be the one to oust me, but never did I expect Tesuri to be the one to figure me out on his own. What else was there for me to say?

“Kasa, I’m your father. I know I don’t look like much most of the time, but I’m not blind. I watched you grow and get stronger and stronger everyday. I watched as you pushed yourself during training, forcing yourself to get better at everything you learn.” He placed a hand on my cheek. “As if, if you didn’t the world could come crashing down all around you. I could see how desperate you are, knowing what could happen, what would happen.”

“Tou-san…” I whispered weakly.

“I know I can’t take that weight off you, but please let me help lessen it,” whispered Tesuri desperately. “Even if it’s to take your place in the hands of T&I, I could take any torture they dish out. I don’t want to see you go through that if they knew of your knowledge. You don’t have to take on everything yourself. You have me. I’ll always be here for you.”

“Tou-san…” I curled up on my side, grasping onto his hand and pressing my face against it. My body shook as I let out the sobs. “I tried so hard. I tried so hard to save Minato-san, but I couldn’t.”

Tesuri rubbed my back as I let out my sobs. “You did your best Kasa. No one will blame you,” whispered the man.

We stayed in silence, with me shaking with quiet hiccups and Tesuri rubbing my back in soothing circles. I had no clue how long we stayed like this, but eventually I drifted off to sleep. I found out later, Tesuri had gone off to help the relief efforts at the hospital while I slept. I slept for hours, exhausted from the excitement and expending my small reserve of chakra.

Fortunately, Kushina hadn’t needed the healing bite, because I don’t think it could’ve healed much after spending so much chakra in reinforcing her chains. I slept for hours, obliviously unaware of the political shit storm that was to come.

Three days after the Kyubi fiasco, Tesuri along with all that were present at Minato’s death were summoned to a private council meeting with Hiruzen and his advisors, Koharu, Homura and Danzo. I’m already cringing at the conversations to come.

Kushina was seated in a wheelchair holding Naruto, as she hasn’t recovered completely
from giving birth and suffering Kyubi’s violent extraction. Kakashi and Obito both stood protective
on each side of her as if challenging anyone that dared to bring harm to their sensei’s wife. I stood
quietly behind Tesuri, while clinging onto Rin’s hand, trying to make myself invisible.

“I’m quite sure everyone had a trying couple of days since Kyubi’s attack and we all
want nothing more than to put this behind us,” started Hiruzen civilly. “Unfortunately, we still have
to clarify what brought on this attack in the first place.”

“It’s obvious that the jinchuriki here cannot control the beasts as well as we thought,”
snorted a heavily bandaged man. No doubt, he was Danzo. Come on, I dare anyone to bet against
me saying he’s not.

“Danzo, may we let those who were present, clarify?” interrupted Hiruzen. Danzo stayed
silent as if indulging the old man. “Kushina, if you may?”

“Thank you, Hokage-sama,” nodded Kushina. “Shortly after giving birth to Naruto,
Minato was about to reinforce my seal, but just as he was about to do so, a young man donning a fox
mask appeared, killing Biwako-sama along with the ANBU stationed at the hideout.”

Fox mask? I kept the frown off my face. Who the heck wears a fox mask in this series?
The only time a fox mask ever appears was in fanfics and usually either Kushina or Naruto had sole
use of it if they were in ANBU. Who the heck did Madara recruit?

“I wasn't able to see much of the fight between him and Minato, but the little that I
managed to glimpse, the young man was capable of redirecting jutsus,” said Kushina.

Redirect? Does she mean reflecting attacks? Who the heck reflects attacks here? Tobi had
attacks faze through him, this guy outright reflects them. If Minato didn’t have Hiraishin, he could’ve
died if he couldn’t dodge.

“The young man also seems to be using an old gunbai as a weapon,” continued Kushina.

The eyes of the elderly council widened at the statement. Danzo in particular was very
interested.

“Are you certain the young man was using a gunbai as a weapon?” asked the old
woman, Koharu.

“I’m certain,” nodded Kushina. “After he tore through my seals and extracted Kyubi, he
used the gunbai as a means to control him.”

“Do you know if there were any other distinctive traits on this man?” asked the elderly
man, Homura.

Kushina grimaced. “He had the sharingan… claiming he was Madara Uchiha.”

“Preposterous,” snorted Danzo over the gasping breaths of Koharu and Homura.
“Everyone knows Madara died at Valley of the End after his fight against Hashirama-sama. This
imposter is likely someone in the Uchiha Clan planning a coup against the village.”

“With all due respect Danzo-dono,” interrupted Kushina, her voice cold. “I don’t believe
it’s someone from the Uchiha Clan. Never before have I’ve seen anyone exhibiting such skill in
fighting against Minato and especially not in the sealing arts.”

“However, you’ve also stated you have not seen much of their fight,” noted Danzo. “If
“I don’t know,” answered Kushina. “But I don’t believe the Uchiha Clan would betray the village as willingly as you believe.”

“Then an outsider?” challenged Danzo as he glanced over to Tesuri and me. “My intel tells me it was the outsider jinchuriki that first declared you and Yondaime Hokage-sama were in danger. How do we know it’s not her that brought this attack on us? Her lack of control over Sanbi’s chakra in the past might’ve been a ruse for her to attack Konoha. Since she was ejected from the village that happened, she schemed with another to release the Kyubi instead on our village.”

“Danzo-dono,” interrupted Tesuri. “Please keep your insinuations to yourself. I’ve made it quite clear when I returned earlier that evening that Kasa had ran off on her own to find Yondaime Hokage-sama and Uzumaki-san when she found out, from me, that they were in danger.”

“And you are not in any better of a situation Tesuri Mon, you are still under a probation period and are not considered an official Konoha shinobi,” countered Danzo. “If you claim that the jinchuriki has no affiliations to this event, then do you take full responsibility of the chaos that befell on Konoha?”

“My daughter has a name, please refrain from referring to her as a jinchuriki,” grounded out Tesuri. “Furthermore, it was not a fault of either of us. I’ve already explained myself when I warned Sandaime Hokage-sama of the situation.”

“Yet, what proof do you have? We only have your word and yours alone. How can we confirm anything you say if you’ve betrayed your previous village?” snapped Danzo. “Your words mean nothing!”

“I denounced my village the moment they turned on me and my family!” retorted Tesuri, fuming at the accusations. “I sworn loyalty to Konoha because its shinobi was gracious enough to keep my daughter safe when I was not able to, but if this is how we will be treated I—”

“That is enough!” interrupted Hiruzen with a booming voice. “Both of you settle down, this meeting is not meant for laying blame on anyone. It is for the clarification of what happened on the day the Kyubi attacked. If neither of you can keep a civil tongue, I suggest you both stay silent!”

Danzo turned up his nose distastefully at his words. “I was only looking out for the wellbeing of our village.”

Tesuri took a deep breath as he calmed himself. “I apologize Sandaime Hokage-sama, I was out of line.”

Hiruzen sighed in annoyance as he puffed on his pipe. “Kushina, if you could, please continue.”

Kushina nodded, glancing at Tesuri with an apologetic gaze. “The masked-man tried to kill me using Kyubi, but Minato came to my rescue and took me to a safe location that later he brought the Kyubi to, for us to reseal him. I’m not sure what happened to the masked-man, but Minato must’ve drove him off.”

“Currently, you’re no longer Kyubi’s jinchuriki,” noted Koharu. “Sandaime noted Yondaime sealed the beast into your son, correct?”

“That is correct ma’am,” agreed Kushina.
“Is the child a hazard to the village at this point and time?” continued the woman as she turned her gaze to me. “Or will we have a repeat of what happened with this child nearly two years prior?”

I resisted the urge to shrink behind Rin. Situations like these were not my forte. I’m utterly terrified of opening my mouth at the chance that I might say something stupid and screwing everyone over.

“Minato placed an Eight Trigram Seal on Naruto,” explained Kushina. “Compared to Kasa’s Four Point Seal, his seal is considerably stronger in keeping in Kyubi’s chakra. The only reason why the Four Point Seal was used on Kasa rather than the Eight Trigram Seal was because she needed the extra chakra to survive the severe case of chakra exhaustion. Sealing off that chakra completely at the point and time would’ve been counterproductive and ultimately lead to her death.”

“And if the seal keeping Kyubi fails?” challenged Danzo. “Who would be able to control the beast? You?” waved the man. “You barely survived the event as it was.”

Kushina glared back. “You’re right, I won’t be able to tame Kyubi on my own.”

“Even the former jinchuriki agrees with me,” smirked Danzo. “I say we take the child into custody and start training him as soon as possible. If we could ingrain absolute loyalty now from the child, we could eventually have him as the village’s wea—”

“Danzo-dono,” grounded out Kushina, almost growling at his words. “Please allow me to finished.”

The bandaged-man looked vexed that she dared to interrupt him. However, before he could say another word, Hiruzen gave a loud cough warning him to stand down.

“Thank you,” said Kushina graciously. “As I was saying, I alone cannot tame Kyubi alone. However, with some assistance I could very well tame the tailed-beast with no problem.”

Homura raised a brow. “Assistance? Who exactly do you have in mind? I don’t recall us having a shinobi capable of doing such a feat, not since Hashirama-sama.”

“We don’t,” agreed Kushina, drawing more confusion from the council. “At least not yet,” grinned the red-haired woman. “She still needs to pass the genin exam and go through a ton of training, but I think Kasa would be able to help tame Kyubi if ever he breaks free again.”

Say what now? I stare at her with wide eyes in disbelief. What the hell are you talking about woman? I can’t tame the freaking Kyubi! I’m not even worthy to be considered a snack in his eyes!”

“Me?” I said in disbelief.

“…I’m sure you have an explanation?” noted Hiruzen before anyone could voice out their objections.

“When Minato was about to seal the Kyubi, it was ready to lash out to kill Naruto before he manages to seal him away,” started Kushina before she turned to me with a grin. “Kasa here did something unexpected. She managed to grab onto my chakra chains.”

“And?” drawled Danzo, unimpressed.

Kushina smirked. “Those chains had enough chakra to burn any new graduate genin and
even some chunin. Not only did she manage to touch them without getting harmed, she reinforced it. Enough to *chain down* the Kyubi.”

The pipe dropped out of Hiruzen’s mouth as he turned to me. “Is that true child?”

“…Y-Yes?” I squeaked out at the sudden attention that was directed on me. That’s the right answer right?

Hiruzen hummed thoughtfully as he digested the information.

Danzo growled. “You’re not really contemplating in trusting a *child* with the responsibility of dealing with a sealed beast. Not just any beast, the *Kyubi*.” He turned to me with a glare. “Not to mention, she’s not a Konoha citizen. She’s a child from Ame.”

Okay, I had enough of this asshole.

“I don’t like Ame!” I snapped. “They’re mean people who kidnaps you and threatens to kill you if they don’t like what you say!”

“Kasa!” hissed Tesuri warningly.

“Kidnapped?” voiced out Koharu. “What do you mean by kidnapped, child?”

“Let me explain!” interrupted Tesuri quickly. “When we were passing the borders between the Land of Fire and the Land of Rain, Kasa was briefly abducted by Ame-nin.”

“Abducted?” said Danzo in outrage. “You brought an abducted jinchuriki back into the heart of Konoha? She could’ve been turned into a sleeper agent for all you know!”

“Danzo!” snapped Hiruzen. “Keep your tongue. You may voice out your objections when they are finished with their story.”

“This is nonsense! They’re both originally form Ame, both of them could be spies!” snapped Danzo.

“Danzo! This is your last warning if you do not cease now,” warned Hiruzen.

“They will cross us!” countered Danzo.

“Cross us?” I murmured with a frown, something about those words sounded familiar.

“She’s an outsider, a jinchuriki, she will cross us,” repeated Danzo.

“Cross us.” I repeated again, my head tilted as I tried to remember.

Hiruzen and Danzo continued to trade heated words as I shuffled through my memories. Something about that sounded familiar.

“Kasa-chan?” whispered Rin quietly when I placed a hand over my mouth trying to focus on my memories. “Are you okay?”

“…She’s a jinchuriki. Danzo must’ve crossed us.” I said the words slowly.

“What did you say?” asked Rin, kneeling down trying to get my attention.

“There’s no way she’s a jinchuriki. Danzo must’ve crossed us.” I repeated, slightly louder
this time before it finally clicked in my head. “There’s no way she’s a jinchuriki! Danzo must’ve crossed us! That’s what they said when they woke me up!” I shouted loudly, catching the attention of everyone in the room.

“What nonsense are you spouting?” said Danzo evenly.

“When they woke me up after kidnapping me, that was what they said! There’s no way she’s a jinchuriki. Danzo must’ve crossed us! They kept asking me if I was a jinchuriki sealed with Sanbi’s chakra. They said Danzo promised them a jinchuriki!” I shouted loudly, not giving the man a chance to interrupt again.

“Be careful what you say child. Slander is—”

“The man Hanzo said he was going to attack Konoha after he dealt with the rebels in Ame because the village was already weakened by Sanbi’s attack! He said Danzo was going to help them!” I pointed to Danzo. “It must be him!”

“This child is speaking nonsense, as if I would ever betray Konoha,” waved off Danzo.

I’m totally lying my ass off here about the later bits, but every lie was always stronger with some truth in it.

“That is a serious claim child, do you have any proof?” asked Homura.

I paused, the confidence behind my declaration suddenly deflated. “…No.” I muttered. Shit, I don’t have proof! Wait! Wait! I got it! “But no one else should know I’m a jinchuriki! Jiraiya-sama, Kushina-san and everyone made sure to keep it a secret! I didn’t even tell my friends! Who else could’ve told that man Hanzo that I was a jinchuriki.”

“Hanzo?” repeated Hiruzen. “You’re certain that was the man that said this?”

I nodded rapidly. “He had a weird mask and this giant scythe thing and he was super scary! He started talking about eliminating things and, and!”

By this point, it was all word vomit and I don’t think I made all that much sense even to myself. I think Rin had to cover my mouth to make me shut up after a while.

“I see… This is very alarming news,” noted Hiruzen.

“Don’t tell me you believe this child,” drawled Danzo. “She doesn’t belong to the village.”

“Pardon me for interrupting,” said Kakashi as he spoke up. “I would like to input my thoughts on the matter.”

“You have no place—” started Danzo, but Hiruzen raised a hand to stop him and allowed Kakashi to continued.

“In my observation of Kasa Mon since her arrival here nearly three years ago, I’ve seen her done many things benefiting the village more so than most shinobi in Konoha,” started Kakashi. “Before arriving at the village, she along with her father has already saved one of our shinobi, Obito formerly of the Uchiha Clan and she had earned the trust of Kushina-san, Yondaime-sama’s wife and trusted companion before she even enter the gates of Konoha.”

Danzo frowned lightly at his words.
“And during the course of her stay, she have also earned the trust of Yondaime Hokage-sama, the man who recently sacrificed himself for the safety of the village. In addition, she has also assisted stopping both Sanbi and Kyubi in the past and recently several days ago,” stated Kakashi.

Danzo closed his eyes as the silver-haired jounin stared back at him; he knew how to play this game of politics.

“Regarding to that,” continued Kakashi, much to Obito’s glee. “She also freed Rin from the control of Sanbi when she was turned into a jinchuriki against her will and used to decimate the village from within. While there are no physical record of her past deeds, I do believe that Kasa Mon have done a great deal in protecting and benefitting Konoha.”

“Hey! Don’t forget, she left Konoha for two years to train up, so Sanbi’s chakra wouldn’t act up while she’s in Konoha!” added Obito. “She’s doing everything she could to keep it safe and she’s even training to be an iryo-nin! How could you say she’s a threat to Konoha?”

“During the entirety of Kyubi’s attack, Kasa-chan was also quite adamant in us going to save Yondaime Hokage-sama," continued Rin. “I’m willing to vouch for her as a fellow jinchuriki of Sanbi.”

“And I as well, as her kin. Kasa is also a descendant from the Uzumaki Clan. And we of the Uzumaki Clan are *loyal* to the village we serve,” grinned Kushina as she added her last two cents to the pile of praises Team Minato have already placed in front of the council.

I could see Hiruzen resisting a smile at our presentation. Danzo opened his eyes a moment later after Kakashi was finished.

“What about him?” stated Danzo as he waved towards Tesuri. “He is not an Uzumaki nor does he have a notable sponsor to vouch for his loyalty to Konoha. He could very well be using the child as a front to hide his real objective.”

“I could gather a list of signatures from civilians to jounins I’ve assisted in the past three years if you wish for confirmation of my deeds. A good number of them are from notable clans, such as the Hyuga, the Akimichi and the Uchiha just to list a few. Furthermore, I’ve recently finished my rounds around the Land of Fire assisting every village that lent a hand in helping Konoha during the previous war,” stated Tesuri, almost annoyed by Danzo’s last-ditch attempt in screwing us over.

How the man managed to keep so calm after all this, I have no clue.

“To be fair,” continued Tesuri. “I think someone should look into the claims of Danzo-dono collaborating with an enemy village to clear his name. It really was rude of my daughter to say such slander about a man such as yourself Danzo-dono.”

Ooh, well played there Tesuri, well played. Making it sound like you’re trying to clear his name rather than outright saying the bastard’s a traitorous douchebag. Who knew the man had a hand at playing this game.

“Very well, I will have someone look into that matter,” agreed Hiruzen. I swear his eyes were twinkling like Dumbledore. “We must clear up this misunderstanding.”

Danzo’s nose flared. “Of course, that would be prudent to do. Once the village is on its way of recovery.”

Damn it, does nothing phase this man?
“I do believe we’ve cleared up the matter on what happened the day Kyubi attack. Shall we move on to the next matter?” noted Hiruzen much to the annoyance of Danzo.

“‘The next matter?’ asked Kushina. ‘I thought this meeting wasn’t to put blame on anyone. What’s the next matter?’”

Hiruzen sighed as he folded his hands in front of his face. “It’s concerning the identity of Naruto.”

We all stiffened.

“What about Naruto?” I asked immediately.

“As you already know, there’s a negative stigma brought on by Kyubi’s recent attack. Many of the villagers have already voiced out their desire to eliminate Kyubi’s jinchuriki to stop another attack from Kyubi to occur again.”

“Hokage-sama!” started Kushina, but the man raised his hand to stop her before she can voice out her complaints.

“I’ve have decided on a law to keep all Konoha jinchuriki, both former and current safe from the villager’s wrath, if anyone dares to attack any of you unprovoked, they will be punished severely. The law will be effective immediately on announcement after Minato’s funeral proceedings,” said Hiruzen.

Danzo scowled at the law, but said nothing, most likely there was already a vote on the matter and he was outvoted.

“If that’s the case, what’s there to discuss about Naruto?” asked Kushina with a frown.

“I would like to have him under your name instead of Minato’s,” said Hiruzen.

Confusion set on Kushina’s face. “I am honored Hokage-sama, but why not Minato’s name? Him being Yondaime Hokage-sama should deter the villagers.”

Hiruzen shook his head. “As you all already know, Minato have created quite a name for himself in the previous war. With him gone, his old enemies might be tempted to kidnap Naruto and extract revenge on him for what he done,” said Hiruzen.

“So, this is about his safety right?” asked Obito.

Hiruzen nodded. “However, that’s not the only thing we need to discuss. There is no doubt, that you’ve already heard some whisperings spreading amongst the villagers about Naruto’s status as a jinchuriki. I would also, like to add a ban on anyone revealing his jinchuriki status until he is deemed ready to handle Kyubi’s chakra.”

I tilted my head in confusion when he looked at me.

“After seeing what Kasa here gone through previously, I don’t believe it would be the best idea for Naruto to know about the power that resides inside him. Furthermore, despite not having many people know about her jinchuriki status, we’ve already seen examples of biasness towards her.” He glanced briefly at Danzo to make a point. “I don’t think it would be fair to Naruto if all his peers were to treat him with similar biasness. Don’t you agree?”

Kushina reluctantly nodded. “I really do want him to know being a jinchuriki is an honor,
not a curse, but I could understand your concern. It probably is best that none of his peers and the future generations know about this.”

“If I may be prompt,” interrupted Danzo. “Even if we are to go with every plan that is noted here today, I must voice my concern about the current jinchuriki child that have yet become a Konoha shinobi.”

Obito growled, ready to lash out at him, but Kakashi raised a hand to block him, keeping him from voicing out his complaints.

“If she is to be trained to restrain a jinchuriki such as Kyubi, I do believe she needs more special training than what the Academy offers. With her gone for nearly two years, no doubt, she’s behind on the Academy curriculum,” noted the man.

I frowned, not likely where this conversation is going.

“I suggest the jinchuriki should get a personal mentor rather than a jounin sensei and genin team. Those would be too much of a distraction for her,” said Danzo as he eyed me calmly.

Damn it! He’s going to try to drag me into ROOT with an apprenticeship! I’m not sure if it's been disbanded yet, but I don’t doubt the bastard would find some way to keep that thing running in the background like bad spyware.

I clung onto Rin’s hand tightly and glanced at her desperately, hoping she could read my mind. At a brief glance, I’m not sure if she understood my plight, but she got something as she spoke next.

“I don’t think it’s wise to separate Kasa-chan from the potential teammates she might work with in the future,” interrupting Rin. “True, she would probably learn much faster with a mentor rather than a normal jounin sensei, but at the same time, I do believe she needs the experience with working with others. As Danzo-dono noted, Kasa-chan have been gone from the village for quite some time and she needs to return to the Academy in order to reconnect with those that may become her comrades.”

Thank you Rin! I smiled up at her in relief.

“You cannot deny that she is behind,” reinforced Danzo. “If we waste time with putting her through the Academy, she might end up wasting her time in the Academy for years rather than spending it more productively,” countered Danzo.

I could feel the sparks in the air as everyone fought to have their voice heard and their decision chosen. I really don’t want to end up in Danzo’s hands. Who knows what the hell he’s going to make do! He might just brainwash me and turn me into Kabuto or something!

“They’re all very sound suggestions,” noted Hiruzen as he spoke up, stopping any argument from starting up again. “How about we place a time limit?”

“Time limit?” I frowned.

“If Kasa can graduate within the next year, she will join a genin team with a jounin instructor,” said Hiruzen impartially. “If she cannot graduate within the next year, a mentor will be selected and Kasa will take on an apprenticeship instead. Does that sound fair?”

“A full year?” sneered Danzo. “That’ll be time wasted if she can’t catch up! Three months, that’s when the next genin exam is being held.”
“You can’t expect her to graduate that quickly!” snapped Obito. “She’s been gone for so long! It’s not fair to give her that little time!”

“I agree, time is unreasonable for someone that has no prodigal inclination,” stated Kakashi. “She should be given multiple attempts at taking the exam rather than just time.”

Oh thanks for the compliment Kakashi, you stupid prick. Just because I’m not the smartest crayon in the box, doesn’t mean I’m a dumbass!

“Enough,” stated Hiruzen when it seemed like another argument was about to start. “Kasa may have up to three tries in the genin exams with the next year. If after three times or she passes the one year time limit, she will get a mentor instead. The matter of mentorship will be dealt with in a year’s time if she fails to graduate.”

Shit… I have one year and three attempts. If I fucking screw up, Danzo find a way and own my ass! Hell! Can’t I get a break for a change? I just got back!
My first month back in Konoha was hell. Why may you ask? Oh, it has nothing to do with Kyubi’s rampage over the village or the countless construction work sites I assisted. Hell, it doesn’t have anything to deal with the stress of graduating within the year or the threat of Danzo looming over my head. Those I could deal with. What I can’t deal with was…

“Naruto! Please stop crying!” begged Kushina desperately, haggard from caring for the fussy infant.

It wasn’t as if we left her on her own. Kushina was far from alone Rin and I both took turns helping her out during the nights so she could have some rest, but Kushina was a new mother and has little to no experience in how to take care of children. She’s not a bad mother, just not an experienced one.

It was obvious she has never taken care of a child for more than a couple of hours at a time and never once had she dealt with a newborn. I wonder what it would’ve been like if Minato was still around. Would they both be headless chickens like Kushina was now? Or would Minato have fared better?

No clue and not likely I would ever find out, so let’s not venture into the emo-zone, that should be left to the Uchiha. They’re way better at being emo. I don’t know how they do it. I get tired of it after two days. I know I sound kind of heartless, but knowing my defense mechanism, I’ll break down once I have some time to do so.

Way too many things to worry about and not enough time for me to waste it on crying, I’ve already reached my crying quota for the next couple of months. More importantly, I have to go save Kushina from Naruto before she has a mental break down. Geez, I hate dealing with new parents.

If a newborn cries, it’s one of three things. They’re hungry, they’re dirty or they’re sleepy. Cure all three and they’ll sleep until the next feeding or diaper change. How exactly was that hard? Okay, fine I have way more experience in this than her. I’ve practically helped raise and care for a good number of my nieces and nephews in my previous life, making me no stranger to diaper changes and bi-hourly feedings.

I could just take over and help Kushina with everything, but the issue that’s gotten me so stressed was that I think Kushina might be a tad bit overprotective. With Minato gone and Naruto being such a difficult child, Kushina was beyond stressed and maybe a bit paranoid. She’ll let Rin and I get close to the baby, but if Kakashi, Obito or Tesuri even tried, she turns almost rabid as if terrified that they might take him away. I hope its only temporary, but I’m not going to hold my breath.

“Kushina-san, I think he might be hungry, why don’t you feed him?” I suggested before her tired eyes looked up at me almost grateful at the reminder.

Another thing I seemed to notice after helping Tesuri deliver so many babies, it takes quite some time for mothers to gather their wits back. Not sure what causes the drop of common sense from the childbirth, but it seemed very common among civilians. Kushina was the first shinobi mother I dealt with, I have no clue what the norms were concerning kunoichi mothers.

Tesuri and Rin gave me tips on how to handle her if things get hectic, but for the most part Kushina was reasonable…
“Kasa-chan! He won’t eat! What’s wrong with him?” wailed Kushina.

…Sort of… It’s going to be a long couple of months.

More often than not, I found myself asleep in class. Not the best thing to do considering I need to pass like no one’s business, but with everything happening I couldn’t help myself. I was out like a light the instant history or trivial information was being recited. Fortunately, I’m not much of a snorer. Unfortunately, I have friends that were less than gentle when it came to waking me up.

“Ow!” I hissed covering my head as a sharp flick hit my forehead. Gods! I really need to get something to cover my forehead!

“You’re dead last in the class rankings again. Are you sure you should be sleeping?” murmured Itachi quietly as our chunin sensei continued the lesson either not hearing us or pretending to not notice us whispering amongst ourselves.

“I was just resting my eyes.” I hissed back. “I was paying attention.” Nope, totally a lie, I didn’t hear a single word the man in front said.

“I’m quite sure you can recite word for word what was just said,” drawled Itachi dryly.

“Oh shut up.” I hissed.

“Kasa Mon!” snapped our chunin sensei.

“Yes sir!” I stood erect at the call of my name. I paused when I realized I just disrupted the classes even further. Giggles from my fellow classmates made me place a hand behind my head sheepishly. “…Sorry?”

“If you’re quite done flirting with Itachi, please sit back down and pay attention,” noted the man.

“I am not flirting with him!” I snapped before a piece of chalk smacked me straight in the head.

“Sit down,” ordered the chunin before I huffed and plopped down in my seat, sulking. I swear I will find a way to stop all these attacks directed to my poor head one of these days. “You are in no position to be fooling around, you’re two years behind and I’m surprised that you’ve gotten approval to continue shinobi training with how poorly you’re doing.”

I sunk lower in my seat. It’s not like I disrupted his class on purpose, he didn’t have to get on my case that badly. Man, if shinobi classes were like this, I don’t want to know what kunoichi classes were like.

“… Kasa-chan, I know you were gone for two years with your father,” started Hana hesitantly. “But didn’t he teach you anything about concealing yourself while you were recovering?”

“Yeah, he gave me a thorough lesson on hiding and fleeing tactics along with their uses in espionage. Why?” I said with bewilderment during kunoichi class.

"…I don’t think forest camouflage would be suitable for anywhere except in the forest,” noted Hana before I looked up at our fellow classmates. They were all working on a different set of makeup.

“…We were supposed to do royal court espionage today weren’t we?” I muttered darkly
Okay, maybe Kushina wasn’t the only one that’s losing brain cells; I’m losing mine by the truckload. Even so, I still signed up for the first genin exam that was open. I know I’m not likely going to pass it on my first try, but at least I could take it to see on what the heck they’ll be testing on. I have one year and three tries; I’m going to make sure to get the most out of the first two attempts.

Hey, I know my natural intellect can’t match up to the so call geniuses in this world, but I know how to make up for it with preparation and planning. Not everyone can be that lucky. The rest of us mortals have to get creative to keep up with those bastards.

“Kasa… you do my notes aren’t going to help you with your current classes right? You haven’t caught up yet,” noted Shisui when I demanded to see his notes.

“Don’t care, give me any and all note scrolls. You at least take notes unlike Itachi, who just memorizes everything!” I grumbled.

I have tried asking Hana for her notes when I found out the Uchiha prodigy didn’t take notes, but I have no clue how to read the Inuzuka short hand, and learning would take too much time. Mikoto had taught me the Uchiha short hand during the period I stayed with them. Shisui was probably the only person I could ask for notes without needing to learn another set of shorthand. Damn ninjas and their need to code the crap out of their things.

Seriously, why do they need to code a freaking grocery list? I understand the need to keep the mind sharp with practice, but it’s not practical. I glared at the scrolls as I rewrote the notes in my own form of shorthand and in English. It wasn’t as if I was afraid anyone reading my notes, but more rather my brain was still wired to remember English better than Japanese.

Sure, it’ll take a second or two for my brain to translate between languages, but at least I don’t have to worry about remembering three sets of writing. Hiragana and katakana were bad enough, but once you put in kanji, my brain completely shuts down. With kanji, there are a shit ton of strokes to a single character and a numerous number of characters that could be built into words.

To be considered literate, you would need to know roughly 1,500 characters. To be a scholar you would need about 10,000. However, to be a freaking ninja, you need to go beyond a scholar so you could do coding! What the hell? I swear, even after losing computers and the almighty internet, I’m still stuck doing coding.

“… My brain hurts.” I whined, banging the back of my head against the tree after transcribing and reorganizing four scrolls worth of information into my notebook. Screw scrolls, pages are better to do flip study.

“Bashing your head in won’t help you remember,” said Itachi with a drone. “And I don’t think you can afford losing anymore brain cells.”

I chucked one of Shisui’s scrolls at him. He caught it with ease and cracked it open leisurely. “You’re not supposed to catch it!” I whined.

“I know I agreed to lending them to you Kasa, but I do want them back in one piece,” noted Shisui.

“Why are you studying so hard anyway? You don’t have to take the genin exams immediately,” said Hana as she petted one of her ninkens.

Every since I resumed classes in the Academy, the four of us made it a routine to meet up
during the lunch breaks to either eat lunch together or just lounge about. For kids, they’re pretty laid back. Most other kids around this age would normally be running around playing tag or getting themselves hurt doing something stupid… What are you looking at? I’m not talking from experience!

… Okay, fine. I’m the idiot that got both arms disjointed doing something stupid around this age. Hurts like a bitch, but I learned not to let my arms lock when pulling at things! That’s something right?

“I have to graduate within the year.” I grumbled under my breath. “If I don’t, I’m totally screwed.”

“Screwed?” Shisui asked curiously. “How so?”

“Let me put it this way, if I don’t graduate within this year, good luck ever seeing me again.” I grumbled.

Knowing how Danzo worked, even if I was lucky and he couldn’t get a hold of my apprenticeship, I’ll still end up with a mentor that would train me into a weapon. I personally don’t want to go into the front lines as a half jinchuriki. If the enemy’s smart, they won’t go after the dumbass brute with the sword and shield. They would go after the person who could rain hell on the earth.

Think of a weaponized jinchuriki as your black mage with AOE attacks, area of effect for you non-gamers. Now, think of what I just said about fighting and what ninjas are known for. That’s right, they’re cunning bastards that hide in the shadow and snipe you the instant your back’s turned.

Fair play? What the hell is that? Why bother with confrontation when I could easily slit your throat in your sleep? Ninjas are not rainbows and sunshine, if you lived in this world for as long as I have, you’ll notice the portrayal of this world in my previous life was totally the PG version with gallons of blood lost.

“You’re exaggerating. If you fail, just take the exam over,” said Hana. “You could take the genin exams until you’re fifteen. You’re not that bad in ranking. You just need another year or two.”

“I don’t have that much time!” I complained. “If I don’t graduate this year, they’ll take me away!”

Immediately, the three turned their attention on me. I didn’t realize why until it was too late and I stumbled to correct what I said. Shit, I don’t need these kids involved this, especially kids that weren’t even out of the academy! Heck, even if they were chunin, I wouldn’t want them involved! Danzo was ruthless. Stealing Shisui’s eye, manipulating Itachi to kill his own clan. If these kids went after him now, they would die.

“Who’s taking you away?” asked Itachi. If I didn’t know any better, I might’ve thought he was demanding to know.

“Eh? Did I say away? I mean they’ll—”

I got three glares pinned on me like a circus act with daggers and a spinning wheel. Obviously, I’m the one on the wheel and they have the daggers.

“Eh… heh…” I squeaked out a weak laugh and lied. “It has to deal with my health?”

Their glare lessened at my lie.

“I’m fine… but they rather make sure I could handle becoming genin the normal way. If I
couldn’t, they’re going to set me up on an apprenticeship with a mentor.” I improvised. Wished I had
more time for a better cover story, but this was better than nothing.

 “…Isn’t that a good thing? You’ll still be a genin and have your very own sensei,” noted
Hana confused. “You could take up specializations if that’s the case right?”

Shisui and Itachi stayed quiet, possibly suspicious of my story.

“Erm…” I chewed on my lower lip, my brain racing through excuses. “The apprenticeship
isn’t exactly like being a genin… and I don’t think I want to go into the specialization they choose.
It’s not likely that they’ll let me pursue a career as an iryo-nin… considering…” I stopped myself
before I let slip my situation.

 “… Is it hard for you to become an iryo-nin with your health problems?” asked Hana,
genuinely concerned.

I would feel guilty in conning her, but I was too distracted by the suspicious stares from the
Uchiha boys. Hard to feel guilt, when anxiety threatens to kick your ass.

 “…Not exactly, it’s more like I’m more suitable for another line of shinobi work rather than
iryo-nin.” I replied sheepishly.

 “Then why not go into what you’re good at?” asked Hana curiously.

…Because being good here means more people will target your ass and end you. And
knowing how much a dumbass I could be in a tense situation, I can assure you my life span would
be shorter than most shinobi if I was a part of the front line. Come to think of it, aside from games, I
really dislike conflicts of any sort. Even with my hot temper, I do try to keep out of fights whenever I
could… Keyword: try.

 “That’s because you want to be like your dad right?” inserted Shisui.

Thank you Shisui, I love you!

 “Yeah, Tou-san’s amazing!” I chirped. “Even though not all iryo-nins could be an amazing
fighter like Tsunade-sama, he still managed to help a lot of people during our trip around the Land of
Fire. They were so happy to see him!”

You know, I actually did like seeing the smiling faces on the people Tesuri healed. As much
as I liked to bust a couple of heads together and kickass, there was something about working with
healing chakra that made everything feel so much more satisfying.

 “You really like iryo-ninjutsu don’t you?” mused Shisui.

 “Of course!” I huffed. “So what if ninjutsu, genjutsu or taijutsu could ultimately win a fight,
a battle or a war? In the end, it’s always the iryo-nin that picks up the pieces.”

I bit my tongue when I saw the solemn look crossing their faces. The Kyubi attack was
probably still fresh in their mind, not to mention the Third Shinobi War only ended two years prior.
They were children of war, prepped for eventual deployment onto the field. I really do pity these
child soldiers. Their childhood memories would always be a life of violence and bloodshed.
I almost drifted off in a tangent before I felt a hand on my shoulder. Blinking, I glanced up to Shisui with a puzzled expression. He gave a wry grin.

“You’re not going to be able to remember much if you keep letting your mind wander off,” mused Shisui.

I huffed in annoyance. My concentration was far from perfect, but I managed enough to keep Isobu’s chakra down without having to worry about random episodes of wild chakra and memory blackouts.

“Don’t you dare start flicking my forehead like Itachi!” I snapped. It took me ages to overcome the need to press against my forehead to concentrate and stop myself from drifting. I’m not about to let them restart the need to do so whenever I start drifting.

“You need to keep everything in there, I’m not going to knock out what you’ve learned already. Itachi would probably do that for you,” teased Shisui.

I huffed, shrugging off his hand. “Ha-ha. Joke all you want, but I’m going to graduate the normal way and get myself onto a genin team! You guys better watch out because I might become a badass before all of you!”

A snort, I glanced over to Itachi and he acted as if he didn’t make the noise. “We’ll see Miss Dead Last.”

I scowled and opened my mouth to say something, but he continued.

“Come over in the morning. My father said he’ll resume your taijutsu training,” said Itachi. I blinked in surprise at his words. “Your horrible grades aggravated him.”

“What?” I said in confusion.

A small twitch appeared at the corner of Itachi’s lips. “He’s annoyed with your taijutsu grades claiming you’re sullying his name by doing so poorly despite having prior training from him.”

My eye twitched as I scowled, damn egotistic Uchiha. One of these days, I’m going to wipe that arrogance off their faces.

“Though, I suspect, he only said that because he knew my mother wanted you to come visit,” said Itachi.

The scowl disappeared from my face. Oh right, I haven’t gone to see Mikoto after the Kyubi attack… I really should go visit her. That was sweet of Fugaku to do this for his wife… but that doesn’t excuse his douchebaggery.

“Hey, don’t go hogging Kasa-chan all to yourself,” teased Shisui as he looped an arm around my shoulders. “You already have her sharing all the same classes with you. Keeping her to yourself in the morning would be double-dipping.”

Itachi rolled his eyes. “If you’re jealous then you can have study sessions with her after classes are over. I’m quite sure she could use the help.”

A sly grin crossed the older Uchiha’s face. “Maybe I will have study sessions with Kasa-chan and she’ll like me so much that she’ll ditch your morning sessions. Then I’ll get to keep her all to myself.”
“Who’s double-dipping now?” drawled Itachi.

I resisted as sigh as the two traded words. Somewhat, I became their plaything. No, not that sort, you perverts. They’re kids, not even preteens yet. The furthest they’d go would be pulling my arms out of my sockets in a game of tug-of-war while childishly claiming ownership. Not that either of them would stoop to so low. The Uchiha in them wouldn’t allow that.

Instead, they settled with a game of words, teasing and annoying one another. If they ever get a chance to get on the Konoha council, they would be great politicians. I on the other hand, would suck if my previous experience at the council were any indication. That bit of word vomit at accusing Danzo might’ve gone better if I was more composed and phrased my words better.

No doubt, the level of treason I accused of the man should send alarms to anyone with a brain. Unfortunately, I’m not the type to be eloquent with my words and Danzo seems like the type to cover his tracks. If the man was as tricky as the show portrayed; there would be no incriminating evidence against him. Even though it may seem like we won against him with my study extension and the addition of retaking exams, I get the sinking feeling it was still within his machinations.

Danzo was known to be calculating and cautious. He would never do something without weighing the pro and cons of each action. Now that I think about it… everything about my kidnapping and the council meeting seemed off. The man was known to hoard power in order to build his ideal Konoha.

Even though I don’t technically carry a demon, I was still a jinchuriki carrying half the power of one. Yet, he offered me to Hanzo? How would that benefit Konoha? Not to mention, he kept trying to eject me from the village and paint me as a villain. It’s almost as if he has a grudge against me or something.

There was also the matter about pushing a mentor on me. I’m not exactly sure who would become my mentor, but I get the sinking feeling Danzo might be able to either convince the council that his candidate was perfect. Or more likely, he would have either Koharu or Homura, the advisors, to advocate the mentor of his choice.

By the time I figure it out on whether or not Danzo have succeeded, it would be too late. Either he’ll have me brainwashed or my reluctance to listen to my mentor would get me court martialed for disobeying a superior. Neither situation was in my favor. I’ve definitely gotten the short end of the draw.

Aside from geniuses and war, most Academy students don’t graduate until they were at least twelve. The nine-month extension was hardly enough if taking in the consideration that I was also two years behind. Thank god, I’m not really a child. I wouldn’t have stood a chance if I were.

Even so, I’m not meant for the world of politics and conspiracies. Word play and deception were my Achilles’ heel. The fact I’ve gotten this far with my lies was likely pure luck and the fact that the truth was unbelievable to most.

Imagine, if I suddenly went up to someone, anyone really, and told them their life, their world and everything they believed in was a lie, what would they do? If I’m lucky, they would think I’m insane and walk away. If I’m not so lucky, and I know Lady Luck hates me, they would get the men in the white coats and drag me away. Telling them the truth of my origins would do nothing to help and my claim of being an oracle would not hold out for long.

My foreknowledge only went as far as what I could remember in the show and the validity of that knowledge only applied if nothing changed. Well, it’s safe to say, I’ve already changed a shit
ton of things. So, my claim of being an oracle was shit. I could probably still get away with saying what could have happened, but no one cares about what ifs, only what will.

“That’s not fair at all, if you guys get her in the morning and after classes, I get her during our breaks,” joined in Hana with a grin. Obviously, not wanting to get left out of the fun of playing tug-of-war with my poor body.

“Not you too Hana.” I groaned burying my face into my hands. The trio found great amusement in my misery.

For the following months, my daily routines involved taijutsu training with Fugaku and Itachi in the morning, shinobi and kunoichi classes during the day, practicing and recapping kunoichi classes with Hana during breaks and study sessions with Shisui in the afternoon. Following that, depending on whether it was my turn, I took up babysitting Naruto to give Kushina a brief break. If I managed to survive all that, Tesuri slipped in some iryo-ninjutsu practice after dinner.

By the time the genin exams came about, I was sick with a high fever. Oh, I still went into the Academy to take the exam. I’m really good at hiding the fact that I’m sick. It’s a useless skill that I kept from my old life. Yeah, I know I’m weird. Most kids would totally use the sick card as an excuse to cut school. Me? I’m the idiot that went in despite having a 104-degree fever.

“Just a little more.” I murmured to myself as I worked through my pounding head and rasping breath.

You would think that my Uzumaki blood would keep me from catching the common cold, but even the resilience of that clan was not infallible when faced with the stress of training and studying nonstop for three months straight.

“Pencils down,” said the chunin proctor.

“Done.” I whispered hoarsely as the pen slipped out of my hand and I landed face flat on my desk.

“Sensei! Kasa passed out!” shouted someone, no clue who, but it sounded muffled to my ears.

It felt like having cotton balls in my ears. Any other time, I would get up and pretended it was all a joke, but I didn’t even have the energy to sit up straight. I vaguely heard someone talking to me—at me? Not even sure about that right now. Eventually, the world turned black for the nth time and I was embraced by sleep.

Yeah… If you can’t already tell, my written exam was discarded. I never got a chance to take the practical portion as they immediately shipped me off to the hospital and dumped my feverish ass in a cold bath. My brain was so hazy; I don’t remember much of the hospital stay. When I was finally coherent enough to make sense of anything, I was under a healing coma for nearly two weeks.

Total balls, just when I was getting the hang of taijutsu, my body totally crapped out! I knew my body wasn’t meant for taijutsu and the daily training with Fugaku and Itachi had done a number on me. Had my natural inclination been any of the main three, those exercises and training would’ve made my body stronger, but since I wasn’t under any of those, my body crapped out from overexertion.

To say Tesuri was upset was an understatement, but I’m not going to get into his lectures.
By now, every lecture he gives me was about my recklessness almost every time. He banned me from taijutsu training until I’ve recovered and even after a full recovery, my physical and practical training was limited to every other day. Apparently, it was to give my body a chance to recover and avoid a repeat.

I sorely hope the exhaustion and fever haven’t fried anything important. The lack of memory on the exam questions was upsetting. I couldn’t even use my first failure to improve my studying method. There were four genin exams in a year, when I was reinstated in the Academy, the last exam for the year was already done and over. I needed to wait three months for January’s exam and we all knew how that turned out.

Nine months and two chances left. Shit… I need sleep.
Judgment Day

When the next genin exam came about, everyone barred me from taking it and I mean *everyone* and their mother. I swear Mikoto was scarier than Tesuri and Kushina combined, giving me death threats if if I showed even the slightest sign of a sniffle when I left the Uchiha household after my morning training session. Not that it really mattered, there were two more chances I could take the exam before the year was over.

I’ll admit I was a bit hasty with how hard I pushed myself. I should’ve definitely paced myself better to avoid that little mishap. I kept forgetting this wasn’t my old body. This one wasn’t used to high stress and all-nighters. Even if my mind was ready and willing to deal with such things, the body was still a child. Most six to seven-year-old children should have at least twelve hours to function properly, teens needed at least eight hours.

In my old body I worked with less than six, but that one was used to long hours of gaming and last minute assignments. Yeah, I’m a procrastinator, but I always know how long it would take me to finish an assignment, so I’ve always left myself more than enough time to do so. Now, if only being a ninja was as simple as writing a paper.

Since I was banned from taking the genin exam this time, I decided to take that day off from everyone. As much as I like them and maybe even love them, I missed having a moment of solitude to myself. Come to think of it, I haven’t had any alone time since I arrived in this world.

“What to do?” I murmured to myself the morning of the genin exam.

Those who weren’t taking the exam had the day off. Not that they really needed it. It was more for the examiners so they don’t have to deal with watching the examinees and rowdy Academy students while they graded the potential genin candidates.

I didn’t feel like heading towards the Uchiha district for morning taijutsu training, nor did I want to visit the Inuzuka to study with Hana. Today was supposed to be all about me… now if only I knew what I want to do for me…

Hell, I haven’t had a day off in ages and now I’m lost at what to do! What did I do in my previous life when I had a day off anyway? Let’s see… video games, web browsing, reading manga and fanfics, online shopping… Well, shit. How am I going to do all those anti-social activities without technology?

“Balls.” I muttered to myself darkly as I wrapped my hands behind my head and strolled through the village.

I couldn’t even go off and gorge myself on the various cuisines in Konoha; I didn’t have any spending money. I’m sure Tesuri would’ve given me some if I asked, but I haven’t needed to use money in so long, I didn’t even think about asking. Again, it’s no big deal. If I can’t be a pig, I’ll just find something else to do.

An hour strolling through the various sectors of Konoha and I found myself playing tourist as I turned it into a game to see if I could find the homes and locations of Naruto’s future friends and teammates. I knew where the Uchiha district and the Inuzuka Clan household were so there was no point in searching for them. Those two areas I made sure to steer clear as I went about with my game. As much as I liked the kids, I really don’t want to humor them on my day off.
All the while, I worked on my mental map of Konoha. I haven’t gotten a chance to really explore Konoha and this was a great chance to do so. The best part of this game was the familiar locations where I knew Minato hid his various special kunai. I have to try to find one of his kunais. It would make traveling around Konoha so much easier.

Interestingly enough, I found one of the kunai locations at one of the clan houses I was looking for. I just hadn’t realized it when I saw it the first time using the Hiraishin.

“Hmm?” I hummed as I spotted a koi pond and my fan-girl side got the better of me. With a grin I formed a half-ram seal and whispered, “Hidden Mist Jutsu.”

The water in the koi pond dispersed slowly as a fine mist enveloped the area. The house stood some distance away from the hustle and bustle of Konoha, surrounded by trees and a large forest behind the traditional house. I had decent cover behind the trees, at least until the mist was thick enough for me to run in. It’s still early enough in the morning, no one would notice and it’s almost spring, a little mist or fog wouldn’t be too out of place right?

Normally, I would’ve never allowed such stalker tendencies to surface, but I couldn’t help it. This clan was by far, my favorite out of all the clans in the series. Their screen time was limited, but my goodness when they do have screen time, they totally steal the show!

Also, I wanted to see if I could find Minato’s kunai. If I could, it’d be easier to find the others and gather them for emergencies. I might need to tap into Isobu’s chakra to do use them, considering I don’t have enough chakra to pull it off on my own, at least not yet. Could you imagine how awesome that would be when I finally do have enough? Not sure how big my stores would be, but I’m hopeful that I’d be able to use it. If not… well, I could give it to Naruto when he’s older.

I’m quite sure if I had a mirror, I would see the biggest grin on my face as I snuck into the compound. It’s not like they wake early anyway right? I could get in, look around and get out. No one would know I’m there! I nearly skipped my way to the house with how excited I was.

“I’m going be awesome.” I whispered in a cheery sing-tone as I made my way through the mist.

Though… that might’ve been a stupid move on my part. The second I spoke, my body froze, resisting all efforts I made in moving. Me and my big mouth. The next thing I knew, my body moved on its own and out of the veil of mist.

“Why does it have to be a girl?” sighed a dull voice as I approached a man with a pineapple hairstyle. “This is so troublesome.”

I nearly squealed on the spot. It was Shikaku Nara. I found it impossible to keep the stupid grin off my face. “Good morning Nara-san! I’m totally not a suspicious person!” I greeted brightly with the worst defense ever, but I don’t think he’d kill me for my sass.

“You do know, saying you’re not suspicious only makes you even more so?” drawled the man lazily. “Don’t you have anything better to do on your day off from the Academy?”

Ah, no doubt this guy Sherlocked his way to this conclusion. My fan-girl side tempted me to ask him to explain how he figured it out, but knowing the personality of his clan, he wouldn’t bother indulging my fan-girl tendencies.

“Are you going to answer me?” sighed the man, almost as if he was exhausted. “I much rather waste my morning some other way.”
Crap, I totally got distracted. Excuses, excuses… uh… what excuse can I use?

“If you’re going to lie, don’t bother answering,” said Shikaku dully.

I squeaked. Damn it! Was I that obvious? Or was he really that good? The look in his bored eyes told me he really wanted to just let me go and go back to lazing around.

“Sorry?” I offered instead. “I wasn’t going to do anything bad if that helps any. I just wanted to find something.”

“Something?” droned the man. “What exactly do you think you can find here?”

“I wanted to see if I could find Minato-san’s kunai.” I answered truthfully. There was no point in lying to this man, he could see through it in a heartbeat. “His Hiraishin was so cool!”

He raised a brow, but showed no other response at my words. I wonder if he was shocked or even surprised at all, probably not. “What makes you think there’s something like that here?”

“Because I saw it. There were a couple of other places too, but I don’t know Konoha well enough to find them yet. I stumbled across this place by accident.” I grinned. “You’re Minato-san’s friend right? He must visit you a lot if he left a kunai here.”

It’s not surprising that the late hokage visited the Nara household often for Shikaku’s expertise advisement. Minato, being the smart man he was, would have noticed the excellent mind behind the lazy Nara exterior. No doubt, they were teammates at some point in their career and Shikaku respected him greatly. I doubt Minato would be able to venture into the Nara household with such freedom if that wasn’t the case. Hokage or no hokage.

Shikaku sighed. “Do you think a kunai could help you graduate within the year?”

A confused frown crossed my face before I could stop it. How does he know about my deadline? Wasn’t that confidential? Or did he come to some other conclusion that involves with me wanting to graduate early? Let’s not think too hard on it, I might hurt myself.

“How would a kunai help me graduate? It’s not like it could take the exams or perform on the practical for me.” I pointed out the obvious flaw of the statement, though I don’t think he meant it quite literally.

The only thing I would make sense from his statement was that he thinks I was going find a way to use Hiraishin as leverage to bribe my way through graduation. Becoming a ninja wasn’t as simple as knowing how to perform a bunch of jutsu. Any dumb brute could do that with enough power and practice. Being a ninja required a keen mind and adaptability. Just because I could use the ultimate technique of someone famous meant nothing, if I don’t have a brain to know when to use it.

Tell me, if you were a genin and suddenly someone tells you to go fight Orochimaru. Are you going to be a dumbass and outright attack him? Hell no, you would poison the bastard when he’s not around to see you. Though, I doubt he could be killed that easily with poison, but that’s not the point I was trying to make.

Shikaku looked intrigued. “What were you planning to do with the kunai then?”

“Use it to cut down traveling time. I could save a lot of time if I could use it.” I answered truthfully before shrugging. “And if I can’t, I was going to give it to Naruto later.”
“Why?” asked Shikaku.

“Why not?” I returned. “It does belong to his dad, so technically it would belong to him. Even if I could use it, I’m only borrowing it for now.”

Shikaku said nothing as he looked at me with wry amusement. The restriction on my body disappeared and I found myself tumbling at the sudden freedom.


“If you want access to the Nara estate, come talk to me after you become chunin,” said Shikaku as he turned to leave.

“Chunin?” I resisted the urge to whine. I’m having enough trouble just becoming genin!

“Show yourself out and do try not to break in again,” drawled Shikaku. “I rather not waste energy in catching you and kicking you off the property.”

I watched, baffled, as the man walked off, completely ignoring me. The laziness of the Nara knows no bounds, but then again, I’m hardly a threat.

“Oh, and you might want to work on dispersing the mist better. Hidden Mist Jutsu might work fine in the Land of Rain and the Land of Mist, but here you need to be a little more careful on how you execute the jutsu,” noted the man offhandedly.

Damn it, I feel like Konohamaru now. I wonder how obvious I looked from the outside? Oh, no point in worrying about that now. I’ll deal with it when I get around to it. Well, that was time wasted. I didn’t get a kunai and I might have garnered more unwanted attention… again. You know, I’m really bad at this ninja business, even my stats are telling me to do something else.

Man, why couldn’t I have ended up in the Harry Potter’s world? Heck, even a Final Fantasy setting would’ve been better. Lost in my griping thoughts, I hadn’t notice where I wandered off, until a cat ran past me.

“Watch out!” shouted an unfamiliar voice.

A split second later, I was plowed to the ground by another body. My head spun at the collision to the ground. I should probably pay more attention to my surroundings.

“Ow…” I whined, sprawled the ground with someone lying on top of me. What the hell man? I just wanted a nice day off.

“Sorry,” murmured my attacker as he pushed himself off me and pulled me up. “Are you okay?”

“Why are there three of you?” I said in a daze as I shook away the triple vision. I sorely hope I didn’t get a concussion. I pressed a hand to my head. “I think I’m okay.”

“Are you sure now?” asked the boy.

I glanced up at him; on his head was a Konoha hitai-ate. A genin most likely, but that was hardly what I was thinking about. What’s most notable about this boy was the familiar scar across his face and on the bridge of his nose.
“Iruka! What are you doing? Tora’s getting away!” shouted another boy.

“Just a second Mizuki!” shouted back Iruka before he turned to me again. “You’re going to be able to get home on your own if I leave you right?”

I gave a dumb nod, not sure what else to say.

“All right, sorry again!” shouted the scarred-faced boy before he dashed around me and raced after his white-haired teammate.

What were the chances of me running into Iruka of all people? I guess I’ll run into everyone at some point while I’m here, but I didn’t know he was a genin already. He must’ve graduated during the last genin exam since I’m quite sure he wasn’t a genin when the Kyubi attacked. Good to know he’s still alive and I haven’t accidentally killed him off during Isobu’s attack. It would suck if I killed off the only Academy sensei that doesn’t hate Naruto’s guts.

I was ready to be on my way before another thought hit me and I turned to stare at the disappearing figure of Iruka and Mizuki.

“… Just how old is Tora?” I wondered. Is that cat immortal? Or did the daimyo’s wife name every cat she owned, Tora? Most cats live about fourteen to sixteen years. There’s no way this is the same agile cat that Naruto and Konohamaru both chased after in twelve to sixteen years time… Right?

I found myself going on these exploration trips once every couple of days as a break in between training and study sessions for the next several months. I haven’t run into any other familiar faces during that time, but I’m not complaining. It was a relaxing break in between cram sessions.

Of course, with me, you totally know there was no such thing as peace. If it wasn’t one thing, it was another. Fortunately, this disruption of peace was not hazardous sort… well, depending what’s your definition of hazardous.

“Naruto!” I shouted as dove to shield the blonde baby as my pile of notebooks came tumbling down from my desk.

“Saa!” giggled the blonde baby as the books smacked against my head and slid off my back.

“Not funny.” I grumbled as I picked him up and hauled him out of my room.

Yep, the brat reached his eight-month milestone, which meant the little ankle-biter crawled everywhere and grabbed at everything. He can’t exactly walk on his own, but with proper support he could go pretty far on his two feet. You thought the bi-hourly feedings was a nightmare before? Ha, you haven’t seen a thing yet. I’m dreading the moment when he could walk and run.

“Kushina-san, you forgot to put Naruto in the playpen again.” I sighed exasperatedly when she came out of the bathroom.

“Damn it!” said the woman as she did a face palm. “I knew I forgot something!”

Obvious, even after eight months, she hasn’t completely regained her wits yet and it’s not only her. I’ve seen Mikoto and Tsume act this way several times as well when I visited the Uchiha and Inuzuka household. I really hope this mommy syndrome would go away soon. I don’t think my heart can take the stress, especially not with my deadline coming up.

“I’ll be more careful. Are you going back to studying? You’re taking the genin exams
tomorrow right?” noted Kushina as she took Naruto from my arms.

I crossed my arms behind my head. “I think I’m going to take it easy tonight, I don’t want a repeat of last time.”

She smiled at me. “That’s good. Just remember, if you don’t pass this time, you’ll still have next time. Don’t stress yourself out. Treat this as a learning experience.”

“How many times did you take the genin exams, Kushina-san?” I asked curiously.

“Once,” chirped the woman. “It was easy.”

I felt a dark cloud over my head. I know she’s not trying to rub it in, but still, that stung. This is going to suck if it ends up like my first driving exam where I failed by like one point… Shit, I just had to go and think that didn’t I?

On the day of the exam, everything went fairly well. I didn’t oversleep; I didn’t collapse through the written exam. I even got through the practical portion of the exam. Things were looking good…sort of…

“…How did I do?” I asked nervously when they took me aside for a personal interview.

I’m not sure if this was a part of the standard procedures, considering we never get to see what really goes on for the genin exam in the series. The most we ever saw was practical portion for the Transformation Jutsu, which I managed, thank you very much. I might not be genjutsu inclined, but I could still manage looking like someone else if need be.

“To be honest,” started Daikoku sensei, the roll-poly man. He’s a nice guy, but kind of forgettable. Took me ages to remember his name. “You did much better on the practical exam than the written exam. You could handle the work of a genin that wouldn’t be much of a problem…”

“But?” I asked, recognizing the lingering but that he didn’t want to voice out.

“Your grades in kunoichi espionage and shinobi tactics were lacking,” noted Suzume sensei stiffly, my kunoichi instructor. “If you don’t already know, there is an additional portion to the genin exams for hopeful kunoichi.”

Well, no one ever told me that.

“Judging by the look of your face, you likely didn’t pay attention to that portion of kunoichi lessons,” said the woman sternly.

I felt a blush rushing to my cheeks. Okay, maybe I wasn’t paying a hundred percent attention to class as I’m supposed to, but come on! You’re telling me I’m going to fail because I screwed up the sexist portion of the exam? What the hell? If I was a guy, I bet they’d totally pass me! They wouldn’t have this stupid kunoichi portion.

“Kasa,” continued Suzume as she pushed up her glasses. “I am aware that you have returned from a two-year hiatus and recovering from your previous bouts of health issues. While I applaud you for the progress you made in the last eight months, you must understand, as a kunoichi, there are certain skills that our male counterparts cannot partake.”

Yeah, I bet. Even if the guys could use the transformation jutsu to turn into a woman, it would be hard to keep it up constantly if the mission was noted for long term. Even if they cross-
dressed, it would take a considerable amount of effort to hide the fact they’re men. There was also another thing… but I rather not venture into that area. Preferably, I don’t ever have to do that portion of kunoichi work.

If you don’t know what I mean, then obviously you’re too young to know. This is why I’m aiming to join the medical corps as soon as I can. Let some other person deal with espionage and the other ninja stuff. I’m a horrible liar anyway.

“I understand.” I replied, resisting the urge to sigh and slump into depression. “Is it allowed for me to ask on what to study and improve on? To prepare for the next time I take the exam?”

Suzume smiled faintly. “It is allowed. I suggest you brush up on your kunoichi lessons, along with shinobi tactics. Overall, your practical scores in disguises were almost flawless, but your failings was in your inability to emulate the appearance of your disguise.”

“And one other question… I’m aiming to join the medical corps at some point after becoming a genin. If I score better in other areas in the next exam, but still scored less than desirable in the kunoichi portion, would there be exceptions? Or is the kunoichi portion mandatory?” I asked, surprising both instructors.

As I’ve said before, I’m not a natural genius. I know I’m not going to be able to get a perfect score on everything. However, I am the master of loopholes! And considering Lee later on graduated with no skill in genjutsu and ninjutsu, I’m quite sure I could find someway to get an exception for my lack of acting skills.

“Medical corps?” said both of them in surprise.

“Yeah, Tou-san and Rin-san are already training me in iryo-ninjutsu. I could perform several jutsu, if you want me to prove it.” I offered.

The two of them looked at one another for a moment as if debating something before turning back to me.

“It is very impressive that you are studying other subjects in addition to your current studies,” noted Daikoku. “We will take that into consideration on your next exam if your grades improve. At the moment, even if you perform excellently with your iryo-ninjutsu, we cannot pass you with your current level in shinobi tactics.”

“I understand, but uh…” I started sheepishly, scratching the side of my cheek. “Can I know how much did I fail by, in overall? I know each portion is graded differently, but if you were to use a point system, how much did I get out of a hundred? And what’s considered passing?”

The two sighed, giving me a shake of a head.

“Never mind, how about, was I close?” I asked instead.

“We’ll see you in class tomorrow, Kasa,” stated Suzume before I was told to leave.

“So you flunked,” said Itachi the next day during lunch break.

“Oh shut it. I was close!” I said as I plopped onto the ground next to him, I had kunoichi lessons earlier during the morning. “I didn’t see you taking the exam.”

“I don’t feel like taking yet,” noted Itachi.
“Why the hell not?” I asked mildly annoyed. “I know you could pass and take Rookie of Year while you’re at it. Why the heck are you still here?”

A wry grin touched his lips. “I wanted to see how many times you failed first.”

“… Did I tell you how much I hate you?” I huffed in annoyance.

“Every day,” replied Itachi.

“Well, the next exam will be my last and I’m not planning to fail.” I retorted. “So, enjoy this while it lasts.”

“I thought you said you had a year,” said Itachi with a frown.

“The next exam is the last one before my deadline is over.” I waved it off. “You might as well take the next genin exam when it comes around.”

Why am I pushing him to take the exam, you wonder? Because, the damn bastard was supposed to graduate ages ago! I just caused another unnecessary change. I wonder if this will affect the timeline for the Uchiha. If Itachi doesn’t graduate early, would that mean he wouldn’t get into ANBU? And if that were the case, would the coup the Uchiha planned be carried out?

Gods, I swear I’m going to get an aneurism from trying to figure these changes. Obito’s no longer the fake Madara, but there was another fake running around to trigger the Kyubi attack. Even if I managed to change certain things, the big events still happened. Does it mean, regardless what I do, this universe would try to revert itself back to its normal course? That’s a depressing thought, but then again that’s just a wild shot in the dark on my take of what might happen despite the ripples I’ve caused.

“Do you know where you were lacking in the exam?” asked Itachi.

“Don’t remind me.” I groaned, smashing my face into the desk. “Suzume sensei said I need to get better in the kunoichi portion of the exam. The hell? If I was a boy, I’d totally pass that stupid exam.”

“Only the kunoichi portion?” asked Itachi with a raised brow.

“…And shinobi tactics…” I grumbled reluctantly. “Maybe I could see if Rin-san’s free for some tips, because Kushina-san, Tsume-san and even your mother, Mikoto-san all seem to suffer from mommy syndrome.”

“…Mommy syndrome?” asked Itachi with a confused expression.

“They all gave birth some time around last year right?” I noted before the Uchiha heir nodded. “Yeah, they’re not all there yet. Something about giving birth to babies makes them not very sensible. It’s no wonder they get a year off from active duty.”

“My mother’s retired from shinobi duties,” said Itachi.

“Because you obviously sucked out all the brainpower she needed to function as a kunoichi. How else would you explain your perfect scores and near perfect memory?” I noted with a grin. “I feel bad for Mikoto-san if Sasuke ends up to be a little genius like you.”

Itachi hid a snort of laughter behind his knuckles, his lips twitching up, unable to resist the grin spreading across his face. “Little genius? I’ll tell father and mother that you think so highly of
Sasuke’s potential. He’s only recently stopped trying to chew my hand off.”

I cracked up laughing. As much as I wanted to hate Sasuke for betraying Naruto in the future, I found it impossible with how adorable he was as a baby. I haven’t forgotten that it was Itachi that caused the change in his demeanor, but at the same time, I couldn’t see that ruthless teen that would eventually kill his family for his village. I know I’m being hopeful, but I really want to see if I could change the fate of the Uchiha. I didn’t plan to, but… they’re kind of growing on me.

“What are you guys grinning about?” asked Hana when she joined us; she stayed behind to talk to Suzume sensei earlier.

“Guess what Hana? I didn’t pass!” I said with a bright grin.

She looked at me puzzled. “I know that already, why are you so happy about it?”

“You rather I sulk and cry about it?” I asked, grin still wide on my face.

“No, I just find it odd that you’re suddenly so happy about it,” said Hana baffled.

“Well, I still have one last chance before they stick me to a mentor.” I shrugged. “You want to take the next exam with me? Maybe we could end up in the same team. Ooh, I should ask Shisui to take the exam too!”

“You’re not going to ask Itachi?” asked Hana with a raised brow.

“He said he didn’t feel like.” I waved a nonchalant hand.

“I said I didn’t feel like it for the previous one, I said nothing about the next one,” said Itachi.

“Oh good god, I totally need to get Shisui to take the exam now. What if I pass and end up with you as a teammate?” I said jokingly.

“Did I hear my name?” said Shisui as he came closer.

“Hey! Hey!” I waved him over. “Shisui join us and become one of us! ONE OF US! ONE OF US!”

Shisui chuckled as he took a seat with us under our usual spot under the tree. “What is she talking about?”

“She’s talking about her last genin exam attempt,” drawled Itachi. “She wants us to come watch her fail in person.”

“Hey!” I puffed up my cheeks indignantly.

“That’s not very nice Itachi,” grinned Shisui. “I’m sure Kasa-chan could probably pass the next one.”

I grinned at him brightly. “See! Shisui’s not shooting me down. I totally want him to be on my team more than you.”

“That’s because Shisui’s too nice to tell you the harsh truth,” retorted Itachi with a smirk.

“I’m going to ignore you now.” I said before latching onto Hana’s arm. “So, you’re going to take the exam with me right?”
Hana chuckled. “I think I’m going to wait a little. While my class ranking isn’t bad, I don’t think I’m ready.”

“Awes, but Hana!” I whined. “What if I end up on a team with Itachi? He’ll totally bully me!”

The Inuzuka girl giggled. “Well, if you can get Shisui to take the exam as well, maybe he could save you from Itachi.”

“Oh yeah!” I said before turning to Shisui with a big grin. “What do you say Shisui?”

“Hmm…” hummed the older boy with an amused grin on his face. “I don’t know… Itachi-chan might get jealous if I steal away Kasa-chan.”

Itachi rolled his eyes. “Don’t use me as an excuse. You’re just being lazy.”

“Like you?” I retorted. “Mr. I Didn’t Feel Like it.”

“All right, all right. I’ll take the exam if that would stop the flirting between you two,” chuckled Shisui.

“We’re not flirting!” I snapped.

Hana covered her mouth giggling. “You’re so easy Kasa-chan.”

September, three months later, I sat in the interview room once again with Suzume sensei and Daikoku sensei with my sweaty hands gripping at hems of my long shirt. I spent the last couple of months studying with Rin whenever she was free to give me tutoring sessions on kunoichi matters. I spent hours at a time perfecting the Uchiha style taijutsu taught by Fugaku while juggling chakra control exercises. I was nearly perfect with the basic ninjutsu and genjutsu that was required for graduation.

I definitely knew I scored better in my practical compared to the written exam, but I have no clue whether or not it was enough to graduate. I have no confidence in the kunoichi section of the exam whatsoever.

“Here we are again,” started Daikoku warmly as he and Suzume looked over my results. “I must say. You’ve improved some since the last exam.”

“I-thanks?” I stuttered out. Good lord, someone just kill me already. My nerves are shot. If they’re going to drag this interview out, I might just pass out.

“T-thanks?” I stuttered out. Good lord, someone just kill me already. My nerves are shot. If they’re going to drag this interview out, I might just pass out.

“Since we’ve done this once before, why don’t we just get into the matter?” said Daikoku as he shuffled through his papers. “Like last time, your practical scores were much better than your written exam. This you probably know already.”

I nodded stiffly. “How did I do in the kunoichi portion?”

Suzume adjusted her glasses, the light glinting off the corner as she glanced through her set of notes. “There have been improvements compared to the previous exam,” started the woman.

I bit my lower lip. Was it enough to pass?

“But you still need quite a bit of work for it to be acceptable,” said the woman.
“I understand.” My shoulders slumped.

Not good enough after all. Shit… Goodbye freewill. I wonder who they’re going to stick me with? Or are they going to just stick me into ROOT and get it over with? I wonder how long it would take before they complete brainwash me? Hmm… I got to admit; I’m very easily swayed. Seriously, if I see a commercial for fried chicken on TV, most likely I’ll end up eating that for dinner. It’s happened before. This is so going to suck…

“Kasa, are you paying attention?” noted Daikoku as he snapped me out of my thoughts.

“Huh?” I said in puzzlement, there’s more? “We’re not done?”

“I know you didn’t do as well as you have liked,” consoled Daikoku. “However, taking into consideration of what you said in the previous exam, we’ve looked into your medical education as you claimed proficiency in.”

“Yes?” I said, puzzled. Why were they bringing this up? Didn’t I flunk already?

“After speaking with your father, Tesuri Mon, he verified your claims and gave us an evaluation of your current level of iryo-ninjutsu. Of course, we cannot put his evaluation on record until you are formally tested by a certified iryo-nin that has no relations to you,” said Suzume.

“…Okay?” I continued hesitantly. Dare I hope this was a good sign?

“With that in mind,” said Daikoku. “You currently have the worst grade among the graduates…”

My heart stopped.

“However, I do believe you are a suitable candidate to graduate to the rank of genin with some guidance,” said the man as a smile spread across his and Suzume’s lips.

“…I… passed?” I whispered, baffled.

“Please come up to receive your hitai-ate,” said Daikoku as he retrieved a Konoha hitai-ate from the neat spread on his desk.

My fingers felt numb as I pulled my hands away from the hem of my shirt to push myself off my seat. The short trip to the desk felt surreal as I fought against the smile that threatened to split across my face. When I reached the desk, Suzume gave me a pointed look.

“Do keep up with your kunoichi studies even if you do join the medical corps. You’ll never know when those skills would become useful in a future mission,” noted the woman.

“Yes ma’am!” I said in an erected stance.

Daikoku chuckled as he presented me with my hitai-ate. “Congratulations Kasa. Keep up the hard work.”

I gave a formal bow as I took the hitai-ate with as much grace I could muster. Keeping myself calm and composed as I walked out of that room was probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done in this life. I’ve made all of two steps out of the room, before I found myself dashing down the halls and out of the building.

“WOOHOO!” I cheered at the top of my lungs as I jumped out of the front doors of the
Academy. “VICTORY IS MINE!” I cackled insanely as I skipped and hopped about on the school grounds.

I’m totally ignoring all the odd stares from my fellow peers. I don’t care how insane or weird I look; nothing can ruin my mood today! Oh man! I can’t believe I passed! This is so awesome! I held up my hitai-ate to the light and grinned like the idiot I am.

“I think she’s finally lost it,” drone Itachi in a dry voice.

“Oh, let her enjoy this,” chuckled Shisui.

I bounced on the balls of my feet, as I turned to them with a bright grin. In their hands, they both held a hitai-ate of their own. I squealed as I skipped over, showing off mine.

“Look! Look! I passed! I passed! I can’t believe I passed!” I’m quite sure my voice was squeaking and cracking at this point, but I could really care less.

Heck, I even tackled Fugaku with a hug when he came to see the graduation. He was mortified by my actions, but I don’t care. I’m a freaking ninja! How awesome is that? This is the best day of my life! Take that Danzo! I passed! I’m a ninja! WOOHOO!
Hostile Situation

My victory in graduating was short lived. I completely forgot about the second portion of the exam, where the jounin instructor decides whether or not they want to deal with the genin candidates’ bullshit. However, before that, I get to know who my teammates are! Yaaaay… Can you hear the enthusiasm dripping from my voice?

“I thought you were happy about graduating,” noted Tesuri at breakfast, the morning of the team assignments. “Aren’t you going to eat something?”

“Not hungry.” I muttered.

As if I could keep anything down right now. I’m going through the worst case of jitters right now! How could I be such an idiot and forget about the second portion of the exam? Argh! I totally wasted my earlier attempts! My fingers drummed against the side of my mug, a nervous habit that carried over from my previous life.

Something about drumming my fingers calmed me… Kind of wished tea still did the same, instead of getting me all wired up. Tesuri and Kushina banned me from having more than a mug per day because of how twitchy I get.

One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. I paused, suddenly realizing what rhythm I was tapping. God damn it, I better not freaking summon the Master and turn into a crazy time lord. This world is crazy enough without time travelers and aliens.

“You know there’s a second exam, don’t you?” sighed Tesuri.

I blinked, glancing at him as I came out of my thoughts. I almost forgot he was aware of my so-called oracle abilities.

“Don’t worry about it. Even if you have to get a mentor, I’m quite sure Uzumaki-san will find a way to secure your mentorship,” said Tesuri.

I gave a sigh as I glanced towards the quiet room. Naruto’s not awake yet, which meant Kushina could sleep in a little more. She took last night’s shift since I had orientation and team assignments today.

“I’ll eat later during lunch.” I murmured.

Tesuri gave me a look.

“I will!” I said indignantly. “I’m not stupid like the older girls going on diet.”

Seriously, why do girls go on freaking diets? The anorexic look is totally not attractive, not to mention if they want boobs they need to eat, to grow those things. Starving your body does no one any good and also that is torture! The glutton in me gets very upset at the thought of shying away from food. Yeah, I was a hefty girl before this, must be all the growth hormones in the milk.

I wonder if I would ever hit over one-twenty in this world. Fast food was near nonexistent, unless you count street stalls, but even those were still organic, considering, there were no genetically modified plants or steroids pumped into the livestock here. Longevity should be prominent in this world… if not for the dangerous shinobi life and jutsus of mass destruction. Maybe I should start calling it JMD, it totally sounds more threatening.
“Did you even pack lunch yet?” drawled Tesuri.

I paused before face palming. “Damn it, I knew I forgot something.”

Tesuri shook his head in amusement as I bounced up to my feet and rushed to the kitchen. Even now, we still lived with Kushina in the same apartment after Minato’s death. There was no need for Tesuri and me to move out, considering she needed all the help she could get in caring for Naruto and Tesuri practically lived at the hospital more than half the time.

Since I’m his daughter and seven, I doubt he felt uncomfortable in sharing a room. Heck, in my old life I shared a room with my parents until I was ten. And before you make fun of me, no, I’m not a big baby that needs mommy and daddy to fall asleep. I’m just poor and it’s cheaper to share rooms. I’ve done it many times with roommates during college.

“Kasa,” sighed Tesuri. “I think you’ve made more than enough onigiri.”

I paused, glancing down on the ball of rice in my hand and the eleven on the plate. “Damn it!”

“Why don’t you pack it up and share it with your teammates?” said Tesuri in amusement. “I’m sure that would help break the ice.”

I shrugged, packing the onigiri into a big bento box and filled a thermos with tea. I’m totally abusing the share advice to get my tea fix. That I’m not sharing.

“…Didn’t Kushina-san ban you from tea?” said Itachi dryly when he saw me nursing my thermos cup over the desk.

“Bite me.” I retorted with a huff.

“No thanks, I might not be able to sleep tonight,” drawled Itachi as he took the seat next to me. “Not with the amount of tea you drank.”

I rolled my eyes and glanced around the classroom. “Ha-ha, where’s Shisui?”

Itachi shrugged. “I’m not his keeper.”

Our conversation was short lived. Come to think of it, without Hana or Shisui around, we really don’t have much to say to each other. He’s boring as hell. I don’t really see why the heck does he have so many female fans gushing over him. Oh, and I don’t mean the girls in the academy, I mean the female Narutards. This guy is so boring. Sure, he’s a major badass in fights, but aside from that, what else could you say about him?

He’s a loving brother? So? Does that make him anymore interesting to talk to? What hobbies does he have aside from training? What does he like? What does he not like? Before you tell me to go ask him, I have and let me tell you… Itachi was the most boring child in the world. You think Shikamaru is boring with his cloud watching and lazing about? Itachi beats him in being boring by a long shot.

Damn Uchiha, not only does he have to be a prodigy, he had to be the best in everything. Even in being boring! How do you even do that?

Tap, tap, tap.
I blinked and glanced up when I felt the percussion against the hitai-ate around my forehead. Shisui hovered over the front of my desk in amusement as Itachi pulled away from tapping the metal plate.

“ Took you long enough,” snorted Itachi.

A grin broke across my face as I adjusted the hitai-ate perched on my forehead. “ Ha! I have protection now! You can’t poke my forehead anymore!”

Itachi rolled his eyes. “ You say that as if I assault your head at every turn.”

“You do!” I huffed. “ Shisui, you agree with me right?”

“ Maybe,” chuckled Shisui as he took the remaining seat next to me. “ It looks a bit big on you though.”

“You think?” I said trying to tie it tighter, but it kept slipping down.

“ Maybe you should wear it on top of your head instead,” suggested Itachi.

“You just want to poke my head again.” I grumbled.

Itachi said nothing while Shisui sniggered. Even miffed with annoyance, I still found myself grinning. Doesn’t matter if I’m a seven-year-old brat or a grown woman, something about being around these two eased my nerves.

“ Hey look,” murmured our fellow graduates behind us. “ The three youngest graduates this year.”

“ How old are they?” whispered another.

“ Not sure, but I think the youngest was seven,” answered another in an equally hushed voice.

I resisted the urge to sigh, what was it about people, not even children, that makes them think that talking quietly behind someone’s back and not expect them to hear? Or were they doing that on purpose?

“ I’m not surprised about the boys passing, they’re Uchiha after all, but who’s the girl?” whispered another.

“ Kasa?” said Shisui, drawing my attention back to him.

Damn it, I drifted again, listening to these brats.

“ Something wrong?” asked the older boy.

I shook my head. “ Just wondering what teams we’re going to be on.”

“ Maybe we’ll end up as teammates,” grinned Shisui.

“ Maybe.” I murmured quietly as we waited for Daikoku to come in with the team assignments.

Come to think of it, since I’m dead last in the class, I should technically get teamed with the rookie of the year right? Both Shisui and Itachi were tied for the spot, though for different
sections of the exam. The two were even in the written exams and taijutsu practical, but Shisui scored higher in ninjutsu while Itachi scored higher in genjutsu. Kind of unfair to the rest of the graduating class, getting outshined by two brats half their age.

Hmm… actually, it might not be that bad to get them as teammates. They’ve never failed their genin exam as far as I know. If I get them as teammates, I might be safe from failing. A grin crossed my face as my nerves settled some.

“Team four, Kasa Mon,” started Daikoku.

I snapped out of my thoughts, when the heck did he get here? And did he say four? What the hell is with this world giving me the unluckiest number possible? Getting the number four was equivalent to getting number thirteen. Fate was practically telling me to go die.

“Tokuma Hyuga,” continued Daikoku as I sat there in confusion. “And Santa Yamanaka.”

“What?” I said in confusion before I spoke up. “Wait a sec! How are these teams determined?”

Daikoku sighed. “Kasa, I explained this ten minutes ago.”

“…Sorry.” I said sheepishly with a hand behind my head. “I wasn’t paying attention. Could you repeat that again?”

The class sniggered at my response. “How did this one even pass?”

My blood boiled, I know I shouldn’t let the words of snot-nosed brats get to me, but I really abhor anyone calling me stupid. I know I’m far from a genius, but I’m not retarded.

Shisui placed a hand on my arm when he saw my plight. “Let it go Kasa,” whispered the boy.

Daikoku sighed again. “I’ll explain it one more time, please pay attention.”

“Yes sir!” I answered.

“Normally, team assignments are done based on your grades in order to create a balanced team,” started Daikoku. “The worst will be placed with the best, those who are weak in one area will be teamed with someone who is strong in that area and vice versa.”

I have the worst grade here and Uchiha boys here have the highest. How does that make sense?

“There are exceptions to this rule,” continued Daikoku when he noticed the look on my face. “You, Itachi and Shisui would be prime examples here, graduating five to six years below the standard age. While we are very proud of your achievements, we must take into consideration the risks of deploying three extremely young genin into the field with the disadvantage of having a younger and a lesser developed body.”

I frowned. I guess that’d make sense. Even if we were all trained to fight and kill at a young age, there’s only so much a child could do compared to an adult. Weaker bodies and immature chakra coils, we’d be easy pickings on the field.

“Had you three graduated at the standard age, team dictation would’ve gone as per
norm,” continued Daikoku. “I know the three of you are close, but do try to branch out and learn to work with other people, especially you Kasa. Itachi and Shisui are not the only ones around. Try flirting with someone else for a change.”

I bashed my head against the desk, the metal plate on my hitai-ate clacked loudly. I’m really starting to love this thing. “Why does everyone think I’m flirting with them?” I whined.

“If we’re quite done,” continued Daikoku.

“Looks like no one gets Kasa-chan this time, Itachi-chan,” grinned Shisui as Daikoku continued to name teams.

Itachi rolled his eyes. “You can have her.”

At this point, I stopped listening. I have no clue who any of these people were. Sure, the last names Hyuga and Yamanaka registered and I could guess vaguely what skills they would have, but that tells me nothing about who they are and whether or not Danzo has his claws on them already. I can’t remember the roster of ROOT members, but I’m quite sure there was a couple from notable clans.

“Get to know your teammates, your jounin sensei will be here after lunch,” noted Daikoku before orientation was over.

Crap, he’s done announcing the teams already? Did he mention who the jounin instructor was for each team? I was so worried about possibly having teammates from ROOT, I didn’t even think about the threat of having a ROOT member for a jounin sensei! I am so screwed! I whimpered, threading my fingers through my hair and gripping it in a panic.

“Are you okay?” asked Shisui worriedly.

“I’m fine.” I mumbled, voice distorted with my nose pressed into the desk.

“She probably just tied her hitai-ate too tight,” drawled Itachi.

“Oh shut up Itachi.” I grumbled and pulled my head up. “I’m so not going to share the onigiris with you.”

Itachi raised a brow as Shisui hid a snicker behind his knuckle.

“My, my Kasa, I didn’t know you liked Itachi that much,” teased Shisui.

I frowned. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Onigiri is Itachi-chan’s favorite,” grinned the older Uchiha.

A vein twitched at the bottom of eye. “…You know what? I’m going to share my lunch with my new teammates. You guys can find your own lunch.” I said childishly as I hopped out of my seat and glanced through the dispersing graduate class.

Not exactly sure how either of my teammates looked like, but I could at least recognize the Hyuga eyes. Already, a number of the graduates were gathering into groups of three. Most likely because they all shared the same classes and knew one another almost intimately. I huffed in mild annoyance before jumping onto the top of the desk for a better view. I hate being so short! I hope I get a major growth spurt when puberty sets in.
Ignoring the surprised glances, I searched through the lingering students, skipping over the groups of three before I spotted the eyes I was looking for. Seated in the back row with his arms resting on the desk was a quiet pretty boy with featureless white eyes. With a sweep of my hand, I grabbed my things and bounded over the heads of my fellow graduates.

“Hey! Watch where the hell you’re going,” shouted another boy before I landed a desk away from the Hyuga boy.

“Hiya! You must be Tokuma; I’m Kasa.” I greeted the boy cheerily. “Do you know where Santa Yamanaka might be? I thought we could have lunch together since I made extra this morning by accident.”

The boy raised a brow. “…How domestic.”

I felt the smile on my face strain. What the hell? Was douchebaggery an inherited trait for the prestige families? Come on Kasa, you’re mature. Handle it like a civil adult.

“You do know, domestic skills are required in kunoichi lessons for reconnaissance and infiltration right?” I replied. “It’s only logical to keep up the practice.”

“I suppose you would need to keep up the practice considering you are dead last in ranking,” said the Hyuga with a slight wave of a hand.

Oh, fuck civility.

“Do you have a problem with me being dead last?” I snapped, smile gone.

“What makes you think I have an issue?” noted the boy civilly, but I could tell he was mocking me. “I’m simply making an observation.”

“I didn’t do a single thing to you!” I said, purposely leaving out the yet. If he kept up his holier than thou attitude, I might just have to do something about it.

“I never said that,” drawled the boy with his hands folded in front of his face. “Someone’s being defensive.”

“Tokuma, enough,” said another voice. I turned to see an auburn-haired boy with a high ponytail. I wonder if that’s a Yamanaka thing.

“It’s not my fault she’s so easy to rile up,” drawled the Hyuga with a slight flair of his hand.

“Ignore him,” said the Yamanaka boy. “He enjoys being an ass.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Santa,” said Tokuma as he turned away with an upturn of his nose.

“Sure you don’t,” droned Santa before turning to me. “You said something about food earlier? I hope your cooking’s edible. I’m starved.”

Tokuma snorted. “Maybe you should’ve been born an Akamichi. You sure eat like one.”

“Go screw yourself Tokuma,” retorted Santa.

My eye twitched as I watched the two go at each other’s throats…First impression of new teammates? I hate their guts.
Lunch went by in silence on the rooftop. Tokuma was an asshole with a girly face and Santa was a callous prick. It was hard to start any conversation when it took all my self-control not to shiv them on the spot with a kunai. You know, for a second I really thought maybe I would’ve been on a team with Itachi and Shisui. Sort of like a fanfic where everything just so happens go conveniently the character’s way. Should’ve known my luck would have never allowed that.

“Your onigiri’s edible,” commented Santa.

“Gee, thanks.” I muttered darkly. You know what? Maybe it’s not so bad working under Danzo. At least with him he just wants loyalty and wouldn’t go out of his way to be a prick.

“It’s a bit dry though,” said Tokuma as he munched on his portion.

“Then get your own drink. I’m not sharing.” I huffed, nursing the only cup to the thermos.

“So much for sharing lunch,” droned Tokuma dryly.

“Get bent!” I snapped back.


I bit back a groan as I placed a hand to my head, but growled when the hitai-ate was in the way. “God damn it.” I hissed under my breath as I shoved the hitai-ate onto the top of my head so I could press my fingers against the center of my forehead.

It doesn’t matter that my head was exposed, it’s not like it was in danger of being poked by Itachi or someone dangerous. I’m a bit embarrassed to say that two little boys managed riled me up enough to force me to refocus. This team thing wasn’t going well with me.

Okay, maybe I was being a little unfair. I know nothing about these two. I shouldn’t be so quick to judge.

“So…” I pulled the hitai-ate back down to cover my forehead before lighting a grin on my face. “We might have gotten off on the wrong foot somehow. How about we start over again and get to know each other a little?”

“What’s there worth knowing about a dead last like you?” drawled Tokuma. “You should’ve waited another year or two before you took the exam. Maybe you would’ve gotten a better grade than dead last.”

I felt my eye twitch despite the forced myself to keep the smile on my face. “Humor me, considering we’ve know nothing about each other. You have to have something you like or aspire to be right?”

“Hmm…” hummed Tokuma as he glanced up to the sky. “What was that you said earlier about a drink? Oh, that’s right. I’m not sharing.”

I chewed my inner cheek. Keep it together Kasa. He’s just a stupid little brat. All preteens are full of themselves. Don’t fall to their level.

“You’re going to finish that?” asked Santa before he snatched my cup and downed the last of my tea.

I let out a slow shaking breath as I pressed a hand against my eyes. Calm down, don’t get
angry. Remember you’re physically seven and you’ll get your ass kicked if you pick a fight with someone from a clan that specialized in taijutsu. Not sure how the fight would end up if I decided to pick a fight with a Yamanaka, but knowing my luck, he would probably kick my ass somehow even without swiping my body.

Stop thinking, think of something else. Anything else. I found myself staring at the Yamanaka boy as he munched on another onigiri… How the heck was he packing away those things? I had two and I was full already. I’m surprised he’s not a roly-poly sort of guy… though… it’d be pretty funny if he were, especially if he had a red suit and a white beard.

“Ninja Santa.” I pressed a knuckle to my lips as I bit back a snort of laughter.

Now that I thought about it, how many people could claim they have Santa on their team? Sure, he’s not exactly the jolly old man on the sled delivering gifts to children around the world, but the thought of a ninja Santa Claus was hilarious! Can you imagine, Santa bellowing ho-ho-ho as he rains death and weapons upon you made by his loyal elves and then summon a horde of reindeers to plow you into the ground in a stampede. Santa would totally be a weapon specialist and summoner. How badass is that?

Yeah, I know you’re probably thinking I’m insane at this point since it’s not even pronounced the same way, but come on! You have to agree the ninja Santa concept is awesome!

“What’s so funny?” asked Santa as he finished off the last of the onigiri.

“N-nothing.” I grinned innocently, but the mirth was clear in my eyes as I tried to keep myself from laughing my ass off.

“It’s obvious, she’s a bit off her kilter,” said Tokuma as he clapped his hands clean. “It’s about time we head—” He never finished as his eyes widened and he quickly darted towards me.

Startled confusion crossed my face at his sudden aggressive movement, but that was quickly ignored when a lengthy chain wrapped around my body and squeezed the breath out of my lungs. I didn’t get a chance to recover as the chain whipped again and I was yanked off my feet. My body felt weightless as I hung in the air for a moment before the chain changed direction, dragging me towards the edge in midair.

“Shit!” I cursed as the roof disappeared beneath me and everything slowed as if played in slow-mo.

My body felt light as it hung in the air and my eyes darted about trying to take in everything at once. In my struggle, I spotted a cloaked figure reining the chains holding me. His face was obscured by the shadows of his hood, but his arms were shackled with the very chains imprisoning me. There was something wrong with this picture. Who the hell would be ballsy enough to kidnap someone in broad daylight in the middle of a ninja village?

Not even Danzo would be that daringly obvious. If he wanted to kidnap me, he would’ve done it in the dead of night or when I was alone. Whoever this was, he definitely had balls. I wiggled and squirmed against the chains, but to no avail, it didn’t budge in the least. The chains felt almost alive with the amount of chakra coursing through it.

The world sped up, I had no clue where we were going; the man kept dragging me further away from the main part of the village and quickly into the forest. At some point, I was quite sure the man got away from Tokuma and Santa. Damn it! I’m not about to let myself get kidnapped.
“Let me go! I demand you to let me go! Stop making me the damn damsel in distress! I freaking hate being in distress!” I shouted loudly. “What the hell is it with you people always making the girl the damsel? Why can’t you kidnap the guys for a change? Seriously! Stop being so sexist and even out the kidnapping would you?”

The chain whipped around and I felt myself flipped upside down as I hung in front of the face of my captor. “You should really be more careful with what you say. After all, you are my hostage now,” said the man, his voice deep and commanding.

“Screw you!” I snarled. “I’ve spent the last hour with two dickwads for teammates after stressing over whether or not I could be a genin. Whatever the hell you’re planning to do with me, I’m going to make your life a living hell!”

“I would like to see you try,” drawled the man.

“You’re such a clichéd villain!” I growled, pulsing chakra to my hand and concentrating it into strands of chakra. With a flex of my fingers the chakra strands whipped about, latching onto the seal rings and pulling them slowly off my digits. I had to concentrate, can’t say I’m a natural marionette. It was hard enough to maintain these strands as it is.

“Childish insults will get you nowhere,” continued the man.

“Why don’t you say it to my face?” I snapped.

“You really need to learn your place,” said the man as he drew me closer with his chains.

Come on, just a little closer… Yes! With a flick of my wrist and the rings dropped like yo-yos, flying at the man’s face. It took me weeks to get the hang of manipulating each strand independent from the other strands and even longer to have them move the way I wanted them to. Frowning, I focused on latching the rings onto the man’s limbs and torso in an attempt to seal off his chakra.

“Feeble,” said the man as he severed my chakra strands with two glowing fingers, no doubt charged with chakra. Damn it, he wasn’t even the least bit phased by this! “Your seals are useless if you can’t activate them fast enough.”

I watched helplessly as the rings dropped to the ground. Shit, that was the only defense I had! He was careful to keep me at a distance. While I can’t do anything like Tsunade where she completely fucks up your nervous system to the point you can’t even stand, I could disrupt someone’s chakra control by shooting excess chakra into their system.

“What will you do now?” asked my captor.

“I…” I bit my lower lip.

As much as I wanted say fuck it all and flip him the bird, I couldn’t. I was clearly outclassed and helpless at this point, not to mention still tied up. Where was help when you need it?

“Kasa!” snapped Santa, his voice coming from out of nowhere.

I perked up at my name. Did they catch up somehow? I frowned when I saw no one coming out from the foliage. No, that’s not it. Something’s not right.

“They’re genin, they’re not going to be able to save you,” drawled the man. “If anything, they will only get themselves caught.”
Again with the insults, but... it didn’t seem right. They seemed... generic? “...You never told me why you wanted me as a hostage.” I said with a frown. “What exactly do you want me for?”

“It’s none of your concern,” said the man.

There it was again. The vague answers, the clichéd villain dialogues. What...Then it clicked. This wasn’t real. I’ve been stuck in a genjutsu!

Flaring chakra to my head, I let out a scream. “KAI!”

The forest disappeared and I was back on the roof again, still chained by my captor, my rings laid on the floor by Tokuma’s feet.

“You’re such a hassle,” said Tokuma in annoyance.

The side of his eyes bulged out with veins from the byakugan. He stood defensively, guarding Santa’s prone body behind him. The auburn-haired boy was slumped to his knees, Mind Transfer Jutsu maybe? At the sight of the Hyuga’s glowing hands, I figured he severed my chakra strands. Ooh, that wouldn’t have been pretty if I ended up sealing his chakra instead. I seriously need some defense against genjutsu.

“Good thing those didn’t hit you, right?” I said sheepishly, but the Hyuga didn’t share my humor.

“Dead lasts don’t get to joke,” retorted Tokuma.

“Well, excuse me.” I snapped back. “If you haven’t noticed yet, I’m busy being held hostage. If you want me to do something then get me out of this!”

“Ugh, why are you two at each other’s throats already?” said Santa in annoyance as he stood up rolling his neck and rubbing out the slight soreness from siting prone with is head lulling to the side.

“I was wondering how long it was going to take you,” huffed Tokuma.

“How about you free her next time? I’m quite sure you’re excellent with the Mind Transfer Jutsu,” said Santa dryly.

“As if you can defend me if I could,” replied Tokuma.

“Hello!” I grumbled in singsong. “Still a hostage if anyone cares!”

“Of course we don’t, why else would be bother freeing you,” retorted Tokuma sarcastically before directing his attention to the stranger. “I don’t know what you want with the dead last, but she’s not really worth kidnapping.”

“Gee thanks!” I snapped before the chains whipped again and I was drawn closer to my captor. His hand latched out and grabbed me by the chains. “Let me go!”

“How did any of you ever become ninjas?” said the man in annoyance. “Bickering like children and insulting one another as if you were in the schoolyard.”

“Technically, I’m seven, I still counted as a child for most places.” I slipped in a wisecrack.

The man scowled as he looked down at me. My body tensed when I saw red eyes
looking back at me. The sharingan? I couldn’t see his face through the shadows, but somehow the eyes stood out in the darkness. Shit, was this Madara?

“Insult us all you want, but we’re not letting you take her! Dead last or not, she’s our teammate and we’re not about to abandon her,” noted Tokuma.

I glanced at the boy in surprise. Didn’t he have something against me earlier? Or was he like every other prick in this world that just enjoys bullying me? What am I? A bully magnet? First Itachi, then Shisui, and now Tokuma? I am so punching the next person that dares to claim he only bullies me because he likes me. It’s bad enough with Itachi and Shisui, I don’t need another one to the list!

“Then come and take her from me,” said the man. His free hand moved to grip me by the throat and pulled in front of him as if I was his personal shield.

I gagged at the sudden forcefulness. Tokuma and Santa stood rooted to their spot, teeth gritted and fists clenched. We were at a disadvantage with me hostage.

“If you come closer, I’ll end her here. If you dare leave to get help, I’ll end her here,” said the man as he held me closer and the chains tightened. “What are you going to do?”

I bit back a scream as my body lurched from the pain.

“Damn it!” hissed Tokuma.

“Tokuma, we could try—”

“No! He’s already seen you use it once already. You’re lucky that you even managed to hit the dead last the first time around,” said Tokuma.

Gods, I’m so not listening to this! It’s going to be one of those multi-chapter explanations or even worse, multi-episode talking!

“Fuck this.” I hissed before charging up chakra in my hand and slapped it with force behind me. The chains made it hard to move, but since he was holding me fairly close, I had a good shot.

The instant my hand made contact, the chains loosened.

“What?” hissed the man in surprise, but he kept a firm grip on my neck.

His chains didn’t completely come apart and hit the ground, but there was enough wiggle space to free my arms. With his other hand occupied, I took it as a chance to charge another handful of chakra and tried to slap it into his chest. Realizing what I did the first time, he released my neck and hastily backed off. His chain arm grew taut as he yanked at the jingling metal links again.

“Shit!” I hissed, bracing myself for another round of swing Kasa like a ragdoll, but it never came as Tokuma caught the chain with glowing hands. His feet were planted firmly to the ground and his hands were reinforced with chakra to handle the enemy’s weapon.

“Hurry up Santa!” said Tokuma. “I won’t be able to hold this for long.”

“Don’t rush me!” said Santa as he loosened the chains further and yanked me out of the tangled weapon.
“How naïve,” said the man before he whipped the chains one more time. Before we knew it, the chains came to life and ensnared each and every one of us.

“What?” said Tokuma in surprise as he watched the chains cascade and crash around us like waves.

In seconds, all three of us were chained up and dropped to the ground.

Crap, crap, crap! My heart raced a mile a minute. What the hell do I do? All three of us were captured now! There’s no chance of escaping or calling for help. The man made his way towards us, stopping short only a couple of feet. I kept my eyes to the ground, terrified that he might drop me into another illusion.

“What a disappointment,” started the man in annoyance.

“What do you want?” demanded Tokuma. “If you think you can get out of this village, lugging around three hostages, you’re sorely mistaken!”

“Quiet,” said the man as he tightened the chains around us. We all bit back a grunt of pain. “I only need one hostage. I could kill off two of you if I need silence.”

Shit, how did things go so down south? How could I be that freaking unlucky? I was totally joking about the superstition about how the number four was a bad omen for death. I didn’t expect it to actually happen!

“Still I have some time to spare. How about I let you decide who I kill?” said the man.

The three of us fell into silence. How could we choose? None of us wanted to die, but at the same time, could we really damn the other two? I bit my lower lip. Could I live knowing I ended the lives of two children? I know as a ninja, at some point I’m required to kill someone. In this world, it was kill or be killed. Niceties like mercy was not something you can indulge in unless you’re powerful enough to defend yourself.

I glanced briefly at the two boys by my side. So young, barely even teens yet… I can’t do it. I can’t let these kids die just so I have a chance to live. I’ve already lived once, while it wasn’t very long, I at least got to experience a decade more of life than them. They’re nothing more than stupid little soldiers right now. They deserve a chance to make something of themselves. My body trembled as I forced my nerves to settle.

“I volunteer.” My voice cracked as the words left my mouth.

“What?” said the man in confusion. Both Tokuma and Santa turned to me in surprise.

“I said,” I started slowly with a silly grin spreading across my face. “I volunteer as tribute.”

They stared at me dumbfounded. I’m totally the queen of killing the mood. This is totally not the time to be pulling random references like that out of my ass, but I couldn’t help it. That was the perfect chance to use that line and if I’m going to die, I might as well go out doing something I could laugh about. Oh, this is going to be fun.

“… You do know, you’re volunteering to die, right?” noted the man.

“Yep.” I chirped. “You made it pretty clear. Only one of us can survive.”
“…And you’re certain on that?” said the man slowly.

“Absolutely.” I nodded before someone head-butted me from behind. “Ow! What the hell was that for?”

“You idiot! Why would you choose yourself?” snapped Tokuma.

“Why not?” I retorted. “He said we get to choose. How come I can’t choose myself?”

“It doesn’t work that way you moron!” joined in Santa.

“I know how it works!” I huffed.

“Obviously not!” growled Tokuma before turning his attention to our captor. “Ignore this idiot, she doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She’s not worth killing. She’s hardly even a threat. I on the other hand could pose as a challenge.”

“What the hell?” I snapped. “How come you can volunteer and I can’t? And you better not give me some sexist answer! Because I will beat you!”

“As if you can!” retorted Tokuma.

“Not again!” groaned Santa. “Please just kill me before they get into another fight! Seriously, I’ll take death over listening to them bicker.”

“Hey! Get your own thing! I volunteered first!” I said, annoyed.

“Dead lasts doesn’t get to choose!” snorted Tokuma.

“Shut it Tokuma!” I returned.

“Can you two stop fighting for once?”

“No, he started it!”

“As if!”

Not exactly sure how this turned into a three-way argument, but eventually our captor got annoyed and bashed all three of us over the heads.

“Ow…” We grimaced.

“All you shut up! I don’t even know why I bothered with this. I should just fail the three you and kick you back to the Academy!” snapped the man.

We glanced up at him in surprise. “…Huh?”

“What do you mean?” asked Tokuma with a frown.

The man huffed in annoyance as he pulled the hood back, revealing the Konoha hitai-ate around his head. I blinked in surprise when I noticed his red eyes weren’t the sharingan. There were no tomoe in his eyes and furthermore, I think they were actually natural. Huh…that’s… interesting.

“It means you lot have about five minutes before I decide whether or not to ship you back to the Academy for remedial classes. Never before have I seen genin candidates act so poorly!” snapped the man.
“Wait, what do you mean candidates? We graduated already!” argued Santa.

The man snorted. “That graduation was meant to filter out those with no potential in becoming a ninja. It means nothing when the jounin in charge decides you’re unsuited for, for the field.”

“We weren’t told about this!” snapped Tokuma.

“That’s the point,” said the man. “We don’t need little puppets, we want shinobi that could think on their feet and adapt to any situation, while working in tandem with others. We don’t need constant bickering from children.”

“…This was a test of teamwork?” said Santa in disbelief. “You’ve got to be kidding me! How the heck are we supposed to figure that out from you kidnapping one of us and then kicking our asses?”

I frowned as I mulled over what happened. It was a bit unconventional and odd. From the series, Team Seven had the traditional bell test, but I suppose not everyone uses it or else there would be some sort of gossip about it. Ambushing us on the spot would be a good way to candidly test on how well we worked together and whether or not if we had any bad social habits. Though, from the looks of this conversation, I think we flunked it.

“I sighed, dejected. “The kidnap and ambush was supposed to test out how well we react to a teammate in distress and in the hands of the enemy wasn’t it? Where did we go wrong? If you don’t mind me asking?”

It’s kind of pointless now, but I still wanted to hear it. At least I’d know how badly I failed.

The man snorted. “At least someone here knows they’ve done wrong.”

I said nothing, I don’t think I did anything wrong, but I’m not about to tell him that. Seriously, if you get kidnapped, how well do you think you can handle the situation? I think I handled it pretty well.

“Let’s start with you then,” said the man as he stared down at Tokuma, who glared up at him. “You obviously saw the attack coming at your teammate, but instead of warning them, you went straight towards the enemy to engage in combat. That was inconsiderate and reckless. Had you shouted her a warning; she might’ve been able to dodge the attack and maybe not get into the hostage situation you’ve all faced.”

Tokuma scowled, turning his face away.

“Then there’s you,” said the jounin as he looked pointedly at Santa. “Like the first one, you’re reckless, rushing into matters and using a volatile jutsu that requires absolute stillness. Had I not moved your teammate into position, you would’ve left your remaining teammate at a further disadvantage with two incapacitated teammates.”

Santa mulled over his words quietly.

“Lastly,” he turned to me with a glare. “You are by far, the most reckless of the group, so ready to attack when you’re obviously no match. Your temper fairs no better, since you riled up your teammates into a frenzy instead of assisting them. I’ve never seen such a hot-headed team in my life!”
We all frowned at his words, but at the same time something clicked in my mind.

“You said we had five minutes before you decide to send us back.” I interrupted. “That meant you saw something you liked or else you wouldn’t bother talking to us.”

Seeing what I was implying, Santa quickly joined in. “It wasn’t fair that we were never given a heads up. I know it’s supposed to be a test, but since we’re not even considered genin, we should be given an advance notice. After all, in mission assignments, all shinobi were given briefings before they venture off.”

“And your test is not in our favor,” added Tokuma. “While Santa and I have known each other for some time, today was the first time we met her.” He nodded towards me when he noted her. “It’s obvious we won’t be able to work together immediately, but given time, I think we could work around it. If we don’t have a natural inclination in teamwork, we could overcome it with practice and training.”

“Yeah! Our bickering was just a way to get to know each other! I’ve never seen a shinobi rule that doesn’t allow bickering as a means to build relationships.” I quipped.

“Really?” said Tokuma dryly. “That’s the best you can come up with?”

“Oh shut it, you only know how to talk out of your ass.” I snorted.

“Guys stop it,” said Santa warningly. “We’re trying to convince him not to fail us, not give him more reason to fail us faster.”

Tokuma and I shared a silent truce before glancing at Santa. With a nod, the three of us turned to the red-eyed jounin with a determined glare.

“We demand a retest!” said Tokuma.

“If it’s teamwork you want, we’ll have the best teamwork you’ll ever see,” said Santa.

“If we still fail, we’ll fail as a team.” I finished.

We watched with bated breath as the man planted a hand on his hip and studied us. I forced myself not to back down from the stern look on his face. There was something intimidating about this man. Now that I think about it, he looks… familiar?

“Hmph,” huffed the man as the sound of mild annoyance escaped from his throat. “Trust my luck that I end up with the group of reckless genins.”

Our breasts caught at our throats. The chains dropped around us as he retracted his lengthy weapon.

“Did you…?” I started and the man glanced at me with a dry look. “Does that mean…?”

“At this point, I don’t think any other jounin can handle a group of reckless, self-sacrificing genins. So, until the three of you reach chunin. You all have the pleasure of going through my self-preservation training,” said the man.

The biggest grin crossed my face. “I don’t care if you put me through hell! I just want to hear those beautiful words of confirmation!” I nearly squealed.

Tokuma had his arms crossed, trying to look cool, but I could see it on his face that he
was waiting for it just as much as I was.

Santa rolled his eyes. “You might as well get it over with sensei or she might just keep
bugging you,” suggested the auburn-haired boy. “By the way, what is your name anyway?”

The man snorted. “It took you this long to ask? I think I might have to add a lesson in
priorities to the team regime.”

“Who cares! Sensei, just say it already!” I whined, but the annoyance was only
superficial. The giddiness coursing through my body gave it away.

Mildly annoyed, the man sighed. “I, jounin Kurei Yuhi, declare Team Four passes.”

“WOOT!” I jumped up in glee and raised a hand to Tokuma and Santa. “Give me a high-
five! Cause I’m a ninja!”

“No,” said Tokuma bluntly.

I puffed up my cheeks. “Buzz-kill!”

“Dead last,” retorted the Hyuga.

“Asshole!” I continued.

“Spazz,” returned the other.

“Oh would you two please stop it already?” sighed Santa exasperatedly.

I get the feeling that bickering would be a big part of Team Four… Team Four Star? Nah,
just kidding! This was going to be…different.
“White lotus in position,” said Tokuma via headset.

“Mullein in position,” continued Santa.

“How come we’re not using the codenames I chose yesterday?” I complained over the radio.

“Because the ones you chose were meaningless,” retorted Tokuma.

“No, they’re not! Nightwing, Red Hood and Robin totally have meaning behind it.” I grumbled.

“Kasa, are you in position?” sighed our jounin sensei Kurei.

“Yeah, yeah. Rainflower in position. Santa, that is the least creative flower you could’ve picked for me! Rainflower! Seriously?” I grumbled. “How come I can’t be white lotus instead of Tokuma?”

“You do know, if you keep saying everyone’s names, it defeats the purpose of having codenames to begin with right?” drawled Tokuma.

“… Shut up.” I muttered.

“You know I’m right,” said the other in amusement.

“Can we please finish the mission? Why do you two always have to bicker?” sighed Kurei.

“I see the target!” said Santa. “On three!”

“Three!” I shouted, grinning as I waited to see if anyone jumped out.

“Kasa…” said Kurei warningly. No one fell for it.

“Okay, okay! It was joke!” I grumbled.

“One, two, three!” shouted Santa before we all darted out from our hiding places.

“Target’s running!” said Tokuma through our headsets.

“I got it covered!” I said as I reached back to grab my brand new weapon.

After taking us as his students, Kurei took us to a weapon shop and promptly had a weapon specialist find each of us a compatible weapon. He seemed quite determined to hammer in some form of offensive skill into the three of us. I doubt we could become weapon specialists, but I suppose we managed well enough… if you could call it that.

Of the three of us, Santa probably had the most, due to his natural leaning towards traps. Caltrops, kunai, metal wires and a variety of shurikens, he had so many that he needed to carry storage scrolls to hold them all. He probably hit Kurei’s wallet the hardest out of the three of us. Sadly, his shurikenjutsu was far from perfect, especially when compared side-to-side with Itachi…
Fine, maybe that was a little unfair to compare him with a prodigy, but what other example could I give? He couldn’t use it on the fly like Itachi in direct combat, but he could set up a pretty damn good trap. Santa, I do not want as an enemy. Whether his name reminds me of Santa Claus or the fact that he could turn me into a pincushion.

Now, Tokuma is a spoozy bard. Why am I calling him a spoozy bard? Because his weapon is a freaking instrument and he’s practically useless in combat. I kid you not; he was most compatible with a shamisen. For those who don’t know what that is, it’s a three-stringed instrument that plays like a banjo… Why was he born in Konoha rather than Oto, I have no clue. How the heck do you use that thing as a weapon? I’ve never seen him use it during training.

Ah, whatever. Kurei gives each of us personal lessons once a week, which meant the other two were free to relax or train on their own. I don’t get the luxury of relaxing. Not with medical training with Tesuri and Rin, while Naruto scurried about.

Oh yeah, you want to guess what weapon I got? I’ll give you three guesses… but you probably only need one. I swear, this world has a ridiculous sense of humor. My weapon… is an umbrella. Who didn’t see that coming?

With a firm grip, I forced it open, using it like a blockade. Compared to a normal umbrella, a weaponize umbrella was tougher and took tons more abuse. It was the main reason why I didn’t argue against having this as a weapon, despite the horrible puns that were sure to come. I needed the defense just as much as the offense and this thing offered both… Wish it didn’t cost so much though…

Sure, this one was a gift from Kurei, we each got a gift, but if I break it, I have to go buy a replacement… and let me tell you, this thing was not cheap. While it’s not the most expensive weaponize umbrella on the market, it wasn’t your common everyday rain umbrella either. A common umbrella was about a hundred ryo; this thing was at least ten thousand. Now, let’s tackle my worst subject, math. If ten ryo equals to a dollar, how much does ten thousand ryo convert to?

Mind you, this was a starter umbrella. A quality umbrella weapon could go into the hundreds of thousands. A D-rank mission pays about five to fifteen thousand ryo and that’s split between the team. A portion of that goes to taxes and another portion goes into restocking supplies, if I happened to use anything. Then of course, there were the team outings after training and we all go out for food and whatever.

I’ll let you mull on how many D-rank missions I need to upkeep my lifestyle before I could get a decent weapon. Thank god I don’t have to pay for housing since Kushina and Tesuri had that covered. Don’t care if I’m a moocher, I’ll chip in when I have more money. It’s going to be a long while before I could get C-ranked missions. Kakashi must’ve been one BAMF, if he managed chunin at age six.

“Reow,” mewed our target, looking mildly annoyed as she sat in front of my umbrella.

“About time!” I huffed in annoyance as I closed my umbrella and heft it to my shoulder.

“How many more of these D-ranks do we have to do?” Tokuma all but growled.

We’ve been doing D-ranked missions for the past six weeks with plenty of training in between each mission. I’m quite sure he’s sick of working as a gardener, a janitor, a baby-sitter, a kitchen aide and a cat catcher. Personally, I’m okay with doing all that sort of work… except the cat catching bit.
“Don’t care, but we are so not taking a Tora mission again!” I grumbled, hiding behind Tokuma as the cat waved its tail lazily.

“Get over your fear of cats would you? Santa’s in control of the cat, he’s not going to attack you,” sighed Tokuma in annoyance as he stepped away from me. “This is ridiculous! You can handle playing with the giant Inuzuka dogs, but you’re terrified of this thing?”

“Shut up! Cats are evil.” I muttered darkly as I edged away.

The cat rolled her eyes; no doubt Santa was exasperated by my words. As our trap expert and our only real fighter, he was the only one that could handle the demon cat. Yes, I know, we have a Yamanaka as our main fighter. Not to harp on them, but the Yamanaka Clan was more suitable for infiltration and espionage, but Santa is pretty decent short-ranged fighter.

Surprisingly, Tokuma was better in infiltration and recon related work. You would think Tokuma would be a taijutsu badass, considering Neji was also from the Branch House… but then again, Neji was an anomaly compared to the rest of his clansmen. Oh, forget I said anything, we’re not going to have a Hyuga as a fighter in this team.

“Good job,” noted Kurei as he appeared with Santa’s prone body on his back. “We can take Tora back to the admin building and call it a day.”

“Sensei, when are we going to get something more interesting?” asked Tokuma in annoyance. “All these D-ranks were nothing more than practice. I don’t need to study civilians in order to imitate them and I don’t need pet cats to sharpen my hunting skills. I could take on a C-ranked infiltration or retrieval mission with no issue.”

“You’re not ready yet,” answered Kurei bluntly.

“I can do this!” growled Tokuma.

“My word is final,” said Kurei. “Even if you think you’re ready, are your teammates ready?”

The Hyuga wanted to say something, but he stopped himself.

“This is your team, you don’t move without your team,” said Kurei.

Tokuma grumbled darkly, crossing his arms in a huff.

“Kasa, you’re carrying Tora back,” said the stern man as he turned his attention to me. “You do need to get over your irrational fear of cats.”

My face paled as flashes of my childhood went through my mind. “No! Anything but that!” I squeaked backing away.

“Kasa, this is an order. Santa’s in control of the cat, he won’t attack you, if that’s what you’re afraid of,” said the man.

“Trust me, if you put me near a cat for that long, I might just go Neko-ken on you.” I edged away, trying to hide behind Tokuma, but he sidestepped my attempt.

“…Neko-ken?” said Kurei with a raised brow.

“…Okay, maybe not Neko-ken, I’m not a badass like that, but trust me, bad things
happen when I stay around cats.” I said seriously.

“… Do I even want to understand you?” exhaled Tokuma in mild annoyance.

Okay, maybe I’m not making a lot of sense here, but trust me when I say cats and I don’t get along very well. They may look cute and sometimes maybe cuter than dogs, but those things are pure evil. They’ll stalk you and pounce with claws at the ready. I am so not reliving that memory to clarify why the hell I don’t like cats. I just don’t and let’s just leave it at that!

“Kasa, carry the cat,” said Kurei in a deadpan. I’m quite sure if his hands were free, he would pinch the bridge of his nose.

I cringed, trying to inch away, but the cat sighed and made its way towards me. “Santa, don’t you dare!” I said backing away some more until I found my back pinned against a tree.

“What kind of shinobi are you?” snorted Tokuma. “Getting terrified of a cat of all things? You’re an embarrassment.”

“Embarrassment?” I growled. “I’ll show you embarrassment!”

I know I should’ve ignored the obvious bait, but something about assholes from prestige families pisses me off. Ten minutes later, we made our way back to the admin office… highly embarrassed.

“…Just give me the damn cat!” hissed Tokuma, his face red from the giggling whispers all around us. “Everyone is staring at us.”

“Nooo!” I cried tears of fear as I kept the cat at arm’s length in front of me. “I could do this!”

“…Not if you’re going to bawl while doing so! Give me the cat,” snapped Tokuma as he reached for the evil incarnate in my hands.

“No!” I retorted childishly as I darted off ahead.

“Give me the cat Kasa!” growled Tokuma as he chased after me.

“You can’t make me!” I snapped back as I dodged his attempts at grabbing the cat.

However, I didn’t get far as I crashed into someone outside the admin office. I seriously need to work on my sensing abilities. I’m getting sick of running into things.

“Reow!” screeched the cat as she darted out of my hands.

“Kasa! Grab it!” shouted Santa from behind. “I lost my grip on her!”

“Damn it!” I scrambled to get up, but a hand caught the cat before she could run away.

“I didn’t know you were scared of cats,” snickered a familiar voice. I glanced up before a bright grin spread across my face.

“Obito!” I said in glee, but refrained from tackling him with a hug. As much as I’m fond of Obito, even I wouldn’t hug him if he has a cat in hand.

“How’s it going?” asked the former Uchiha as he lifted the flailing cat by the scruff of her neck. “Hello Tora, nice to see you’re still bringing terror to all geinin.”
The cat snarled swiping a paw at his face, but he easily pulled her away before she could.

“You’re interrupting her team’s mission,” said Kakashi as he snatched Tora out of his hand. “She lost the cat, so she’ll have to retrieve it herself.”

“Wait don’t—” I dived to catch the cat as he let Tora go, I am not chasing after the damn thing again. Tora struggled and fought with all her might, but I managed to hold her tightly in my arms.

“Oh look, you’re not that scared of it after all,” said Kakashi with a sadistic sort of cheeriness.

Promptly, my gut turned and I realized that I did what I was trying to avoid the whole time. I felt a cold chill go down my spine as the cat turned to me with an evil glint in her eyes and swung a clawed paw at my face. I let out a painful screech as she started her assault. You know that opening with Team Seven going after Tora? And then once Naruto caught it, Tora swiftly kicked his ass with stomps and rapid kicks. You thought the show was just being funny and over-exaggerated how bad Naruto was.

No, you were wrong. It wasn’t an over-exaggeration. Tora is a freaking taijutsu master! I kid you not! She is well versed in the arts of Neko-ken! Now wonder the damn thing lived so long. Taijutsu masters in this world tended to live much longer if they don’t get killed. Tokuma took pity on me when my body was beaten and twitching on the ground. With quick gentle-fist jabs, he knocked the cat out and hauled her into his arms. Why the hell didn’t he do that in the first place?

“Kakashi, you sadist,” sighed Obito with a shake of his head as he helped me up.

“…No more cats…” I said as I rubbed at my bruises.

“If you gave me the damn cat, we could’ve avoided all this,” grumbled Tokuma.

“Shut it Tokuma!” I grumbled before turning to Obito. “Are you off on another mission again? I haven’t seen you in ages!”

Obito grinned brightly. “I’m not called the Flaming Obito for nothing! A-ranked missions all the way!”

“…Pft.” I covered my juvenile laugh behind my hand. “Flaming? Of all the names people could’ve given you, flaming stuck?”

“I’m really good with fire-based attacks!” argued Obito.

“He doesn’t have a title,” drawled Kakashi. “He just got jealous that I got one and decided to give himself one. It hasn’t stuck yet… Though, that one was an interesting choice. Are you trying to tell us something Obito?”

“What?” asked Obito, completely oblivious to what Kakashi said.

“He’s still in denial,” sighed the silver-haired jounin in mock exasperation.

I nearly died laughing.

“Kasa,” said Kurei sternly as he made his way to us with Santa close behind.

I stopped laughing and turned to him sheepishly. “Sorry.”
“Yuhi-san,” greeted both Obito and Kakashi.

My jounin sensei gave an acknowledging nod as he glanced to Kakashi. “You’ve grown.”

“Everyone grows,” said Kakashi in return before grabbing Obito by the back of his flak jacket. “If you will excuse us, we have a mission to attend to. We’re behind schedule as is.”

“I said I was sorry!” grumbled Obito.

“Getting a cat out from a tree is not a valid excuse,” said Kakashi as he dragged Obito off.

…I got the feeling there’s more to it in this conversation, but I’m not one to step into people’s personal business. Besides, my team still has a mission to complete.

“Oh, my Tora!” gushed the hefty woman as she grabbed Tora out of Tokuma’s hands and proceeded to squeeze it to death like Elmyra.

“Poor cat,” whispered Santa.

“It could take it.” I grumbled back.

“Team Four finished missions faster than most new genin teams,” mused Hiruzen as he glanced through the list of D-rank missions.

My ears perked up at that. “Faster than Itachi and Shisui’s teams?” I asked with a grin.

“It wouldn’t be fair for me to tell you,” said Hiruzen in good humor. “Now what mission should I give Team Four next?”

“Hokage-sama, is it possible for something more challenging?” asked Tokuma. “A C-ranked maybe?”

“Mind your words Tokuma, I told you, you’re not ready yet,” said Kurei.

“Hokage-sama noted we finish missions faster than most teams, which meant we’re more than ready for something more challenging,” argued Tokuma.

Oh good lord, why does this feel like the start of the Wave Mission? Its eleven years too early!

“Tokuma,” said Kurei warningly.

“I’m requesting, not demanding,” retorted Tokuma challengingly.

Kurei said nothing else.

…Scratch that, the Wave mission doesn’t sound so bad. I could risk dying, compared to what might come in the near future. Nothing good ever comes out when Kurei sensei stops talking. We are so dead.

“I do believe there is a C-ranked escort mission,” said Hiruzen in amusement.

“We’ll take it,” said Tokuma before Kurei could put in a word.
“…Shouldn’t we learn a bit more about the mission before we accept it?” I added weakly.

The old man chuckled. “Not to worry. Technically, this is a D-ranked mission, but the person requesting it was a bit… let’s just say enthusiastic.”

“Enthusiastic?” I asked warily. Enthusiastic was a nice way of calling someone psychotic or dangerous. Or was that for eccentric? Regardless, neither word was good to hear when used in wry amusement.

“I’m quite sure you’re familiar with this client Kasa,” said Hiruzen in amusement.

“What?” I almost dropped the word in deadpan. Someone I know is definitely not something I wanted to hear in a mission.

“You can let him in now,” said Hiruzen.

The door opened slightly before we spotted a tiny hand grasping at the door’s edge at roughly two feet. I blinked when a familiar head of blond hair popped through curiously and peeked into the room.

“…Naruto?” I said in confusion. What the heck?

The little boy turned at the call of his name. “Sa-sa!” His face lit up as he hurried towards me in an awkward hop-skip waddle.

Naruto was a little over thirteen months old; his motor skills still had some ways to go and his speech coherency could use a couple more years. Aside from random household things and his own version of everyone’s names, it was near impossible to make out what the hell he’s saying more than half the time. And that’s only if you living with him and know his little quirks.

Kakashi and Obito couldn’t make out a thing he says since they’re always off on missions. Apparently, Obito was promoted jounin at some point during my two-year trip, who knew. Rin on the other hand was mostly stationed at the hospital and had an easier time to stop by and visit. Actually, I think Rin was probably Naruto’s favorite person aside from Kushina. Or it could be that I’m a tiny and he probably doesn’t see me as someone much older… Gods, I hope puberty gives me some height.

“…Hokage-sama, are you telling us our client is this toddler?” said Tokuma in a deadpan.

“It’s a minor escort mission,” said Hiruzen in good humor. “To the Uchiha district.”

“Uchiha district?” said Santa in disbelief. “That’s inside the village! Why would he even need an escort?”

I knelt down to catch the excited Naruto as he tackled me with a hug and babbled incoherently. “Uh… where’s Kushina-san?” I asked.

“She has a special mission to attend to, but she shouldn’t take too long,” noted Hiruzen.

“…Isn’t C-rank… a bit… extreme for such a simple task?” frowned Santa.

Hiruzen coughed. “As I said, it has the difficulty of a D-ranked mission, but Naruto’s mother is… a bit extreme in her requests.”
I rolled my eyes, not surprised at all. I should probably talk to Tesuri at some point to learn more about the Uzumaki Clan, at the moment... it feels like I’m from a family of spazzes.

“Who was watching Naruto before now?”

Hiruzen coughed as if to hide something. “You don’t need to know that detail.”

…He’s totally had his ANBU babysit Naruto up till now… Wasn’t that considered an abuse of power? Oh, what do I care? I’m not an ANBU and if I could, I don’t think I want to join either ANBU or ROOT. As much as I’m confident that much horrible luck would keep me from dying, I don’t think that luck extends to coming back unharmed or mentally stable.

“When do we need to get the client to the Uchiha district? And where?” said Tokuma, obviously annoyed at the minor mission, but was adamant in completing it with utmost professionalism.

“You must get Naruto to the Uchiha Main House before sunset,” replied Hiruzen.

Main house? Isn’t that…?

A grin touched the elderly Hokage’s face. “I’m quite sure you know where that is Kasa. I trust you can complete this mission in a timely manner?”

“…Yeah.” I muttered as I adjusted my hold on Naruto, he squirmed and wiggled in my arms as he turned to face me.

“Sa-sa!” grinned Naruto as he continued to babble incoherently.

“By your leave, Hokage-sama,” said Kurei with a polite bow. Tokuma and Santa followed suit. No doubt ingrained into them by their respective families.

“Come on, let’s just get this over with,” grumble Tokuma as he turned to leave.

“What?” sniggered Santa as he followed suit in a slight jog. “We got a C-rank like you asked.”

“Shut it,” retorted Tokuma.

“Hey, a little help here? You don’t expect me to carry Naruto all by myself do you?” I grumbled.

If I was in my adult body, I wouldn’t have issue carrying this little tyke, but with a seven-year-old body, it’s a bit harder when I’m only about a foot taller than Naruto and twenty pounds heavier. Gods, I feel like a midget. My teammates had at least two feet of height over me and double the weight.

“Think of it this way, we could get some more training done if we get this mission finished quickly,” said Santa in good humor, but Tokuma didn’t see it the same way.

“Hey! Don’t ignore me!” I shouted as I hauled up Naruto and chased after my team.

“… Tokuma, don’t kill our client,” said Kurei evenly as Naruto grabbed a handful of the Hyuga’s hair and stuck it in his mouth.

“Aw, looks like he likes you,” gushed Santa teasingly as we made our way out of the admin building and down towards the Uchiha district.
“Take him or I will kill you along with him,” growled Tokuma as he put Naruto at arm’s length, much like how I was like with Tora.

“Pft.” I sniggered. “What was that about me being embarrassing Tokuma?”

The Hyuga glared at me, but made no attempt to defend himself.

“Naruto’s mother must be one strange woman if she’s calling this an escort mission,” said Santa as he relieved Tokuma of the excitable toddler.

“Who cares what this is,” grumbled Tokuma as he dried off his drool-slobbered hair with a handkerchief.

“Who would’ve thought Tokuma’s worst fear were little children?” I teased playfully before Tokuma swung an arm to swat at me. I hastily jumped back, expecting his half-hearted attack and stuck out my tongue childishly.

“I am not afraid of children!” grumbled Tokuma.

“Keep telling yourself that.” I said in a singsong before a thoughtful hum escaped me. “But it is a bit odd for Kushina-san to leave Naruto like that. I’m actually surprised she didn’t put a higher ranked mission for him…”

“It’s a bit weird doing a mission for family isn’t it?” said Santa.

“Maybe a little.” I agreed, mostly because I have no clue what the heck Kushina-san was planning. “I wonder why she didn’t just take Naruto to Mikoto-san herself, would’ve been faster.”

“Ke!” shouted Naruto as he flailed towards our right.

“Nawu!” shouted another childish voice in return.

I blinked in surprise and turned to the voice, not expecting anyone to call out to Naruto that excitedly, if at all. When did Naruto get a friend? I paused when I spotted a familiar raven-haired toddler babbling and pointing to us with a bright grin. Though, who were tending to him, startled me a bit.

“…Itachi? Shisui?” I said, baffled. “Don’t you guys have missions today? Why do you have Sasuke with you?”

“My team has a day off,” chirped Shisui as he ruffled Itachi’s head. “And it seemed like Itachi’s team had the day off too.”

Itachi chose to not respond to the playful tousling of his hair as he came closer, allowing Sasuke and Naruto to come in range to babble incoherently. “Do I want to know why Naruto isn’t with Kushina-san?”

I shrugged. “Don’t know, but we’re told to take Naruto to your house.” I answered. “So why are you out and about with Sasuke? I thought Mikoto-san didn’t like him out of her sight.”

“Most likely she’s planning something, if she had Shisui drag me out of the house with Sasuke,” droned Itachi.

“Huh?” I said in confusion.

At this point and time, my brain was jumping to a hundred conclusions and more.
Though, most of them fell to very… unsavory events. If Fugaku and Tesuri show up, I am totally out of there before they say a word, mission be damned. If I know my anime tropes as well as I do, and I do, there’s a high chance this shounen series might turn into a freaking shoujo series. I’d take facing death, gore and torture any day of the week to avoid that.

“Oh god! Kasa, take the kid!” said Santa as he swiftly shoved Naruto into my arms. The blond baby promptly started to cry at being manhandled.

“Hey!” I said as I fumbled to hold onto Naruto before he hit the ground.

“You might want to get Naruto to the house,” said Itachi at the twitch of his nose.

“Oh, ew!” I groaned at the stench.

At the wail of the toddler, we quickly made our way to the Uchiha Main House. Mainly because Sasuke started crying when he heard Naruto cry and the chorus of two toddlers crying triggered the crying of whatever baby within our vicinity. To say the nearby villagers were pissed off was an understatement.

“Oh goodness, why are Naruto and Sasuke crying?” said Mikoto as she greeted us at the door.

“Diaper emergency! I’m going to take Naruto inside to change.” I said in a hurry as I kicked off my shoes and darted in with the wailing toddler.

“Kasa-chan, wait—” said Mikoto, but I darted ahead before she could finish. I rounded the corner and darted down the hall to where I knew was the changing room.

However, before I managed to make pass the living room, a series of loud cracks burst through the air, followed by a loud, “SURPRISE!”

“Holy shi—”I let out a yelp as I dropped backwards startled, clinging to Naruto protectively as I hit the ground. I felt the world spin as my head collided with the ground.

“Kasa, language,” chided Kushina.

“Mama!” said Naruto excitedly as he lifted his arms up to be picked up.

“Kushina-san?” I said in a daze as she pulled Naruto from my arms. “I thought you were on a special mission.”

“I am,” chirped Kushina as she helped me up. “Mission, surprise party for your graduation to genin!”

“…Uh… you’re kind of late, I’ve been a genin for over a month already.” I said, puzzled.

“I know, but today’s the only day that everyone happened to be free… well, everyone sans you anyway!” said the woman. “Hence, why I had Sandaime Hokage-sama assign your team to this mission.”

“…You paid a C-rank to throw a party?” I said in astonishment.

“Yep,” said Kushina brightly. This woman was mad as a hatter.

“You should know Kushina-san better by now,” drawled Itachi as he made his way in with settled Sasuke in his arms. “She always gets what she wants.”
“Kushina-san,” said Kurei sternly as he entered the room with the rest of my team following, shortly after. “I would appreciate it if you don’t interfere with my team’s missions.”

“Liven up will you? Geez, even after so many years, you’re still a stickler when it comes spontaneity. It’s not like I interrupted anything, your team was already finished with missions for today,” said Kushina with a roll of her eyes. “If anything Team Four’s already over quota with how many missions you have them plow through a week.”

Over quota? There are set quotas? Scratch that, there are *safety regulations* in this world? What the hell? Where the hell was my worker’s compensation?

“While, I do believe that a strict regime is something new genins require, a fun break would do more help than a stressful day off,” said Kakashi. “She has been using that time to train or take care of Naruto.”

How the heck does he even know? He’s rarely around.

Obito seemed to notice my confusion before he chirped up. “Rin mentioned about how tired you looked since you became a genin. And considering what happened the first time you took the genin exams, we thought an intervention was necessary.”

“…And you saw the need to drag us into this farce in order to do so?” said Tokuma in disbelief.

“This is for the benefit of your team as much as it is for Kasa,” said Tesuri as he glanced from the Hyuga boy to Kurei. “If it’s the matter of her health, I could request a medical for her as a iryo-nin and her father, but on long term, it wouldn’t help her or her team.”

“Why not?” frowned Santa in confusion.

“Kasa is self-destructive,” said Itachi bluntly.

“Am not!” I huffed.

“Says the girl who volunteered to die on our first meeting,” snorted Tokuma as he frowned in thought. “The real C-rank wasn’t to escort Naruto, it’s to keep Kasa from endangering herself, isn’t it?”

“Ninjas must look underneath the underneath,” chirped Kushina.

“…We’re never going to see that payment,” sighed Santa ruefully, but I’m quite sure he’s pretending. He’s not the type to be bothered by such a revelation… Sometimes I think he’s born into the wrong clan. Seriously, he acts more like an Akimichi and Nara than a Yamanaka.

“I wonder how long before our flawless record becomes marred by this mission?” continued Tokuma in a drawl. “The dead last is suicidal even on a good day.”

“I’m not suicidal.” I puffed up my cheeks indignantly. “You two are so doing this on purpose!”

“Then why are you falling for it?” droned Itachi.

I would’ve pounced at him or my teammates, if not for Shisui catching me in an over shoulder hug. “You make this way too easy Kasa,” chuckled the older boy.
“One day, you will all suffer by my hand.” I grumbled darkly under my breath. It was just my luck that my teammates joined up with the Uchiha boys to bully me. “I’ll turn you all into ducks, just you wait.”

“Aw, she’s giving us the duck threats! That’s so cute,” teased Shisui.

“All right! Let’s get this party started!” cheered Kushina.

“…You might want to change Naruto first,” noted Rin at the smell that permeated the room.

“After we change Naruto!” continued Kushina without missing a beat as she carried the toddler out to change. “Be right back!”

“Why don’t we start on the food while she does that?” said Mikoto brightly as she ushered the rest of us towards the delicious spread. “I made your favorite Kasa-chan.”

“Woohoo! Mikoto-san is the best!” I cheered at the mention of food. “Bet I can eat more than you Santa!”

“Is that a challenge?” grinned Santa.

“Great, I have another teammate that’s secretly an Akimichi,” said Tokuma with a hand to his brow.

“You’re just jealous that you eat like a bird.” I retorted.

“If you either of you get sick, you’re cleaning it up,” said Itachi bluntly.

In the midst of our chattering and bantering, I spotted Kurei sensei pinching the bridge of his nose and letting out a low sigh. Tesuri patted him on the shoulder with a weak and understanding smile and they traded brief words that I didn’t catch. Normally, I wouldn’t bother noticing something like that… but at the sight of Kakashi adding his two cents, the color on their faces changed. Kurei turned into a shade of white while Tesuri into a shade of red. Obito and Rin seemed highly amused.

Kakashi caught me staring and give a friendly wave. Somehow… I get the feeling that he just did something completely evil… and I’m so not looking forward to it.
“Shit!” I hissed as Santa and I raced through the foliage. “I hate it when Tokuma gets kidnapped!”

“You and me both,” grumbled Santa. “It’s so much harder to pursue people without him around.”

“He just had to go and piss him off didn’t he?” I growled.

“Stop complaining,” inserted Santa. “It’s not like he’s on vacation, you should know considering how many times you get kidnapped.”

“I’ve got that number down by half this month!” I huffed.

“That’s because Kurei sensei only pulls the hostage training when we slack off,” said Santa with the roll of his eyes.

“Gods, I hate hostage training!” I groaned. “I rather go back to weapons training!”

Most of you are probably confused, I would too if someone talks about getting kidnapped as a regular occurrence in their lives. Though, in my case, it is a regular occurrence. Kurei sensei took our training seriously and made sure we had daily team training when we weren’t having individual training. Most teams, by the fourth week had a specialization of some sort. Team Four has none.

Sensory, infiltration and reconnaissance, medic, and combat, our team as a whole never fell into any single one of these categories. Considering what we were comprised of, it’s not hard to see why. Each of us on the team had skills in one or two branches but none of us really shared the same specialization even if we happened to share the same branch.

For example, Santa was a natural sensor and a combat specialist in setting traps and ambush. If I haven’t mentioned it before, I’ll say it here, Santa’s our only real fighter in the team. Direct combat and pursuing enemies were not something we should engage in. I think he’s about the only one that could go off on his own in the future. As for the rest of the team, we should never be left alone! EVER!

Tokuma shared the sensory skill, but unlike Santa, he was not a combat specialist. Instead, he specialized in scouting and infiltration. Normally, he would be the one to flush out the traps and update us on the terrain and area. Without him, we were practically running blind. Funny, since he’s the only one that looks blind!

You know my skills already and… I’m pretty much useless in the frontlines… or battles in general… Well, that’s depressing to know how little I’m worth on the battlefield. If anything, I think we fall under support, what with our ranged-fighter, scout and enhancer… Yeah, I’m going to stay in the back, sniping, buffing and healing. The only one that would possibly go ahead was Tokuma, since he’s a scout.

Though, I supposed that’s probably why Kurei placed so much effort in training us. The man was a specialist in genjutsu and bukijutsu, the weapon arts. Genjutsu was a given, as he was Kurenai’s father, but the weapons completely threw me off. I always thought illusions were strictly all about mental attacks and driving the enemy insane. Kurei does do that, but at the same time, he mixes in swordplay and chains. It’s a very deadly combination… just kind of wish he didn’t use it on
us during training.

“Shit!” I cursed when chains shot out from the ground. I quickly reached back to grab my umbrella and swung it to deflect the onslaught of chains.

With a firm grip, I forced the rigid canopy open with chakra, just in time to twirl the handle to block and redirect the barrage of chains crashing into my last minute shield.

“Santa, I thought you were supposed to keep an eye out and warn me.” I said in exasperation as I checked over my umbrella for damage, even with chakra reinforcement, sometimes it wasn’t enough to keep it from getting damaged.

“I’m not Tokuma! I can only sense things with chakra!” grumbled Santa.

I groaned. “How much further before we get to Tokuma?”

“Not long, it seems like he’s coming towards us,” said Santa as he closed his windmill shuriken. He was using it to deflect the chains, just as I did with my umbrella.

“He’s coming?” I asked, puzzled. “Wait, you mean he got out of the hostage situation?”

“Don’t know,” frowned Santa. “Maybe it’s another test from sensei.”

“…Ugh… if he placed Tokuma under genjutsu…” I paused in thought.

Tokuma’s not a fighter. Sure, he could still do the Hyuga’s Gentle Fist style that seals off your chakra points, but Santa is a ranged fighter, he wouldn’t need to get close if we do get into a fight and I’m definitely not a close range fighter… if I fought at all.

The Uchiha fighting style was meant for quick violent assaults where the fighter rarely stays planted to the ground for more than seconds at a time. While I’m fairly adept in the style, training with Fugaku, Itachi and Shisui would do that to a person, it wasn’t a style I was comfortable with. Heck, in this body, my balance was completely shot. Something about these stupid open-toed sandals made it hard for me to keep my center.

Maybe I should find someway to fix my balance problem. If I’m that unbalanced on stable ground, can you imagine me trying to be Jesus and walk on water? Yeah, I’m not going to part the seas anytime soon. I’m more likely to belly flop face first into the water. What I wouldn’t give for a good pair of sneakers or combat boots. Stupid ninja-shoes.

“It doesn’t make sense for Kurei to send Tokuma back under genjutsu.” I muttered. “Unless he’s trying to test our level of caution.”

“How should we check to make sure Tokuma’s not being controlled? Kurei sensei did put you in a genjutsu last time and he knows what we’re like, he could easily have him respond naturally,” noted Santa.

“Kurei sensei does like making things difficult…” I groaned smacking my head against my closed umbrella.

“Whatever we’re planning, it better be quick, Tokuma will be here in five minutes,” said Santa.

“Five minutes? We can’t come up with a plan in five minutes!” I snapped before ruffling my hair into a mess. “Ah, screw it! I’m going to wing it.”
Santa raised a brow. “You do know what happened when you did that last time right?”

“T-that was my trial run!” I spluttered, face red. “Maybe I should’ve practiced a bit more before I used it in actual combat, but, but…” I fumbled.

Santa sniggered at my poor excuse. “Did you get any better?”

“I—” I paused when I felt a displacement in the air. Santa did too from the look on his face.

“Kasa, Santa,” said Tokuma as he landed on a tree not far from us. “Training’s over today.”

“What?” frowned Santa. “But we haven’t even faced Kurei sensei yet.”

“…You’re a spy!” I blurted out.

Santa sighed in exasperation. “Kasa…”

“What?” I grumbled.

“Let’s hope we never have to go on an espionage mission with you,” droned Tokuma.

“I don’t care! It’s not like Kurei sensei to let off training this early and without good reason. I could work on my improving my interrogation skills later.” I grumbled.

A phantom grin touched Tokuma’s lips before he darted forward with chakra glowing on the tips of his fingers. Santa and I barely dodged in time as he went after our tenketsu.

“You’re learning,” said Tokuma in amusement.

“I knew it! Tokuma turned traitor! He’s helping Kurei sensei!” I said as Santa yanked me back before I fell off the branch.

“Geez, Kasa we really need to do something about your balancing issue, I’ve lost count how many times you’ve nearly fell off,” said Santa in exasperation.

“Never mind that! Tokuma turned traitor!” I pointed to our teammate. “He’s not under genjutsu!”

“Calling him a traitor is a bit harsh isn’t it?” said Santa before he glanced to Tokuma. “But it is a bit odd that Tokuma would be siding with sensei today. Did hostage training turn into renegade training?”

“Technically, I’m not supposed to tell you and let you work it out, but since Kasa figured it out already, it’s pointless to keep up the charades. I rather not deal with her pestering me to admit I’m a traitor for the next twenty minutes,” droned Tokuma.

Oh yeah, I forgot to mention, sometimes hostage training gets turned into renegade training, which meant an ally has turned traitor and you’re to beat their ass down and ship them back to the village for T&I. Don’t see how this works, since this training only helps us if we happened to turn on each other, which I highly doubt would happen.

Its more likely Kurei was using this method of training to get us familiarized with each other’s fighting tactics and skill set. Then using that to improve wherever we were lacking from these mock-fights. I’m actually a little glad that Tokuma’s on the other side today and not Santa.
Why? Because Santa freaking ruined my umbrella that last time we were on opposing sides, it took me months to pay back my debt to the weapon shop to repair the damn thing! At least with Tokuma, I know he won’t brutalize my weapon. He’ll bruise the hell out of me, but it’s much cheaper using iryo-ninjutsu compared to paying for weapon repairs… but I suppose that defeats the purpose of having a shield and weapon if I’m not going to use it.

“…You two are breaking protocols,” sighed Santa.

“Who cares?” I said as I rotated my wrist and hefted the umbrella in my hand. “This just means we don’t have to fight Kurei sensei today! I’m so going to get a TKO on you today Tokuma!”

The Hyuga boy rolled his eyes. “You’ve been saying that for months already.”

“Then why should you care if I said it one more time? Unless you’re chicken!” I said childishly.

Yes, I know, it’s no better than schoolyard insults. I don’t care if I’ve been a genin for half a year already, I’m only eight and Kushina would kill me if I started cursing like a sailor. Oh, how I can’t wait for puberty and then I could hide behind the guise of a rebellious teenager!

“You know, one of these days Kurei sensei is going to kill us for straying from his training,” said Santa wryly.

“Then he shouldn’t skip out halfway through our training after kidnapping one of us.” I huffed. “I swear this must be a weird fetish for him to kidnap little kids.”

Tokuma planted a hand to his face. “I really wonder where do you learn these things.”

“From the voices in my head.” I replied bluntly. “It’s telling me to change all your underpants into frilly panties too.”

“…I question your sanity sometimes,” sighed Tokuma as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“And my sanity questions you too.” I said in return.

“Now, you’re just stalling,” huffed Tokuma as he returned to a fighting stance. “The sooner I knock you out, the sooner we can call it a day.”

“You can try! Santa and I are so taking you down!” I retorted.

“Maybe we should do that first before you make that claim,” said Santa before we darted opposite directions and circled around our teammate.

Santa made quick work of sending shurikens flying at the Hyuga as the limber boy dodge and danced around the flying projectiles with his family styled taijutsu and using a kunai to deflect any he couldn’t dodge. I sent my own barrage of senbons when it seemed like he was cornered, but Tokuma looped around to the underside of the branch and used it as a shield instead.

“Damn it! He’s a nimble bastard.” I grumbled under my breath as I scrambled to perch on the branch I landed on. Seriously, the tree-walking exercise isn’t that hard, I could do it no problem, but for some reason I still have trouble using it during combat.

“You’re going to have to do better than that,” taunted Tokuma.
“Oh, it is on!” I growled as I cracked my knuckles and limbered my fingers up. “I’m going to make you eat those words Hyuga!”

“Bring it on dead last!” replied Tokuma.

Reaching into my pouch, I gave a burst of chakra to my hands before launching the senbons at the tree. Unlike my previous attack, these were reinforced with chakra, capable of piercing through thick armor, or in this case a thick tree limb. This trick I learned from Tesuri. Originally, this was meant for medics on the field with dull scalpels. Tokuma spotted the attack a mile away with his byakugan eyes and dodge before the projectiles managed to burrow through the branch and out the other end.

“Can’t beat me, so you’re trying to kill me now?” drawled Tokuma from his new perch.

“Quit complaining! It’s not like it hit you, you totally saw it coming!” I shouted back.

Before either of us could continue yelling at each other, a kunai whistled through the air, hitting beneath Tokuma’s branch. An explosion of fine white dust enveloped him causing him to choke and cough. I cheered inwardly at Santa’s ambush as I took the chance to charge in with my umbrella at hand. Even in the distance I could see Tokuma’s vague silhouette in the cloud of white dust.

“VICTORY IS MINE!” I cackled as I raised my umbrella over my head and bashed it violently over his.

Tokuma gasped at the initial attack and staggered with each succinct blow following it. I gave him no chance in dodging or shielding himself as I used my umbrella similarly to a bokken, whacking him wherever I could. Interestingly enough, among the three of us, I was the most agile and picked up Kurei’s weapon training the quickest.

Unfortunately, I’m physically the weakest in the group, considering the age gap and my size. Even if I could get blows in, more than half the time, it doesn’t do enough damage to make it worthwhile. Today was an exception.

“Kasa! Stop!” shouted Santa.

“Why?” I paused and jumped back. Tokuma wheezed as he hit the branch and rolled off.

“Shit! Grab him!” cursed Santa as he came at us. “I sent paralyzing powder at him instead of sleeping powder and he just breathed in a ton of it!”

“What?” My eyes widened as I jumped after the Hyuga boy.

Tokuma had already hit three branches on the way down, and the sound of something cracking loudly wasn’t good. I managed to catch up in time to grab him, but it was too late, we were falling too quickly and I didn’t have enough strength to carry Tokuma while getting us to safety. Do I let go and save myself? Or should I cling on and try to tumble to save Tokuma? If I leave him now, he might just break his neck.

Better make a decision fast! The ground is coming awfully close. I closed my eyes tightly as I clung onto Tokuma. Damn it!

“Kasa!” shouted Santa.

I expected to hit the ground, breaking at least a limb or two, and maybe some heavy
internal bleeding. I’ve disjointed both my arms and my jaw before and let me tell you, the pain was excruciating. Hitting the ground at this height, if it doesn’t kill us, it’ll hurt like a bitch.

I cushioned Tokuma’s head in my arms as I tucked in. An iryo-nin can fix anything as long as their patient’s not dead right? I steeled myself for the pain that was to come. This is going to hurt!

…Except, the pain never came.

Strong arms wrap around Tokuma and me as someone caught us in mid-air and quickly attached himself to the closest tree.

“…I should’ve known better that the lot of you will somehow find a way to kill yourselves if I left you alone,” grumble Kurei.

“Kurei sensei!” I said in relief.

“Your father wasn’t joking about you being self-destructive,” frowned Kurei.

“Argh!” I huffed in annoyance. “For the last time, I’m not self-destructive! Oh, forget about that! We need to get treatment for Tokuma, he breathed in Santa’s paralysis powder!”

For the rest of you who hasn’t faced Santa’s traps and bag of tricks before, the Yamanaka in my team is evil. Not evil like a villain, evil like the sneaky bastards ninjas are supposed to be. When it came to this blond ninja, there were several key things you need to remember.

One, never let him hit you any form of projectile. Why? Because the bastard laced all his blades with paralyzing agents. I’m quite sure he’ll eventually switch it over to poisons, but at the moment I don’t think he trusts me not to run into his line of fire by accident.

Two, since Santa was an expert in ambush, he carries a lot of shit with him. Remember the storage scrolls? Yes? Remember how I can activate seals with no problem? Yes? Don’t do it. Don’t active those seals! Why, you ask? The shit that’s in them is super volatile.

Now, he has two types of storage scrolls. One for weapons, that one’s not that dangerous, but the second one? You better hope none of that stuff hits you if the seal decides to fail.

In another life, I might’ve called Santa a chemist or a mad scientist because this bastard carries around bottles of acid and what seems like napalm. How he managed to create napalm? I have no clue, but like I said before, Santa was not one to be fucked with. I found out the hard way when I activated his seals during one of our previous training sessions.

I haven’t met anyone else from the Yamanaka Clan yet, but if they’re anything like Santa, I am never going to look at florist the same way ever again. I’ve seen him whip up things on the fly with common plants found in the surrounding forest that you would never imagine to be dangerous. Seriously, half the poisonous vials in his second scroll were made from the common plants found around the village. Hell, I think he would’ve done great in kunoichi classes.

Argh, there I go, off topic again. Let’s head back before I stray even further… Where was I again? Oh right, Santa is evil. Don’t cross him while he has his toys, he makes Batman look unprepared.

Kurei ended up rushing Tokuma to the hospital using the body flicker. Paralysis powders and poisons were not something I could handle, at least not yet. Tesuri and Rin had only finished my lessons on mending bones and resuscitation techniques.
“Is he going to be okay?” I asked later at the hospital. Santa and I took a little longer in getting there since neither of us knew how to use the body flicker.

“He’ll live,” said Kurei with an exhausted sigh. “But he won’t be going on missions for some time. Santa’s paralysis powder was more potent than expected. He’s off the roster for the next couple of weeks, doctor’s orders.”

Santa grimaced. “He doesn’t have any permanent damage, does he?”

“Don’t worry,” consoled Kurei when he noticed the guilt eating away at the blond boy. “Tokuma’s shinobi career won’t end here. The paralysis to his lungs was fixed and he will recover. However, he sustained a large number of fractures and broken bones on the way down.”

“…Can’t those be fixed with a mending technique?” I frowned. I’m quite sure it doesn’t take weeks to heal broken bones, at least not in this world.

“Santa, you want to explain it to her?” said Kurei.

The Yamanaka boy looked even guiltier. “My paralysis powder had chakra inhibitors in it. Even if they got rid of the paralysis powder, the chakra inhibitors would stay in the system for a couple of weeks before it’s completely filtered out.”

“Chakra inhibitors?” My eyes widened. “Why the hell would you… well, I guess it was effective, but what the hell?”

For those of you who are lost, chakra inhibitors does what the name implies, it stops chakra from flowing through the body. Now, let’s have a crash course on chakra. I’m sure you already know that chakra is necessary for all the basic jutsu and other badass things everyone in this world can do. However, that’s not all it does. Chakra is also what allows everyone here bleed gallons of blood and not die.

Bet you didn’t know that and chalked it up to anime physics. I won’t bore you with the long boring lesson Tesuri gave me when he ran me through the concept of chakra. It’s way too long and way too boring, if I went on about it, I would probably fall asleep halfway through.

Anyway, back to topic. With chakra being more important than blood in a shinobi’s body, to have chakra inhibitors running through your system was equivalent of having your immune system shot to hell and then catching pneumonia. You can see why that’s a bad thing.

“I didn’t mean to use it!” grumbled Santa. “I meant to use the sleeping powder on Tokuma.”

“Why were you even carrying that stuff in the first place?” I asked. “It’s not like we’re going to face any enemy ninja during a D-rank.”

Santa said nothing.

“… You really wanted to use it huh?” I said dryly.

“Shut up,” grumbled Santa.

I sniggered as Kurei sighed.

“The lot of you will be the death of me,” muttered Kurei under his breath before he stared at us sternly. “With Tokuma out of commission, standard shinobi protocol calls for the remaining
genin in the team to reallocate to another team until a time the injured member recovers.”

“Wait, Team Four is disbanding?” I said in disbelief.

“Only temporarily, until Tokuma recovers,” answered Kurei. “I will still oversee your individual training, while you take missions with other teams, but team training will postpone until Tokuma returns. Maybe next time, the lot of you will learn to be more cautious next time.”

Both Santa and I grimaced at his words. We were both at fault, Santa, for being careless and using a dangerous poison against allies and me, for carelessly taking the chance to attack rather than to check on my teammate.

Thank god, there wasn’t much paperwork in doing our reallocation. Considering the fatality rate of being a ninja, it’s probably best to make reallocations less of a hassle. I wonder if there’s a curse on Team Four? You know, like how Team Seven always ends up having a traitor in its midst. I wonder if Team Four’s curse is bad luck or if it’s just me?

Why am I asking this, you ask? Guess what number is my new temporary team.

“Team…thirteen…” I said in a deadpan when I received my transfer notice. “…Screw you, universe, stop trolling me!”

Santa gave me the weird eye before he glanced away. “I’m not even going to ask.”

“What team are you on?” I asked.

“Team Nine,” said the Yamanaka boy. “One of your Uchiha boyfriends is on the team.”

“Itachi or Shisui?” I asked before realizing what he said. My face flushed. “They’re not my boyfriends!”

“Sure,” sniggered Santa. “I’m surprised you have to ask since you’re on the team with the other one.”

“Eh?” I voiced out in surprise. “I’m on whose team?”

“…You really spaced out during orientation day didn’t you?” sighed Santa. “You should pay attention.”

“Are you going to tell me whose team I’m on or not?” I grumbled.

Santa grinned. “You know what? I think I’m going to let you find out yourself and tell your other boyfriend that you’re cheating on him with his better half.”

I opened my mouth to retort, but sighed. “You know what, say what you want. Let’s see if I’ll heal you the next time you get hurt.”

“Wooh, you’re threatening to let me die, I’m so scared,” mocked Santa before a wry grin touched his lips and he reached over to ruffle my hair. “I think we have to worry more about keeping you alive than myself.”

I huffed in annoyance. It’s really sad that I’m getting bullied by these brats. I’m old enough to be their mother if you add up my current age with my previous age. Hmm… what does that say about me?

…Nothing good.
“Whatever, I’ll find out myself.” I pouted as he laughed.

“See you at training!” said Santa as we parted. He went off to who knows where to meet up with his new team and I found myself heading towards the mission office to wait for my new team. Apparently, they were going to meet up here to get a mission.

It’s a bit weird, I’ll admit. After spending six months with my current team and the sudden change to a whole new team is a bit jarring. I was kind of thinking we’d stay together until one of us becomes a chunin or, if we’re unlucky, one of us dies.

It’s not a bad alternative, I guess. My thoughts didn’t linger long as I stepped into the missions’ office. Seated at the desk as usual was Hiruzen, a normal sight as I’ve seen him each time whenever Team Four came for missions, but somehow today felt a little different.

“Good morning Kasa,” greeted the man with a warm smile.

“…Good morning?” I returned, a little uncertain.

“Are you anxious to meet your new team?” asked the man conversationally.

“…I’m okay, I guess.” I replied with a shrug. Maybe I’m overthinking this, it’s probably just new team jitters.

“How has the training been with Kushina?” asked the man.

“Training?” My brow furrowed in confusion was he talking about seal training or training with demon chakra. “Fine… Is something wrong?”

“It’s nothing to concern yourself about. Just think of it as an old man’s curiosity,” chuckled Hiruzen.

That didn’t relieve me in the slightest.

“How do you like your training at the Uchiha Clan?” asked Hiruzen, most likely to change the topic, but that only seemed to make me even more nervous.

“…Hokage-sama, did something happen?” I asked nervously. The man does trade common pleasantries with me on occasion when my team shows up and we get a bit rowdy, but this is exceeding the pleasantry quota.

Hiruzen gave a hearty laugh. “Ah, I apologize if my questions worried you. There are no grave news waiting for you if that is what you’re worried about.”

That doesn’t make me feel any better!

“Hokage-sama,” greeted a commanding voice, thankfully ending the awkward conversation with Hiruzen. I wanted to thank him a million times, but relief was short lived when I recognized the blank white eyes on the man speaking with Hiruzen.

“Kasa, this is Hizashi Hyuga, he’ll be your temporary team leader until your team is ready to reform,” said Hiruzen.

...Did he say Hizashi? As in the Hizashi Hyuga?

“…Hi?” I forced out an awkward greeting.
“I know the number of kunoichi graduating this year was low enough to disrupt the usual team setup but…” trailed off the man with an assessing frown. “Does this girl even know how to be a kunoichi?”

“Kasa here is a little unconventional,” offered Hiruzen. “But I’m quite sure you can handle having her join your team.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” said the man.

…I get the feeling that I just got insulted.

“Um… Hizashi sensei, if you don’t mind me asking, where is the rest of the team?” I asked.

“You won’t be meeting them anytime soon,” said the man.

“…Huh?” I said puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve looked through your performance evaluations. At your current standing, you won’t be able to join Team Thirteen on any missions or team training,” started the man. “You are a hazard and I don’t need a repeat of Tokuma’s incident.”

“What?” I said incredulously. “What do you mean I can’t join missions or team training? It’s not even my fault that Tokuma’s out of commission!” Well, maybe partially my fault, but he makes it sound like I was the main culprit. “Why am I even placed on Team Thirteen if I’m not allowed to do anything? You might as well just tell me to not come in!”

“We will have to remedy her of that temper,” said Hizashi as the frown deepened on his face. “How did Kurei let her go about as she is for so long? It’s no wonder Tokuma is in the state he is.”

I felt indignant rage bubbling. “What happened to Tokuma wasn’t Kurei sensei’s fault! Sensei is a great team leader!”

“He was careless,” said the man.

If I was a cat, I’d be hissing by now with my hair rising. Instead I pushed up my hitai-ate and pressed my fingers against my forehead. Calm yourself Kasa, he’s not attacking you… but he’s attacking Kurei sensei! I pressed my fingers harder, taking a deep breath. Think of something else, something cool… Hmm, I still haven’t gotten around to learning how to do Kushina’s demonic hair trick yet. Yeah, that’s pretty cool. Maybe I should ask her later…

“Please settle down Kasa,” soothed Hiruzen. “While I am quite delighted that you want to defend your jounin sensei, Hizashi currently is your direct superior and you must treat him as such.”

Taking another deep breath to settle down, I pulled the hitai-ate back over my forehead, sneaking a glance through my lower lids. I could see the disapproval on Hizashi’s face. No doubt, looking down at my behavior. Any other time, I would’ve let my anger gotten the better of me and cursed him out in every language I know while making a number of obscene hand gestures. None that would translate, but I’m quite sure I wouldn’t care.

Right now, however, I have no interest in instant gratification. He wants to play the proper game eh? I’ll play with him. I could pull off being a proper lady! How hard can it be?
I lowered my hand slowly before straightening my posture and collecting my feet together. I ran through even etiquette lesson I had in kunoichi class and every memory I had in Japanese culture in general as I evened out my breathing. Back straight, hands together and anger wiped from my face; I did a fluid forty-five degree angle bow.

“I apologize for my manners.” I said softly without an ounce of venom in my voice.

“…Your tone is right, but your stance is off, your feet are supposed to be together,” stated Hizashi.

I twitched as a vein pulsed at the side of my temple. Okay, maybe being a proper lady is a bit more difficult than I expected. I grated my teeth briefly before I corrected my stance, stood up with a bright smile.

“Of course, I have much to learn. Please advise me Hizashi sensei.” I said cheerily.

“Hizashi?” inquired Hiruzen as he glanced at the Hyuga.

“Maybe I can salvage something with some training,” said Hizashi after staring at me for a moment. “How well can you move in a kimono?”

Wait—What?
Hey, remember those weird questions Hiruzen asked me and I got super paranoid and worried? Yeah, turns out, he was trying to give me a tip off that I’m getting a continuing education in how to be a kunoichi…by a man in a prestige clan… Yeah, you try to figure it out from hearing, Kushina and Uchiha in the same conversation. I bet even you guys thought it was something else! Don’t deny it, I totally know what you guys were thinking!

Anyway, the thought of resuming kunoichi lessons was enough to give me hives. No, I’m serious! I really got hives when I found out I had to resume kunoichi lessons! Tesuri managed to fix that in a heartbeat, but the fact that I got hives from that alone meant it was going to be a horrible, horrible training session. Even Kushina and Rin have given up on training me in the kunoichi arts at some point, something about me being as graceful as a bull in a chinaware shop.

Though, I must say, moving in a kimono…wasn’t as bad as I expected. At first when Hizashi asked how well can I move in a kimono, I was ready to throw in the towel and say fuck it and I’ll find a way to Rock Lee my way into being a ninja! I was tempted to go kicking and screaming when Hizashi took me to the kimono shop.

In my previous life, and maybe this life as well, I’m not someone you would associate with grace and femininity. Far from it, you’re more likely to see me decked out in armor and a gun, crawling through the muddy fields. The thought of loose and flowy clothing made me dread the cape moment. In the wise words of Edna Modes, NO CAPES!

Surprisingly, the kimono wasn’t as bad as I expected. I expected to fall flat on my face on more than one occasion considering how long the damn things were and the okobo shoes that went with it was at least three inches thick, making sure that the kimono never touches the ground. The most surprising thing was that I actually moved better in the okobo than in the standard shoes. Weird huh? Of course, I had to modify it a little bit behind Hizashi’s back to strap the damn things to my feet so they don’t accidentally slip off like Cinderella’s slipper.

Hmm, you know what? I think I might just keep using these shoes. I haven’t fallen off a tree in ages! The kimono on the other hand, I might need to modify the crap out of it if I want to actually fight in them. Don’t get me wrong, I actually fight better in a kimono than the clothes I have, the only issue was the length, if I can chop it down to half length so my legs aren’t restricted, I think I might have just found my permanent outfit for missions… Somehow this feels a lot like prepping for cosplay and I’m absolutely giddy over the notion.

 “…The Uchiha style taijutsu isn’t meant for you,” said Hizashi at the end of the first week. “You become unstable and noisy whenever your feet leaves the ground. Not to mention, you don’t have the physique or power to pull of that style.”

 “…I know that, but it’s a little better than the Academy standard.” I said as I untied the tasuki that kept my long-ass kimono sleeves out of the way while I trained.

I still haven’t met the rest of Team Thirteen yet; the man won’t let me until I could pull off wearing a kimono like a pro. He probably have them train or something while he drags me up to speed, but you know what? While men like Hizashi and Fugaku from prestige clans were hard asses and assholes when it came to anyone outside of their clans, they’re generally pretty good teachers. I think I actually learned more from them than from my kunoichi lessons, but I suppose since they’re from old families, traditions such as this would be their specialty.
Don’t get me wrong, I’m not going to be the bigger person and do that forgive and forget thing. I’m way too petty and immature for that. Be assured, I will have my vengeance!

Hizashi frowned thoughtfully. “You have been picking up the dances much faster than expected and you do seem to work better with fluid styles than harsh combat styles.”

“…Fluid?” I said thoughtfully, while I’ve never practiced any form of martial arts in my previous life, I was a fighting game junkie and for a time I researched into the various branches of fighting styles each character used.

For example, the Hyuga taijutsu style resembled greatly to the baguazhang style, a style where practitioners trained within an eight-trigram field, sounds familiar doesn’t it? They’re not the only one though; Tekken and Street Fighter have characters using that style too. Though, I doubt I could get Hizashi to teach me the Hyuga style taijutsu by asking…

Hmm… wait a sec, maybe I could… but that would… no, then… An evil grin crossed my lips. I have an idea.

“Hizashi sensei, I want to try something, may I have this spar?” I asked politely.

The man glanced at me, as if curious to what I was planning and gave a curt nod.

I grinned, giving him a polite bow, a proper one this time before slipping into a stance I’ve seen Tokuma take a hundred times. Hizashi raised brow, but said nothing as he fell into a similar stance.

Now, before you skip ahead and think I can imitate styles like an Uchiha, I can’t. Life would be so much easier if I could, but I can’t. So what the hell am I trying to do? Well, what I can do, and will do, is butcher the Hyuga style taijutsu. What was that? How am I going to do that? Well… are you guys familiar with a certain, let’s say, dance?

Blow by blow, I mixed in fluid moves stolen from air-benders, short alchemists and extremely girly looking men from games and anime. Each, Hizashi countered flawlessly with his superior skill and experience.

“Interesting,” said Hizashi. “Where did you learn these moves?”

I grinned brightly. “You’ve seen nothing yet!”

Hizashi paused with a frown as I swapped to another stance with both arms held out to my left and my legs spread evenly on the ground.

With a crabwalk scurry, I made my way towards him. “Fuuuuusison—”

THWACK!

I never finished as Hizashi palmed me in the face and sent me flying. With a twist of my body I managed to land on my feet, but skidded backwards as I covered my hands over my stinging face.

“Ow!” I whimpered. “You didn’t even let me finish!”

Hizashi’s face was red with rage. “What in the nine hells was that repulsive, repulsive —!” He was so furious that he couldn’t even finish his sentence.
“You said fluid!” I complained.

“That was utterly hideous with no fluidity in regards to rest of your performance,” said the man. “I am disappointed in you. I thought you were taking this training seriously.”

“I am taking this seriously! The fusion dance is totally a legit move! Though, it probably does nothing since I don’t have a partner to mirror me.” I reasoned.

“… Mirror?” repeated Hizashi in disbelief. “This atrocious dance is meant for two?”

“Atrocious?” I parroted. “Oh come on! You’re harping on me because it’s not pretty? What the hell?”

“You are a kunoichi, to infiltrate, you need to acquire all the class and grace of a lady. At this rate you can’t even pass as a maiko!” growled the man.

“…You do know who I have for role models right?” I said dryly.

Hizashi breathed through his nose in an attempt to collect himself. “Come to the Hyuga compound in the morning.”

“…I have training with Fugaku-san at the Uchiha compound in the morning.” I said.

“Have you tried those moves in his presence?” asked Hizashi.

“No?” I said in confusion. “The Uchiha style taijutsu uses quick and violent movements.”

“…Tomorrow, tell him you’re coming to me for morning training and if he asks why, show him… that fusion… dance… thing,” said Hizashi as if the name of the dance was too repulsive to touch his lips.

The next morning, Fugaku kicked me out of the Uchiha compound faster than you can say troll. Who knew being one could be so effective? Considering everyone thinks I’m an idiot anyway, acting oblivious while doing something that embarrassing should garner some attention… What do you mean I’m not acting? I am not oblivious! I totally know what’s going—hey, there’s Tokuma!

…Where was I again? Oh, I’ll figure it out later.

“Good morrow dear sir!” Archaic words rolled off my tongue as I greeted him cheerily. “Alack how dos thou health fair?”

“It’s as if she’s trying to communicate with me,” drawled Tokuma in a deadpan. “Why are you here? It’s too early to deal with your insanity.”

“Forsooth, good sir, I’ve been summoned henceforth—”

“Speak human!” interrupted Tokuma, not humoring my sense of humor. Ha, get it? “And why are you in a kimono?”

“I’m undercover.” I whispered conspiringly as I dropped my archaic speech.

“… Undercover?” repeated Tokuma, not believing me in the least. “What are you undercover as?”

“A magic girl of course!” I struck a pose. “As defender of love and justice, in the name of
Konoha, I will punish you!”

Tokuma pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a sigh. “…Definitely too early.”

“Fine, fine, all kidding aside.” I huffed, dropping my hands onto my hips. “I’m here for training with Hizashi sensei.”

“Training?” Tokuma paused, glancing at me with interest. “Hizashi-sama is your temporary jounin sensei?”

“Yep.” I chirped.

“…Someone at the team assignment office must hate you,” grinned Tokuma wryly. “You do know Hizashi-sama’s team specializes in infiltration and reconnaissance right?”

“…What?” I said in a deadpan. Excuse me as I find a wall and repeatedly bash my head against it.

Normally, my hitai-ate would take the abuse, but due to my current attire, Hizashi demanded I wear the hitai-ate in a manner that would compliment the kimono. Hence, why I’m wearing it like a headband on top of my head. Don’t know why should I bother wearing it at all since it defeats the purpose of what it’s for. With how much Hizashi harps on my closet and personal grooming, I think he would work very well with the Fab Five in my old world.

Tokuma sniggered as he patted me on the head. “There, there I’ve only got a couple more weeks to go before the chakra inhibitors completely flush out of my system. Enjoy your training,” said the Hyuga boy with sadistic glee as he directed me through the Hyuga compound.

I found myself giving a dejected whimper as I followed my quietly cackling teammate. Even so, it didn’t stop me from taking in the sights. The Hyuga compound was a little different compared to the Uchiha district. Like the Uchiha, the Hyuga was a prestige clan in Konoha, obvious by the size of the compound. However, unlike the Uchiha, the Hyuga compound is completely walled off from the rest of the village. They like their privacy I suppose.

Though, the biggest difference, aside from the anti-social walls surrounding the compound, was the Zen garden scattered throughout the place. With how peaceful the whole place felt I swear I could pass out snoring in the halls without a second’s notice. Totally not meant to be an insult; there were very few people and places in this world that I could and would let my guard down completely to pass out dead to the world.

Snap, snap.

“Wake up!” said Tokuma as he snapped his fingers.

I blinked sleepily at the hand in front of my face before I glanced up with a dazed look on my face. Crap, did I fall asleep walking? Hizashi stood with his arms crossed and raised a brow. I resisted the urge to scratch the back of my head sheepishly. According to this Hyuga sensei, that’s not considered very lady-like and he made it a habit to thwack my head whenever I did so. Did I tell you how much I love my hitai-ate?

“Sleepwalking… that’s a first,” said Hizashi as he breathed out through his nose. “But since you weren’t snoring or drooling while doing so, I can’t complain too much.”

“I don’t drool or snore even when I sleep normally!” I puffed up my cheeks.
“Good, then we don’t have to train you while you sleep,” continued Hizashi.

“… Wait, you serious?” I said baffled. “If I’m a lousy sleeper, you would put me through sleep training?”

“Civilian geishas can sleep perfectly still without a hair out of place,” replied Hizashi.

“Good lord, they’re not human!” I blurted out before the man gave me a firm look.

“I’ll leave you to your training then,” said Tokuma as he hid his chortle behind a well-disguised cough before giving a polite bow. “Hizashi-sama.”

“Actually, you can help,” said Hizashi.

Tokuma paused with a questioning look.

“Your teammate will be learning a variation to the Hyuga style taijutsu,” noted Hizashi.

“… What?” said Tokuma in surprise. “But she’s not part of the clan. Isn’t it against the rules to…”

Damn it Tokuma! Stop ruining my chances in learning skills to save my ass!

Thinking quickly, I added, “Hizashi-sensei, if I can’t learn the Hyuga style, can Tokuma be my partner in—”

“NO!” said Hizashi almost violently. “That dance is now forbidden! You will learn the variation taijutsu and never speak of that dance again.”

“… Dance?” Tokuma glanced at me questionably, but a glare from Hizashi made him clam up immediately.

Personally, I don’t see why he’s so mortified by the fusion dance. Sure, it’s a bit silly and maybe useless since I have no clue whether or not fusion even works in this universe, but turning it into a forbidden dance is a bit extreme isn’t it?

Hmm… Unless there’s something I’m missing here? Maybe it’s a totally badass instant KO dance… that or it’s really that embarrassing that he doesn’t want me to soil the image of the village… Yeah, that’s probably it.

Surprisingly, learning the steps and the stances weren’t hard. I got it down within the first hour or so… the hard part… was to actually use it in combat. You would think it’d be easy for me considering I’m such a junkie when it comes to fighting games. Combat is nothing more than memorizing your moves and predicting your opponent’s moves. Then when they have an opening you combo-mash the crap out of the controller and beat them to the last HP on their health bar.

The fact that Tokuma was kicking my ass despite having chakra inhibitors in his body makes me sad, very sad. Of course, this was strictly a no-enhancement spar, which meant no chakra, no weapons and no fancy moves aside from the katas. Since he has the advantage of using the Hyuga style longer, it’s expected…but that doesn’t make me feel any better.

I’m seriously considering in switching my white mage class to red mage. Unless I could find someway to trigger heart attacks or cause strokes; I’m near useless as a fighter. I know, I know, medics aren’t supposed to be in the frontlines, but the longer I hang around this world, the more I’m itching for a fight. What the heck happened to my sense of self-preservation? Is it something in the
By the way, all this happened in the span of two weeks. Unbelievable, I know, but if you had Hizashi as a sensei, you’ll be terrified that it took you that long to get anything down. Remember what Tokuma said about Team Thirteen specializing in reconnaissance and infiltration? There’s a reason why that’s their specialty.

According to Hizashi, Team Thirteen was required to memorize his training routine along with various roles within the same day it’s taught and perfected before the end of that same week. It vaguely reminded me of drama class in high school with the amount of improv and acting exercises. Except there was more killer intent and an unspoken death threat if I failed to meet standards. I’ve lost count how many times I bit back the urge to scream like the little girl I currently am.

“Two weeks,” said Hizashi, mildly annoyed by my progress. “I supposed that should be enough for the upcoming mission.”

“…I can go on missions?” I lit up at the mention of something that’s not training. Heck, at this point I’ll do anything else just so I don’t have to go to kunoichi lessons again!

Personally, accomplishing as much as I did in two weeks was impressive in my opinion. Who the hell can memorize the damn katas to a new taijutsu style that quickly? Not to mention, my muscle memory was still wired to the Uchiha style. I can’t use the new taijutsu practically yet, but if he randomly shouts a kata, I could perform it perfectly… though, I supposed it’s near useless since I don’t have the byakugan. The only things I could do were redirect and defend.

“You haven’t improved as much as I wanted, but Team Thirteen is long overdue for another mission. Kurei hasn’t taken Team Four on a mission above D-ranked yet, has he?” asked Hizashi, even though I’m quite sure he already memorized the poor stats to Team Four.

“Mainly D-ranks.” I replied. “Kurei sensei said it’s hard enough keeping us alive on D-ranks.”

“…We’ll see how you fair,” said Hizashi as he pressed his fingers against the side of his temple.

“So… When do I meet the team?” I asked brightly as I swung my umbrella over my shoulders, holding it like a weight bar. The thought of finally breaking free from the damnable kunoichi—

“Not so fast,” said Hizashi, interrupting my cheerful thoughts. “As a part of your continuing training, you’re to upkeep the appearance of a proper lady for the duration of this mission.”

Say what now?

“The whole time?” I protested. “Can I at least speak with the team normally?”

“If that is an issue, hand in your hitai-ate and resign,” stated Hizashi coldly. “I am not Kurei. I’ve only indulged on your childish whims because Hokage-sama believed that you have a chance to improve on your mediocre skills given time and a proper mentoring.”

Any protest I had, died on my lips as the man continued.

“The life of a shinobi is privileged to the few,” said Hizashi. “It is dangerous and not an easy path to walk. That is another reason why the unspoken second exam was given to potential
genin. You are among the youngest to graduate and physically in every sense, you are a child, but that does not excuse you from the responsibility you’ve chosen for yourself.”

“Right…” I murmured quietly.

With how everyone treats me as a child, I nearly forgot what it was like to be an adult. When was the last time I had to worry about bills? Tesuri and Kushina footed most of the living essentials and I really didn’t need to chip in for anything. Sure, I had to pay for repairs when Santa nearly demolished my umbrella, but that can’t compare to supporting a family.

…Come to think of it… How come I haven’t thought about my family up to now? I’ll admit I’m a bit tunnel vision if you keep me busy enough… but it’s a bit odd that I haven’t thought about them at all. As great as Tesuri, Kushina and everyone else… they’re… not the same.

“You must take into account every action you make,” said Hizashi, breaking me out of my thoughts. “If you were on a mission undercover, what would happen if you were exposed in enemy territory? What would happen to your team? What repercussions will the village face because of this?”

“Nothing good…” I answered, even though it was a rhetorical question.

“I trust you can carry yourself in an appropriate manner?” droned Hizashi.

“Yes, sir.” I bit back the urge to sigh and composed myself properly pulling the umbrella off my shoulders and holding it front of me like a cane. I wiped away the look of annoyance and exasperation and replaced it with a stoic indifference.

Quite sure I look positively ridiculous trying to pull the look of indifference. Tesuri told me I looked constipated and Kushina said I looked adorable… Maybe I should ask a third party. They might be bias…

“Hokage-sama,” greeted Hizashi as we made our way into the mission office.

“Hizashi, Kasa,” returned Hiruzen with an aged smile. “I see you’ve made some progress with training.”

I gave a courteous curtsey and kept quiet as expected for any proper lady… or more likely, I usually screw up polite speech patterns the moment I open my big mouth. I could work on that later… maybe…

“Some,” repeated Hizashi in response to the old man’s praise. “But I do believe that the best training comes from the field experience rather than practice.”

The elderly man chuckled. “I see. And will your team be joining the mission today?”

“Of course,” said Hizashi. “I do believe they’re on their way, if they’re not already here.”

“Yo, Hizashi-sensei!” shouted an unfamiliar cheery voice.

The urge to grin at his greeting was torturous, but I must preserve! Tokuma might be right in that the team assignment office had a sense of humor. With how my new teammate said his greeting, no doubt Hizashi doesn’t approve. Biting my inner cheek to keep a straight face, I snuck a peek in my peripheral vision and spotted a vague mop of brown hair along with two others.
“Zaji,” said Hizashi warningly.

“Right, right! Sorry!” said Zaji, raising his hand to his head in a sheepish salute. “It’s been so long since we had a mission! So where’s our new temporary teammate?”

“She’s standing next to Hizashi sensei,” said another unfamiliar voice in a deadpan.

“...You’re kidding right Muta? You’re meaning to tell me that tiny little girl there is our new teammate?” said Zaji in disbelief. “I thought she was the client!”

A vein throbbed at the side of my temple. Oh, I’m not bothered by the tiny, short or little comments. Hell, those words never applied to me in my previous life. What I am annoyed with was the fact that I’m not intimidating whatsoever. I supposed it’s more to my benefit that people underestimate me, but my inner brute demands recognition. My hand tightened on the umbrella handle briefly before Hizashi cough interrupted my bubbling rage. It took me a moment to gather myself before I plastered the sweetest smile on my face.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance.” I said, turning to greet them with a polite bow.

“...Okay...” said Zaji skeptically before he turned to Hizashi. “Sensei, are you sure she can handle a mission?”

“Oh, don’t worry about little ole me.” I said with as much sugary venom I could muster behind my hand. “My harmless demeanor only makes it easier for me to slaughter you and your entire family in your sleep. Tee-hee.”

Dead silence.

Hizashi was probably going to kill me later for this break in character, but how could I resist? Glancing at my new teammates, I quickly noticed a trend that seemed to appear in nearly all genin teams in Konoha. I guess Konoha loves their idiot, stoic and fanatic combo. Say which one I am on Team Four and I will find you and end you.

Anyway, Team Thirteen had its stoic spot covered by an Aburame; at least I think he’s one. Leaving only the fanatic position, which meant only one particular Uchiha could fill. Personally, I think I prefer being in a team with him more so than with Itachi.

“...Pft,” sniggered Shisui as he tried to hide it behind his hand. “I’d sleep with my eyes open around her, if I were you, Zaji.”

The brunette glanced at me with uncertainty and I returned with an unwavering smile.

“I’m glad that you all get along so well,” said Hiruzen with a chuckle, it’s unclear whether he was joking or if he had an onset of senility.

“Hokage-sama, the mission, if you may?” interrupted Hizashi evenly. “I do believe the lot of them could get better acquainted later.”

...Somehow I got the feeling that we’re all going to pay for this dearly... very dearly.
So… bored…

An hour into the mission and I wished something would go wrong just so it wouldn’t be so boring! Team Thirteen’s C-Rank was to a businessman that believes his extremely hot wife is cheating on him, who wants to bet it’s his wallet she’s after and not his froggy good looks?

Anyway, our mission was to stalk his wife and find her boy-toy and where he lives. Simple enough… if it wasn’t so damn boring. Good lord, if I want to follow a woman around shopping, I would’ve become a sales associate. The woman should really get a different color for her wardrobe aside from pink. Seriously, pink dress, pink lipstick, pink shoes, pink everything. What I wouldn’t give to have this mission title into “A Study in Pink” at least that has murders. Oh, how I wish this was an assassination mission, anything to get away from this monotony.

“Dying?” asked Shisui evenly, his eyes glinting with mirth as he kept his face straight.

“As if Hizashi sensei would accept that excuse.” I replied airily, doing my best to maintain my posture and form.

A wry grin touched his lips. “Have you seen Itachi recently?” asked Shisui.

“Not since Fugaku-san passed my morning training to Hizashi sensei… he was quite adamant that I finish training with kunoichi training.” I resisted the urge to sigh.

“Looks like you made progress,” said Shisui in good humor as he bumped shoulders with me. “I would never think that our little Kasa could pull off being a lady.”

I broke my attention on our target and glanced briefly at him. “Am I supposed to take that as a compliment or an insult?”

“Had it been a couple of weeks ago, your fiery temper would’ve flared up, followed with a duck threat,” said Shisui with a soft theatrical sigh. “I’m going to miss that… Hmm, now that I think of it, how exactly were you going to turn us into ducks anyhow?”

“…Turning people into ducks requires an intricate process of completely unnecessary steps, with roller-skates, tar and lots and lots of duck feathers.” I answered.

“…That’s it?” said Shisui with a raised brow as if he’s disappointed. “From how you always talked about it, I thought there would be more.”

“That’s the child friendly version.” I added. “The other one would require me to knock you out, disable you from using chakra and taijutsu ever again and then sell you to a madam to shell you out to the highest bidder, which most likely will be creepy pedophiles that has a fondness for snakes and other kinky things.”

Shisui stared at me wordlessly.

“I’m still debating which one I should do.” I said pleasantly, biting back the urge to cackle at the look on his face.

“… Do I want to know what the heck you two are talking about?” crackled Zaji’s voice over the headset.
I paused, startled by his voice. “…Were our headsets on the whole time?”

“Nope, just yours,” replied Zaji. “…Should I worry that you might turn us into ducks anytime soon?”

“I don’t believe so,” crackled Muta’s voice as he joined in the conversation. “From what I’ve gathered, only those with the Uchiha name were given such threats.”

“Oh,” drew out Zaji in realization. “So it’s an Uchiha thing. I didn’t know you guys liked girls that’s—”

“Zaji, it will become your thing if you continue on that train of thought,” said Shisui warningly.

“He’s getting defensive,” said Muta. “I believe that is a sign of—”

“The mission,” interrupted Hizashi, exasperation tethering at the edge of his voice. “Or have you all forgotten about it?”

“Target sighted at twelve.” I answered to make sure Hizashi doesn’t kill me later with more training. I wonder if clashing conversations was another Konoha team dynamic because even the normally calm Shisui wasn’t immune to the squabbling.

“The guy looks old enough to be her father,” commented Zaji. “Is he really the guy we’re looking for?”

“It’s possible he’s just an acquaintance of sorts,” noted Muta. “Maybe a business partner of our client?”

 “…I don’t think so, something about them doesn’t seem right,” said Shisui.

“What do you mean?” asked Zaji.

“Just look at the way she smiles at him,” said Shisui as he pointed out the subtle interactions between the two. “That sort of smile isn’t one you give to someone you barely know. Not to mention the subtle way they brush their hands against one another. There’s something more here.”

“Hizashi sensei, should I confirm it?” I asked.

“Try not to screw up,” replied Hizashi, his voice distorted through the static.

Shisui glanced at me curiously. “What are you planning?”

“Just watch.” I said conspiringly with a grin before darting behind a building for cover. My hands went through a short run of seals as I charged up my chakra. “Transform!”

In a poof, I appeared as a frantic looking handmaid from our client’s household before dashing out towards the woman.

“Milady Rina!” I cried out daintily as I weaved through the crowd in an amateurish fashion. Good lord, someone punch me. I used the word dainty to describe myself. “Milady wait!”

The reaction was near immediate; the woman tensed and snapped her attention to me. The man on the other hand remained calm and made a smooth turn of his heel to walk off. If we weren’t watching them, it would have been a smooth escape for him. There’s definitely something
“What is it Sayuri?” asked the woman stiffly. With the way she carried herself, she was
doing her best to not allow her gaze to follow the man.

“Ryunosuke-sama will be having guests this evening, will you be joining him for
dinner?” I asked, faking the breathless heave from the run.

“You came all this way out here to ask me that question?” She stared at me in a deadpan.
“Of course I’ll be home! When am I not home? Are you stupid?”

“Sorry, milady!” I whimpered pathetically, refusing to break character. I probably
should’ve picked a better question, but too late now. Just stick with it! “But you left without a word
this morning so I thought—”

“You thought wrong!” snapped Rina in ire. “What do I have to do to get someone with a
brain around here? No! Not even a brain! Even half a brain would be better than an idiot like you!”

Wow… harsh much? I feel a little bad for the girl I’m impersonating. I wonder if I can
sue her for mental anguish? Would that even exist in this world? Hmm, scratch that, I don’t care.
What with this weird semi-feudal-ish world, I’m not about to waste time dissecting its laws and
ethics. Besides, I’m a freaking ninja! We work around the law anyway. I’ll make sure to leave
something nice for the woman before our mission is over.

“Why are you still standing here? Don’t we have guests coming? Go home and tend to
your duties!” snapped the woman.

“Y-yes milady!” I stuttered for good measure as I bowed repeatedly.

“Don’t just stand there! Get going!” snapped the woman again before I gave one last bow
and darted off in a frenzy, crashing into several people and apologizing as I went. Maybe I should’ve
picked a maid that was less clumsy… The poor thing is going to get a tongue lashing later.

“You couldn’t have thought of a better question?” crackled Shisui’s voice over the
hidden earpiece as I ran for cover.

“I confirmed it did I not?” I retorted under my breath as I hid myself and laced my fingers
together. “Kai!” The image of the distressed maid disappeared and I peeked out from my cover for a
better look at our target.

“I’ve got to say, lover-boy is slick,” said Zaji. “He slipped away pretty smooth for a
civilian.”

“The man is hardly a boy,” injected Muta.

“Do you need to take everything so literally?” grumbled Zaji.

“What’s our next objective?” I interrupted before another bout of team squabbling starts. I
swear they’re almost as bad as my team. “Do we report back to the client? Or do we continue to
observe and gather more information on the man?”

“What do you all think?” asked Hizashi, obviously testing our decision-making on the
field.

On the one hand, we know the face of the man we were paid to find. On the other,
client might or might not know who he is. Do we follow and gather more information, such as his name and locations where he could be found or do we report back to the client? In a C-Ranked mission, it would save a ton of time if we just went with the extra step and stalked the man, in case the client had no clue of the man’s identity.

However, had the mission been a higher rank and enemy shinobi were involve, the decisions would be made differently. Blindly stalking a target is not the wisest thing to do.

“I say we report back to the client and call it a day,” said Zaji. “We found the guy he wanted right? And we could just do a transformation for him to see his face.”

“What if the client has no clue who that is?” interrupted Muta. “I suggest we follow the suspect and gather as much information as we can on the off chance that the client requests a follow-up and further investigation.”

“But that’s not even a part of the mission objective!” complained Zaji.

“Would you rather waste time scouring the town looking for the man at a later time if we do end up getting a add-on in the mission?” retorted Muta.

“No,” grumbled Zaji.

“I don’t think Zaji’s completely wrong though,” commented Shisui.

“Your thoughts?” asked Hizashi.

“Technically, our mission is done and over the moment we found our client’s wife with that man and the extra legwork isn’t really necessary considering our mission parameters doesn’t include a thorough investigation. However, I do agree with Muta that there might be a possibility that we might have an add-on to the mission if the client is not pleased,” noted Shisui.

“And what do you propose we do?” continued Hizashi, his betraying none of his thoughts.

“We should follow the suspect and gather whatever information we could, at least until we can locate him again if necessary. If not, the amount of effort we wasted is minimal at best,” concluded Shisui.

“Kasa?” continued Hizashi, his voice betraying nothing. “Your thoughts?”

“Uh…” Shit, what do I say? “I think Shisui has a valid point, but…”

“But?” prompted Hizashi.

Crap… uh… m-make up something! Quick!

“There’s a miniscule chance that the suspect isn’t our target. I think we should split into two teams, one to investigate the suspect, preferably a team with better combative skills in case things go sour. The other team, one that is more familiar with our target, should continue surveillance on Rina-san.” I blurted.

Shit! Why did I suggest splitting the team? Nothing good ever happens when people split up! Or was that only in horror movies? Huh… when was the last time I saw a movie? Better yet, what was the last movie I saw?
“…Did you all get that?” said Hizashi as he finished whatever orders he was giving.

Damn it! Curse you, short attention span!

“Um… Can you repeat that? I didn’t pick that up.” I lied.

“…You dazed off again,” droned Hizashi.

“No I didn’t!” I protested.

Dead silence followed and it would have likely continued much longer if I weren’t already aware of the scathing glare accompanying the silence.

“…Yes…” I muttered under my breath. “I apologize for my lack of attention.”

“Do try to pay more attention in the future,” noted Hizashi. “We’re splitting into two teams as you suggested. The team following Rina will comprise of Shisui and Muta. You and Zaji will be with me following our suspect.”

“…Why am I on the pursuit team?” I asked warily, certain that my combative skills are subpar compared to my new teammates.

“It’s obvious due to the fact neither you or Zaji should be trusted to stalk a target without Hizashi sensei’s guidance,” droned Muta.

Ah, that makes more sense.

“Hey!” protested Zaji. “I am totally capable of handling myself! Hizashi sensei obviously put us on this team because he knows we kick ass.”

More like ass kicked. Personally, I’m not bother by this; at least I know if I screw up, Hizashi would be there to save my sorry ass.

What? I’m a freaking level one medic with barely any medical skills and crappy ass defense. I’d be glad I survive fighting sewer rats and ginormous bees! Though… knowing my luck, I’d be bested by a slime. A level one slime, now wouldn’t that be sad?

“Oh… Hizashi sensei, both targets are leaving.” I interrupted.

“You all know what your objective is,” started Hizashi. “If all goes well, we’ll rendezvous in an hour. You all know where.”

“Except Kasa,” inserted Shisui cheerily.

“I dearly hope you fall into a pit and drop into an endless abyss where you will perish.” I said with sugary venom.

Shisui chuckled. “I love you too.”

“Enough, Team Thirteen move out,” ordered Hizashi.

Once we split and followed our targets, it didn’t take long before Shisui and Muta left our communication range. As genin we were issued the standard radio with a hundred-meter radius, a range that’s hardly useful for anyone above a genin, but for a jounin sensei, it meant if shit happens they have more than enough time to get to their student, give the idiot in trouble didn’t get themselves killed.
“So, what would make a woman like a man that’s old enough to be her father?” asked Zaji curiously.

“Many reasons,” said Hizashi, but supplied no further information.

“That’s it?” said Zaji in disappointment when silence fell. “No wise words? No warnings about how all women are evil?”

“You do know it defeats the purpose of him warning you if you know already right?” I drawled over the static.

“Touché,” noted Zaji. “So, same question as before, why would a woman like a man that’s old enough to be her father?”

He’s a persistent one isn’t he? I’m surprised Hizashi sensei hasn’t killer-intent his ass to the grave yet…. Or has he done it already and this was the aftermath?

“Why are you asking me?” I returned the question.

“Duh, you’re a girl,” said Zaji. Even without seeing him I could tell he’s was rolling his eyes.

“And you’re a boy.” I agreed.

“Huh?” said Zaji, puzzled. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Exactly.” I said.

“Are you sure you’re eight?” asked Zaji.

“No, I’m actually in my thirties if you count the last eight years of this second life.” I replied truthfully, as if anyone is going to believe it.

“…Wait, serious?” asked Zaji, baffled. Well, maybe this one would…

“I’m under disguise in a transformation jutsu. I’m actually a four hundred-foot tall purple platypus bear with pink horns and silver wings… that sparkles when in direct sunlight.” I added as an after thought.

“Now you’re just yanking my chain,” grumbled Zaji. “As if anyone sparkles in the sunlight. You’ve got to show me your true form sometime thought okay? I’ve never seen a platypus bear before.”

I paused briefly. “Were you dropped on your head as a child?” I asked.

“Were you?” retorted the boy.

“Cease your bickering and keep your eyes on our suspect,” ordered Hizashi.

“Yes, sensei.” We chorused, but let it be known we will have another match!

Compared to the rest of the mission, bickering with Zaji was actually kind of fun. He’s not dull-witted as acts even though he technically is that idiot of the team. It was all an act, remember what I said about Hizashi assigning everyone a role on a weekly or bi-monthly basis? Zaji’s role for this particular week was a gullible country bumpkin. If I didn’t know about Hizashi’s training routine, I might actually think he was that daft. Though, the act wasn’t too far off from his true
personality. After all, Hizashi knows the limits of his students and we are only just genin.

I feel a little gypped that my assigned role was a proper lady. I could do it, I just don’t like

to.

Anyway, the rest of the mission was rather dull. Can’t expect much, considering in C-
Rank missions, the most danger was a possible bandit attack and while I’d like to say our suspect
was secretly some big-shot Yakuza boss and we totally stumbled into his lair and fought about a
hundred men each, that didn’t happen. Rina just had a taste for older men and he wasn’t the only
one. Shisui and Muta found several others while following her.

You should’ve seen the look on our client’s face when we showed him the faces of the
men we found. Who knew she was a serial adulterer? She’s really good at keeping it a secret too,
one of them knew about the other men. I wonder if we can recruit her and train her to be a
kunoichi? She has the whole subterfuge thing down.

Nah, she’d probably hate us for cutting off her cash cow and backstab us without us
knowing. She is a good actress after all.

Anyway, by the time I finished the third C-Ranked mission with Team Thirteen, the
chakra inhibitors were long out of Tokuma and Team Four was reinstated the week he formally
rejoined the active roster. As fun as it was with Team Thirteen—I’m using fun loosely, I hate
reconnaissance work—I missed the oddity of Team Four.

“TOKUMA!” I screamed as I tackled the Hyuga boy with a hug. “I missed you!”

“You saw me this morning for training!” He placed a hand on my face, trying to pry
himself from my crushing hug.

“But that was training with Hizashi sensei!” I whined.

“Get off!” grunted Tokuma as we got into a weird redirecting game. Where he would slip
out of my grasp, but I’ll dance into his path and latch on again before he manages to flee.

“Give it up Tokuma,” sighed Santa as he rolled his eyes. “She did the same thing to me
when she saw me five minutes ago.”

“Damn it, I should’ve never let Hizashi-sama teach you all those moves!” complained
Tokuma as I caught him again and hung off his back like a koala bear.

While I’m still not much for combat, most of the dances and moves Hizashi taught me
were good for evasive maneuvers as well as interception. The C-Ranked missions that followed the
initial mission with Rina all turned into interception missions when the targets fled and retaliated. Not
that I did much of the fighting. My role in those missions was to intercept and confuse or distress the
target. You’d be surprise how many grown men succumb to a lost child that’s close to tears.

Though, that’s only if they’re not heartless bastards. In cases like those, use the
surrounding crowd to your advantage. That’s right; mob mentality, make a crowd think the target is
bullying a helpless little girl and then sic them on him. It works wonders.

“Who would’ve thought a dead last like Kasa could find a way to cling onto you of all
people,” sniggered Santa as Tokuma finally gave up and I hung on his back like a limp doll.

“Everyone has his or her specialties,” interrupted Kurei before we snapped attention to
his voice.
“KUREI SENSEI!” I used Tokuma as a bouncing board as I pounced towards our jounin sensei. However, before I could latch onto the man, he grabbed me by the back of my kimono and hauled me up like a bad puppy.

“I’m glad to see you too, but I do believe Hizashi mentioned something about receiving updates on your performance every now and then,” commented Kurei.

My blood ran cold and likely my face paled if the amused look on the jounin’s face was any indication. “No! Don’t tell him about this! I’ll be good! I promise! If he hears about this, he’ll murder me!” I whimpered pathetically.

“Will I see you accosting your teammates again tomorrow?” asked Kurei.

“Noooo,” I wailed. Had I paid attention, I would’ve noticed the hint of amusement glinting in his normally stoic red eyes. Since I wasn’t, I wailed like no tomorrow. “I’ll be a good girl! Don’t make me take calligraphy lessons again! I’ll do anything! I’ll give you my first born!”

“… Is this Hizashi sensei that scary?” asked Santa as my offers became more and more ridiculous.

“His lessons aren’t that bad…she’s just really bad at it,” noted Tokuma.

“Sensei, while Kasa’s having her mental breakdown, what’s on the agenda today?” asked Santa, completely ignoring my babbling mess.

Of course, I didn’t notice one bit of the conversation going on, rambling like a lunatic will do that to you. Considering this was the first day back for Tokuma, we ended up doing mainly D-Ranked missions, something to ease him back into the groove or some nonsense of the sort. I expected it to take as much time as we’ve done before, but surprisingly we finished in half the time.

“Does it seem like it was much easier?” I asked once the mission debriefing was over and we handed in our completed mission scroll to the office.

“It better be easy,” grumbled Santa. “This is nothing compared to the six C-Ranks Shirakumo-sensei put me through.”

“Shirakumo-sensei?” I asked.

“Your other boyfriend’s sensei.” Tokuma raised a brow. “What kind of ninja are you? Shouldn’t you at least know that?”

“I’m not going to even retort to that.” I huffed and turned my attention back to Santa. “So, what sort of C-Ranks did you get? Hizashi-sensei only got us the reconnaissance related ones.”

“Escort missions,” said Santa in a deadpan. “In general, they’re not bad, but when Itachi steps in to fight, let me tell you, your boyfriend is a beast. It’s near impossible to keep up with his speed and Shirakumo-sensei will run you to the ground if you don’t pull your weight during missions. I’ve lost count how many punishment exercises I’ve been through.”

“I guess that explains part of it.” I murmured.

“You of course, we don’t need to ask if your psychotic meltdown earlier was any indication,” drawled Santa but glanced to Tokuma guiltily when he noticed our quiet teammate. “Sorry, we really shouldn’t be talking about C-Ranks, it’s my fault that you were indisposed for so long.”
“The time’s not wasted,” said Tokuma after a moment. “I’ve improved on my training despite the chakra restrictions. I just need some time to refine it… though…” a wry grin touched his lips. “It was quite amusing to pulverize the dead last every morning.”

“You did not pulverize me!” I huffed. “I was going easy on you.”

“Sure, in another reality maybe;” said Tokuma in good humor.

“Should I send you into another impromptu vacation again?” I grumbled.

“That was all Santa, you were just picking up his spoils,” snorted Tokuma.

“Oh yeah?” I puffed up my cheeks. “I’ve gotten better! I’ll totally beat you during our next training session!”

“I like to see you try,” continued Tokuma. “Without Santa, you’re not that hard to beat.”

“Do I need to break you two up again?” sighed Santa. “We just got back!”

He was promptly ignored as we continued bickering. Even Kurei-sensei didn’t bother with his personal input this time. Even though we were apart for weeks, our team still picked up exactly where we left off. No doubt giving the man a migraine or an ulcer.

Overall, my short time as a genin seemed peaceful and calm compared to the previous years of terror and panic. Though, unless someone turns inexplicably evil in the next week or two it’d be hard to match the terrors that plagued me the past three years in Konoha.

I wonder how long will this calmness last? I get the feeling that something was going to change soon. Something big. It was something I should worry about, yet for the life of me, I couldn’t make sense about this nagging feeling at the back of my mind.

What exactly?

“Sa-sa!” chirped Naruto’s cheery voice as I stepped through the door and shuffled off my shoes.

“Hey, Naru, did you miss me?” I said, patting his head as he clung onto my leg briefly before darting off to who knows where in the house in a giggle.

Ah, whatever it is, I’m sure it’s nothing too bad… I hope.
“…I can’t believe you’re this bad,” noted Kushina as she hovered over my latest attempt at
drawing seals. “Naruto’s finger-paintings look better than this.”

I scowled and glared at the mess of Rorschach blots I tried to call seals. “I told you, I couldn’t
do it.”

In my old life, I’ve gotten plenty of people telling me that I should become a doctor. Note,
that it has nothing to do with my intellectual prowess or my compassion toward others, which I must
add is near non-existent. It has everything to do with my chicken-scratch handwriting. Hell, it’s bad
to the point that sometimes I don’t even know what the hell I wrote. I was lucky that Hizashi showed
pity and let me off from calligraphy lessons when I managed to make my words legible.

“This might be a problem,” sighed Kushina as she ran her hand through her hair. “A seal user
that can’t make seals. You’re not going to be able to do much if you can’t even make a basic storage
seal. Not unless you can find a seal maker that matches your specialization.”

“Kaa-san told me as much when she tested me.” I grumbled, rubbing my hands over my face
in frustration. “Where am I going to find a seal maker?”

“I would offer to make seals for you, but it’s probably best you find a partner that’s
compatible, considering… well, you know,” apologized Kushina sheepishly.

Her hand briefly brushed over her stomach, hinting at the demonic chakra we carried, in case
Naruto was listening in. Had I not become a pseudo jinchuriki, Kushina could very well made all the
seals I would ever need. Unfortunately, due to the fact that she was formerly the Kyubi’s jinchuriki
and I have large amounts of Isobu’s chakra running through my system, our chakras didn’t mesh
well and when used in seals, they either worked poorly or not at all.

Thank god that’s all it did, can you image if it blew up? I’d be cursing the unfairness of the
Uzumaki curse. Making me a perfect seal user, but with absolutely no talent in making seals. Then,
when I find someone who could make me seals, my chakra is not compatible! What kind of bullshit
is this?

“What about the seals on my body? Can we experiment with that? They’re information seals
right? Maybe there’s something there I could use?” I suggested.

“Hmm…” pondered Kushina.

“You said I could try it as long as I have supervision right?” I pointed out.

“I much rather you didn’t until you’ve gotten more training,” noted Kushina with a finger to
her cheek.

“But it’s almost time for my evaluations!” I protested.

“They’re just evaluations, they’re not going to take away your ninja status if you don’t do
well,” sighed Kushina exasperatedly.

“Then how come Tokuma and Santa aren’t getting them? Hell, I don’t think Shisui or Itachi’s
teams are getting that either.” I protested.
“Well,” started Kushina uncomfortably, but she never bothered finishing her sentence.

“Still having trouble?” asked Tesuri as he poked his head in from the other room.

“Trouble!” shouted Naruto gleefully from his arms.

“This is hopeless!” I dropped my head onto the table loudly, not caring about the pain or the ink that was sure to smudge all over my face.

As you can already tell, evaluations were not part of the norm for genins, those were usually done for jounin and Anbu-leveled shinobi to assure that they would not meet an early death whether due to exhaustion or debilitating injuries. Continuing on this line of thought, I get the sinking feeling this evaluation has everything to do with whether or not I could take up the role of being Naruto’s keeper, on the off chance he decides to go absolute nuts and unleash the Kyubi on these poor bastards.

At this point, had I been Isobu’s actual container, I might just release the demon to spite them. Screw protecting Konoha, they’re going to push me to Madara and turn them all into good little puppets with the way things are going. Stupid Danzo and his shadow machinations, if on the off chance I turn evil, the first thing I’m doing after I become supreme overlord of the world is to off the conniving old man. Let’s see how he likes them apples!

“Kasa,” said Kushina as she knocked on the table lightly to catch my attention. “Did you hear a word I said?”

“No.” I sulked and wailed. “What’s the point? I can’t make any seals and it’s not likely I’ll find another seal master that would make them for me. I’m going to fail the evaluations!”

“Stop being dramatic,” chuckled Kushina. “There’s more than one way to make a seal.”

I rolled my head to glance at her. “What do you mean?”

She grinned brightly. “Are you interested?”

“You’re not pulling my leg are you?” I asked suspiciously.

“You can be the judge of that for yourself, do you want to try it or not?” asked Kushina, her grin never wavering.

“…I’ll bite.” I said after a moment. “How does this other method work exactly?”

“We’re going to need a bigger space to work with,” said Kushina before she glanced towards Tesuri. “What time do you have work?”

“I can watch Naruto for a couple of hours if you need,” offered Tesuri in amusement.

“Great! You can come along and be my guinea pig,” said Kushina cheerily.

“…Wait, what?” said Tesuri before he found himself pushed out of the door with Naruto in his arms.

It was a bit amusing to see Tesuri dumbfounded so easily by the energetic woman. Maybe he has a weakness against Uzumaki women? Or maybe just the Uzumaki blood in general. I swear Naruto has him wrapped around his little fingers with how Tesuri dotes on him. Hmm… I wonder if that’s why he joined Akatsuki in the first place.
Anyway, Kushina wanted to use Tesuri as a sparring partner as a means for demonstration. Of course, I had no clue that was what she planned until we were in the third training ground and Naruto was thrust into my arms, a safe distance away.

“Come at me,” said Kushina as she rolled her arms and cracked her knuckles in preparation.

“…Are you sure?” asked Tesuri. “You haven’t had a spar since Naruto was born.”

“Oh shut up and just do it. It’s not much of a demonstration if I don’t have someone attacking me. It’s a defensive sealing technique anyhow,” said Kushina with her hands at her hips. “Come on, we don’t have all day.”

Tesuri sighed through his nose as he slipped into his basic stance. “All right, all right,” said the man as Kushina raised her arms delicately as if she was going to dance.

The two had a brief stare off as if to size up one another before Tesuri took the first move. The blue-haired man charged, arms maneuvering in a manner that distracted the eyes from his true movements. Kushina in turn twirled and skipped around his attacks much like a fast-paced gypsy dance. Actually, now that I’ve a better look, she really is doing a gypsy dance.

“This isn’t much of a defense,” noted Tesuri as he casually threw in another attack, half-hearted at best. He wasn’t even bothering going beyond taijutsu in fear that he might hurt her. “I thought this was supposed to be a demonstration. You’re not going to demonstrate much if you’re going to dance the whole way.”

“Did your wife tolerate you being such a pansy when it came to sparring?” drawled Kushina. “Just attack me already.”

Tesuri raised a brow. “Are you trying to incite me, Uzumaki-san?”

“How many times do I have to tell you to call me by my name? For goodness sakes we’ve been living together for two years!” grumbled Kushina.

Why do I get the feeling that they’re flirting? I shook my head, damn overactive imagination. As I turned my attention back towards the fight, I noticed that Kushina hasn’t whipped out any pre-made seals or even unleashed any ninjutsu or genjutsu attacks. Just what does…? Oh… Oh!

“Uzumaki-san, I—”

“Tou-san! Beneath you!” I interrupted, but it was too late.

Kushina grinned gleefully as she slapped her hand to the ground. “Got you!”

Tesuri had but a moment to glance at his feet before the ground turned into sludge and plunged him, knee-deep into the liquefied ground. He would’ve went deeper I suspected, if not for the amount of chakra he was pulsating around him. I’m really jealous at the speed he could direct his chakra throughout his body. If I was in his position, no doubt I’d be neck-deep if not under.

A contemplative look crossed Tesuri’s face as he tried to make sense of the situation. There were no seals on the ground and judging by how he attacked, he made certain that she couldn’t draw any efficiently, if at all.

“Interesting, I expected you to draw seals with your feet, especially since you decided to fight while dancing,” noted Tesuri as he breathed out through his nose. “But you didn’t make any marks on the ground.”
Kushina snorted. “That would be obvious wouldn’t it? And considering Kasa-chan can’t even write her name legibly to save her life, what makes you think she can do it with her feet?”

“I’m within hearing distance!” I shouted.

“I hear you sweetie,” returned Kushina, but her attention remained on Tesuri. “I’m a bit out of practice with this method of seal combat, but I’m surprised at the speed you’ve counter it. If Kasa didn’t warn you, how deep would you have plunged?”

“Maybe waist deep,” replied Tesuri as he carefully pulled himself out by wiggling his leg and pushing down at the sludge with his chakra enhanced hands. “But in that situation, I might not be able to defend myself.”

“Oh, you’re just being modest,” grinned Kushina.

Good lord, they’re trading false pleasantries.

“Someone throw a punch already!” I grumbled under my breath. Naruto glanced up at me with a clueless expression and babbled incoherently. “You said it little buddy.”

For the life of me, I couldn’t make sense how Kushina managed to perform that earth-base attack without any seals in sight. If I didn’t feel something going off, I would’ve never known she was making one. There were no hand seals, no drawn seals, nada, zip, zilch. Seriously, I was on the same line of thought with Tesuri, completely expecting her to draw with her feet. How did she do it?

“Did you work it out yet?” grinned Kushina as she and Tesuri strolled over.

“You cheated.” I concluded after a moment. “There’s no way you could’ve done that without hand seals or premade seals.”

Thwack!

“Guess again,” said Kushina as she smacked me upside the head.

“Ow!” I complained, covering the back of my head, grumbling as I tried to think of another answer. “It has something to do with the dance?”

“And?” continued Kushina teasingly.

My frown deepened, but I couldn’t think of a single answer. However, Tesuri on the other hand does have some clue to how she did it. Though, I can’t make heads or tails of the hand signs he was trying to use to pass the message on.

“Awkward turtle?” I said in confusion before Tesuri sighed and raised a hand to pinch at the bridge of his nose.

Kushina gave Tesuri a hearty slap to the back. “You tried.”

“How do we normally perform ninjutsu or genjutsu?” said Tesuri in exasperation.

“Hand seals.” I replied bluntly. “What does that have to do with this? Kushina-san didn’t use hand seals.”

“No, but what did she use?” continued Tesuri patiently.

I frowned and glanced at Kushina again. Her smile never wavering as she rolled her wrist in
a delicate manner often used for exotic dances. I paused… You’ve got to be shitting me.

“The dance moves are seals?” I said in disbelief.

“Bingo!” said Kushina brightly. “Personally, it’s not a form of seals I like to use since it’s so elaborate and bothersome, but since you seem to pick up dances like fish to water, this is probably the best form of seals you can use.”

“…How is it different from using hand seals?” I frowned. “Wouldn’t hand seals work faster?”

“How fast can you seal with your hands?” asked Kushina.

“Uh… maybe ten to thirty seconds depending on what jutsu it is?” I said uncertainly.

“How fast can you molding your chakra while doing that?” continued Kushina.

I paused, pondering on the matter.

“All seals work the same, it’s just the matter of how fast you can activate one or the other and how much chakra you expend when doing so,” said Kushina as she went into lecture mode. “Pre-made seals give the advantage of not needing to mold and shape the chakra required to perform a jutsu. However, the issue that lies within it is that you need to know exactly how to channel chakra through such seals.”

I raised a brow at this and she grinned.

“You, of course, have no issue, you’re a natural at seal activation, but since you can’t make a seal to save your life,” I grimaced here. “You’ll have to rely on another means of creating mass destruction.”

“…Don’t you mean self-preservation?” interrupted Tesuri.

“Wasn’t that what I said?” asked Kushina with false innocence.

I found myself grinning as the fiery red-haired woman worked her way around Tesuri. The man really had no defense against her outside of battle.

“Anyway,” continued Kushina as she flicked her hair behind her. “Since you’re an enforcer type, the ninjutsu and genjutsu fields will never be your strong points unless you work in conjunction with another person. Your issue is in molding and manipulating chakra for specific purposes. You can, through hard work, overcome this, but…”

“But for the purpose of the evaluation, I’m not being tested on how well I work as support for others, am I?” I finished grimly.

An apologetic look crossed Kushina’s face. “Unfortunately, most evaluations judge you on how well you work alone and on your individual skillsets.”

I sighed dejectedly. “So, what’s the point in learning dance seals? It’s going to take just as long as doing hand seals. Maybe even longer.”

“And that’s where you’re wrong,” chirped Kushina. “Can you tell me what’s the difference between a dance seal and a hand seal?”

“…Aside from the fact that one uses the legs and the other uses the hands?” I answered in a
deadpan.

Thwack!

“Ow! Stop doing that!” I whined, holding my head.

“Take this seriously and I might,” huffed Kushina.

“Uzumaki-san didn’t only use her legs,” inserted Tesuri, giving me a break for a change and for that my head is utterly grateful.

“Geez, why don’t you tell her all the answers while you’re at it?” grumble Kushina, but let it go for the sake of the lesson. “With hand seals, choice amounts of chakra is gathered and manipulated through the hands before a jutsu is unleashed. However, with dance seals, there’s no need to concentrate chakra into a specific area considering the entirety of your body is used to make the seal.”

For those of you who are lost in all this seal mumble jumble, here is the layman’s explanation for how dance seals and hand seals work. Hand seals equals to putting a pen to paper, crafting the alphabet in calligraphy. Dance seals equals to dancing ballet to the YMCA song. Depending whether you’re artistically talented or physically talented, the results varies. In my case, physical conditioning and instinct are my strong points rather than calculations and planning.

“So…” I started slowly as I filtered and sorted out Kushina’s lecture. “If I master the dance seals, there’s a possibility that I might be able to fight on an even plane with others, rather than just stand as support?”

“That’s the idea,” agreed Kushina. “After all, you do have a big role to uphold.”

I tilt my head in confusion at her words.

“Did you forget your promise to be the best-est big sister to Naruto?” sighed Kushina. “How exactly are you going to watch over Naruto if you can’t even take care of yourself?”

“I can too take care of myself!” I huffed and hugged the little bundle of energy in my lap. “Dance seals? Ha, it shouldn’t take me that long to master them! Just you watch, I’ll be the best there is! Right Naruto?”

“Wight!” giggled Naruto in agreement.

As confident as I was in mastering the four elements—I mean dance seals, I only had two weeks before my evaluation, which meant I practically had no time to learn anything significantly badass.

“Hello, Kasa-kun,” greeted Hiruzen. “Are you ready for your evaluation?”

“…Can I reschedule to another time?” I asked lamely before Kurei jabbed me discretely with his elbow. “I mean, yes.”

Hiruzen chuckled. “No need to be so anxious. It’s only a merely a formality to check on your progress. It’s not detrimental to your career.”

Like hell this is merely a formality. Why the hell is Danzo sitting there if it’s merely a formality?
“Let’s see how much you’ve improved in the span of six months,” droned Danzo. “Personally, I believe she should be under a mentor and not a team.”

“I can assure you Danzo-sama that Kasa improved exponentially since her graduation,” offered Kurei.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” noted Danzo offhandedly.

Great…

“Shall we proceed with the evaluations?” asked Hiruzen pleasantly.

Not that I have much choice in the matter.

“What do I need to do?” I asked.

“I’ve arranged a sparring partner for you. You needn’t defeat him, but do try your best,” said Hiruzen in his grandfatherly tone. “Tenzo, you may come in.”

Tenzo? Now why does that name sound familiar?

“Hokage-sama,” greeted a young man at the door.

Curiously, I glanced through my peripheral vision as he made his way to Kurei’s other side. Brown hair, dark eyes, a hoppuri-styled hitai-ate, something that’s not common at all, basic weapon’s pouches on the hip and leg and a short sword strapped to his back… Hmm… I resisted the urge to scratch my head in wonder. Somehow I get the feeling I should know who he is, but the name Tenzo isn’t ringing a bell at all. Quite sure he’s not a major villain or else I would definitely remember… but…

“Kasa, this is Tenzo, he will be assisting with your evaluation,” noted Hiruzen.

“A pleasure to meet you,” greeted the young man pleasantly. “I look forward to our match.”

“The pleasure is mine.” I replied with a bow, Hizashi’s training kicked in while my brain was busy trying to figure out who he was.

“Well, at least she’s gained some manners,” commented Danzo offhandedly. “Let’s proceed with the evaluation.”

Tenzo gave a formal bow before flourishing a hand towards the door. “Shall we relocate to the training grounds?”

I gave a silent nod and followed with my superiors in tow. As we changed locations, my gaze stayed on him. Just why the hell was he so familiar? Argh, it’s times like these that I curse the paranoia that kept me from making notes. Is this guy significant in any manner?

“We’re here,” noted Tenzo as we came to a stop.

For the first time, I took a look at my surroundings and inwardly cursed at my short attention span. Which training ground was this? Hell, are we going to do a straight up fight or guerilla warfare? Can I even handle guerrilla warfare at this point and time? Quickly, I surveyed the area. Trees, trees and what do you know, more trees.

However, unlike the trees in the other training grounds or the civilian sectors of the village, these trees looked old. And by old, I meant ancient. Trees throughout the village and elsewhere
ranged from twenty to eighty years in age. Judging by the thick trunks here, these were likely here before the village was formed. The thick humid air made the place feel more like a jungle than a forest. The hell? Do we have a training ground like this?

“Training ground number forty-four,” noted Hiruzen wistfully. “It’s been quite some time since I’ve been here.”

My blood ran cold. Did he say forty-four? Why the hell are we doing my evaluation in a death trap like this place?

“Hokage-sama, isn’t training ground forty-four restricted for genin?” I asked, doing my best not to squeak as I queried.

“Normally,” agreed Hiruzen. “However, we would like to see how well you perform in less savory conditions. Every mission you had thus far was either low D-ranked missions or reconnaissance-based C-ranked missions. Neither required much combat according to the mission reports. For the evaluation, we’ll use this as a chance to test your combative abilities among other things.”

By other things, I think he meant survivability. Good lord, I’m going to have to contend with this Tenzo guy while trying to survive this death trap? I am so going to die. I know this village is known to produce child prodigies that can handle this shit, but I’m no prodigy! I’d be lucky if I don’t trip and fall to my doom within the first ten minutes being here.

“Make sure you pay attention to your surroundings,” suggested Kurei as he left me with some last minute tips.

Quite sure if Hizashi didn’t put me through his training regime, I’d be quaking with my knees knocking.

“Please advise me.” I said with a solid bow before tugging my umbrella into combat position.

“Likewise,” said Tenzo as he shifted into a fighting stance.

“Time limit is sundown. Your objective is to either incapacitate or capture your opponent. No restrictions,” said Hiruzen.

Danzo raised a brow at this. “No restrictions?”

“I trust their capable judgment,” said Hiruzen with a bright grin. “At the ready! Begin!”

Immediately, I launched a handful of senbons before my opponent can retaliate. As he moved to dodge, I knocked my umbrella onto my shoulder and quickly went through the hand seals for the Hidden Mist Jutsu and released a dense cloud of mist into the immediate area using the water from the humidity.

“Hiding already?” commented Tenzo.

I didn’t respond as I made note the general location where his voice came from. I know already I can’t beat him in an outright match. If I want any chance at all, I would have to rely on hit-and-run tactics or traps. If my arsenal of skills was listed in a convenient battle menu, you would immediately notice the majority of those skills were meant for hiding and fleeing and have no place on the battlefield.

Sure, my list of iryo-ninjutsu has grown impressively since I’ve gotten training from both Rin
and Tesuri, but I seldom get to use it considering the missions I go on rarely calls for a medic. Actually, it’d be sad if they actually needed me to heal them on those missions.


I bit back a yelp as a torrent of water crashed through the mist, nearly plowing me into the closest tree. The mist dispersed some as I stared wide-eyed at the older boy. You’ve got to be shitting me. He can do elemental attacks? How is this even fair?

“That was short-lived,” commented Tenzo in good humor.

Damn it! I inwardly cursed as I moved my hands again to reestablish the Hidden Mist Jutsu. All right, no more distractions this time! No thinking, just acting! I know that’s a bad plan, but any plan I make will go down south the instant I’m done thinking it through.

Using the temporary coverage the mist offered I delved into training ground forty-four’s forest. Hardly the safest place to hide in my case, but since I’m running on instinct rather than common sense, you’ll have to excuse this poor decision. Step-by-step, jump-by-jump, I danced and dodged Tenzo’s barrage of water-based attacks, hoping I could outlast his chakra supply.

“Shit, shit, shit! Why don’t I have any long range attacks?” I found myself bemoaning as I danced out of the way of another torrent of water, using my umbrella as a shield to deflect whatever I couldn’t dodge.

Had I been on the standard ninja shoes, I would’ve been fucked three times over. Unlike the typical trees surrounding Konoha, the trees within training ground forty-four has an abundance of chakra surging through them, which meant sticking to them made it harder than usual and—SHIT! Curse you short attention span!

“This just isn’t fair.” I came to a screeching halt, finding myself in front of a ginormous spider web with Tenzo following close behind.

“End of the line,” noted Tenzo when he caught up.

Damn it, I just needed a little more time!

“How much chakra would you say you have left?” I asked, wheezing and heaving as I planted my umbrella on the ground as a makeshift cane.

“You do know it’s easier for you to surrender at this point right?” pointed out the older boy.

“At least half right?” I ignored his advice and gave a wild guess. Tenzo’s grin told me that I wasn’t even close. “Good enough I suppose. I would’ve liked it if you had less than that though.”

“Good enough?” repeated Tenzo in puzzlement before I clapped my hands together and summoned whatever chakra I could for the upcoming fist fight.

In that same instance, I dropped into the Hyuga’s Gentle Fist stance before charging at Tenzo with great fervor. One issue with using the Gentle Fist style was that only a Hyuga could ever pull it off efficiently with the help of their byakugan. Consider I neither have the eyes or the necessary accuracy; I’m going to butcher the style to something more useable for me.

One thrust and another, I tried to strike at the general vicinity of the tenketsu points I was familiar with. Tenzo recovered from his bout of confusion and defended himself by dodging and redirecting my attacks. Unfortunately for him, he was in for a shock, all puns intended, as the chakra
wasn’t limited to my hands.

“YAH!” Tenzo yelped as his hand instinctively clamped down harder on my arm from the electric charge from my chakra.

“Lightning Release: Defibrillation.” I supplied, relieved that it worked at all.

Technically, this jutsu is near useless in combat, considering it does little to no damage to whomever it’s used on. The actual application for this jutsu is actually used in emergencies to restart the heart, hence the name defibrillation. Unless I could land the jutsu directly on someone’s heart, the most they’ll get was a nasty shock that’ll stun them for a minute or so. However, for the purpose of this match, I needn’t kick his ass, I just need to restrain and capture. I can’t believe it, victory is mine! I actually—

CRACK!

“W-Wood Style: Smothering Binding Jutsu!” stuttered Tenzo through the shock before his arm turned into a tree with branches rapidly growing into wood-like vines.

“You’ve got to be kidding!” I said in disbelief as I moved to perform seals for the replacement jutsu, but unfortunately, Tenzo still had a firm grip on my arm, preventing me from escaping.

“S-sorry, but not this time,” said Tenzo with a weak grin as I saw the barrage of wooden vines coming at me like a tentacle monster.

“Oh no, you don’t!” I snarled, sick of always having the odds against me.

There was still enough chakra in my free hand for another defibrillation. I was ready to slam it into Tenzo’s chest when suddenly he shoved me aside instead. Not expecting the sudden change in attack, I barely had enough time to catch myself and jump to another branch before I fell off.

“What’s the big—” I started when I regained my footing, but stopped abruptly when I realized why Tenzo shoved me out of the way in the manner he did. Apparently, our scuffle attracted unwanted attention from the owner of the ginormous spider web I nearly ran into moments earlier and it wanted a piece of the action.

“I call hacks!” I snapped before hastily raising my umbrella to block of a particularly nasty spray of web from the spider, but the spray didn’t seem to let up as I quickly noticed my legs were encased in the sticky substance as well.

By the time the spider was done, my umbrella was at least ten pounds heavier and I was glued to the spot, quite literally. Lowering my weapon, I resigned with an exasperated sigh as I stared at the terrifyingly enormous, black beady eyes.

“FML.” I grunted as it screeched and came at me.
Breaking Point

As the screeching spider came at me, I quickly closed my web-covered umbrella and smashed it into the spider’s mouth in an attempt to keep it at bay. Downside, it held only for a moment, as it was impossible for my childlike body and noodle-like arms to hold up more than my own weight. Upside, it gave me enough time to pull out four senbons and charge the suckers up with enough chakra to sharpen and pierce through the hairy bastard’s eyes like jelly.

The spider screeched, toppling off the branch and squirming in agony as it plunged to the ground below.

“Ha! Try to eat me will you?” I yelled with a shaky voice before I found myself flailing from my unbalanced footing, legs still encased in spider webs.

With a firm stab of my umbrella to the branch beneath me, I used it as a crutch while charging an incomplete version of the chakra scalpel to cut away the sticky substance. No time for complete precision, not without knowing where the hell Tenzo was or what he was planning. The plan was to get free, get out and get moving.

Uh… that’s about as far as my plans go… Hey, I’m improv-ing here. You try to come up with something after being thrown into freaking training ground forty-four without so much a heads up. Cut me some slack, I’m not a Nara. Though, I should probably have done something about the webbing on my umbrella, it’s getting a bit heavy.


I barely had enough time to whip my umbrella open before the torrent came down at me. With the pressure coming down from above, keeping my grip on the umbrella was becoming an issue. What’s even more pressing was the fast approaching ground beneath me.

Shit! What are my options? Let go of my umbrella and possibly drown as the torrent washes me to who knows where or keep hold of the umbrella and hit the ground, breaking my legs and becoming a bloody smear on the ground… and maybe drown after that too.

Hmm… if I’m going to drown either way, let’s go without the pain! Taking a deep breath, I snapped my umbrella shut and was immediately caught in the torrent and tumbled about as if I was in the rinse cycle. Second thought, maybe becoming a bloody smear wasn’t that bad. Puffing up my cheeks and biting down on my inner lips, I tried my best to keep from breathing, but eventually failed when the torrent hit the ground and the air was knocked out of my lungs.

Desperate, I forced my hands together for another useless jutsu before I found myself settled and breathing again. The world was still spinning when I spotted Tenzo coming out from hiding with a confused frown.

“Odd… where did she go?” murmured the brunette as he surveyed the area.

I hastily covered my mouth as a sudden wave of nausea hit me. Good god, don’t puke don’t puke! It’s one thing to give away my position, but it’s another to give away my position while sitting in my own vomit. I am not a fan of Hiding In Water Jutsu, considering you’re practically a sitting duck if the enemy can sense you. Oh the irony, I’m a sitting duck. Ha!

While Tenzo surveyed the area in hopes of finding my sorry ass, I took the time to mull over my thoughts and gather my bearings. We met for the evaluation at high noon since Hiruzen was
needed in the mission office earlier in the morning to give out assignments and missions to the various shinobi in Konoha. Traveling to the training ground took maybe fifteen to twenty minutes at most and it took maybe another five minutes for Hiruzen to set down the rules of the game.

Tenzo and I have probably been going at it for at least half an hour if not more. Unless the torrent knocked me silly, it’s probably one or two by now and it’ll be another three hours before sundown… Not that any of that matters considering I have no way to defeat Tenzo or capture him. I swear this evaluation is rigged! How the hell am I supposed to beat him with his large repertoire of elemental and ranged attacks?

We’re not even on the same class level! The best I could hope for was to hide and flee. No way is this guy a genin. Hell, I don’t think he’s a chunin, not with how he throws around elemental attacks. How old is he? Fourteen? Fifteen? Damn prodigies.

What was that Tesuri said about mastering elemental affinities? Something about how it’s required depending on your rank? Oh who cares, this guy can use water like no one’s business and wood as if it’s an extension of his own body. Was wood even considered elemental? Or was it just called nature affinity? Ah screw it, who does this guy think he is? Gary Stu? Throwing around badass wood style attacks like Yama—

…Oh.

Now, don’t I feel stupid, no wonder I didn’t stand a chance. Isn’t Yamato in ANBU or something at this age? Though, I suppose I did go for quite sometime without meeting someone from the main cast or relating to the main cast… but then again… why the hell am I matched up with a freaking ANBU? They’re setting me up to fail!

…

It all makes sense now… Why else would I be stuck with a team that specializes in nothing, a sensei that specializes in weapons and everything that has nothing to do with my skillset and another sensei that emphasizes on the useless mannerisms befitting a kunoichi? If I didn’t supplement with Kushina and Tesuri’s lessons I would be even more abysmal than I already am.

I gritted my teeth.

Exiled for two years. Used as a Trojan horse in hopes I’d blow up in Hanzo’s face. These bastards tossed me around like a worthless tool! I’m nothing more than a fool, used in their game of politics! It wasn’t that Danzo was being careless; it was because I’m a worthless, disposable tool.

There’s absolutely no value in destroying me or obtaining me. I’m useless in taijutsu, useless in ninjutsu, useless in genjutsu and even though I’m good in seals, I can’t do shit since I don’t have a seal master to make seals for me. If I was a jinchuriki it would make some sense, but I’m not even a real one!

And as if adding kindling to a growing fire, my body burned with each passing thought. The more I thought about it, the more infuriated I became. I almost didn’t notice the wooden spike that nearly skewered me as it plunged into my puddle.

“What are you doing?” said Tenzo, his voice barely audible over the blood pounding and pulsing in my ears.

No, not now! I was doing so well! Cursing, I pressed a hand to my head, struggling to focus and settle the raging energy. Settle damn it! SETTLE! I didn’t train for two years for nothing! I
curled up into fetal position hissing and growling as I forced down the chakra.

“Stay back!” I growled, smashing my palm into my head over and over again.

“You do know, if you shout like that while hiding, no one would even need a sensor to find you,” droned Tenzo.

Ignore him! Get it under control! I can’t— My hold on Hiding In Water Jutsu broke and I was spat out from my puddle. I screamed as every inch of my body burned with the invasive chakra.

“What on earth?” Tenzo’s eyes widened as the demonic chakra flooded from my pores.

“This chakra…”

As the pain grew, my senses slowly dulled. I could barely hear or see anything, but I could still feel. I could feel the demonic chakra coursing through my veins. I could feel the muddy ground beneath my puddle. However, it was a restrictive and slow tightening feeling on my body that made me focus through the haze of pain. Cloth? No—bandages.

“Enough… Never…” The words were broken as if part of a long speech I couldn’t hear, but I recognized the raspy aged voice.

Him again. I gritted my teeth as the bandages pulled my focus back into the world. If only I had Isobu, then I would teach him the true meaning of fear! Only… there was no way he would possibly be terrified. This was Danzo, given the chance, he’d sooner enslave a demon to serve him rather than cower in fear. If the old bastard ever hides, it’s to stab some poor soul in the back.

“Hokage-sama, look at her now. Uncontrollable,” said Danzo. “She shouldn’t have been allowed on a normal genin team.”

Allow? ALLOW? Even now, they’re still keeping up this bullshit? That’s it! I’ve had enough. You want uncontrollable you bastard? You’ve got uncontrollable!

With a scream, I released my hold on the chakra and let it flood out of my system in three-fold. Immediately, the bandages wrapped around my person burned to a crisp. Those from Danzo and those wrapped around my sealed arms. You want to play you old bastard? We’re going to play!

Using what little chakra I had control over, I charged it to my hands and slapped them to my arms. If I’m going to get screwed over, it’ll be from my stupidity and my own hands. I’m tired of being fate’s bitch. This time, I’m taking charge!

Unlike the previous times when I activated the seals, I wasn’t aiming to save anyone. I wasn’t aiming to help anyone. I just wanted to make someone pay. I want them to suffer as much as I have!

As my mind sorted through the deluge of information flooding in, I found myself cackling at the hilarity of it all. All these badass seals I could ever use, all the wanton destruction and death I could cause… and I can’t do a single one of them! All because I can’t make a seal!

For the first time, I didn’t need anyone to detach me from the seals. My hands slipped from my arms, one to hold onto my side as I laughed uncontrollably and the other to cover my face, trying to hide the miserable expression that I’m not doubt making.

“This is just cruel.” I pressed my hands over my eyes as I continued to laugh. “Showing me all this and I can’t use it? How is that even fair?”

With pain still searing through my body, I reached for the twine of seals around my neck and
pressed my fingers onto the center seal. The demonic chakra licked at the disk before slowly the outer casing melted away and showed the carved seal hidden beneath.

“But I suppose, I’ll use what I do have.” I reigned in my laughter until it became sporadic giggles. “Sealing Technique: Amplification!”

As the seal activated, I could feel a tug as it ate away at the demonic chakra, converting it as it went. Despite my natural proficiency with seals, I couldn’t activate this seal because of the protective casing around it. The reason for such precaution was due to the seal’s nature to eat away at the user’s chakra the moment it’s activated. Had it been out in the open before all the chakra control and sealing lessons, I would’ve unknowingly activated it by accident and died of chakra exhaustion. Either because I couldn’t cancel the seal or I couldn’t keep myself from constantly activating it by accident.

The amplification seal boosts the power of the jutsus used in conjunction by two ranks, but in exchange it eats away at the user’s chakra every second it’s active. However, with the amount of demonic chakra currently dripping from my pores right now that hardly posed a problem.

“Uncontrollable you called me?” I said sweetly, pulling my hand away from my face as I crawled to my feet like a zombie. “Shall I show you how uncontrollable I am?”

“She’s gone mad,” droned Danzo as he brushed away the remains of his charred bandages.

“Oh, I’m mad alright.” I said lowly as I raised my muddy hands to hastily weave them into seals. “Mad that I don’t have anything remotely dangerous to eviscerate you and hang you by gastrointestinal tract!” I screamed. “Hidden Mist Jutsu!”

Immediately, the puddles in the surrounding area vaporized and shrouded everything thick humid fog enough to suffocate the common man. It would hardly affect a ninja, but that wasn’t what I was aiming for.

“You think using the same tactics would help you any?” drawled Danzo. “It didn’t work before, what makes you think it will work now?”

My hands went through another set of seals. “The mist isn’t for hiding and fleeing!”

“What?” said Danzo.

“It’s to soak you fuckers for this!” I snarled out, overcharging the jutsu as it tore through, using the mist to amplify the attack. “Lightning Release: Defibrillation.”

As I mentioned before, this jutsu wasn’t meant for combat, as it does little to no damage to the target. However, when using it in conjunction with an amplifying seal, I’m willing to bet, it’s going to hurt like a bitch.

“Water Release: Tearing Torrent!” shouted Yamato as all the moisture in the air was drawn to his hand into a swirling mass of water.

How is he still moving? The amplifier seal should’ve boosted it to a C or B-ranked powered jutsu. Wait—no, he was affected. I could see him struggling to keep his hand still as it spasm from the current.

“Why are you interrupting me?” I snapped, reaching for my wire-strings and clapped my hands together to reinforce them with chakra. “My business is with the old bastard!” Looping the ends between the fingers on my right hand, I pulled out four wire-strings at an arm’s length each and
weaved the fingers on my left hand into the other end.

“You think, you can defeat me?” said Danzo with amusement, but I could see the slight twitch in his hand caused by the spasms from the lightning release attack.

“I apologize Danzo-dono,” said Tenzo as he took a step in front of him. “But I believe her opponent is me.”

Another wave of water attacks came at me and the ground became a muddy and slippery nightmare. Sliding with every step, I twist and turn my body to dance through the narrow area between his water onslaughts. Had I paid the least bit attention I would be cheering at every close miss I had, but since I only had anger and vengeance on my mind, the only thought was to get through these annoying attacks and strangle him with my chakra-enhanced wire-strings.

“Get out of my way!” I growled, whipping the thin wires around him as I slipped under another wave of water.

“Can’t do that,” said Tenzo as he hastily raised one arm up to the front of his neck and the other behind. “Wood Release: Three-Folded Shield!”

Branches formed around his arms, spiraling into Celtic knot-looking shields just as I pulled. The wires only managed to cut halfway through before stopping dead in its tracks.

“I am so sick of this!” I growled, tugging the wires against his shield as he pushed back. My skin burned and prickled at the demonic chakra covering me.

“What are you talking about?” Confusion crossed Tenzo’s face.

“As if you would know!” I growled fighting to hold onto the wires, but eventually switched over to the Uchiha-style taijutsu when he overpowered my grip.

“Know what?” asked Tenzo as he maneuvered the shields on his arms to block my attacks.

“About getting turned into a pseudo-jinchuriki.” I took a step back and charged. “About getting kicked out of the village like a dog.”

Tenzo blocked my roundhouse kick.

“Dangled in front of a monster like Hanzo. Used as a ticking time bomb in hopes I do some damage to the bastard!” I skipped back switching to the Gentle Fist and charged my hands with chakra. “Treated like a traitor despite having done nothing wrong! All I wanted to do was stay in Konoha with Kushina-san, Naruto and everyone! I’m sick of all this bullshit I keep getting into!”

Right jab, northeast tenketsu, left jab, southwest tenketsu, open palm thrust, center chakra circulatory system.

Block, block, block, Tenzo wasted no time shielding himself from all my attacks.

“Sick of being useless in ninjutsu, useless in genjutsu, useless in taijutsu! SICK OF BEING A USELESS SACK OF SHIT!” I kicked up my umbrella from behind, catching it in my hand before I swung it forward like a bokken, whacking it against Tenzo’s ever moving shields.

I thrust the umbrella forward before Tenzo pulled out his short sword, still sheathed to block and parried.
“You know how I cope with this? By pretending I’m okay with my fucking failures and joke that it’s just bad luck and I’m not meant for this!” I huffed and heaved, breathless as I tried to block Tenzo’s parries. It didn’t take long before my umbrella was knocked out of my hands.

The quiet brunette lowered his sword without a word.

“I train, I study! I do whatever the hell I could whenever I could, but it amounts to nothing!” I kicked at my umbrella furiously. “I’m barely passable as genin support! Genin support! Do you know what that means?”

Again, he said nothing.

“I’m not just dead last! I’m a dead weight!” I roared. “I can’t fight. I can’t make seals. The seals I do have are near useless because I have no means to use it to its fullest extent! And worst of all, I sound like a fucking bratty teenager that’s bitching about how the world’s unfair!”

“Kasa, that’s enough. Calm down,” said Kurei as he stepped in.

“No!” I snapped. “You know it too! Why else would you give me so much grief all the time? What use is a seal user if they can’t even make seals?”

“Kasa-kun, you need to calm down,” said Hiruzen as he stepped into view.

“Why should I?” I growled.

“You’re forming a tail,” said Hiruzen calmly. “If you continue on your tirade you’ll lose yourself to the demonic chakra.”

“Excellent! Why not dump me at the closest enemy camp? I’ll just blow up on them while I’m there!” I snapped cynically. “Just like what the hell you wanted when you exiled me the first time right?”

“Kasa,” said Kurei warningly.

“No, I insist.” I hissed. “Throw me somewhere so I could wreak havoc on every unfortunate soul that crosses me. I’ll do a good job. No wait! I won’t! Because I’m a useless traitor!”

“Tenzo, I’ve seen quite enough. Please end this,” said Hiruzen.

“Yes sir,” said Tenzo obediently as he quickly went through a set of hand seals.

“Let’s see you try!” I growled, pulsing chakra into one of the wing seals. “Sealing Technique: Barrier Wing!”

“Wood Release: Foo Dog Heads,” said Tenzo as he slammed his hands on the ground.

Pillars of foo dog heads shot up from the ground with burning wickers on their heads just as translucent wings sprouted from the seal and wrapped around me protectively. I dashed towards my fallen umbrella as the foo dogs came to life and charged at me. Grabbing the umbrella, I reinforced it with demonic chakra before hastily carving seals on the ground.

“You already showed your hand when you said you can’t make seals,” shouted Tenzo from where he stood. “There’s no point in bluffing.”

“Who said I’m bluffing?” I snapped back with a violent last stroke before the foo dogs pinned me to the ground.
“Then why bother wasting your time drawing a seal that won’t work?” asked Tenzo as the foo dogs gnawed at my Barrier Wing, trying to get to the demonic chakra.

“I said I can’t make seals.” I growled, struggling against the weight of the foo dogs on top of me as I reached for my sloppy carvings on the ground. “But I never said I can’t blow it up!”

Tenzo’s eyes widen as he hastily formed hand seals.

“EAT THIS!” I snarled as I sent a large burst of chakra into the ground.

The ground crackled as the seal tried to activate, but moments later a bright light enveloped the area, blinding me as it went. Tenzo shouted something in the distance before the silence took over and I knew of nothing else that happened in the forest.

“…Maybe we should get her a permanent room.” Tesuri’s soft grumbling greeted me the moment I woke. “She seems to end up in the hospital sooner or later.”

“Maybe… Kasa-chan is a bit accident prone,” agreed Rin.

Exhausted, I tiredly cracked my eyes open, blinking slowly as the hospital ceiling came into focus… Why am I in the hospital? Shouldn’t I be dead? Or at least imprisoned somewhere with a ton of restraining seals?

…Or am I already sealed up? Twitching my fingers, I tested out how much movement I could make, but screamed at the burning pain scorching through my every nerve ending. Good god, why does everything hurt?

“Tesuri-san! She’s awake!” shouted Rin as she rushed to my side.

“Hurry up and put her back under!” ordered Tesuri.

“W-what?” I struggled to talk through the pain.

“Sorry Kasa-chan, but you have to go back under!” said Rin before the world turned dark again.

I wasn’t sure how long I was out, but I’m quite sure I was in and out of consciousness quite a few times as I heard snippets of conversations from Tesuri and Rin. None that I could make sense of, but that hardly matters when pain dominates my senses each time I had any semblance of awareness to the world. When I finally woke up to a moment where the pain didn’t immediately hurl me into a screaming mess, I was thoroughly exhausted.

“Is this my punishment?” I groaned as I tried to push myself up, but with each move I made, the skin tugged painfully against the bandages. “Oh, someone just kill me already.” I plopped back down, grimacing as my skin burned.

“Not even a minute awake and you’re wishing for death?” Hiruzen’s voice drew my eyes towards him, but I didn’t bother moving my head. Everything hurts.

“Are you here to end my misery?” I asked hopefully.

“Has your anger subsided?” asked Hiruzen.

“If I say yes, will the pain go away?” I asked miserably. “I’ll promise never to go crazy again if it stops hurting.”
A soft chuckle escaped Hiruzen. “Unfortunately, it’s not possibly to haggle with injuries. Though, I must say it would be useful if you could.”

“Figures.” I sighed, glancing up at the ceiling. “Since I’m still here, I’m guessing execution isn’t on the punishment list. We did exile last time, but that’s out since it did nothing to stop that can of worms. Are we doing torture this time? Just letting you know, I scream like a little girl. I’m already crying with these injuries. It’s not going to be much fun for T&I, they’ll be done with me in five minutes or less.”

A sad expression crossed Hiruzen’s face as he softly sighed through his nose. “We’ve done you a great wrong.”

“Hmm? Really? You did something wrong?” I said, surprising the man. “It’s wrong to care for your village? Protecting it from the dangers whether it’s inside or outside of the village? Doing what you need to do to make sure the people living in it are happy and prosperous?”

“Kasa-kun,” started Hiruzen and I shook my head despite the searing pain. “You don’t need to explain Hokage-sama.” I grinned sheepishly. “I kind of had it coming with how I kept treating this life like a game. Always pushing off my failure as a joke, blaming it on bad luck instead of doing something about it. I should’ve known that my recklessness would come back and bite me in the ass…Though, I kind of wish it didn’t do it with third degree burns.”

A chuckle escaped my lips, but it didn’t last long as pain followed, forcing a hiss out instead. I pressed my head back into the pillow, clenching my eyes close, trying to will away the pain.

“Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen softly.

My eyes opened to his sadden aged face. Somehow, he looked so exhausted and frail.

“Nothing I could say can make up for what you’ve gone through all this time. I’m very regretful that you felt unwelcomed in the village for as long as you have,” said the man.

“Does it really matter?” I mused offhandedly, staring at the ceiling again. It’s straining to keep glancing at the corner of my eye to watch his expressions. “I’m an outsider after all. What I feel doesn’t matter as long as Konoha—”

“You are a shinobi of Konoha,” said Hiruzen firmly, startling me in mid-sentence. “As much as I like to say every shinobi is loyal to their birth village that would be a lie. Loyalty to the village sounds grandeur, but people as individuals, we’re not loyal to any single village.”

“…Are you sure?” I asked skeptically. “Isn’t it the kage’s job to be utterly loyal to the village? Doesn’t saying that makes you mutinous? Huh… can the council charge you with crime of being a traitor in that case? Wait… but how would that even work? Is there such a thing as impeachment here?”

Hiruzen let out a hearty laugh. “You really are something, Kasa-kun. How do you keep up such spirits despite what happened?”

“How?” I pondered over the question, but promptly gave up as my brain went up in smoke. “…Meh, I’m tired. It’s too exhausting to think of a reason and even more exhausting to stay angry. Besides, staying angry all the time only stresses the body. I’ve already killed enough brain cells from my last stunt. I’d like to save what little I have left. Tsunade-sama did warn me if I keep letting this chakra get to me, I’ll turn into a mindless brute… not that I’ll be much of a threat… isn’t that sad?” I sighed.
Tsunade?” said Hiruzen in surprise. “You met her during your travels?”

“She trained me to control the demonic chakra that kept slipping through and…and…” A dark cloud hovered over my head as a sudden chill went through me. “If she knew I let it slip, she’s going to kill me! Oh god! Hokage-sama, please don’t tell her! She’ll kill me and make me go through bomb diffusing lessons again! I’ll take any punishment! Just don’t tell her!” I wailed.

Hiruzen raised an eyebrow at my words. “Why do you keep suggesting I punish you?”

I paused in mid-panic and stared at him in confusion. “You aren’t? But I completely when bat shit crazy and released demonic chakra. I freaking got exiled last time! And you’re telling me there’s no punishment?”

“There is,” said Hiruzen.

“Now you’re just being a troll!” I complained.

Hiruzen laughed. “But not for what you think you’re being punished for.”

“…You lost me.” I said in a deadpan.

“Do you know why you were given an evaluation in the first place?” asked Hiruzen.

“… Isn’t it to test whether or not I can handle Naruto when…uh…” I trailed off. What’s the nice way saying I’m his keeper? “When his furry problem acts up?”

“You thought…” Hiruzen shook his head. “We still have quiet some time before that becomes an issue.”

“But… isn’t the chakra in Naruto way more dangerous than what I have?” I questioned in confusion.

“When Minato made Naruto’s seal, it was done so that the chakra will slowly incorporate itself into Naruto’s body over time. Unlike you, who had completely depleted your natural chakra at the time, Jiraiya placed only one Four-Symbol seal and a Yin seal in order to allow more chakra flow through to replace and replenish what you’ve lost. Your seals are considerably more unstable compared to Naruto’s and much harder to adjust,” explained Hiruzen.

“…Then… what the heck was this evaluation for?” I huffed.

“To see how much you’ve progressed of course,” said Hiruzen cheerily. “You are among the youngest to graduate in your batch, even if you’re dead last.”

I made a face at the title.

Hiruzen chuckled. “You did surprise me with your performance. I hadn’t expected you to do so well and fight with such ferocity. Even Tenzo was a little surprised by your final attack.”

“Only a little?” I grumbled. “I should’ve guessed it wasn’t enough. With the amount of nature release jutsus he pulled off, he’s at least chunin ranked right? I think you should promote him.”

“Already have,” said Hiruzen.

“…Wait what?” I said in confusion.
“The evaluation was for him as well as you,” said Hiruzen pleasantly. “As of your hospitalization, Tenzo was promoted from special jounin to regular jounin.”

What?

“Part of a jounin exam, aside from mastering at least two nature releases, is to be able to handle rowdy genins like you. I must admit, I don’t think anyone could’ve predicted that you would try to blow us all up with a faulty seal,” laughed Hiruzen.

I would sweat drop. How could he even laugh at that?

“If Tenzo hadn’t adjusted his jutsu to shield you along with the rest of us, you would’ve been in a much worst state, if not dead. His wooden foo dogs took the brunt of the explosion shielding you from the majority of the blast, while that barrier seal you used lessened the intensity of the flames. I’m quite sure if you didn’t have either, you would’ve been incinerated into nothing,” said Hiruzen.

…I came that close again? Does death hate me or something? How is it possible that I’m that bad at dying?

“Ugh… I’m never going to blow myself up again.” I grumbled. Apparently, I can survive incinerating explosions. Who knew? I really don’t want to see what else I can live through, the hospital trips are going to give me nightmares for years to come.

“That’s good to know,” said Hiruzen, highly amused. “Though, I must finish what I came here for.”

“Right, there’s still my punishment. Lay it on me.” I said, not caring for ceremony or manners. I’m in pain. I can care less even if Hizashi crashes through that door threatening me with more kunoichi lessons. As long as it’s not Tsunade, I’m not afraid of anyone.

“You’re suspended from shinobi duties for six months,” said the man.

“Suspension?” I said in disbelief.

“No need to make such a face,” said Hiruzen. “The suspension is for your recklessness against yourself. While you’re not leaving the hospital bed anytime soon, once you’ve recovered from your injuries, your new assignment is to the hospital as a nurse’s aid.”

“Nurse’s aid?” I blanched at the thought. I won’t even be able to use any iryo-ninjutsu as a nurse’s aid. “For six months?”

“It’s a suitable punishment. If you value your life so little, you might as well give it to people who value it more than you. Once you’ve recovered, you’ll be assisting in the intensive care ward alongside the geriatrics ward,” said Hiruzen. “Any objections?”

I sighed, what could I object to? It’s not T&I, it’s not execution or exile. Working as a nurse’s aid was equivalent to being sentenced with community service. Hiruzen is such a softhearted old fool. Maybe that’s why he couldn’t end Orochimaru when he had a chance. I guess I shouldn’t be complaining. After all the craziness, maybe some community service downtime will do me some good.

“None sir.” I replied. “I’ll serve Konoha with my best.”

Hiruzen nodded with a bright smile. “Kasa-kun, what I said about how no one is loyal to any
single village isn’t as mutinous as you think.”

“Hmm?” I glanced at him curiously as he got up from his seat and walked to the door.

“People are loyal to those they love and care for. Any loyalty to a village is built on by the loyalty they have for those they hold dear.” He smiled warmly at me. “I could see that you have many people here you would say that’s close to your heart and I’m proud to call you a Konoha shinobi.”

“…Hokage-sama…” I whispered, nearly speechless by his touching words.

“You’ve done well in your performance,” said Hiruzen as he reached the door. “I look forward to seeing you in the chunin exams in six months.”

…Wait, what?

The man grinned. “What do you think the evaluation was for?”

What?

“I wish you the best of luck, Kasa-kun,” chuckled Hiruzen as he stepped out of the room.

“What?” I screamed.
“…How on earth did you get third degree chakra burns from a training accident?” said Santa in disbelief.

“…Enthusiasm?” I offered sheepishly.

“Better question,” quipped Tokuma. “How did you get Kurei sensei to go with it? He’s not one to let you recklessly maim yourself.”

“Uh… By asking nicely?” I mumbled.

“You’re horrible at lying,” said Santa in a deadpan. “I still can’t believe you got yourself suspended for half a year. What did you do? Burn down a forest?”

“Pretty much.” I said with a nervous chuckle.

“…Serious?” said Santa skeptically. “What made you go and do that?”

“…Menstrual cramps?” I suggested with a grin, expecting them to get flustered, but I was met with deadpan eyes instead. Weird, that trick usually works on guys.

“Are you even menstruating yet?” drawled Santa.

“Oh right…” I said in realization. “I don’t have that yet.”

“Why are you my teammate?” Santa planted a hand to his face.

“I’m surprised they haven’t demoted you back to the academy,” continued Tokuma. “A six-month suspension is lenient.”

“Don’t remind me.” I groaned. “Even after I recover, I’m stuck in the hospital.”

“Speaking of which, how much longer are you going to be bed bound?” asked Santa.

“Hmm…” I pondered, staring at my bandaged hands. “Shouldn’t be all that much longer considering I’m awake to help Tou-san and Rin-san with the healing sessions. Maybe another week or two at most?”

“Will you be coming to the team training sessions? Or are you banned from that too?” asked Santa.

“Not sure.” I frowned. “I’ll have to clarify that when I don’t look like a walking corpse.”

“Hn,” snorted Tokuma in amusement. “I think that look works for you. Though, I don’t think Hizashi-sama will say the same if he saw you.”

“Eh?” I glanced at him in confusion.

“Especially with your hair looking like that,” added Santa with a sniggered.

“…My hair?” I blinked. “What’s wrong with my hair?”

“You’ve been here for two weeks and you haven’t even looked at the mirror once?”
questioned Tokuma.

“Seeing I was comatose for a week and bed bound for another. I don’t think finding a mirror was high on my priority list.” I said drolly.

“Here, let me get you one,” said Santa cheerily as he bounded to the bathroom.

“I don’t think the mirrors in the bathroom are—” I paused when I heard a loud crack and Santa came bounding back with a mirror and a good chunk of the wall with it. “Did you rip that out of the wall!”

“Never mind that, take a look!” He grinned before turning to our stoic teammate. “Hey Tokuma, how much do you want to bet that she’ll lose it?”

“I’m not making a losing bet,” drawled Tokuma.

“It’s not that bad is it?” I said as I took the offered mirror into my hands, but screamed like a banshee when I saw my reflection.

First off before I tell you what I look like, I was quite aware that I’m not going to look my best considering I had burns in places I rather not mention. Hell, I was fully prepared to see Freddy Krueger looking back at me, but I didn’t. Iryo-ninjutsu was amazing that it could heal severe burns to the point that it looked no worse than a bad rash. However, it’s not my injuries that made me scream. It was my hair… or there lack of.

“AH!” I screeched, dropping the mirror and running my hands over my head.

“It’s not that bad,” sniggered Santa. “I think it’s a nice look for you.”

“How is it not bad? I look like a bald Zuko!” I screamed, but paused when I realized what I said. “Wait, I look like a bald Zuko! I could totally cosplay him!”

“Who’s Zuko?” asked Santa, puzzled.

“Wait, what am I saying? I can’t cosplay as Zuko! Hizashi sensei’s going to kill me when he sees me!” I wailed.

“You could go join the ninja monks at the temple,” drawled Tokuma in amusement. “You’ve already got the bald head.”

“It’s not funny!” I snapped, but Santa was already on the ground dying with laughter and Tokuma was discreetly hiding his chuckles behind a well-disguised cough.

Just to clarify, I’m not a vain person by nature. On most days I could roll out of bed without tending to my hair or looks and I won’t even care, but baldness is where I cross the line! I’m already having trouble acting like a kunoichi! How the hell am I going to pull off being a girl without hair?

“Oh calm down, it’s not like it’s not going to grow back,” said Tokuma was a casual wave of his hand. “It doesn’t look like you have any scars on your head so unless you’ve managed somehow to destroy all your hair follicles, it’ll grow back in a couple of months or a year.”

“Good thing you’re stuck in the hospital for the next six months huh?” added Santa as he wiped away a stray laughing tear.
“Come back hair!” I gave a pathetic whimper as I rubbed my head trying to will it to grow faster.

“How you managed not to notice your hairless state, I would never understand,” said Tokuma as he got up from his seat and made his way around my bed. “Do try to get better quickly, it’s a bore only having Santa as a punching bag.”

“This coming from Mr. I-get-kidnapped-a-lot,” retorted Santa.

“We can’t all be a coward like you and fight from the shadows,” droned Tokuma with his arms crossed.

“Is that a challenge I hear?” said Santa with a smirk.

“Please, you won’t last ten minutes without Kasa being your distraction,” said Tokuma with a casual wave of his hand.

“I don’t need Kasa’s distraction skills, I could handle myself!” snapped back Santa.

“I am so not the distraction!” I retorted heatedly.

“Yet, you always make yourself the walking target,” drawled Tokuma.

“You want a fight? Bring it on pretty boy!” I shouted as I jumped out of bed and pounced him.

“Are you dense? You’re not even supposed to get out of bed yet!” snapped Tokuma.

“What, afraid you’re going to get beaten by a girl?” sniggered Santa.

“I take offense to that!” I shouted as Tokuma hauled me back to bed.

“You want to take it outside girly?” grinned Santa.

“Grow up both of you,” said Tokuma as he rolled his eyes.

“Shut up!” We retorted.

I’m not sure when it happened, but somehow their thoughtful little visit turned into a full out Team Four bicker-fest and eventually both Tokuma and Santa were kicked out of the hospital for causing such a ruckus. Even though we may get on each other’s nerves from time to time, it’s actually a ton of fun whenever we get into fights.

…Especially when there were no other visitors.

Without them, the room became unnervingly quiet. Aside from Tesuri and the visit from my teammates from Team Four just now, I haven’t gotten any visitors since Hiruzen stopped by. Rin had stopped coming shortly after I was stabilized and I haven’t seen or heard from Kushina or anyone else… I know I’ve said that I could handle a little solitude, but this silence…. It’s almost enough to make me miss getting an earful from everyone for being reckless.

I get that everyone is busy and all, but they could have at least stopped by for a five-second hi, but…Who am I kidding? I’m acting like a spoiled little brat looking for attention because everyone is busy with their own lives.

After spending so many years pretending to be a child, I think I’m actually regressing into
one. Temper tantrums, thoughtless outbursts and reckless irrationality, my old self would’ve died of embarrassment. With less than half the maturity of my teenage self and ten times the obnoxiousness of a psychotic otaku, I don’t think I’ve ever been this loud in my old life.

Huh… My old life.

“That’s weird.” I mused to myself, if only to break the silence. “Why am I suddenly thinking about that?”

Eight years I’ve been here and I think this is probably the first time in a long time that my thoughts wandered away from the here and now. Now that I think about it, this was the first time I’ve gone this long without having some sort of companionship. Hardly surprising, considering I’ve lost count how many times I’ve been either hospitalized or severely injured… Uh… that’s probably not a good thing right? Good lord, I should probably be more careful.

Knock, knock.

I perked up at the sound with a bright grin before bounding out of my bed to open the door. “Sweet merciful sound! I thought I was going to go nuts with how quiet it’s been. What took…” I paused when I notice who my visitor was. “Oh… Hi…”

“Not who you expected?” said Tenzo softly with an apologetic grin.

I pushed the disappointment from my face and grinned. “…No, not exactly, but you’re just as good if not better! Come in!” I grabbed hold of his hand and dragged him into the room. “I’m about to go crazy with how quiet it’s here!”

“Enough to have another episode like last time?” asked Tenzo jokingly.

“Episode?” I said in puzzlement for a second before it clicked and I gave a nervous chuckle. “Oh, you mean the whole trying to kill you thing. Uh… um… Sorry?”

Tenzo returned the chuckle as he took one of the seats by the bed. “Do you always apologize to the people you try to kill?”

“I wasn’t trying to kill you.” I huffed before pausing “Wait no, I was... but…”

He grinned wryly as I fumbled over my words.

“I did try to kill you, but I wouldn’t have if you… Wait no, if you didn’t step in then… but that doesn’t excuse… wait no it does… Argh!” I growled in frustration and tried to ruffle up my hair out of habit, only to remember that I don’t have any hair.

“I’m glad you’re feeling better,” said Tenzo as he hid a small grin behind a loosely curled fist. “You’re definitely livelier compared to when I last saw you.”

“Laugh it up. I’m just having an off day.” I grumbled, plopping down on my bed, facing him.

“Everyone has an off day,” agreed Tenzo as his eyes trailed over my arms. “How are your burns?”

Startled by his sudden concern, I glanced at my red skin. “As good as someone who suffered from third-degree burns. It’s much better now compared to a couple of days ago…” I paused, unsure what to say next. Why was he here anyway? It’s kind of weird for him to just
randomly visit someone he met only once. “Um…Thanks for asking…?”

“You’re probably wondering why I’m here, right?” added Tenzo helpfully when I found myself unable to ask.

“A bit, unless you usually make it a habit to visit people who tried to kill you.” I joked light-heartedly. He didn’t smile. “Um… I was joking?”

“I know,” said Tenzo softly. “Do you know you have a bad habit?”

“Pardon?” Confusion crossed my face, clueless to what he was saying. “What habit?”

“You hide behind lies,” answered Tenzo. “And you’re quite good at it.”

“Me? Good at hiding behind lies?” I repeated before a chuckle slipped out. “Oh man, that’s funny. Me a good liar? You’re a riot! I could give you a list of people that would say otherwise.”

“You’re always joking and smiling, but did you know your smiles never reach your eyes?” noted Tenzo.

My grin faltered as the chuckle died at my lips. “What do you mean?”

“When I first met you, I almost mistaken you for someone from one of the major clans,” explained Tenzo. “The way you carried yourself and the way you spoke, you imitated the mannerisms of someone born from a major clan quite flawlessly.”

“…Are you sure we’re talking about the same person?” I frowned. “I nearly failed my genin exams because of the kunoichi portion. Acting and lying are not my strong points.”

“The fact you believe your own lies is another sign that you’re good at it,” inserted Tenzo. “I’m not sure if you’re aware, but those who announces their weaknesses usually falls into two categories. One, they’re an idiot.”

“Hey!” I huffed with my cheeks puffed up.

“Or two, they’re using it to hide their true weakness,” said Tenzo as he looked straight into my eyes. I paused at the intense gaze. “During your little episode, you claimed you were bad in everything. Yet, when I fought against you, I saw otherwise.”

“What?” I said, suddenly finding it hard to get to my voice.

“True, your skillset isn’t that much better than most genin, but unlike them, you’re fully aware of what you can do and what you can’t do,” said Tenzo. “I don’t know if you know this or if you’re hiding it from yourself through lies, but it’s this awareness that makes you stronger than what you claim.”

I stared at him in disbelief.

“You’re bad at direct combat, so you compensate with using support ninjutsu to distance yourself and bade time as you hide and make plans. Knowing you’re bad at taijutsu, you compensated with a defensive style that lures your opponent into a false sense of security, not knowing you’ve laid a trap for them the moment they drew closer,” said Tenzo.

“You’re making me sound like I have a mind to plan everything accordingly.” I forced the
words out of my mouth as I grasped onto my failing voice and forced it kicking and screaming to the surface. “I didn’t even know if any of that could’ve worked. Stop making it sound like it was all within my plans.”

“Which is exactly why I believe you’re not giving yourself more credit than you should,” continued Tenzo. “Not knowing whether or not those plans would work, you were always looking for a means to retreat and hide in case it didn’t work. Not all shinobi are meant to be front line fighters. You knew you weren’t one and you adjusted accordingly.”

“…Thanks for the praise and all, but what’s your point? How does this relate to me being a good liar?” I grumbled. “Better yet, what does it have to do with you visiting me? You didn’t really come here to call me a liar in one moment and praise me the next did you?”

“I came because I saw that you were scared,” answered Tenzo.

“…Scared?” I glanced at him warily. “What’s there to be scared about? I’m not being executed, I’m not being exiled. Heck, I’m not even getting punished all that severely, what’s there to be scared about?”

“You’re being defensive,” pointed out Tenzo.

“I’m not being defensive!” I snapped. Despite my claims, my voice was shaking.

“You’re not scared of punishment or death even,” said Tenzo as he changed the line of thought. “If you were, you wouldn’t have snapped and tried to blow yourself up with the rest of us. No, what you’re afraid of is rejection.”

I opened my mouth to retort, but I couldn’t find the words or my voice. Why was this bothering me so much? I’m not a child or a love-struck teenager, why would I be afraid of rejection?

…If that’s the case, how come I couldn’t say it?

“You hide behind that loud personality of yours because if ever you say something wrong, you had an excuse and no one would spare a second thought about it,” said Tenzo as he pressed on. “Aren’t you exhausted? Always smiling, always making excuses, always lying?”

I stared at him, lips pressed into a thin line as words refused to come to the surface. First Tesuri and now him? Why was it always the person I least expect that ousts me?

“Am I not allowed to?” I forced out. “I’m not hurting anyone. I’m not harming Konoha.”

“No, you wouldn’t allow yourself to,” said Tenzo.

“Then why is this an issue? Just let me go about my merry way and everything will go about that same.” I grumbled.

“Until you snap again and have another episode,” interrupted Tenzo.

“I’m not going to—”

“Are you sure?” said Tenzo. “Everyone has a breaking point and while you’ve done an excellent job hiding behind your own lies and almost believing in it yourself, you’re just human. How long do you think you’ll go before you have another episode? I know you can care less about your own life, but what about the people around you? You care about them don’t you? What happens if they’re around when you blow up again? What happens if they get hurt? Or worse?”
“I…” I trailed off unable to answer.

“I’m not telling you to stop doing what you’re doing. I don’t know what caused you to be so terrified of showing who you are behind that idiotic guise you put up, but you’ll doing yourself a disfavor if you keep bottling everything up the way you do,” reasoned Tenzo.

“…Why do you care?” I asked after a moment. “If you’re worried that I might snap, you could’ve just told Hokage-sama and let him deal with me. Why do you care enough to come talk to me about this?”

“Because you’re like me, an outsider.” I jolted at the sad smile as he continued. “We’re said to be Konoha’s shinobi, but the fact is, we’re always going to be under suspicion and our loyalties will always come to question. There doesn’t need to be a physical wound for it to hurt.”

We sat in silence as everything he let his words sink in. This whole time, while I was getting defensive thinking maybe it was a trap of some sort, all Tenzo wanted to do was tell me I wasn’t alone. He was just trying to be nice and maybe make a friend. I on the other hand treated him like an enemy, like he was a monster that was about to attack me.

“Sorry.” I said apologetically with a sheepish laugh. “I must look like a complete ass with how I acted. Can we start over?”

“If it makes you feel better,” said Tenzo wryly.

Returning the grin I started with an AA styled greeting with a two-finger salute. “Nice to meet you, I’m Kasa. Pseudo-jinchuriki and loaded with a mountain’s height of rejection issues.”

Tenzo chuckled as he returned with a similar greeting. “I’m Tenzo, former lab experiment and fellow outsider. Nice to meet you.”

We shared a look for no more than a second before we both cracked up laughing at the hilarity of the situation. Talking with Tenzo was a pleasant change. Unlike everyone else, he didn’t treat me like a child or an idiot. When we talked, he spoke to me rather than at me.

Talking to him felt like talking with an equal. How long has it been since I’ve had a conversation that didn’t start or end with a condescension from the other party? How long has it been since someone treated me as an equal?

“I’m surprised that Danzo showed such interest in your progress,” said Tenzo at some point during our conversation. “He did try to recruit me at first, but he didn’t press on once Hokage-sama decided on how I was being dealt with. With how murderous you sounded that day, I’m guessing this wasn’t the first time he tried suggest to Hokage-sama on what to do with you?”

“You noticed too huh?” I sighed as I plopped back down on my bed. “No clue why Mr. Mummy is out to get me. I must’ve killed in mother in my last, last life or something.”

Tenzo raised a brow. “Why two lasts? What’s wrong with the first last?”

“Aside from refusing to haggle, have you ever heard of a bookseller or a librarian getting into a scuffle that would lead to a death feud?” I asked with mild amusement crossing my face.

“Now, you’re just showing off,” chuckled Tenzo. “I can’t tell whether you’re lying or telling the truth.”

“Think whatever you want.” I replied cheerily. “If you can’t tell the difference, I’m not
going to pop my own bubble.”

Too long, I decided. It was too long since I spoke comfortably with anyone without snapping in a childish rage.

“I should really get going,” said Tenzo as he glanced at the sky outside the window. “I have some senpai in the intensive care ward to visit while I’m here.”

“Intensive care?” I glanced at him curiously. “Anyone I know?”

“Maybe…” said Tenzo thoughtfully. “Do you know any Hatake or Uchiha?”

“What?” I sat up in a hurry. “Kakashi and Obito are in the intensive care?”

“Oh, so you do know them,” said Tenzo.

“Forget that! Why the hell are they there? What happened?” I jumped out of bed and grabbed him by the arm. “Which room are they in? Are they okay?”

Tenzo planted a hand on my shoulder to calm me down. “They’re fine. They’ve been fine the last two days.”

“Last two—? How long were they here?” I asked in a hurry.

“Maybe a week?” said Tenzo.

“A week?” That’s too much of a coincidence. “You’re going to see them right? Can you take me too?”

“…You’re not supposed to be leaving your bed, much less your room,” droned Tenzo.

“Can’t you just turn a blind eye?” I grumbled. “I thought we were friends.”

“Just because we’re friends, I’m not going to let you recklessly run off while you still have injuries,” sighed Tenzo. “I’m quite sure they’ll still be there when you’ve recovered. After all, they’re both suffering from a severe case of chakra exhaustion. It’ll take them at least two weeks to recover.”

“Can you at least tell me why they’re in such a condition?” I sighed.

Surprise crossed Tenzo’s face. “You haven’t heard—right, you weren’t conscious then,” muttered Tenzo in hindsight.

“Haven’t heard what?” I frowned. “What did I miss while I was out?”

“We’re on the verge of war with Kirigakure,” replied Tenzo. “For the last two months, we’ve been trying to settle with some quiet negotiations, but about two weeks ago, things went sour. Kakashi and Obito senpai were in charge of escorting the negotiations team.”

“So that’s why…” I murmured. No wonder I haven’t been getting any visitors, everyone’s busy fortifying the village defenses in case of an attack. “Wait, how come you’re telling me this? Isn’t this classified information?”

“Hardly,” waved off Tenzo. “Hokage-sama will be giving a formal announcement at the end of the week. Everyone’s going to know one way or another.”

“I see.” I mumbled thoughtfully as I released his arm and took a step back to mull over my
thoughts. “If that’s the case, do you know what the reason for this conflict is? Or is that classified?”

“I’m not clear on the whole situation, since it’s not likely for either village to go to war on a single reason alone, but I do know why Kakashi and Obito senpai came back the way they did.”

“Why?” My brows furrowed with a frown. Come to think of it, neither of them were pushovers. So what would cause them to come back in such a state?

“Apparently, one of the demands Kiri made was for the return of the Three-Tails to a jinchuriki of their choosing,” explained Tenzo.

My eyes widened. “But if that’s the case, Rin-san would…”

Tenzo nodded grimly. “As you already realized, Kakashi and Obito senpai didn’t take to the idea very well.”

“…What did they do?” I asked, almost terrified to hear the answer.

"They decimated several platoons of Kiri-nin while they were there. I’m not sure if they killed anyone, but there were a large number severely injured. From what I heard, I think it was Obito senpai that started that mess,” answered Tenzo.

A grimace crossed my face. “…Why am I not surprised?”

“The negotiations team had to forcibly drag them both back to the village before Kiri decided to declare war on the spot. I’m not sure if that helped any, but the damage’s already done,” said Tenzo.

“Things aren’t looking good, huh?” I said, rubbing my baldhead absently. It’s still so weird not to have any hair.

“Regardless what happens, it’s none of your business until you’ve recovered at least,” said Tenzo. “You’re assigned to hospital for six months aren’t you?”

“Right…” I paused. “How do you know I’m under suspension?”

“Suspension?” said Tenzo in confusion. “Why do you think you’re under suspension?”

“That’s what Hokage-sama told me, what did you hear?” I asked, puzzled.

“With the impending war, any shinobi with a notable amount of medical experience are to be reassigned to the hospital or into field platoons as a medic until the conflict is over. Haven’t you read the protocols for iryo-nin since you’re aiming to be one?”

“Protocols…? I’m not being punished at all?” I said flabbergasted.

“Do you want to be punished?” said Tenzo with a raised brow.

“No, but…” I trailed off, confusion clear on my face. “Why would Hokage-sama tell me this was my punishment?”

“Likely because you kept asking him about getting one. By any chance, do you have a masochist streak along with that reckless abandonment for your life?” asked Tenzo offhandedly, amusement clear in his eyes.

“Oh, ha-ha.” I huffed indignantly.
“Hokage-sama is a kind man,” offered Tenzo. “If he could, he would do his best to compromise when he can. No doubt, he was just trying to make you feel better.”

“I guess.” I murmured quietly. Duped again. That old man is more unpredictable than I thought.

“Well, I’ve stalled for long enough. I need still have things to do after visiting both senpai. Take it easy on yourself and maybe I’ll stop by to visit again,” said Tenzo.

I grinned brightly. “I’ll hold you on your word.”

Tenzo chuckled as he made his way towards the door, but paused as if he remember something. “Oh! Before I forget. Congratulations.”

Confusion crossed my face. “For what?”

“I’m not clear on the details, but from the sound of it, you’re getting an engagement,” said Tenzo.


“Marital engagement,” said Tenzo.

I stood there dumbfounded before I did the only thing I’ve never done in my life, this one or the last, I fainted.

Someone is definitely trolling me somewhere out there.
Engaging Changes

Fainting, never would I have ever thought I’d pass out like a damsel in distress. Damn Tenzo, he called me a liar, but how much do you want to bet he’s just as much of a liar as I am. All this talk about me getting engaged, it was likely just passing gossip he heard somewhere and blew it out of proportion. I bet there’s probably nothing out there to confirm it.

I swear if this life turns into some crappy ass shoujo story, I will find some way to kill off all possible love interests. I don’t care if I’m completely outmatched. I seriously don’t need romance to complicate my miserable life right now. This must be a bad joke.

Tesuri took the news harder than I did as Tenzo was nearly strangled to death when I came to.

“Who told you this?” roared Tesuri dangerously as he shook Tenzo like a rag doll. “I’ll kill them in their sleep!”

“I-I don’t know,” said Tenzo in between violent shakes. “I just heard it in passing!”

“It’s one of those Uchiha boys isn’t it? Isn’t it?” growled Tesuri. “They think just because Kasa has an engagement, it’s to one of them! Well, tell them I would never give up Kasa to those brats!”

“P-please stop!” said Tenzo desperately.

…Tesuri’s possessive daddy mode is scary. I almost felt bad for Tenzo, almost.

“Sucks to be the messenger.” I muttered under my breath as I sat up to watch Tesuri tie him up with chakra rope. “They’re always the first to get shot.”

“Kasa, I thought we were friends,” said Tenzo desperately, mirroring a conversation we had probably no more than ten minutes ago.

“I don’t know.” I drawled mockingly repeating out previous conversation while propping an arm up to rest my chin on the palm of my hand. “Just because we’re friends…”

“Don’t you even dare look to Kasa for help, punk,” said Tesuri dangerously as he materialized chakra scalpels. “You have two options and I don’t think I need to tell you what they are.”

Tenzo’s face paled as a meek squeak escaped him. “Kasa!”

The pure terror on his face made it hard not to smile. Okay, okay, my inner petty demon is satisfied.

“Tou-san, enough already. I think he’s going to pee himself.” I said cheerily.

“Not until he tells me where he heard this information,” said Tesuri dangerously.

I rolled my eyes. Good lord, Tesuri, your closet sadist is showing.

“While you’re busy with that, can I go visit Kakashi and Obito? I heard they’re in in intensive care.” I suggested before he abruptly snapped out of sadist mode and into lecture mode.
“Absolutely not. If you fainted that easily from a minor shock, you’re in no condition to leave your room. Your body is still trying to adjust since your chakra is working overtime to get you back to full health,” chided Tesuri.

“But I’m not even leaving the hospital, you can escort me. I’ll even sit in a wheelchair if you don’t want me walking around.” I said, drawing out the conversation as Tenzo quietly undid the knots on the rope and slipped away. He gave me a thankful look he stealthily made his way to the door.

“No,” said Tesuri bluntly with fatherly sternness before switching his tone back to psychotic sadist. “And if I hear spreading that particular piece of news, I’ll find out where you live and finish what I started.”

“Yes sir!” squeaked Tenzo before he ran out of the room.

“Come and visit me again!” I called out after him.

“Kasa,” said Tesuri sternly.

“All right.” I sighed, crossing my arms. “Who am I engaged to? And why am I engaged at all if you’re going to freak out at the thought of anyone taking me away?”

The sternness on his face stayed for a moment before he sighed in exasperation. “Why does the Uzumaki Clan have such unreasonable women?”

“Huh?” I said dumbfounded. Completely lost at his sudden helpless expression. “You mean this is Kushina-san’s doing?”

Tesuri sighed as he pressed his fingers against his brow. “Be glad you were unconscious for the most of it.”

My interest peaked. “What happened while I was out? Better yet, what did Kushina-san do?” I asked gleefully.

“… Why do you have to take after your mother?” sighed Tesuri.

“Oh come on, Tou-san, tell me!” I clung onto his arm like a little kid. “I promise I’ll stay in my room like a good girl if you do!”

“…Are you blackmailing me?” asked Tesuri.

“Blackmailing implies I’m extorting you.” I reasoned cheerily. “I’m just bribing you.”

“…With you, there’s no difference,” said Tesuri dryly.

“Exactly.” I said cheerily. “So let’s skip to the juicy details! Come on, what did Kushina-san do?”

Tesuri tried to resist, but after a moment he gave in. “It started when she found out what happened to you during your evaluation…”

“HOKAGE-SAMA!” roared Kushina as she kicked down the door to the administration’s office.

“Kushina, please calm down,” said Hiruzen calmly as the woman stormed in with her fiery
red hair flaring wildly like the Kyubi’s tails.

“Don’t you please calm down me! What kind of evaluation did you put Kasa-chan through?” snapped Kushina.

“The evaluation was meant to be a simple formality to check on her progress. No one meant for it to turn out the way it did,” reasoned Hiruzen as he puffed his pipe absently.

“Some formality this is,” growled Kushina as she stepped deeper into the office.

“Kushina, calm down,” said Mikoto in exasperation as she pulled her friend back. “I know you’re upset over what happened to Kasa-chan, but you blowing up Hokage-sama’s office isn’t going to help her any.”

“Wait, Mikoto-san was there too?” I interrupted, but Tesuri was quick to cut me off.

“Let me finish before you interrupt would you? I barely even started!” said Tesuri in a deadpan.

“… Sorry.” I muttered sheepishly but then paused when I realized something. “Hey, if Mikoto-san was there does it mean—”

“I can stop here and now,” threatened Tesuri.

“Sorry, sorry. Please continue.” I muttered under my breath.

“Fine,” huffed Kushina as she plopped down on the seat in front of Hiruzen’s desk. “I’ll be civil.”

Mikoto gave a sheepish chuckle before she turned to Hiruzen. “Hokage-sama, what Kushina wanted to ask was why Kasa-chan was placed through such unorthodox tests. Even if she is younger than most graduates, she’s not the first to graduate at her age.”

“And?” Hiruzen closed his eyes as he took in a breath of smoke.

“And she’s not the only one in her class that was promoted to genin at her age. I don’t understand why she’s the only one that’s given such a difficult time,” added Kushina. “And before you make excuses about testing her skills, you and I both know where she stands. There was no need to test her in the first place. Not only that, she was hospitalized because of the amount of exertion she went through. Who the hell did you put her up against Anbu?”

A sad expression crossed Hiruzen’s face as he breathed out through his nose, letting out smoke as he did so. “It is unfortunate that Kasa is in the hospital. None of us expected her to have such emotional baggage that would drive her to such extreme actions.”

“She wouldn’t have those issues if you stop letting Danzo and that council of yours treat her like a spy!” said Kushina darkly.

“Kushina,” whispered Mikoto harshly.

The fiery woman glanced at her for a moment before reluctantly backed down. “…Fine, we’ll do it your way,” grumbled the woman as she crossed her arms.

“Hokage-sama,” started Mikoto. “The only reason this injustice to Kasa-chan lasted for as
long as has is because she has no political backing to protect her.”

Hiruzen said nothing as he lowered his hat.

“I’m right aren’t I?” said Mikoto. “Even though Kushina is a legitimate Konoha shinobi and gives her support, she has no political sway because like Kasa, she’s not originally from Konoha.”

“Unfortunately,” murmured Hiruzen in agreement as he shifted his pipe.

“…So, they’re treating me as a traitor now?” said Kushina in a low voice, unamused.

“Before you go off on another one of your legendary tirades,” inserted Hiruzen. “Please understand that I whole-heartedly trust you and believe that Kasa only has Konoha’s best interest in mind. However, I alone do not have the authority to override a majority ruling.”

“Why not?” huffed Kushina. “You’re the leader of the village!”

“Be as it may,” started Hiruzen. “Under the laws set down by the First Hokage, when matters concern the safety and well-being of the village, the council among others can override any ruling I may make, given they have adequate reason.”

“…And given Kasa-chan isn’t a native to Konoha and carries demonic chakra from the Sanbi…” Mikoto trailed off.

“I see you understand my plight,” said Hiruzen wearily with his hands folded in front of his face. “If I try to override the council, it would seem as favoritism and in the long run, it might be more detrimental to Kasa.”

“Are you telling me there’s nothing we can do to stop this?” asked Kushina, irritated.

“My hands are tied,” said Hiruzen regretfully.

“Damn it,” hissed Kushina. “So all we can do is watch?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” interrupted Mikoto as a cheery grin touched her lips.

Hiruzen’s attention was peaked. “What are you suggesting?”

“Hokage-sama, I’m curious, are you familiar with a particular law concerning marital engagements with major clans?” said Mikoto offhandedly.

“…In this day and age?” said Hiruzen with a raised brow. “Are you sure? Youngsters nowadays are quite vocal when it comes to such things and if you add Kasa to the mix…”

“I’m quite familiar with Kasa-chan’s personality,” chuckled Mikoto. “And it’s likely she won’t take to the news very well. However, if she has an engagement with a major clan, she’ll then fall under their political protection. Wouldn’t you agree this would be more beneficial to her?”

“…Have you spoken to her father about this?” asked Hiruzen warily.

“He’s a hundred percent behind this,” said Kushina cheerily.

“What did Kushina-san do to make you agree?” I can’t help but interrupt.
“…Don’t ask Kasa, please just don’t ask…” said Tesuri pathetically.

Were Uzumaki women really that terrifying? Judging by the look on Tesuri’s miserable face, I don’t think I want to find out. That’s probably one mystery I’ll leave alone.

“So… this engagement thing…” I continued hesitantly. “It sounds like a farce Mikoto-san came up to protect me. I don’t actually have to marry anyone, do I?”

Tesuri sobered up. “If they try to force you, I’ll kill them.”

“Uh… I’m guessing not?” I laughed weakly, relieved by the news.

“Even if this is a farce, you must adhere to the engagement laws just so they won’t give you any grief,” pointed out Tesuri. “Which means… if you’re ever going to get a boyfriend, please at least give me a heads up so I can prepare myself okay?” said the man desperately as he placed his hands on my shoulders.

“…Pft…” I covered my mouth trying to hold back my laugh. “Tou-san, I’m not planning on getting one for a long time.”

“Good,” said Tesuri with relief as he held me close in a hug. “You can’t believe how hard it was for me to agree to Uzumaki-san and Uchiha-san’s plans to engage you to one of those Uchiha brats!”

I rolled my eyes. “Speaking of which. Which one am I technically engaged to?”

His hug tightened. “Why? Which one do you like?”

“Tou-san.” I said in exasperation. “I thought we’ve been through this already. There’s no one I’m interested in. So stop worrying.”

“…You sure now?” grumbled Tesuri under his breath.

“Completely.” I replied dryly.

Tesuri sighed as he loosened his grip, but kept me close “You’re technically not engaged to anyone.”

“Huh?” I glanced up at him in surprise. “Then how am I engaged?”

“You have an engagement to the Uchiha Clan,” corrected Tesuri. “Until you’re of age, you’re not bound to anyone, but at the same time you’re not allowed to bind yourself to someone outside of the Uchiha Clan.”

“… How needlessly convoluted.” I sighed before giving a careless shrug. “Do whatever you want as long as I don’t suddenly end up with a hundred fiancées or something.”

“Sorry Kasa. This was all I could do,” whispered Tesuri.

“I know Tou-san… I know.” I said, resting my head on his chest. Not liking how depressing the mood was, a wicked idea crossed my mind. “So… does that mean you won’t try to kill my boyfriend if I ever bring him home?”

Tesuri tensed. “I thought you said you there was no one!”

“Of course there wouldn’t be one, if you’re going to kill him.” I retorted.
“Who is it Kasa?” snapped Tesuri, completely breaking out of his misery and into protective daddy mode.

“Not telling you.” I grinned.

“Kasa!” snapped Tesuri. Well, it was either watch him wallow in misery or have his blood pressure elevated for a little while. Meh, a little adrenaline never hurts anyone.

There were probably more to Tesuri’s story, like how on earth did he recount the events at Hiruzen’s office so well? Was he there when they decided? Or was it a recollection from Kushina or Mikoto? What was Fugaku’s view on all this? Did Mikoto get him to agree? If not, how much power does she have? Between my injuries and the stress of the oncoming war, this fake engagement was taking a backseat until things settled. I have more pressing matters to tend to… like rowdy chakra exhausted jounins.

“Kasa, can’t you be more gentle?” whined Obito as I redid his bandages. “I’m a patient, and I’m hurt.”

“Quit complaining, it’s not like it hurts. Most of your wounds are superficial by this point. The only reason that you’re still here is due to chakra exhaustion.” I retorted as I tightened the bandages around his neck bit more just to spite him.

“Ack! Too tight! Too tight!” flailed Obito.

It’s been a week since I’ve recovered and immediately, I was listed under Rin as her nurse’s aide. My first assignment as her aide was to tend to Obito and Kakashi’s bandage changes and their feeding if Rin decided that they needed to be restrained. Apparently, these two has the highest record in trying to escape from the hospital and not even chakra rope could keep them at bay.

Rin was assigned to these two as a means to keep them from obliterating the supply of chakra rope. Who knew she could use the chakra chains as a means to reign in rowdy patients like Kakashi and Obito. Knowing what I knew of them, I found it extraordinarily strange that they would act so… juvenile. From what I remember by this point they were more solemn than anything else.

With so many things happening one after another, I haven’t had a chance to take a step back and take note what changes occurred with the presence of Obito being alive and still in Konoha. From early on, I realized that any major event I changed had an unpredictable butterfly effect to follow.

Isobu’s rampage through Konoha all those years ago was a prime example. In saving Obito, I inadvertently saved Rin from her death in Kakashi’s hands and unleashed this demon on Konoha. Though, without her, I might not have been able to save Kushina. I could probably spend days listing out all the changes and differences Obito made by just existing alongside everyone, but I hardly have the time for that.

What I will note is what his presence did to Kakashi. Unlike the silver-haired jounin I knew from long ago, this one wasn’t the aloof and Icha Icha obsessed jounin… Well, maybe he’s secretly obsessed with Jiraiya’s pervy books, but his personality was considerably more subdued compared to the original. I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing. Sure, he still had his moments where he’d crack well-timed jokes and tease Obito to no ends, but somehow, I get the feeling that his heart isn’t all there when he does so.
“I can’t believe you two!” grumbled Rin as she marked off their charts. “I skip one mission and you two idiots go off and cause an international incident!”

“But what they wanted would’ve killed you!” protested Obito.

“I’m quite sure the negotiations team wouldn’t have let it come to that,” said Rin as she dropped the charts back into their bins. “It’s bad enough you threw the first punch, did you have to go and take out platoons of Kiri-nin? You even dragged Kakashi into this mess and now both of you are stuck here with chakra exhaustion.”

“Why am I getting all the blame?” whined Obito. “Kakashi took out more of them than me!”

“Don’t drag me into this,” drawled Kakashi. “I was just saving your neck.”

“Yeah right! You were just as angry that they wanted to do that to Rin!” snapped Obito before he turned to me with a kicked puppy expression on his face. “Kasa, you believe me right?”

“I don’t know.” I said absently with a grin. “Kakashi’s not the type to start international disputes.”

“Kaaassaaaa,” whined Obito. “Not you too, why doesn’t anyone believe me?”

“I’ll believe you when you grow up,” said Rin dryly. “Now are you two going to behave or do I have to chain you up?”

“Wooh, Rin-san’s kinky.” I said juvenile before she flushed red.

“Kasa-chan!” shouted the girl, completely mortified.

“Does your father know you make such lewd jokes?” commented Kakashi.

“Do you want to be the one to tell him?” I replied cheerily.

The silver-haired jounin snorted. “No thanks, I’ll leave that honor to someone else.”

“Why?” I grinned. “Tou-san is a pleasant conversationalist with excellent bedside manners.”

“I supposed that would be true, but I don’t think that extends to everyone. Especially concerning certain individuals,” drawled Kakashi.

“Eh?” I turned my attention to him before I caught a knowing look under his lowered lids. How the heck does he know? Did Tenzo blab?

“Really?” said Obito in confusion. “Tesuri doesn’t seem like that sort of person. He’s usually so nice to me when I get hospitalized. Nicer than most of the other iryo-nin in the hospital anyway.”

“Is that so?” said Rin leisurely.

“I-I mean not as nice as you Rin!” Hastily Obito corrected himself. “You’re the nicest and most awesomest one there!”

“Suck up.” I sniggered quietly as Kakashi snorted.
“The only reason why Tesuri seems nice at all is because he actually likes him,” snorted Kakashi.

“What, Tou-san doesn’t like you then?” I asked curiously.

“More like he doesn’t like anyone that you could take fancy to,” droned Kakashi. “Considering Obito practically treats you like a little sister and is overly obsessed with pleasing Rin at every turn, I think that’s the only reason why he’s not amongst your father’s kill on sight list.”

I pressed a hand to my face. “Good lord, Tou-san’s taking the phrase overprotective to a whole other level…” I paused. “Why does he think I might be interested in you of all people? You’re an ass.”

Obito cracked up laughing. “You tell the stoic bastard, Kasa!”

“At least her father thinks I’m cool enough to be a threat,” replied Kakashi.

“Ha, but he actually likes me. What do you say to that?” grinned Obito.

“Likeable like a toothache,” droned Kakashi.

“You want a fight tough guy?” snapped Obito as he crawled to his knees.

“Please, you can barely even get out of bed,” retorted Kakashi with a snort.

“You want to test that, tough guy?” growled Obito.

“You won’t last five seconds,” challenged Kakashi.

“Enough!” snappe Rin as she chained the two with chakra chains and planted their faces into their beds. “Neither of you are getting into a fight in the hospital. Now shut up and settle down!”

“Y-yes ma’am,” croaked the two as they struggled to breathe with the chain’s grip.

With my hands to my mouth, I did my best to cover the giggles escaping. You got to love the team dynamics in Konoha. Even when beaten and down, as long as the team is still together, they’ll still wreak havoc, whether on the battlefield or the hospital bed. As long as Kakashi has Rin and Obito, I don’t think I have to worry all that much… Probably…
Fulfilled Commitment

“Kasa-chan!” shouted Hana gleefully before I found myself tackled in a bear hug and swept into her arms, her brand new hitai-ate glinting in the dying sunlight.

“Hana!” I said in surprise with a laugh and returned her hug. “It’s been so long! How have you been?”

“I’m a genin now,” chirped the older girl.

“I heard you almost made rookie of the year.” I grinned.

“Almost,” sighed Hana as she released me. “That honor falls to one of my teammates.”

“Anyone I know?” I asked curiously as the Haimaru brothers nipped at my feet. I giggled as I knelt down to scratch their ears. “Hey boys.”

“I’m the only early graduate this time around,” replied Hana. “We never shared any classes with them before, but so far… one’s an idiot, the other’s a bore and our jounin sensei is probably the laziest person I’ve ever met! He was late on the first day because he said it was too exhausting walk up the stairs. We found him lounging at the Academy entrance staring at the clouds when we went to look for him.”

…That sounds like a Nara.

“…Your sensei wouldn’t happen to be Shikaku Nara would it?” I asked, trying my best not to sound excited by the prospect.

It’s been quite some time since I last stumbled into the Nara compound and promptly told to get my ass off the property because he’s too lazy to kick me off it himself. I know he said not to go bother him until I’ve become a chunin, but he never said I can’t visit my best friend while he’s around.

“Nope, but he is a Nara though. Ensui Nara,” answered Hana.

“Ensui?” I muttered to myself, my memory not sparking at all from the name, but considering the Nara Clan is pretty notable, there’s probably more members aside from Shikaku’s immediate family.

“I wouldn’t expect you to know who it is, considering you had a hard enough time just covering the basics without the addition of studying fellow shinobi,” said Hana.

“…You make it sound like I’m inept.” I muttered in annoyance before the Haimaru brother plowed me to the ground as started licking my face.

“Oh, don’t take it like that,” giggled Hana. “You’re just busy and don’t have time for that sort of thing. How’s working at the hospital anyway?”

“How?” I repeated giggling as I tried to push the dogs off.

It’s been months since I was reassigned to the hospital in the guise of a punishment. In actuality, it was due to the rising conflict between Konoha and Kiri that all medically adept shinobi were reassigned to specific stations. My original thought that as a nurse aid, I wouldn’t have much of
a chance to actually practice iryo-ninjutsu, considering in my old world, nurse’s aide generally did
the menial manual labor like changing bedding, washing patients and pretty much whatever that
doesn’t need extensive training or schooling.

What I actually ended up doing was assisting senior iryo-nin in tending minor to mid-level
injuries ranging from lacerations to poisons. Often times, I worked alongside Rin or Tesuri, but as
more and more patients came in, I usually ended up in the A&E ward, the accident and emergency
ward for those who needed immediate treatment. Not that there were much of a rush of shinobi daily.
Maybe once every couple of days during the changing of shifts that there was an increase of injured
shinobi coming into the hospital and even then a good portion of their injuries were already treated
by the field medics.

Unfortunately, that meant my workload was considerably larger since I dealt with minor to
mid-level injuries. I seem to recall Rin and Tesuri intervening in several occasions to get me out of
my tunnel vision to take breaks and actually eat… I should probably put some effort to fix that tunnel
vision mentality. I’m quite sure Rin and Tesuri can’t always be around to stop me from killing myself
via chakra exhaustion.

“Fine I guess?” I said, covering a hand over one of the dog’s eyes so he’d stop licking me.
“Aside from healing people, I don’t think there’s much else that’s interesting to talk about.”

“So…” a sly grin crossed her face. “Have you been talking to your Uchiha boyfriends as of
late? Or are you still avoiding them because of your hair disaster?”

“My hair is not a disaster!” I grumbled. It has grown back some in the last couple of
months. While nowhere close to a girlish bob-cut, at least it no longer looked like a military issued
buzz-cut.

“Ah, but you admit that they’re your boyfriends,” chirped Hana.

“As if.” I muttered darkly, more like unwanted fiancées. “I’m not avoiding them, I’ve been
busy.”

“Sure, you’ve been busy,” sung Hana. “I’ve seen you around with your new friend, what
was his name? Tenzo?”

“He visits me at the hospital!” I retorted. “It’s not like I take time out of my schedule to
hang out with him.”

“And your teammates and Obito?” continued Hana.

“Okay, Tokuma and Santa had it coming!” I snapped. “It has to be done even if I had to
take time out of my busy schedule.”

“…Wait… what did you do to them?” asked Hana warily.

“Nothing they didn’t deserve.” I huffed childishly.

You know the phrase sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me?
Well, my answer to that is to smash a dictionary into the face of the person who said it. Let’s see if
getting hit by over a hundred thousand words hurt. Not sure if it’s my innate pettiness or the
Uzumaki blood that’s running through my veins, but the urge to extract petty revenge was stronger
than ever. Being a shinobi only made matters worse because it made pranking all that much easier.

If you’re worried for their safety, be calm because let’s face the facts, I’m not all that
threatening to begin with. All the pranks I’ve done thus far are childish and harmless for the most part, considering I have a cute and adorable little assistant at my tail when I pull off my pranks.

Who’s my cute little assistant you ask? Why, it’s Naruto of course! Age three and barely coherent most of the time, Kushina was very encouraging that Naruto dips his little feet into the art of pranking. I’m no master in the arts, but with excellent role models, the term being used very loosely, like Kushina and Obito, pulling one over my fellow genin teammates isn’t a big deal… considering my pranks aren’t all that awesome to begin with and I only wanted petty revenge.

“…I probably shouldn’t even ask,” sighed Hana. “All right, you’ve explained your way out of two, how about Obito?”

“He’s using me as an excuse to visit Rin.” I replied bluntly. “And how come I have to be the one that strikes up a conversation with Itachi and Shisui? If they want to talk to me, they can come visit me themselves.”

“That is a bit odd,” said Hana thoughtfully. “Just because you’re being shy and avoiding them, doesn’t mean they have to avoid you.”

I scowled. She’s baiting me. “They’ll turn up sooner or later. I doubt there’s any shinobi that hasn’t landed in the hospital at least once in their career.”

“…That’s kind cold,” said Hana. “Do you really want them to get hospitalized?”

“…Stop twisting my words.” I sighed, turning my attention back to her dogs.

“Joking aside, this conflict with Kiri is starting to get pretty bad,” said Hana as she grew solemn. “I heard from my mom that there were skirmishes at the border. Kiri’s been taking missions opposing Konoha. At this rate, I think we might be in for another war.”

“Another war.” I repeated grimly.

There was supposed to be at least ten years of peace between the hidden villages before the next major war happened, but due to my meddling, I’ve created a butterfly effect that’s even more chaotic than the last. What the heck should I do at this point? If things keep going the way it’s going, I won’t have a clue of what’s to come. Not that I could do anything to stop it. I wouldn’t know how to steer things back to its original course even if I wanted to. Everything is just spiraling out of control.

I pressed a hand against my head trying to will away the oncoming migraine. Gods, what a mess, why does everything I touch go so horribly wrong?

“Kasa-chan?” asked Hana worriedly, her eyes focusing on my hand before I hastily dropped it to my side.

“It’s nothing, just a minor headache.” I answered. “It’s great seeing you again, but I think I should probably get going before Tou-san decides he needs to go hunting again.”

Hana giggled. “So that’s why.”

“Why what?” I frowned in confusion.

“The reason why Itachi and Shisui haven’t been seeing you,” replied Hana cheerily.

“Huh?” I said with a dumbfounded expression, she can’t mean…
“Your dad is a bit overprotective, don’t you think so?” grinned Hana. “Or are you that serious with Itachi or Shisui?”

“…Think what you want.” I said in exasperation. Talking to Hana is exhausting, just let it go, go home and hit the hay.

“I still say you should give the boys a visit,” suggested Hana.

“Can I do it another day? I’m sleepy.” I protested, but the Inuzuka girl would have none of it as she hauled me under her arm.

“Come on, I know you missed them,” said Hana as I flailed in her grip.

“If I want to visit them, I’ll go on my own! You don’t need to drag me!” I complained.

“I don’t know what happened while I was still in the academy, but the Kasa I know wouldn’t ignore her friends for months on end just because she’s tired or busy,” said Hana.

I stopped my struggling and slumped into her grip. “Have you been hanging around Tenzo? How come you guys can read me so easily?”

“Because you’re not a solitary person,” said Hana. “You’d go insane if let alone for too long.”

“I’m not going to go insane.” I grumbled.

“Nothing you say will stop me from dragging you to the Uchiha district,” said Hana.

I sighed. “If I have to go, can I at least walk there myself?”

“Are you going to run away the moment I put you down?” asked Hana.

“I’m not stupid enough to run while you have the Haimaru brothers at your beck and call to hunt me down and maul me.” I retorted.

“Good,” said Hana before she dropped me to the ground. “So, you want to tell me why you were ignoring the boys?”

“Nope, not one bit.” I answered as I caught my balance and walked in step with her.

Truth is, I’m not avoiding them because I’m embarrassed. I’ve gotten over that after two weeks of endless teasing from Tokuma and Santa. Somehow my baldness status became their choice of poison in riling up my temper. A good number of our bicker-fests had ended with me tackling them to the ground and trying to beat them senseless. Trying being the keyword, but I’m getting sidetracked.

I knew the engagement is a farce. I knew it’s only a front to protect me from the scrutiny of the council, but I also knew this meant change was coming. A change that I had no clue if it was for the better or for the worse. By this point I’m exhausted from all of it. Avoiding Itachi and Shisui was just me childishly running away. Hardly the most mature thing to do, but what would you do in my position? With everything spiraling out of control, can you really fault me for trying to cling onto what little comforts I had left?

With each step I took, it felt like a step closer to hell… Okay, maybe I was exaggerating a little. The Uchiha district was hardly hell. I’m quite sure Danzo and Orochimaru has that covered
somewhere in the dark abyss of the village.

“Kasa, if you walk at that speed, you’ll get to Itachi’s house in a year,” sighed Hana in exasperation as she grabbed my hand and dragged me along. “Come on, it’s not like Itachi’s going to eat you or something.”

… Oh good lord, what is with Hana and her unintentional dirty comments? Is it her or do I just have a dirty mind? I pressed a hand to my face as I bit back a groan. Gods, if I ever die in the future, someone please make sure I stay dead. If I have to relive my pubescent years again, I might just do something stupid.

“Sorry for intruding! Is anyone home?” shouted Hana as she dragged me through the entrance of the Uchiha household.

“I’m gonna beat you there first!” shouted a childish voice.

“Nuh-uh!” shouted another.

I blinked in surprise when I heard two sets of pitter patter on the ground. Two? That’s odd, who else was here that’s Sasuke’s age?

“SASA-NEE!” shouted a gleeful child as I found a small orange bundle crashing into my stomach.

“Oomph!” I barely stood my ground as I caught the energetic child and spotted the mop of blonde hair. “Naruto? What are you doing here?”

“Sasa-nee! Tachi-nii was showing us how to use shurikens!” babbled Naruto. “He, he was jumping and, and throwing shurikens and he hit all the thingys! It was so cool! And then, and then he let us try!” He said more, but the rest was considerably more incoherent compared to what he started with.

“All right, all right, settled down Naruto.” I said as I planted a hand on his head. His smile never wavering as I ruffled his hair. “Where’s Mikoto-san?”

“Mom went out to buy food,” answered Sasuke before puffing up his cheeks. “How come you never come anymore?”

“Sasuke,” droned Itachi’s voice long before I spotted him rounding the corner to the entrance. “Kasa’s busy with work at the hospital, you know she can’t come all the time.”

“But even Shisui-nii stops by and visit once in a while,” pouted Sasuke.

“Shisui has nothing better to do with his time than to be annoying,” retorted Itachi dryly.

“…I don’t think he’s annoying,” said Naruto from my arms. “Shisui-nii is fun! Sasa-nee, I think you should come play with us when Shisui-nii is around too!”

“Maybe when I’m less busy, Naruto.” I said.

“But you’re always busy!” grumbled Naruto.

“Hey, Naruto, Sasuke, you want to play with the Haimaru brothers?” asked Hana before the two boys lit up, excited by the notion.

“Yeah!” They both cheered before dragging Hana into the house with her three dogs
“Have a nice chat!” chirped Hana before she disappeared with the two boys.

The urge to glare at her retreating back was hard to resist.

“… Uh… Hey.” I said lamely when the sounds of the boys disappeared.

Itachi stared at me for a long moment and we stood in silence. I wonder does he know… or if he’s still in the dark about this? What am I saying? Itachi’s a genius, even if no one told him, he would’ve figured it out himself… Huh, I wonder if Shisui’s in the loop of things. He’s just as much of a genius as Itachi, maybe he figured it out too. Why the hell were there so many prodigies in the Uchiha clan? No wonder they’re such smug bastards most of the time.

With the amount of—

_Poke._

Oh, he so did not just do that! I snapped out of my thoughts with a glare.

“Even after months of not seeing you, you’re still the same space head,” said Itachi as he pulled back from poking my forehead.

“God damn it, Itachi!” I growled, covering my forehead to prevent another poke. “I swear one of these days!”

“You’ll what?” A faint twitch quirked up the corner of his lips. “Turn me into a duck?”

“Ooh! Is Kasa doing duck threats again?” said Shisui from behind before I felt the weight of an arm on my shoulders. “Hey, your hair grew back!”

“What are you doing here?” droned Itachi with his arms crossed.

“Aw, don’t be like that Itachi-chan. It’s been so long since we’ve seen Kasa-chan, be nice and share!” said Shisui cheerily.

“…You make me sound like a toy.” I grumbled.

“Nah, you don’t have to be a toy for Itachi to not share,” said Shisui as he looped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer to whisper into my ear. “He won’t even share Sasuke with me. I’m surprise that he’s willing to Naruto play with his precious little brother.”

“Just because Sasuke decides you’re annoying, doesn’t mean it’s due to my machinations,” said Itachi bluntly.

“Says the person who told his impressionable little brother that I have nothing better to do with my time than to annoy you,” retorted Shisui.

“It just shows Sasuke is sensible for his age,” reasoned Itachi.

“What?” spluttered Shisui in disbelief. “Do you hear this Kasa? The abuse I get from him? And to think I love him like my own flesh and blood!”

“We are related by blood,” said Itachi bluntly.

“And yet I get no love,” said Shisui dramatically with the back of his hand over his eyes.
“Woe is I!”

I bit my lower lip resisting the urge to giggle as my shoulders shook in mirth, but failed as a hearty laugh escaped my lips. “Oh gods, you guys are too much!” I said as I held onto my sides laughing.

“So, not angry at us anymore?” asked Shisui once I composed myself.

“Huh?” I glanced at them, puzzled. “When did I say I was angry at you guys?”

Itachi gave me a pointed look. Guiltily I ducked my head and scratched the side of my cheek.

“Oh, maybe not talking to you guys for months on end does come off as something wrong, but you guys could’ve talked to me about it. It’s not like I told you guys to stay away.”

“We did visit,” said Itachi bluntly.

“…You did?” I said, blinking before I noticed a particular look on his face. “…Are you pouting?”

“Uchihas don’t pout,” drone Itachi with his arms crossed.

“Oh really?” I said with a grin as I took a step closer with my arms behind my back.

“Really,” said the boy in a deadpan with a glare.

Aw… I hurt his feelings. Bad Kasa… Hey wait a sec, something’s not adding up.

“When did you guys visit me?” I asked in confusion.

True, I did what I could to avoid them in between going to the hospital and going home, but that was as far as I went. Unless I hate the person from the depths of my soul, which is a bit rare, there really aren’t that many people that could keep me angry for long. I normally get over being angry at someone usually in a couple of hours.

“A week after you woke up and several times after that,” answered Shisui. “I thought maybe you were angry at us for not visiting when you first woke up. Our teams were out on a mission away from the village.”

“…Odd, how many times did you guys came to visit?” My brows furrowed. “Because this is the first time I’ve heard about this.”

“Once a week,” said Itachi.

“Sometimes twice,” added Shisui.

“O-once or twice a week?” I said in surprise. “Don’t you guys have missions? Where do you guys find the time to do that?”

“You do know we do get breaks in between missions, right?” said Shisui in good humor. “I think your team is probably the only one that does non-stop back-to-back missions, considering at least one member of your team goes out of commission weeks at a time.”

“Oh… but what about when I was on your team? Aside from the training, we were on missions almost all the time.” I noted.
“That was our quota for the month,” said Shisui cheerily.

For the month? What even? Kurei you slave driver! We did that many missions almost on a weekly basis! I inwardly fumed as my vision glazed over with plans to make my dear sensei pay. Just you wait, I’m going to find some way to strip him down to his skivvies, wax off all the hair on his body and then I’ll dump him into—

Poke

“Argh!” I growled, clapping my hands over my forehead, glaring at Itachi’s retreating hand. “When I become evil overlord of the world, the first thing I’m going to do is turn you into a duck, dress you up like a girl and sell you off to a delusional rabid fan-boy!”

“Looks like she’s back to normal,” droned Itachi with a slight quirk at the corner of his lips.

Shisui sniggered. “Aw, she’s so cute when she’s out for blood.”

I puffed up my cheeks, doing my best not to rise up to the bait. I know they’re doing this on purpose. They’re just out to make my blood boil. Don’t rise to it! Don’t—

“Idiot,” murmured Itachi. “You’re going to hurt yourself again.”

Normally, I would’ve jumped the gun and attacked him, thinking he was just throwing one of his usual insults. The tone he used though, made me pause. It didn’t have his usual deadpan arrogance or amusement. Instead, he sounded almost…wistful? I found my childish rage extinguished by confusion as I stared at him with furrowed brows.

Before I could voice out my confusion, I felt the arm around my shoulders shift and Shisui’s hand on my head. Glancing to the older boy in confusion, I spotted him with a cheeky grin.

“Don’t worry your little head about it. Itachi’s just happy that you’re talking to him again,” said Shisui cheerily. “Just pretend everything’s just like old times. Nothing’s changed and nothing has to change unless you want it to.”

I frowned, there’s something odd in the way he said it… Nothing’s changed… unless I want to? What could he… My eyes widened in realization.

“Y-you…” I found myself stuttering turning my head to look the two of them as I tried to force the words out. “How?”

Itachi raised a brow as if to say I should know better than to ask. Shisui on the other hand sniggered as if to tell him to play nice. Oh, and Itachi rolled his eyes in response, telling him to grow up… Good lord, am I fluent in Uchiha silence now?

“Gods, I don’t even…” I pressed a hand to my face, giving up on trying to make sense of the whole thing.

Poke

“You’re going to fry your brain if you keep thinking about it,” droned Itachi, mirth peeking through his deadpan voice.

“I think it’s already fried,” sniggered Shisui. “She’s not even threatening you for poking her head.”
And he’s not all that far off. I think I need to reboot my brain, I think I just got blue-screened.

“It doesn’t matter what labels people tag you with,” continued Itachi. “We won’t treat you any differently. To us, you’re still the same hotheaded idiot that charges headfirst into trouble.”

“Just relax and stop walking on eggshells around us,” added Shisui with another bright grin. “As cute as it is for you to get so flustered, it hardly suits you. Brash, reckless and overall self-destructive is more your style.”

“…Are you encouraging me to be self-destructive?” I noted in bewilderment.

“Goodness no,” laughed Shisui.

“Your father would likely kill us if we did,” said Itachi dryly.

“… What makes you say that?” I asked in confusion.

“Well,” started Shisui sheepishly. “Considering you had no clue that we visited nearly every week the past couple of months and you’re not all that angry at us. I think your father’s not taking this as well as you are.”

“…What happened?” I asked, dreading to find out what Tesuri did while I was avoiding them.

“You take after your father more than you think,” replied Itachi bluntly.

Shisui covered his mouth trying to hold back his laughs.

“Huh?” I furrowed my brows, trying to figure out what he meant by that. “The only thing I can think of that would make sense is that I’m a pretty good medic… Aside from that I don’t think I have much in common with Tou-san.”

“Oh, you have more in common with him than you think,” giggled Shisui. “Wouldn’t you agree, Itachi?”

Itachi’s face flushed red as he turned to him with a glare, as if to say don’t you dare.

Now my interest is peaked.

“What did he do?” I asked.

“Remember how you always threaten us?” said Shisui gleefully.

“Shisui!” grounded out Itachi as he took a step forward and Shisui shifted himself behind me as if I was a human shield.

“How I always threaten you?” I repeated dumbly. “I give you guys a million different threats. You have to be more specific.”

“Oh you know the one,” grinned Shisui as Itachi face turned even redder and his fists clenched tightly.

My eyes slowly widened in realization. “You don’t mean…”

“Shisui!” Itachi all but growled, his face completely red by this point.
“Oh yes,” cackled Shisui. “Your father did what you always wanted to do.”

Itachi darted forward trying to grab Shisui, but the older boy easily zipped out of the way. By this point I had my hands over my mouth, body shaking as I did my best to keep myself together. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t breathe. My chest was heaving so much, I thought I would pass out.

“You know what he did?” said Shisui with a dramatic flair as he skipped out of Itachi’s advances.

“W-what?” I wheezed, biting my lower lip hard enough so the pain would keep me sane for a moment longer.

“Shisui, don’t you dare,” said Itachi warningly.

“Why not Itachi-chan?” teased Shisui. “It’s not like I’m going to show Kasa-chan the pictures Obito took of you after Tesuri-san turned you into a duck with tar and duck feathers.”

“There were pictures?” snapped Itachi, breaking his composure.

I had none left to speak of when I hit the ground laughing. Tears rushed to my eyes as I held my sides rolling on the ground. My lungs burned as my cackles turned into silent wheezes. I had no clue how long I was there, but I’m quite sure by the time Hana came in to smack me back to my senses, I was already blue in the face.

I couldn’t say anything as she pounded my back. I think I’m going to die!

“What’s wrong with Sasa-nee?” asked Naruto.

“I think she’s broken,” answered Sasuke.

“Kasa! Calm down, you’re going to laugh yourself to death at this rate,” said Hana as she smacked me in the back, trying to get me to breathe.

“Oh, they’re killing me!” I managed to squeak out. “This is almost as funny as getting Itachi to say to the extreme!”

“…Your Sasa-nee is weird,” said Sasuke.

“No, your Tachi-ni is weird!” retorted Naruto and before long, the two were in a childish scuffle of their own amidst Itachi and Shisui’s game of death tag.

This was the best day I had in ages! What I wouldn’t give to freeze time and preserve this moment forever.
Nominations

“...Tokuma? Santa?” I said in puzzlement when I found them at my doorstep one morning as I was leaving for the hospital. “What are you guys doing here?”

“Don’t know,” answered Santa as he fought back a yawn behind his hand. “Kurei sensei told us yesterday to pick you up this morning and head to the admin building.”

“Admin building?” I said in confusion.

“We were assigned a special mission,” said Tokuma with his arms crossed and looking much more awake and alert compared to our teammate.

“Mission? But I’m still on…” I paused. Wait a second, my six-month assignment to the hospital ended yesterday. I’ve been so used to the schedule, I completely forgot about it. “Oh right, I’m supposed to meet up with the team today.” I rubbed the back of my head sheepishly.

“You might want to dress warmer and get whatever else you need for a long mission,” suggested Tokuma.

“Long mission to somewhere cold huh?” I murmured before looking even more sheepish. “Do you think I have time to restock?”

The two raised a brow as if asking if I was serious.

Since I was hospitalized immediately after my evaluation and then promptly dumped into hospital duty for the last six months, I hadn’t had a chance to restock. I know, I know, I’m a horrible ninja for not keeping my basic tools stocked, but it’s not like I had to fight anyone inside the hospital. Heck, the worst danger I faced in there was catching a cold.

“Well, I’m not completely out!” I defended myself. “But what I do have is hardly enough for a long-term mission.”

“How on earth did you go for so long without restocking?” asked Santa with a frown. “What were you using during training?”

“Iryo-ninjutsu.” I replied as if it answered everything.

After working with experienced iryo-nin in the hospital for six months I’ve added a couple of new tricks into my minuscule arsenal of skills. It was hardly a bragging point considering most of those skills aren’t all that powerful or useful in combat. Anyway, back to equipment issues. Since I was too lazy to drag my ass to actually restock, I’ve been juggling between using chakra scalpels as a temporary kunai and chakra needles as temporary senbons.

Both techniques wastes chakra and requires enormous amounts of attention and chakra control if you want it to do anything remotely useful. I would’ve probably be better off to have a physical weapon, but considering I haven’t gotten a chance to go shopping, I’ll work with what I’ve got. I admit, my chakra scalpel technique isn’t badass enough to slice through muscles and tendons without breaking skin, but I could use it with the same ease as if having a physical weapon.

Anyway, aside from these tricks, I do have some offensive techniques under my belt now thanks to Kushina… but I don’t think they turned out the way she had hoped…
“I’m sure Kurei sensei will let you restock before we actually leave,” drawled Tokuma. “Though, you might want to be careful the next time we have training.”

I felt a shiver run through my body at the thought.

During the last six months, while I was avoiding Itachi and Shisui, if I wasn’t in the hospital working, I was usually training with my two teammates. Kurei sensei was very encouraging in the matter… considering he would personally come to the house and haul my half-awake ass to the training grounds then promptly beating all three of us to the ground in the name of training.

After one of Kurei’s impromptu beatings—I mean training, I’m extremely glad I decided to be an iryo-nin. Although, being an iryo-nin might also be the reason why he handed our asses so soundly. There’s no need to hold back if he knows someone on the team that could heal the damage afterwards… Good lord, I just realized Kurei is evil.

“Don’t you think you’re over reacting?” commented Santa. “It’s just training.”

“No, it’s not that… I just realized Kurei sensei is the devil incarnate.” I said as I rubbed my arms, trying to get rid of the goose bumps.

“I thought Hizashi-sama was the devil incarnate,” said Tokuma dryly as we continued to the admin building.

“No, I said Hizashi sensei was a demon.” I grumbled. “Hokage-sama must be the lord of the underworld for employing them.”

“If Hokage-sama is the lord of the underworld, does that mean we’re all hell spawns then?” inserted Santa.

“…Huh…” I hummed thoughtfully. “I think you might have a point.”

“Stop humoring her Santa,” sighed Tokuma. “You’ll only encourage her to make more outrageous comparisons next time.”

“What’s wrong with that? I find it funny,” sniggered Santa.

Tokuma rolled his eyes as we made our way into the building. What I didn’t expect was to run into two other teams heading the same way. One I knew fairly well and other… well, I know one person there.

“Holy shit! Is that Kasa? What the hell happened to your hair?” blurted Zaji when he spotted me.

“…Nice to see you again too.” I said in a deadpan.

“Eh? I didn’t expect to see Shirakumo sensei’s team here too,” said Santa as he followed up from behind, with a casual wave. “Yo, Kotetsu, Izumo and of course Itachi.”

I blinked, I didn’t know Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were Itachi’s teammates. With how bland and boring they are, I’m surprised anyone could tell them apart. I think I would have an easier time trying to differentiate twins compared to them.

“You’re all here for the same mission,” droned Itachi, taking note of the backpacks on everyone’s back. He frowned when his eyes dropped on me.
I rolled my eyes and gave a tap at my pouch of storage scrolls before he could lecture me.

“I wonder what mission would need three sets of genin,” said Zaji with his hands behind his head as we made our way up to the office. “It’s a bit of an overkill, don’t you think? I mean there are three jounin sensei tagging along with us.”

“It is a bit unorthodox,” agreed Muta. “Maybe an infiltration?”

“Good luck with that. Not with these two and Kasa,” snorted Santa as he thumbed towards me and Itachi’s teammates.

“Hey!” I found myself retorting alongside my fellow insulted genin-mates. …Somehow,” sighed Tokuma as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “I get the feeling it’s going to be a stressful mission.”

“It’d be rather boring otherwise, don’t you think?” quipped Shisui with a grin as he latched an arm around Itachi’s shoulders.

“Don’t drag me into your thought process,” said Itachi dryly as he casually peeled the older Uchiha’s hand off his shoulder.

“Are the lot of you done dragging your feet?” droned Hizashi’s commanding voice before we spotted him and our respective jounin senseis.

“Sorry! Sorry! We’re coming!” said Zaji cheerily as he bounded ahead of us.

“Zaji,” chided Hizashi before the genin rubbed the back of his head sheepishly.

As much as I wanted to say I’m going to enjoy this odd team-up between the nine of us…I can’t, I have a feeling that I might know what this mission was for.

“Good, everyone’s here,” started Hiruzen, his aged voice low and rumbling with power.

“Sir!” We chorused, back straight and our stance painfully formal.

“As you may all be aware, we are at odds with Kirigakure for quite some time and while I would much rather not send any of you into their territory, this is the matter of preserving what little civility we may still have with Kiri,” said Hiruzen grimly.

“Kiri?” noted Tokuma with a frown. “Hokage-sama, forgive my interruption, but what can nine genin do to alleviate an international crisis between villages?”

“Sound question,” replied Hiruzen, his hands folded in front of his face, his eyes lit with a serious undertone. “As I’ve said before, I would much prefer that I needn’t send any of you. Unfortunately, that would come off as an insult if we were to opt out in attending and it would only deter our already unstable situation.”

I remained quiet as the seriousness of the situation sunk into my fellow genins. Several of them were already frowning either in puzzlement or realization at what responsibilities we’re about to be given.

“In reviewing the progress of each individual here, all of you have shown great aptitude in the chosen field of specializations, chosen by your jounin sensei,” said Hiruzen.

I had to blink at that. I get Itachi’s team specialized in combat and Shisui’s team specialized
in reconnaissance and maybe mid-range combat if necessary, but my team had no specialty. The closest you could claim is probably weapons since that’s Kurei’s specialty, but we’re hardly weapon masters or meant for combat. We’re probably closer to support.

“After much consideration, I’ve decided that Team Four, Six and Thirteen will be the representatives of Konoha for the upcoming chunin exams in Kirigakure,” said Hiruzen.

Surprise crossed several faces, likely not many of them expected to be nominated for the chunin exams so soon. Had Hiruzen not told me about the possibility all those months ago, I might’ve reacted much differently compared to the quiet calmness I have right now.

“Representatives?” noted Shisui with a frown as the phrasing was odd.

I don’t blame him. Normally, taking an exam meant the examinee was a participant, barely of any importance unless they score well. A representative on the other hand held more weight as it wasn’t just a test of your own knowledge or skills. It was the matter of showing the strength pride of wherever they’re from.

“Don’t be fooled by the notion of joint exam between the villages,” said Hizashi. “It may seem like a show of friendship to have genins from the various village to take an exam together, the exam is very much another battlefield.”

“How?” asked Izumo or was it Kotetsu?

“As a standard, if the exam is held in Konoha, we often opt out letting genins know of the tournament in the last portion of the exams less they qualify,” answered Hiruzen. “The tournament is a means to showcase the villages’ power and assets to the lords and possible clientele. From previous experiences, giving this information to inexperienced genin affected their performances poorly. However, in light of our situation with Kiri, I will be frank with all of you.”

If the gravel of his sagely voice didn’t hold our attention, the sternness of his gaze certainly did. There was something behind it that I just couldn’t put my finger on. Was it intent?

“The reason the lot of you were chosen despite having less than two years of experience because of you have the best chance in getting into the finals’ bracket out of all the potential genins I could have sent,” said Hiruzen.

Best chance? You’re kidding right? I am the worst possible candidate for a one-on-one battle. Why am I even considered? Hell, why is my team? Why is Shisui’s team? We’re meant for support or gathering intelligence. The only team that stood a chance was Itachi’s since they were train for com—oh…

“It seems like you’ve come to a realization Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen. “Would you like to enlighten the rest of your fellow genins?”

Stage fright wasn’t something I faced often, considering I don’t make it a habit of mine to draw attention to myself, but suddenly having all eyes on me felt a little unnerving.

“It seems like you’ve come to a realization Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen. “Would you like to enlighten the rest of your fellow genins?”

Stage fright wasn’t something I faced often, considering I don’t make it a habit of mine to draw attention to myself, but suddenly having all eyes on me felt a little unnerving.

“I wouldn’t call it enlightening considering we all learned this when we first became genins.” I answered trying to ignore the stares. “And if you take into consideration what each team is specialized in and what you just said, it’s not hard to figure it out.”

“And what did I say brought you to that conclusion?” droned Hiruzen’s lips. It was obvious he knows that I know the answer, but it must be his innate flair for the dramatics that he’s waiting me out.
“You said the lot of us, which meant you didn’t pick anyone specifically from our teams. You chose us as a whole.” I continued when his lips quirked up in amusement. “Our teams each specialized in a field that compliments the other teams when placed together. Not to mention several of us have worked together in the past due to unforeseeable circumstances, giving us a better advantage compared to other genins as we have experience working with others aside from our primary team.”

“Correct in all counts,” said Hiruzen shortly after I finished. “It is with utmost importance that you all support one another when the time comes. While the priority is to make it into the finals, remember who your allies are. In Kiri, the only support you’ll have is each other. You’ve all grown so much as shinobis of Konoha and I am proud to have you all as subordinates.”

Pride glowed in my fellow genins as they all straightened their posture with their heads held high and confident. Even I couldn’t deny the feelings bubbling at my chest as Hiruzen finished his motivational speech. It’s to instill patriotism to the village, I know that, but it’s nice feeling like I’m a part of something for a change.

“I’ll leave the mission briefing to your senseis. I wish you all the best of luck and possibly see some of you return a chunin,” said Hiruzen as a warm smile spread across his face.

“Yes sir!” I said in unison before giving the man a respectful bow and taking our leave.

As we filed out the room, I found Kurei sensei lingering briefly next to me.

“Well said,” complimented Kurei quietly his stoic face not giving away his thoughts, but I still found myself beaming at his praise. It wasn’t often my sadistic sensei handed out compliments.

The mission briefing wasn’t all that extensive. However, the material we were required to memorize were. While we didn’t have elaborate maps of Kirigakure, there were plenty of notable shinobi listed in the bingo books listed from the previous wars and possible clans with kekkai genkai traits we should take note of. Though, from the side notes in the bingo book, it looked like many clans were eliminated during the purge of kekkai genkai after the civil war ended in the Land of Water.

Chances of us running into someone with a kekkai genkai weren’t high, but in enemy territory, there was no such thing as over-preparation. Though it is worth mentioning that Kiri isn’t known for its kekkai genkai users. Rather, they’re known for their bloody thirsty shinobi.

By now, my memories of people, not directly related to Naruto’s life, has grown hazy. Flipping through the bingo books, I found myself filled with dread that I couldn’t recognize almost any of these shinobi. Being in Konoha for so long, I took for granted the familiarity and safety it offered. Heading to Kiri, I would be entering the village blind. Knowing next to nothing of its layouts and politics. Sure, I’ve traveled close to the border with Tesuri when we did our rounds around the Land of Fire, but that hardly helped.

I’m quite sure there would be uprisings and revolts at some point. Likely caused by Obito, if I haven’t changed the timelines, but with everything change, I have no clue what’s going on in Kiri. Was Yagura still Mizukage? He was Isobu’s jinchuriki, that much I could remember, but with Rin being Isobu’s current jinchuriki, does that mean he’s dead? Or did he find some way to survive the exchange? If that’s the case, was he still under someone’s control?

“Kasa.” The sound of Kurei’s voice snapped me out of my thoughts before I realized I’ve stopped reading… and stopped paying attention to the briefing all together.
“Sorry.” I sunk into my seat embarrassed.

“As I was saying,” continued Kurei. “You’re all issued a bingo book and I suggest you familiarize yourselves with it. I doubt any of you would run into any of them, on the off chance something goes wrong, use your better judgment and flee if possible.”

“Knowing when to retreat is not a weakness,” noted Shirakumo. “You’re only genin and no one will fault you if you do so. If anything, it’s preferred. You’d be more use to the village alive rather than KIA.”

“We’ll be departing the village in two weeks’ time. Prepare what you need and make sure you’re ready by then,” said Hizashi. “If any of you make it into the final exam, it’s likely our stay in Kiri may last up to a month or more. All of you should pack additional equipment and supplies.”

“While it is possible to buy equipment from Kirigakure, often their prices for outsiders are inflated and the quality is subpar. So if any of you have a dependency on your gear, make sure you pack what you need,” advised Kurei, but I’m quite sure his eyes landed on me when he said that.

“In addition to preparing what you need for the upcoming trip to Kiri, all three teams will be gathering three times a week for group training,” noted Shirakumo.

“Group training?” questioned Santa with a frown.

“It’s merely a precaution,” replied Hizashi. “On the chance that Kiri tries something and the teams become scattered. It’s best for all of you to be able to work with members from the other teams.”

“Kasa and Santa,” said Kurei as he turned to us. “The two of you are familiar with working in tandem with Team Six and Thirteen respectively. During the group training, you’ll be responsible assisting the others in familiarizing with each of the team’s dynamics.”

“Me?” I blinked in surprise, it’s a pleasant surprise that Kurei believes I could be helpful, but I’m hardly the best candidate. “Are you sure? I haven’t worked with Team Thirteen for a long time already. They’ve probably grown leaps and bounds. What I do know was probably outdated by now.”

“Not to mention she hasn’t been on the active roster for over half a year already,” interrupted Shisu with concern lacing his voice. “Kurei sensei, shouldn’t Kasa concentrate on re-familiarizing herself with actual combat?”

“Pft,” snorted both Santa and Tokuma as they poorly hid their laughter behind a cough.

“Your concern for your fellow genin is heartwarming,” started Kurei, his eyes stern and unwavering. “But it’s unnecessary. Kasa could hold her own in battle if the situation arises.”

Several brows went up in surprise before I suddenly found myself at the attention of curious glances. To make the situation worse, Tokuma and Santa were struggling not to die from laughter as my face flushed red and I tried to sink deeper into my chair. I’m quite sure between me and the rest of my team, we’re sending quite a number of mixed signals to everyone else in the room.

I could hold my own in battle. Kurei was quite determined to make sure I don’t end up blowing myself or my teammates into the hospital. Apparently, everyone sees me as suicidal and explosive. Even though Kurei made certain I could manage without blowing myself up, I wouldn’t say I’m doing it quite the same way as some other shinobi. Sure, I could fight… but… well, you guys will get to see it eventually if I ever get thrown into a fight.
Don’t take this as a declaration of badassery—yes, I know it’s not a word. I’m making it one. Deal with it—now where was I? Oh right. I shouldn’t ever be considered for the frontlines. The most I could do in a fight was either survive long enough to run away or last long enough for reinforcements to come save my ass. I know that sounds lame, but even if I wanted to charge in with guns blazing, I couldn’t because the physique of this damn body isn’t meant for direct combat.

“Since none of you have any questions, this briefing is adjourned. Remember, team training is at six tomorrow morning in training ground three. Don’t be late,” dismissed Shirakumo before he and the other jounin left with

“Looks like you’re going to have time to restock after all,” said Santa before sniggering. “Though, I think Kurei sensei caught on the fact you haven’t been up keeping your supplies. You’re going to get an ass kicking tomorrow.”

“Stop rubbing it in.” I sighed, already halfway off my seat with how low I’ve sunken into it. Actually, it’s a wonder I’m not on the floor already.

“You’re out of supplies?” said Shisui with a cheery skip in his step as he made his way to where my team sat. “Maybe you should stop by at Neko-baa with Itachi and Sasuke later. I heard she stocked up on new seals.”

“New seals? What kind?” I asked, perking up at the mention of seals and bouncing to my feet.

Sure, the local shops sold seals, but they were primarily storage seals and explosive tags. Neither much use to me in combat, considering I don’t have anything worth storing for battle and if I wanted to blow shit up, overloading my faulty seals worked just fine…. As long as I stay out of the blast range anyway.

Seals were hard to come by, at least ones I could use anyway. Only few seal masters were in the business of selling their crafts, mainly because most would rather use it themselves and not risk the chance of facing their own seal in battle.

“Don’t know, I’m not too familiar with seals,” said Shisui before he turned to Itachi who was coming down from the top row with his teammates. “Hey, do you know what seals Neko-baa has in stock?”

“One-use seals,” replied Itachi once he came close enough. “I wouldn’t suggest buying it. You’ll bankrupt yourself.”

I’m quite sure I don’t need to explain what one-use seals are, but in case any of you are lost, one-use seals is exactly what the name implies. You can only use it once and then it becomes obsolete. Unlike the charm seals I have, which I could use near indefinite given I have the chakra for it, one-use seals incinerates itself once it’s been used. However, one-use seals has a ton more variety compared to the long-lasting seals I have. Since they’re not constrained by reuse, the possibilities were limited only by the seal’s creator.

…I only could make them… It’s frustrating that I have all this sealing knowledge, but I couldn’t do anything with it. Ever since my evaluation, I’ve figured out how to access the seals on my arms without frying my brain. My mistake was overcharging the seals during activation and progressively adding more and more chakra when the information started pouring through. Though, that had more to do with my affinity for seals as an activator.

I sighed depressingly. “I’ll take a look anyway. Maybe there’s something there that won’t
empty my wallet.”

“Then its settle,” said Shisui as he planted a hand on each of our shoulders. “You guys have fun on your date. I have something to do and can’t chaperone you guys.”

“Something?” I repeated curiously before a sly grin crossed my lips and I nudged him playfully. “Would you happen to be going on a date yourself?”

Itachi snorted at the incredulity of my claim.

“Aw, no need to be jealous,” grinned Shisui as he latched onto me and Itachi like we’re overgrown teddy bears. “Regardless what girl manages to steal this unworthy heart, you two will forever be my first love!”

“Both of you’ve been cheating on me with each other this whole time?” I rested the back of my hand to my eyes dramatically. “How could you? I thought we had something special!”

“Oh forgive me dear Kasa!” returned Shisui just as dramatically as he fell to one knee before me. “Itachi’s icy allure was too much for me! I couldn’t resist! Give me a second chance!”

“No, no!” I said placing a hand out to stop him. “The two of you were made for each other! Who am I to step in between the true love?”

“Kasa!” said Shisui teary. “Though we may never be together, know that I love you!”

“Shisui!” I cried back before we held our hands in each other’s.

The room dropped into an awkward silence as our fellow genins stared at us with conflicting expressions, uncertain what to make of our performance.

Itachi was the first to break the silence, bluntly stating, “… You two are idiots.”

Shisui and I shared one look before we cracked up laughing. Our shoulders bumping one another as we hugged our sides laughing.

“D-Did you see the look on their faces?” I cracked up laughing as I used Shisui to prop myself up from laughing so much.

“…We’re going to have to deal with this for the duration of the exam,” said Tokuma in mild annoyance as he brushed the tips of his fingers to his brow. No doubt he was feeling a migraine coming on.

“I don’t know,” sniggered Santa. “I think they might make good entertainment for the road.”

“You’ll get tired of it soon enough,” murmured Muta as he adjusted his sunglasses. “They’ll only get progressively worse in the presence of each other.”

“Speaking from experience?” grinned Santa.

“You don’t know the half of it,” said Zaji before the rest of the genin in the room gathered together to become better acquainted.

As terrifying as it is to go to Kiri without knowing what’s to come, I think… I don’t mind as much as long as I’m with them… Maybe…
Pyromaniac

There were many things I can handle. That includes Kurei’s daily beatings, Hizashi’s kunoichi hell lessons and of course we can’t forget my tendency to blow myself up on a whim. Hell! I’ve beaten death more times than I care to keep track of.

Yet, there was one thing that I could never take on alone. Not even with the sheer amount of explosives at my fingertips. My arch nemesis, the bane of my existence! The hellion of the underworld! The scion of the devil himself! The—

“Kasa-nee! Kasa-nee! I caught it! I caught it!” said Sasuke gleefully as he popped out of the bushes with a big grin on his face.

…I’m saying this because Sasuke’s current interest.

“…G-good job.” I forced myself to say as I felt a spastic twitch under my eye when I spotted the disgruntled feline in his arms.

I’ve said this once and I’ll say it again. Cats are evil and I’m quite sure they’re all out to get me. If it wasn’t for the talk of seals, I wouldn’t have ever bothered shopping from Neko-baa just due to the sheer amount of cats the woman had. She was the epitome of crazy cat lady and like the cats, I don’t think she liked me much.

What was supposed to be a supply run, turned into a babysitting job when Sasuke decided he wanted to touch everything in Neko-baa’s shop. And when I said everything, I meant everything! Including a full set of samurai armor, spears and swords included. I think Itachi and I nearly had a heart attack when it came tumbling down.

Good thing Itachi was fast enough to drag him out of the way before it landed on him… probably wouldn’t have killed him, but he’d be a crying mess at least. I hate to image what it would’ve been like if we took Naruto along… second thought, I don’t think I want to ever see these two together outside of Kushina and Mikoto’s supervision.

So, in an attempt to keep him occupied while Itachi finished shopping… Yeah, I just realized how funny that sounded. Itachi shopping… hehe… Oh right, in an attempt to keep him occupied, Itachi made up a challenge for Sasuke to get the paw prints of all the cats in the area. Considering how agile and cunning these evil bastards were, it’s a good training exercise for him. I wonder how far along has Fugaku gotten him in training. Knowing that man, he would’ve started Sasuke’s training the moment he could walk.

“Look how big this one is Kasa-nee!” said Sasuke as he hauled up the medium sized cat in his little arms. He actually caught the damn thing faster than I expected.

“Yeah… it’s enormous.” I said. “How about you stamp that thing’s paw and we get back to seeing if your brother’s done with shopping?”

“Do you think he’ll be proud of me?” asked Sasuke brightly.

“Sure, let’s just get this done, okay?” I said as I pulled out a sheet of shikishi, autograph paper, and an ink pad for him.

“Come on,” said Sasuke as he struggled to catch the cat’s paw and forced it to tap the ink pad and pressed its paw onto the shikishi. “Yes! Hey—Woah!”
It felt as if the world was placed in slow-motion when the cat broke free from Sasuke’s grasp. Either that or stop-motion snapshots. Regardless which one the world suddenly decided on, I found myself tensing and turning my heel in that same instance as the eyes of the little monster glinted with all of hell behind its back. I found a high pitch girlish scream escape me as it charged at me.

“GAAAAAH!” I screamed, kicking up dust behind me as I fled from the monster. “Get that thing away from me!”

“Kasa-nee! Where are you going?” shouted Sasuke behind me. “Wait up!”

“You do know cats can climb trees right?” said Itachi when he found me, hours later, long after he took Sasuke home.

“They won’t climb this high up.” I retorted childishly, hugging my legs to my chest as I puffed up my cheeks.

“Kasa, you’re supposed to be a shinobi,” said Itachi bluntly. “Frankly, it’s quite embarrassing that a three-year-old like Sasuke can take on a cat while you’re cowering away from it as if it’s the plague.”

“Just because you’re Mr. Fearless doesn’t mean everyone else is.” I grumbled.

“What did cats ever do to you?” asked Itachi dully.

“…What did they do?” I repeated before a flash of memory from my previous childhood send me quivering. “Don’t think about it, don’t think about it, don’t think about it!”

“This is getting ridiculous,” sighed Itachi through his nose before he grabbed me by the arm and dragged me to my feet. “We’re going to fight this fear of yours right now.”

“W-What?” I said as I stumbled as he dragged me along. “What do you mean we’re fighting it? Where are we going?”

“In a few weeks, we’ll be heading into dangerous territory. Such a ridiculous fear would be detrimental to you and the rest of us,” said Itachi as he pulled me off the tree and into a full run.

“That doesn’t answer my question!” I shouted as I caught my balance and matched his pace. “Where are we going?”

“Somewhere to desensitize your ridiculous fear of cats,” droned Itachi.

“Again, that tells me nothing!” I grumbled.

“By the way, you might want to put this one, with where we’re going,” said Itachi before he handed me a headband…with cat ears.

“You’re kidding right?” I said in a deadpan. “What makes you think I’m going to wear that?”

“With where we’re going and your particular fear, I think you might want it,” replied Itachi, his face stoic as ever.

“And where are we going? A fetish convention?” I grumbled. “I didn’t think you were the type to like furries.”
“...This is your last chance. If you don’t wear them now, they’ll be obsolete later,” said Itachi, not even warranting a comment towards my jab at his closet fetishes.

“...Obsolete?” I said in confusion. “What exactly does it do? Aside from making you look like a perverted otaku’s wet dream?”

“It’s so you can...never mind,” said Itachi as he slipped the headband onto his head. If I wasn’t so terrified, it would’ve been a funny sight. “I’m sure the sink or swim method works just as well.”

“Sink or swim?” I paled, struggling to pull away from his grip. “Itachi, let go of me! I don’t want to go! Itachi!”

The Uchiha bastard ignored all protests and continued to drag me along. I don’t know why, but for some reason, a sense of dread filled me the further along we went. As if there was something there that I was forgetting. Something I really should be remembering. What was it? Something to do with Akatsuki? Madara? Orochimaru?

My mind ran a mile a minute, desperately trying grasp onto a glimpse of any memory that might’ve cause such dread, but it kept coming up blank. There was no way I’m reacting to nothing. I must’ve seen or heard something significant that stroke up a memory in my subconscious! It couldn’t be the chunin exams considering it was likely nothing like the one from what I could still remember. I could go into much more details on why that wouldn’t be the reason, but that would hardly solve my current problem.

Think!

If it’s not the chunin exams, then what? Itachi said he’s going to get rid of my fear with a sink or swim tactic, but what could that mean? Did he dig a pitfall and filled it with starving cats? Or is he tossing me into a den of lions? The more I thought about it, the wilder my imagination became. I’m quite sure the idea of facing a werecat or some sort of furry came to mind once or twice and getting turned into one like a werewolf crossed my mind too. However, it wasn’t until I spotted the structure that I realized why I was feeling such dread.

“You’re taking me to the Cat Fortress?” I screeched, doubling my efforts to break free from his grasp. “You evil asswipe! That’s what you meant when you said sink or swim? You’re just going to toss me into a fortress of human hating cats? Are you trying to kill me?”

“I’m surprised you know this place so well,” commented Itachi casually, his grip tightening on my arm to keep me from escaping. “With the amount of cats in there, you should be desensitized in no time.”

“You’re taking me to the Cat Fortress?” I screeched, doubling my efforts to break free from his grasp. “You evil asswipe! That’s what you meant when you said sink or swim? You’re just going to toss me into a fortress of human hating cats? Are you trying to kill me?”

“I’m surprised you know this place so well,” commented Itachi casually, his grip tightening on my arm to keep me from escaping. “With the amount of cats in there, you should be desensitized in no time.”

“Where the hell did you get your degree in psychology?” I wailed. “That’s not going to fix me! That’ll just traumatize me further!”

“If you keep screaming like that, it’ll just attract them to us faster,” added Itachi.

“W-h-h-h-h-hy?” I whimpered, though it sounded more like a mix between a whimper and a wail. I’m not even sure how should I take this anymore. “Why are you doing this to me? Those things are going to kill me and then turn my corpse into meow-mix!”

“What is with you and your absurd imagination?” sighed Itachi, finally stopping our advance towards the Cat Fortress. “You’re not going to get turned into cat food.”
“How would you know? You’ve never—” I was cut off with a poke to the head. “Itachi!”

“Stop whining,” ordered Itachi. “Whatever trauma you’ve had with cats, it’s in the past. If
you keep clinging to that fear, it will never go away.”

“But…” I tried to argue, but any protest I had died at my lips when Itachi raised his hand. I
quickly covered my forehead and shuffled back. “I’ll stop! I’ll stop!”

However, instead of a poke to my forehead as I expected. I felt something slip onto the top
of my head and behind my ears, crowning the area in front of my hitai-ate. Raising a single hand
warily, I felt for what it was and realized Itachi had use my distraction to slip the cat ears on.

“If you wear that, the cats in the fortress won’t attack you. They’ll think you’re one of
them,” explained Itachi. “It also serves as a translator so you could understand what they’re saying. I
know you’re not going to get over your fear in a heartbeat, but exposing yourself to a culture of
purely cats and learning a bit more about them might help ease the fear a little.”

 “…That’s it?” I said in surprise. “You dragged me all the way out here just to mingle with
cats?”

Itachi raised an eyebrow. “What did you think I was going to make you do?”

“…Fight our way through the fortress and take down Nekomata…?” I said sheepishly.

“…How…” Itachi pinched the bridge of his nose as he sighed in exasperation. “How did
you come to that conclusion?”

“…You said we’re going to fight my fears… I thought you meant literally…” I mumbled.

“…You are an idiot,” said Itachi bluntly as he delivered another poke to my head. “We’re
leaving for Kiri in two weeks. Facing an entire army of cat ninjas is hardly a recommended training
method for your current level.”

“And it’s yours?” I snorted. “Just because I’m a support fighter, doesn’t mean I can’t
fight.”

“Support isn’t meant to fight,” retorted Itachi dryly.

“Oh yeah? You want to test that? I could take you on any day of the week! Bring it!” I
growled before he gave my head another violent poke.

“Don’t try to change the subject,” said Itachi as he grabbed my arm and resumed dragging
me along. “Pretending to be angry to pick a fight with me won’t get you out of this. You’re still
going in.”

“Who said I was faking? I could totally take you on duck-boy!” I snapped. “Come on!
You and me! One-on-one! I’ll kick your sorry ass!”

“The fact you’re not throwing out random threats just proves you’re just stalling,” drone
Itachi.

“I am so not stalling!” I huffed.

“Give it up already,” said Itachi. “Aside from training, you’ve never once challenged any
of us to an actual fight. The most you ever did was throw out random and absurd threats that you
never intend to carry out.”

“Never intend to—” I spluttered indignantly. “Mark my words Uchiha! You will eat those words one of these days!”

“As I’ve said, empty threats,” stated Itachi before we stopped. “By the way, we’re here.”

“Eh?” I said before taking note of my surroundings. We were standing on the bridge that crossed over to the Cat Fortress. “EH? When the hell did we get here?”

I turned my heel and tried to run, but Itachi had a firm grip on my arm and continued to drag me forward. “Calm down, it’s not that bad.”

“Not that bad?” I nearly screeched, my voice cracked from the sheer amount of terror running through my veins. Seeing the guard cats at the entrance staring at me suspiciously didn’t help the matter either.

“Let’s go,” said Itachi as he tugged me along.

My breath hitched and my body trembled. Despite how ridiculous I acted up to now with the name calling and the childish refusal to cooperate, I’m genuinely terrified of cats. The reason behind it isn’t as outrageous as someone tossing me into a pit of hungry cats or even having watched a cat brutally murder someone close to me. Rather it was just a childhood trauma that never went away.

I’m sure you guys remember my fondness for dogs, so it’s not like I’m terrified of all furry animals. It’s more like… I tried to play with a feral cat and it attacked me in defense because as a kid, I was too stupid to realize that wild cats weren’t like domesticate pets… and if you were to approach one, you probably shouldn’t do it as an excitable child.

It’s ridiculous, considering it was a lifetime ago. I know, but… I can’t help it. Every time I see one or even hear them, all I could think about was how scared I was when the cat attacked. I just… My vision blurred, obscuring the Uchiha fan on the back of Itachi’s shirt. I thought maybe Itachi was doing some weird jutsu, but it wasn’t until I felt something warm dripping down the side of my face that I realized I was crying.

“…Are you really that scared?” said Itachi, a frown crossing his face when he noted the tears on my face.

“C-can we please go back?” I sobbed, raising an arm to wipe away the tears. “I know it’s ridiculous to be scared of cats of all things, but please, can we just go back? I know it could be used against me if an enemy ever catches me or even if I’m in battle, but please I’ll try to get over that fear on my own. Just… don’t make me go in there. I don’t think I can handle being around so many of them.”

I felt the grip loosen on my arm before Itachi’s hand left it all together.

“…”I won’t force you then,” said Itachi quietly. The amount of relief I felt at that action couldn’t be placed into words as my tears became a downpour.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you.” I chanted over and over again, rubbing away the salty streams with my sleeves.

“Hey you two! What’s all this ruckus about,” purred one of the feline guards dangerously.
Immediately, my body snapped into a defensive stance, my hands alight with chakra as the ingrained response from Kurei’s training kicked in. Are any of you familiar with the fight or flight response? In the face of danger, a primal response whether human or animal is either to run away or stand and fight. Considering, I was already scared out of my wits at being dragged to a fortress filled with cats and kept from fleeing time and time again by Itachi, the flight response was nearly non-existent.

Hearing an actual meow within my immediate vicinity was the last straw and it pretty much snapped the last string of sanity I was clinging to.

“Kasa, wait!” shouted Itachi, but it was too late.

“Stay away from me!” I screamed. In my panic, I’ve materialized four senbons in each hand and violently chucked it at the cats.

“What the hell are you doing, meow?” snapped another cat, rushing at me.

“Cats! Cats everywhere!” I screamed as I materialized more senbon and chucked at anything that looked furry and came my way.

“Kasa!” snapped Itachi as he caught my arms from behind.

“They’re coming!” I shouted, my voice shaking as I desperately clung to the chakra senbons in my hands.

If I could I would materialize shurikens or kunais instead, considering they’re heftier and did more damage, but compared to senbons, it took more effort due to their shape and they’re much harder to keep intact once I’ve thrown them. Chakra-based weapons aren’t meant to be used as projectile weapons after all. Not that a little fact like that could stop me in my terrified state.

“Stop this right now, Kasa. If you don’t stop, they’re going to—”

“REOW! We’re under attack! We’re under attack!” shouted the two cats when my senbons hit. “Get reinforcements!”


“Does that mean we can go home now?” I whimpered pathetically.

“From the look of things?” said Itachi as he surveyed the area. “I don’t think so.”

“I told you cats were evil.” I whimpered, sounding less certain and hateful towards the furry felines and more like I was hyperventilating with how many deep breaths I was taking in an attempt to calm myself from another panic attack. Not that it helped, I still ended up screaming, “They’re going to kill us!”

“… Bringing you here was a bad decision on my part, but it’s too late to cry about it now,” sighed Itachi as he quickly assessed the situation. “We’re going to have to fight. I’m not going to be able to do that and keep watch over you at the same time. If I let you go, do you think you can handle defending yourself without going berserk and attacking everything on sight?”

“D-defend?” I repeated, picking up the only word out of the long slew of whatever Itachi said. I’m quite sure if he waited any longer to give me a command, I might’ve been too far gone to hear anything.
“Yes, can you do that?” asked Itachi.

“Defending is good. A good defense means safe. Safe is good. Yeah, I can defend.” I ended up in a crying, laughing ramble.

“… Good enough,” said Itachi as he released me. “Follow my lead. Your priority is to keep yourself safe. I can handle myself. If you feel like you can’t handle it, fall back. Got it?”

“Defend, defend, defend.” I continued rambling as I started skipping in place and shaking out my arms to limber up.

“There they are! The intruders!” shouted the cats.

“Kasa?” inquired Itachi.

“Defend, defend, defend.” I repeated the mantra with a whimper as I fell shakily into a dance stance, at the ready with chakra senbons between my fingers.

Itachi shook his head with a sigh as he reached into his back pouch for a kunai. “Let’s go.”

Immediately, Itachi dispatched three cats the instance they were within range for him to grab, toss and knock out. I on the other hand ran on auto-pilot as I sent four senbons at a time at the vital joint areas that targeted movements. If training with Kurei taught me anything, it was to go for vital areas and quickly disabling the enemy from the start if possible. One immobile enemy was one less enemy to deal with.

Unfortunately, with these nimble felines as our enemies, it was hard to land hits on a number of them. With each one I managed to hit, two more took its place. It didn’t take long before I switched to the next tactic lined up in my auto-queue.

“Earth Style: Earth Fist!” I shouted as I completed the necessary dance and slammed my hand to the ground. Chakra left my body and into the concrete bridge before six silhouettes shot out around me, doubling as a defense as well as offense. I may not be good in a one-on-one battle but when it comes to crowd control, I think I could hold my own.

“Argh!” grunted one of the cats as them crawled back to their feet. “You’ve hit us, but now you’ve gone and trapped yourself!”

“Defend, defend, defend.” I continued to chant if only to distract myself from the meowing cats that Itachi knocked out in turn after I sent them flying towards him.

“After the girl! She’s trapped! The boy will stop if we have her hostage!” shouted another cat.

“Kasa!” shouted Itachi. Somehow his fight had drawn him quite a distance away before a squadron of cats cut off his path towards me. “Why are you standing in there? Run!”

“Defend, defend, defend. A good defense is a great offense.” I nearly screeched in a panic at the sight of so many cats congregating to my location. Hastily, I pressed my fingers to the two wing seals on my necklace closing my eyes as I activated them. “Sealing technique: Dragon Wing and Barrier Wing!”

A transparent feathered wing and a leather wing sprouted from the seal and wrapped around me in a protective bubble. In my fury last time when fighting against Tenzo, I used only the barrier wing seal which only protects against physical based attacks. And before you say Tenzo was
using the wood element to hit me, wood has a physical form, it counts as a physical attack as does earth and water, even if water’s physical form is malleable.

Unlike an RPG, where attacking with anything that’s not a weapon or fists, they’re immediately categorized as magic and you need the appropriate shields for whichever. The Dragon Wing seal worked more like an energy shield than a magic shield, if I had to give it a comparison. It protects against attacks that has no form that could be grasp onto, like flames, lightning and air.

With so many defense buffs, one would think I was going to wait out the attacks and hide behind my shields… If only training with Kurei allowed such a thing… I reached into my back pouch and pulled out six cards, each with a half-ass seal, drawn by yours truly, and flicked each of them into one of silhouettes reigning them with a handful of chakra threads on each. I only kept my eyes closed in an attempt to keep myself from turning into a blubbering mess at the sight of so many cats coming at me.

“Defend against this you scions of the underworld! Fire in the hole!” I cried in fear, ducking down with my hands covering my ears as I overloaded the handful of chakra threads in my hand.

Since I had no talent in creating restraining chakra chains and could only create chakra threads, I reapplied them for another use. A single thread was hardly useful with how little weight it could carry at a time. However, when made in bulk, it did well to transfer chakra and made for a good fuse line when used with my faulty seals.

“Fire in the what?” said one of the cats, shortly before the seals flickered to life and turned everything around me into a fiery blaze of flying concrete shrapnel.

Even with my hands covering my ears and the ringing from the blast, I could still hear the screams of my feline adversaries. The sound of so many cats meowing in agony at the same time was almost enough to drive me into another panic attack. That is if I wasn’t busy with keeping up my shields to protect myself from the explosion’s initial blast and shrapnel. I couldn’t waste any of my concentration on anything but its upkeep.

With how violent the flames roared and the shrapnel bouncing off the shield around me, maintaining the only protection I had was quickly becoming a strain, maybe blowing them up with me still in it wasn’t the best idea I had. Actually… I wonder did I accidentally hit Itachi? He was far enough, right?

“Oh crap! I didn’t kill him did I?” I said, finally snapping out of my auto-pilot and squinted my eyes trying to see pass the amount of smoke hovering outside my shields. When I couldn’t see him, I shouted. “Itachi! You’re not dead are you?”

“Kasa? Where are you?” shouted Itachi in response from above.

Above? Holy crap! Did I dig myself into a pit?

“Down here!” I shouted as I made my way through the rubble and climbed out of the pit I placed myself in.

Surprisingly, the pit wasn’t as deep as I expected. Just as I climbed out, the ground beneath me shook as something landed heavily on the bridge.

“Who dares attack my fortress?” purred a silken voice. By the volume, it sounded like a big… cat…
“Why?” I whimpered on the ground with my hands over my head. “Can we go home already?”

“Kasa! Get yourself together!” snapped Itachi as he hauled me up from the ground.

“So it was you two,” snarled the voice. “You think wearing those headbands can hide your human scent from me?”

Hesitantly, I peeked an eye open and nearly screamed at the size of the monstrous white cat partially obscured by the smoke. Darting behind Itachi, I used him as a human shield as I shouted. “Itachi! Kill it! Kill it with fire!”

“Nekomata, I presume,” said Itachi, ignoring my request. “I understand the situation looks dire, but it is not our intent to assault you or your subjects.”

“Not your intent?” snarled Nekomata. “You think you can come here, attack my subjects and walk away with such an excuse? Neither of you are leaving!”

“Kasa, get ready to move,” ordered Itachi when Nekomata’s eyes glowed through the shroud of smoke.

However, before I could move, the world around us changed as walls shot up at the bridge’s edge and enclosed us in what seemed like an elaborate hallway.

“W-what kind of jutsu…?” I trailed off, head snapping about trying to find an exit while my hand clenched a fistful of the back of Itachi’s shirt. “I-Itachi? What should we…?”

“Reow…” I flinched at the sound coming from Itachi.

“That’s not funny Itachi!” I snapped, punching his shoulder.

“What’s not funny, meow?” said Itachi as he turned back, but instead of usual pale face, in place was furry cat face with whiskers and bright yellow-slit eyes.

With a scream I pulled out my umbrella strapped to my back and swung it at him like a bat. However, instead of hitting him like I expected, he caught my umbrella and pushed his furry face even closer.

“What’s the matter Kasa? Scared?” purred the feline Itachi.

“Notrealnotrealnotreal!” I screamed before releasing my umbrella and crossing my fingers. “KAIAKAIAKAIAKAIAKAI!”

The illusion shattered around me before I spotted the large furry body of Nekomata in front of me.

“I’m surprised you managed to break free from my genjutsu,” drawled the monstrous cat with a purr. “Your little friend doesn’t seem to have broken out of his yet.”

“Itachi?” I said shakily as I glanced to my side, the Uchiha boy stood unmoving. “Please no more cats. No more cats!”

“Oh, so you’re scared of cats eh?” mused Nekomata with a vicious grin. “Maybe I won’t kill you after all, since you understand the might of cats. Your friend however, I will kill, for his blatant disrespect to my kind!”
“N-no! Itachi! Snap out of it!” Why the hell hasn’t he broken out of the illusion yet? Doesn’t he have the sharingan?

“Run along now human child, I’ll spare you the gruesome experience of watching your companion die,” chortled Nekomata.

I’m not sure how I managed to keep sane for this long, but I’m quite sure, I’m on the last threads of my sanity as I desperately tried to force my brain back into autopilot. This was not the time to let my fear get the better of me. Itachi’s out of it and I don’t know if he would even break free from the illusion. He’s supposed to be better than this, wasn’t he? Didn’t he take down Nekomata in the series? Or was that at a later time? I don’t know anymore!

“What’s the matter child? Too scared to run?” cackled Nekomata darkly.

“No!” I said firmly, despite how desperately my voice wanted to tremble at the sight of him. “I may be scared of you, but I’m not going to abandon a friend because of it! You want to fight you furry bastard? I-I’ll take you on!”

“You?” bellowed Nekomata with a laugh. “I’ve seen what you can do child. You’re not going to be able to land a single attack on me if you keep your distance.”

“Then I’ll just have to fight in close combat!” I declared, materializing chakra scalpels to my hands, but before I could charge in to attack, a familiar figure darted in front of Nekomata and sent a high kick, knocking the cat several paces back. “Itachi!”

“I think you’ve made some progress concerning with your fears, fall back. I’ll handle this,” commented the Uchiha boy, the red sharingan dying away from his eyes. Does he not like using it?

“Fall back?” I growled. “After going through all that, you think I’m going to let you turn me into a damsel? No way, you little prick! If you’re going to fight, I’ll fight as your support. I may be useless in direct combat alone, but I am not useless working in tandem with others.

Itachi looked as if he wanted to protest, but gave up after an exasperated sigh. “It’s faster to just agree with you. Twin dragon?”

“Twin dragon.” I agreed before we fell into an Uchiha style taijutsu stance, mirroring one another.

While I haven’t trained with Itachi in a long while, I still remember the bases to the taijutsu Fugaku ingrained into the both of us during my training sessions with the Uchiha patriarch. The Twin Dragon kata was meant to be used by two people, whether with another person who was familiar with the style or a clone, be it a Shadow clone or the basic academy illusionary clone.

It was a style meant for deception and distraction. Splitting the attention of the opponent with multiple targets and attacking when their guard was down. Fugaku had taught it to us with our age and lack of power in mind. Being so young, neither of us had the muscle or power needed to pull off the more advance styles.

If we tried to bulk up with strenuous weight training or otherwise before we’ve reached maturity, it would’ve stunted our growth and caused irreparable damage to our bodies. There was a reason why academy students were taught the basics of D-ranked taijutsu and not given more advance techniques until they were on teams and a jounin sensei to personally overlook their progress.

“How heartwarming,” spat Nekomata as he dropped to all fours, the sinew limbs flexing as
he crouched at the ready to pounce.

“Ready?” said Itachi.

“Just waiting on you.” I replied before the two of us darted forward, meeting Nekomata head on.

The monstrous cat swiped a mighty paw at us when we neared, but with a quick step, the two of us split, separating to opposite sides of Nekomata. Itachi pulled out a handful of wires and shurikens while I formed chakra threads and pulled out a handful of seal cards. I should really restock on actual weapons, making chakra based ones was seriously exhausting.

“You two think you can take me out with such a simple distraction?” snarled Nekomata as he swung his tail at me and swiped at Itachi at the same time.

Flipping back with a handstand, the two of us backed away before launching the wires at Nekomata. The cat swatted them away with ease. Itachi charged in, engaging the cat in a clash of fists, kicks and claws, while I slipped in, to cover for him during his rebounds. Compared to Itachi, my punches and kicks were weak, but that could be remedied with a handful of chakra scalpels. That’s right, I’m freaking Wolverine. Fear my claws of surgical blades!

Nekomata grew more and more furious as the fight drew on. Whenever he was about to get one of us, the other would slip in and interrupt his attack before he could complete it.

“I’ve had enough of you pesky brats! I’m going to end the two of you now!” roared Nekomata as she swatted the last of the wires away and charged at us at full speed.

“Kasa, time to end this!” warned Itachi before the two of us regrouped. I slipped behind him and placed a hand on his back as he hastily went through a set of hand seals. “Fire style!”

“Amplification!” I shouted, sending a burst of chakra into his back and into the handful of chakra wires in my hand.

“Phoenix Flower!” finished Itachi before a barrage of shurikens covered in hellfire shot out, following the wires we laid down earlier.

“What? No! NO!” screamed Nekomata as the cards I scattered around him exploded into a fiery blaze and the shurikens engulf in flames ignited him on contact.

“D-do you think we killed him?” I huffed in exhaustion, my hands resting on my knees as I did my best to stay on my feet.

“I don’t know,” said Itachi, frowning in concentration as we watched the flames slowly die away, revealing a smoking and twitching Nekomata in its wake.

“Y-you…” rasped Nekomata as he took a shaking step forward.

“You’ve got to be kidding me. He’s still moving?” I complained, wearily reaching into my back pouch for more cards. I’ve made tons, but activating a faulty seal wasted more energy than a normal seal. I was beat.

“Wait Kasa,” said Itachi as he caught my arm.

“Why? He’s going to come at us, we have to—”
“Y-you monsters…” Nekomata collapsed backwards. “What kind of human produced such children?”

“He’s beaten, you don’t need to fight anymore,” said Itachi before he released my arm.

“W-we won?” I said as dropped to my knees and sprawled on the ground in relief. “Thank god…It’s over…”

A wry grin touched his lips. “Stay here, I’ll be right back,” said Itachi.

“I can’t move even if I want to.” I laughed weakly.

Itachi shook his head in amusement before he made his way to Nekomata. The cat flinched away as he neared, but the Uchiha boy stopped a meter short of the fallen creature.

“What do you want?” asked the feline.

“I want to apologize for the trouble we caused,” said Itachi. “As I’ve said before it wasn’t our intention to assault any of you. We were just trying to get her over her fear of cats. It was unfortunate that it escalated. I do hope you won’t hold it against our village for our indiscretion”

“…Unfortunate…” repeated Nekomata in disbelief.

“Yes, please do forgive us,” said Itachi respectfully with a polite bow.

Nekomata stared at him in silence and disbelief.

“…Unbelievable… simply unbelievable,” said the cat before a hearty laugh escaped him. “All you wanted to do was to help your companion over there to get over her fear of cats? Oh this is too hilarious! Too hilarious!”

“Will you forgive us?” asked Itachi again.

“Very well, I won’t hold it against your village,” said Nekomata in amusement. “Is there anything else you would like to add while we’re at it?”

“…There was one other thing,” started Itachi slowly. “A request if you may.”

“Request?” mused Nekomata, thoroughly entertained by Itachi.

“I had planned on asking an audience with you a later time, but since you asked. I would like to request you to fight against my little brother in full strength if he ever comes to challenge you,” said Itachi.

“Fight your brother?” said Nekomata with a raised brow. “That’s a strange request.”

“It’s for his training,” replied Itachi. “He might not be able to take you on now, but with time. I’m sure he’ll make for a decent challenge and I hope you will indulge me in appraising his skill in the future.”

“Interesting,” chuckled Nekomata. “Very interesting. You’ve been the most interesting I’ve met thus far. You and that other child there. What are your names?”

“Itachi Uchiha,” answered Itachi.

“And the girl?” asked Nekomata.
“Kasa Mon,” continued Itachi. “We’re shinobi of Konoha.”

“Itachi Uchiha. Kasa Mon. Shinobi of Konoha,” mused Nekomata before another chuckle escaped him. “Very well. I’ll agree to face your brother at full power if he ever visits my Cat Fortress. Konoha must be proud to have such powerful youths as you two.”

“You have my gratitude. It was an honor facing you in battle,” said Itachi as he gave one last polite bow.


“Of course,” said Itachi. “I apologize again for the trouble we caused.”

Nekomata gave one last laugh before he motioned for the cowering cats at the gates to retrieve him and carry him back into the fortress. Itachi glanced briefly at the scurrying cats running about to gather up their injuries before he made his way back to where I laid.

“Ready to go home?” asked Itachi as he hovered above me.

“Yeah… but…” I started lamely.

“What? Do you want to stay?” mused Itachi. “You complained about going home the whole time. Don’t tell me you actually want to stay longer.”

“Nooooo,” I whimpered. “I want to go home! But… uh…”

“What?” asked Itachi.

“I can’t move.” I said sheepishly. “Between the adrenaline rush and the amount of chakra I used for the shields, I can’t move anymore.”

“…You can move… at all?” asked Itachi with an amused grin on his face. “Should we go rest inside the fortress until you’ve recovered?”

“Nooooo,” I whined. “Why would you even suggest that you sadist!”

A light chuckle escape Itachi as he knelt down and poked my head. “You’re hopeless.”

“Yeah, yeah, pick on the girl who can’t defend herself right now. You’re an ass!” I retorted before Itachi shook his head and grabbed my arm.

“Come on, let’s go home,” said the boy before he hauled me to my knees and pulled me onto his back.

“You do know this is going to cause a whole lot of teasing from everyone later right?” I said in annoyance.

Itachi gave a shrug. “Would you rather I leave you here in the care of cats?”

“Don’t you dare!” I snapped.

“There you have it,” said Itachi as he shifted my weight on his back.

“…Itachi.” I grumbled.
“Yes?” said the boy as he began the walk back to Konoha.

“I hate you.” I grumbled.

“It’s not the first time I’ve heard this,” agreed Itachi. “Anything else?”

“…You’re an ass.” I continued, resting my chin on his shoulder in exhaustion, so I could see the path in front of us.

“Uh-huh,” said Itachi. “You’ve said that already. Any other insult you want to add?”

“What’s the point? You’re not going to take offense to it anyway.” I muttered.

“I see,” said Itachi.

“…So tired…” I mumbled.

“Why don’t you take a nap then?” said Itachi.

“Nap…” I said sleepily. “That sounds nice…”

“I’ll wake you up before we get back to Konoha,” offered Itachi.

“Thanks…” I mumbled, tilting my head, trying to find a comfortable spot before allowing myself to drift to sleep. However, before my eyes closed I spotted something that made me giggle.

“What now?” asked Itachi.

“…Pft…” I giggled. “You know, cats wouldn’t be that scary if they’re all adorable cat boys like you.”

“W-What?” said Itachi in confusion.

My body shook with mirth. “I wish I had a camera to take a picture of you in cat ears… I bet everyone would find it funnier than you getting turned into a duck…”

“You’re not taking a picture of me with these ears,” said Itachi in a deadpan. “I’m returning these to Neko-baa the next time I see her.”

Wooh, I stroke a nerve! Finally! Something to tease the ever stoic Uchiha boy! I wanted to continue and tease the living daylights out of him, but my eyes were being uncooperative and I found them drifting close as Itachi’s walking pace slowly lulled my consciousness away.

“Kasa?” I faintly heard Itachi calling out to me before sleep overtook me.
“All right, good job everyone,” said Shirakumo as he drew training to a close. “While I would prefer to have more time than allot to make sure you can all work together flawlessly, all of you have made great progress. We will all meet at the south gate tomorrow morning at six hundred hours and we’ll depart at six-ten.”

“Make sure to pack everything you need because we’re not turning back if you forget. And that means you Kasa,” said Kurei.

“That was one time!” I retorted with a huff.

“Regardless,” continued Hizaishi. “I would like for us to get there without any interruptions or hassle. Please be ready to depart once everyone arrives. You’re all dismissed.”

“Yes sensei!” We all chorused before they left.

“You forget your weapon once and they’ll never let you live it down,” I grumbled under my breath as I brushed off the dust from my kimono and hauled my umbrella over my shoulder in a brutish manner. So what if I’m not ladylike? Hizaishi’s not around to give me grief.

“You can’t blame Kurei sensei,” sniggered Santa. “It’s not like it was your first day with your weapon. You can’t even make that excuse.”

“I was in the hospital for six months! I didn’t need to carry my weapon every time I left the house! Give me a break!” I grumbled.

“You’ve restocked at least right?” asked Tokuma.

“Yes mother, do I need to show you I cleaned my room as well?” I said sarcastically.

“Wow, did you wake up on the wrong side of bed today?” commented Zaji as he joined in the conversation. “I haven’t seen you this peeved in a long while.”

“It’s nothing,” I grumbled under my breath as I turned to leave. “See you guys tomorrow morning. I’m going to head home and crash.”

“What’s wrong with Kasa?” I could hear a vague whisper from the rest of the group as I left.

“Leave her alone, she’ll get over it soon enough,” said another.

Just to clarify, I’m not being emo. No one died and there’s no evil sub-plot I’ve stumbled onto. Rather… I’m upset that I haven’t made any progress in finding someone to make seals for me. I know seal masters were hard to come by, but at this point, I’ll be happy to find someone who could make basic seals. Hell, even an artist would be great at this point. They could draw it and I’ll just over charge it with chakra for it to work or something.

If only I could somehow transfer all this seal knowledge I had to someone else. If only there was someone that could understand the complexities of the sealing arts without going bat-shit crazy with power… Where would I find someone like that? Everyone in the shinobi world is power hungry and nuts.
Even if I managed to find one, how could I be sure I could trust them? My memories were fading fast and the ones I clung so desperately gave me only few candidates that could possibly make this work. Several, I’m not even sure I could trust. If I went with my previous thought of finding an artist to draw the seals for me, Sai from Root was likely the best candidate, but at the same time, he was currently working for Danzo and unless I somehow pull a Naruto and change his loyalties, I doubt he would humor me in drawing seals.

I was so lost in my thoughts, I hadn’t notice someone walking alongside me until I spotted his shadow mingling with mine in the setting sun.

“Holy crap!” I shouted, nearly jumping out of my skin as I turned to face my quiet companion in haste. Only to realize it was Tenzo. “How long were you there? You scared the living daylights out of me!”

“I was wondering how long it would take before you noticed me,” said Tenzo in good humor.

“Geez, you could’ve said something! Were you trying to shorten my life with that scare?” I grumbled with a hand over my chest.

“Sorry, I didn’t want to interrupt you since you were scowling at the world,” said Tenzo sheepishly. “What were you thinking about to cause such a face?”

“It’s nothing.” I replied automatically, not really in the mood to explain.

“You’re lying again,” said Tenzo.

I huffed, annoyed how easily he could see through my lies. “It’s not like you can help me with it. So there’s no point in telling you.”

“How are you so sure?” asked Tenzo.

“Can you make seals?” I asked bluntly.

“…Not really?” said Tenzo. “I haven’t looked into the sealing arts as of yet.”

“Then I’m pretty sure.” I retorted in a deadpan.

“You’re trying to find a seal master?” asked Tenzo curiously.

“Seals are the one thing I excel in.” I grumbled under my breath. “It’s just such a waste that I can’t do anything because I can’t make seals.”

“Why is it that?” asked Tenzo with a thoughtful look on his face. “You’ve only ever told me you’re bad at making seals, but never why. Considering you could use them with such expertise I would think you’d have no problem making them.”

“…I can’t draw them.” I muttered darkly. “I could recognize and identify nearly any seal on sight, but I can’t draw for shit! I’ve tried tracing, but it’s near impossible to make a decent seal with paper that rips so easily because of how thin it is. I can’t use thick paper either because I can’t see through it well enough to do a trace! It’s impossible!”

“So, you’re looking for someone to make it for you instead,” stated Tenzo thoughtfully. “Can’t you use Uzumaki-san’s seals? I’m sure she’ll make you some if you asked.”
“We’re incompatible.” I muttered. “Our chakras conflict when it comes to intricate seal work. In general, seals work best if it’s made by the person who uses it. Secondhand seals shouldn’t be used unless you have no other alternative, but since I can’t make any…” I sighed in frustration.

“Hmm… so it has nothing to do with yourself per say, right?” asked Tenzo with a thoughtful tap of his finger to his chin.

“Not that I know of.” I replied, eying him with a questioning frown. “Why?”

“Nothing,” said Tenzo with a grin.

“Are you mocking me?” I huffed, noting his repeat of what I said only moments earlier.

“You know I won’t do that to you,” said Tenzo with a light chuckle.

“Then what’s with the weird question?” I grumbled before blinking in realization. “Actually, better question, what are you doing here?”

“I heard you were leaving tomorrow and I thought I stop by wish you luck.” A grin touched his lips as he pocketed his hands casually. “Though, from the grumpy look, luck probably isn’t all that useful for you at the moment.”

“No really?” I grumbled, but my grumpiness didn’t linger for long with the next words coming from Tenzo.

“Stop it,” said Tenzo softly. “If you stopped thinking about your shortcomings for a moment, you’ll notice you’ve improved a whole lot since we last fought.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but he cut me off with a raised hand.

“I don’t need you to repeat the list of failures you’ve no doubt memorized and beaten yourself over and over again,” said Tenzo as he lowered his arm. “Just know, among all the candidates that Hokage-sama could have chosen and have chosen, you have something that none of them do.”

“None of them?” My brows furrowed as I mulled over his words.

If you want me to list out all the things I can’t do I could give you a book and a half, but regarding what I could do, it’s not that long of a list and most of them are doable by most people if they have the training for it. Of course, those have to be chakra incline and trained for the shinobi arts, but I doubt Tenzo was talking about anyone that’s not already a shinobi as comparison.

Maybe he’s not talking about abilities? Considering the only thing different I could think of is the seal affinity and maybe my enforcer ability, but I can’t be certain there isn’t another enforcer type among the genin ranks. Differences…I glanced up at him with furrowed brows.

“You mean it’s because I have…” I started but Tenzo shook his head.

“That is partially why Hokage-sama chose you, but that’s not it either,” said Tenzo before finally taking pity on me. “It’s your resourcefulness and adaptability.”

“You’re kidding me right? He chose me because I improvise?” I said in disbelief. “Half of my improvises doesn’t even work! Just look at what happened during the evaluation I had with you!”

“Again, you’re not giving yourself enough credit,” sighed Tenzo in exasperation. “Just
because the improv failed on the spot, doesn’t mean you haven’t found ways to improve on them and incorporate it into your growing arsenal of skills.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I mumbled.

Tenzo raised a brow. “Do you really think it’s that easy to hide the sound of multiple explosions?”

My face flushed red.

“Sure, you’ve made the smallest faulty seal possible when you were refining a way to active them without having to be in such close quarters, but since you have an affinity for seals, even the smallest of seals could still be amplified to a normal one. Even without the ability to make a proper seal, you still found a way to make use of what you have.”

“As much as I love blowing shit up… I doubt being a trigger happy pyro is the answer to everything.” I said dryly. Tenzo gave me a pointed look before I sighed. “Sorry, sorry. I know you’re trying to instill some confidence in me and me being the ass I am, is shooting down every attempt you make. Thanks for the effort, but I don’t think a pep-talk is going to be enough to ease my nerves. Even if I’m willing to believe that I can do this.”

“Then what would ease your mind, if words can’t?” asked Tenzo with his arms crossed. “And before you brush me off and say nothing, I’m not taking that as an answer. You said we were friends right? Then you should be able to confide in me.”

 “…You’re playing the ‘I thought we were friends’ card? Talk about playing dirty.” I huffed with a pout. “That’s hardly fair, you’re not giving me a choice.”

“You’re one to talk,” retorted Tenzo.

“Give me one example of me playing dirty!” I sniped back.

He raised a brow. “I seem to recall you leaving me at the mercy of your father quite some months ago.”

I spluttered. “I got you out of it didn’t I? That’s not fair!”

“We’re ninja, we don’t play fair,” replied Tenzo.

“…Touché.” I agreed.

“Well?” said Tenzo, still waiting for my reply.

“…Fine.” I grumbled. “I’d feel safer if there was a way for me to make seals. Even basic ones like storage seals or one-use explosive seals or something. So even if I do run out, I don’t have to worry about being defenseless until I restock. Sure, I could make my faulty ones, but at least one out of ten of them is a dud and won’t blow unless I waste even more chakra, so they’re not the most reliable.”

“You really want to use that seals ability don’t you?” asked Tenzo.

“…What I wouldn’t give to be able to mass produce them without having to worry about a crooked stroke or something of the sort.”

Tenzo looked thoughtful for a moment. “Hey, have you ever tried asking Uzumaki-san to
hold your hand and help you draw a seal?"

“No, but my mother had when I was little.” I replied with a frown. “Those seals worked just fine from what I could remember.”

“Then I have an idea,” grinned Tenzo brightly.

“Oh?” My interest peaked yet again.

“What time are you leaving tomorrow and where are you meeting your team?” asked the older boy.

“Six hundred hours at the south gate, why?” I asked.

“Be there about half an hour earlier, I’ll have something ready for you by then,” said Tenzo.

“…Half an hour…” I groaned. “You want me to wake up even earlier? Who knows when I’m going to get the luxury of sleep again during this mission? What the hell man?”

Tenzo rolled his eyes at my juvenile response. “Just be there tomorrow morning. I’ll make sure it’ll make up for the loss of your beauty sleep.”

“Hey, I don’t need sleep to be beautiful.” I retorted. “I just need it to be human.”

“Whatever you say,” snickered Tenzo as he turned his heel to leave. “I only suggested to meet up a little earlier so you could get the chance to test it out before you leave. So I could do any last minute adjustments if needed, but if you rather have sleep I guess you could come at the appointed time.”

“…Testing?” I asked curiously. “What are you planning?”

Tenzo raised a finger to his lips. “It’s a surprise.”

“Fine, fine!” I said in defeat. “I’ll wake up earlier and meet you then.”

“Don’t be late. I know you hang around Obito senpai a lot and I do hope his tardiness hasn’t rubbed off on you,” joked Tenzo.

“I doubt any black cats or old lady will be awake at that hour.” I said dryly. “See you tomorrow then.”

With a wave, the two of us parted ways and I continued on. Except, I didn’t return home like I said to my fellow genins. I couldn’t, not with how wired my mind was with all these thoughts floating around. Letting my feet take me wherever it decided, I sunk into my thoughts.

I know I’ve said I don’t like the silence, but sometimes, it’s a necessary evil to face. Tomorrow, we’re leaving the village, while it’s not my first time, it was still frightening. Sure, I’ve learned plenty and improved like Tenzo said, but we’re heading to Kiri, the Bloody Mist. I don’t think I need to remind you why that should be worrying. It’s in its bloody name! Quite literally. Learning a few skills and improving on whatever crappy ones I had previously isn’t going to do much.

…I’m stalling, I know. It’s… really not easy for me to do this, you know. Coming face to face to the reality that is… well, this I guess. Nine years, I’ve been here for nine years and I’ve
treated almost every moment living here like a game, a childish fantasy, but I guess in a way, it is. I mean how often does someone get to pop into a fictional world and live as if they’re a part of it?

And how many of those actually have things go the way exactly the way they want? Changing crucial events, saving people who aren’t supposed to be saved, standing out… There was no such thing as perfection. With every action there’s a reaction. Ripples will eventually turn into waves, winds into typhoons. There were no definite in life, just possibilities.

I know this, but it doesn’t make me any less terrified. The chunin exam at Kiri, it’s an unknown. Even if I had a pristine memory, there were simple little or next to no information on Kiri, aside from their ruthlessness and several key events involving important individuals. Hell, I think heading into Suna and Ame might’ve been less terrifying. At least there I know what dangers to expect and who to possibly avoid. In Kiri, I have nothing.

By the time my feet stopped, whether from exhaustion or a roadblock, I noticed I was standing at the Memorial Stone.

“How did I end up here?” I muttered, staring at the smooth stone engraved with countless names.

I’m not one for such sentiments. I never believed you needed a tombstone or a grave to remember those who passed. If you truly cared for someone, regardless whether they’re dead or alive, they had a place in your heart and you don’t need such physical reminders… but I guess it’s a coping mechanism for some people.

“I must be completely out of it if I came here of all places.” I said in wry amusement before scratching the back of my neck. “Well, I suppose I am trying to cope with something, so this makes sense… sort of…”

What do people normally do at memorial stones anyway? Crossing my arms, I thought for a moment before a sour expression crossed my face. Talking to the dead, praying to the dead, confessing to sins or wrongdoings to the dead or ever popular stand there for hours on end moping on the unfairness of life.

“…Screw this, I have better things to do with my time.” I muttered under my breath as I turned my heel to leave, but not even two steps away from the stone, a sighed escaped and my shoulders slumped in frustration. “It’s not that hard! Stop making excuses and running away!”

Stomping my feet, I turned back to the stone stubbornly.

“All right, I’m just going to lay it all out here! Here it goes.” I took a deep breath. Tenzo did say it’s bad to let things bottle up. “I know I have a ton of foresight and I should’ve been spending my time trying to change everything for the better, but I can’t! I’m not all knowing and I’m not all-powerful, there’s only so much I can do on my lonesome and sometimes even doing that just makes the situation worse. I’m tired of constantly worrying about things that might or might not happen.”

Taking another shaky breath, I gripped onto my umbrella handle and pulled it before me with two hands. There was really no purpose in doing this, the umbrella held no real significance to anything. Yet… I felt it was necessary. Much like a knight swearing his loyalty by his sword or a doctor to a Hippocratic Oath, this pointless gesture just felt… right.

“I know my next words won’t mean much to anyone and it may sound silly even, but these words are for me and me alone.” I said with quiet determination. “From this day on, I will live
my life to how I see fit. Regardless what obstacles or misery may fall my way, I will do my best to preserve. While I can’t promise that I won’t stray from my path, but I will face everything to the best of my abilities without any regrets.”

The site remained silent with only the whisper of wind rattling through the leaves to keep me company. Holding out my umbrella in a silent promise, I nodded firmly to myself before returning it to its harness. I gave the stone one last glance before turning my heel and left. In hindsight, that whole bit did seemed corny as hell, but… screw it, I felt better after letting it out. Regardless what happens in Kiri, I’ll take it as it comes.

“Sasa-nee!” shouted Naruto as he tackled me from behind with a hug while I was sitting at the genkan, removing my shoes.

“Hey, Naruto were you good today?” I said as I reached back to ruffle his hair.

“Mmmhmm! Sasuke said you and Itachi-ni and Shisui-ni are leaving tomorrow! Where are you going?” asked the curious blonde as he hung over my shoulders.

“We’re going to take the chunin exams.” I answered, getting up with him still hanging off my back.

“Eh? What’s chunin?” continued Naruto as he continued to barrage me with questions as I made my way into the apartment.

At age three, he’s in the stage of questioning everything. From why the sky is blue to why Tesuri wants to kill Kakashi and any other boys he sees trading more than ten words with me. It’ll probably get annoying eventually, but at the moment, I see it as a blissful distraction.

“Naruto, your Kasa-nee just got back from training. Stop hanging off her like that, she’s tired already,” scolded Kushina after a brief glance at us from the kitchen. She was in the middle of cooking dinner.

“Aw, but she said she was going show me more dances!” whined Naruto.

“You’re not even done with your calligraphy practice yet,” said Kushina.

“But it’s so boring! I want to do what Sasa-nee does!” protested Naruto.

Biting back a snicker, I adjusted Naruto’s weight on my back, shifting him into a piggyback position instead. “Come on Naruto, seals are way cooler than any silly dance. If I could make seals, I would totally make it myself and blow shi—”

“Kasa!” scolded Kushina.

“Shi—Shiny and booming explosions!” I corrected myself lamely in mid-sentence.

“But you can already do that without having to draw it on paper!” pouted Naruto.

“Yeah, but wouldn’t it look cooler if you could just touch something and it blows up without you have to dance to make it work?” I added.

“… I guess…” mumbled Naruto, his brow furrowing cutely as he thought it over.

“How about this, if you can make a decent seal by the time I come back from my exams, I’ll spend half a day training with you.” I suggested.
“Really?” said Naruto excitedly before frowning with an accusing look on his face. “You’re not going to be like Itachi-ni with Sasuke are you? Say you’re going to train with me and then say you’re busy.”

I rolled my eyes, snaking a hand behind his head so I could press his forehead to my lips. “I’m not Itachi, I don’t break my promises.”

“I don’t believe you!” said Naruto as he pulled back and shove his hand in front of my face instead, with his pinky sticking out. “Pinky swear!”

“Fine, fine.” I sighed in fake exasperation before catching his pinky with my own before chanting with Naruto in unison. “Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle through my eye.” Wow… that’s morbid…

“You promised okay?” said Naruto again as if to reassure himself.

“I promise, I promise.” I said before tucking my arm back under Naruto before jumping up. “Now who wants to body flicker?”

“I do! I do!” shouted Naruto.

“Kasa, stop fooling around, you should be resting, tomorrow’s your big trip,” chided Kushina, waving a spatula around as she lectured me.

“But moooom!” whined Naruto.

“We want to plaaaaay!” I joined in with a grin before Kushina rolled her eyes.

“Just for a little while!” relented the woman with a shake of her head.

“Yeah!” cheered Naruto.

“All right, hold on tight! Body flicker!” I said, making a fake hand seal before darting around the apartment making whooshing sounds whenever I stopped and changed directions.

Dinner came and went without much pomp and circumstance with only the three of us, Tesuri was working late since the hospital was still short on iryo-nin. Throughout the meal, Naruto kept the silence away with his endless energy and chatter. To the point that he eventually exhausted himself to sleep in the tub while Kushina was giving him a bath.

“Big day tomorrow,” said Kushina quietly with a smile behind her cup of tea. “Nervous?”

Taking a sip out of my cup, I nursed the warm beverage against my lips and gave a shrug. “Not going to let it bother me.”

“Good,” chirped Kushina as she returned to her drink. “You don’t have anything to worry about.”

I can’t help but glance at her warily. “…Why?”

“…Nothing,” said the woman innocently.

“…Kushina-san…” I drawled in a deadpan.

She grinned sheepishly. “Remember that engagement bit we mentioned about six months
“…Kushina-san…” I repeated, voice almost dangerous.

“I’m just saying you’re engaged to one of the Uchiha boys,” said Kushina casually.

“…And?” I continued before she cracked up laughing and reached over to pinch my cheeks.

“You’re so adorable when you’re angry!” sniggered the woman before I swatted her hands away.

“Knock it off, what do you mean I don’t have to worry? Worry about what?” I asked.

Kushina blinked in confusion. “…So you’re not worried at all?”

“Again.” I repeated in exasperation. “Worried about what?”

“Going to Kiri with…” said Kushina as she tapped her stomach, noting my jinchuriki status. “They were… well…”

She didn’t need to say it out loud for me to know that one of the reasons Kiri and Konoha were conflicting over was the possession of the Three Tails.

“I… just assumed that Hokage-sama had something planned if that became an issue… it’s not like I’m going to be handed over to Kiri… am I?” I asked, worried creeping into my voice despite how hard I tried to keep it at bay.

“No, no we won’t let that happen,” said Kushina reassuringly. “As I mentioned before, you’re under an engagement contract with the Uchiha and because of that, you’ll fall under their political protection, both inside and outside of the village. If Kiri decides to take you by force, they’re not only declaring war with Konoha, they’re starting a feud with the Uchiha by insulting their clan’s standing.”

“…Oh…” I settled down. “I didn’t think of it that way.”

“That is as long as you don’t start any international incidents on your own,” said Kushina cheerily. “The protection could only go so far as long as you don’t suddenly gather a number of blood feuds, but what are the chances of that?”

... Murphy’s Law is totally going to fuck me over.

“I know you can do this,” said Kushina as she grasped onto my hand with confidence. “Show them what you can do.”

“Thanks.” I said, gripping her hand in return with a grin. “I’ll make you proud.”

“Give them hell,” said Kushina brightly.

“…Packed everything?” asked Tesuri in the morning after.

“Yes.”

“Med-packs?”
“Yes.”

“Storage scrolls?”

“Yes.”

“Soldier pills?”

“Yes, I’ve also packed rations, extra clothing and a collection of poisons to use in combat or turned into anti-venom if need be… and the custom tent with the alarm seal to warn me and the other senseis if someone aside from me tries to enter my tent. Can I go now?” I grumbled irritably.

Tesuri sighed as he placed his hands on my shoulders. “I can’t believe how much you’ve grown. Just a year ago you were barely a genin and now… you’re going to your first chunin exam.”

“…First… geez, thanks for the confidence, Tou-san.” I droned.

“You know what I mean,” sighed Tesuri as he pulled me into a hug. “Stay safe okay?”

“I will.” I returned the hug with a grin. “Nothing’s killed me yet, I’ll try to keep that up.”

“Don’t do anything reckless. Remember, there will always be a next time. You don’t have to become chunin right now if you can’t handle it,” said Tesuri.

“I got it.” I sighed in exasperation. “I don’t think any of my teammates are going to let me do it even if I want to anyway.”

His hug tightened. “If those boys try anything, remember that trick I taught you.”

“…Yes, Tou-san.” I rolled my eyes. “Can I go now? I can’t be late.”

“Come home safe okay?” said Tesuri as he pulled away.

“Got it!” I gave a two finger salute as I turned to leave, shifting the backpack-sized storage scroll on my back.

Considering the amount of crap I need to lug with me and my strength barely matches those of my teammates, I have to optimize my storage space. In the scroll were traveling necessities, toiletries and a number of things that would make the long trip easier. The majority weren’t necessary if we do happen to run into conflict before we get to Kiri. For that, I have a smaller pouch at the side of my waist with a number of my faulty seals and smaller storage seals filled with senbons and miscellaneous things necessary for the road.

“Kasa!” said Tenzo when he spotted me nearing the south gate.

“What exactly did you want me to try out at this ungodly hour that I have to wake up extra early for this?” I grumbled when I got into hearing distance.

“Here,” grinned Tenzo as he tossed me a storage scroll.

Raising a brow, I caught the flying object, looking at it with furrowed brows. “You do know I have a ton of these already right?”

“It’s in the scroll, just take a look,” said Tenzo in exasperation.

I gave him another odd look before unravelling the scroll and brushed a finger over the
seal with chakra before a wooden box poof into existence. “Couldn’t you have just given me the box? Or is this a prank? I’m going to find another storage scroll in the box and then another box in the scroll?”

“Just open it already,” sighed Tenzo in exasperation. “I promise you, you’ll like it… well, if it works.”

“…If it works?” I asked warily.

“Trust me,” grinned Tenzo. “I worked all night on it. Now we just need to see if it’ll work.”

“…You stayed up all night making it?” I said in puzzlement before turning my attention back to the box and opening its lid. Inside were several small blocks of wood—no, not just blocks. After pulling one out, I noticed it fit right in my hand and was much more elaborate on one of the surfaces. On it was a design that looked very much like… My eyes widened in surprise as I turned to him, showing him the small block of wood.

“They’re seals! You made me seals?” I asked. “I thought you didn’t know how to make seals.”

“I don’t,” agreed Tenzo. “I haven’t a clue how to actually make them. All I did was carve the seals into the wood. If you check, there’s no chakra in them and you can’t really use them as a seal, it’s inversed.”

“Then why?” My brows furrowed in confusion, but his grin never wavered.

“What you have there is more of a stamp than an actual seal. You said you can’t draw them yourself, but you have no problem if someone else held your hand to guide you. So I thought, what if,” grinned Tenzo as he raised a finger to make a point. “You don’t have to draw them? With a stamp the seals will always be conformed perfectly.”

My jaw dropped at the realization of his words. He found a way around me problem. He found a way for me to make seals! “Tenzo you’re a genius!”

A sheepish grin crossed his face. “Let’s hold off the compliments until we’re certain it works. Even though you’re not drawing it, technically you’re still making the seals yourself. So in theory, it should work.”

“I’m going to try it right now!” I squealed like the little girl I am and hastily pulled out several blank seal cards from my pouch and an ink pad I kept handy in case I needed to draw more faulty seals.

Pressing the stamp into the ink pad and shortly after on the seal card. A neat seal marked the once blank surface. With a bright grin, I stored away the precious box of stamps as I fanned the card dry. At a close look, everything about the stamp looked perfect! The curves, the lines and even the proportions! Once the ink dried, I wasted no time in flicking it a safe distance away with chakra threads attached to it. In case anything goes wrong, at least it won’t blow up in our faces.

Hitting the ground several meters away from us, I chucked several senbons at the card before pulsing chakra through the threads to activate the seal. In an instance, the seal activated the senbons disappeared.

“Did you see that?” I said excitedly, both of us holding our breaths as I sent another pulse
of chakra again. The card glowed briefly before the senbons materialized again on top of the card.

“It didn’t blow up.” I squeaked excitedly. “It was a storage seal and it didn’t blow up!”

“It works,” whispered Tenzo in relief.

“IT WORKS!” I cackled madly as I tackled Tenzo into a hug. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! This is the best gift ever!”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Tenzo as he returned my enthusiastic hug with a laugh.

“Like it?” I said in disbelief. “You’ve got to be kidding me! I love it! You are my most favorite person in the world right now! Wait—no, scratch that. You are the most AWESOME person in the world right now! I don’t even know how to thank you!”

“Calm down, it’s not that big of a deal,” said Tenzo. “You would’ve figured it out on your own eventually.”

“Stop being so modest damn it!” I couldn’t stop myself grinning from ear to ear.

“I’m not,” said Tenzo with a wry grin. “I’m just saying you could’ve figured it out yourself.”

“Oh whatever be like that.” I huffed.

“Anyway, I have to get going. I have a mission to attend to. Good luck on your exam,” said Tenzo as he let me slip down from my enthusiastic hug.

“Well, good luck on your mission too.” I said before jumping up to peck him on the cheek. “Thanks for the stamps!”

Cackling like a maniac, I went on to stamp more seal cards with the other stamps, waiting for the rest of the group to Kiri arrives. There weren’t many seals and most of them were basic ones that could be bought in the store, but who cares? I can make seals! And since I can amplify any seal I touch, these tiny suckers are going to be awesome!

“I’m totally going to own this exam! WOOHOO!” I cheered, completely oblivious to my surroundings.

Had I been more attentive, I would’ve noticed Tenzo and I weren’t the only ones at the gate… but since I didn’t… Let’s just say the little affectionate peck I gave Tenzo at the spur of the moment is going to come back and haunt me… Yeah, fate hates me.
The Roles We Play

“It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood. A beautiful day for a neighbor! Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor?” I sang cheerily in my native tongue while resisting the urge to skip along the road.

Nothing could ruin my mood today and I mean nothing. The skies are blue, the day is beautiful and I have the most awesome friend in the world! Tenzo has given me the best gift anyone could’ve given to me in this lifetime and I was beyond stoked! To my travel companions, it probably seems like I lost my mind. What with the goofy grin and the cheery song in a whole other language. It must sound like I’m singing gibberish to their ears. But who cares? I’m way too happy to think much on the matter.

“…Anyone has a clue what’s gotten into Kasa?” asked Santa warily as our group traveled. “She’s been singing nonsense all morning… do you think she’s possessed?”

“With her?” noted Tokuma dryly. “It might just be a bout of insanity. No spirit in their right mind would want to possess her.”

“Probably,” agreed Santa.

“I don’t know,” mused Zaji. “She looks more love-struck than possessed.”

I’m ignoring that.

“Love-struck? This idiot?” noted Tokuma in a deadpan.

Still ignoring that.

“The signs are there,” continued Zaji. “The cheery mood, the silly grin and the singing… I’ve seen plenty of girls act like that during our missions.”

“Pft, I wonder who the poor soul that she’s has her eyes on?” sniggered Santa.

All right, not ignoring that one.

“Hey Santa,” I turned to him with a cheery grin. “When we get to Kiri, do you want to go for some dango?”

“…Why?” asked the Yamanaka, suddenly wary at my sudden attention on him.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I pouted, latching onto his arm playfully. “Can’t I just spend some time with my favorite teammate? You know, enjoy a cup of tea, and talk about training tactics. Go on a date.”

Santa flinched away almost immediately. “Don’t even joke about that!” said the boy in a panic as he ran behind Tokuma for cover. “Do you know what your father would do to me if he heard you say that?”

“But Santa, I loooove you!” I said in mock hurt as I chased him around Tokuma.

“Kurei sensei! Kasa’s trying to get me killed!” shouted Santa as he fled from my creepy fan-girl routine.

“But we’re meant to be together!” I shouted after him, a laugh bubbling at my throat as he
ran away even faster.

“Can’t you be quiet for a change? You’re loud,” droned Itachi as he walked pass.

Normally, I wouldn’t have given his words a second thought aside from my default indignant retort, but for some reason, I got the feeling that Itachi was a little off today compared to his normal stoic self. Just as I was about to pounce him and find out what exactly was wrong with the Uchiha, a firm hand clasped onto my shoulder, keeping me from doing so.

“Maybe you should let Itachi be today, he’s not feeling well,” said Shisui as he held me in place.

“What, did he catch a cold?” I asked curiously. “Or did Sasuke give him food poisoning again?”

“I’m quite sure he hasn’t eaten anything Sasuke made recently, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he caught a 24-hour bug or something of the sort. He’ll probably be fine later if you just let him be,” said Shisui.

“You sure?” I asked. “I could probably whip up some remedies for him if that’s the case.”

“Nah, he just needs some space. He’ll be back to his old self in no time,” said Shisui with a faint grin.

I would believe him… if his smile reached his eyes. I turned my gaze to Itachi’s back. There’s something I’m missing here. I wonder what— A hand planted on my head before glancing up at Shisui.

“He’ll be happy to know you’re so worried about him,” grinned Shisui, genuinely this time. “Will there be a happy announcement by the end of this exam?”

“I didn’t think you hate Itachi that much to wish his early demise.” I commented with a raised brow. “His demise?” confusion crossed his face. “Why would I want that?”

“Did you forget who my dad is?” I asked. “What do you think he’ll do if we went home with that bit of news?”

“Ah, I suppose that’s true,” said Shisui cheerily. “But I’m quite sure Kushina-san wouldn’t let that happen. She’s quite fond of Itachi and I don’t think Tesuri-san could go against anything she decides on.”

“You’re right about that.” I sniggered. “Tou-san is helpless when it comes to Kushina-san.”

“So, what exactly got you in such a good mood anyway?” asked Shisui.

I nearly squealed at his question. “You won’t believe what I can do now!”

“Oh?” asked Shisui curiously before I proceeded to ramble about my new gift.

I should probably be suspicious of Shisui, him doing whatever he could to distract me from bothering Itachi, but at the excitement of being able to make seals, I didn’t think much of it… At least until we were halfway to Kiri.

“Hey Ka—”
“...He hasn’t said a word in three days.” I noted, cutting Shisui off before he could distract me again. “And before you say he’s under the weather again, I saw him doing his morning routine. He’s not even the least bit fatigue compared to the rest of us. What’s going on with Shisui?”

“It’s not—”

“You know what? I think I’m going to ask Itachi instead.” I said before skipping ahead.

“Kasa! Wait!” Shisui tried to grab my arm, but I danced out of his reach before darting forward.

While Shisui and Itachi probably have the best speed among our group, I had the best evasive skill out of all of them. A bit odd, considering I’m not all that fast compared to the Uchiha boys, but speed has nothing to do with a well-timed dodge. After training with a weapon specialist like Kurei sensei, he practically ingrained dodge into a reflex action. It was either that or suffer lacerations or bruises depending which weapon he used.

“What do you want?” droned Itachi when I got within range of him.

“Aren’t you a ray of sunshine?” I drawled.

“If you’re bored, go bother Shisui, I’m quite sure he’ll indulge you,” said Itachi without sparing a glance at my direction.

“What crawled up your ass and died?” I joked, tilting my head forward a little so I could get a better look of his face. His face remained blank as he kept focus on the road ahead of us. “…Itachi?”

He said nothing ignoring any eye contact I made as he sped up his pace and walked alongside Shirakumo sensei instead. I found myself slowing to a stop, dumbfounded by the lack of reaction. That’s odd… he always retorted with some sort of wisecrack if I joked like that…

“Did I… upset him somehow?” I said in puzzlement, almost reaching up to scratch the back of my head before I caught myself. Obito was rubbing off on me more than I thought.

“Lovers’ spat?” commented Santa in amusement as he caught up.

“You really should separate your love life from work,” added Tokuma as he came up from behind.

“Oh shut it, the both of you.” I grumbled before turning my attention to Shisui, who smiled faintly at my gaze. “Shi—”

“I think I’m going to walk with Hizashi sensei for a bit, there’s something I need to ask him,” said Shisui with a wave before he darted ahead.

“…Okay…” I started uncertainly, one hand at my hip and the other running through my short hair. “This is… odd?”

Santa sniggered. “Trouble in paradise, how’d you piss off both of your boyfriends?”

“Wish I knew.” I muttered with a sigh, swinging my arms behind my head as I continued walking forward alongside Santa.

“Wait, you serious?” said my blond teammate in surprise.
“You think I wouldn’t say sorry if I knew what I did to upset them? Do I look that petty?” I made a face when I realized I just dug a hole for myself. “Don’t answer that.”

“Your pettiness only goes as far as harmless vengeance against meaningless things, but you’re not that petty of a person otherwise,” noted Tokuma. “Whatever reason the Uchiha are upset, I doubt it’s your fault.”

“…Thanks?” I said in surprise, not expecting such reassurance from Tokuma.

“Wow, are you falling for our rowdy teammate too Tokuma?” joked Santa. Our Hyuga teammate ignored his playful teasing.

“We’ll be entering enemy territory soon, having her emotionally compromised is not favorable for any of us,” reasoned Tokuma. “I’m merely assuring our survival.”

“…Talk about cold,” sighed Santa with his arms out in a careless shrug. “Should’ve known. You’ve always been one to be practical with everything you do.”

“You rather I act like you?” drawled Tokuma. “Slothful and gluttonous.”

“Oh, are those fighting words I hear?” challenged Santa.

After a volley of insults I found myself giggling. It wasn’t often that these two bickered without me on either side. I could tell they’re a little worried and doing what they could to cheer me up… Kind of odd, considering I think needed cheering up. Though, I guess it’s the thought that counts.

“By the way, I wasn’t calling you petty earlier,” said Santa once he and Tokuma decided to finish their bickering.

“Huh?” I blinked wondering what he was going on about.

“What I was alluding to,” continued Santa with a sly grin. “Was how you didn’t deny it when I called the Uchiha your boyfriends.”

“Oh that.” I said with a casual shrug and a bright innocent grin. “I’m building myself a reverse harem. Want to join?”

“W-what?” spluttered Santa, not expecting my response. “The hell?”

“Let’s see.” I pressed a finger to my chin as I pretended to think. “Itachi has the stoic slot covered and Shisui has the charming slot covered… hmm, though, if I tweaked the rules a bit, I could probably get away with having them as twins or something and free up those slots, but what if I actually run into twins? Hmm…”

“You’re… kidding right?” said Santa uncertainly.

“What?” I said, oozing every ounce of innocence I could muster from Hizashi sensei’s acting lessons. “Some people collect coins and some others stamps. What’s wrong with collecting boyfriends? They’re way more useful and fun compared to coins and stamps.”

“Tokuma, are you hearing this?” said Santa in disbelief as he tugged at the other boy’s arm. “Our little Kasa is building a harem!”

“…Why is she ours?” said Tokuma in a deadpan. “Does Tesuri-san know you’re trying to
usurp his place as her father?”

“Do you know what he would do if I tried that?” said Santa, flabbergasted that Tokuma would even suggest such a thing.

“…You… want to be my daddy?” I said shyly, biting my lower lip as I shuffled my feet. And just to top it off, I held my hands behind my back and swung side to side in a child-like manner.

I could see the goose bumps on crawl his skin as Santa jumped behind Tokuma, using the Hyuga as a human shield.

“Don’t do that!” said Santa from the safety behind our teammate.

“Don’t do what?” I asked with a demure voice.

“Stop being a creepy pedo-bait!” said Santa as he shuddered. “If your father gets wind of you acting like this, you’re not the one he’s going to kill!”

“But, I thought you were my daddy.” I pouted, inwardly cackling like a maniac as Santa squeaked in terror.

“All right! All right! I’ll stop joking about you having boyfriends! Just knock it off already!” said Santa.

I kept my act up for only a second longer before I burst out laughing my earnest. “You should’ve seen your face! It was priceless!”

“Ha-ha, hilarious,” said Santa bluntly. “All that training from Hizashi sensei and you use it act creepy and try to get us killed by your father.”

“He’ll kill you anyway if you kept joking about Itachi and Shisui being my boyfriends. In his eyes, if you encourage it, you’re just as equally guilty. I was doing you a favor.” I waved it off.

“Next time, a word of warning would be enough, I don’t need a performance of your new acting skills,” said Santa.

“As you wish.” I sighed dramatically with a flourish bow as if completing a performance.

“By the way… why aren’t you creeped out by her performance?” Santa turned to Tokuma with a suspicious glance.

“She practiced that act in the Hyuga compound under Hizashi-sama’s guidance, it’s hard to take her performance seriously when I could remember the countless failed attempts prior to her mastery,” noted Tokuma before he glanced at me briefly. “Though, I don’t believe Hizashi-sama meant for you to use it in such a lewd manner.”

“Hizashi sensei said to use what I could to my advantage.” I replied. “I’m well within—”

“Kasa,” interrupted a stern voice. I grimaced, glancing towards Hizashi’s back, he didn’t even look back. “A word.”

“Think he heard my performance?” I whispered quietly to my teammates.

“I’ll make sure to buy flowers in commemoration,” answered Tokuma with a wry grin.

“For my performance or my funeral?” I grumbled.
“Kasa,” repeated Hizashi again.

“Coming!” I shouted as I darted after him, hoping he’s not looking to give me another scolding.

“Don’t you think it’s about time you’ve gotten into character?” asked Hizashi once I walked alongside him. His eyes kept forward and wary of our surroundings.

I jolted in surprise at his question. “Already? But we’re only halfway…”

“There’s always a possibility of scouts, the closer we get into hostile territory. You remember what role you play, do you not?” noted the stern man.

Medic. Support. Backup. My mouth snapped shut as I nodded, wiping away whatever personality that didn’t fit the role I was given. Anything that would draw attention to me, be it power or weakness was suppressed until further notice. As the group’s only medic and a support fighter, my priority was to stay out of the line of fire and provide support wherever I could. That meant to stay in the background, to be insignificant and invisible to everyone.

In the first week of group training, we were all trained under the specialization for each team as a means to familiarize ourselves with each other. Hizashi sensei’s training was particularly strict in regards to each of us being able to enact a different persona for the trip. Before we left the village, he assigned all of us a role to play. The reasoning behind it was to mislead our opponents and possibly stave off the more enthusiastic aggressors.

“Yes sir.” I replied softly with my back straightened and my swinging arms drawn in front of me.

Hizashi glanced at me briefly as if assess my performance before he returned his gaze back to where it was before. “Could still use some work.”

“Hizashi sensei is hard to please as ever.” I said pleasantly with a smile. “I’ll be up to standard by the time we reach Kiri, sir.”

“See that you do,” said Hizashi.

This made me wonder whether or not Itachi and Shisui decided to take up their assigned personas the moment we left the village, considering they were a part of the secondary assault team. Aside from group training in the specializations of or other teammates and persona training from Hizahi sensei, we were also reassessed by each jounin sensei for our individual specialty. With the amount of time we were given, it was impossible for each of us to get specialize training for one specific area.

What happened instead, we were regrouped into secondary teams that focused purely on the team specialties. Naturally, Itachi and Shisui fell under combat and were place with Shirakumo sensei for training. Santa was also placed in their team as he was the only one that could support the Uchiha pair and double up efficiently as a fighter. Izumo and Kotetsu on the other hand had practically mastered working as support while they were teamed with Itachi and with Zaji’s sensor abilities they were even better under Kurei’s tutelage. That left Tokuma, Muta and myself with the perfectionist Hizashi sensei.

Reconnaissance, those who are actually good in the field would not necessarily need to face direct combat, unless it’s to remove the threat, i.e. assassination, or prove their loyalty to the group they’re spying on. As we needed to be able to defend ourselves more so than gathering intel,
he adjusted the regime that Team 13 normally follows to something more… misleading.

“Whatever issue you might have with the Uchiha boys, that will have to wait until we return to Konoha,” stated Hizashi. “This is neither the time nor place.”

“Of course.” I agreed out loud before staying quiet for the remainder of the trip.

The persona Hizashi assigned me was one of a proper lady from a main clan. To exude an air of confidence to show I’m not weak, yet calm and soothing enough to not seem aggressive. This made me suspicious if Hiruzen had this planned all along when he assigned me to Hizashi, but… I supposed it’s pointless to dwell on the matter. Since there’s nothing I could do about it.

It’s such a pain to have to act like a lady when the urge to grab either of Shisui or Itachi by the collar and demand to know why the hell they were ignoring me gnawed at my thoughts. I swear, once this stupid exam is over I’m going to unleash hell and give them a piece of… Oh, what the hell is wrong with me? I’m a grown woman for peak sakes! I shouldn’t have these juvenile thoughts just because I’m being ignored! I’m not a child. I could handle being alone. I…

…I keep saying that… Yet, it feels like I’m losing grip on what little’s left of my maturity from my previous life with each passing day. It never bothered me before, since it was a lot safer and easier to let everyone think of me as a harmless, silly little child… but as time went on, moments like these where I’m alone to my thoughts, I found myself hating the fact that I’m not only physically a child, but I’m mentally turning into one as well.

Being surrounded by prodigies didn’t help the matter either. It was one thing to get outclassed by someone the same age, but getting outclassed by children? That’s just a major blow to what self-esteem I still had. Man, I feel pathetic…

A firm hand rested on my shoulder before I spotted Kurei at the corner of my eye. His face betrayed no thought and he said no words, but I could tell he was concern just by the look in his eyes. Compared to Hizashi and Fugaku who were adamant about perfection, Kurei was concerned with our survival. It didn’t matter if we had perfect form, as long as we survived he was content. It warmed my heart and eased my mind a little. Even if I couldn’t match up to everyone else, as long as I’ve done my best and made it out alive, he would be proud.

“I’ll be fine Kurei sensei.” I smiled at the man. “Thank you.”

“State your business,” said the guarding Kiri-nin stiff with a suspicious eye on all of us.

“I’m Kurei Yuhi, jounin. We’re shinobi from Konoha,” started Kurei as he along with Hizashi and Shirakumo pulled out their passports and motioned us to do the same. “Our teams will be participating in the upcoming chunin exams.”

The guards took our passports, inspecting its contents before giving a stiff nod and returning our documents. “You’ll be escorted to the administrative office.”

Much like Ame, Kiri shared a similar despondent mood with the lack of sun and constant miserable weather permeating throughout the village. Every shinobi we passed in the village seem to be on edge, particularly when they noticed our village affiliation. Even the civilians were wary of us when we made our way to the hotel and checked in.

“We’re not very popular huh?” noted Zaji quietly once we’ve settled in.

“Do you mean our presence here or just your popularity in general?” I replied dryly from
my seat at the window in my shared room. To save on costs, each team shared a room. However, due to crowding issues, our jounin senseis shared a fourth room among themselves.

“Hey!” retorted Zaji as he stuck his head out to yell at me. Not that he needed to, the walls were so thin, it’s impossible to not listen in on the conversations in the next room. “I’m being serious!”

“It’s expected,” said Shisui, brushing off his teammate’s indignation. “With the situation between our villages, this shouldn’t be a surprise.”

“But…” Zaji trailed off, my gaze focused on him when his eyes focused and his forehead crinkled in concentration. Someone stepped into his sensory range.

“But nothing,” continued Shisui, covering for his lapse in conversation. “It’s not something you should be concern with anyhow.”

“I guess,” replied Zaji with a sigh, resuming the conversation with fluid ease, but his words were laced with double-meanings. “We’re only genin, it’s not like we could do any lasting damage. If anything, we should probably take this chance to rest and actually get some sleep before the exams start.”

High chakra level, sizeable threat, non-threatening at the moment, but retreat is suggested if it turns hostile. Odd… High chakra levels isn’t something that should be showed off needlessly… Unless they’re doing it on purpose as a bait? But who are they trying to lure out? I glanced about, doing my best to stay discreet as I tried to see who stepped into Zaji’s sensory range, but nothing stood out to my unenhanced eyes.

The village was quiet compared to Konoha, everyone went about their business, limiting their words and pleasantries to the barest minimum. With this amount of mist, it was hard to tell whether it’s natural or someone was abusing the Hiding in the Mist jutsu.

“Rest is for the weary and sleep is for the dead.” I droned breaking away from the window.

Stay cautious and be careful, that was all the warning I could give to my fellow genin without breaking character. We were in enemy territory now and we can’t afford to show any weakness… Balls, keeping this act up is going to be a pain in the ass.
“Any luck?” I asked Zaji discreetly as we made our way to the exam hall.

The brunette shook his head. “It’s impossible with this many people.”

“Muta?” Shisui glanced to his teammate with a questioning gaze, but the quiet Aburame shook his head in response.

A grimace crossed the faces of the primary and secondary reconnaissance teams. One of the first things Hizashi sensei drilled into our heads when it came to infiltrating enemy territories was to identify all sources of possible threats. Ignoring even a single one could lead to the failure of the mission or worse, death… Since we couldn’t pinpoint the culprit of the high chakra source, we were going into this exam blind with a dangerous stalker at our heel.

In any normal mission, finding the source would have been a priority before we continued… but with the chunin exams that priority had to take a backseat, less we want to dropout altogether. That was one option we couldn’t take if we want to make it to the finals and showcase our village’s strength to the daimyo and potential clients.

“It’s pointless to dwell on matters out of your control,” said Itachi, his crisp voice cut through our thoughts as he continued to move forward. “When you reach the end of the rope, tie a knot and hang on. Whatever happens next, happens.”

I was a little surprise to hear his voice after so many days of silence. True, the role Hizashi assigned him wasn’t a talkative one, but he wasn’t banned from talking at all. I still have no clue why he decided to stop talking all those days ago, but at the same time, I couldn’t fathom why he decided to talk again either.

“Such arrogance.” I retorted as I played my role accordingly. “Typical Uchiha.”

And before you ask what hidden meaning is behind my words, there aren’t any. I’m just outright calling him an ass. Well, as close as I could get while acting as a lady. Hizashi sensei made it quite clear that death will be waiting for me if I dare utter a single crass word while in character. If I’m going to insult them, it would have to be in a snide aristocratic manner that belittles the existence of whoever I wish to smite. In other words, I have to insult them without actually insulting them… Yeah, that totally makes a whole lot of sense… the upper crust is weird.

When we arrived at the exam hall, there were already quite a number of genins waiting for the exam to start. Of course, since this exam was hosted by Kirigakure, the majority of the participating examinees were from Kiri. Being the hosting village gives the village an advantage of not having to waste funds on traveling fees and raises the chances of having their own representative show up in the finals. Even if a number of them fail, there would be no wasted travel time for the genin before they could resume their work in taking missions. Though, the downside would be utter embarrassment if none of the genins makes it into the finals.

Aside for the soft murmurings between teammates, the hall was fairly quiet and extremely unnerving. With a quick glance, it wasn’t hard to notice how much we stood out. Even after taking our sensei’s suggestion in changing our wardrobes to a more muted color, our age made us more distinguishable compared to other teams. It didn’t take long before predatory eyes laid upon us.

“Lambs in a den of wolves and no shepherd in sight.” I spoke softly.
Fortunately, the wait wasn’t long before a sultry woman strolled into the exam hall. Her auburn hair cascaded around her shoulders, swaying with each step she took. A breathtaking beauty, if I have to say so myself, and I’m quite sure she was aware of this fact as well. Why else would she stroll in through the sea of genins instead of body flickering into the room to show her ninja prowess?

“Good morning,” said the woman airily, her movements fluid and graceful as she turned to the examinees. Had Hizashi not placed me through kunoichi training, I wouldn’t have register her as a threat… though, with her next words, it would be hard to think otherwise. “Today, you will be giving up one of your teammates for torture and interrogations.”

Silence fell as the words sunk into everyone’s mind. It didn’t take long before chaos broke out and we all realized what she declared.

“What?” the room roared with indignation.

“What do you mean giving up one of our own for torture and interrogations?” snapped an unknown ninja from Kusa.

“You can’t do that!” shouted another ninja from Taki.

“What kind of exam is this?” demanded an Ame-nin.

The shouts of indignation escalated with each angry retort. The only ones that kept quiet were those from Kiri and my fellow teammates from Konoha. In normal circumstances, I might have joined the voices of indignation, but I rather like living and not face Hizashi’s wrath. If given the chance, I could fill this room with nervous energy by my lonesome. I have no desire in participating a T&I session.

“If you’re all quite done,” said the woman as her soft voice broke through the genins’ roars. “You may back out now if you do not wish to participate. However, if you do choose to do so, you will be forfeiting your right to take part in the chunin exams.”

The genins remained silent, but the fuming rage could be seen burning in their eyes. No doubt, they want nothing more than to rip this woman to shreds. She didn’t just insult their individual skills, but their village as a whole. She sure knows how to rile up the crowd.

“Once we start this exam, you may still forfeit.” A condescending chuckle escaped the woman. “However, I can’t promise that you won’t leave without some physical or mental trauma. If you’re uncertain, this is the best time for you to back out now.”

No one raised their hands.

“None?” asked the woman happily and the responses remained the same. “Good. Then allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mei Terumi and I’ll be your examiner for the first portion
of the chunin exams.”

My eyes widened at the declaration of her name…Did she say Mei? As in Kirigakure’s future Godaime Mizukage? We have her as our proctor?

“The rules of this exam are simple, each team will be given some vital information on how to proceed to the next portion of the exam. Your teams may choose who to act as prisoner and they will be swapped with the prisoner of the opposing team. Your task is to extract the necessary information from your prisoner before the opposing team. The slower team to do so will fail. If neither team could do so, both teams will fail. By the end of this exam, at least half of you will fail. We only wish to see the best of the best.”

“I have a question,” spoke a firm voice in the back. Our eyes drew to a blonde young woman from Kumo. Her eyes were crossed and her stance was defiant. “Are there any rules against the ones chosen as a prisoner to fight back while in the hands of the opposing team?”

Mei’s smile brightened at the question. “Of course not. Treat this exam as you would if you fell into enemy hands in the midst of war. Your roles as prisoners in this exam would be the same as a prisoner of war. You may attempt to take on your captors if you wish and force them to give you the answer to leave, but you would be at a disadvantage. If you have no qualms in doing so, you may take this option.”

The blonde Kumo-nin nodded in understanding.

“While I did say you may all use whatever means to extract the information, do try not to kill one another. After all, under real circumstances a dead prisoner is a useless one,” added Mei with a grin before she returned her attention to the rest of us. “The opposing teams will be chosen by lottery. We’ve already started the lottery the moment you’ve already arrived. It will be posted momentarily. Until then, please choose who will become the prisoner wisely.”

“Torture and interrogations.” I mumbled quietly under my breath. Who would’ve thought, after having so many close brushes with that in Konoha that it would run straight in my face on my first chunin exam?

“Kasa, you stay on the interrogations team,” said Tokuma as he broke me out of my thoughts. “Santa and I’ll will decide which one of us will be the prisoner.”

“What?” I said, startled by his words. “What do you mean you and Santa will decide?”

“What?” I said, startled by his words. “What do you mean you and Santa will decide?”

“Do you really have to ask?” sighed Santa with his arms crossed. “You think we would just let you be the prisoner?”

“But—” I tried to protest, but Tokuma cut me off.

“Didn’t you hear what she said?” noted the Hyuga. “She said we’re allowed to use any means necessary to extract that information.”

“I’m hardly the optimal person to interrogate someone.” I tried to reason. “Besides, she said we could retaliate as well. I could—”

“You’re a kunoichi,” cut off Tokuma. “What do you think they would do to force you to talk?”

I opened my mouth to protest, but it died at my lips when I realized what he meant. Compared to him and Santa, I was considerably more vulnerable due to my gender. With them, it
was likely they’ll be subjected to physical torture and abuse, but me as a girl? They could do so much more on top of that and it wouldn’t matter that I’m nine, considering T&I’s job was to break people… Damn it, why am I always so useless when it comes to things that matters?

“Don’t worry, we won’t break. We’re made of tougher stuff than that,” said Santa reassuringly, but that only made me feel more frustrated.

I know I said I didn’t want to ever face T&I, but the thought of having either of my teammates go instead didn’t make me feel any better. I glanced over to our other teammates and it seemed like they had no problems in deciding who to go. From where I stood, it seemed like Itachi and Muta were chosen to be the prisoners.

Likely because Kotetsu and Izumo worked better together rather than apart and Itachi was more than likely able to out silence, the silence itself. As for Muta, from our training together, I could tell he was going to be a frightful prisoner. I supposed Santa and Tokuma could hold their own as well, regardless who decides to become the prisoner… Maybe I’m just worrying for nothing?

“Maybe you can channel some of your dad’s sadistic streak to get the code faster,” joked Santa as he tried to alleviate the jitters he could no doubt see through my façade.

“You’re suggesting I take up after my father’s protective tendency?” I asked with a raised brow.

“Just a thought,” grinned Santa with a playful wink.

I raised my nose in the air with a haughty sniff, but in actually, I was doing my best not to giggle. Out of all my teammates, he was the only one that always exaggerates his reaction to Tesuri’s overprotectiveness. Sure, everyone is a bit wary of Tesuri when he gets into his protective streak, but none of them were utterly terrified of him… well, maybe Tenzo is, but he’s Tenzo. He has a thing for pleasing elders and his superiors.

In the end Tokuma decided he should be the prisoner as protocols call for a weapon strip. Santa, being a heavy weapon user and a long range fighter wouldn’t do well in an enclosed room, weaponless. We ended up with a genin from Iwa before the other observing proctors lead us to a soundproof room for our interrogations.

“This door will only open once you’ve obtained both codes or the other team have done so. There will be no outside intervention,” said the proctor before we all nodded in understanding. Without so much as a good luck, he closed the door and immediately, our prisoner moved.

“Kasa!” shouted Santa, but his warning came too late.

Our prisoner grabbed my arm, pulling it behind my back as he latched an arm around my neck. He dragged me in front of him, using me as a shield. Really, not even a second into this exam and I get turned into a hostage? Really?

“This is pathetic, I was actually expecting a bit of a challenge and they dump me with two kids?” snorted the Iwa-nin. “Whatever, just give me the code or I’ll—ARGH!”

“…Or you’ll what?” I drawled dangerously as he dropped to the ground, twitching with uncontrollable spasms. “It’s rude to touch a lady without permission.”

“You really shouldn’t have done that,” sniggered Santa as he made his way to our prisoner and squatted down to meet his eyes. “Princess here is quite feisty when it comes to physical contact. Only she may initiate contact, anyone else would be in for quite a shock. Quite literally as you may
attest to it. How does it feel to have several thousand volts run through your system?"

One good thing about the defibrillation jutsu, there was no need for hand seals. It’s a technique that only requires the right amount of chakra and could be concentrated anywhere you pleased as long as you have the chakra control necessary for it. It makes a useful distraction for moments like these where an enemy attacks unexpectedly and there was no way to retaliate in time. With one arm behind my back and a threatening arm around my neck, it would’ve been impossible to do hand seals or dance seals.

If I didn’t have my amplification seal, things might’ve turned for the worse. As I’ve said before, this was not an offensive technique and it’s hardly dangerous unless I could plant it at the heart. Under normal circumstances it won’t do much aside from giving the person a nasty zap. However, when used in conjunction with the amplification seal, it intensifies the jutsu and shooting its power up by several ranks, turning it into a paralysis sort of attack. Hence, why our prisoner was now twitching on the ground.

The Iwa-nin tried to lash out, but Santa planted a foot to his head and pulled out a kunai to his neck.

“Now, now, don’t be hasty. My hand might slip if you’re not careful,” continued Santa as he nicked the side of our prisoner’s neck. “Whoops.”

“Y-you think that would scare me?” growled the Iwa-nin through the spasms. “If you kill me, you won’t be able to pass and your teammate will suffer—”

Santa planted the kunai into the other genin’s shoulder. The other screamed.

“What are you doing?” roared the Iwa-nin. “Didn’t you hear what I said?”

“It’s touching that you’re worried for our teammate. He could handle himself quite well on his own. Oh, but don’t worry, we won’t kill you,” said Santa cheerily as he yanked out his kunai. “Princess over there is quite a skillful healer. She’ll make sure you won’t die… or rather, can’t die. After all, didn’t our proctor say a dead prisoner is a useless one?”

“Bah!” spat our prisoner. “As if your intimidation tactics would scare me! You’re a hundred years too early for that!”

“Intimidation tactics?” Santa laughed. “Who said I was trying to intimidate you? I have no use for the code since our teammate would be more than capable in getting it from yours. No, no. I’m doing this because you’ve touched our princess without permission.”

“What?” said the Iwa-nin in disbelief. “Aren’t you here for the chunin exams?”

Santa stabbed his kunai back into the same spot where he last stabbed. “You don’t listen very well do you? Our teammate has that covered. All I’m interested is to watch you squirm and suffer until he’s done. It might take a while though, since he doesn’t have any weapons on him, but he’ll eventually do so. After all, he is from a prestige clan that specializes in taijutsu.”

I remained quiet as Santa continued to torture our prisoner. It was an ugly sight, I wanted nothing more to look away. He couldn’t retaliate, not with the paralysis agents laced on Santa’s kunai. I felt sick to my stomach as I listened to the young man scream in agony, but I couldn’t let that show. We had to keep this act up until he gave us the code. Until we’ve made it through to the finals.

Santa and Tokuma were assigned with the roles of being my guards while I’m under the guise of a proper lady. Under any circumstance that I’m under attack or danger, they were to act with
hostility. As the only medic in the team, my priority was to make it to end and support whoever makes it into the finals. I was tasked to not engage in any conflict if possible. Hence, why Santa was doing all the dirty work.

The Iwa-nin trembled from the pain and blood lost. I bit my inner cheek to fight back a grimace and the urge to lose my lunch. I know I’ve given vicious threats of violence and death to people in past, but I’ve never imagined it to be this repulsive. Seeing the brutality of torture, smelling the metallic tinge of blood and hearing the screams of agony, it was getting hard to maintain an indifferent mask over my face.

Back in Konoha, back in the hospital, I’ve seen plenty of blood and heard plenty of screams, but none of them were like this. None of them sounded like they were begging for death. Ten minutes, twenty…

“Enough.” I spoke, my voice barely above a whisper. “If he loses anymore blood, he’ll die.”

“Aren’t you lucky?” drawled Santa as he turned to me. “You get a healing session with our princess. You should be honored.”

Our eyes met and he broke character for a second as a worried expression crossed his face. Had I been less perceptive, I would’ve missed it with how fast he recovered. I wonder what did he see on my face that made him look like that? Stop. This is not the time to be thinking about things like this.

I made my way to our prisoner and knelt down next to him. My hand hovered over the single wound Santa kept plunging his kunai into over and over again. With a warm green glow, I numbed the area around the bloody injury as I knitted the torn muscles together. His breathing labored as a reluctant whimper escaped his throat. The numbing wasn’t working. His pain receptors were still on overdrive.

My nose twitched at a faint scent mixed in with the blood, chemical blockers. Another one of Santa’s concoctions laced on his kunai. It keeps the beta blockers from working and escalates the pain with each stab. Cruel, but effective. People did tend to be more loose-lipped when under pain and duress.

“You should probably give up before the damage becomes irreversible.” I suggested quietly as his body trembled, breaking out into a cold sweat. “It’s not worth ruining your career because of this.”

“The hard and soft routine?” Our prisoner gave a broken chuckled as he glanced up at me with a snort. “You two really are amateurs. Don’t think for a moment that you can con me into giving up the code.”

The healing chakra on my hand ceased, but the glow didn’t end. “I really wished you gave into the gentle persuasion… I rather not hurt you.” I murmured quietly.

“Oh, so you’re going to play the hard role this time?” snorted the Iwa-nin. “Please, the time for you to pose yourself as a threat has long passed. You’re a tiny little girl, a medic and it’s hardly likely that you could do any lasting—ARGH!”

A scream ripped through his throat as I grabbed his lower region with my hand charged with an amplified defibrillation jutsu.
“… I do look harmless, don’t I?” I whispered against his ear. “So harmless that no one would think twice about me grabbing their balls and frying them with a medical based jutsu.”

I held on for a moment longer before releasing him. His screams broke off into a whimper and then into quivering gasps. His body convulsed, shaking as he rode through the aftermath of the pain. His eyes clenched shut as he pressed his sweaty head against the cold ground for any sort of comfort.

“The thing about iryo-nins is that we’re intimately familiar with the human body.” I murmured, hovering over his prone form. “We could administrate pain just as easily as we could take it away.”

I planted my hand on him again, sending a wave of healing chakra through his system.

“… I could torture you in a thousand ways and still have you leave this room without a single scratch. So in a sense, you are right about one thing. I won’t be doing any lasting damage to you.” I said before sending another shock through his system when I saw his breathing eased. “But is that really a consolation?”

“Y-you crazy bitch!” gasped the Iwa-nin, his wild eyes filled with pain as he stared at me. “So I’m told.” I replied, pulling a senbon from my pouch. “If I could, I would keep shocking you, but if I did so your pain sensors would eventually dull… and we can’t have that can we?”

“You think I’m going to just surrender? You think I would just break? You’ve got to be—ARGH!” screamed the Iwa-nin as I plunged the senbon into him in precise acupuncture points, blocking off vital tenketsu point that could relieve pain.

Over and over, I kept tormenting and healing our prisoner as Santa watched quietly behind me. My hand gained a slight tremor by the time he screamed himself raw. Why won’t he just give up already?

An hour later… our team reunited… Tokuma looked fairly unscathed but I on the other hand was discreetly leaning against Santa to keep myself upright as we made it out of the room. Without a word, Tokuma took one glance at us he before moved to my other side in case I decided to topple the other direction.

“…Are you going to be sick?” asked Tokuma quietly when he was within range.

“…Dragging me to the closest restroom might be wise. I think I have mild case of food poisoning.” I replied hoarsely.

They did exactly so and guarded the door while I made my way to the toilet and ejected everything from my stomach. Everything from breakfast spewed out of my mouth as I clung onto the toilet cover. I can’t believe I’m reacting this badly, it’s not like I killed the guy. True to my word, there were no lasting damage on him when we left… but that didn’t erase images of his agonized expressions and sounds of his wretched screams. Those were burned into my memory.

“When I said channel your father… I didn’t quite mean it that way,” said Santa with a humorless chuckle from outside the door. “You should’ve seen her Tokuma, she totally fried our prisoner’s balls. It was brutal.”

“I’m quite sure,” droned Tokuma.
“So, how was being a prisoner?” asked Santa, changing the subject as he went.

“Tedious,” replied Tokuma. “They’re nothing compared to Kurei sensei’s kidnappings. Their attempts at psychological attacks were pathetic. I found myself bored.”

My grip tightened over the back cover. How do they do it? How could they be so nonchalant about the whole thing?

“If you’re done, let’s get going,” said Tokuma, his voice breaking me out of my thoughts before I reached to flush away the mess.

“In a moment.” I replied, walking out of the stall and making my way to the sink to rinse my mouth.

I splashed some water on my face, allowing it to drip as I gripped onto the edge of the sink, careful to not get my kimono wet or dirty. Letting out a rough breath of air, I glanced up at the mirror. My face was pale… I look more like a prisoner than Tokuma at this point… man, that’s pathetic. I dried my face with a handkerchief before I straightened my posture and freshened up my appearance.

“Sorry for the wait, I’m ready now.” I said as I stepped out of the bathroom and walked with them towards the exam hall.

“About time,” said Santa with his hands in his pockets. “I thought we might have to go in and check on you.”

Are you okay?

“It must’ve been something I ate last night.” I answered.

I’ll be fine.

“If you knew you had such a weak stomach, you should’ve eaten something else,” said Tokuma.

Why didn’t you just leave it to Santa?

“You two seemed to have enjoyed it.” I answered.

I’m not letting you two take all the burden.

“But you didn’t,” commented Santa. “I’m surprised you managed to hang on as long as you did. It would’ve been bad if you decided to throw up halfway into the interrogations. They might’ve thought you had a weak stomach for this sort of thing.”

It’s not worth it.

“I could’ve turned it into another form of torture. I doubt anyone would enjoy being force fed regurgitated food.” I retorted.

I can handle it.

“That would be torture,” noted Santa. “You’re just as much of a sadist as your dad. Maybe you should switch fields to T&I instead of working at the hospital.”

Your dad would make a trip to T&I seem like a nice picnic if anything happened to you.
“Not interested.” I responded.

You’re exaggerating, he won’t do that.

“Oh really?” drawled Santa. “I’ve seen how creative you’ve gotten with our prisoner.”

That’s a lie and you know it.

“Is that so?” I raised a brow before glancing at Tokuma.

Are you arguing with me in code? Tokuma, is he serious? He’s arguing with me in code!

“No, you’re right, you’d be horrible at it,” continued Santa.

What if I am?

I glanced at Santa without a word.

Are you challenging me?

He smirked.

What are you going to do about it?

“You’re both idiots,” cut in Tokuma before either of us could cause a scene.

…You’re both idiots.

Okay, maybe that last bit didn’t need translating.

“Anyway,” said Santa as he stretched his arms over his head and gathered his hands behind him. “We can’t have you getting sick on us again. Calling you a princess is just a nickname, you’re not actually one.”

You don’t have to prove yourself, you’re pulling your own weight just as the rest of us.

“Aren’t you charming?” I drawled.

It doesn’t feel that way though.

“Enough,” interrupted Tokuma again. “We’ve only passed the first exam, there are still others. Let’s see if the others have made it through.”

Bickering aside, we hastily made our way to the hall and much to our relief both Team 13 and Team 6 were there among the group examinees that passed. A worried look crossed Shisui’s face when he spotted me. I gave a faint smile in an attempt to ease his worries, but it didn’t seem like it worked.

“Glad to see you made it,” said Shisui once we were within hearing range.

“Sorry that we took so long, I needed to make a little detour.” I replied, trying to keep my tone as pleasant as I could, but my voice was slightly hoarse from vomiting up earlier.

“Your voice…” said Shisui, but he didn’t get a chance to speak further as our proctor Mei stepped into the hall once again.

I would’ve liked a chance to talk with him and the others on whether or not they needed healing, but
that would have to wait.

“Congratulations, I’m impressed that this many of you managed to get through this relatively unharmed,” said the woman cheerily as she ran her eyes over us. “Executing a flawless interrogation is an art that not many could claim mastery to and escaping one is an even more difficult task. As a shinobi of any village, information often times is more valuable than any treasure or gold. To be able to extract it or protect it from your enemies is an admirable trait.”

Her speech continued into some patriotic gibberish, but in amidst of it all, I found myself trying to fight back another wave of nausea. I could do without worshipping the porcelain god again.

Just as I tried to plunge myself deeper into my thoughts to block her words out, a pale hand reached in front of me and opened with a small wrapped treat. I blinked in surprise, my eyes following the pale arm back to its owner… who turned out to be Itachi. His eyes remained on our proctor while his hand remained outreach to me with the small treat at hand. Confused, I took the small offering and the Uchiha dropped his hand back to his side.

I did my best to unravel the wrapper quietly as Mei was still talking and I found the treat to be… dry umeboshi? A baffled expression crossed my face. Why dry umeboshi? I glanced at Itachi in question before my mind finally caught up and I realized dry sour plums were one of the many remedies that helped with nausea. Tesuri had suggested it many times to newly expecting mothers to alleviate their morning sickness and drunks with hung-overs and bad bouts of nausea.

How did Itachi—Oh right, Mikoto-san. She must’ve eaten them when she was pregnant with Sasuke. I wouldn’t put it past Itachi that he would remember something as trivia as a common remedy… I found myself resisting the urge to giggle as I popped the sour-sweet treat into my mouth. It was surprisingly thoughtful of him… even if he refuses to talk to me.

“…Thanks.” I whispered gratefully as the nausea became much more bearable.

Itachi spared me a glance briefly before he reached out and poke me in the head. This time, I found myself unable to get angry at him as a grin crept up the corner of my lips and he rolled his eyes, returning his attention back to the woman’s speech. I guess I’m forgiven… though… I still have no clue what he was angry at in the first place.
“Listen up, you insignificant little worms,” snapped the muffled voice of our second proctor as Mei finished her speech. I found my breath hitch in surprise when I spotted the bandages on his face and the ginormous sword on his back. “Each of you will be receiving a numbered tag. Make sure you don’t lose it or consider yourself disqualified.”

Several proctors went about handing each of us a round disk about the size of a coaster. Too big for my small hand to grasp fully around its diameter and a bit thick to hold comfortably between my fingers. The number four marked on the disk nearly made me roll my eyes before I tucked it in the folds of my obi. There were more pressing matters at hand… Like our proctor.

…Zabuza Momochi. I had to bite my lip to fight the urge to mouth out his name. Even with my past memories quickly fading, I still recognized him. The Demon of the Bloody Mist, the man whole killed every single one of his classmates during his genin exam. He was in Kiri’s anbu, one of its seven prized swordsmen. He was the first real threat that Team Seven faced and the first death they’ve witness.

“We’ll be relocating to the next location. If you can’t keep up, then go home. You won’t be able to handle the next portion of the exam,” said Zabuza. His words inciting some of the genin.

Standing threatening and tall, his reputation and his moniker as the Demon of the Bloody Mist should terrify me, but... I wasn’t. Rather, I felt sorry for him. From what little memory I still had, he was painted as a villain, a missing-nin, a heartless mercenary, but the reason for all those titles was due to his desire for change, a desire to cease Kiri’s heartless practices. He was no different from Tesuri, from Akatsuki. All they wanted was a moment of peace, a moment where they didn’t have to fear punishment from their tyrannical leaders.

… He will die… as will many others. There wasn’t a damn thing I could do about this. I clenched my hands into fists as they begun to shake. Damn it! I said I wasn’t going to think about things that’s out of my control. Just stop it, stop it! Taking a shaking breath, I forced myself to unclench my hand.

“Kasa?” questioned Santa.

“We should probably get going before we’re disqualified.” I replied, forcing a cheery grin to my face, but it came out more of a grimace. I spotted Itachi eying me at the corner of his eye, but I ignored it and latched onto Santa’s arm. “Come on, let’s go.”

Easier said than done… It seemed like Zabuza was out to disqualify us as he sped through the village and into the surrounding forest area. It was a little hard to see. There were several times that I thought we lost him, but thank god for Zaji’s sensor abilities and Tokuma’s byakugan. Unfortunately, due to the need to exert ourselves just to keep up, a number of us were spent by the time we reached the second exam area.

“Hmph, looks like you’ve all managed to keep up,” sneered Zabuza in amusement as he eyed those who were exhausted and struggling to catch their breath.

I would have been among the group had Hizashi sensei not drill breathing exercises into my kunoichi training. Rule number… who the hell cares, a lady must not pant even in the face of exhaustion. Even though my lungs burned for air, I persisted. I kept my back straight and my breathing slow and shallow, fighting back the urge to hunch over and wheeze like a three-pack a day.
smoker. Glancing to my side, I found it a bit irksome that Tokuma could do it with such ease. No doubt he’s exhausted as well, but his breathing was much shallower than mine.

“This is the Fogbank Woods. The lot of you will be hunting each other. The time limit is one week,” said Zabuza.

This time it didn’t take as long for the message to sink into our minds, but with the exhaustion, not many of us could rise with indignation.

“First T&I and now this? How many more of these psychotic tests are there?” snapped an irate Kusa-nin. “What are we doing this time? Subdue and kill each other?”

Despite the bandages on his face, we could still see the sadistic grin Zabuza was giving. “You’re all free to do so if you think you can handle annihilating friends and foes alike.”

“What?” The Kusa-nin took a step back in surprise.

“For the next part of this exam, you’ll be hunting each other for these,” continued Zabuza as he held up a circular disk we were handed earlier. “In order for any of you to proceed to the next exam, four of these tags will be needed… per person and of course that is including the one you already have.”

“Per person?” said the blonde Kumo-nin in disbelief. “You mean we would have to take out three teams if we want to pass? There’s only fourteen teams left!”

“The max number of participants that could pass in this exam is ten. Due to the number, you’re not required to pass as a team as you may take your teammates’ tags and pass on your own.” Zabuza looked thoroughly amused as a harsh cackle escaped him. “Of course, even if you take their tags, you’ll still need one more.”

“So we’re just supposed to take each other out?” snapped the Kusa-nin in disbelief.

“In the real world, the weak is food for the strong. As long as you’re strong, it wouldn’t matter,” smirked Zabuza. “You may start once I leave. I look forward to seeing who makes it back to the exam hall with the necessary tags.”

“…The weak is food for the strong,” drawled a young man from Kiri in mild amusement.

*Code!*

My eyes quickly gravitated to him at the tone of his voice, he looked a bit younger compared to the blonde from Kumo, but several years older than us. His casual yukata made him stand out almost as badly as I do in the midst of our warmly dressed fellow genins. Well, at least my travel kimono is thick and warm, his looked like something you wear to a summer festival.

I have no clue what was traded, but I turned my gaze to Team 13 hoping they’ve noticed. Zaji closed one eye as he covered his mouth in a yawn, his hand patting against his lips twice to signal they’ve notice. I glanced over to Team Six and spotted Itachi with his arms crossed and his finger idly tapping his arm. He and Shisui were trading codes. They were already planning what to do the instant Zabuza disappears.

*Scatter… regroup…*

We’re not participating in the initial skirmish. With so many teams and so few spots open, no doubt it would be a bloody mess. Waiting it out was the best option for us, when the numbers
dwindle and those in the skirmish exhaust themselves. While I agree it’s a cheap and dirty tactic, I have no shame in doing so. Why? Let me reiterate one thing.

We’re ninjas.

With a slosh, Zabuza’s form collapsed into a body of water, alerting us the start of the second exam. Water clone, sneaky. I should’ve expected that. The shift in atmosphere snapped my attention back. No time to be admiring other people’s handiwork. Time to move. Immediately, my hands went through the necessary hand seals.

“Hidden Mist Jutsu!” I shouted before low visibility in the already foggy forest became zero.

In that instant, our three teams turned heel and ran, distancing ourselves from the shouts of indignation and confusion. From the beginning, before any of us even stepped foot out of Konoha, we all agreed that we would be supporting each other to the fullest regardless who makes it to the finals. Realistically thinking, there was no way for all nine of us to qualify for finals.

That’s simply impossible, the hosting village wouldn’t allow it. No sane coordinator would let their own village miss a chance at the finals where potential clients gathered. There were six teams out of the fourteen that was from Kiri. If they played their cards right in subterfuge, they would have at least three candidates for the final and three remaining either to play keep away or dwindle down the numbers even further.

My mind flickered through the hitai-ate on the candidates in the field earlier. 18 Kiri, 9 Konoha, 6 Iwa, 3 Kumo, 3 Ame and 3 Kusa. 6:3:2:1:1:1. The ratio’s in Kiri’s favor, while it’s a free for all for the remaining teams. The odds weren’t looking good for us. If we pooled together our tags, we might be able to get two people into the finals. Our first choice was likely going to be our secondary assault team. This exam wasn’t meant for career advancement as much as supporting our village.

Except…

“Kasa! Behind you!” snapped Tokuma.

I snapped my eyes back and spotted blue will-o’-the-wisp breaking through the mist and coming straight at me. With a quick grasp of my umbrella, I snapped it open just before it crashed into my shield and exploding. Gritting my teeth, I held on against the impact. A hissing noise told me it was slowly burning through the fabric of my weapon. I twirled my umbrella between my hands, sliding my hands in opposite directions to send the highest speeds to toss off the flaming mass.

I stuck a foot out behind me, readying myself with chakra at my soles for impact against the tree. I couldn’t have taken more than a second to jump off before claw-like gouges dug into the tree where I once stood. Claw marks? What the hell?

“Not bad for a bunch of greenhorns,” drawled an amused voice. I couldn’t see anyone through the mist, but I could recognize the voice as the blonde girl from Kumo. “Creating a diversion and escaping in the midst of confusion. Well done.”

Despite her compliments, never once did she stop her assault. I could hear conflict a short distance away, what Tokuma and Santa fighting her teammates? Shit! Do I have to deal with her on my own?

“But it’s useless against someone who could see through it!” snapped the girl as I dodged
more mouse-like fireballs and deflecting whatever I couldn’t dodge.

With each fireball she sent my way, the air heated and the mist evaporated. It didn’t take long before I got a good glimpse of her. Claw-like hands, the immediate thought my mind jumped to was Wolverine, but before a snicker of amusement could escape me, she moved.

“Barrier Wing!” I shouted activating the seal barely in time to double up my defenses alongside my umbrella. With brute force alone, she punctured through both my barrier and umbrella. I was left with a quivering gasp at the single claw, a mere inch away from my eye.

“Kasa!” shouted Santa before I found a barrage of shurikens flying towards the blonde Kumo-nin. She pulled back, retreating from the barrage of attacks in the same ease as a feline dropping to his paws. “What are you doing you idiot! MOVE!”

I snapped out of my daze and quickly slid down the side of the tree. Previous experience taught me that I should never engage in aerial battle or fight more than a couple of feet away from the ground. My strength lies in my dance seals and I couldn’t very well complete an intricate dance on a narrow branch.

Once my feet touched the group, I was assaulted again, this time by the blonde girl’s teammate, a dark skinned young man with spiky white hair. I nearly lost my head, quite literally, when he swung that ridiculous size of a cleaver he calls a sword. Thank god for the gymnastic training from kunoichi lessons because I don’t think I would’ve been able to force my back to arch into a bridge to dodge that attack.

Wasting no time, I kept the momentum of arching my back and swung myself upright in a twirl, stepping into the beginning of my dance seals. My opponent persisted, thrusting and swinging his sword at me with every chance he had. I grimaced as I Kushina’s precise dance became mutilated in order to keep from being cleaved in half.

“Earth Style: Earth Fist!” I shouted as I completed the steps and slammed my hands into the ground. Six silhouettes emerged from the ground, delivering a straight punch all around me. I’m not sure whether or not it hit my opponent, but it did seem to cease his attack for the moment.

“So you’re an earth type user,” chuckled my opponent as I heard him pat a hand against the mounds of earth surrounding me and separating us. “Just what the heck are these things? You said fists, but they look more like cows!”

Cows? Indignation crossed me. They do not look like cows! I scowled, looking at my creations… well, maybe a little… But he ruined my dance! A little deformity is expected, at least it still went through! Stop it! Don’t get distracted! I shook my head, deciding to start my next dance immediately in case he was planning something, but the familiar sound of electricity crackling made me freeze as my earth creations crumbled around me. He grinning arrogantly with his hand sparking from electric discharge.

“It’s really too bad for you that my nature affinity is lightning,” grinned the other. My heart raced as he charged up his hand reaching for me.

“Yeah… too bad.” I wheezed out before slamming my hands into the ground again, completing yet another dance. The ground turned to sludge and my opponent quickly sank into the liquefied ground.

“Damn it!” hissed the genin before he charged up a handful of electricity and slamming it into the murky mess, halting his descent. While he was stuck, I made my way out of my crumbled
barrier of cows… yes, I know how ridiculous it sounds, but now’s not the time to be thinking such things.

I have to focus! What’s lightning weak to in this reality? Shit, why were there only earth-based dances in my head right now? Focus!

“Protocol break!” shouted Tokuma.

What the hell? Now?

“Protocol break!” confirmed Santa.

Damn it!

“Protocol break!” I repeated after him before we all turned tail and ran.

Among the many things Kurei sensei drilled into our minds during survival training was to know when we’re outclassed and run. Considering we’re not meant to go into combat less it’s an ambush and we have a combat team with us its best we run whenever we find ourselves outmatched. If any one of us declares protocol break, the other two must follow in turn. No exceptions.

This only served to piss me off even more. Sure, I shouldn’t be one to talk, since I could barely keep up with our attackers, but if we had a chance to regroup even for a moment. We could’ve—

“Where do you think you’re going?” purred the blonde as she body-flickered in front of me.

Shit.

“Dragon Wing!” I shouted before she shot a mouse-like fireballs straight into my face.

I bit back a scream as I quickly brushed off the flames with my sleeves. The seal took the brunt of the attack, but that doesn’t mean it hurts any less. Staggered, blinded and dazed, I could do nothing as she grabbed my arms, forcing them behind my back before pressing her claws against my throat.

“Don’t even think about fighting back, unless you want me to ruin that pretty little face of yours even more,” drawled the older girl as she reached into my obi and took my tag.

I said nothing as I sent out a number of fine chakra threads, barely noticeable to most people, to reach for my pre-made seal cards in my pouch. I may be captured, but I’m not going to sit around like a damsel and wait for help. There’s no definite that someone would always come to save you. Even though, I’m quite sure my teammates would never abandon me, I don’t want to have a close incident like Obito, where one of them die trying to save me… I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if that happened.

In a chunin exam, I doubt it would come to an extreme situation like that, but I rather not risk the chance. The skin on my face was still too tender for me to risk opening my eyes. I really do hope that I didn’t suffer from any lasting scars. Now, if only I could reach those—

“Yugito!” bellowed one of her other teammates as he approached.

Yugito?
“It looks like they’ve left her. Either that or they just haven’t notice we captured her,” continued the girl’s teammate.

As in Yugito Ni?

“For a bunch of brats, they run pretty fast,” commented the other as he rejoined the group.

As in one of Kumo’s jinchuriki?

“No matter,” said the girl. Her claws brushing against my face. “They might still come back for her.”

As in the jinchuriki of Matatabi?

“Maybe,” replied the laid back voice of her first teammate. “If not, we could always dump her corpse somewhere. You have her tag already.”

As in the jinchuriki of a giant ca…ca…

“Corpse? Now you’re just being cruel,” said Yugito. “She’s too pretty to leave it as a corpse. Maybe turn her into a doll instead?”

My heart dropped to my stomach as a cold chill raced through my body. Pulse racing, chest burning, the world spun even in the darkness of my closed eyes. Why was it spinning? Why can’t I breathe? Did I stop breathing? When did I stop breathing? I opened my mouth trying to suck in whatever air I could, but only managed to wheeze as the air refused to fill my lungs.

“Yugito, you’re scaring her,” laughed the second teammate. “Look at her, she can’t even scream!”

Stop it! Shut it out! Shut it all out! Focus on what’s important. Get a hold of yourself! Don’t forget the role you’re supposed to play! Don’t forget you can’t show fear! Focus!

“Aw, aren’t you cute?” drawled Yugito. Her tone, mocking at first, switched to a low rumble purr as she brushed a single claw against my face. “Maybe you should’ve thought twice before joining the shinobi ranks. With how pretty you are, you could’ve gone into plenty of civilian fields and not end up in this situation.”

My chest heaved as I finally took a breath and filled my lungs with much needed air. Then I took another and much to the surprise of everyone, myself included, I let out the most condescending laugh I’ve ever given in my life. This wasn’t the laughter of someone scared. No… This was the laughter that brings terror to the night, silence to the bold. They can’t scare me. It can’t scare me!

The slow and soft giggle broke into an uncontrollable cackle that no normal child should ever make, drowning out the laughter of my captors, ruining their moment of victory.

I laughed, continued laughing, and kept laughing until the sounds of my derangement was the only thing that filled the silence. Without the heat of Yugito’s flames, the air around us quickly cooled and I could feel the mist slowly rolling back in. It must seem quite unsettling to my captors that I’m laughing in such a manner while in this foggy barely visible forest.

“She’s… laughing…” said the second teammate in confusion before it turned into annoyance. “The Konoha-dog is really laughing! Why is she laughing?”
“I’m sorry,” I drawled with a sadistic smile as I reigned in the dying cackles. “Were you still relishing in your faux victory?”

Silence.

“What’s the matter?” I whispered with my eyes still closed. “Am I intimidating you?”

“…Bold words for such a little girl,” said the first teammate, breaking the silence from the trio.

Another giggled escaped me as I lolled my head against Yugito’s claws and turned my head to his voice. I could feel the sharp pain as it dug into my neck and cutting into my skin. Her breath hitched in surprise by my action and she quickly pulled her claws away from my neck before I could injure myself further. However, she still kept a firm hold of me with a headlock.

“Oh?” I continued with wry amusement. “Not going to put that against my neck anymore?”

“Do you have a death wish?” asked the second teammate.

“Please,” I drawled, not bothering to turn my head towards him. “As if any of you would kill me. You would’ve done so the moment you’ve gotten my tag.”

“And what makes you think we won’t change our mind now?” asked Yugito, her headlock tightening as she spoke.

“Because despite all of your bravado, you’re all nothing but scared children.” I replied, bluffing as I tilted my head back in a mock attempt to glance at her, even though my eyes remained close.

“Scared children? You’re one to talk,” snorted her other teammate.

“And what makes you think we’re scared?” asked Yugito.

“If the lot of you were that confident in your abilities, you would’ve gone after the teams from Kiri.” I continued, relaxed in her grip. “The fact that you came after me, a seemingly harmless little girl, spoke volumes.”

“Volumes of what?” scowled Yugito. “We could have just wanted to eliminate the weaker teams before we went after the more interesting ones.”

“Good try… but no.” I replied with a low whisper. “With Matatabi at your fingertips, do you really need to use such tactics?”

“…Matatabi?” said Yugito, a frown hinted in her tone.

I opened my eyes and looked straight into hers with sly grin and a bemused chortle. “Don’t tell me you don’t know the name of the two-tailed demon you carry.”

Her dark eyes widened in surprise as she released me and hastily backed away. “How—?”

Her teammates glanced at me warily as they stepped back, but only to maneuver themselves to surround me at a safe distance.

“Are you scared of little ole me?” I asked, straightening my kimono and brushing off the remnants of her fire attack from my sleeves. My smile didn’t waver as I took a slow step forward,
brandishing my hands open in a slow theatrical manner. “I’m just a harmless little girl.”

“Who are you?” demanded Yugito, her eyes alight with anxious tension as she followed my every move.

“Who indeed?” I continued, raising an open hand against my face and dragging the tips of my fingers down to the shallow cuts on my neck. I could feel the blood staining my fingers as I discreetly healed the cuts in one fluid motion. When I pulled my hand back into my line of vision, it seemed almost like I simply wiped away the damage she’s done. “I must applaud you for your attempts at intimidation. You did better than the prisoner I had in the previous exam.”

“Who—are—you?” growled the girl, but I could see the uncertainty in her eyes, the confusion over my words.

“They sealed Matatabi into you early didn’t they?” I shook my head clicking my tongue as I stepped closer to her, watching her face pale with each word. This was a risky bluff, trying to scare them away with words alone, but what other choice do I have? “Tsk, tsk, tsk, age two was it Kumo is quite harsh with their jinchuriki aren’t they? Have you managed to form any tails yet?”

The three tensed at my words.

“Oh…” I whispered with exaggerated awe as I pressed my fingertips together in almost a prayer fashion. “So you have managed. I see… that’s why you weren’t going after the stronger teams. You’ve formed the tails once and you’ve hurt your teammates.” A chuckle escaped me as I continued. “You’re afraid! Afraid of that monstrous strength you hold. You can’t—”

“Enough!” snapped the blond young man as he moved to stand between me and Yugito.

“I don’t know what trick you’re using or who told you these things, but what you’re doing is nothing more than—” His voice cut off, his body stilling.

“C?” Yugito reached out to her teammate, but he didn’t move. She turned to her teammate worriedly. “Darui, he’s not…”

“C, snap out of it!” said Darui as he reached to shake his teammate, but the blond remained unmoving. He turned to me with a growl. “What did you do?”

I said nothing, eying at the stillness of the blond they called C… Did I do that? No, I didn’t do that. How would I do that?


“Stop lying! We’ve had enough of your games! What did you do?” snapped Yugito.

I kept silent, discreetly tapping my fingers against the top of my other hand, testing the weight on the chakra threads floating around me. Unknown to them and hidden in the mist were thin chakra threads linked to the seal cards in my pouch. There was one with paralytic powder in it, but I don’t remember activating it… Let’s see… no, they’re all here, I didn’t accidentally activate any of them. So why?
“Why are you quiet?” screeched the girl as she dropped into an aggressive stance with her claws stretched out and ready to attack.

“Yugito! Get a hold of yourself!” snapped Darui, but froze when his hand reached C’s nose. “He stopped breathing.”

I stood, unmoving from my spot, watching as they panicked over her teammate. The frantic shaking. Yugito in particular more so. She was scared; she was angry. Angrier than I expected… but I suppose I should’ve expected it nonetheless. Jinchurikis were rarely given a chance by most people. The few that does usually ends up as the closest to the jinchuriki. He must’ve been one of them.

“…You’re angry because it hurts.” I whispered, glancing at C’s still form. They’ve laid him on the ground, trying to get him to breathe again with CPR, but it didn’t seem like it was working. “It hurts because you care.”

“Stop it! Just stop it! Fix him! Heal him!” shouted the girl, her voice desperate and cracking.

A pitiful sight… This isn’t the Yugito I remember. This isn’t the strong woman who took on two members of the Akatsuki to her last breath. This one didn’t have the confidence or respect of her village. This one… was still a genin… still a child. She’s not strong enough to be on her own. She still needs her team. What I’m doing was just cruel. Yet… I have no clue what possessed me to say what I said next.

“Give me your tags.” I said.

“W-what?” she replied.

“Give me… your tags…” I repeated slowly. “If you want me to heal your companion. Give me the tags and leave.”

What kind of monster am I? I don’t even know if I could fix him!

“How do we know you’ll do what you say?” growled Darui.

“You don’t.” I answered bluntly. The two looked troubled as they tried to decide on whether or not to trust me. I didn’t give them a chance to mull over their thoughts. “My offer won’t stand for long. The body can only go so long without air and by then, I don’t think even I could fix him.”

The two tensed and I smiled… Why am I smiling?

“Ten…” I started counting. “Nine… Eight… Seven…”

“Wait!” shouted Yugito the claws disappearing from her hands, the look of conflict still on face. “W-we’ll go! But… You have to fix him like you promised!”

“And keep going.” I said when they took the first step. “I’m not stupid. If you hide and wait, I will simply let him die.”

“Fine.” Yugito gritted her teeth, her hands clenched, shaking as she took out the tags and chucked them at my feet. “We’re going.”

Darui glanced at me with a suspicious frown, but followed his teammate nonetheless. It
didn’t take long before they were out of my line of sight and I found my knees buckling under me. I
collapsed to the ground, trembling with a shaky laugh, trying to fight back the whimpering sobs that I
tried so hard to hold back. I turned away from the tags in disgust as I crawled my way to C’s body
and hastily charged up healing chakra to my hands. I don’t even care that he’s an enemy right now.
I…I just…

My vision blurred as tears welded up in my eyes. I raised my arm to wipe away the tears. Stop crying and get your ass to saving him! I lowered my hand to scan what was wrong, but before I
could do anything a hand suddenly grabbed mine, startling me to look down at C. He had a mildly
annoyed look on his face.

“Geez, why do you always put yourself through this?” said the blond. “We said you could
leave it to us, didn’t we?”

“W-what?” I said, fighting back a hiccup.

“You’re such an idiot Kasa,” said Tokuma. I snapped my head up to the source of his
voice and found him lugging Santa’s limp body out from the shrubby.

Mind Body Transfer Jutsu. Santa’s in C’s body.

“T-Tokuma? Santa?” I whimpered as C, no Santa, dropped my hand and moved to wrap
an arm around my shoulder.

“It’s okay,” said Santa as he rubbed my arm reassuringly. “You’ve done one heck of a
performance and you’ve even got three tags out of it.”

“So, this whole time…” I hiccupped before he ruffled my hair.

“You won’t believe how hard it is to hold your breath when someone’s trying to force
CPR on you,” said Santa with a grin. “Thank god you managed to keep that act up. I don’t know if
the three of us could take them on otherwise.”

“Hizashi-sama would be proud of you,” said Tokuma.

I did my best to hold it in. I tried so hard to keep myself from doing it, but couldn’t hold it
in any longer; I covered my face and broke down crying. I thought I used the death of another person
for my own gain. I thought I lied. I thought I was a monster! I thought… I thought…

“Geez, you’re such a crybaby,” said Santa, planting a hand on my head. “Everything’s
fine.”

“Come on, let’s grab the tags and rendezvous with the others. Santa’s getting unbearably
heavy,” said Tokuma as he dropped our teammate’s body unceremoniously to the ground.

“Careful!” said Santa indignantly. “And what do you mean unbearably heavy? Are you
calling me fat?”

“Yes,” replied Tokuma bluntly.

“What? I am so not fat!” retorted Santa.

“With how gluttonous you are, you’re not that far off from it,” snorted Tokuma.

“You’re an ass,” said Santa in annoyance.
“And you’re a fatass,” replied Tokuma in turn.

Even with my hands pressed firmly against my eyes with tears streaming from it, I found my body shaking, torn between crying and laughing. How…? How was it possible that they could get me to laugh even after what I’ve done?

“Come on. We should really get going. I’m not sure how much longer I could keep up with this jutsu,” said Santa as he glanced down at me. C’s body was considerably taller. “Do you have any sleeping agents in those storage seals of yours? We should knock him out before I transfer back. The less conflict, the better.”

“…Right.” I agreed, drying my eyes against my sleeves. This was no time to be crying, we still had an exam to go through… Damn it, I don’t know how much more of this I could take… I want to go home…
“Wait, wait, wait, back up. I get Itachi and Shisui being able to get tags on their own, but Kasa?” said Zaji in disbelief when we reunited and updated each other on what happened. “This Kasa? Our Kasa? You’re saying she got not one, but three tags on her own? How?”

“Zaji have you no tact?” said Muta as he spared a brief glance at me.

“No, it’s fine. I didn’t expect it either.” I said in quiet agreement.

Between Zaji’s sensor abilities and Muta tagging each of us with one of his female bugs, it didn’t take long for them to find all of us. As we traded stories, I found out my team wasn’t the only one that was assaulted by another team. Itachi and Shisui, being almost just as young as I am in the exam were also targeted. Apparently, our young age made it seem like we were easy pickings. Of course, aside from me, Shisui and Itachi could handle themselves in a fight. After all, they each managed to grab two tags before their attackers decided to do the smart thing and flee before they beat them senseless and took everything.

“What should we do next?” asked Kotetsu. “We have more than enough tags for our assault team to enter the finals. Hell, we have enough tags for one other person to enter. The proctor did say the max amount of people that could enter the final was ten, we have nearly half the spots covered. Shouldn’t we head back and submit the tags for the finals rather than risk staying out here and getting ambushed again?”

“Hmm…” Shisui hummed thoughtfully as he crossed his arms, resting a chin on a loosely held fist. “We should really quit while we’re ahead, but at the same time, this is a good opportunity to gather information on the other teams for the finals since we don’t have to worry about getting tags for ourselves.”

“The only issue we have is running the risk of being found out with such a large group,” noted Muta as he pushed his sunglasses up. “Even with Kasa’s Hidden Mist Jutsu, there’s only a few of us that could move unhindered by the lack of visibility.”

“True…” agreed Shisui. “Espionage usually does work best with a smaller team. Both for hiding and escaping. It’s probably best that we keep our scouting group small.”

“If that’s the case, should we being going with our primary or secondary team?” asked Izumo with a thoughtful frown. “We’ve agreed that our secondary assault team should enter the finals, so they should really go on ahead and secure their spot.”

“However, if we do that, the support and recon teams will be left without fighters. If they run into conflict, it might be dangerous.” Tokuma pointed out. “Even if they don’t have tags, the other team might still attack thinking otherwise.”

“Well damn, doomed if we do, screwed if we don’t,” sighed Zaji before a joking grin crossed his face. “Maybe we should just have Kasa scare the shit out of everyone we cross and let her torture the info out of them. Right Ka—”

THWACK!

“You really don’t know when to shut up do you?” grumbled Shisui as he pulled his hand back from smacking his teammate upside the head.
“Ow…” complained Zaji, covering the back of his head. “I was joking!”

“It’s not funny, can’t you see she’s still bothered by it?” snapped Shisui.

“I’m fine. I’m just shaking from the cold.” I lied, gripping my hands together tightly, trying to get rid of the slight tremor in them.

“Kasa, you don’t have to pretend. We—” Shisui was cut off.

“No. I think Zaji may have a good suggestion,” interrupted Itachi, much to everyone’s surprise. He hasn’t spoken for a while. “We could use Kasa’s performance to our advantage.”

“What?” Shisui turned to him in disbelief. “Are you listening to yourself? You want her to continue? She shouldn’t even be a part of the scouting team right now, much less the frontlines with only a bluff to back her up.”

“She’s not a porcelain doll, even if Hizashi sensei insists she dress like one. She’s trained, just like the rest of us and while she may have moments of weakness, she’s not weak. Besides, I’m not suggesting she continue on in the forest, she could be of more use elsewhere” noted Itachi.

“Then what are suggesting?” asked Shisui, a frown prominent on his face.

“Consider this, with only ten spots open for the next exam and the tags from both enemies and allies are up for the taking, the proctor practically declared this exam open war, every man for themselves,” started Itachi.

“Okay…?” prodded Shisui, not seeing where he was going with this.

“Without a scratch and a handful of tags not from her own teammates, what do you think our battle weary competitors would conclude of Kasa, especially if she continued her subterfuge?” noted Itachi as he glanced at me at the corner of his eyes. “What would her presence do?”

I said nothing as I met his eyes. I knew full well where he was going with this and it was a good plan. Definitely better and safer than having me out here in the forest in my current condition, but that didn’t stop the one thought that crossed my mind.

…Itachi, you dick.

It took a moment, but realization slowly dawned on the faces of everyone present and they didn’t seem all that opposed to the idea.

“…She’ll seem like a sizeable threat and their attention would focus on her,” said Kotetsu slowly. “They’ll be distracted and there’s a likely chance that the rest of us won’t register in their minds, giving us a slight advantage in the finals.”

“But wouldn’t that put Kasa in danger?” asked Izumo with a frown. “If they all see her as a threat, wouldn’t they try something?”

“No…” said Tokuma as he crossed his arms and grasped his chin thoughtfully. “They wouldn’t do a thing. They wouldn’t dare, not when they know nothing of her abilities.”

“And even if they did,” continued Muta. “She won’t need to do much to maintain her façade, a sleight of hand would be more than enough. The proctors wouldn’t let a major fight break out when they need the ones that passed to perform in the final exam.”
“And she’ll still be able to scout out our prospective opponents,” said Santa thoughtfully. “Out in the open too.”

“Shouldn’t Kasa have a say in this?” interrupted Shisui with a frown. “You’re all so quick to push her to do this, but you do know if she does, she’ll be in the finals. She’ll be facing the strongest this exam has to offer and they won’t hold back if they think she’s that big of a threat. Are you sure you want to put her through that?”

“Would you rather she stay out here and face one attack after another?” challenged Itachi. “You and I both know everyone in this exam already sees the three of us as easy targets because of our age, but her even more so because she’s a girl. We don’t have the time or luxury to play bodyguards when we have scouting of our own to do. At least this way, she could be of use and still stay safe.”

“Safe for the time being! What about in the finals?” snapped Shisui. “What then? The purpose of these exams is village promotion, no one’s going to show mercy.”

“…Shisui, stop.” I said, grabbing his arm to pull him back.

“Kasa—” He would’ve continue, but I stood my ground.

“I’ll be fine.” I interrupted. “If worst comes to worst, I could always forfeit in the finals. Itachi’s right about the fact that none of you have time to defend me. I’m a distraction and it’s something we could better use against enemies.”

“Are you sure?” asked Shisui worriedly.

“I’ll be fine.” I said with a grin.

“Then it’s settled,” said Itachi. “Kasa will head back to the village and hand in her tags for a spot in the exam. The rest of us will be in two teams of four and we’ll scout out the remaining teams.”

“Right.” I said reaching into my back pouch and pulling out a bottle of soldier pills and planted it in Shisui’s hand. “Since I won’t be around to heal any injuries, make sure you guys replenish your energy whenever you can.”

“…Will you be able to head back to the village on your own?” asked Shisui with a worried expression on his face.

“Yes mother.” I said, trying to force as much mock annoyance too my face despite how exhausted I felt. “You guys get going. I’ll be able to make it back on my own. Fleeing is a Team Four specialty.”

Santa sniggered. “Got that right.”

“Stay safe,” said Tokuma.

“I will.” I nodded before turning to Zaji. “What’s the readout like for the path back to the village?”

Zaji closed his eyes and concentrated. “There aren’t many teams left in that general area, most of have either dispersed or move onto another area in their fights. As long as you’re careful, you should be able to make it back relatively uninterrupted.”
“All right, you guys take care and I’ll see you in a week’s time.” I said before we parted.

Normally, I’m against splitting the party. Whether it was due to my dying memories as a gamer or my inner cynic that thinks the worst of the world, splitting up was always a bad idea. However, by this point, I’d do anything just to get away from facing another team out on the field and possibly reprisal of what I did with Yugito. Besides, how many people would get through the exam this quickly?

To say the proctors were surprised to see me was an understatement, but I was hardly in the mood to explain myself at their questioning gaze. I was mentally exhausted and wanted nothing more than to go back to the hotel and crash. Unfortunately, I still had work to do and due to the exam’s duration, I couldn’t leave even if I wanted to.

Instead, I stayed in the infirmary. There were other rooms in the building with beds, but I found the smell of disinfectants and medicine soothing. It reminded me of the hospital back in Konoha and all the days I spent in the last half a year working there. It was the only respite I had while maintaining my subterfuge. In order for the other genins to believe I’m a threat, the proctor themselves must see me as a threat as well.

After all, the young always looked up to their elders whether they like them or not. It’s a primal instinct ingrained into our minds to ensure our survival. There’s a saying, if one person staring at the sky he or she is odd, but when there are two or more people staring with them, then that means there must be something of interest.

…I’ve managed to garner quite a few stares. The feeling was unsettling, to be watched by unfamiliar eyes and to have my every move followed. While it does make my job a whole lot easier, it’s uncomfortable to not know why exactly they’re doing it.

Maybe coming back here alone was a bad idea… I should’ve probably dragged at least Santa or Tokuma with me. I know I’m supposed to scare our potential opponents, but I haven’t a clue what to do since we parted ways. Who would be threatened by a tiny 4’1 girl that weighed no more than 60 pounds? Hell, like Itachi said, I look like a porcelain doll. Who’s afraid of dolls?

I mean, they wear pretty dresses. They’re fragile to the point that just touching them would break them. Most people just keep them on display or locked them in the attic. What with their flawless complexion, frightfully fragile body, expressionless face and wide… dead eyes…

…

Scratch that, dolls are creepy as fuck. Now, how do I go about making everyone thinking I’m one?

Fortunately, it would take several days before I have to perform to anyone from the exam. Unfortunately, I ran into a block on how to carry on my assignment and ended drumming my fingers restlessly in a dissonant beat in my irritation. At some point it started to sound like a knife against the chopping board or erratic footsteps. Not sure which, but it started to unnerve even me after a while. Though, I doubt just making creepy noises would be enough unsettle trained killers… even if they’re only in-training. It wasn’t until my mind burned out from overthinking and boredom set in that I finally remembered the seals on my arms, hmm… reading material. My fingers stopped in mid-drum as I debated on whether or not I should check to see if there were anything useful I could use.
That last time I’ve tried accessing this was during my evaluation with Tenzo. I hadn’t fried my brain then… but then again, I was juggling a number of seals and struggling to reign in Isobu’s chakra at the same time… maybe if I went about this with less chakra?

I weighed my options carefully, thinking for a long moment before I finally brushed my hesitant fingers against the seals. It looked as if I was taking my pulse as I slowly siphoned the information bit by bit with small bursts of chakra. It took some time with trial and error before I eventually found the right amount to pour into the seal.

When I finally managed to access the information in a coherent stream rather than the choppy snippets from earlier, the euphoria I felt was indescribable. I couldn’t stop the maniacal giggle from escaping as I drank up the information like a parched traveler in a desert.

I must’ve spent hours sitting alone in the infirmary with a deranged grin on my face as I poured through the boundless vestige of Uzushio’s history and the library of seals and various other useful tips and tricks of my trade. If not for the pangs of hunger and exhaustion, I might’ve lost myself to what seemed like an endless sea of knowledge.

Even with taking breaks to stretch out my limbs from the hours of sitting still and using that time to grab a bite to eat and relieve myself, I had to stop myself from continuing on the second day. In the excitement of finally being able to access information that was previously too dangerous to even give a passing glimpse, I’ve overextended myself and exhausted a good amount of my chakra stores. I hadn’t realized how eerily quiet the empty halls were until I walked through with the scratching and clocking noise of my okobos echoing off the walls.

If I didn’t have to maintain the façade I’ve created, I might’ve actually jumped at my own shadow… The silence was getting to me…

All right, take a breath and breathe out. I have to go about this with a level head. I’ve gone through the seals as much as I can already, if I continued, I’ll just suffer from chakra exhaustion. There’s no one here yet aside from the exam proctors and it won’t help build a terrifying image if I was friendly with them. I don’t have much chakra, so I really couldn’t do much at all.

I gave the boys the soldier pills, so I can’t even replenish my chakra. I packed more, but I had them sealed in the large scroll back at the hotel. Though, even if I had the scroll with me, it wouldn’t be a wise decision to be spending anymore chakra in my current state. Breathing out a shallow breath in annoyance, I resumed drumming my fingers again, in that slow dissonant beat.

I had no choice but to wait for my chakra to replenish the normal way… Gods… At this rate, I’m not sure what’s going to kill me. The stress from trying to keep up my façade or the maddening boredom of stagnation.

…The drumming increased, the beat growing more violent and discordant with each passing second. Eventually, I had to force myself to stop before I go completely mad. I took another breath before I decided to pull out my stack of storage seal cards and did a mental inventory of the plants and poisons stored within. I needed a distraction and this was as good as any.

From what I’ve managed to gather during my seal binge earlier, Uzushio actually had another specialization in their ranks. While not as prominent as the combat ready seal masters, the chemists in Uzushio had plenty to contribute to iryo ninjutsu and non-chakra users. Just as seal masters could make and use seals for combat and healing, chemists could create a variety of concoctions that needed little to no chakra at all to use.

Interestingly enough, a good number of the ones I’ve skimmed pass worked very similarly
to hallucinogenic drugs either sending the target into blissful oblivion or a nightmarish hell… It gave me the sinking feeling that Uzushio could’ve of became a major drug trafficker if it didn’t get wiped out.

…Well, they’re gone now, I guess that’s one less thing to think about. Anyway, after flipping through my inventory, I noted I had a good amount of the necessary herbs and roots that were required for such concoctions. However, since I don’t have enough chakra, I couldn’t put what I’ve learned into practice… that didn’t stop me from making my seals into a strange one-person card game.

After three days of solitude and not a single soul to talk to, I familiarized myself with the seal cards to the point that even after shuffling I could still pull out the necessary combination for the specific poisons and concoctions I wanted… while doing so, I think I might’ve given anyone who passed by the infirmary for duration of my stay the wrong impression.

You see… the game I created was meant to be played like a multi-card old maid. In order for the cards to count, you would have to collect the corresponding cards that would create one specific mixture. Considering I had so many cards, I laid them all around me on the infirmary floor in a circular pattern that may or may not look like an occult ritual… and each of those cards had chakra threads attached to them so I could flip them without accidentally ruining the formation. I didn’t have enough chakra to waste activating seals, but chakra threads doesn’t really expend energy since they worked more like an extension of the body and I could reabsorb them when I’m done.

So…uh… to anyone who walked pass, they were likely met with the sight of me sitting in the middle of the circle of cards covered in indecipherable creepy squiggly-lines… It probably didn’t help that when I flip the cards, they all end up floating around me like I’m doing a séance and summon spirits of the dead… and the fact I eventually turned it into a game of Cluedo didn’t help either… Cluedo is not very fun, playing alone…

“Lady Lavender, killed him in the study with tea made fromaconite leaves and belladonna berries.” I droned out of boredom after flipping the first card and yanked the corresponding cards with my chakra threads. As expected, the cards I noted showed up as I’ve said. It didn’t matter if I shuffled them anymore, I’ve gotten so used to feeling what was in the contents of the seals to the point it’s become instinctual after flipping the first card.

“…What the hell?” whispered the quiet murmuring at the infirmary’s door.

If my mind wasn’t mellowed out from three days of boredom, I might’ve jumped in surprise at the sound of another human being. With a flick of my wrist the cards all gathered into a neat stack and returned to my hand. I pocketed the deck away before rising to my feet and turning to them with one fluid motion.

“Hello.” I greeted politely with my hands gathered in front as I observed the newcomers. They all wore Kiri’s hitai-ate. “It’s a beautiful day isn’t it?”

“… It’s been pouring for days…” said the young man with glasses quietly.

“Is it now? I wouldn’t know, I’ve been in here the whole time.” I replied.

His eyes widened in surprise. There was a deceptively timid quality to him that would have most people brush him off as harmless. He stood off to the side rather than the center, not likely the leader of his team, but not as harmless as he appears. I’m willing to bet he’s quite good in kenjutsu if that unique sword hoister strapped across his chest was any indication.

“Oh, so you’ve been here since the first day,” drawled the young man in the summer
Him, he’s the leader of this group. That look of disinterest and boredom, I’m not sure whether it’s his personality to not care about an oddity as me, or if he’s as much of actor as I am. Just looking at him made feel cold, from the amount of skin his showing. Summer yukatas should really be worn only during the summer.

It didn’t help that they were all drenched from the rain as well. None of them seemed like they suffered any injuries, but upon closer inspection, I’ve noticed some tears and dirt stains on their clothing. An iryo-nin must’ve patched up their injuries. My eyes drifted to the last member, unlike his two teammates, he had a soothing air around him. He must be their healer.

“Yes, had I known it would take so long before other people arrived, I would’ve brought some reading material. It’s quite boring with only the dead…” I paused briefly, I was going to say dead silence, but the sound of nearing footsteps interrupted our conversation… I guess that could still work…

A peculiar man with a Fu Manchu mustache and round spectacles approached. The trio relaxed slightly at the sight of the man. Their jounin sensei perhaps? But he’s not dressed like any jounin I’ve seen. He glanced at me briefly at the corner of his eye, if I wasn’t paying attention, I wouldn’t have noticed his focus was on my arms before he turned his attention to the trio of Kiri genin.

“Master Harusame,” greeted the young man in the summer yukata, while his other two teammates dipped their heads respectfully to the man.

“It took you lot three days to get through the exam?” said the man, displeased. “Ao must be neglecting your training.”

“You’re a harsh taskmaster as usual Master Harusame,” said the young man in the yukata with a smile while his two teammates grimaced at the man’s words.

I’m quite sure there was a code hidden somewhere between their words, but I haven’t a clue what they might’ve traded. Nonetheless, this interruption was dampening my attempts in scaring them senseless.

“I apologize for my interruption, but are you one of the proctors for the exam?” I asked boldly. “I’m afraid I’m not too familiar of the exam regulations, but is common practice for the participants to interact with their superiors while in the midst of an exam?”

“Ah yes, the young lady who qualified merely hours after the start of the exam,” continued the man as he tried to divert my question. “Quite an accomplishment. I haven’t seen that happen in quite some years. Where are your teammates, if you don’t mind me asking? It’s rather harsh of them to leave a young lady such as yourself on your own.”

“You are very kind sir. Not many people would concern themselves with the safety of shinobi from another village,” I replied pleasantly before a cold smile crossed my lips. Two could play that game. “...The Kumo team I came across was quite kind as well, offering me their tags so that I could take refuge at the exam hall...So kind.”

Sometimes, it’s best to leave people to their own imagination.

“...That kindness won’t last forever,” said the man as the meeker boys tensed.

“You’d be surprised sir.” I replied before glancing briefly to the boys. “I’ll leave you to
your conversations. It was a pleasure meeting you. Best of luck in the next exam.”

Just as I left, my okobos scratching and clocking against the ground, I caught a snippet of Harusame’s last words to them.

“Chojuro, Kiri, what was that?” said the man, scolding the meeker boys for their timid reaction. I felt almost bad for them at least until I heard his next words. “…Utakata, when the exam’s over, I need a word with you.”

“…Yes sir,” replied the yukata wearing young man.

Utakata…? Hmm… something tells me that I should know this name… but why? I wanted brush it off as nothing, but the thought ended up plaguing me for the next four days. Who the hell is Utakata? And why the hell should I care?

The thought fester and gnawed from the back of my mind, so much that I felt the tendrils of Isobu’s chakra bubbling to the surface. I could feel the air distorting around me as I forced it down. This was not the time for a psychotic break down. I really don’t need people to know I’m carrying Isobu’s chakra, not when I’m in the very village that wants it back.

“Damn it… we only managed to get enough for two,” growled the familiar voice of Yugito on the last day. “If only we didn’t lose… argh…”

“Hello,” I greeted her pleasantly when we crossed paths. “Thank you for giving me your tags.”

“Give?” growled the girl. “We didn’t give them to you! You—”

Darui stopped her with a hand to her shoulder. “Let it go Yu, she kept her promise.”

“But, what if she—” She protested, but her teammate shook his head.

“Hmm?” I hummed, it seemed like she’s still terrified of me, but her teammates, not so much… that might be a problem.

“We might have underestimated you time, but next time it won’t happen again,” said Darui before he turned to stare down at me.

I ignored his declaration to glance to C instead, who eyed me cautiously. “How are you feeling? Any lingering aches and pain? I’m quite sure I’ve gotten everything… but I might’ve missed some… I’m only human after all.”

Yugito’s nose flared as she tried to lash out at me, but Darui and C caught her before she could do so. I let out mocking giggle. It really was quite funny. Three menacing shinobi that’s at least three heads taller than me and quite a few years older as well, all looking at me as if I was the greatest challenge in the world. If only they knew how much of a pushover I really am…

“I look forward to seeing you again later in the exams.” I said before I continued on my way, while I’m quite sure my team would rather I scare them senseless, I’m getting a little worried.

Including myself, there were already six slots taken for the finals and the assault team had enough tags for another three slots. Even though Zabuza said there were ten slots, I don’t think all ten would be filled. Today’s the last day already. If they don’t come now, they might just get disqualified… Good lord, don’t tell me I’m going to be the only one in the exam… Please don’t let me be the only one in the exams.
“Yo Princess!” shouted a familiar voice from the entrance.

“Santa, Tokuma.” I greeted evenly despite how I wanted to let out a sigh of relief at the sight of my teammates.

We didn’t spend much time trading pleasantries as I was still tasked with keeping up a threatening appearance to our competitors. Team 13 and Team 6 eventually made their way in not much later. They all agreed to space out their arrival times to avoid causing suspicion.

When the exam came to an end, only nine were qualified for the finals. Not particularly bad on our part considering that’ll be one less opponent to worry about. However, it wasn’t until the match drawing that I realized how wrong I was and why Utakata’s identity nagged me in the back of my mind. I have no clue why it never registered in my mind before now, but after seeing both him and Yugito standing in the same room, I finally realized who he was.

He was a jinchuriki, just like Yugito. Our summer yukata-boy was carrier of the six-tailed demon, Saiken. Which meant, we were facing not one, but two jinchurikis in this exam… Sucks right? But that’s not the end of it.

You know how this exam was meant to have ten finalists and there’s only nine now? Yeah? Good. So, since it’s an odd number, the normal tournament grid wouldn’t work. Heck, even if it wasn’t odd, it still wouldn’t work. Two people would have to fight twice in order to get into the semi-finals. However, since we only have nine people, that meant only one person would have to fight twice in order to get into the semi-finals… Yeah… and guess who that one person is?

…Yep, me. Lucky, right? A one in nine chance… and I got it! That’s Uzumaki luck for you… but you know what? That’s not even the worst bit of news. Want to guess what’s the worst bit? Come on, I know you want to… no? Well… I’ll tell and you won’t even believe it.

The first opponent I have to face is Yugito that in itself is pretty bad. I’m quite sure she hates me with the passion of a thousand suns… and if I somehow manage to beat her, the second person I’m facing is… you got it… Utakata… Ugh… I am fucked in every sense of the word… and you know who’s fault is that? Itachi Uchiha… fuck you, you little weasel.
“Congratulations in passing the second exam,” said the deceptively young looking man. “In a month’s time the finals will commence and you will all be facing one another in the presence of potential clients.”

With his delicate features, a stitch-like pattern on the side of his face and pink pupil-less eyes, he looked like a ragdoll. If not for his serious demeanor and the Mizukage’s robes, I would probably never thought this would be Kiri’s fourth Mizukage… Yagura looked so child-like even in person.

My memories of the man was a bit skewed as time whittled away what knowledge I had. From his reputation and my memories of Zabuza, I vaguely recall him to be a ruthless tyrant… but at the same time I have a faint memory that he might’ve been controlled. In life and after death, Yagura was a puppet. He was strung along by Obito while he was alive and turned into Isobu’s jinchukiri in his death.

“I do not make a habit of sugar coating my words and I will not start now. The Chunin exam is a means to demonstrate the village’s strength. Your performance will reflect that strength or expose your village as weak,” said Yagura, his cold eyes staring down each of us.

Was he being controlled now? A frown crossed my face. Obito’s no longer Tobi because of my intervention, but that meant nothing. The Kyubi attack still occurred and someone else took up his mantle as the new fake Madara. Gods… this make me hate the Uchiha so much. Why the hell are they so powerful? Why the hell are so emotionally constipated to the point that a death of some close to them would drive them bat shit crazy and bent on destroy the world because of it?

I’ve managed to save Obito from that fate… but what would happen if things continued the way it did in the original timeline? I glanced at the Uchiha boys… Shisui’s going to die trying to salvage the relations between his clan and the village… Itachi’s going to murder his entire clan in an attempt to protect the village. Sasuke would be driven into the path of hate and self-destruction… and eventually the story would unfold the same way just as before.

A low growl rumbled at the base of my throat. Why am I thinking about that in a time like this? I have bigger problems to deal with. Like surviving a fight against two jinchurikis. Damn Itachi. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be in this situation. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t even think about this! If it wasn’t for him…

“…Kill…must kill…” I murmured with unbridling rage.

“…Kasa?” whispered Santa quietly, but I wasn’t listening. Too occupied with the bubbling thoughts of rage.

“Flay… skin, layer by layer…” I mumbled, voice rumbling dangerously as I felt the strands of my hair fluttering lightly at my agitated chakra. “Disembowel… blunt kunai… rip every… single… organ out.”

“…K-Kasa?” said Santa as he took a cautious step back.

“Scream for mercy… force-fed…eviscerated entrails… crying for… mother. Yes… scream… scream…” I breathed out, forcing a sadistic giggle down as my body shook.

“Kasa!” hissed Santa as he prodded me roughly.
It took a moment before I realized the room had grown quiet while I was lost in my thought of planning Itachi’s demise. Everyone shared a peculiar expression as if they’re uncertain to how to take my behavior… All except Yagura, who watched with disinterest.

“If you’re quite done young lady,” said the man with a dull drone.

Temporarily at a lost to what to do, I fell back on my default response and smiled sweetly. I wonder how disturbing do I look at the moment?

“I apologize. I hadn’t realized that I lost myself in the excitement of the finals,” I replied with a pleasant tone. “Please do continue. I’ll do my best to contain myself.”

Yagura’s gaze stayed for a moment. I was worried that maybe I might’ve let some of Isobu’s chakra slip out from my inattention. It’s been so long since my last outburst and with Kiri’s interest in regaining Isobu, I sorely hope I’m doing a good job. Despite the anxiety I felt, I kept a straight face and he eventually turned away and finished his speech. Even though his eyes weren’t on me anymore, I couldn’t shake off the feeling that his attention might still be on me.

…How am I going to survive this?

“…Unbelievable…” said Hizashi in exasperation, pressing his fingers to his brow to fight off an oncoming migraine. “You lot managed to grab four spots in the finals and you give one to Kasa. The medic, who may I remind you is not supposed to be on the frontline.”

“He did it.” I said bluntly, pointing to Itachi, the culprit.

“Kasa, you went with his decision, you have just as much fault,” said Kurei.

“…But it sounded like a good idea at the time…” I said meekly as both he and Hizashi stared me down with a glare.

“You do know forfeiting without putting up a fight is not an option now,” said Kurei with a frown. “Not with that little display you’ve made in front of the Mizukage. What were you thinking?”

…A thousand ways to kill Itachi and make him eat his own entrails? I didn’t dare say it out loud, but I was totally thinking it.

“She would’ve been in more danger had she stayed in the forest with the rest of us,” interrupted Itachi. “If she was injured in the forest, we wouldn’t be able to treat her as she is our only medic. Furthermore, she would be more useful in the stadium with us during the finals. If any of us gets injured, she could heal us in between matches.”

“What about her matches?” noted Kurei with an icy tone. “She can’t forfeit now without insulting the hosting village and she’s not meant for combat. She won’t last in a fight on her lonesome.”

“I beg to differ,” disagreed Itachi. “Kasa’s quite capable of fighting alone. I’ve seen her done so before and she could be a formidable opponent if only she had the right motivation.”

“Right motivation? I said with indignation. “I take my training just as serious as you do.”

“Yet, you always hold back,” retorted Itachi.
“Hold back? I don’t—”

“You do,” cut off Itachi. “You have the capacity to be much stronger. I’ve seen your training sessions with Kushina-san. You could do so much more, but you always fall back on the earth natured attacks.”

“That’s not—” I started.

“True?” finished Itachi. “Stop lying, we both know you have no nature affinity and because of that, Kushina-san had you learn dances to each type of nature. You have more aggressive dances, yet you lean heavily on the defensive dances. If you stop being afraid just for once you could—”

“Itachi, that’s enough,” interrupted Shisui as he pulled the younger Uchiha back.

“No,” said Itachi, firmly putting his foot down. “If she continues to pretend she can’t match the rest of us, getting hurt would be the least of her problems in the finals.”

“And whose fault is that?” snapped Shisui as he took a step forward. “I’ve had enough of it with you Itachi. Just because the clan placed you in an arranged marriage with someone you hardly know doesn’t mean you can take it out on Kasa!”

…Wait, what?

Itachi’s response was immediate, knocking Shisui to the ground with a solid punch. I barely had time to process what was being said before Itachi’s teammates caught him by the arms and pulled him back.

“Itachi! Knock it off!” said Izumo as he pulled him back.

“This has nothing to do with that,” snapped Itachi as he shrugged them off and turned to Shisui with an angry scowl. “I’m trying to help her! Just because she’s not meant for the frontlines doesn’t mean she won’t ever have to face a fight on her own. We won’t always be there to protect her! Don’t you see that?”

I stood, dumbfounded by Itachi’s outburst. He was normally so calm and composed. To see him actually get angry was a bit… odd. And what’s this about him trying to help me? I don’t see how sending me to imminent bodily harm would help. What is he, Dobby? Miss Kasa Mon would very much like Itachi not to help please.

“The decision isn’t for you to make!” shouted back Shisui as he pulled himself from the ground.

“Enough!” snapped Shirakumo, silencing everyone present. “Both of your concerns for Kasa is admirable, but regardless what either of you believe, neither of you have the authority to choose what she has to do. And Itachi, I am very disappointed that you would put a comrade in harm’s way even if it’s to help them. What’s even more disappointing is that you raised a hand against one for no good reason.”

Itachi said nothing, the glimpse of anger on his face quickly smoothed away back into his usual look of indifference. I’m not sure should I be amazed at how quickly he could subdue his emotions or scared that he was starting to seem more like the Itachi from my distant memories. It wasn’t until I spotted his hands clenching discreetly at his sides that I felt any amount of relief.

“Regardless what’s happened, it’s in the past. We don’t have the luxury to dwell on such
matter if we’re to get the four of you battle ready for the finals,” said Hizashi. “We’ll go through the information you’ve gather and organize a training routine for the four of you. Use the rest of today to recover. Dismissed.”

With that, our jounin senseis left in a swirl of leaves and Itachi made a quick escape not long after. Making it impossible to talk to him about what just happened.

“…Should we go after him?” asked Kotetsu with uncertainty.

“Just leave him,” said Shisui as he gingerly touched his face with a grimace.

“You okay?” asked Izumo. “Itachi could throw quite a nasty punch when he wants to.”

“No, I’m fine,” said Shisui as he pulled his hand back. “He pulled his punch in the last second.”

Zaji sighed as he glanced off towards the direction Itachi ran off to. “Man, who would’ve thought Itachi would get engaged?”

“Arranged marriages aren’t an uncommon practice in the major clans,” noted Tokuma. “They’re often done for political reasons and considering his position… I’m not too surprise if they either picked someone from the Uchiha clan to ensure the sharingan line to be passed down or someone else from a notable clan.”

“Yeah, but isn’t he a bit young?” asked Zaji. “I mean… shouldn’t he get a say in this? It’s his life, no?”

“Itachi’s a clan heir,” sighed Shisui. “He doesn’t get much say in anything until he becomes the clan head and even then he would have to contest with the clan elders.”

“He could do more than what some of us could do,” said Tokuma icily with his arms crossed.

“…Tokuma,” said Santa with a grimace, no doubt aware of the Hyuga politics between the main and branch houses.

“It’s none of my concern anyhow,” continued Tokuma as he turned his heel to leave. “You can all gossip and do whatever you want. I’m heading back to the hotel.”

“What’s his problem?” asked Zaji confused that another one of us parted from the group.

“It’s a clan issue,” supplied Muta. “Best not to get yourself involved.”

“…Yeah, but that doesn’t explain why Itachi’s taking it out on Kasa. I mean, it’s not like she’s—Yeow!” shouted Zaji as Muta smacked him upside the head.

“Thank you Muta,” said Shisui as he turned to me with a worried glance. “So… how are you taking this? You’re being awfully quiet.”

“How am I taking it?” I blinked, bewildered and confused by his question. “About having to survive at least one match in the finals?”

“About Itachi’s engagement?” said Shisui as he did a vague roundabout hand motion.

“Uh…Congratulations?” I offered.
“Kasa,” said Shisui in annoyance.

“What do you want me to say?” I backed up defensively. “I mean, this totally explains his crabby mood since we left the village, but it’s not like my opinion could change anything about it.”

“Not like…” said Shisui in disbelief. “You—he---argh! You have absolutely no opinion whatsoever? Not even a little bit upset?”

“Why would I be upset?” I asked slowly with a frown.

“You don’t feel anything?” asked Shisui.

“…Do have to?” I sighed as realization set in.

“Why are you taking this so nonchalantly?” snapped Shisui. “Don’t you care?”

“Can we seriously do this another time?” I clapped my hands over my face as I scrubbed and dragged them down in annoyance. “I could really care less about idle gossip about Itachi’s potential love life right now.”

“Idle gossip!” said Shisui in disbelief. “He’s going to marry some other girl!”

“Yeah, in like what? Eight to ten years?” I retorted. “The clan’s not going to force him to marry while he’s just a genin. He’s biologically not ready to produce an heir. Besides, we might all die before then, so why should we care about it now? Stop stressing about it.”

“Kasa,” pushed Shisui, but I cut him off.

“Worst case scenario. If Itachi is so against it, we’ll just kidnap him on his wedding day or something.” I waved off my hand.

Santa covered his mouth in a snicker. “Oh, I’d pay to see that happen.”

“Are you treating this as a joke?” demanded Shisui.

“Does it really matter?” I snapped back. “Why are you so adamant about me having an opinion on this?”

“Why are you avoiding my question?” challenged Shisui.

“I’m not—“

“You’re doing it again! Denying!” said Shisui.

“Could you just let me—” I tried again and again to defend myself, but the Uchiha bastard wouldn’t let me get a word in. Each time I open my mouth, he just cuts in with another accusation. I felt the vein at my temple pulsing in irritation. “Argh, for the love of… You know what? Screw it!”

I grabbed Shisui by the collar, yanking him down to my level and planted a firm kiss right on the lips. The older Uchiha silenced, his eyes widening in surprise as he quickly pushed away covering his mouth.

“…Well, that’s one way of shutting him up,” sniggered Santa after a moment.

“So I have your attention now?” I said coldly. “I don’t know what the hell is wrong with the Uchiha Clan that they’re so full of themselves thinking that the world revolves around them, but
if you want to know how I feel about Itachi? I’ll tell you how I feel, but it has nothing to do with his engagement or whatever that’s making him a pissy ass princess!”

Shisui stayed quiet, still recovering from the shock of the kiss.

“I’m pissed—no, pissed won’t even begin to describe how livid I am! Because of him, I’m in a situation that I am in no way ready for!” I snapped throwing my hand aside to make a point. “He knows I’m not ready, I know I’m not ready, but he still went ahead just tossed me into the finals! So excuse me if I don’t give a flying fuck about his majesty getting fucking engaged and throwing a hissy fit! And you!”

I stormed in front of Shisui jabbing my finger violently into his chest as he backed away.

“I’m just as mad at you as I am at Itachi. At least now I know what his problem is. What is your problem? Acting so fucking overprotective all of the sudden! So what, did you get a fucking engagement too? Everything was fine until we left the village, just what the hell happened?”

“Do you make a habit in randomly kissing people?” asked Shisui as he lowered his hand. “And I’m not talking about the kisses you give Naruto and Sasuke on the head.”

“Randomly kissing people?” I said with a confused frown as I tried to think back the last two weeks.

Kiss? When did I… Oh… Disbelief crossed my face. You’ve got to be kidding me! Is he fucking serious? Who does he think he is? My father? This is fucking bull shit! I’ve been dealing with this shit because of that? Fuck you Uchiha assholes! Fuck you all!

I pressed a hands against my eyes as my vision slowly turned red. Isobu’s chakra bubbled to the surface as I struggled to push it back down. Stay down! Stay the fuck down! Don’t do this now! My chest clenched painfully with each ragged breath I forced myself to take. My stomach burned at the chakra trying to force its way out.

“Kasa?” Santa’s voice broke through the pulsing blood at my ears as a hand rested on my shoulder.

“I’m fine.” I managed to shift my hands up to brush my hair back as if nothing happened. The chakra still burned and my vision’s still red, but I did my best to keep the pain from showing on my face. Can’t let them know. “Shisui, the last I’ve checked, you’re not my father. I don’t see how it’s any of your business to what I decide to do.”

“Kasa, you know you have—” I cut him off before he could bring up my engagement to the Uchiha Clan.

“None—of—your—business.” I grounded out and stormed past him. “I don’t feel like talking about this anymore. Sensei said we’re allowed to use today to recover and I’ve decided I could better recover without having to deal with yours or Itachi’s bullshit!”

“Kasa,” said Shisui as he caught my arm.

“Follow me and see if I’ll ever talk to you again.” I said coldly, shrugging his arm off and darted off in the opposite direction to where Itachi went off to.

I ran, gritting my teeth as I tried to see through the haze of red clouding my vision. Too much, the demonic chakra’s too much. I need to burn it off it before it overtakes me. I kept running until I found an open space, a training ground. Immediately, I brushed a hand over the amplification
seal, allowing it to drain away some of the chakra before I started going through the various dance seals Kushina taught me.

One step, two step, three, I went through the basic earth-natured dance seals, creating fists and walls of dirt before switching over to the water-natured seals, collapsing those structures into a muddy serpent. Not enough, still not enough! I whimpered as I twirled and danced, crashing the muddy mess into the ground before drawing it up again as if it was a gigantic ribbon wand.

Itachi was right that I do have more aggressive moves, but the issue with them was that they took a whole lot of chakra and with my lack of affinity, it’s at half-powered at best. For it to have any lethality I would need to use the amplification seal and if I did that my control over them was as good as someone never rode a horse competing in a rodeo.

“Not enough.” I snarled, continuing into the next dance, creating a whirlwind around me that eventually turned into a firestorm.

The mud must’ve had a high content of clay because it hardened at the heat as if it was ceramic, turning the serpent into a statue. Even then, the demonic chakra continued to ravage my body as I performed more and more dances, each one faster than the last just to burn off the excess energy as much as I could.

At some point, I shattered the ceramic serpent, sending burning shards into the surrounding area. I don’t think I was aware of anything until I heard a blood-curling scream. It was only then the redness in my vision disappeared and I saw the destruction I wrought. The chakra still burned, but at least now, I could see without the raging red clouding my eyes.

A frown crossed my face, my chest heaving as I tried to catch my breath from all the dances. I spun, turning left and right searching through the burning chaos for the owner of the scream. Did I…hit someone? I searched through the cleared mist from the heat and spotted a curled up figure almost obscured by the trees.

“Shit…” I hissed darting forward towards the figure, please don’t be a civilian.

My heart dropped when I came close to the figure. It was kid, probably not much older than me. The cloak he wore was burnt along with his arm and face. Shit! Shit! Shit! The scent of burned flesh met my nose as I raced towards his fallen form and dropped to my knees next to him.

“Hold on, I could fix this!” I said desperately as I tried to turn him over for a better look. He let out a scream and flailed against my touch. I backed away slightly chewing my lower lip.

It was impossible to treat him until I could pin him down, but I can’t do that and heal him at the same time. I wracked my brain in a panic trying to find an alternative, but all I could focus on was his guttural whimpers of pain. Shut it out! I can’t think with him crying! What could I use to lessen the pain? What can I use to buy some more time? My eyes flitted back and forth going through my mental inventory for what I could use.

Poisons, hallucinogens, antidotes, antibiotics, fever reducer, herbs and roots extract. God damn it don’t I have anything that could work as anesthetic? My fingers twitched, the chakra threads came to life and pulled out all the seal cards before me. I don’t have anything for pain, not without careful administration. Something that I can’t do on my own… but maybe I could send him into a hallucination that makes him think he’s not in pain. Worth a try…right?

Pulsing chakra into the cards, I quickly unsealed the various vials of concentrated extracts of roots and herbs. Knitting my brows together in concentration, I drew a small amount out with
chakra and converted it into a gas and hastily hovered it over the boy’s burned face. His harsh breathing slowed and his body fell limp to the ground. There was a faint smile on his lips. It was somewhat disturbing to see on a burned face.

Shaking my head, I charged healing chakra to my hands and moved them over the worst of the burns. I had to work fast, I don’t know how long the mixture would last and at the moment, I’m way too fidgety to calculate what a safe amount to use to knock him out.

Between panic and the amplification seal’s draining effects, I could feel the demonic chakra plummet. Without rage, Isobu’s chakra had no means of reaching the surface. It wasn’t long before the supply stopped altogether and I felt my personal stores dropping. Though, that wasn’t the only thing that happened. Rage subsiding, I could finally think clearly again and the first thought that crossed my mind forced a pathetic laugh pass my lips.

“What…is wrong with me?” I said with a broken smile as I fought back the sobbing whimper I wanted to let out.

Forget surviving, at this rate, I’m going to have trouble keeping myself from killing someone…Despite what I insist on making myself believe, I’m not… weak. No jinchuriki ever is. We’re living, breathing weapons whether we’re in control… or not. And in this exam… I’m the Gaara.

Even though there were three of us, I was the most unstable one with bouts of demonic outbursts. I strike fear into those I meet and shut out my teammates who were only trying to help… I’m prone to bouts of violent and irrationality and… I nearly killed someone just now. How long would it be before I actually go through with it?

“Ugh…” grunted the boy as his dark eyes came back into focus, the hallucinogen must’ve worn off.

Almost immediately he sat up scrambling backwards, his hand clenching onto something protectively to his chest as he struggled to get to his feet. The drugs weren’t completely out of his system yet, he was unbalanced and stumbling. His face looked red and tender, the worst of the burns were gone.

“It’s okay!” I opened my hands in front of me try to calm him down and show I meant no harm. “I’m not going to hurt you! It was an accident.”

At first it didn’t seem like he understand me as he shook his head, but then I realize he was trying to shake off the last of the drugs. His eyes narrowed as if he couldn’t see me, but he kept his head low, so that he could hid his face in the shadows of the cloak.

“I didn’t mean to…” I started, but stopped when I spotted a familiar shade of ash-grey hair and round spectacles in his hand. “…Kabuto?”

The reaction was immediate, the boy lashed out with a handful of senbons and I arced back, rolling my body away to dodge the attack. When I got to my feet, I spotted him slipping his glasses back on, pushing the frame up the bridge of his nose. His red skin lightened, returning to its pale color and his posture straightening as if he regained his sense of balance… was he healing himself?

“What are you—” I never finished my question as he pulled out a seal between his fingers and activated it.
The flash tag seal went off, blinding me in surprise. Immediately, I called up my defense seals waiting for the barrage of attacks to follow, but never came. It took a moment for the black spots cleared from my vision before I realized he had used the distraction to get away. I dropped my arms down to my sides limply as I cut off the supply of chakra streaming into the seals. I’m so tired…

What was he doing here? I know he’s a part of Root, but did Danzo already send him out to infiltrate the other villages? Or… did he send him to spy on me?

I glanced about the dying embers surrounding me before I dragged me feet towards the closest tree and plopped down…I don’t even care anymore… I leaned against the tree, resting the back of my head on the trunk as I drifted my eyes close. So tired… I just want to…
I woke up to jostling, my arms hanging limply over someone’s shoulders and their arms heaving up my legs. Groggily, I blinked trying to make sense of my surroundings… I squinted my eyes through the veil of sleep and couldn’t make much out of the mist surrounding me and… whoever’s carrying me.

“…Didn’t I leave the forest on fire before I fell asleep?” I said with a sleepy frown, my words slurring incoherently before turning my attention to whoever it was that was giving me a piggyback.

“Only you would fall asleep while the forest is burning around you,” said the familiar voice dryly.

“…God damn it, how the heck did you find me? I even went the opposite direction!” I whined, smashing my head against his shoulder repeatedly. “I hate you! I hate you so much!”

“So I’ve heard, but apparently, I’ll have to share that hate with Shisui and the rest of the Uchiha clan,” drawled the other. “Hmm… I didn’t think you hated Shisui that much to do what you did. Tesuri-san is going to kill him in the most gruesome manner once he finds out what happened.”

“…You were watching?” I stared at him in disbelief, putting him in a headlock as I looped my arms around his neck. “Itachi, you ass!”

“If you really want to kill me, you’re going to use more force,” noted Itachi dully as I did my best to tighten my arms around his neck.

“Trust me, I would if I could.” I grumbled in irritation, my arms falling limply as I lost my grip. “But I’m out of energy.”

“Typical,” snorted Itachi. “Left alone and you’ll take an entire forest with you. I know I said you should try to use your more aggressive moves, but I didn’t mean you should vandalize the local fauna while doing so.”

“Shut up.” I grumbled, dropping my chin on his shoulder and we fell into a temporary silence… Temporary, only because I’m not in a situation where I need to keep up my appearance and silence has the tendency to drive me bat-shit crazy. “…So, how much more of your brand of helping should I be expecting? Because I need to contact my dad to plan for my funeral.”

“What happened to shutting up?” asked Itachi, a hint of amusement in his voice.

“You actually enjoy the silence.” I said in the deadpan. “I’ll torture you with the noise of socialization.”

“You do know Shisui was trying to help you too right?” noted Itachi with an offhanded comment.

“I know.” I replied bluntly. “But I’m not in the forgiving mood yet and I’m still angry at you too.”

“Expected,” said Itachi as he continued to march on, but to my surprise he didn’t kill the conversation with his usual silence. “That boy you mauled... you called out his name. Someone you know from your travels with your father?”
My anger slipped away as I fell uncharacteristically quiet. With Kabuto here that means Danzo was keeping an eye out for something, but what? In the original timeline Itachi didn’t have to deal with either of any of them until after the massacre… A hell lot of good that did… I wonder what would happen now if I were to tell him.

… It’s not like he could do much in his current state even if I did. Prodigy or not, he’s still only a genin with barely any experience compared to Danzo’s specially trained Root operatives. If I warn him about what was to come… Would he be able to stop the Uchiha Clan from plotting a coup? Or would I have sped up the massacre instead?

“Kasa?” noted Itachi as he shifted his head slightly to glance at me when my arms tightened slightly around his shoulders.

“He’s…” I started, but I found my voice caught in my throat. Where do I even begin?

“…Was he someone you liked?” asked Itachi. I found myself snorting at his conclusion.

“Yes, sure. He’s totally my boyfriend.” I said sarcastically. “We make a habit of trying to kill each other when we meet up. Burning off his face is a declaration of love.”

“Hmm… If burning off someone’s face off is your idea of a declaration of love, it might just be safer to be hated,” mused Itachi.

“You actually want me to hate you?” I said dryly.

“I would very much like my face to stay intact,” replied Itachi. “Otherwise, I might just have to give you a cat for your birthday.”

I tensed. “Don’t you dare!”

“Hmm, what would be a good kitten for you?” pondered Itachi thoughtfully with a finger curled under his lower lip. “Maybe I could see if the daimyo’s cat Tora has any kittens. Since you and Tora get along so well.”

“NOOOO!” I screeched. “That is the worst idea ever! Tora is bad enough! I don’t need any hellions sired by that scourge of the underworld! You hear me?”

“Pft,” a small hiss of air escaped Itachi’s lips before he covered his smile with hand and a fake cough.

“You’re laughing! It’s not funny!” I whined, trying to kick him with my free leg. “I’ll murder you in your sleep! I swear I will!”

“You’re so gullible,” said Itachi with mirth in his voice as he stumbled and hastily returned his hand to catch my flailing leg. “As if we need a repeat of what happened with Nekomata.”

“…” You have a horrible sense of humor!” I sniffed. “I feel bad for any girl who has to marry you.”

“Then maybe you should come crash the wedding and save her from me,” drawled Itachi, his voice had a hint of amusement. “Though, I’m going to have to crash yours in turn. After all, what was that you said about Uchihas? We’re self-centered and thinks the world revolves around us. It’s only right.”

“Good lord.” My body shook with mirth as I bumped my head against his shoulder trying
to contain my giggles. “Your father would kill us.”

“I imagine he won’t be very pleased,” replied Itachi.

“He’d probably turn us to charcoal with one of his Grand Fireball Jutsu.” I sniggered.

“You’re awfully giddy about our possible deaths at my father’s hands,” drawled Itachi in a monotone. Somehow that made it all the funnier and I found myself shaking with laughter. “Sometimes I wonder if you’re bipolar. One minute you’re pissed to the point chakra’s coming off you in waves and the next you’re psychotically laughing at the littlest things.”

“Maybe, I’ll ask dad to have me tested when we go home.” I replied, still shaking with laughter.

“…It’s nice to see you acting like yourself again,” said Itachi.

“Hmm?” I blinked, confused by his comment. “What do you mean?”

“You haven’t laughed like that for nearly two weeks,” answered Itachi.

“It’s not exactly appropriate for the role I’m supposed to play, you know.” I replied dryly. “A proper lady’s not supposed to break into psychotic fits of laughter as you call it.”

“The silence doesn’t suit you,” said Itachi. “Not mention, you never liked it in the first place.”

“Your point?” I asked, tilting my head to get a better glimpse of him.

“…Sorry,” said Itachi quietly.

“For…” I dragged out, wondering if he’s apologizing for putting me into the finals.

“For making you spend nearly a week in silence,” answered Itachi.

“…Really?” I said in a deadpan. “Of all the things you could be sorry for, you’re not the least bit sorry for putting me up with two of possibly strongest people in the exam?”

“You can handle it,” replied Itachi.

“No, I can’t!” I snapped back, smacking him upside the head… though with my exhausted state, I’ll admit he didn’t even flinch.

“I am confident you can,” said Itachi, his voice firm and certain.

“What makes you think that?” I huffed in annoyance, but that feeling didn’t last long as I spotted a rare grin gracing his lips.

“Because you’re unpredictable when pushed to the edge,” answered Itachi. “You do things no one would ever expect you to do.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?” I challenged.

“Like setting off a number of explosive seals while you’re still within the blast range,” started Itachi. “Quite a risky move that no one in their right mind would do, but you did and managed to take out quite a few neko-nin while you were at it.”
“I had barrier seals to protect me!” I argued.

“Did those barrier seals help you intimidate our potential opponents in the finals with nothing more than a bluff?” asked Itachi.

I fell silent.

“You really don’t give yourself enough credit for the things you do,” said Itachi before a tinge of amusement crept into his voice. “Though I must say, kissing Shisui to silence him was the best attack you’ve done up to date. Will we be seeing more of that in the finals?”

“You’re counting that as an attack? You’re joking right?” I said in disbelief. It wasn’t until his body shook with mirth that I realized that he really did mean it as a joke.

“Gullible as always,” said Itachi with a grin.

“Oh, you find that funny huh?” I puffed up my cheeks in annoyance.

“Somewhat,” agreed Itachi in amusement.

“Whatever.” I huffed. “So who’s the poor girl that’s stuck with the pain in the ass like you anyway?”

“Why the sudden interest?” asked Itachi.

“It’s to get the Good Samaritan trophy right after I get the Survive the Chunin Exam trophy. Although, I’m quite sure I’ve gotten nearly all of the bad luck trophies to this date.” I said. “Don’t know, going to have to check my trophy list one of these days.”

Itachi sighed. “You’re not making a whole lot of sense again.”

“So, going to tell me what the pretty girl’s name is or do I have to resort to creepy stalker mode and stalk every girl in the Uchiha district when we get home?” I chirped, ignoring his comment about my random references.

“How do you even know if she’s pretty or not?” drawled Itachi.

“She’s an Uchiha right? Who’s ever heard of an ugly Uchiha? You’re all pretty girls, even the guys look like pretty girls.” I sniggered.

“If you’re trying to upset me by calling me a pretty girl, it’s not going to work,” said Itachi in amusement.

“Ha! So you admit you’re a pretty girl!” I cackled. “Itachi Uchiha admits he’s a pretty girl!”

He rolled his eyes at this, allowing me to finish my bout of laughter before he continued.

“Her name’s Naori, Naori Uchiha,” said Itachi.

“Naori?” I said puzzled, not recognizing the name. “Is she younger than us? I don’t remember there being a Naori in any of our classes or even in the roster of genin that passed with us.”

“She’s a Chunin, several years older,” answered Itachi. “She’ll be taking her jounin exams soon.”
“Older and pending for jounin?” I gave a whistle. “Damn, that’s quite a resume, she must be a badass! Maybe I don’t have to warn her after all, she could totally take you on.”

No doubt the clan would be selective of who would marry the clan heir. Whatever offspring they produce would be leading the clan after Itachi, so picking someone they know with strong genes would make sense. With the rate the Uchiha Clan cranks out prodigies and geniuses, I would be surprised if they didn’t train their girls with the same standard as the guys. After all, genetics are from both parents.

“Is that a sound of approval for my fiancée?” asked Itachi dryly.

“Personally, I wouldn’t wish you on any girl.” I snorted. “You’re a total bore, but I suppose that’ll mean she’ll have no trouble sleeping at night.”

“You on the other hand, would keep whatever poor soul who gets stuck with you from ever sleeping,” retorted Itachi.

“Oh yeah? You want me to make you eat those words?” I challenged.

“Please, as if you’re in any condition to do so,” noted the Uchiha.

“That it! Put me down, right now!” I demanded. “I’ll show you!”

“You do know none of the hits you’ve given me so far done any damage right?” drawled Itachi. “And it’s not like you can use any seals now. You’re already spent.”

“Oh trust me. If you stand still for this one, you’ll be surprise.” I growled. “Now, put—me—down.”

“Fine…” sighed Itachi as he stopped and allowed me to slide off his back. My feet touched the ground and he turned to grab my arm as I wobbled. “Come on, you can’t even stand straight. What makes you think you can—”

He stiffened and fell silent as I pressed a kiss to his forehead. It’s only appropriate since he always attack my forehead with his pokes. I took a step back with a triumph grin, at the sight of his widened eyes and shocked face.

“Hmm, what do you know? It turns out you’re right. It is a very effective attack.” I said cheerily.

The Uchiha said nothing, his eyes still stuck in wide-eye mode.

“Hey, Itachi?” I asked, waving my hand in front of his face. “…I didn’t break you did I?”

No response. I tried poking and shaking him, but he didn’t respond. He looked like that time with Nekomata when he was caught in a… genjutsu! I quickly turned my heel. Shit! Kabuto? Does he even know how to do genjutsu? I searched for a place he could’ve casted it from, but I couldn’t find anyone. Damn it, that’s not important right now. I need to get him out.

“Kai!” I crossed my fingers and shouted before I planted a hand on his chest. Still no response, is it possible for Kabuto to pull off such a powerful genjutsu? Or is it someone from Kiri after his eyes? “Itachi, snap out of it! I can’t defend you right now!”

Shit, shit, shit! I ran my hands through my hair trying to calm myself. This is bad! This is really bad! What do I do? I glanced back at Itachi. Still unmoving. Chewing my lower lip, I forced
my brain into overdrive. How far are we from the village? If I could somehow hide Itachi maybe I could run back and—

I stumbled back at the sudden poke to my forehead before my eyes focused on the two outreached fingers.

“Idiot,” said Itachi before I found myself puffing up my cheeks in irritation. “Learn to tell the difference when someone’s actually in a genjutsu or acting.”

“God damn Itachi! Don’t do that!” I snapped, punching his arm as hard as I could.

“Then don’t randomly kiss people for no reason,” retorted the boy with a nonchalant wave. “I said it’s effective on Shisui, but it’s not going to work on everyone.”

“Meh, I should’ve known it wouldn’t have worked on an ice cube like you.” I stuck my tongue out childishly. “And here I hoped I had something I could tease both you and Shisui later.”

_Poke._

“Stop!” I whined covering my forehead after the second attack.

“I’ll consider it when you stop trying to kill us,” sighed Itachi. “Your father won’t be pleased to hear about this.”

“Fine…” I grumbled as I plopped down to my knees tiredly. “Kill joy.”

“Come on, I would like to get back before the sun sets,” said Itachi as he offered his hand.

“All right, all right.” I muttered, reaching out to grab his hand and letting him haul me onto his back again for the return trip. “Oh yeah, you still haven’t answered me about the helping bit. You’re going to stop right?”

Itachi said nothing.

“Oh, come on!” I whined, but regardless what I said, he refused to give an answer. I sighed. “Hizashi and Kurei sensei are going to kill me with next month’s training.”

“You’re being dramatic,” said Itachi dully. “The senseis won’t let you die from training. It’d be counterproductive.”

“Fine, but one of these days, if I die, it would be your fault.” I grumbled.

“As if you would stay dead,” retorted Itachi dryly. “You’re too stubborn to die.”

“Oh yeah? Maybe just to spite you, I’ll make sure to stay dead next time!” I huffed.

“You’re idiot,” said Itachi.

“And you’re an ass.” I grumbled.

“As you’ve told me so many times before,” answered Itachi.

“I am so going to haunt you when I die.” I muttered.

“Promises, promises,” sighed Itachi. “Since you’re awake now, hold on tight. I’m going to speed back to the hotel. We’ve wasted enough time here as it is and you’re probably better off resting
in bed instead of throwing random threats you’re never going to go through with.”

“I’m going to make you regret those words and that’s a promise I’m going to keep!” I grumbled.

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” said Itachi.

“...I hate you.” I muttered, digging my chin onto his shoulder as he sped the rest of the way back to the village.

If I was Tsunade, right about now, I would be winning the jackpot. My gut was telling me something bad was going to happen and knowing my luck, it’s going to be very bad.
“Come on Kasa, I know you can do it. You’ve done this before,” said Kurei in exasperation.

“But…” I wailed, knees shaking as I clung onto my deck of cards. “Why do I have to have a cat strapped to me?”

“Mreow,” snarled the extremely annoyed cat strapped in my obi.

“Because you never go on the offensive unless you’re scared or angry,” droned Kurei. “And since you can’t seem to force yourself into either state of mind, that cat will be your learning aid.”

“I-I know but…” A pathetic whimper escaped me as I allowed myself to wail in fear.

In the end, I fell under Kurei sensei’s tutelage, while the boys were with Shirakumo and Hizashi. Naturally, they’re all trained to win the finals. I on the other hand trained to survive and maybe win a match. With his specialty in bukijutsu and genjutsu, there weren’t much he could add to my arsenal of skills. At best, I’m passable in either area, but they were not something that I could master within a month.

In weaponry, my umbrella was the only thing I could wield comfortably. I don’t have the strategic mind or skill to pull off the multi-weapon attacks Tenten is known for with her chakra threads. There was the likelihood that I would end up hitting myself rather than the enemy.

Not to mention, my chakra threads were much finer and could barely lift anything that’s heavier than a couple of ounces. With those limitations in mind and my newfound chemist knowledge from my seals, Kurei devised a new combat routine for me to follow… I know I said I had a bad feeling before this all started, but I never thought it would be for a month’s worth of training with cats from the depths of hell.

“Faster!” snapped Kurei as he charged at me with a kodachi.

Gritting my teeth, I planted a firm foot on the ground and sped into the next set of dance seals.

“Fire Release: Dragon’s Dance!” I shouted, going through the harsh steps, twirling and flipping through the air as the flames came to life in the form a fiery dragon.

Kurei jumped backwards as the dragon snapped its blazing jaws at him. I dropped my hands to the ground, sweeping my leg in a full rotation to redirect the dragon at him. The jounin flipped and sidestepped at almost every turn before he sent a barrage of shurikens at me. I kicked the umbrella from my back hoister and in the same motion, I caught the handle and snapped the umbrella open.

When the shurikens never hit, my hand quickly swept behind me, drawing out several seal cards and activating them at the same time. With a poof, the storage cards opened and a fist shaped mound of earth appeared behind me just in time to intercept the shurikens attached with Kurei’s chakra threads. Rolling the umbrella onto my shoulder, I quickly assessed where Kurei was and activated several other storage cards, each at a higher height than the last.

Immediately, I bounded higher and higher on each fist that appeared, resealing the lower
ones to use again to continue my ascent. However, before I managed to get far, the kodachi drove into the fist I stood on and the earth beneath my feet crumbled.

“Damn lightning nature.” I grumbled under my breath. At the sight of Kurei closing in, I snapped my umbrella close and used it to block the incoming punches and kicks from Kurei.

I didn’t manage to block all of them, it wasn’t possible the skill levels between us were too different. The ones I didn’t manage to block ended up knocking the wind out of me. It wasn’t long before he sent me flying with a roundhouse kick and I crashed into the ground tumbling into a roll as I forced myself back onto my feet. Just as I regained my balance and raised my hand, the cool blade of the kunai pressed against my neck.

“You lose,” said Kurei sternly.

“I wouldn’t say that Kurei sensei.” I chirped, my hand still held out, the barely visible chakra threads dancing in the wind as a dome of my seal cards surrounded us. Naturally, they were all seals I’ve used in the course of the fight, explosive seals among other nasty surprises I whipped up from the chemist knowledge.

“In a real fight, this would only be a temporary standstill,” said Kurei.

“Not if I kill both of us first and make it a draw.” I sang cheerily.

Kurei raised a brow at my words.

“The afterlife would be horribly dull to spend alone. I have every intention of taking someone with me.” I said innocently with an unnervingly sweet smile crossing my face.

It took a moment before a smirk crept onto his normally stoic face and he gathered his free hand in front of him.

“Good try, but no,” said Kurei as a swirl of wind surrounded his hand before he formed a half seal. “Kai!”

“Ah…” I started to protest, but sighed dejectedly as my illusionary dome of seals disappeared. He not only saw through my distraction, but also the fact I had secretly set off a number of seals with paralytic components into the air. “How did you know the paralytic was there? I made sure to make this one scentless…”

“I didn’t smell it, nor did I know when you released it,” said Kurei.

“Then how?” I dropped my hands to my hips.

“Familiarity and predictability,” replied Kurei.

“But that’s only a problem if I’m fighting against people who’ve seen me fight right? I haven’t fought all that much during the exam, so technically it shouldn’t be a problem in the finals.” I frowned thoughtfully.

“Except time is your worst enemy,” noted Kurei. “Those scentless mixtures you’ve concocted requires are longer period before it takes effect and in an open space, it might disperse before it could do its work. That last attack I did with the kunai, you could’ve avoided it, right?”

“…Hehe, you caught me.” I said sheepishly.
“You knew I wasn’t going to kill you. So you tried to bid time by letting me catch you and lure me into talking with you,” said Kurei in amusement as he crossed his arms. “You literally tried to win a fight with words.”

“But words are more dangerous than you know, sensei.” I drawled with a sly grin.

“What makes you say that?” asked Kurei.

“Because words could hide a sword in plain sight.” I answered cheerily. “If used correctly, the damage it does could outlast any wound from a sword.”

“Hmm?” the older man raised a brow as he digested my florally cryptic words before a low chuckle escaped him. “An anagram, cute. Are you planning to talk your opponents into surrendering?”

“It would be less of a hassle if they would do that to begin with, but it’s probably better to have them beg for mercy.” I sighed as I shuffled through my remaining seals. “Hmm… I much rather keep to the unscented mixtures since I’ve already built up an immunity to them already, but I guess it’s not going to cut it in the finals.”

Kurei shook his head in amusement as he planted a hand on my head. I glanced up, surprised at the affectionate touch. The man rarely acted with anything less than complete stoic composure.

“…Sensei?” I said, confused.

“Regardless of the results in the finals, I am very proud of you,” said the man. “You’ve grown into quite a resilient flower, Kasa.”

Surprise crossed my face as the unexpected feeling of joy and pride filled my chest. Such warm words, I couldn’t keep the smile from breaking across my face as I raised a hand in salute.

“I’ll do my best, sensei!” I declared, inwardly promising that I would not disappoint him.

At the day of the finals, I heard a knock at my door just as I finished sealing the deck I was planning to use in my matches. Glancing at the time, I frowned. It was still too early to be at the stadium. Kurei and the other senseis had gone off to greet Hiruzen. The man had arrived several days ago, but due to our training, they held off seeing him. The boys had gone off a while ago for some light morning exercises and breakfast, it would be another hour or so before they come back… So who’s at my door?

“Mreow…” screeched the wretched demon before the familiar blood-curling sound of someone being mauled followed.

“…God damn it, Akuma!” I growled, pocketing my deck before rushing to the door.

When I slid the door open, the first thing I spotted was my tormentor for the last month, a furious red cat I named Akuma. Mainly because the word cat wasn’t enough to express my hatred for this particular feline. The hell he’s placed me through… I have a special place for this one, the day I skin him and stuff him.

“Kasa! Run before it gets you too!” wailed Obito as Akuma screeched and tried to claw his eyes out.
“…Obito?” I said in confusion.

What the heck was he doing here? Didn’t he and Kakashi cause an international incident last time? Wouldn’t they be banned from coming again?

“Mreow…” hissed Akuma, drawing me out of my thoughts as he crouched into position to pounce.

My eyes narrowed as I released a wave of killing intent as I dropped my hand from the door. The red feline tensed, hissing as he jumped back defensively. The air around me thickened as I poured one layer after another on the damn cat. The hair on the scruff of his neck raised as his yellow eyes glared defiantly at me.

“Scram. We’re not doing training today.” I ordered icily before the hissing cat reluctantly backed away and turned-tail to flee. I waited until it was well out of my line of sight before I released the intent with a loud sigh of relief.

“Impressive intent,” whistled Obito as he got up and clapped his clothes clean. The mauling was superficial as there wasn’t even a scratch on him. “When did you get over your fear of cats?”

“…It’s only towards that one…” I said meekly.

“Eh?” said Obito in confusion.

“Kurei sensei attached that one to me for the last month in order to get force me into the flight or fight response.” I mumbled with a dark cloud hanging over my head. “… He made sure he found a violent and territorial one in order to force me to build up my killing intent. If I didn’t emit enough of it, that monster starts attacking me in the middle of training… and that was on top of trying to avoid Kurei sensei’s attacks too! It was horrible!”

“…Pft,” hissed Obito as he hastily covered his snickers behind a hand.

“It’s not funny.” I said, resisting the urge to pout.

“Ah, sorry, sorry,” said Obito with a wave of his hand. “It’s great to see you’ve improved.”

Huffing, I gathered my hands in front of me in a proper stance, even if Obito was here, I couldn’t let my act slip. “What are you doing here anyway? Didn’t you cause and international incident? I’m surprised that they let you in the village and unattended at that.”

“So cold Kasa-chan. I came all this way to see your matches in the finals and that’s the welcome I get? I’m hurt,” pouted Obito. I raised a brow at him before a bright grin crossed his face. “Okay, okay, I’m actually a part of Hokage-sama’s escort team.”

“…Aren’t you supposed to be…? I don’t know… guarding Hokage-sama if that’s the case?” I drawled. “You’re not doing a very good job.”

“I’m on break,” replied Obito cheerily with a hand on his hip. “Thought I come see how if you have any last minute jitters. It’s not every day that someone makes it to the chunin exam finals on their first try. Are you excited?”

“What’s there to be excited about?” I muttered under my breath. “…It’s not like I wanted to be in the finals.”
“Eh? That’s not what I’ve heard from the reports,” said Obito.

“…Reports?” I asked with a frown. “What reports?”

“The ones written by the proctors in each part of the exam. Technically, this sort of thing is classified to genins, but if neither of us tell anyone, it wouldn’t be a problem right?” said Obito in hushed tone with a wink and a finger to his lips.

“…You’re horrible…” I said, but I couldn’t keep the amusement from my voice. “Always breaking the rules.”

“They’re more like guidelines,” said Obito.

“What are you, a pirate?” I said with a wry grin.

“Nope, I’m a ninja,” said Obito proudly. “And you’re one too, I don’t see why you’re not happy about making it to the finals. From the reports, it looked like you left quite an impression on your examiners.”

“From what I remember, I puked after my first exam, skipped out early in my second exam, lounging around doing nothing for a week and embarrassed myself while the mizukage was talking…” I mumbled. “…It must be a bad impression…”

“On the contrary, your proctors seemed far more generous with their evaluation of your performance, compared to the one you’ve given yourself,” said Obito.

“Huh?” I said in surprise as he planted a hand on my head.

“Willful, confident, unwavering and maybe a bit sadistic and unhinged,” chuckled Obito as he ruffled my hair into a mess. “You should’ve seen the look on Kakashi’s face when he read the report. I still have some trouble trying wrap my head around some of the things they’ve listed.”

“…Are you sure you read the right one?” I asked dryly, ignoring the mess of my plum red strands.

“Of course, Crimson Terror,” chirped Obito.

“…That sounds like a disease.” I muttered darkly. “I don’t like it.”

“It seems that you unnerved a number of overseers that kept an eye on you while you waited for the second exam to end,” laughed Obito. “Meditating for hours on end, only to come out muttering a variety of methods to poison and kill people while cackling like a maniac.”

I found myself pressing a hand to my face in embarrassment. That was likely when I first started memorizing my seals and became too excited when I got them correct. Good lord… Tesuri did say I have a tendency to laugh like a lunatic when things goes well for me, but I didn’t expect it to turn out like this…

“Ah, geez…” I sighed.

“No need to be embarrassed,” said Obito. I glanced at him from between my fingers. “That just means you could do something completely random and unpredictable. They’ll never see it coming. Something outrageous like—”

“I think you’ve spread enough of your idiocy on the world already,” droned Kakashi’s
familiar voice before Obito found a forceful hand grabbing his ear.

“Yeow! Kakashi!” shouted Obito as his head followed Kakashi’s tugging arm to lessen the pain.

“Your break was only supposed to be for ten minutes,” said the masked jounin.

“But I wanted to wish Kasa-chan luck!” said Obito as he grabbed Kakashi’s wrist to stop the pulling.

“Then do it already and let’s go, you know the only reason we’re allowed back into this village because we’re guarding Hokage-sama. Do you want to cause another incident?” sighed Kakashi.

“You did a fair share too you know,” huffed Obito.

“Whose fault was that?” added Kakashi.

“You would’ve done the same if I wasn’t there!” retorted Obito.

My eye twitched as I pinched the bridge of my nose. Any other time, I might’ve found the team bickering hilarious and relaxing, but today…

“I’m happy that you guys decided to stop by and check on me, but—”

“You want to mentally prepare yourself for the match right?” finished Kakashi before Obito settled down from their bickering.

“…Yeah.” I nodded, shoulders slumping a little. “I know no one’s really expecting much from me, but…”

“But?” asked Kakashi.

“It’s a bit embarrassing.” I said sheepishly, scratching the side of my cheek. “…But after all that training with Kurei sensei, there’s a small part of me that feels like I might have a chance. I know I probably won’t last all that long, but I want to feel like to be a badass in battle at least once in my life.”

The two stared at me in surprise.

“Silly huh? Considering I’m not much of a fighter and as a medic I really shouldn’t be in the frontlines.” I laughed sheepishly, ducking my head down in embarrassment. “But I don’t want to constantly rely on my teammates to protect me… The reason I’m in the finals was because… I couldn’t stand on even grounds with them. They sent me away because they thought they couldn’t protect me…”

“Kasa,” said Kakashi as he released Obito and squatted down to my eye level.

“I want do something they don’t expect from me. I want to be able to protect them…” I mumble quietly.

“The Crimson Terror,” started Kakashi before a warm smile crossed his face. “It doesn’t suit you at all.”

“Huh?” I glanced at him in confusion.
“Obito might actually have the right idea for a change,” continued the silver-haired jounin. “You’re always doing things no one expects you to. I’ve lost count how many times you’ve surprised me. Hmm… Instead of the Crimson Horror, what do you think about Konoha’s Most Unpredictable Kunoichi. It has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?”

I blinked… and blinked again before a giggled escaped my lips. Did I… just steal one of Naruto’s titles?

“I like it.” I said brightly. “Though, I’m not sure if I’ll live up to that title though.”

“Just do what you feel is right and I’m sure you’ll be fine,” said Kakashi.

“Kakashi…” said Obito seriously in a quiet voice.

“Hmm?” hummed the other as he glanced up to his teammate, his eye flickering with focus and concentration.

“You…” started Obito, hesitating briefly as if he wasn’t sure what to say. “…Are you putting the moves on an under-aged girl?”

Dead silence filled the hall.

“Obito…” said Kakashi with false pleasantness as he pushed off his knees and stood up. “Didn’t I say you’ve spread enough of your idiocy on the world already?”

“Eh?” said Obito in surprise before he found his teammate closing in on him.

“It about time we returned to guarding Hokage-sama,” said Kakashi as he grabbed Obito by the ear again. “Let’s go idiot.”

“Oh! Ow! OW!” shouted Obito as he hopped on one foot as Kakashi dragged him off. “I am so telling Tesuri-san when we get back! You cradle robber! Kasa-chan, don’t let this guy sweet talk you, he’s—”

“Enough already,” sighed Kakashi as he hauled him off. “Good luck on your exams.”

“Um… thanks?” I stood dumbfounded in the hall as I watched them disappear around the corner… I wonder if maybe Obito should have that title instead.

Whatever I expected when I walked into the stadium was left forgotten when we met our finals proctor. No words could express the tumult of thoughts that ran through my mind.

“Ho… There are more brats than I expected for this exam,” chuckled the blue-skinned man as a shark-like grin crossed his face. “I’m Kisame Hoshigaki, I’ll be proctoring your matches. Unless you surrender, get knocked out or die, I’m not moving a muscle to stop your fights. So make sure you give it your all or back out before you die. Questions?”

We said nothing. I couldn’t say anything. While my memories of the past are slowly faded to nothing, this man in particular I remember quite vividly. Maybe it’s due his connection to Itachi or maybe it’s the fact he’s the one that provided Akatsuki the essential information on the Shinobi Alliance. I found myself glancing briefly at Itachi and his potential partner. What were the chances of these two meeting like this?

“Good, then the first match will be Santa Yamanaka of Konohagakure and Kiri of
Kirigakure,” said Kisame as he waved the rest of us off. “The rest of you brats go wait on the viewing platform until it’s your turn.”

My body moved mechanically while my mind ran through what I knew of Kisame. The man was very similar to Itachi in a lot of regards. He was loyal to his village through and through… until they betrayed him and drove him away… Come to think of it… isn’t that what happened to most of the missing-nin? Even Tesuri, who was once a part of Ame and Akatsuki. Wasn’t he also loyal? I can’t image any medic would willingly betray their own village without any good reason.

“Kasa?” asked Shisui. “Are you okay?”

“Huh?” I blinked, snapped out of my thoughts and glanced at his concerned face. I quickly masked my thoughts with a smile. “I’m fine. Just thinking. Sensei must’ve placed you guys under harsh training. Santa’s looking great down there.”

And he does, he looked like a badass down there with how he’s handling his opponent, but then again, Kiri was a medic, technically he shouldn’t be on the frontlines.

“Santa has the match already,” said Itachi. “He’s just showing off to the audience for the village’s sake.”

“Hmm?” I studied the match closer, wondering what Itachi saw that made him come to that conclusion. It took a moment before I spotted the familiar broken orbs of Santa’s gas bombs and glanced back to his opponent. “…He poisoned him, didn’t he?”

“Slow-acting paralytic, to his opponent, it’ll just seem like Santa’s moving faster, but in reality he’s just slowing down,” answered Shisui.

“He is quite fond of using those.” I said as we watched the rest of the match proceed as Itachi predicted. To the audience, it seems like Santa was thoroughly outclassing his opponent and he played it to the village’s favor by finishing the match using his clan technique, the Mind Transfer jutsu.

“I forfeit!” shouted the possessed Kiri.

“Victor, Santa Yamanaka of Konoha!” declared Kisame.

“Che, how tedious. The match wasn’t interesting at all.” I murmured. The whole match stunk of political manipulation, no doubt Hizashi sensei told him to do it that way if he managed to get the upper hand in the match. I know I should be glad that my teammate won, but the fact he dragged out the match to show off our village left a bad taste in my mouth.

“Next up, Darui of Kumogakure versus Shisui Uchiha of Konohagakure,” announced Kisame once Santa and Kiri was cleared from the field.

“Wish me luck,” said Shisui as he patted my shoulder.

“Not going to.” I replied.

“Eh? You’re not still mad are you? It’s been a month!” protested Shisui. “Come on Kasa, I said I’m sorry.”

“Don’t you have a match to get to?” I drawled, fighting back a grin. “Do try to make it a more interesting victory than Santa’s.”
“Make it interesting?” Shisui paused as the words sunk in before a grin crossed his face. He and Itachi shared a nod before the older Uchiha disappeared in a poof and reappeared down below.

“Show off,” sighed the dark-skinned Kumo-nin as he pushed away from the metal railing. At hearing the unenthusiastic voice, I decided to lend Shisui a hand and unnerv his opponent a little.

“Good luck.” I said cheerily to him as our eyes met. It was for a brief second that I spotted his eyes shift to wariness before it melded back to his usual indifferent demeanor.

“Darui, I’ll walk with you,” said Yugito as she too moved to go with her teammate.

“Yugito-san,” I called out to the blonde with false pleasantry, her shoulders tensed briefly. “I look forward to our match.”

The young woman ignored me as she and Darui walked on.

“Oh dear, did I upset her somehow?” I continued, delicately raising my hand to cup my face to maintain the act for the remaining spectators, Chojuro and Utakata.

Itachi kept quiet, either fully aware of what I’m trying to do… or trying not to laugh at how poorly I might be doing it… Very likely it’s the later. Damn bastard.

“You are odd,” started Utakata as he returned his gaze to the field below. “You’d deny such well wishes to your fellow Konoha-nin, but you’d give it to your enemies so freely. If you’re not careful, people might start asking where your loyalties lie. From what I remember, didn’t you abandon your teammates at the start of the second exam?”

“Did I?” I replied, returning my gaze to the field to maintain my composure. When I think about it… it does seem like abandonment… though, I’m not sure if it’s me abandoning them… or them abandoning me. “You must have a better memory than I do, I don’t recall doing that at all.”

“You were the first one at the exam hall weren’t you? We got there at least a day or two before they showed up,” said Chojuro, his voice meek and shy as he hid behind Utakata. “If that’s not abandoning them, what would you call that?”

I took a breath and released it slowly. Maintain calmness and reply accordingly, don’t worry and don’t show hesitation. Just remember those rules and move on.

“Confidence,” answered Santa. I glanced at my teammate, surprised at his sudden arrival. “It’s not abandoning if you’re confident your teammate will be able to handle themselves on their own.”

“Oh?” replied Utakata as he turned his attention to him.

“If you’re confident of your teammate’s abilities you could trust them to be on their own if the situation calls for it,” continued Santa as he crossed his arms. “As for well wishes, those should be given to people who actually needs it. Don’t you agree?”

“Hmm… is that so?” said Utakata before he returned his attention back to the match.

“How’s Shisui doing?” asked Santa as he made his way to my side, but paused when he noticed the grin on my face. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing.” I said with a giggle threatening to escape from my voice. “Should I try to kill
you?"

“Eh?” said Santa before he managed to decipher what I meant. “Oh god, please don’t.
You’ve already tried that on Shisui a month ago! He might be able to survive, but I’ll definitely die!”

“But you deserve it.” I answered cheerily.

“Um…a-are you sure it’s confidence that she abandon you guys? Because she just said she
wanted to kill you!” said Chojuro in disbelief.

“Would you like me to kill you instead?” I asked with a smile and I turned to take a step
forward and he took one back. “I’ll be gentle.”

“Kasa,” said Itachi as he grabbed onto the bow on the back of my obi to hold me back. “I
thought you agreed that you would stop trying to kill people already.”

“But what fun is that?” I pouted.

“You’re missing Shisui’s match,” said Itachi dryly.

“Fine, fine. I’ll try to kill you later. Okay, Chojuro-kun?” I chirped before the timid boy
squeaked and hid behind Utakata again.

“You’re really channeling your father,” commented Santa quietly.

“Why thank you.” I chirped as we returned our attention down below.

We’ve already missed most of the match and it seems like the field’s covered in scorch
marks from lightning-based and fire-based jutsus. Darui breathed heavily as he patted away the
flames on what remains of his shirt. Shisui on the other hand seemed untouched and barely even
winded. It wasn’t until Darui fired off another lightning attack that I saw why.

Body Flicker. I watched in surprise as Shisui disappeared and reappeared Darui in an
instant to pummel him from behind and blasting him with yet another fire ball. He did it with such
quick successions that it seemed like he was teleporting. Darui never had a moment’s break as Shisui
finished his attacks and retreated to a safe distance when it looked like the Kumo-nin was going to
retaliate.

However, when he did attack, it was in a completely different direction to where the
Uchiha stood and it seemed like he was just fighting air as Shisui rained fireballs on him from above.
It took a moment before I realized that the Uchiha had used genjutsu on him. I resisted a sigh as he
slowly brought the match to the end, were battles always this boring to watch? Or were my
teammates just outclassing our opponents?

“Winner, Shisui Uchiha of Konoha!” declared Kisame before Shisui gave a polite bow
and disappeared with another body flicker.

“So, was that interesting enough for you?” asked Shisui as he reappeared next to me.

“Not enough for me to kill you.” I said with a bored sigh.

“Huh?” said Shisui in confusion. “Kill me?”

“Don’t ask, you don’t want her to kill you,” said Itachi as he turned to leave.

“Huh?” repeated Shisui again, this time even more confused than the last.
“Good luck, Chojuro-kun.” I waved at the shy Kiri-nin before he squeaked again and ran after Itachi. It’s really funny, he’s quite a few years older than me and he’s like a mouse. “How adorable.”

“...I missed something, didn’t I?” asked Shisui before Santa patted him on the shoulder.

“You’re better off not knowing.” said our blond teammate.

“Next match, Itachi Uchiha of Konohagakure versus Chojuro of Kirigakure,” announced Kisame once the two were on the field.

Itachi maintained an air of indifference while Chojuro quivered where he stood. However, that façade didn’t last long the moment Kisame declared the beginning of the match and he pulled out his swords. As if possessed, Chojuro’s attacks were quick and violent, completely different from the shy and meek boy just a moment ago.

Pulling out a ninjato, Itachi blocked the other’s relentless attacks while backing off to put some distance between them. His hands sped through the basic seals for the Grand Fireball Jutsu before he let out the fiery attack. Chojuro let out a scream as chakra flared around his sword and sliced through Itachi’s fireball.

Blow after blow, it was a dance between swords. Whenever it seemed like Chojuro would get an upper hand, Itachi would disappear with a body replacement jutsu and come from behind with another attack. Chojuro would retaliate and slice through him, but only to find it was a clone and that the Uchiha had continued onto the next attack on his queue. The Kiri-nin would block and the whole dance would start all over again.

It’s interesting that in the three battles that occurred, not a single word was spoken between the fighters, sans the name of the jutsu they were throwing out. Though, I supposed there’s not much point in conversing in these battles. There’s no information to be gained, no drama to unfold. Just… battles…

“Victor, Itachi Uchiha of Konohagakure,” announced Kisame the victory of our village for the third time, but there was a hint of annoyance in it as he turned to glare Chojuro.

The blue-haired young man flinched at the older man’s glare as Itachi pulled his ninjato away from his neck.

“Looks like it’s your turn,” said Utakata as I backed away from the railing to leave.

“It does seems so.” I replied, grabbing my umbrella as I went. “I hope to see you in the next match.”

“I look forward to it,” said the older boy with a wry grin. “Good luck.”

Oh… them fighting words… I smiled warmly, ignoring the subtle insult as I made my way down to the field. I’ll make him eat those words…after I somehow manage to beat Yugito. As I made my way to the field’s entrance, Itachi was coming back in. I didn’t say a word to him and decided to move on to keep from breaking my character, but he caught my arm just as we crossed paths.

“Don’t get reckless,” said Itachi quietly.

“Considering none of you have gotten hurt so far, I really wonder was there a point for me to be in the exams if you doubt my abilities.” I replied in turn.
“There’s a difference between having confidence in your abilities and knowing you would do something stupid if pushed too far,” said Itachi bluntly. “If it gets to that point, forfeit. It’s not worth risking your life.”

“Are you worried that I’ll end up haunting you?” I asked with a grin.

Itachi snorted as he released my arm. “Like I’ve said before, you’re too stubborn to die.”

“And I said I’ll make sure I stay dead to spite you.” I retorted cheerfully. “Let’s see if I’ll keep my word this time.”

“Idiot,” said Itachi as he dropped to a casual stance and pocketed his hands before turning to face me fully. “Just be careful.”

“I’ll try to make this quick.” I said with full confidence as I turned to enter the field.

However, that confidence had all but left when I met with Yugito’s glaring eyes of determination… Oh right, I almost forgot… she actually wants to kill me… Ah… this might take longer than I might’ve promised…

“Fourth match, Yugito Ni of Kumogakure versus Kasa Mon of Konohagure,” said Kisame before giving us a brief glance. “Just as a reminder ladies, unless you surrender, knock each other out or kill your opponent, I’m not stepping in.”

“Just start the match already,” snapped Yugito, her eyes never leaving mine.

…I am so screwed.

“Ho? We have a spitfire here,” chuckled Kisame. “More interesting than the ice cube that was here a moment ago. He could definitely use some of your cattiness.”

Ice cube? I wondered before realizing he meant Itachi. At the mention of him needing to have more cattiness, I found myself in a fit of laughter as an image of him wearing cat ears over a month ago surfaced from my memory. Yugito, who was ready to slice my throat open the moment just as Kisame started the match, stopped and glanced at me warily. Possibly due to my random fit of psychotic laughter.

“What’s so funny?” she all but snarled.

I raised my sleeve delicately over my face as I desperately tried to reign in my laughter. Of all the times for that memory to surface, this was likely the most inappropriate. It didn’t help that the mental image of Itachi in my head started meowing and drove me further into laughter. God damn Itachi! I’m going to die and it’s all your fault!

“Stop laughing!” snapped the girl as claws immediately materialized in her hands and she charged furiously at me.

Ah damn it. My laughter finally ceased at the threat of my life. I activated my two barrier seals and opened my umbrella as a deterrent as she slashed at me. Immediately, I grabbed my deck of seal cards and went through a set of hand seals.

With a flick of my wrist, a dome of seal cards surrounded us as I reigned in the handful of chakra threads. At the sudden appearance of so many cards, Yugito halted in surprise for a brief moment, allowing me to roll the umbrella to my shoulder and start my dance seals. Swinging the umbrella as a part of my dance, I spun and twirled my weapon, using it as a shield for when my opponent regained
her senses and started attacking again.

Yugito was relentless in that she refused to let me get more than three steps into a seal. However, that didn’t mean I didn’t have other ways to attack. Twitching my fingers, I yanked a card from the dome and sent a pulse of chakra through my chakra threads. With a poof, a fist made of earth appeared in a fine mist, flying at her as it went.

The blonde gasped as she arched into a back flip to avoid the fist. Twitching my fingers again, I pulled one card after another to throw fists of earths at the retreating kunoichi, weaving a dance to fire off more fists into the areas she retreated to. She managed to dodge all of them and retaliated by returned my blows with her missile-like fire attacks. I hid behind my umbrella as each mice-like flame hit. Even with the reinforcement of seals, it wasn’t long before I had to close my shield and go on the offensive again, less I want my only protection to turn into a pile of ashes before the end of the match.

“Fire Release: Dragon’s Dance!” I shouted, using the dying embers of her flames to spark up my own attack.

Her eyes widened, but defeat never appeared in them as she gritted her teeth and danced around my dragon and closed in on me with a roundhouse kick. Stopped in mid-dance, the fiery dragon disappeared as I was sent flying by her attack. I barely caught my breath as she caught up to my flying body and delivered a drop kick with the heel of her foot, smashing me into the ground.

“You think you scare me?” screamed the girl furiously as she grabbed me by the hair and hauled me from the ground. “Think again!”

I barely gathered my wits as the world spun wildly in my vision. Just as she was about to punch me again, my fingers twitched again and yanked several cards from the dome. This time, they exploded into a red mist with a sweet smelling scent. Yugito released me at the sight of the red mist and hastily backed away from the unknown threat.

“Goodness… you hit hard.” I whispered with a pained rasp as I crawled to my feet and breathed deeply as the red mist fell over me.

A second slower and she might’ve went for my nose and broken it too. Still dizzy from her last attack, I brushed my hair back to hide the need to press a hand to my head to refocus and regain my balance. She of course, took it as an insult, her body tensing much like a cat with its hair raised. I’m going to have to end this fight soon, I don’t think I could take losing more brain cells than I already have.

“A bluff?” said Yugito as she eyed the mist cautiously.

“Funny how a little color would scare people off so easily from harmless gas.” I said with a chuckle, deciding to rile her further. “What was that you said about not being afraid of me? You’re so adorable.”

Yugito growled as she charged into red mist aiming to claw my throat out. I shifted again, dancing out of the way of each of her attacks, biding time as she breathed in more and more of the red mist. I counted down the seconds as I felt my pulse racing faster and faster. If I’m feeling like this, she shouldn’t be too far off.

From my training with Kurei, the scentless mixtures I’ve used were close to undetectable, but the tradeoff was the activation time. He was right, with how Yugito fights, it would be near impossible for me to get her to breath in enough of the stuff to make it work, but with any scented
mixture, she would be sure to figure it out and not breathe in any of the stuff… So, to make sure she saw them as harmless, I made a show of breathing it the stuff as if it did nothing.

Unfortunately, the only mixture that wouldn’t do any lasting physical damage from breathing it in was what I dubbed as fear toxin. Can’t say the same about psychological damage though. I let out a slow breath, as I forced myself to focus through the tremors that’s slowly taking over my body. Once Yugito threw a sloppy punch, I rolled away from the attack and stood upright in a regal manner as I let out a wave of killing intent.

“W-What?” rasped the blonde as she dropped to her knees in an instant, paralyzed by the fear.

“I’m growing bored of playing with you.” I drawled, keeping the image of Akuma in my mind as I steeled my voice and strolled towards the trembling Yugito. “Either you surrender or I kill you.”

Yugito wheezed, her arms gave way as she collapsed into a trembling mess after the second wave of killing intent. Biting back a curse, I eased up on the intent, giving her time to breathe and recover. The thing with fear, it’s only a paralytic up to a certain point before the person finally snaps and gets violent.

“N-no,” said the young woman once she got her breath back and glanced up at me with wide frightful eyes.

“Boy, you’re stubborn.” I said calmly, trying moderate the next wave of killing intent as I moved closer. If she wouldn’t give up I would have to knock her out before she snaps. Careful… Careful… “If you don’t give up, I’ll not only kill you, I’ll—”

With a terrifying scream, Yugito raised her clawed hand and thrust it through my barriers and straight into my chest. I bit back a grimace as a surge of blood gushed up my torn esophagus. Shit, I’ve screwed up. I forced myself to swallow down the blood, less I want her to see me weak and get even more aggressive.

“No! No! NO!” screamed the girl as she raised her other claw at me.

Gritting my teeth, I activated my amplification seal as I caught her wrist free wrist and grabbed onto the one that has claws plunged into my chest. I have to end it now. I can’t fight anymore.


Another scream ripped from the blonde’s throat as I held on, charging more and more into her until she stopped screaming and fell limp to the ground. With my hands still gripping her wrist, I felt for a pulse and found that she was very much alive. However, at the rate it fell to, it was likely she was unconscious. Wheezing painfully, I released her free hand and charged up healing chakra over my chest as I slowly pulled her claws out. The tightness of the obi was keeping me from bleeding out, but unless I close off all the lacerations… Let’s just say it’s not going to end well for me. The stadium grew dead silent as I stood to my feet and walked calmly towards Kisame.

Conceal it, don’t feel it. I closed my eyes briefly and took a breath. Don’t let it show.

“She won’t be getting up any time soon.” I said evenly, lowering my hand from my chest, even though I’ve barely closed the opening. Any strenuous movement and it’ll rip open again.

“I thought you said you were going to kill her,” said the man with a fanged grin. No doubt
he could still see her breathing.

“T’m feeling generous.” I drawled, doing my best to keep my movement to a minimum to avoid reopening the quick patchwork healing I did. “Besides, I detest killing a sleeping opponent, I rather kill them while they could still scream.”

“Oh ho, hear that ladies and gentlemen? The victor for the fourth match, Kasa Mon, has declared she will continue on!” smirked Kisame as he announced my victory.

What? My eyes widened as the stadium roared in approval. I turned my gaze back to him, wanting to protest, but the smirk on his face told me he was doing this on purpose. A cold chill ran up my spine as realization dawned. Konoha won way too many matches and Kiri was down to their last competitor. They needed to put one of their own in the finals and in my current state I was the perfect opponent for them to torment and showoff their village’s prowess.

I fought back a panic attack as I tried to think of a way out. It’s going to look bad if I backed out after stating such a boastful claim… but what else could I do? I glanced towards the Kage seats. From where I stood, I couldn’t see Yagura or Hiruzen. Not that being able to see them would’ve helped any. Hiruzen hadn’t made a sound of protest since Kisame’s announcement, so I guess… I’m on my own.

“The fifth match will be Kasa Mon of Konohagakure versus Utakata of Kirigakure,” announced Kisame.

Opening my umbrella, I used it as a cover to hold my hands close to my chest. Taking a shallow breath as I discreetly tried to heal my chest wound a bit more before the start of my next match. I’m not sure how long I’ll be able to make it hold, but hopefully long enough to make a decent show before I forfeit the match. While we waited for the medics to drag Yugito’s unconscious body off the field, I spotted Itachi watching from the entrance I used earlier and he didn’t look one bit pleased…well, you and me both buddy.

“I’m surprised you’ve decided to continue,” said Utakata when he came within hearing range.

“It would be rude of me to not do so after you’ve gone through the trouble of wishing me luck.” I said with a smile, despite how much I want to drop to the ground and groan in agony.

“Forfeit, you’re in no condition to fight,” said Utakata calmly as he held the regal air that I’m trying so hard to maintain through the pain.

“I’m delighted that you’re concern with my wellbeing, but it’s not necessary.” I said, absently aware of the medics removing Yugito from the field so that we could start the next fight.

“You will die if you fight me as you are now,” warned the boy evenly. “Will you continue even knowing that?”

“You’re odd.” I repeated his words from earlier with a soft chuckle, but immediately regretting it as it sent unpleasant vibrations to my chest injury. Forcing a grin to my face, I continued.

“Do Kiri-nin normally offer to let people surrender so peacefully?”

“Your teammates seemed quite worried when I left,” said Utakata, shifting the conversation to elsewhere. “I don’t think they have the confidence that you would win.”

“Then I’ll just have to have enough for all of us, don’t I?” I said pleasantly.
“How long would that last?” drawled Utakata as he pulled out his pipe.

“We’ll just have to see, don’t we?” I replied, twirling my umbrella playfully with the one hand that wasn’t healing my chest.

“Enough chit-chat,” said Kisame. “The fifth match will commence now!”

The instant he announced the start of the battle, Utakata placed the pipe to his lips and started blowing bubbles… Any other time, I might find that line a riot and laugh my ass off, but with a chest injury and imminent death in my future, I curbed the urge to laugh at such untimely hilarity and raised my free hand to reform my dome of seals.

Compared to the dome I made during the fight with Yugito, this one was missing a good number of seals. Without both hands, I couldn’t use the genjutsu that filled in the empty spots to make it seem like I had an endless supply of seals. I eyed the discarded fists from the earlier fight, wondering if I would be able to reseal them and use it against him, but the chances that I’d get close enough to reseal them was slim.

Utakata didn’t wait on ceremony as he sent off his bubbles at me. Not wanting to waste what little seals I still had, I started running, keeping my umbrella on my shoulder to cover my back as I tried to put some distance between us.

A skip, a twirl and a slide, I came with several near misses as the bubbles exploded around me. Even so, I kept moving dodging what I could and blocking what I couldn’t. One particular blast nearly knocked me off my feet had I not activated a seal and smashed a fist into the ground for cover.

“Will you not retaliate?” asked Utakata softly, his voice carrying over the dying hiss and clatter of debris thrown from his explosions.

With my back against my fist boulder, I struggled to heal my chest to the best of my abilities as I whirled my free hand once again to whip the seal cards into place. Twitching my finger, I activated my mixture seals, sending the battlefield into a sweet scented red mist.

“That trick won’t work twice,” drawled the Kiri-nin. “If you think you can paralyze a Kiri-nin with the fear of a killing intent, you’re sorely mistaken. We’re raised on fear itself. It won’t work.”

“I know.” I whispered quietly as I took in a deep breath, breathing in the toxins. “But I’m not using it on you.”

“…What?” said the older boy in confusion before I gathered my hands together to form seals.

“Hidden Mist Jutsu!” I shouted before the mist quickly rolled in, obscuring the view of the stadium.

Using the cover of the mist, I jumped to my feet and hastily started my dance seals in the brief window of confusion I’ve created. My chest wound was about 50 to 60 percent healed at best, but it’ll have to do. I might not get another chance if I don’t do it now.

Gritting my teeth, I followed through with each move, fighting back a grimace each time my muscles tugged painfully at the injury. Aside from being a distraction, the point of using the fear toxin was to get my adrenaline up and force my body to continue fighting despite the injury I’ve taken. It’s an utterly psychotic move, drugging myself just so I could continue fighting. There really wasn’t any other way I could continue this fight.
“Using a staple jutsu of Kirigakure against a Kiri-nin?” said Utakata in amusement. “Are you sure it’s a wise move?”

The air exploded with his bubbles, blowing away the mist I’ve gathered before he filled it with more bubbles. Utakata looked amused as the mist parted. I said nothing, our eyes meeting as I completed the dance.

“Wind Release: Vortex!” I shouted, twirling in place as an updraft quickly turned into a violent whirlwind.

Utakata shielded his face, his sleeves whipping in the wind as his bubbles were sent skywards. He crouched, setting a firm stance to keep from being drawn up by the draft as well. No words crossed between us while we were in the wind vacuum. Air was sparse and both of us knew, the moment this wind vacuum ceased, the true fight will begin.

I had the slight advantage being the one that’s maintaining the vortex, but that advantage won’t hold long if I passed out from the lack of air first. I kept dancing and twirling, forcing the vortex to go faster and faster until all the bubbles were long out of sight before I dared to switch to another dance. Once I stop, Utakata would send out his bubble again and I won’t be able to create another distraction long enough for me to whip up another whirlwind.

“Earth Release: Earth Fist!” I shouted just as the whirlwind disappeared.

The ground shifted, shooting up a field of cow shaped boulders in place of fists. Mild annoyance crossed my face at the misshapen boulders. With my injuries, it was impossible to perform a perfect dance, but it’ll have to do. I can’t afford to be picky. I breathed heavily as the toxin ran its course. My heart raced even faster than before, I’m reaching my limit. I…

“Are you attacking me with livestock?” asked Utakata with a raised brow.

A low chuckle escaped me as my body shook slowly escalating it into a psychotic giggle as the fear toxin finally pushed me over the edge. I whipped my remaining seal cards onto the cow-like boulders as my laughter filled the stadium. The seals glowed briefly, before the empty storage cards attached itself onto the boulders, sealing it away once more.

“Livestock?” I drawled, briefly taking a breath of air before returning to my laughter once more.

Utakata frowned warily raising his pipe to his lips to prepare more bubbles.

“No, nothing so dull as mere livestock.” I replied through my giggles. “Rather, I’m going to rain hell on you with exploding cows!”

“Exploding…cows?” said Utakata slowly in disbelief as I activated one seal after another, releasing the cow-boulders rigged with explosive tags. “You’re serious. You’re throwing cows at me! Who throws cows at people?”

“You’re one to talk bubble blower.” I retorted with a giggle before finishing with a dark drawl. “And please get it right, they’re exploding cows.”

With each cow I sent at him, Utakata returned with a flurry of explosive bubbles. The battle became a match of who can blow up the other person.

“This would be hilarious if we weren’t so caught up in this exam. We could have a good laugh over how ridiculous it is to fight with cows and bubbles.” I drawled darkly, chucking senbons
at his bubbles to force the explosion before it reached me. Seeing we were going nowhere with this fight, I gave a careless shrug. “…Oh what the heck, I’ll laugh anyway!”

I laughed. I laughed long and hard until the only sounds that filled the stadium was my laughter and our countless explosions. I had no clue how long we went about trying to blow each other up, but it wasn’t until we crossed one another that I felt the loosening of my obi. I snapped back to my senses as my vision shifted due to blood lost.

“How rude, undressing a lady in such a manner.” I drawled, pulling my kimono close to hide the blood seeping through my white undershirt.

With the amount of adrenaline going through my system, I didn’t feel the wounds reopen. Aside from lightheadedness, there was no pain. I narrowed my eyes, trying to focus as my vision blurred. I’ve reached my limit. Come on, hang in there.

“My apologies,” said Utakata as he dropped my obi. “But I do believe this stalemate has gone on for long enough.”

“I supposed you’re right.” I slipped out of my battle stance and straightened my posture. “Since it seems like we’ve come to a stalemate. I will—”

“KASA!” shouted Itachi in warning before an arm wrapped around my chest painfully and a senbon plunged into my throat.

My eyes widened as I choked back the blood that surged up my throat and into my mouth. When did he—

“It’s really a pity that you’re not a part of Kirigakure, we could use a kunoichi like you,” whispered Utakata against my ear, in an almost intimate manner. “I have nothing against you, but with things as they are now, you’re more valuable to us dead than alive.”

“Y-you—” I croaked, but couldn’t get more than that out.

“You’ll fall into a deathlike state soon. The acupuncture point I’ve used has cut off the flow of your chakra, you won’t be able to use you iryo-ninjutsu to save yourself anymore. And since you’re their only medic, it seems like you’ll likely die from blood lost before they realize this,” said Utakata, his grin was quite pronounced with how his lips felt against my ear. “It was a pleasure fighting you, my fellow jinchuriki. Maybe you’ll have better luck in your next life.”

“KASA!” I heard my name being screamed just as Utakata released my lifeless body, letting collapse to the ground in a lifeless heap.

“Winner of the fifth match, Utakata of Kirigakure,” announced Kisame.

I couldn’t move, couldn’t even twitch my fingers. There was a flurry of movement, I felt my body being hauled up as someone patted my face, trying to get me to respond. I forced myself to blink, trying to focus on the worried face staring down at me.

“…sa!…Ka…!” shouted the voice in broken snippets.

It took a moment, but eventually, I managed to focus my eyes long enough to see the red sharingan eyes staring down at me. Itachi was frantically shouting my name, but I couldn’t hear a single word he was saying. All I could focus on was those worried red eyes, filled with panic and… anger? Why was he angry? Itachi’s never angry… that’s not right. Those eyes shouldn’t be angry. I don’t want to see those angry eyes.
With the last of my energy, I forced myself to lift my bloody hand and clumsily covered his eyes.

“Don’t…” I managed to rasp out pathetically before I felt my heart slowing to a stop… When I said I was going to spite Itachi… I hadn’t meant it to be like this…

With one last wheezing breath, the world became silent and turned black.
Cold Fury

“You idiot!” hissed Itachi as the small auburn-haired girl stepped out of her battle stance and conversed casually with her opponent. What the hell was she thinking? Can’t she see how much danger she’s in? “KASA!”

His warning came too late as the Kiri-nin wrapped an arm around the girl and plunge a senbon into her neck. She could barely croak out a word as her blue eyes widened in shock. Itachi could barely contain himself as he watched the older teen whisper almost intimately into her ear just before he release his hold and dropped her lifeless body to the ground.

“KASA!” shouted the Uchiha boy as he darted out onto the field with his sharingan ablaze. He activated his eyes halfway through the match when Kasa started her war of explosions; it would’ve been near impossible to keep track of the brash girl otherwise.

The older teen turned to walk away as he approached Kasa’s body. His dark eyes met with Itachi’s angry red as the Uchiha slid to a stop and dropped to his knees to gather the motionless girl from the ground.

“Winner of the fifth match, Utakata of Kirigakure,” announced Kisame in amusement as the flurry of conversation swept through the audience.

Various levels of glee, intrigue and disbelief chattering swept through the stadium as they all started to heatedly talk about the matched that just passed. Itachi ignored all of it as he cradled the girl’s head in his arm and patted Kasa’s cheek in soft slaps, trying to get a response out of her. He nearly jumped when she gave a slight twitch and her unfocused blue eyes shifted with slow deliberate blinks.

“Kasa!” said Itachi as he cupped a hand on the side of her face so that she could focus on him. “Kasa can you hear me? Say something!”

She continued to blink, her eyes glassy and unfocused as she stared into his eyes with listless confusion. It was as if she didn’t recognize him. Her breathing rasped as she tried to talk, but it came out as strangled croaks.

“Hang on Kasa, I’ll get you to a medic. You’ll be fine. Just hang in there!” shouted Itachi as he shift his arms and moved to haul her off the ground.

However, before he could do as he promised, she raised a clumsy blood-drenched hand to his face, missing quite a few times as she struggled to cover her hand over his eyes.

“Don’t…” she rasped out weakly, hand shaking as she strained to keep her hand still.

“Save your energy, I’ll…” started Itachi, but froze when her hand slackened, dragging blood, her blood, down his face as it fell limply to the ground. “Kasa?”

Her breathing ceased and her head dropped against his arm in a deadweight. Even her brightly colored hair looked lackluster, sprawled over her face.

“No…no, no, no…” whispered Itachi in denial as he shook her lifeless body. “You can’t choose this one. Of all the stupid empty promises you made, you can’t choose to keep this one! Wake up you idiot! WAKE UP!”
With each shake, Kasa’s lifeless body moved like a ragdoll, remaining unresponsive to his calls. Her head lolled backwards against his arm when he finally stopped. His shoulders shook as he slid from his crouch and landed on the ground with her held in his arms.

“Itachi!” shouted Santa as he and Shisui jumped the railing of the viewing platform and sped to his side. “What are you doing? If we hurry, we might be able to…Itachi?”

“I…can’t feel her chakra anymore,” said Itachi, his voice low and quiet. The two tense and grew quiet at the news.

“T-that doesn’t mean anything!” said Santa, denial heavy on his voice. “We could just jumpstart her chakra and get it to flow again right? It’s not like—”

“She stopped breathing a while ago…” said Itachi, his voice cracking slightly as his bangs hung over his eyes. “With her chest wounds we won’t be able to resuscitate her with the standard CPR. She’ll bleed out if we tried.”

“Then we’ll find a damn medic and close the damn chest wound!” snapped Santa.

“It won’t matter if we find a medic for her now. Without her own chakra to help the process along, it’ll be too late by the time they’ve closed up the wound. She’ll be a vegetable when they resuscitate her,” said Itachi quietly.

“I refuse to believe that!” snarled Santa as he grabbed Itachi by the collar. “Why the hell are you giving up already? Do you think she would give up if it was any of us in her position? That idiot would do what she could to haul our asses back from the death’s door. She—”

A loud throat clearing interrupted their conversation before they turned to Kisame who had an amused expression over his face with his arms cross.

“Sorry to interrupt your little drama, but you brats need to clear the field for the next match,” drawled Kisame. “If you’ve forgotten, there’s still an exam going on.”

“You!” hissed Santa as he moved towards their proctor, but Shisui pulled him back. “Let go of me Shisui!”

“Santa stop it!” snapped Shisui.

“You should know the risk of taking these exams, no need to get angry over one single death,” said Kisame with his arms crossed and leaning back casually on one foot. “By the way, you’re going to have to get rid of that corpse.”

“You damn—” started Santa, but was interrupted.

“I’ll move her,” said Itachi as he started to get up. “Her death—”

He never finished as Santa broke free from Shisui’s hold and landed a solid punch to the Uchiha’s face. Itachi hastily grounded his stance and slid back from the attack, arms still carrying Kasa’s body as he stood.

“Santa what are you—” Shisui move to stop the blond, but the other’s glare stopped him in his tracks.

“You guys can continue with the damn exam, I’m going to save the idiot even if I have to do it alone!” snapped Santa as he hauled his teammate out of Itachi’s slackened arms and turned to
“Oh? Looks like you win by default, Shisui Uchiha,” said Kisame in amusement as he watched the blond run off with Kasa in his arms. He turned to Itachi next. “What about you boy? Will you continue on with the exam or will you forfeit as well?”

“No… I’m going to fight,” said Itachi as he swayed from his grounded stance and stood. His face was red from where Santa punched him.

“Itachi,” said Shisui worriedly as he reached for the young Uchiha, but the other dodged his hand and move forward.

“Her death,” continued Itachi, before Santa interrupted him. “Will not be written off as a mere casualty in this exam.”

“Just don’t let anger blind you Itachi,” said Shisui in warning as he dropped his hand and disappeared in a flurry of leaves.

“Blind me?” repeated Itachi in a whisper, his eyes blazing red as he watched his opponent return to the stadium once more. “My sight has never been clearer.”

“The seventh match, Utakata of Kirigakure versus Itachi Uchiha of Konohagakure,” announced Kisame. “Match start!”

“…Itachi’s angry,” said Kotetsu as he watched from the audience.

Down below, Itachi wasted no time as took the battle initiative and sped through the hand seals for the Grand Fireball jutsu. Utakata barely managed to roll out of the way as the searing heat raced towards him in the form of a large sphere of flames. Before he could even raise the pipe to his lips, Itachi appeared in front of him in an instant, lashing out with the violent Uchiha styled taijutsu.

“I don’t think angry is the right word,” added Izumo. “He looks more murderous to me.”

“I’m more surprise that Shisui’s so calm,” commented Muta as he adjusted his shades. “He’s normally so protective of Kasa.”

“Shouldn’t we follow Tokuma and go check on Kasa-chan to see if she’s okay?” interrupted Zaji worriedly. The group grew quiet at his words. “I mean… I know we’re not medics and we probably can’t do anything to help… but shouldn’t we at least… I don’t know… maybe find one of our senseis and try to do something?”

“They were watching the match too,” replied Muta quietly. “They’re likely already heading towards wherever Santa took her.”

“But…” protested Zaji weakly as he turned his attention back to the match. “What if she’s actually…?”

The unspoken word hung in the air and the group fell silent once more. The explosions from Utakata’s bubbles had started up once more and Itachi could be seen dodging and throwing shurikens at the floating explosives. His moves seemed to grow faster and more violent as the match went on, mixing ninjutsu, taijutsu and a variety of shuriken and wires attacks in quick succession, pushing Utakata into the defensive.

“…I’m going to go and see if there’s anything I could do to help,” said Zaji as he stood
from his seat, unable to sit still any longer. “Even if I couldn’t… I rather do something than nothing at all…”

As he ran off, Izumo sighed, running a hand through his spiky hair and moved to get up. Kotetsu shook his head and followed suit. They couldn’t sit by either. Muta on the other hand stayed seated and didn’t look like he was going to move anytime soon.

“Going to follow him?” asked Muta when they crossed their arms expectantly.

“Aren’t you?” retorted Izumo.

“I’ll let him find them first before I go after him,” answered Muta. “He has a better chance in finding them.”

“You tagged him with one of your bugs?” asked Kotetsu, uncrossing his arms in surprise.

“No point in all of us running blindly in search for them,” replied Muta before the two took their seats again.

“…Times like these,” murmured Izumo as he watched Itachi draw out his ninjato and charged at Utakata. “I wondered if more of us should’ve decided to learn iryo-ninjutsu like Kasa?”

“Obito, would you stand still already?” sighed Kakashi as he kept his arms crossed and watched the battle down below. “You’re going to wear a hole into the floor if you keep that up.”

“How could you be so calm?” snapped Obito, his foot tapping impatiently as he did his best to not run off in search of his little auburn-haired savior. “She could be dead for all we know.”

“You know as well as I do that we can’t run off randomly while here in Kiri and don’t forget, we have a job to do,” said Kakashi.

“Are you pulling the mission is above all nonsense again? Because if you are, I’m going to —” growled Obito.

“Even if we ran off to find her now, neither of us are iryo-nin. We won’t be able to do anything to help her,” said Kakashi.

“Argh! If only Rin or Tesuri-san were here right now!” groaned Obito as he ruffled his messy hair in frustration. “Damn this whole political bullshit! If the threat of war isn’t looming over our heads, Hokage-sama wouldn’t have ordered for all iryo-nins to remain on standby in case of an invasion!”

“It can’t be helped,” said Kakashi as he glanced to where Hiruzen sat. “With Hokage-sama out of the village like this, it’s necessary to fortify the village in any way possible. Besides, it’s probably best that Rin doesn’t come here.”

“I know but…” said Obito worriedly. “Kasa-chan wasn’t moving when she was carried out. I don’t think she was breathing.”

“Stop worrying, I’ve already sent someone to go check on her,” said Kakashi.

“Who?” asked the Uchiha with a frown.

“Our cute little kohai,” replied the silver-haired jounin cheerily. “Hokage-sama did bring him along for a reason.”
“Geh…” blanched Obito as he rubbed the goosebumps from his arms. “Seriously, you’ve got to stop this new happy personality you have going on here. It’s creepy!”

“How?” asked Kakashi with a wry grin.

“Because you’re starting to sound like a creepy pedophilic stalker,” said Obito as he pointed at his teammate with an accusing finger. He found a fist punching him in the back of his head seconds later. “Ow!”

“Stop being an idiot,” said Kakashi as he reverted back to his usual bored indifference as he pulled his fist back.

“I’m just calling it as I see it,” grumbled Obito as he rubbed the dull ache away. His face grew solemn as his gaze returned to the match. “Itachi’s pissed.”

“You were no different when it came to Rin,” said Kakashi.

“Maybe so… but,” murmured Obito as he focused on the fighting Uchiha down below. “I didn’t drag out the fight.”

“You’re furious,” drawled Utakata as he blocked Itachi’s ninjato with his pipe and leaned close to whisper into the younger boy’s ear. “Was that girl important to you?”

Itachi let out a roar as he pushed back against the older genin, slashing at the teen as he retreated. Utakata sidestepped, dancing out of the young Uchiha’s way in a manner that almost resembled his previous opponent. At the sight of his sly smile, it seems he was emulating Kasa’s movements on purpose to rile Itachi.

“It would seem so, with that type of reaction,” said Utakata as he swept a hand back, allowing his sleeves to fall and smooth out against his arm. “It’s really a pity that the match with her had to end the way it did. She would’ve grown into quite a beauty, don’t you agree?”

“…If you’re trying to rile me with your words, you can save your breath,” whispered Itachi.

“You say that, but your eyes betray you,” chuckled Utakata as he noted the furious eyes hidden behind Itachi’s bangs. “Such cold fury… if that’s your reaction to me simply killing her… I wonder what reaction you would have, had I done more?”

“Enough,” said Itachi as he adjusted his grip on his ninjato and held it in front of him in a starting stance. “I’ve said before, such tactics won’t work on me.”

“Are you sure about that?” Utakata smiled as he placed his pipe to his lips.

Itachi crouched with one hand open between the blade and his face. Glancing between his fingers, he used his hand as a distance gage between him and the Kiri-nin. He frowned when he noticed Utakata taking his time to send out his bubble attacks. The older teen was planning something, but he has no clue to what the other was thinking. A trap? A bluff?

“Don’t…” The familiar broken voice whispered.

“Kasa.” His eyes widened as the bubble from the pipe slowly formed and materialized into the likeness of the auburn-haired girl.
“Don’t what, I wonder?” said Utakata as he brushed his fingers under the chin of the bubble clone, tilting the fake Kasa’s chin up in an intimate manner. “Don’t look?”

Itachi lowered his gaze as his grip tightened on the hilt of his blade.

“Don’t cry?” continued Utakata as he cupped a hand over the clone’s face and brushed his thumb over its eye. “Or maybe…Don’t…die?”

“Stop…” whispered Itachi.

“Hmm?” hummed Utakata softly as his fingertips ghost over the clone’s pale face in a gentle caress. “Ah, maybe she was trying to warn you to not end up like her.”

“Stop acting like you know her!” growled Itachi as he finally snapped and the tomoes shift into the shape of a three-point shuriken. “TSUKUYOMI!”

“Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!” snapped Santa as he raced through the halls, skidding to a stop whenever he found himself in a crossroad. “Where the hell is the infirmary?”

“Santa!” shouted Tokuma’s voice from behind.

“Tokuma!” said Santa in relief as his teammate raced to catch up with him. “Hurry, do you know where the infirmary is? I don’t know how much longer she has, we have to hurry.”

“Let me see,” said his pale-eyed teammate as he reached for Kasa’s face, lifting her eyelids to inspect her eyes and moving his other hand to her neck to check for a pulse.

“She’s stopped breathing a while ago already and Itachi said he couldn’t feel her chakra. We can’t waste any more time, she needs treatment now!”

“Give her to me,” said the Hyuga. “I’ll take her to infirmary, you go get sensei.”

“What? But—” Santa frowned as the other interrupted.

“Didn’t you say there’s no time? It’ll be faster for me to—”

“Who are you?” growled Santa as he took a step back, holding Kasa closer to his chest.

“What are you talking about? I’m—”

“You think I can’t recognize my teammate from someone using a simple transformation jutsu?” said Santa with a glare. “I don’t have time to deal with you, get the fuck out of my way!”

“Tsk… I forgot, you’re a sensor,” said the other with his teammate’s voice as he pressed the tips of his fingers to his brow. “I was hoping to take her without making a ruckus, but it seems like I have no choice. I’ll just do it here.”

“You think I’m going to give up my teammate, you’ve got another thing coming!” snapped Santa.

“Can you really afford to fight me with her dying in your arms?” sighed the stranger.

Santa gritted his teeth. The stranger was right, if he fought him now, there will be no saving Kasa. Whatever slim chance there might be would be gone if he stopped to fight here. There must be something he could do to get away. He can’t just let the idiot die! He just—He never got the
chance to make up his mind as a sharp pain plunged into his neck. His eyes widened as he lost all motor control and dropped to the ground in a motionless heap, much like his teammate.

“W-what?” croaked out Santa as the other came closer and hauled Kasa out of his arms. He then laid her on the ground next to him and yanked out the senbon in her neck. With a Kirii-issued kunai in hand, he started peeling away her clothes and cutting away the blood soaked undershirt. What the hell was this bastard doing?

“Tsk, no time for gentle tenderness,” said the fake as he placed one hand onto Kasa’s stomach and slid his other over her bare chest.

“D-don’t tou…ch her.” Santa forced out as his vision started to fade.

“You’re still conscious?” grumbled the other in annoyance before he noticed the blond struggling to keep his eyes open. “No matter, you don’t have long anyway.”

“Ka…sa…” struggled Santa one last time as his vision blurred and all he saw before the world disappeared around him was the fake with Tokuma’s face with one hand still on Kasa’s chest while the other moved to cradle her head as he lowered his face to hers. Damn it… how could he have let this happen?

A loud scream ripped through the stadium, surprising the audience as they watched Utakata drop to his knees screaming. To them, it seemed like one moment he was taunting Itachi and the next he was writhing on the ground against an invisible tormentor. For Itachi, he spent seventy-two hours with the older teen, implementing whatever punishment he could on the other.

…but it wasn’t enough.

Kisame raised a brow when the younger boy dragged his feet to Utakata in almost a zombie-like state and reached down to haul the screaming teen up by the collar.

Itachi said nothing as he pulled his fist back and delivered blows into the older teen’s face, over and over again. Utakata’s screams slowly turned into gurgles as his face became bloodied and broken. At first the audience cheered at such brutality, but the cheers soon stopped when they realized Kirini-nin was no longer retaliating. Even so, Itachi continued, his mechanical punches smashed into the other’s face over and over again.

His eyes remained wide, with his sharingan still in its changed state. Utakata struggled to breathe through his broken nose with each additional blow, but Itachi didn’t pay that any mind as he continue. The cold fury he felt for the older teen was all but gone. Even though he had tormented him for seventy-two hours straight and beaten him to the inch of his life, it didn’t satisfy him in the least.

“Don’t…” Her voice echoed in his mind.

Utakata did bring up a valid point in that he had no clue what she meant when he forced out her last word. Don’t let her death be in vain? Don’t lose? Don’t let him get away? He drove his fist into Utakata’s face as the thoughts invaded his mind. He would never know what she wanted to say to him because of this bastard. Blood splattered against his face as his fist smashed into the blood pooling from the older teen’s face.

“Enough,” said a low voice as a hand caught Itachi’s wrist when he pulled his fist back for another blow.
“He didn’t forfeit,” said Itachi, his eyes never moving from the older teen. “And I haven’t killed him either.”

“He’s unconscious,” said the man. “The match is over.”

“The proctor didn’t call an end to the match,” said Itachi with cold indifference.

“The kid’s right,” said Kisame in amusement. “I haven’t stopped the match yet, Ao-san.”

“Kisame,” said the man coldly. “The moment I step onto the field, the match is a forfeit. End it.”

“You do know you’re breaking protocols by doing this,” drawled Kisame.

“Now,” said Ao firmly.

“All right,” sighed Kisame as he glanced towards Itachi. “Sorry kid, I would’ve let you go on to your heart’s content, but rules are rules.

 “… I understand,” said Itachi as his grip on Utakata’s collar slackened and he dropped the older teen.

“Ao-san?” drawled Kisame before the blue-haired man released the younger boy’s wrist. “Victor, Itachi Uchiha of Konoha.”

“You are a formidable shinobi,” said Ao as he knelt down to pick Utakata from the ground. “However, you won’t be able to get by forever if you allow your emotions to dominate your actions.”

Itachi said nothing as he turned his eyes to the blue-haired man next. However, before he could do anything, a hand reached from behind him and covered his eyes.

“Don’t,” said Shisui quietly in warning.

Itachi clenched his fists as he stood, slapping his hand away as he turned to the older Uchiha with a glare. Shisui returned the look with a calm stare before he turned to Ao with a respectable dip of his head.

“You advice is much appreciated, he will keep that in mind,” said Shisui.

“Hmm, you younger generation isn’t as hopeless as I thought,” smirked Ao in amusement as he carried Utakata out of the stadium.

“Shisui,” said Itachi with a low growl, but the other said nothing.

“Well, since both of you are in the stadium already, we might as well start the last match,” said Kisame as he glanced at the two with a fanged grin.

“Shisui,” repeated Itachi as he took a step closer, but the older Uchiha continued to ignore him.

“We’re ready whenever you are,” said Shisui politely.

“Shisui,” said Itachi one more time as the other left his side and walked a respectable distance. “Why are we still…?”

“Itachi, fight me,” said Shisui calmly as their sharingans met.

“I don’t understand,” said Itachi, his voice was so raw that he could barely get his words out. “How can you still go on with this so calmly? Kasa… she’s…”

“You can’t even bring yourself to even say she’s dead,” said Shisui as he fell into an Uchiha-styled taijutsu stance. “Do you think she’ll be happy to know seeing you like this?”

“But—” started Itachi.

“Just because she’s dead, doesn’t mean you can ignore her feelings!” snapped Shisui as he darted forward, throwing the first punch.

“Why does it matter?” retorted Itachi, instinctively responded with a block in turn and sent out a kick of his own. “She won’t ever be able to get angry! She won’t ever be able to give us her pointless threats! She won’t be able to laugh, cry or do any of that! She’s not with us anymore!”

Shisui caught Itachi’s leg and used the momentum to swung and throw the younger Uchiha across the stadium. Itachi twisted his body in mid-air and landed with a slide as he grounded himself. It took no more than a second before he charged at Shisui again, throwing punches and kicks. The older Uchiha retaliated in turn, blocking each attack he made before promptly dropkicking him to the ground.

“So you’re going to forget about her instead?” said Shisui, his red eyes staring down at him.

“F-forget her?” grunted Itachi as he pushed himself off the ground. “I’m not—”

“Then what was the last thing she said to you before she left for her match?” asked Shisui.

“It’s…” Itachi paused, frowning as he tried to think back, but his mind was blank.

“You can’t remember it can you?” noted Shisui. “With how clouded your mind is with anger, can you see anything beyond her death?”

“What about you?” snapped Itachi, shaking his head as he charged at Shisui with another attack. “How are you taking her death so calmly? Maybe you’re the one that’s forgetting her!”

“Her last words to me was that my match was not interesting enough for her to kill me,” said Shisui quietly as he redirected Itachi’s attack. “Before that, I asked her to wish me luck for my match and she said no. Last night, before dinner, when we all returned from training, she gave each of us a healing session to relieve the tension in our muscles in preparation for today’s matches. Santa in particular got a tongue lashing because he managed to pull a muscle.”

Confusion crossed Itachi’s face as a silent question lingered in the air, his assault stopped when Shisui smiled and chuckled at the memory.

“You asked if I forgotten her,” said Shisui with a melancholy smile. “I remember her clearly, but do you, Itachi?”

“I…can’t,” admitted the younger Uchiha quietly, frustration driving him mad as he pressed the palms of his hands against his eyes. “I can’t see beyond her dying face. All I could think about
right now is to make him pay."

“No, you’ve already wasted enough chakra,” answered Itachi as he gathered himself. “It’s
time we left this genjutsu.”

“Ah, when did you realize?” asked Shisui sheepishly.
“Just because I’m seeing red, doesn’t mean I won’t notice the world turning red around me,” replied Itachi.

“Ah,” nodded Shisui. “Tsukuyomi does have a tendency to not work very well on people who knows how to use it.”

“Let’s finish this match quickly,” said Itachi as he laced his fingers together. “Kai!”

“Match start!” announced Kisame as the illusionary world disappeared.

Tenzo frowned as he sped through the stadium halls. Where on earth did that Santa run off to? He had already checked the infirmary, but there was no sight of either of them. Did the blond get lost? Kasa didn’t look very good when he left the arena, hopefully she wasn’t doing too poorly.

Had he not faced Kasa in battle once before, he would have no clue why the hokage would add him to the roster to attend the exam finals. With the impending war, he would be more useful back in Konoha to fortify the village defenses. However, due to Kasa’s pseudo-jinchuriki status and Kiri’s strong desire to retrieve their three-tailed demon, he was asked to tag along in case Kasa for some reason had a demonic outbreak. With Kushina and Rin unable to leave the village, he was the only other person that could possibly subdue Kasa if that happened.

“Just where—” the words died on his lips when he felt a presence. Immediately, he subdued his own presence and pinned himself to the wall. Carefully and with utmost silence, he snuck a glance around the corner and what he saw almost forced him out of hiding.

Unconscious on the ground was Santa, but what had his attention was Tokuma hovering over Kasa with his hands over her bare body and his lips firmly over Kasa’s. His hand seemed to trail from her stomach to her chest as he pulled back. With one hand on her chest, the other slid up to her neck, holding it in almost a caressing manner.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” snapped Zaji as a quick figure darted from the other side of the hall and kicked Tokuma away from her body. He hastily crouched over Kasa, pulling her clothes shut while the… other Tokuma?

Two? A fake? Tenzo frowned as he watched the one that had hovered over Kasa crawl to his feet. His chakra must be impeccable to be able to maintain a transformation jutsu after a hit like that.

“How tedious,” grunted the fake as he wiped away the trail of blood from the corner of his lips. “I’m not even done yet.”

“You vulgar low-life,” growled Tokuma, his hands out and ready in a battle stance.

“Tokuma! Santa’s not breathing!” shouted Zaji after he reached over to check on the blond.

The Hyuga’s eyes widened in surprise as he glanced back, but in the moment he did so, the fake pulled out more senbons and chucked it at them.

“Watch out!” shouted Zaji, but before the senbons could connect a large branch shot between them and the projectile.

“Wood release?” said the fake in surprise before he jumped to his feet and dodged the next attack from Tenzo.
“That’s as far as you go,” said Tenzo as he appeared in front of the ground with his branch wall separating the fake from the others.

“Tsk,” hissed the fake as he clicked his tongue before he tossed a smoke bomb and fled.

Any other time, Tenzo would’ve pursued, but the priority were the genins behind him. He hastily jumped over his branch and landed next to Tokuma whose byakugan was active and looking over his fallen teammates.

“How are they?” asked the older teen as Tokuma did his survey.

After a moment… the Hyuga sighed, dropping to his knees and dipping his head. Tenzo found his heart drop to his stomach as he stared at the unmoving redhead on the ground. This can’t be happening.
“Ouch, Itachi’s brutalizing that guy’s face,” grimaced Kotetsu.

“I think he’s going to kill him,” said Izumo, sharing a similar expression as his teammate.

“Hmm?” said Muta as he raised a finger for his messenger fly to land on. “Looks like Zaji found them.” “Okay, then what are we waiting for?” asked Izumo as he stood, but Muta made no move to follow.

“Muta?” questioned Kotetsu when he noticed the other’s stillness. “What’s wrong?”

“…Kasa and Santa’s dead,” whispered Muta.

“What?” the two nearly pounced him. “What do you mean they’re dead?”

“Looks like Santa was ambushed,” murmured Muta. “Tokuma’s with Zaji and they’re fighting…Tokuma?”

“How does that even make sense?” asked Kotetsu.

“Likely a fake,” said Muta as he got up. “We should assist them.”

“Wait, that’s it?” asked Izumo. “There’s nothing else?”

“They were in the midst of battle when the messenger came back. Likely because they’re in trouble. We should hurry.”

“Damn it! It’s just one thing after another isn’t it?” grumbled Izumo as he and Kotetsu followed the bug user and ran out of the audience stands and into the stadium’s halls.

“Neither of them have chakra… Not only that, but there’s a taint in Kasa’s pathways. Likely residue from that lowlife,” whispered Tokuma with his head down and fists clenched in anger. “It’s not enough that they killed her, but… just what the hell was that bastard planning to do with her body?”

“Residue?” repeated Tenzo with a frown as he reached out. “What sort?”

“Don’t get me wrong,” interrupted Zaji as he pulled Kasa back protectively. “We’re grateful for your help, but who are you?”

“A friend,” answered Tenzo, dropping his hand when he noticed the younger teen growing hostile. “Kakashi senpai sent me to check on her, but… I guess I wasn’t much help after all.”

Sullen with at auburn-haired girl’s death, he glanced down at her unmoving form. If not for the blood on her, she looked almost like she was sleeping. The lack of expression on her face was a strange sight, especially since she’s always forcing herself to show something on her face to hide what she was truly feeling. To some people, it may seem like she wore her heart on her sleeve, but for those who knew her, her heart was something she guarded it with great fervor.

“Who would’ve thought, I would lose two teammates to the same technique on the same day?” murmured Tokuma as he yanked out the senbon from Santa’s neck and glanced at the metal
“And to think, it was so harmless when Kasa used it…”

“Tokuma…” said Zaji quietly.

“With how she fights, I really wonder why she decided to specialize in iryo-nin jutsu,” murmured Tokuma as he tossed the senbon aside. “That stupid berserker.”

“I don’t think that’s a stupid decision on her part,” said Tenzo as he removed his branch from the hall. “If she is a berserker and she’s aware of it, I could see why she would choose iryo-ninjutsu. After all, being medic requires fine control and concentration. Kiri’s hunter-nins are a prime example in that they…”

“She’s dead,” snapped Tokuma, ignoring the pensive expression that crossed the older teen’s face. “No amount of training could fix—”

“H-hey! What are you—” protested Zaji when Tenzo reached down to touch Kasa’s neck and slid down a bit below the loose kimono robe.

“Still warm,” said Tenzo as he moved to pull her robe open.

“They haven’t been dead that long, of course they’re still warm,” snapped Zaji as he tried to pull Kasa’s robe close once more, but Tenzo ignored his attempts and ripped it open.

“Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?” growled Tokuma as he grabbed Tenzo by the shoulder.

“You said there was residue energy in Kasa,” interrupted Tenzo. “How much of it was there? And Santa are you sure he has no chakra? Or is it just suppressed? The hunter-nin in Kiri has a technique that could force a target into a fake death state. Are you sure he didn’t use that one him? Senbons as a rule of thumb are rarely used in combat because of the miniscule damage it does.”

Tokuma frowned, confused by the sudden question, but activated his Byakugan once more to check. The taint residing in Kasa hasn’t lessen, still remain with no changes. Santa on the other hand, his core seemed to be sparking as if trying to relight a dying flame.

“H-he has chakra!” shouted Tokuma as he darted to his fallen teammate and worked on trying to force his tenketsu open to assist the struggling spark.

“Seriously!?” shouted Zaji in surprise.

Tenzo used his distraction to pull away the robe he tried so hard to keep covering Kasa. Even without the robe, there was enough blood on her chest to keep anyone from actually seeing anything. Not that there’s much to see on an undeveloped nine-year-old. Placing a hand down on the motionless girl’s chest, he felt for the puncture wounds she gained from her earlier fight, but what found instead surprised him.

“Defibrillation Jutsu?” said Tenzo in surprise.

Between the spar he shared with her during her evaluation and her father’s threatening nature, he was quite intimate with the experience of how the jutsu felt by proximity. The fact he felt it on her, meant the fake was trying to restart her heart and resuscitate her. The taint Tokuma spoke of was Sanbi’s chakra, the fake was trying to draw the demonic chakra out… if he succeeded the chakra in Kasa’s body would’ve circulated once more and… she could’ve been… A cold chill went up his spine when realization set in.
“…What have we done?” whispered Tenzo in horror.

“Kakashi,” whispered Obito as the fight below started.

“I’ve noticed, Itachi’s calmed down,” replied the silver-haired jounin, narrowing his single visible eye at the Uchiha boys down below. “…A bit too fast for someone who was beating the Kiri-nin to a bloody pulp just a moment ago.”

“Well, Itachi’s always been a composed kid. Regardless what pranks Kasa tries to pull on him, he never reacts,” commented Obito, leaning on the railing with his arms hung over the side. “Though… I don’t think he managed it on his own.”

“Hmm?” hummed Kakashi as he glanced at his teammate at the corner of his eye.

“In general, most Uchiha children are encouraged to not make friends outside of the clan until they’ve become genin. Simply because of the clan standard, if your peers can’t join you on the field, they’re not worth keeping,” said Obito as he glance at the two down below. “While they’re quite close to Kasa and possibly Hana whenever she’s around, prior to the academy and Kasa’s arrival to Konoha, likely those two only had each other for company.”

“So you’re saying Shisui somehow calmed Itachi in the span of seconds before their proctor announced their battle,” noted Kakashi. “Is that even possible?”

“Who knows,” Obito shrugged. “Maybe they’re created some psychic link between them. I wouldn’t be surprised considering they’re pretty much ranked as prodigies with their earlier graduation. Only a year older than you when you graduated to genin.”

“If you’re using age as a bases to being a prodigy, then Kasa technically is one too,” said Kakashi. “Even if she is a dead last, you’ll have to admit, not many people, especially one at her age could master iryo-ninjutsu as quickly as she has and with how she fought just now. If she could get over whatever’s keeping her from fighting full on, she might be more useful as a combat specialist rather than a medic.”

“Amazing isn’t she?” grinned Obito. “To think she was just a scared little girl when I met her in a pile of rubble.”

“And now, she’s become the Crimson Terror that traumatizes near every person she meets,” drawled Kakashi, causing the Uchiha to snigger.

“I thought you said that title didn’t suit her,” chuckled Obito.

“Only to those who doesn’t know her,” said Kakashi as he rested one arm on the railing. “It’s a strong moniker if she decides to switch specialization.”

“Oh? Are you trying to steal Kasa for Anbu’s Black Ops?” said Obito as he glanced back at his teammate. “Her father’s going to kill you if you did that.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about it,” replied Kakashi. “As long as I get Kushina-san on my side, her father won’t do anything.”

“Kushina-san is scary as always,” sniggered Obito. “Maybe it’s an Uzumaki thing… Man, I hope she’s okay. How long ago did you send Tenzo to check on her?”

“Out of curiosity, if Shisui and Itachi are the closest to each other, who do you think is
“Hmm?” Obito glanced to his silver-haired teammate with a curious glance. “What brought that question on?”

“Humor me,” said Kakashi.

“Uh…” pondered Obito as he scratched his chin thoughtfully. “Good question. She seems to be able to get along with almost everyone… well, everyone sans the people she scares anyway… So… I guess everyone and no one at the same time?”

“That’s a not a valid guess,” said Kakashi in a deadpan.

“Then who do you think is the closest to Kasa?” huffed Obito.

“Who I think is closest to her?” replied Kakashi as he pretended to think. “Probably you.”

“Eh? Me?” said Obito in surprise.

“I never said it was an insult,” said Kakashi.

“Huh?” said Obito in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Kakashi said nothing as an amuse grin crossed his lips and he returned his attention to the fight between the Uchiha boys once more. Only Kasa and Obito’s crazy enough to risk their lives to protect people they care about and still be oblivious how they affect everyone around them. Maybe she’ll share his inability to stay dead as well.

“Argh! I really don’t understand you sometimes,” sighed Obito in annoyance as he turned his heel to leave.

“Where are you going?” droned Kakashi.

“To the bathroom, do I need to report that to you too?” grumbled Obito as he stomped off.

“Don’t take too long,” said Kakashi offhandedly even though he knew full well, the closest bathroom was in the other direction.

It’s so dark… so quiet… I hate it!

I can’t feel anything. I can’t move anything. I’m not even sure if I’m breathing at this point. It was hard to tell whether I’m dead or alive. Was this the afterlife? This void of dark nothingness. I wanted to scream, but my voice was nowhere to be found.

It’s frustrating to be so trapped and powerless. Just where am I? Am I stuck in limbo? Are the fates laughing while I’m stuck here, in this world between worlds while they decide where to throw me next? The thought was no reassuring. The last time I died, I ended up in a new world with a new body. Relearning how to use basic motor skills was torturous on its own and forging new bounds with complete strangers was an exhausting task that I really have no interest in doing.
To be honest, I’m a little grateful that I ended up in Naruto’s world of all places. While there was an impending doom looming over this world in another ten years’ time, it was the fact that I knew what to expect that kept me from going mad from my first death. Surprising what tunnel vision and the will to survive could do to keep a person from a mental break down. Thinking back on it now, it’s frightening how much it suppressed.

The shock of dying, the shock of losing everything you know and love… It oddly sounds like I’m the last survivor of something rather than a corpse. If I could sigh, I would do so. After all, one could only be in panic and distress for so long before it becomes boring.

Yes, I know. I just said I’m bored of mental breakdowns. I wonder if this was what vampires felt when everyone dies around them and the world moves on. I really hope I don’t end up in another body again. I don’t think I can handle growing up a third time, especially when advantage of the knowledge I have from my previous life was fading. Who knows where I would end up next.

… No point in thinking about now. If it happens, it happens. I just hope my luck in the next life isn’t as psychotic as this one…

Spark

Huh? Confusion crossed my mind as I wondered if that spark was part of my imagination. I haven’t felt or saw anything thus far while being here in this void. Was it a sign that it’s time for me to move on?

Spark

There it is again, but it’s nothing like the light at the end of a tunnel… it’s more like…

Spark

Pulses?

Spark…pain…

P-pain? My stomach burned as the sparks continued, each time growing brighter than the last. It was like… trying to light wet tinder and the flames refused to catch on. Each time the spark came, the light wavered and was quickly snuffed out by the darkness. My chest burned with each dying spark and the void became suffocating. I desperately wanted to gasp, to wheeze, anything for a breath of air, but I could do none of those as panic set in.

A breath…

If I could gasp, I would, but I still couldn’t move a muscle. As the air flooded my lungs, the spark caught on and I felt everything burn as it pulsed through my body. I recognize this burn… I’ve felt it so many times before whenever I lose myself. It was chakra… Isbou’s chakra.

I’m… still alive?

My eyes snapped open, accompanied by my blood-curling scream as the demonic chakra invaded my body once again. Like the opening of a floodgate, the chakra poured out in an uncontrollable torrent. I thrashed, writhing and clawing at my body in agony as the transparent cloak of chakra blanketed over my body.

Gasping, I pressed my hand against my chest where the pain burned strongest and found the wounds hissing close. This pain… it hurts so much more than being stabbed by Yugito or blown
I rather be dead than endure this pain…

It’s their fault…

What?

It’s their fault that you’re in pain.

Their?

The bastards from Konoha.

Who?

The Konoha council, the Hokage, the senseis, your teammates. They’re all at fault. If it wasn’t for them you wouldn’t be here in this exam. If it wasn’t for them, you wouldn’t have to suffer through this painful revival.

But it’s my own fault that I ended up dying.

Is it really? If it wasn’t for them, you wouldn’t be in this exam. If it wasn’t for Itachi, you wouldn’t be in the finals. Have you thought of why you were placed in this situation in first place?

Why? Wasn’t because we worked well?

Are you really that naïve to believe that lie? Have you forgotten why Kiri and Konoha is in conflict in the first place?

…It’s because I carry Isobu’s chakra? But I’m not even a real—

Does it matter? Why would they send you here when they know for a fact that Kiri wanted the demon? You’re being used. You’re nothing more than a puppet, a tool. Do you really think you have any true value to them? How much are you worth? The truth? Nothing. You’re worth nothing to them.

I’m worth…nothing?

As you’ve said, you’re a fake. Who would want a fake?

But Kurei sensei said…

You trust him? He’s just the same as the others, lying to you with false compliments and stringing you along like a good puppet master.

Then all those words…

And all that training?

As if you really needed that training. He just wanted you to get over your inability to kill. If you were willing to kill, would you think those two would’ve stood a chance? You would’ve just killed them before the finals began and be done with it. Only idiots would fight opponents head on when there are easier ways to get the job done. You are no idiot. You’re just too kind.

Too kind?

They know this and abuse it. And they will continue to abuse it unless…
Unless…?

You show them why they should never cross you. Then they will stop. Don’t you want the pain to stop? It will stop once you kill—

F-fuck off.

What?

I might be delirious from the pain, but I know better than to fucking listen to a disembodied voice that pops up in my head telling me to kill people. Now get the fuck out of my head!

Tch, so be it, we’ll have to go about this the hard way.

Another scream ripped from my throat before another surge of demonic chakra hit me.

The sudden scream and surge of violent chakra startled Tenzo to back away as the red demonic chakra blanketed over her.

“What the hell?” said Zaji as he moved to grab Kasa, but Tenzo held out a hand to block him.

“If you value your life, don’t touch her right now,” said the older teen with a serious expression over his face.

“What’s happening? What’s that on her?” asked Zaji in a frantic, worried for the smaller girl as she thrashed and writhed on the ground, hands clawing at her chest and neck.

“It’s…vile,” said Tokuma raising a hand to his mouth as his eyes stared at the violent mass of energy. “I’ve never seen such repulsive chakra before.”

Kasa continued to scream as the chakra dragged her from the ground like a marionette’s puppet and hung her limply like a rag doll. They watched in morbid fascination as the wounds on her body burned away with a hiss before three transparent tails formed and curled around her legs and right arm like large pythons, forcing her to stand as the last hauled her upright.

“Dead…” whispered Kasa, strands of her auburn hair draped in a messy fashion over her face as her body hung unevenly. Her eyes glowed an eerie red, resembling nothing to her usual dark blue. “You’re all dead!”

“The both of you have to take Santa and retreat right now,” said Tenzo as he formed hand seals. “I’ll hold her off as long as I can.”

“But what about—” started Zaji, but was interrupted.

“Listen to him,” interrupted Kurei’s voice as he appeared in a body flicker. “Will you be able to contain her?”

“She never sprouted the full three tails before, but I’ll try,” grimaced Tenzo as he planted his hands to the ground. “Wood Release: Foo Dog Heads!”

“The pain will only stop when you’re all dead!” snapped Kasa, skipping out of the way the instant the wooden dog heads darted for her.

“Kasa, listen to me,” said Tenzo calmly as he chased her with his foo dogs. “You’ve just
suffered a great deal of injury, you're not in your right mind. If you just calm down—”

“Die, die, die!” screamed Kasa as she formed hand seals and the halls was flooded with
demonic chakra.

“Kasa!” shouted Tenzo, his foo dogs twirling and tangling into one another as they tried to
devour the surrounding demonic chakra.

Before any of them could make another move, decrepit looking fire dragon appeared
devouring mist and wooden dogs alike. Kurei grabbed hold of Santa’s unconscious body and pulled
back, while Tokuma, Tenzo and Zaji fled from the fiery attack. Following close behind, the demonic
tails flicked angrily behind Kasa as she pursued. Her dancing looked like something out of a
nightmare as the tails dragged her along.

“Tokuma? What the—” started Izumo when he rounded the corner.

“Holy shit! Kasa’s gone nuts!” shouted Kotetsu when he spotted the dangerous jinchuriki
behind them.

“Turn around and run!” snapped Zaji, but his warning came too late as another fiery
dragon came at them.

“Wind Release: Vacuum Sword!” shouted Hayama as he appeared, slashing at the fiery
dragon with his sword. The flames dispersed as Kasa was knocked back. She crouched with her
arms held defensively in front of her as she slid back, the cloak of demonic chakra flickering as it
took the brunt of the damage.

However, she was not given a moment to recover as Hizashi appeared next with his
byakugan fully activated and his fingers charged with chakra as he attempt to close off her tenketsu
points. Kasa hissed as she jumped backwards and spun a roundhouse kick. Hizashi managed to
dodge her foot, but not the chakra tail that followed. He raised an arm to guard as the tail knocked
him into a wall.

“Die,” growled Kasa her arm hung limply to her side as the chakra flaring dangerously
around her. The tails on her legs continued to drag her feet forward in almost a zombie-like manner.
Her eyes landed on them but it seem like she was all that focused.

“Kasa, snap out of it! We’re not going to hurt you!” shouted Tenzo as he took as step
forward, but the girl didn’t respond positively as the arm held by the tail raised and dragged her body
into another dance. He barely formed the hand seals in time to create a branch as a flame dragon
crashed into it.

“What’s gotten into her?” whispered Zaji, torn between fleeing and staying to help.

“All of you move a safe distance away,” ordered Hayama as he adjusted his sword once
more. “There’s no reasoning with her anymore.”

Kasa snarled in an animalistic manner as she redirected the dragon once more, but only to
get it sliced down by Hayama again.

“Are you going to kill her?” asked Tokuma with a frown when the wind attack knocked
her back again.

“If we can’t subdue her…” murmured Hayama quietly with a grimace.
“I won’t let it come to that,” said Tenzo as he glanced back to them. “We’ll try to save her, but we can’t do that if we need to protect all of you. Now re—”

A violent whirlwind whipped up in the middle of the hall, knocking everyone into a wall and keeping them anchored and unmoving. With how unstable the winds were, the weak gaps of air in between were near impossible to judge for an escape. The tails continued to drag her body forwards as it forced her to continue the sloppy dance.

“Ka…sa…” strained Tenzo fighting against the wind and sound vacuum to get his voice to the girl.

“Die,” whispered the girl when she reached him, the arm wrapped by the chakra tail raised to swipe him.

“Kasa!” snapped Obito’s voice as he appeared behind her catching her wrist before she could deliver a killing blow. A grimace crossed his face as the demonic chakra burned his hand.

“Obito senpai?” said Tenzo as the wind stopped and dropped everyone to the ground.

The girl roared as she jumped and swung around to kick him, but he caught her leg as well.

“What has gotten into you? Why are you… what the?” said Obito in surprise when he saw her eyes. In place of her usual dark blue eyes were the familiar red sharingan with three tomoes.

“She’s mine,” snarled out the girl in a dangerous whisper as the other leg swung to kick him. Her arm cracked loudly as she moved in an inhuman angle to deliver the attack.

Obito released her arm to catch the other leg and held her at an arm’s length away as she hung upside down, the tatter robe and remains of her top slipping off her arms, leaving her topless with blood as her only cover.

“Tenzo! Hurry up!” snapped Obito as the tails moved from her legs and to her arms instead.

The wood release user quickly rolled to his knees and formed the correct hand seals before slamming them into the ground. “Wood Release: Foo Dog Heads!”

In seconds, the wooden dog heads sprouted from the ground and rushed out to latch onto the thrashing girl. Obito held on only long enough until she was pinned to the ground. One tail disappeared while the remaining two thrashed angrily as it fought to push the wood back.

“Hizashi-san!” shouted Obito before the Hyuga made his way towards the trapped girl and hastily jabbed several vital point in her back.

“No!” screamed the girl as another tail disappeared.

Obito knelt down grabbing her face as his single sharingan glared into the hazy pair that coated over her eyes. She didn’t have the sharingan, this was a possession. Someone with the sharingan was controlling her. “Kasa, don’t let this bastard take you. Break out of it.”

“No,” growled the girl, but her eyes flickered between blue and red. Her face contorted between anger and pain.

“I’m talking to Kasa, not you,” said Obito with a commanding tone. “Get out.”
“O-obi—” grunted the girl as the colors of her eyes flickered, rapidly changing colors.

“That’s right, you can do it,” said Obito encouragingly. His eye not wavering from hers as she fought.

“F-five… point…” she rasped out, teeth gritting as her eyes turned a solid red.

“Kasa!” shouted Obito, but the girl on the ground stared back with a glare.

“You may keep her for the time being, but she’ll be mine,” growled the voice before it flickered back to her usual blue.

“…Seal,” finished the girl before the final tail disappeared and she slumped to the ground in a motionless heap.

“…Is it over?” asked Tokuma warily as he and his fellow genins watched with wary eyes.

“She’s not moving,” murmured Zaji. “…Does that she’s dead again?”

“No,” said Tenzo, his hands still pressed on the ground and maintaining the foo dogs. “She’s still emitting a great deal of chakra. It’s dying down slowly, but she’s definitely alive.”

“…Kasa?” called out Obito when the girl still remained motionless. Her back was still exposed from when Hizashi sealed off her tenketsu and her right arm was red and swollen from the breakage.

“... You guys… are so dead…” whispered Kasa weakly as her body shook with a dark giggle.

“W-what?” The group tensed as they took a step back, readying themselves for another attack.

“Kasa?” whispered Obito in question. A frown marring his face as he was quite certain whoever it was that possessed her was gone for the moment. If it wasn’t the stranger than who…

“...Tou-san is so going to kill all of you when we get back,” said Kasa weakly as she opened her tired blue eyes with a smile.

“Pft, only you would make jokes after dying and getting possessed,” snorted Obito as he hugged his side laughing.

“…not much else I could do besides that,” said Kasa tiredly before groaning. “…Man, I could use a hot bath and a soft bed… ugh… everything hurts… why is living such a drag?”

Relief crossed the faces of the group while some released a breath they weren’t aware that they were holding. Kasa remained conscious for only a moment longer before she dropped into a motionless heap, breathing softly as she fell into a slumber. Tokuma shook his head in amusement as he untied his sash and shrugged off his outer robe.

“Even after all this chaos and destruction, you’re still the same damn idiot,” said her teammate as he pulled the robe over her bare body.

A faint smile crossed Kasa’s face as she slept on, unaware of the world around her.
Mind Games

To tell the truth, I can’t remember much of what happened once I fell into my impromptu nap. I swear the reaper must find my constant deaths hilarious, otherwise I think someone in the underworld is being a lazy prick and not doing their work to make sure I stay dead after being killed. Seriously, I practically threw myself gently into that good night without a fight. All they needed to do was reap my wretched soul and be done with it.

… Not that I want to be dead. If given the option, I would much rather not die in the first place. It seems like every time I “die” something bad would be waiting for me when I wake up. Last time was a marriage engagement and a hidden pass to for the Chunin exams, no doubt due to Tenzo’s high praise and my reckless abandonment for my own life. The time before that I became a pseudo-jinchuriki and eventually got kicked out of the village for a whole year… and before that, I ended with a new body in new world and… huh… actually if I think about it, it seems to get a little less bad every time I die… or am I being optimistic?

Come to think of it…

“Where the hell am I?” I wondered as I looked around me.

I stood in what seemed like the ruins of a hospital that’s been swallowed by nature. Trees and various other plants alike, grew and overtook its floors with roots and crept across the walls with vines. Sunlight peeked through the cracked ceilings from the floors above, lighting the ruined hallways. A frown crossed my face as I tried to make sense of the situation.

The last time I check, I was quite sure I passed out with no less than three senseis, six teammates, one ex-test subject and one Uchiha that might still have a chance of going bat-shit crazy if his love interest for some reason dies… so how exactly did I end up here without a person in sight? Not to mention, I have no freaking clue where here is.

It wasn’t until I raised a hand to scratch the side of my head that I realized something was off… my right arm was not broken. Blinking in surprise, I pulled it into view and inspected my arm curiously. Not only was it not broken, I was fully dressed in my own clothes again. If that’s the case…

“Genjutsu?” I sighed in exasperation, raising my two hands and lacing my fingers together. As if dying once today wasn’t bad enough already, I have to deal with another attack now? “KAI!”

The scenery remained the same.

“Uh…” I dragged out my drawl of uncertainty before furrowing my brows in concentration. “KAI!”

Nothing.

“Well, shit… I must’ve screwed myself when I used that Five-Point seal.” I muttered darkly, dropping my hands to my hips. “All right, you can come out now, I know you’re there. No point in hiding.”

Silence.

“Are we really playing this game?” I sighed in annoyance. When no one responded, I dropped my head in exasperation. “Fine, be like that.”
In normal circumstances, I would never allow myself to recklessly go along with something like this without knowing who the hell was on the other side, but who can really say anything circumstance I’m in is ever normal anymore? No chakra, no allies, no help. I’m on my own for this one, but oddly, I don’t feel the least bit terrified. For some reason, I don’t feel threatened at all.

If anything, I felt safe here. Completely, utterly safe… I didn’t even know that was possible anymore. Everywhere you turn in this world was a deathtrap waiting for you to stumble into and fall to your imminent death. I could count all the places I felt safe enough to pass out without a care in a single hand and none of those places had the same feeling as this place.

“Shit… this must be one badass genjutsu user… I am so screwed.” I muttered dejectedly… that lasted all of two seconds before I gave a careless shrug. “Oh well, what’s the worst that could happen? I’ve already died once today, what’s another visit from shinigami-sama?”

“You really are a reckless idiot aren’t you?” said a familiar voice. “Even if you think the situation is dire, you don’t have to announce it.”

“…Obito?” I said in confusion as I turned to the voice, but froze when I recognized the cloak he wore. “…No…”

“No?” asked the other with mild interest.

Black cloak with red clouds, Akatsuki. If his eyes weren’t white, I would say this would’ve been the original Obito before my interference. Did they pull this from my memory? And if they have, how much have they managed to see? This is bad, forget the hopeful optimism I had for surviving, I think I might have just doomed the world.

Shit! I should’ve invested some time in fortifying my mind, but how would I have gone about trying to do that? Not that it matters now! It’s too late! They know about Obito and Madara and…

Wait a second… a confused frown crossed my mind. If they did manage to pull this from my memory, they could’ve just played for time and just syphoned off everything without me knowing… Why would they bother showing me this incomplete version of Obito? Or… were they not able to get everything? Maybe I can salvage this.

“No… way!” My voice switched to an upbeat cackle before pointing at him with a grin. “You got stuck in this genjutsu too?”

The fake nearly face faulted at my blatant display of stupidity. I didn’t bother fighting back the grin on my face as I held my hands behind my head carelessly. It’s pointless to stay on the defensive if this is a genjutsu. I can’t defend against it regardless, so I’ll just play up the trusting idiot façade. No doubt, they’ve already labeled me as such already.

“How much of an idiot are you that you can’t even recognize your own mindscape?” sighed the fake.

“Mindscape?” I blinked, waving a finger around vaguely before excitement poured into my voice. “You mean… this is my mind palace? Holy shit! Does that mean I could be like Sherlock and store a shit ton of information? If that’s the case I could totally own people in trivia games!”

“Be serious for a minute can you?” snapped the other.

“This is my head, technically I am king here and I can do whatever I want!” I said with a
huff. “By the way, if this is my mindscape, why the heck is it a forest inside a hospital instead of palace? I see enough of both on a daily bases I don’t really need to see it some more while I’m in my own head.”

“You’re asking me? This is your head,” said the other in a deadpan. “I can’t change anything in it.”

“Then why are you here?” I asked. “If you’re a figment of my imagination, you’re hardly the most comforting person to have in my head. Hell, I’d pick someone else altogether!”

“And who do you think is most comforting in this situation?” asked the other with a raised brow.

“A giant Totoro of course!” I grinned. “Who else besides the fluffy king of the forest can soothe away your troubles and fear?”

“…Fluffy…king?” said the other before he pressed a hand against his head. “The amount of stupid you’re emitting is hurting my head.”

“Pft, if being in my head is hurting yours, then get out.” I stuck out my tongue childishly.

“You do know you were possessed not too long ago right?” said the other irritably. “How could you be this carefree? You should be trying to fortify your mind and keep intruders from invading.”

“And how exactly am I going to do that?” I replied bluntly. “I have no experience in the mind arts and frankly, you’re awfully pushy and nasty for someone who’s trying to help. If you treat me to ice cream, maybe I’ll think about it.”

“Only you would think of such asinine ideas, Na—” the fake cut himself off as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “Forget I said anything, let’s just comb through your mind to see if there’s any intruders.”

“Why would I want to do that with you? For all I know, you might be the intruder.” I huffed, but in the back of my mind I frowned at his little slipup.

Na? The possibility of what he was trying to say was near infinite, but my mind immediately jumped to Naruto. That can’t possibly be what he was trying to say, right? Naruto’s barely even three years old right now. There’s no way he would think to link me with… no, I might be over thinking this. He’s probably just trying to egg me on to get me to spill. This Obito is incomplete, which means whatever information he’s trying to use would be incomplete as well. I can’t let myself slip.

“…And you choose now of all times to be sensible?” said the fake in disbelief and annoyance.

“I’m a lady, of course I’m supposed to be sen—Hey! Where are you going?” I shouted as he started to walk away from me.

“Away before I catch your stupidity,” replied the other.

“You say this as if stupidity is contagious.” I grumbled as I jogged to chase after him.

I’m quite sure I’m trapped in a genjutsu, but at the same time, I can’t completely rule out that he might be telling the truth about this being my mindscape. If it’s a genjutsu, I have just walked
into them most obvious trap. However, if it really is my mindscape, letting him wander around on his own might be more hazardous than just talking to him. Who knows what he might unravel if let on his own? Why am I always stuck in these lose-lose situations?

“I thought you said I might be the intruder,” said the other dryly.

“Yeah, but I can’t let you just go through my mind! What if you found my porn stash?” I retorted.

This time the fake really did trip and fall flat on his face. For a fake... he’s surprisingly easily to startle and throw off. Was this a really convincing genjutsu? Or was he supposed to be a guide my mind decided to whip up to troll me?

“Why the hell would you have a porn stash? You’re nine!” snapped the other as he pushed himself up.

“Why can’t I have a porn stash?” I challenged. “It’s because I’m a girl isn’t it? You sexist chauvinistic pig!”

“No, it’s because I don’t want you looking at it!”

“Do you even know what the hell you’re talking about?” said the other in exasperation as he turned to face me.

“It’s my mind, of course I know what the heck I’m talking about.” I answered before an expression of realization crossed my face in an exaggerated manner. “Oh! I get it! You’re here for my yaoi collection! I’ll never let you have—”

THAWCK!

“Enough!” snapped the fake as he smacked me upside the head. “I swear if this is your idea of prank I’m going to wring your neck.”

“Geez, you have such a bad temper.” I grumbled, nursing the back of my head. “So what should I call you anyway Mr. Fake? Or should I just call you Mr. Fake? Because I totally know you’re not Obito!”

“Call me whatever you want!” snapped the other as he turned to walk off again.

I wasn’t sure if it was curiosity or stupidity that made me do what I did next, but...

“...Tobi.” I said out loud and the other froze and slowly turned to face me.

“Why... that name in particular?” asked the one I named Tobi.

“Why not?” I asked. “You said I can call you anything and since you look like Obito, but you’re not Obito... so... Tobi!”

“...That’s it?” asked the other.

“Yeah, why else would I call you that?” I asked with a curious tilt of my head, playing the naïve fool. “Do you know something I don’t?”

Tobi was silent for a moment before he turned around, letting out a sigh. “Never mind.”

I fell in step with him not a moment later, eyes trailing after him as he walked forward with determination. Though it looked like his eyes were glazed over as if he had cataracts, he had little to no trouble navigating around the halls.
“Out of curiosity, do you know where you’re going?” I asked. “You look rather blind.”

“I don’t need to see,” answered the other. “If it has your chakra and yours only, I’m not interested. I’m only searching for foreign chakra.”

“Hmm?” I hummed, allowing my eyes to trail over the main doors he passed. “There’s a lot of doors that doesn’t seem like it could be opened. Are they supposed to be like that?”

“They’re probably just old memories you don’t think about,” said Tobi as he continued forward.

“Old memories huh?” I murmured thoughtfully.

Most of them were quite old with the knobs rusted over and vines practically barring the door from entry. It was only due to mild interest that I walked up to one and ripped away some of the overgrowth, but what I found beneath it made me stumble back in surprise.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tobi.

“N-nothing… that door was mom’s…” I trailed off.

“Memories you don’t think about,” repeated the other as he continued on. “No one tampered with that one.”

“…Sure…” I murmured quietly, eying his back with caution.

The thing is, when I said mom… I wasn’t talking about Somoku Kaa-san… the door was labeled in English with my mom’s name, the one from my previous… shit… this might actually be my mind. No one should know the name, much less know how to write it in English. If he’s right, whatever I think about the most is likely free from all this overgrowth and making it immensely easy to come and go with ease.

Wait a second, he said foreign chakra. Does that mean he’s looking for Isobu? But his real form isn’t even in me. Unless… I felt my heart race and a chill go down my spine as a memory surfaced in my mind. The ten-tails… could be summoned even without the actual biju… What if… the reason he’s in here… is for that chakra?

The halls grew dark as the sunlight disappeared from the cracks and holes from the ceiling above. Tobi didn’t seem to notice the difference in lighting as he was likely blind, but it didn’t seem like the slight atmosphere change affected him in any manner. Since I can’t use any chakra… I’m defenseless here…

“…Are you okay?” asked Tobi quietly.

I snapped my head up in surprise at the words of concern. His voice gave away no indication of those words, but it was there. Why would a fake… be worried? Is he really an enemy? Or am I just naïve? Terror struck me when I couldn’t find my voice. Shit, I have to say something or else he’ll catch on that I’ve been just pretending this whole time. Come on, don’t freeze up here. Say something! Anything!

My mind was so overrun by terror that I almost didn’t notice the comforting hand resting on top of my head. Confusion crossed my face before he removed his hand and walked on. I found my body mechanically following him, still lost and confused. Why would he do that? Friend of foe… I can’t even tell anymore. I think I’m going to go insane soon if I have to decide. Neither of us said another word as we continued on.
The overgrowth slowly disappeared the deeper we went in and the halls became cleaner and better maintained as well. The names on the doors were all clearly labeled in English. A good number of them were all related to iryo-nin jutsu and various other kunoichi related skillsets I’ve learned over the years. What’s more surprising though were the amount of names on some of those doors and some of those names were repeated on other doors too.

At a closer look, I realized they were names of patients I’ve tended while in the hospital and the reason their names were listed on different doors was because they shared a similar diagnosis with other patients… I’m not sure if I can call this organized or disorganized. I have no problem figuring out how to navigate these rooms and find the info I want, but for someone else… hmm… this might be in my favor. If this order of disorganization was any indication anyone who comes in might not be able to make much sense of it unless they know both English and my personality catalogue preference.

My nerves settled some as we continued on. Tobi hadn’t stopped in any of the rooms, despite some of them were labeled with the names of several quite volatile individuals that can derail the entirety of this world’s timeline. When he passed the room labeled Uchiha listed with various names, I wasn’t sure if I should be relieved or concern. On the one hand, it showed he wasn’t interested in whatever information I had, on the other… it only reinforced my worry that he was after Isobu’s chakra.

SLAM! SLAM!

I snapped my head towards the sound of the noise as did Tobi. Worry crossed my face as we both made our way towards the sound. What on earth could cause that?

We ended up in front of double doors to what seem like an ER, except there were no knobs and a spiral seal over the split between the two doors with the Five-Point seal rings hanging in its outer rim. Painted across the two doors in a dramatic manner was the phrase “Already dead” in blood red… I have to say, my mindscape has a horrible sense of humor to make this seem like a post zombie apocalypse hospital. However, much to my surprise Tobi continued to walk on.

“Um…” I finally found my voice, but I was interrupted before I could say another word.

“It’s only your chakra in there. We don’t need to go in,” answered the other.

…My chakra? I glanced at the doors in disbelief. Shouldn’t that register as a foreign chakra since it is Isobu’s? Glancing back at Tobi’s retreating form, I chewed on my lower lip. If he really thinks it’s my chakra, I should probably no look at the gift horse in the mouth. This was my chance to retaliate and kick him out. While he went further and further down the hall, I moved to remove the Five-Point Seal on the door.

The banging ceased almost immediately, but to my surprise and horror, chakra rapidly seeped out from the edges. The first thought I had was “oh shit,” but that quickly faded when only a stream of soothing green chakra pooled at my feet… shouldn’t this be demonic chakra? Why would it be this peaceful? Unless… but then… Ugh, I’ll deal with it later. For now…

I laced my fingers together and shouted. “KAI!”

Even if this wasn’t a genjutsu, a strong cancellation could likely break whatever concentration of chakra from any external forces and kick out whoever’s in my head. Of course, there’s always a chance that their will is stronger than mine and it wouldn’t work, but at this point. I’m exhausted willing to go for any possibility. With the throbbing pain on my right arm as my guide I slowly drifted back into the world of consciousness.
…I don’t get how she left the stadium dead with chest wounds, but ends up surviving with a broken arm instead,” muttered a familiar soft voice as the soothing feeling of healing chakra coated over my broken right arm. “Who did you say healed her?”

…Wait familiar? Healing? In the haze of exhaustion and sleep, I tried to identify the owner of the voice and bolted when my brain finally made the connection. In my haste, I ended up colliding heads with my healer and the two of us ended up groaning and clutching our heads in pain as we fell back. Friend? Enemy? Frenemy? Why doesn’t anything make sense anymore?

“Ow… Kabuto, why is it every time I see you, one of us ends in a world of hurt?” I whimpered pressing my good hand against my pounding head as I finally gave up trying to determine whether he’s trustworthy or not.

At this point, I just wanted to go home. Foreknowledge in this situation was useless and doing nothing more than giving me a headache and seeping uncertainty and fear into my mind. Both I don’t need right now especially after the day I’ve had. Sometimes I wish I could just be a complete idiot like everyone thinks I am and just go with gut instincts. If only I really was an innocent and naïve child that could trust blindly.

“I’m quite sure you’re usually the cause for most of it, Kasa-san,” murmured the ash-grey haired boy, mirroring my movements in nursing his head as he dropped on his behind with one hand behind him to keep him up.

“Oh right, sorry about rain of hellfire. How’s your face?” I asked.

“I’ve… been better,” replied Kabuto with hesitant confusion, no doubt wondering why I wasn’t bombarding him with questions to why he was in Kiri the first place or whether he’s an enemy or something along the lines of that.

“Don’t worry about it, Kasa’s always like that,” answered Obito cheerily before I realized my head was on his lap. “How you feeling?”

“Like someone danced on my chest wearing spiked stilettos,” I grumbled before deciding to glance around the cramp room. “Where’s everyone?”

“Back in the stadium watching the closing ceremony. If too many of us congregate in one area, we’ll be seen as hostile,” answered Obito.

“But being seen with Kabuto is okay?” I asked pointing to Kabuto’s Kiri hiate with my good hand. “Wouldn’t he be in trouble?”

“I find it more interesting you’re not bothered by that at all,” said Kabuto quietly.

“As long as you don’t go bat-shit insane with an identity crisis and turn into Dr. Frankenstein. I don’t really care.” I chirped before raising my broken arm. “Fix this for me please?”

“You’re really odd,” said Kabuto as he moved to heal my arm. “And who’s this Frankenstein?”

“Ah, just a mad scientist that likes to play god.” I replied before I dropped back with a tired sigh, arm still in Kabuto’s healing hands. “Man, I’m exhausted.”

“Well, considering you just died and came back to life, I’m not surprised,” commented Obito.
“Yeah about that.” I stared up at the ceiling. “If I ever die for good. Please, do me a favor and burn my corpse into a pile of unrecognizable ash and spread it to the four corners of the world.”

“…That’s a bit extreme don’t you think?” asked Obito.

“You may say that, but I much rather not risk my luck and come back from the dead after that.” I retorted with a huff. “…Where are we anyway?”

“Janitor’s closet,” replied Obito cheerily. “Can’t have Kabuto get into trouble by healing you out in the open right?”

“Okay… Not exactly sure if this is the most sanitary place to be healing someone, but whatever.” I said before glancing at the two. “How do you guys know each other anyway?”

“It’s a story I rather not talk about,” said Kabuto with an impossibly cheerful smile that is no doubt fake.

“Only because you got—” sniggered Obito when the ash-grey haired youth shot him a dangerous smile.

“Obito-san, please kindly shut up,” said Kabuto pleasantly. “Otherwise I might incline to slip some laxatives into your regular diet in the near future.”

“Waaah, Kabuto-kun is scary,” said Obito jokingly. “And here I thought you loved me.”

“I don’t know how you deal with him Kasa-san,” said Kabuto haughtily.

“Hmm?” I hummed, glancing at the two in puzzlement before returning my gaze back to the ceiling again… I must’ve missed something big at some point if these two are friends. “I don’t know either.”

“Kasa!” whined Obito. “How come you never side with me?”

“Because she has sense,” answered Kabuto offhandedly.

“No one asked you, Kabuto,” huffed Obito.

Watching Obito’s one-sided argument made my mind trailed back to Tobi who I met inside my mind… I could feel my chakra undisrupted, so likely it wasn’t a dream since I’ve unsealed the Five-Point Seal while I was there. However, seeing how carefree Obito’s acting with Kabuto and without a worry at all, my mind trailed back Tobi in my mind. I have to wonder who took up his place and became his replacement. Considering how much of a badass Tobi was, was the person replacing him… he even more so? This universe seems to like to throw me in the worst of situations and it might just happen. The thought of it sent dread down my spine.

“Kasa? You okay?” asked Obito when he noticed how silent I’ve become.

“Hmm? Yeah, I’m fine.” I lied before plastering a grin over my face to try to stop myself from dwelling in my thoughts. “So who do you think won?”

“Well, when I left the last match was between Itachi and Shisui. They’re fairly even in skillset. So, it could be either of them,” said Obito.

“Hmm? What happened to Utakata?” I asked curiously.

“All you need to know is that dear Itachi defended your honor and beat the poor sucker
“Honor?” I drawled sardonically. “I’m quite sure I flashed nearly all of you before I passed out. He would have to beat each of you into a bloody pulp for that to be defended.”

“You’re no fun,” pouted Obito in disappointment.

“What do you mean?” I asked before he grabbed my cheeks and manhandled my face.

“I was expecting your face to turn completely red and then you going kyaaaaaa screaming you perverts! And then try to beat the living daylights out of us,” said Obito sulkily as he tugged on my cheeks as if it was play-doh.

“Do you want me to beat the living daylights out of you?” I asked, garbled because of his meddling with my face. “Because that can be arranged.”

“I can’t believe Kasa-chan is growing up so quickly!” cried Obito with mock tears. “Before you know it she’ll have the boys eating out of her hand!”

“Kabuto, can you be a sweetheart and heal up my arm? I want to wring Obito’s neck.” I said evenly with a vein throbbing at my head.

“You know he’s just egging you on, why do you let him?” said Kabuto as he continued his focus on my arm.

“Because she loves me,” chirped Obito as he released my face and patted my cheek.

“Like a toothache as Kakashi would put it.” I said with a deadpan.

“Why must you wound me so?” said Obito as he clenched his heart dramatically.

“Pft.” I covered my mouth, fighting back a giggle before the two of us cracked up laughing. Kabuto shook his head in wry amusement as the glow ceased on his hands and he pulled back.

“I’ve managed to mend the bone, but it’s still rather fragile. Try not to exert that arm too much for the next couple of weeks,” said Kabuto as he rested his hands on his lap. “You might want to avoid inflammatory foods too like—”

“I know the drill.” I said, sitting up and flexing my hand to test for pain. “Thanks a bunch, I owe you one. It would’ve been hell traveling back to Konoha with a broken arm. Oh! How about I treat you to lunch one day when we’re both back in Konoha?”

A startled look of surprise crossed Kabuto’s face as he registered my word. To be startled just by an act of gratitude… the contrast was so different, when exactly would he lose that innocence and turn into the monster in my memories? My memories… I keep saying that, but nothing is like my memories anymore… Everything’s slowly changing and it’s hard to tell what’s going to remain the same and what’s going to be different. Do I keep my distance from Kabuto? Or should I try to sway him to our side?

Dare I risk it? If things go wrong, I would have aided Madara’s victory by giving the ash-grey haired medic access to valuable key players, but at the same time… those wide eyes, that confused face… I reached out cupping my hands over his face, startling him further as I pulled his face closer.
“K-Kasa-san?” said Kabuto with uncertainty when our faces were about an inch apart.

“…You’re like a lost puppy.” I gushed with a giggle as I squished his face between my hands.

“Kasa-san,” protested Kabuto as he tried to remove my hands, but was careful not to jar my recently healed arm.

“Hey Obito.” I glanced back at the one-eyed Uchiha. “Do you think I could get Tou-san to adopt him?”

“…Kasa, even if you think he looks like a puppy, you can’t treat him like one,” said Obito in a deadpan.

“He could be my brother.” I suggested.

“I thought Naruto was your pseudo-brother,” said Obito.

“Why can’t I have two?” I huffed.

“Greedy much?” chuckled Obito.

“What do you think Kabuto?” I turned back to him with a grin.

“Kasa-san,” said the ash-grey haired medic with a slight sigh as he pulled my hands away with a wry grin. “While your sentiment is appreciated, I have to get going before someone notices I’m missing.”

“So… I’m taking that as a no…” I said, dragging out my words in a silly manner.

“I’ll take up on your lunch date offer instead,” said Kabuto continued slyly.

“Wha-? I never said it was a date!” I protested.

“See you then!” said the other with a wave before he slipped through the door.

“Uh…Obito?” I blinked.

“Yes?” chirped the older shinobi.

“What just happened?” I asked.

“Looks like you got yourself a date,” said Obito brightly.

“Oh…” I blinked… that was unexpected… “So… what now?”

“Do you have any more of that red gas you used during your fight?” asked Obito.

“I still have a couple… why?” I asked cautiously before he covered his mouth sniggering in an absolutely evil manner.

“Wanna scare the crap out of everyone and cement your title as the Crimson Terror?” asked Obito with an evil grin.

“…Do you want to cause an international incident again?” I asked in disbelief.

“Okay, maybe not everyone, but it’d be totally fun, don’t you think? Just imagine the look
on their faces!” cackled Obito.

“…You’re evil… you know that?” I accused.

“Yes,” agreed Obito. “But you can join me and be my evil little minion!”

“Why do I have to be a minion?” I huffed.

“Fine, you can be my lovely assistant instead,” amended the other before he nudged me with his elbow. “You wanna scare so people? Eh? I know you wanna. Come on, eh? Eh?”

I said nothing as nudged me with each offer, but eventually gave in as I gave him a dull glance at the corner of my eye.

“…What do you have in mind?”

Obito let out a gleeful cackle as he curled a finger, motioning for me to come closer so he could reveal his evil plot. I sighed, smiling as I gave in and crawled over to listen to his inane plans. I’m not a big fan at these sort of pranks, but after that day I’ve had, I want to share the misery.
“This is going to be awesome,” sniggered Obito as he and I stood in the shadows of one of the entrances to the stadium’s battle ground.

“You’re crazy.” I muttered under my breath. “This is an international incident waiting to happen!”

“Quit complaining, you’re the one who agreed to it,” chirped Obito. “Now we just have to wait for the crowds to thin out a bit and we can start our master plan!”

“…Were you dropped on your head as a child?” I asked dryly.

“Itachi and Shisui are so going to freak out!” cackled Obito with glee.

“I thought they’re your family, aren’t you being a bit cruel?” I asked.

“Disowned remember?” sang Obito pleasantly. “Besides, they’ll be happy to know you’re alive after the prank! So it’s not like they’ll hold a grudge.”

“If you say so.” I sighed.

“Just make sure you get started before the others let the cat out and tell them you’re alive,” said Obito.

“Right.” I sighed as we patiently waited.

Before we got there, the audience was already starting to leave. Itachi and Shisui remained on the field, likely not wanting to run into the leaving spectators as they left. Judging by the state of the stadium, the fight must’ve been quite epic. There was quite a bit more scorch marks compared to when fought and it seemed like they cleared out what’s left of my earth-made fists and cows. I can’t really tell who won considering they’re both still up and about.

I sent a wary gaze up to where the Kage seats were, but from our vantage point, I couldn’t catch a glimpse of Hiruzen or Yagura. While the prank Obito planned is for shits and giggles, I’m not sure if our esteemed leaders would think of it that way.

“Showtime! Are you ready?” grinned Obito when there was probably a quarter of the audience left.

“Let’s get this over with.” I muttered, flexing my fingers to form chakra threads for my seal cards. “I don’t know how long I could last, so we’re going to have to work fast.”

“Got it,” said Obito as he started to form hand seals of his own. “Demonic Illusion: Crimson Mist.”

A shroud of blood red mist slowly rolled into the stadium in a slow spiral, circling the edges of the field before rolling towards the center. Much like the Hidden Mist Jutsu, the Crimson Mist was meant to be used as a shroud. However, unlike the Hidden Mist Jutsu, this one was meant to be used in conjunction with fire release attacks or red clothing so that the enemy can’t predict their movements. It’s often a waste of time and chakra, not many people would use it unless they’re genjutsu specialists like Kurenai.
I’ve never actually seen her fight. If anything, I don’t think I’ve seen her all that often either. She and Kurei sensei doesn’t seem to get along that well. Obito probably stole the jutsu from her during a spar or something. I haven’t seen him talk with Kurei sensei that much either.

“Red mist?” said Kisame with a confused frown as he glanced about the field.

While subtle, I could see Itachi and Shisui tensing up. If it wasn’t for the month of training we spent together, I wouldn’t have noticed their body tensed for a split second before they relaxed and allowed their eyes to dart about warily. I had asked Obito if they would figure out the ruse if he were to use genjutsu against them, but he assured me that he’s never sparred with either of them and it was unlikely that they could identify him in such a manner.

“What the hell’s happening?” the audience whispered amongst themselves in confusion.

Itachi and Shisui subtly turned with their backs facing one another to cover any blind spots they might have. Kisame remained unmoving with a watchful eye on the red mist.

As we waited for the mist to fill the stadium, I used the red shroud as cover to shoot out my seal cards using chakra threads. I kept the cards low to keep them out of sight and subtly activating them as they drew closer to the trio. After glancing through my supply of the red fear toxin I used in my previous battles, I noticed I didn’t have enough for what Obito planned.

Hence, why we were improvising with Obito’s genjutsu and my scentless toxins. It’d take longer to take effect, but I have the benefit of being immune to the scentless batch. Just as half the stadium was filled, Obito gave me a nod and I formed the hand seals for the academy’s basic clone jutsu and mixed in several more to layers of genjutsu on top of the clone.

Without a sound, a disheveled clone appeared, drenched in blood and injuries I wore prior to leaving the stadium along with my original clothes with only the cuts and rips from the battle with Utakata. Blood-soaked auburn bangs hung over her face in a mess, hiding the little surprise I had for our lucky victims. Obito gave a thumbs up before I had the clone slowly drag her feet into the stadium.

It had taken quite some time and practice, but Kurei sensei made sure that if I ever needed to use a basic clone as a distraction, I wouldn’t give myself away due to small details such as sound. My clone rasped and wheezed as she dragged her feet towards the field, the sound of the wooden okobos echoed briefly in the hall as it scraped across the concrete floor. My copy looked like a walking nightmare as she left a trail of blood with each step.

“Why…” The clone’s voice cracked as she staggered to a stop, a sadistic giggle escaped her lips as she slowly lifted a hand to run her fingers through the unruly blood drenched strands and pulled it from her face. “So serious?”

The remaining audience in the stadium had a mix reaction of horror and screams. From where Obito and I stood, we could see Itachi and Shisui’s faces pale and their eyes widen in horror as they saw the entirety of my clone. With the sleeve slipping to her elbow, a number of deep lacerations could be seen on her arm, oozing with dark blood. Her face was no different with gashes so deep that bone could be seen.

However, those were not what drew the audience’s scream and the paled faces of the Uchiha boys. In place of where eyes should’ve been were empty sockets, blacken with dead blood.

I couldn’t hear clearly what anyone said in the midst of chaotic murmurs, but I could see the shape of my name being whispered by the boys. Somewhere in the back of my mind and the
depths of my heart, I should feel for doing this… but that’s somewhere very far and deep.

“Looking gruesome,” sniggered Obito as we shared an evil grin and he went through another set of hand seals.

My clone opened her arms in a dramatic manner as she swept a single hand as a mock bow to the audience.

“Please pardon my rude interruption as I seem to have lost my eyes.” She said pleasantly with a chuckle before purring with a dangerous drawl. “Would someone be kind enough to lend me theirs?”

Without further warning, the crimson mist came to life at the twirl of her hand and immediately climbed the walls over stadium. Screams could be heard as the lingering audience scrambled to flee. With a cackle, my clone waved her hand and seemingly controlled the mist, directing it up the walls. However, before either Obito or I could do a thing, my clone was complete torched by not one, but TWO balls of fire.

“…The hell? Did my clone just die?” I blinked before my eyes followed the twin balls of fire to its source. “Uh-oh…”

Both Uchihas had their sharingan flaring as they glared at the spot where my clone stood. The flames grew, swallowing the red mist as it burned everything in its path. Obito let out a low impressed whistle as he stopped fueling the red mist. Had he kept fueling it, they might’ve just followed the chakra source to us.

“Holy shit…” I whispered, watching the two of them vaporize the red mist and practically torching the stadium while doing so.

Before either I or Obito could do anything, the two disappeared with a body flicker. In seconds, I found a blade to my throat and a pair of angry sharingans glaring into my eyes. Obito shared a similar situation with Shisui pressing a kunai to his throat.

“Probably not the best way to say I’m not dead, but uh…I guess I lied about dying. Ehe… Surprise?” I offered sheepishly with a guilty grin. Their eyes remained cold and their face expressionless as they pressed their blades firmer to our throats.

“Ah, so much for our prank. It seems like we might’ve pissed them off,” chirped Obito. “They might actually want to kill us.”

“To be fair, you guys killed my clone so—” I didn’t get to finish as the sound of the blade hit the ground in a clatter and I found the air forced out of my lungs. It took a moment before I realized Itachi had pulled me into his arms and held me in a crushing hug.

“You idiot…” whispered Itachi, his voice cracking as he shook. “I don’t care if you break a thousand promises, but don’t you dare keep that one. You’re not allowed to keep that one.”

“…You do know that would just be another promise right?” I said softly with a wry grin.

“No more promises,” whispered Itachi as his hold tightened, burning his face on my shoulder.

I fought back a grimace as I awkwardly reached up to return the hug and patted his back. I kept forgetting how young he is. Even though we were all trained to be killers and soldiers, it doesn’t change the fact that we’re still human and vulnerable inside. This Itachi was still a child. He hasn’t
stained his hands with blood and death. He hasn’t been weighed down with the responsibility of choosing his clan or village.

Now that I think about it, the prank Obito and I was going to do would’ve been cruel if we actually managed it... If Itachi was like this, how bad was the other? I glanced over to Shisui guiltily, but what I saw was him letting out a sigh of relief as he slowly pulled away from Obito. I gave a weak grin and an apologetic glance to him as he shook his head with a small forgiving smile.

“What a tooth achingly sweet scene,” cut in Kisame with a drawl before Itachi broke away and stood defensively in front of me. The blue-skinned jounin crossed his arms as he stood at the entrance expectantly. “You young lady have quite an audience waiting for you.”

“Itachi.” I said, grabbing his shoulder as I walked around him. “It’s okay.”

“But Kasa,” whispered the boy worriedly, but I gave him a grin and a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

“It was awfully rude of me to leave the audience in mid-performance.” I said as I twitched a finger and sped through a basic set of hand seals. “Allow me to remedy that.”

“Kasa what are you—” Itachi started but never finished.

With a poof, several things happened. A log appeared in place of the card I left on the field when the mist was still present and within seconds, I switched places with the log with a replacement jutsu before either Itachi or Kisame could grab me.

“Ladies and gentlemen, lords and kages.” I announced, holding out my hands in a low dramatic flourishing bow. “I would like to extend my sincerest apologies for the abrupt end to my performance as it seems to have given the wrong impression. It is not with disrespect that I bring such horrors to the field, but with reverence of our hosting village.”

Confusion murmurs filled the stadium before a sigh of relief crossed some few. I knew I was playing a dangerous game by doing this, but with the reckless prank Obito and I both pulled, no doubt Konoha would be facing a political whiplash. If war was inevitable, we don’t need the addition of leaders in the surrounding countries to declare a threat and send even more forces at us.

“Reverence?” drawled Yagura as he slowly stood from his seat and moved to the railing to look down at me. “For what exactly?”

“Your kind generosity in gifting Konohagakure with the three-tailed demon and welcoming us to participate in this chunin exam, of course.” I said boldly as I glanced up to the man with the sweetest smile I could muster.

The man said nothing as his pink eyes locked in with mines. Even if it was a potshot at best, I might as well try to put things to our favor. Yagura wasn’t stupid. If he declared an attack in front of so many of our mutual clientele due to the thoughtless actions of a child, he would be presenting himself in a negative light that might not sit well with the royals and noble class. It might do well with the more unsavory clients, but those were more likely to cross you than pay you.

“Only a powerful and confident leader such as yourself would be willing to part with such an invaluable gift. For that, Kirigakure has my utmost respect and admiration.” I said, dipping my head even lower in respect.

The flip in my performance probably wouldn’t help us much on the matter. After acting like a psychotic lunatic, how many of the remaining spectators would believe I’m a sweet and
harmless little girl anyway? Yagura definitely wouldn’t believe a second of my performance. What I’m doing now was just buying time until the lords and daimyos get bored and decide to leave.

“You have a peculiar manner in showing your respect,” said the man.

“I’m afraid, the shinobi curriculum in Konohagakure does not extensively teach the use of fear tactics. I hope my rendition of Kirigakure’s specialty did not offend you Mizukage-sama.” I said as returned to the upright proper stance with a pleasant smile.

“Is imitation one of Konohagakure’s specialties?” drone Yagura as his eyes remained pointedly on me.

“Emulation is the highest form of flattery.” I replied cheerily with a sheepish grin. “I really do hope that my actions haven’t led to any unfortunate misunderstanding. It would be a pity that our villages would fall into war over the actions of a silly girl such as myself.”

Yagura’s pink eyes stared down at me with lower lids. I kept my hands gathered and my back straight as I returned the gaze with as much composure I could muster. Inside, my heart pounded a mile a minute, hoping to whatever higher being out there to let me get through this without having to fight through an army of ninjas to get home. Well, either that or give me a swift and painless death. I’m not picky.

“…Your name is Kasa Mon?” inquired Yagura after his moment of silence.

“That is correct, Mizukage-sama.” I replied with certainty in my voice, even though I felt none of it.

“…Hmph,” an amused smirk crossed Yagura’s lips as he turned his gaze away from me and towards Hiruzen. “Your village produced quite an interesting batch of genins this year, Hokage-sama.”

“Such high praise Mizukage-sama,” said Hiruzen with a wry grin as he tipped his hat. “But I have no hand in this performance. The youngsters nowadays have a mind of their own, often deciding to act on their instincts rather than tact.”

“Then I must say this one has a strong instinct,” said Yagura as he gave me a sideway glance. “Almost like an animal or… a demon.”

I fought back the violent jerk as I kept my face straight and my hands firmly grasped in front of me. It was a hassle to keep a steady breathing pattern as cold sweat beaded down my neck.

“Demon? You flatter me.” I said with a pleasant tone. “Compared to the experts of Kirigakure, I’m an embarrassing novice.”

“Mizukage-sama,” interrupted Hiruzen casually. “I’m sure Kasa-kun meant well with her actions. Furthermore, I believe our lords have found her performance quite entertaining. Let’s not go beyond a reprimand with her.”

I gave a discreet glanced towards the lords’ section in the stands. At the height they sat and the shadows looming over their faces, it was hard to tell what they looked like. Not to mention the number that obscured their faces with fans. The few that I actually managed to see, due to them leaning forward trying to get a better look of the stadium grounds, were grinning.

“Or are you upset that one of the Konohagakure genin won the tournament while your village is hosting?” added A, the fourth Raikage with a drawl.
“I’m surprised you’re not the least bit upset that none of your men managed pass the first round,” replied Yagura crisply.

“There’s no need to get upset if your opponent was just stronger,” said A, his deep voice booming despite how casually he spoke his words. “Are you really such a petty loser, Mizukage-sama?”

“Petty? No, I’m merely interested,” droned Yagura with a casual wave of his hand before he glanced at me once more. “I’ll be looking forward to seeing your achievements girl.”

For a moment, I found my face flushing and heart racing, completely at lost to how to respond to that. Of all the things I expected to happen, the compliment was the last on the list… actually, I lied, that wasn’t even on the list. Even so, my body moved on its own accord.

“Mizukage-sama you’re too kind, I’m not worthy of such high praise.” I said with a humble bow. Had auto-pilot not started, I might’ve ended up stuttering and fumbling my words.

“Hmm,” the corner of Yagura’s lips twitched once more before he raised a hand and gave another wave. “Enough, you may be dismissed.”

“By your leave.” I said with another bow, sneaking a glance at him one last time before I left the field at a moderate pace. Don’t run, don’t run, don’t run…

“That’s quite a performance,” chuckled Kisame as we passed one another. “How long could you keep it up?”

Saying nothing, I smiled and bowed before making the rest of the way into the safety of the exit hall. However, my relief was short lived when I spotted Itachi standing in wait with his arms crossed and glaring at me with his dark eyes… Well, at least he’s not going to sharingan me to death.

“Ehe…” I laughed sheepishly clapping my hands into a prayer in front of my face with one eye close, afraid of his answer. “Please don’t kill me?”

Itachi’s nose flared slightly as he took a breath. I snapped both my eyes shut with my hands held up defensively when he started walking forward.

“Eep, if you’re going to kill me please make it quick and painless! I promise I won’t haunt —”

POKE POKE POKE POKE POKE POKE POKE!

“You utter idiot!” snapped Itachi as he continued to poke my head. “I told you! You can break all the promises you want! But you’re not allowed to keep the one about you dying just to spite me!”

“Ow…” I whined, reaching up to rub my sore forehead once he stopped. “I said I was sorry!”

“Sorry isn’t going to cut it,” said Itachi as he crossed his arms again.

“Then what the hell do you want me to do? Give you my lunch money? You schoolyard bully!” I grumbled.

“…Lunch money and schoolyard bully?” repeated Shisui before a light-hearted chuckle escaped him. “Where do you keep coming up with these weird comparisons?”
“Shiiissuuuiii!” I whined, yanking at his sleeve like a child. “Itachi’s picking on me! Protect me!”

“Shisui, don’t you dare,” interrupted Itachi. “She’s only like that because you let her!”

“But Itachi-kuuun!” whined Shisui as he went behind me latched his arms around my shoulders in a hug with his chin on my head. “How could you be mad at a face like this?”

“Yeah!” I added on with a pout and puppy eyes. “Do you really want to stay mad at little old me?”

“You know that cute act won’t work on me,” said Itachi in a deadpan.

“Che.” I huffed with puffed up cheeks. “Shisui’s already forgiven me, stop being such a hard ass!”

“I’ll stop when you stop being an idiot,” retorted Itachi.

“Everyone’s an idiot to you, Mr. Genius!” I argued.

“I don’t think everyone’s an idiot!” responded Itachi.

“Now, now,” chuckled Obito as he planted a hand on both our heads and mussed up our hair. “You two should really stop fighting. After all, Kasa-chan did just come back from the dead.”

“Obito’s right, why don’t you and Kasa-chan just kiss and make up?” chirped Shisui gleefully as he shifted to plant his hands on my shoulders instead.

“Shisui!” growled Itachi with a scowl.

“What do you say, Kasa?” continued Shisui, ignoring Itachi’s growling warning. “Give Itachi-kun a kiss and we’ll call it even?”

“Shisui!” growled Itachi again. “Stop this—”

“Sure.” I agreed without skipping a beat. “Where do you want it?”

Silence fell as the two of them stared at me in surprise. It took a moment before Obito cracked up laughing, hugging his sides with one arm and pressing a hand against his face with the other.

“You’re killing me Kasa,” laughed Obito, nearly out of breath as his body continue to shake with uncontrollable laughter.

“…Kasa-chan, didn’t we have a conversation about you giving out kisses like candy?” asked Shisui weakly.

“What?” I asked in puzzlement. “You guys said not to give kisses to strangers and people I don’t know, but you guys aren’t strangers, right?”

That comment threw Obito into another fit of laughter while Shisui sighed in exasperation, giving up on trying to reason with me.

“So, where do you want the kiss Itachi?” I chirped. “If I give you one, you’re not allowed to stay mad anymore, okay?”
“…Forget it,” said Itachi as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t want a death sentence the moment we step into the village.”

“Eh? But that means you’re going to be mad at me the whole way home!” I protested.

“You’ll just have to deal with it,” drone Itachi.

“As if!” I growled as I stomped towards him. “You’re getting this kiss whether you like it or not!”

“I don’t want it!” said Itachi as he took a step back.

“Well too bad!” I huffed and sped forward.

“Knock it off Kasa!” shouted Itachi as he dodged my attempts to grab him.

“Not until I give you your kiss, now stand still and take it like a man!” I snapped.

“Quit it!” shouted Itachi before he turned heel and started to run.

“You can run, but you can’t hide! You’re still stuck with me for another two weeks before we make it back to the village asshole!” I shouted as I chased after him.

“Fine! I won’t be mad! Now stop trying to kiss me!” snapped Itachi.

“Hell no!” I snapped. “As if I would give you a chance to change your mind and turn that against me later! Pucker up Uchiha!”

“Quit it!” shouted Itachi as he kept dodging my attempts to plant a kiss on him.

…This was probably the most ridiculous scene anyone could come across… what with me trying to kiss Itachi and Obito laughing his ass off. I’m quite sure Shisui wanted to help too, but was unsure which side he should give his assistance to. I probably looked just as ridiculous doing this too. Ah, who cares! I’m just going to have my fun toying with Itachi. Who knew the Uchiha heir could be so squeamish?
Little Nuisances

What were you thinking? Are you stupid? What self-respecting person would do such things? How could you be so reckless? So thoughtless? So immature! You’re twice as unstable as Gaara even on a good day! Your mother died for you! How could you live with yourself?

...Okay, I might’ve added the last couple on the list, but I’m quite sure I’ve collected all the things that were said or screamed at me after each close brush of death I’ve experienced. Though, this time I’m being scolded for the prank I pulled with Obito. While we both got tongue lashings for what we pulled, he suffered an additional speech for being the instigator.

Expected, considering if things went sour, we could’ve very well started a war… well, the war could still happen, but not over this. Not after the implication A stated during my performance. If Yagura decides to hold this over us, he would seem awfully petty. I have to say, A cutting in like that probably saved us from having to fight our way home.

Not that it would make me regret my actions in the least. There was something oddly exhilarating about making people shit themselves with terror. The adrenaline, the excitement, the feeling of power… delicious power… Hmm… It does seem like I’m acting like an irrationally unstable child doesn’t it?

Come to think of it, I never really spared a second thought before willingly jump into mortal danger. During Isobu and Kurama’s attacks on Konoha, the amount of anger and hate rolling off those demons should’ve had me on my knees quaking in fear and crying for my mommy. Yet, I feel completely at ease despite all the death and destruction all around me.

Uh… I think there might be something wrong with my brain… I know people normally act cautious and wary for their lives in those conditions, but for some reason the threat just doesn’t seem to register. In hindsight, when I faced Yagura in the stadium, I didn’t really feel fear. Sure, I was in a cold sweat and my heart raced a mile a minute, but now that I think about it, I wasn’t really terrified. Actually, I think it was…

A flash of pink eyes and a sly grin crossed my mind before I found myself nearly tripping over my feet. Oh god no… no, no, no… I felt my face heat up as I regained my balance. You’ve got to be shitting me! What the hell body? Are you hitting puberty early? And why Yagura of all people? I mean sure, he has pretty eyes and an alluring—Oh, don’t you fucking dare!

… Fuck you, body.

Utakata’s pretty cute too.

Okay, now you’re just being a troll.

And you’re arguing with yourself.

Oh shit… You’re right, I am! How’s life treating you buddy?

You know, recently just died, came back to life and nearly caused another international incident. You know, the usual. How the hell do you think we’re doing dumbass?

Bit not good huh?
No shit, Sherlock.

“Kasa?” A waving hand in front of my face snapped me out of my thoughts.

“Huh?” I blinked a couple of times before my eyes focused on Tenzo.

After what happened, Hiruzen had ordered Tenzo to join our group for the return trip. He remained in Kiri with Kakashi, Obito and the rest of his anbu. I’m uncertain to whether they’re staying for damage control or that they have other negotiations to handle. Either way, I’m quite glad to not be there.

“Are you okay?” asked the older teen with a worried frown.

“Yeah… I’m just… thinking.” I scratched the side of my cheek sheepishly.

More like arguing with yourself.

Shut up, stop making me sound like I’m crazy.

You’re the one arguing with yourself.

…Touché.

“About someone?” grinned Tenzo.

“W-what?” I stutter, my traitorous body flushing. Why the hell are you flushing? That was a perfectly normal question. Stop being an asshole.

“Is that why you’re not walking with Itachi and Shisui?” drawled Tenzo as we continued walking side by side.

“…Huh?” I blinked, losing the redness on my face as I waved a casual hand. “I’m not thinking about them. Why would I be thinking about them? They’re the ones avoiding me.”

“They’re… avoiding you?” Confusion crossed his face before a big grin plastered over mine.

“There’s a saying that girls shouldn’t kiss and tell.” I raised a finger to my lips with a wink.

A chuckle escaped Tenzo as he raised a hand to hide his laugh. “And you said you weren’t thinking about them?”

“I’m not.” I huffed. “Why would I think about them when Yagura is so much more… ignore that, I said nothing.”

“…Yagura? As in… the Mizukage?” said Tenzo as realization set in, followed by disbelief. “You have a crush on him?”

“Shut up!” I said indignantly as my face flushed red.

“…You do know if our villages go to war, it’d be him declaring it right?” noted Tenzo.

“You say it like I’m actually dating the man.” I retorted dryly.

“Your father would have a heart attack,” commented Tenzo.
“As if liking someone from Konoha would make him feel any better.” I snorted. “I think if Tou-san had a choice, he’d lock me away from all suitors and toss away the key.”

“Oh?” said Tenzo with interest. “Is there someone in Konoha?”

“…When did you become Hana?” I said in a deadpan.

“Well, the boy to girl ratio of this mission is quite skewed,” commented Tenzo. “I thought I balance it a bit for you.”

“Pft.” I covered my mouth in a snigger. “Are you going to wear a dress?”

“Sad to say, I forgot to pack it,” continued Tenzo without missing a beat.

“I could lend you one of my kimonos.” I joked with a grin.

“You sure you want to do that? I might ruin your imagine in your crush’s eyes,” grinned Tenzo.

“Nah, I doubt he’ll notice for at least another decade.” I replied cheekily.

“…Another decade?” frowned Tenzo. “Who do you have a crush on?”

“Jiraiya-sama.” I said with a grin.

“What?” Tenzo stumbled, nearly planted his face on the ground. “You’re joking right? He’s older than your father!”

“Love knows no age.” I said dreamily. “Besides, Jiraiya-sama is so cool!”

“…I find it frightening that I can’t tell whether or not you’re joking or serious,” said Tenzo quietly.

“What can I say, I like powerful men.” I answered cheekily.

“Mreow…” hissed a familiar feline before I flinched and jumped behind Tenzo, using him as a shield.

“God damn it Itachi! Are you taking him back to Konoha just to spite me?” I snapped, glaring at him and the hissing feline in his arms.

“You do know he is actually a she, right?” commented Itachi nonchalantly as he scratched the demon cat behind the ear while it remained curled up in his arms. The cat purred in content and settled.

“… You actually checked?” I said in quiet disbelief.

“Why are you surprised?” droned Itachi.

“…I never thought you were that sort of a pervert.” I said quietly, hiding myself behind Tenzo. “Poor Naori-san. She’s going to have a husband that’s into bestiality.”


“Pft.” I clutched Tenzo’s arm, desperately trying to keep my laughter at bay, but failed miserably as I cracked up laughing. “Oh my goodness, if only you could see the look on your face.
Man that was priceless!”

“Even after all that’s happened, you still haven’t gained an ounce of maturity,” said Itachi in mild annoyance.

“There’s a saying that growing old in inevitable, but growing up is optional.” I retorted with a cheeky grin.

“You’re an idiot,” said Itachi bluntly as he resumed scratching Akuma behind the ear.

“And you’re a clichéd villain with a cat.” I countered.

“And so, the flirting begins,” said Shisui with a fake dramatic sigh.

“Shisui! How could you say that?” I turned to him just as dramatically. “You know I would never come between you and your true love! You and Itachi are meant to be together!”

“Oh for the love of!” said Tokuma pinched the bridge of his nose as Shisui and I slipped into another one of our silly acts. Santa along with the majority of our teammates rolled their eyes as our performance unfolded.

“But alas!” Shisui draped the back of his hand on his head. “Itachi’s heart has been stolen by the wretched succubus that lays curled up in his arms. I am no match for that fiery little vixen.”

“Worry not Shisui!” I grasped onto his hands. “Together we will vanquish that vile demon and you and Itachi could be together once again!”

“Oh Kasa!” said Shisui as he gripped ours hands closer to our faces.

“Shisui!” I returned with teary eyes.

“…You two are still idiots,” said Itachi in a deadpan.

Tenzo shook his head as Shisui and I sniggered. The rest of the trip back to Konoha was done in relative peace with no notable interruption. On the surface it seems like I’m calm and ready, dropping jokes and nonsense, but inside, I felt jittery and restless. At first, I thought it was just the adrenaline from dying and then pulling off that stupid stunt with Obito. Who wouldn’t be unnerved and nervous after something like that?

I ended up having to keep myself from jumping at every little noise and brushing it off as a joke when I do end up yelping in surprise. Tenzo noticed my unease, but there wasn’t much he could do except help me hide it from everyone else. I’m sure Kurei and the other senseis noticed as well, but they didn’t say anything.

As the week went on, I noticed… changes. It’s nothing particularly big, but for some reason, I found myself having food cravings. I don’t think I’m going to menstruate anytime soon, so I don’t think the craving is from that, but it’s odd… I’m craving for fish, lots and lots of fish… I mean, I like fish, but I never had a craving for it. Not only that, I want it raw and I don’t mean raw like sashimi where it’s properly prepared and seasoned.

I want it…alive… I want to tear into it while it was still fresh and flailing.

…That probably should’ve clued me in that something wasn’t right, but I didn’t think much about it. Not with the blond bundle of energy plowing into me the instant I stepped into the house.
“Sasa-nee!” squealed Naruto as he tackled me.

“Oof! Naruto!” I yelped before I hit the ground with him sitting on my stomach. “Ow…”

“About time! I thought you were never coming back!” said Naruto with a huff. “You do remember your promise right?”

“Promise?” I said in a daze as I pushed myself onto my elbows to get a better look at him.

“So you did forget!” said Naruto with an angry pout. “Sasuke was right! You’re just like Itachi-ni!”

“Woah! Woah! Hold on a second! Do not compare me to Itachi!” I said indignantly.

“Then what did you promise me before you left?” said Naruto with a huff with his arms crossed.

“I just got home!” I protested, but the younger boy kept his arms firmly crossed and an angry pout on his lips.

“Naruto,” said Kushina with humor tinting her voice as she pulled her son off me. “I know you want to win the bet you made with Sasuke, but Kasa just came home. Let her rest for a bit.”

“But mooom!” whined Naruto as he tried to wiggle out of her grasp.

“…Bet?” I said in confusion. “What sort of bet?”

“Naruto and Sasuke made a bet to see who has the better sister or brother,” giggled Kushina as she hugged the pouting Naruto like a plush doll. “Apparently, both you and Itachi promised to train with them when you returned.”

“…I really wanted a nap, but…” I sighed, dropping back down to the ground before raising my legs into the air. With one swift swing of my legs, I used the momentum to pull me from the ground and turned to him with a grin. “A promise is a promise, right?”

Naruto perked up with a grin. “Really?”

“Kasa, you just got home,” said Kushina. “Are you sure you’re up to it?”

“I never said I’m going alone.” I chirped.

“Oh?” Kushina made a sound of interest.

“Naruto’s not the only person that gets to rub my greatness into someone’s face today!” I cackled as I waved to my blond little minion. “Come on now kiddo, we have Uchiha to make fun of!”

“Yeah!” cheered Naruto as he slipped out of his mother’s arms and hurried to his room to grab his training gear.

“Kasa,” chided Kushina with an amused shake of her head. “That’s not very nice.”

“Well, I never did say I was a nice person.” I retorted in good humor. “Come on Naruto! Get your butt into gear! Time’s a wasting!”

“Coming!” shouted Naruto as he darted out of the room, struggling to strap on his weapon.
pouch as tried to rush.

“Don’t give your Kasa-nee too much trouble, okay?” chuckled Kushina as she bent over to plant a kiss on his forehead.

“Argh, mooom!” whined Naruto as he broke free and ran to the door. Sasa-nee! Let’s go already!”

“Okay, okay.” I said with a grin as he ran in place waiting for me.

“Don’t stay out too late,” said Kushina as she planted a kiss on my forehead too.

“Got it!” I said before darting out after Naruto.

As we made our way to the Uchiha district, Naruto babbled on and on about what happened the last two months whilst I was away. From what he was saying, it didn’t seem like anything happened at all, but then again, Naruto’s only a child. I doubt Konoha’s security has fallen that badly while I was away.

It’s weird. After all the excitement in the chunin exams… it’s weird to just return to life… as if nothing happened. Do things normally go this way? Some big event ripping through your life and then… this? Maybe I’m overthinking this. Maybe—

“Pardon the intrusion!” shouted Naruto as he ran into the Uchiha household. “SASUKE! I totally won our bet! Come out! Come out!”

I fought back a giggle as he kicked off his shoes and scrambled up the ledge before running off to find Sasuke. Shaking my head, I took off my own shoes and gathered his to place them neatly. I paused when I noticed an extra pair of shoes. Normally, I wouldn’t take note of anyone’s shoes, considering they all pretty much look identical to everyone else’s. However, there was another pair of adult sized shoes and I’m quite sure Fugaku was still at work. So… that means they have a guest…possibly an important guest…a political…

“Oh crud.” I muttered as I darted up to chase after Naruto. So much for ‘as if nothing happened’ me and my stupid assumptions.

“Mikoto-san! Where’s Sasu—” Naruto started, but I hastily snatched him up before he could dart further into the house.

“Naruto, today’s not a good day.” I hissed, hauling him. “Let’s come back tomorrow.”

“Why?” whined Naruto.

“Because I said so!” I hissed again. “Now come on. We have to get out before—”

“Mreow!” snarled a familiar feline before I felt chills run up my spine.

“Time to go!” I shouted as I turned heel to run, but only to run straight into another body.

“REOW!” screeched Akuma as she pounced.

“Damn it!” I stood my ground, letting out a killer’s intent to freeze her in her place. However, my attention was broken with Mikoto rushed out into the hall.

“Kasa-chan! What are you doing here?” asked Mikoto as she stepped out into the hall with a panicked expression.
“REOW!” screeched Akuma once more as she pounce. 

Damn it, nowhere to run! Naruto stood paralyzed in place due to my killer intent. Shit, Akuma’s going to kill him! I gathered him into my arms using my body to shield him from harm. I closed my eyes preparing for claws against my skin and pain to follow.

Only it never came…

“Using a killer’s intent against a cat is overkill, don’t you think?” said a soft but self-assured voice.

“Huh?” I squeaked, cautiously peaking back to see what happened.

Above me was an indigo-haired young woman. Akuma hissed and snarled as she was grasped by the scruff of her neck by the woman. The demonic feline was doing her best to claw at her, but she didn’t seem the least bit bothered. After a moment of struggle and snarling, Akuma spun helplessly in her grasp as she kept her an arm’s length away without any effort or killer’s intent. I stood stunned and bewildered, surprised by how easily she handled the demon cat.

“…Oh my god. You’re such a badass…” I said in awe and admiration. “I think I’m in love.”

“What?” said both women in confusion before I found a fist smashed into the back of my head.

“Ow!” I protested, covering my head and turning back to my attacker. “What the hell was that for?”

“For being an idiot,” droned Itachi. “Don’t you have anything better to do?”

“Well, I was going to take Naruto out training.” I said, rubbing the back of my head irritably.

“Kasa-nee, should Naruto be looking like that?” asked Sasuke curiously.

I froze.

“Oh shit! Naruto!” Hastily, I charged up a handful of healing chakra and brushed it over the blond’s head, drawing him out of his terrified state. “Naruto, you okay?”

“…Sasa-nee?” said Naruto in befuddlement before he snapped out of his daze and jumped up. “Sasuke! You lose! Sasa-nee’s going to train with me like she promised! HA!”

“No fair!” whined Sasuke before he turned to Itachi with an indignant pout. “How come you never keep your promise like Kasa-nee?”

Itachi turned to glare at me.

“His words, not mine!” I darted behind the violet-haired beauty to shield myself away from another knuckle to my head. “If you have so much time trying to kill my brain cells, why don’t you use that time to train Sasuke like you promised?”

“You’re one to talk about promises,” said Itachi in annoyance.

“And you’re the one that gave me the okay to break all the promises I want. I have Shisui and Obito as my witnesses!” I stuck out my tongue childishly.
“So you’re the Kasa I heard so much about,” said the young woman as she glanced down at me. Akuma still hissing and snarling in her hand.

“…Oh… hi! We haven’t met before. Please allow me to introduce myself.” I said with a squeak before backing up and giving a polite bow. “My name is Kasa Mon a pleasure to meet you. I apologize for interrupting your meeting with Mikoto-san.”

“A pleasure to meet you. I’m Naori Uchiha,” replied the young woman.

“Naori…Uchiha?” I repeated, blinking as I stared up at her pretty face. “As in Itachi’s fiancée?”

“So you’ve heard,” said Naori, her soft voice never changing. “What’s your thoughts on this? Itachi is your best friend right?”

“…I guess?” I glanced at Itachi briefly before shrugging. “Personally, I think you’re too good for him Naori-san. He’s a weirdo that’s into beast—” I found a hand clamped firmly over my mouth before I could finish.

“I’ll be right back mother,” said Itachi in a deadpan as he dragged me kicking and flailing down the hall. “I need to escort Kasa out of the house before she could taint Sasuke and Naori-san with her stupidity.”

I tried to back-kick him for the insult, but he easily dodged my attack and continued dragging me along like a rag doll. I tried fighting back, but eventually, I gave in and waved the two women a fair well as Itachi dragged me out.

“Are you trying to make yourself a nuisance?” sighed Itachi as he released me a safe distance away from the house.

“Not actively, why?” I said as I adjusted the straps to my okobos and straightened my clothes, brushing away the wrinkles that formed during the little scuffle. “I just wanted to join Naruto in a little gloating that I’m the better older sibling. I wasn’t expecting to see your fiancée. By the way, I think she is totally awesome! Did you see her handle Akuma? She didn’t even need a killing intent! Do you think if I asked her, she would teach me how to do that?”

“…You came over to gloat?” said Itachi in confusion.

“Uh… yeah, why else would I bother coming over, when we just got back?” I tilted my head mirroring his confusion. “I’ve seen you nearly every day for the last two months why the heck would I randomly decide to visit you just as we got home? If I had a choice I would totally crash into my bed and sleep until next week or until Kurei sensei come and drag my ass out for missions.”

“…So you really didn’t come over to cause trouble?” asked Itachi warily.

“If I wanted to cause trouble, do you think I’d try to drag Naruto out instead of just letting him do whatever he wanted to do?” I replied dully.

“I’ve learned not to trust you,” said Itachi with crossed arms.

“Believe what you want.” I gave an uncaring wave. “But shouldn’t you head back soon before your mom thinks we’ve eloped to a far off country, changed our names and decided on a life of circus performers? Only to get tragically killed, leaving our only son of a rich philanthropist billionaire that’s secretly a vigilante that puts him in a bright red uniform that screams kill me?”
“…I’m not even going to try to make sense of what you’ve just said,” said Itachi as he rubbed the side of his temple trying to ward away the oncoming headache.

“No, you’re right, Shisui is your one and only love and technically you should be eloping with him.” I chirped as Itachi found his palm to his face. “You know, maybe you could get Naori-san to surrogate for you two. Your babies would be totally badass. Though, that’s probably unfair to her, but I wouldn’t recommend getting a fan girl to do it, she might just steal your baby and try to extort you into marrying her.”

“Why is it the longer I talk to you, the less sense you make?” sighed Itachi.

“I’m making perfect sense, you just don’t have the right sensibility to understand what I’m saying.” I retorted with a grin. “Seriously, you’ve got to let loose once in a while and just give into the hypothetical situation.”

“Like what you and Shisui do?” said Itachi dryly.

“Exactly!” I agreed. “Now, how would you solve the surrogate issue?”

“By not having kids,” said Itachi bluntly.

“Oh come on, that’s boring! Pick something crazy!” I huffed. “It’s not like you’re actually going to do it.”

“This is stupid,” said Itachi.

“Do it, or I’m going back into the house and tell Naori-san that the reason you brought Akuma home was so that you could—”

“You,” cut off Itachi.

“Huh?” I blinked. “Pardon?”

“You said pick something crazy,” reasoned Itachi. “Only someone that’s out of their mind would ask you to be the surrogate mother of their child.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but curled a finger under my chin thoughtfully instead. “You have a point there.”

Itachi sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Well… I would do it I supposed, since you and Shisui are my best buddies.” I hummed.

Itachi glanced up in surprise, but before he could say anything, I continued onto a psychotic ramble.

“But childbirth is such a hassle, I much rather turn into a weird blue alien that gets experimented on by maniacal scientist that eventually breeds a badass silver-haired soldier with mommy issues. Who eventually decapitates me and uses my head as a teddy bear as he slumbers and waits for the appropriate time to drop meteor on this pathetically little planet and declare himself god!”

Following my near nonsensical rambling was a psychotically cackle. For some reason, I really enjoy those cackles. It gives the lungs a good work out. However, before I could indulge any further, I felt a hard poke to my forehead.
“Enough,” said Itachi as he turned to leave. “Keep this up and someone will definitely think you’re crazy and lock you up in the psyche ward.”

“I’m surprise you haven’t done it yourself.” I retorted, rubbing my head.

“Stay here, I’ll go get Naruto,” said Itachi with a roll of his eyes. “I really wonder if you are a good role model for him.”

“At least my little brother won’t have a big brother complex and end up bringing about the world’s end just because you were a dick to him one too many times.” I stuck my tongue out childishy.

Itachi shook his head in exasperation as he turned and headed back to the house. I fought back a snigger as I grasped my hands behind my back and rocked back on my heels. I guess a little normalcy after all that’s happened is a nice break for a change… if only I appreciated it more…
Hiruzen’s return followed ours two weeks later. It didn’t seem like Kiri and Konoha were going to war anytime soon, but with politics you could never tell. One minute we’re good friends and the next, they want our heads on a silver platter. I wouldn’t trust the word of any politician in this world or any other.

Of course, with our esteemed hokage back in the village, the chunin promotions would be the first priority, right? Well… it would have been if not for the demonic outbreak that happened in Kiri, done by yours truly. Instead of getting notice on which in our group were promoted, I got summons to get my ass to get myself checked out by a Yamanaka mind specialist.

I mean, it’s not like I have lapses in my memory. That would be alarming if that’s the case, but between the random bouts of anxiety and odd food cravings. I have notice I’ve been spacing out more than usual. It’s not like I don’t remember what I’m doing. I mean, I know I’m there. I know people are talking, but it’s as if everything’s distanced… like a spectator watching a game and the player is speeding through the dialogue faster than I could digest it and then completely lose all context of what the hell is going on.

Right now would a prime example as my teammates converged and charged at me in unison the moment I slipped out of my lapse. Not knowing what the hell was going on, I did what a sane person of my caliber would do… Flash-bang the crap out of them with one of the many seals created from the Tenzo’s stamps. Utterly useless in combat, but a great distraction for running away.

Even as I fled, it didn’t seem like they were going to relent in their pursuit. To say I felt like a hunted animal was an understatement. Pulse racing, I wordlessly activated my barrier seals as kunai and shurikens came flying at me. At the sharp intimidating strum of Tokuma’s shamisen I hastily formed chakra scalpels in my hands and held them defensively as chakra threads, a thicker variety compared to mines, snaked its way towards me.

Remember how I said I’ve never seen Tokuma use his weapon since Kurei sensei bought it for him all those months ago? Originally, the idea for his weapon was meant as a distraction and an intimidation tactic to be used in conjunction with genjutsu as Tokuma’s not exactly a fighter despite being a Hyuga. However, Tokuma took the instrument and turned it into a nightmare mixing in both illusions and physical attacks.

“Damn it!” I cursed as a single thread made pass my frantic slashes. The instant Tokuma strummed, the thread tightened, digging into my skin before I could slice it off with my other hand.

Unfortunately, in that moment that I was distracted, a surge of chains rang like bells behind me as they caught each of my limbs before constricting around my body tightly like a serpent. My legs snapped together as I was dragged off my feet. I could barely breathe as I hit the ground, chains tightening with even the slightest movement.

“All right, I think I might’ve missed something.” I wheezed, forcing myself to take shallow breaths less I want to pass out from the lack of air going into my head. “If I say sorry would you let me go?”

“You have to go,” said Tokuma as he towered over me with a frown. “You’re spacing out more than usual.”

“Y-you two ganged up on me because I wouldn’t go to a doctor’s appointment?” I
wheezed in disbelief.

“No, it’s because you spaced out for over an hour already and didn’t respond to any of our calls,” muttered Santa as he held onto the chain. He had gotten a new toy during the chunin exams. Never got to see it in action though, since he was saving it for the finals, but… I’m going off topic again aren’t I?

“Fine, I’ll go! A-air!” I wheezed before Santa finally relented and loosen the chain, if only slightly. Coughing, I took in a breath before sitting up with an annoyed scowl. “I’m not going to run away if you let go completely.”

“We know better,” replied Tokuma bluntly as he pulled me up by the chains.

“Your bedside manner suck balls.” I grumbled as they rolled their eyes and nudged me on.

“Like yours is any better. Ms. Suck-it-up-it-doesn’t-hurt,” retorted Santa.

“Wow, I can totally hear all the hyphens in that title.” I drawled dryly as we made our way through the streets of Konoha and we garnered quite a few odd stares. “You know, I feel more like a convict than a patient.”

“As if being either of them is any different to you,” snorted Tokuma.

“True.” I agreed. “But I could definitely do without the chains.”

“Not happening,” replied Santa.

I grumbled dark nothings under my breath. My teammates ignored me as we made the rest of the way to the hospital, no doubt used to my oddities. Though, I doubt that was enough to protect them from what happens next.

“What is the meaning of this?” snapped Tesuri when we made it through the hospital lobby.

“Hi dad!” I answered cheerfully. “Santa and Tokuma said they’re going have their way with me and teach me the pleasure of BDSM.”

It would’ve been hilarious to see Tesuri tear my teammates a new one, but Kurei managed to grab his shoulder before he could snap and killed the two boys. Santa and Tokuma on the other hand thwacked me over the head with a fist each.

“Stop joking around and trying to get us killed,” snapped Santa.

“Geez.” I grunted with a grimace as I raised my head. “You guys seriously can’t take a joke.”

“Santa, Tokuma,” interrupted Kurei. “You two may leave.”

“All right,” agreed Santa as he loosened and retracted his chains. “Just make sure you don’t end up stuck in here for another half a year again.”

“It’s a checkup!” I grumbled. “I’m not going to get hospitalized from a checkup.”

“Again, even if it’s starting to sound repetitive,” drone Tokuma. “We know better.”

“Whatever.” I waved off their concern and grinned. “I wouldn’t worry too much, they’re
probably using this checkup as an excuse to give me my promotion! Don’t be surprised if I show up tomorrow a rank higher than you two!”

The two rolled their eyes before giving a half-hearted wave and left.

“…Are you ready?” asked Tesuri once the two were out of sight. I glanced up to him briefly and spotted the concerned expression on his face.

“…Yeah…” I murmured quietly as I followed him and Kurei into one of the bigger examination rooms.

I fought back a grimace when we stepped in and I spotted the seals in the room. The worst part was that I won’t be going through this examination alone. Aside from Tesuri and Kurei that stood with me, were Hiashi, Obito, Rin, Tenzo and a blond man I’ve never met before. Likely the Yamanaka mind specialist.

Judging by the containment seals and the group of people with obvious skills in detaining, restraining and demon enslavement, I don’t doubt that if shit goes wrong, I’m fucked beyond fucked. There was no possible way for me to run or get out of this situation.

If that meeting with Tobi was any indication, my old memories haven’t faded and disappeared with time. Rather it’s just buried and hidden behind mental shrubbery. Anyone with skills in mental landscaping could likely unveil a plethora of information that could definitely throw the world into utter chaos.

“…A bit overkill don’t you guys think?” I managed weakly despite the cheery smile I’ve placed up.

“No need to be scared,” said the blond Yamanaka gently. “Only I will be entering your mind. They’re just here for your safety in case there’s a repeat of the Kiri incident.”

“…Right.” I murmured quietly before glancing at Rin. “Wouldn’t she be in danger too if that happens? Hokage-sama did mention it in the past that if the two halves were together it might…”

“Don’t worry Kasa-chan,” soothed Rin. “I’ll be able to handle it if it comes to that. You’re not the only one that’s been going through training.”

“But …” I fought back the protest and lowered my eyes. She didn’t get the message at all. I was so hoping she would recall my so-called oracle abilities and find a way to get me out of this, but that’s just hopeful thinking on my part. I glanced over to Tesuri, wondering if I could find a way to get the message across, but I doubt it. Damn it, I wished I had the sense to prepare for something like this. If they found out I have foreknowledge, they’re going to—

“It’s going to be okay,” said the Yamanaka reassuringly. “I know it’s frightening to have someone go into your head and see what normally is kept from other people, but it would be dangerous for you and everyone else around you if the incident in Kiri happened again.”

Well, there’s no way I could talk my way out of this. I gave a hesitant nod and made my way to the center of the seal and sat down. Kushina and Tesuri had both ran me through these seals before and the seal was no stranger to the hospital. It wasn’t often that the seal was used to actually contain rather than keep out. Generally, there weren’t any major outbreaks that would need containment, but using it to keep germs and other hazards from reaching the patient worked just as well.

“I’m ready whenever you are, Yamanaka-san.” I said, trying to keep my voice even as he
took a seat in front of me. I did what I could to clear my mind, to not think about anything that would bring up unwanted questions. Think medical texts, elaborate dance seals, stupid pranks to pull with Naruto and—

“We can forgo the formalities,” said the man with weak but kind smile. “Such stiffness would only make this more difficult. Please feel free to call me Inoichi for the duration of this examination.”

Fuck… all efforts I made to clear my mind, completely backfired at the mention of his name. I was given no chance to remedy the situation as he placed his hand on my head and immediately pulled us into my mindscape. The forest within the hospital. I found myself stumbled at the suddenly change, but a firm hand caught my arm before I landed on my face.

“You okay? It is a bit jarring at first, but you’ll get over it,” said Inoichi.

I took the moment of disorientation to glance quickly through my mindscape, trying to figure out which part of my mind I was in. I had hoped that we would’ve showed up where I left off last, by the door with Isobu’s seal, but with my horrible luck, I ended in the forgotten memories section with shrubbery over all the doors.

“I’ll be fine.” I murmured quietly, keeping my head low as he glanced about.

“So many sealed doors…” whispered Inoichi under his breath.

I bit back a wince at the comment. Great, he’s already found something that makes me stand out. Is it the amount of doors? Or the fact that this entire hall is covered in vines and shrubbery like the Secret Garden?

“…Is that not normal?” I asked, even though I likely knew his answer.

“No, it’s normal for people to have sealed doors,” said Inoichi as he glanced about. “Just as it’s normal for people to forget things over time.”

“That’s not what your words sounded like when you saw them.” I murmured as a frown crossed his face.

“Doors are fickle and varies with each person’s mindscape. Sometimes they’re childhood memories. Sometimes they’re traumatic memories that’s been repressed. Then there are some that are just insignificant memories like what you had for dinner last night,” explained Inoichi as he pressed a hand against one of the doors.

“If it’s normal, what’s the problem?” I asked, resisting the urge to flinch as he approached the door. I have no clue what’s behind there.

“Sealed doors disappear over time, taking the memory with it. They’re not supposed to linger,” muttered Inoichi, a frown crossed his face as he moved to the next door and placed repeated his action in placing his hand against the door.

“It doesn’t feel like I’ve forgotten anything.” I offered.

“As I’ve said, memories are fickle. You won’t be able to tell what you’ve forgotten until someone with the right trigger tries to get you to recall it. The only exception to that rule is repressed memories as it’s often caused by trauma that’s not easily let go. Those have the best chance of resurfacing once it’s behind forgotten doors but with this many doors, the chances of them being…” Inoichi trailed off as he tested another door.
“What’s wrong?” I asked as he moved his hand to another door, then another in rapid succession… don’t tell me he could see the contents without opening the damn things!

Inoichi paused and glanced over at me with furrowed brows and a sadden gaze… Why is he looking at me like that?

“You don’t have to be scared. I’m just trying to help,” said the man gently.

“I’m not scared. What makes you think I’m scared?” I asked, denying his words even though they were true. Why shouldn’t I be scared? I have knowledge that they would kill for. Not that they would kill me, what I have is too valuable for them to just throw away, but…

“Kasa!” shouted Inoichi, his voice filled with urgency before I pulled out from my thoughts… Is that even possible? To get lost in your thoughts while being in your head?

“What?” I blinked before noticing the green chakra pooling at our feet and the vines coming to life, creeping further into the cleaner parts of the hall.

“You have to reign in that chakra, it’s sealing off your memories,” ordered Inoichi as he fought against the vines ensnaring him.

“How do I do that?” I snapped, at a lost to how to reign the chakra while in my mindscape. The vines slithered at my feet, nuzzling at my legs as if it was fond of me. “This doesn’t make any sense! Why would my own chakra do this?”

“That’s because it’s not your chakra,” said Inoichi.

“What do you mean it’s not my chakra?” I turned to him with a frown. “I’ve been using it since—”

“You don’t have any of your own chakra anymore,” said Inoichi calmly as he sliced through the vines with a glowing hand. “Concentrate, you need to reign this in!”

“…I don’t have chakra? Then what chakra have I been… Oh,” I trailed off, realization sinking in and the tone of my voice dropped several octaves. “Oh… This is demon chakra isn’t it?”

“Kasa, focus,” said Inoichi. “Even though you have no chakra of your own anymore, it doesn’t mean anything. These sealed memories are only repressed, they won’t disappear over time. If you could restrain the chakra from sealing off any more of your chakra, we could unseal the doors and regain your memories.”

The vines slithered and danced trying its best to ensnarl Inoichi completely. I felt one playfully tug at my hand before I held it up to my sight. I suppose that would make sense. Jiraiya did say I ran out of my own when I woke up after Isobu’s attack… but… I guess the question now is… am I still human?

If I’m running on demonic chakra and I can’t produce any of my own… does that mean I’m a demon? Tsunade did say that losing myself to that chakra would eventually turn me feral. The fact that the chakra is actively trying to seal off my memories might just be a transitional stage. I glanced over to Inoichi who was still struggling with the vines.

So this is how it’s going to be huh? Either subject myself to a fate worse than death in T&I or throw away my humanity and take my vent my frustration as the next demon that wreaks havoc and destruction on the village. How on earth am I supposed to choose? It’s not even a choice!
“Why do you bother?” drawled a bored voice in a language I haven’t heard in ages. “They wouldn’t think twice in throwing you to the wolves if you outlived your usefulness.”

Slow footsteps came from behind me as I forced myself to turn and face the voice. My breath hitched, a cold chill running down my spine as I met with a pair of blood red irises glowing eerily in the blackness that should’ve been white. Standing before me was a carbon copy of my current self with the exception of the eyes. The same eyes on the dark manifestation of Naruto during his training at the Falls of Truth.

…Shit.

“Not expecting to see me?” said my copy in fluent English with her arms crossed and looking thoroughly bored. “I supposed being the fan girl you are, you would forget that none of these people really matter. Were you really considering to make yourself a martyr? Have you let this indulgence addle your mind?”

I couldn’t move, couldn’t talk. How could I when a bomb like this drops into my lap? No amount of damage control could ever make this right. To makes things worse, the way she speak and acts make her sound like a freaking villain! What the hell am I supposed to do with that? She’s speaking in a language that no one here uses!

What’s to say Inoichi won’t mistake it for a demon tongue of some sort? And even if he doesn’t mistaken it for being demonic that just pulls up a ton more unwanted questions! I found myself fighting off a panic attack as I ran through the worse-case-scenarios that could happen. Despite being in a mindscape, I found myself reacting physically, hyperventilating as panic set in.

“Calm down!” snapped Inoichi as he grabbed onto my shoulders. “She’s nothing more than the manifestation of your inner darkness. Denying her existence would only make her stronger.”

“Oh, I’m sure we both know that,” said my copy with a drawl, eying me with distain. “So, what are you going to do about it? Giving me a hug and parroting blondie’s sappy speech? That’s not going to force me into the recess of your mind. Unlike him, you’re not the chosen one. You don’t get hero quirks.”

The sneer on her face told me she knew full well the consequences of her actions here. Even if the outcome was death, she didn’t give a damn… Who knew my inner darkness could be such a dick?

“The excuse you have in being afraid that you’ll be tortured is a lie.” She snorted. “With your current skills, you could tell them of your so-called oracle skills and have them eat out of your hand. They’d be at your beck and call, not to mention, the demonic chakra that saturated your brain for the last four years did wonders in preserving all the important bits.”

This was unbelievable…Am I really that power hungry? I know I’ve complained about the helplessness I’ve felt from time to time… but I didn’t think it would go as deep as to craving power and recognition. No, that can’t be me. She’s not me! I don’t want to do any of things she suggested. I don’t want—

“Kasa,” said Inoichi, stepping into my line of vision, completely blocking out my copy. I found my breath hitch as he exposed his back to her. I wanted to pull him away before she stabbed him in the back, but he kept a firm hand on mine. “Don’t deny her existence. Even if you don’t want to admit any of the things she said is true, don’t deny the fact that she is a part of you.”

My eyes widened in fear. “Y-You can understand her?”
“No,” said Inoichi calmly. “But I could tell from your expression that you want nothing more than to deny everything she said. Darkness is a part of everyone. No one is perfect and everyone has dark thoughts and desires that they would never openly admit to. The fact you think she would attack me right now, is because you notice exploitable weaknesses of others. Even more so, you’re aware of your own weaknesses and you’re afraid others might take advantage of it.”

I found a shaking breath escaped me as I tried to glance over his shoulder to make sure she stayed where she was, but he made sure to block my view of her.

“It also doesn’t help that the demonic chakra reacts to the subconscious mind more strongly than the typical chakra we shinobi have for everyday use,” continued Inoichi. “Because of your fears and uncertainty, it sealed off memories that you would rather not think about. Until you face those fears, she’s not going to leave and will only grow more, the more you deny her existence.”

“But…What should I do?” I asked, my voice cracked, broken and lost. Oh, how I hate it. “I don’t know how to control any of this!”

“In here, the strength of your will is what determines the strength of your mind,” said Inoichi as he turned to face my copy once more. “While I still would like you to be able to accept your own darkness, it would be impossible for anyone to do so immediately. For now, as long as your will is stronger than the desires of your darkness. It will keep her at bay.”

“Good luck with that,” snorted my copy as she rolled her wrist. The tendrils of vines shot up at her command and came at us.

“Kasa,” said Inoichi with a firm voice. “It’s your will against her desires.”

“O-okay…” I said taking a deep breath, steeling my resolve as I faced the onslaught of vines.

My eyes narrowed dangerously as I reached out and grasped onto the first vine that came within reach. It thrashed, squirming and flailing in my hold as if it was an eel. I fought back the squeamish desire to chuck it as far as I could before letting out a flare of killing intent. If my will was my strength in here, physical attacks meant nothing. If I want to keep my darkness at bay, I would have to resort to mental attacks.

…”Good lord, I’m trying to psybeam my inner darkness…

My darkness… geez, I feel like I’ve just gained an Egyptian pharaoh or something. I fought back a sigh, shaking my head. Might as well just call her Yami if we’re going to head down that road. As I flooded the halls with my killer intent, I could see the tendrils hesitating as if debating whether or not to side with me.

Yami shared none of the tendrils’ hesitation as she lunged forward with scalpels materializing in her hands. She weaved through the slithering mass dancing with elegant ease. I wonder do I look like that when I’m fighting? The tendrils did nothing to help either of us, but as she thrust the blades towards my eyes, I fought the instinctive urge to retreat and funneled more into my killer intent.

The blade stopped a mere inch before my eye, disbursing before it could plunge in violently. Yami snarled as the tendrils latched onto her arm, hastily slithering over to encapsulate the entirety of her body.

“You will not contain me! I will never be a memory!” She snapped angrily.
“I’ve restrained her.” I let out a shaking breath, not daring to let my eyes stray from her as I spoke to Inoichi. “What do I do now? I can’t keep this up forever.”

“You would have to open one of these doors and seal her in there for now,” said Inoichi.

“Open them?” I parroted his words with alarm.

“Direct that intent at the door and the vines will part,” said Inoichi.

“But…” I protested weakly.

“Whatever it is you’re running away from, you’re going to have to face it eventually,” said Inoichi calmly as he rested a hand on my shoulder. “I will do what I can to help you come in terms with whatever it is.”

“But…” My intent wavered at my uncertainty. Yami took the opening, yanking out one of her arms as she drew the vines to her command once more.

I hastily regained my focus, pouring my attention back into my intent. To my surprise, she hadn’t use the opening to attack me. Rather, she had used it to pull away the vines from one of the many doors and forcing it open. I paled as a malignant smirk crossed her face. Inoichi wasted no time in dragging all three of us into the room.

Before I could voice any protestations, we found ourselves standing at a cliff side with a number of shinobi, all dressed in the uniforms of varying villages, but each donned a hitai-ate with the same symbol. The symbol for shinobi. I felt my heart stop when I realized who they were hovering over. The memory slowly came back as the scene unfolded before us.

“What are you doing?” asked a shinobi alarm. Save for his hitai-ate, his gear indicated he was from Suna.

A blonde girl, dressed in Konoha’s standard chunin garb, reached forward, clasping the two fallen shinobi hands together before grasping each of theirs into her hand. Her hair hung over her face in a similar manner to Inoichi and her ponytail whipped behind her with each movement. Judging by their clothing, both of them were from Konoha just like her. Of the two, one wore the standard chunin uniform as her, the most notable feature on him was his spiky pineapple hair. The other was a hefty shinobi dressed in a red battle attire plated with armor and the kanji for food on the chest.

“I’m going to inundate their system with my own chakra,” said the girl with determination. “I’m going to use my own chakra to pressure theirs to circulate their internal chakra.”

“That’s crazy! You can’t circulate two shinobi by yourself!” protested Suna geared shinobi. “You could die!”

“What choice do we have?” snapped the girl. “I’m the only medic here! There’s no one else that could do this. And I’m not about to give up on them!”

“What on earth?” whispered Inoichi in surprise when he took in the situation.

No, no, no, no, no! Why this one? Of all the ones she could choose to reveal to him, why this one? I glanced over to Yami, terror clear on my face as she shook with a silent cackle. It was obvious that she was pleased with my predicament. She wasn’t even fighting against me anymore.

My grasp over the tendrils loosened and their movements returned to life once more.
Inoichi snapped his attention away from the scene and hastily grabbed me, pulling the two of us out of the door before the door could close and the vines seal it off once more. Even as we left, I could hear Yami’s silent cackle turn into maniacal laugh.

“Run, run, run… You can run all you want, but nowhere in this world could you hide!” cackled Yami before the door was completely sealed.

I’m screwed, I’m screwed, I’m screwed! She just showed him something during the Fourth Shinobi War! She just showed him Ino desperately trying to save Shikamaru and Chouji after the Sound Four stole their souls! What the hell am I supposed to say to that? What the hell could I say about that? At this point, I don’t even know if anything in the anime fillers could be considered as cannon to this reality!

I’m dead, I’m dead, I’m de—

“Kasa!” snapped Inoichi with a commanding voice as he pulled my hands away from my hair and face—when did put my hands there? “Calm down before you turn yourself into a soulless husk by sealing off every single one of your memories!”

I couldn’t say a single word, fear gripped at my chest as I stared up at him terrified.

“It’s obvious you’re scared and confuse. I could make a vague guess to why you would react so negatively, but get a hold of yourself!” commanded Inoichi. “You won’t be doing yourself any favors by turning yourself into a vegetable. Whatever it is we saw in your memory, I promise you we will talk about it before I bring the matter to Hokage-sama.”

Lies, lies, lies! I shook my head unwilling to believe him. I am fucked beyond fucked! There’s no return—

“You will calm down!” boomed Inoichi as he flooded the halls with his own intent.

I flinched, finding his voice cutting through the psychotic mess of thoughts running through my mind. Fearfully, I looked into his eyes as he stared me down. Neither of us said anything as I resisted the urge to curl into a ball and seal myself away with the rest of my memories. One minute, two… three… I have no clue how long we kept in silence. It was near impossible to tell in a mindscape anyway.

According to Tesuri’s lessons, the movement of time in mindscares worked exponentially different from the physical world. Much like Itachi’s Tsukiyomi I supposed, condensing hours into milliseconds or less. Inoichi was surprisingly patient, waiting for me to calm down before he made an effort to utter another word. Given my current state of mind, that took some time.

Even so, Inoichi waited, until the tendrils around us calmed, melding into one another until it flowed like a fluid mist through the halls.

“Are you calm now?” asked Inoichi, even though he knew the answer.

“…Yeah.” I murmured quietly.

“Good, now we’re going to talk. Can you keep calm if I bring up the matters of that door?” asked Inoichi calmly.

I flinched, but aside from that, I ducked down my head and nodded. No point in running away now… there would be no place for me to hide.
“That memory, it wasn’t something you’ve experienced firsthand,” started Inoichi.

“…No, it wasn’t.” I agreed quietly.
“And judging by the individuals in it, I doubt it was something that you could’ve stumbled across recently either,” continued Inoichi calmly.

I said nothing, he was already drawing his own conclusion. My hands tightened, clenching onto his as he kept them trapped in his grasp.

“You have more of these… memories don’t you?” asked Inoichi. “Much more if the number of doors here is any indication.”

Again, I said nothing, neither agreeing nor denying.

“How long have you had these memories?” asked Inoichi, his voice surprisingly gentle for the situation. I guess he’s trying to avoid sending me into another fit of panic.

My throat grew dry as I reluctantly opened my mouth to answer. Whatever I say now mattered little. Even so, I found a quote surfacing from the recess of my mind that oddly suited my predicament. All lives end. All hearts are broken… Caring is not an advantage.

“…For as long as I could remember.” I whispered, surrendering what little care I still had for my own fate.
Inoichi’s interrogation was surprising short. Aside from confirming the duration of the surfacing of my so called memories he asked little else. He kept his face perfectly schooled, keeping me from figuring out what thoughts were running though his mind. The only thing I could take away from our whole exchange was that he really didn’t want me to break down any further. He kept offering supportive reassurance, making sure I wouldn’t fall back into my panicked state.

With how he acted, it almost seemed like he was doing this out because I seemed like a helpless little girl. Though, my mind was quite sure he was doing this to keep me from sealing off any more of these doors. I’m not sure of the difficulty in reopening these doors, but it doesn’t take a genius to know it would take a lot less effort to go through a door that’s already open than to open a locked door, not knowing if it would open.

We didn’t end up staying in my mindscape for long. Once Inoichi was certain my mind was stable, he pulled us both out. I felt my body slump in exhaustion, the moment reality hit me like a ton of bricks. I barely registered Inoichi’s considerate hand as he caught my shoulder, keeping me from collapsing on the spot.

“Easy there,” said Inoichi gently.

“Kasa?” Tesuri voiced his concern as he sped over and pulled me out of Inoichi’s grasp.

“I’m… fine.” I murmured quietly.

“What on earth happened?” demanded Tesuri as he turned his attention to Inoichi. His concerns turned into a muddled echo as I tried my best to gather my wits.

With what happened, I doubt I could do much damage control in this situation. My lack of planning had cost me dearly as Yami have displayed in revealing my foreknowledge. Tesuri won’t be able to do much to protect me if they decide to haul me off and strip me of every available memory. I’ve screwed up. I’ve screwed up bad.

And the cost… I don’t even want to think about it.

“Kasa…” said Inoichi, his voice gently breaking through the fog of muddle echoes. “Remember what I said, your will is your strength. Make sure to reign in that chakra.”

“…Yeah, sure.” I murmured quietly.

“Good, your sensei will tell you the details of your training with me once we’ve cleared the schedule with Hokage-sama,” said Inoichi.

It took a moment for his words to sink in before confusion crossed my face.

“…What?” I blurted.

“Were you not listening again?” frowned Hizashi, arms crossed and displeased.

“S-sorry.” I ducked down my head.

“Don’t be too hard on her,” interrupted Inoichi with a raise of his hand. “With her current condition, she won’t be able to help the lapses in attention. The chakra deteriorated her mind more
than expected. It will take some time and a great deal of training before she’ll be back up to standards.”

Again, I have to say…What?

“Don’t worry Kasa-chan, you’ll be good as new in no time,” said Kushina reassuringly as she hovered over me and Tesuri. “Inoichi is Konoha’s best in the mental arts. With his training you, it won’t take long at all.”

Training me? I turned my gaze to the blond man, finding it hard to keep suspicion off my face. Why would he decide to train me? It’d make more sense for him to immediately haul me off and strip me of my memories before I sealed off any more of them. Or at least report this to Hiruzen so he could decide on what to do with me instead.

No, there’s another motive behind his actions, but what? Did he see something in that memory that I haven’t noticed? If he did, what exactly did he see? I don’t recall anything in particular that was worthy to note. Or was this just a precaution to keep my so-called oracle abilities secret? From what? The clans? Not likely. The people here either had no clan to speak of or were not in great terms with their respective clans.

What is it? What am I missing?

“You flatter me Kushina,” said Inoichi with a wry grin before turning back to me once more. “Go home and rest Kasa. Having someone perform a mind-walk and having to fight your inner darkness is a taxing ordeal. I’ll come pick you up for your training once the schedule is set. Rest well.”

…So that’s how it is. He wants to speak with my privately. Strange, my memory of him, while faded, hinted nothing of a desire for political conquest. Hiding what he found and keeping it to himself seem like something Danzo would do. Just what game is he playing?

I found my grasp on consciousness slip as my traitorous body gave way, slumping into Tesuri’s arms as darkness overtook me. Even if I was running on demonic chakra, the body was still human I supposed. There’s only so much it could take before something gives out. I doubt exhaustion would be the thing that would kill me at this point. It doesn’t seem like the demonic chakra wants me dead. If anything, it seemed almost fond of me when we were in my mindscape.

Speaking of mindscape…

“So you’re back.” drawled Yami the moment I opened my eyes. She stood free, leaning on the sealed door she was supposed to be locked behind, buffing her nails against her shirt.

“How did you…” I started, but caught myself with a shake of my head. “Why do I even bother, you know everything I know. I shouldn’t be surprised that you could get out something like a metaphorical prison.”

“Metaphysical you mean,” drawled Yami as she walked passed me with a lazy stretch. “How did you like my ‘I will never be a memory!’ bit? I was going for epic villain, but it might’ve came out a tad bit clichéd. Should I have gone with the deranged psychopath approach instead?”

“What do you want?” I sighed, turning around to face her. “For me to accept you?”

“Please, as if I want to be associated as Lawful Good. It’s sickening how you’re forcing yourself to be such a naive goodie two-shoes. Constantly sacrificing yourself claiming it’s for the good of others. What a load.” She snorted. “I actually don’t mind if you never accept my existence.
“Being regarded as a demon or a monster isn’t so bad. How does it feel to have your very own biju?”

“You’re not a biju!” I snapped.

“No? Are you forgetting we have the chakra of a three-tailed beast at our disposal?” said Yami as the chakra danced around her like a happy little pet. “Even if we’re not a full-blooded demon, we’re at least a half-breed at this point. Demon in human skin as it is. I really can’t understand why you would always put us down claiming we’re weak and unworthy. Think of all the fun we could have!”

“And what’s your definition of fun? Blood, death and destruction?” I growled.

“Just because I played a clichéd villain, doesn’t mean I’m actually one,” huffed Yami in annoyance. “Blood, death and destruction is such a typical villain MO.”

“Then what, you want to take over the world?” I said sarcastically.

“Enticing, but no Pinky. Unfortunately, taking over the world requires an annoying amount of upkeep on political relations,” said Yami. “No, what I want is recognition.”

“Recognition?” I said in disbelief. “Of all the damn things you could ask for. You want fame? Who’s the shallow minded idiot here?”

“The fame you’re thinking of is the pitiful 15 minutes that would be forgotten in a heartbeat,” retorted Yami. “No, the fame I want is the sort that people would remember even long after we’re dead.”

“…What do you mean?” I asked with a frown.

“If you’re looking for a villainous monologue entailing my every plan, you could forget it. Just sit back and enjoy,” said Yami with a pleased grin. “I know I’m definitely going to.”

“Just what exactly did you do? What did you show Inoichi? That memory had nothing worthwhile!” I grounded out.

“That’s what you’re fooling yourself to think,” said Yami with a drawl. “No worries, you’ll see what I’ve done when we go for our mental arts training.”

“And you’ll let me do that?” I said, confused. “Now that you’re free and about, you’re not going to do anything to me?”

“I’m not stupid,” said Yami with a huff. “Taking over your body and maintaining the image of you while in control is a hassle I would rather not bother with. Even if I could mimic you perfectly, I no intention in downplaying our skills and pretending to be an idiot. They’ll eventually notice something’s off and then we’ll have to go through that tedious sealing nonsense once more. I rather not have our freedom taken away when there’s still so much to do.”

“What’s to say I wouldn’t just tell them and let them take away that freedom?” I challenged.

Yami let out a hearty laugh. Not a cackle, not even a maniacal giggle, a genuine light-hearted laugh. It was hard to tell what the hell is going on with her anymore. She wasn’t being evil or even mean-spirited. She’s just… I don’t even know how to categorize this.

“Go on, keep fooling the world with that stupid façade of yours,” said Yami as she finished.
her laugh and continued strolling on deeper into my mindscape with a farewell wave. “But even you could only go so long before you crack under your own lies. I for one can’t wait to see that day come. Have fun, my dear other self.”

I clenched my fist as she disappeared, releasing a frustrated sigh as I pressed my exposed palms against my closed eyes...Just what the hell is going on? I officially don’t understand myself anymore.

“Ready?” asked Inoichi when he came to pick me up for training.

“Yeah, I’m ready.” I said evenly as I followed him through Konoha.

“We won’t be going to the hospital for this,” said Inoichi conversationally as we walked further and further away from the hospital. “Training in the mental arts requires one to be somewhere without distractions or interruptions. The hospital’s not the ideal place for such practices.”

I eyed the route we were taking and went through my mental map of Konoha. This was going towards the outskirts of Konoha and towards the forest area. It took a moment, but eventually I realized I’ve been to that part of Konoha before. There was something specific to make note of there too.

“...This way is to the Nara forest.” I blurted out when realization set, but immediately regretted it when Inoichi turned a critical eye on me.

“I see you’re aware of where we’re going,” said Inoichi evenly. “We’ll talk about it more once we get there.”

I kept silent for the rest of our walk as we made our way to the Nara compound. While it wasn’t as big as the Uchiha district or as many houses, there was a great deal more forest encapsulating the area. Inoichi lead me to the traditional looking house and we were greeted by a dark-haired woman, she had somewhat of a housewife quality to her, but judging by the callouses on her hand, she might’ve been a kunoichi at one point of her life.

“Inoichi,” greeted the woman with a wry grin. “Here to drag my husband out again?”

“Not today Yoshino,” chuckled Inoichi. “I’m afraid I’m here on business.”

“Business?” repeated the woman curiously as she glanced over to me.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance Nara-san, my name is Kasa Mon.” I gave a polite bow before standing back up straight once more.

“It’s a classified matter, is Shikaku available right now?” asked Inoichi.

“He’s probably out back slacking off as usual,” replied Yoshino as she turned around and waved us in. “Come on, you can wait in his study while I get him.”

The two of us slipped off our shoes at the genkan and followed her into the house. Yoshino went off in one direction while Inoichi directed me to another. No doubt he’s been here many times before. The study was a simple classic affair with shoji doors, tatami mats, wall scrolls and a shogi board situated in the middle of the room.

“Do you know why I brought you here today?” asked Inoichi once the doors closed behind us.
“…I could phantom a guess.” I muttered quietly.

“Have a seat for now, we’ll continue once Shikaku gets here,” said Inoichi.

Knock, Knock

“Uncle Inoichi, I brought tea,” droned a bored sounding little boy before the door slid open.

“Thanks Shikamaru,” said Inoichi with amusement as he took a handless mug from his tray. “I’m surprised you’re home today, aren’t you usually out with Chouji?”

“Mom’s not letting me out until I’m done with chores. It’s a drag,” grumbled Shikamaru in an exasperated sigh as he made his way to me with the remaining mug.

Even with how anxious I felt, I couldn’t keep a giggle from escaping at Shikamaru’s ire. Something about his bored expression was just so funny.

“S-sorry,” I fought back the giggle with a grin as I took the offered mug from him.

“Thanks for the tea Shikamaru.”

The bored boy gave me an odd glance, but it didn’t last as a careless shrug followed and he left the room with a half-hearted wave. I found my heart lighten as I raised my mug to my lips with a happy grin. Regardless how odd I may seem to Inoichi at this point, I’m rather glad of the small respite I got from Shikamaru. While his appearance did nothing to make my situation any better, his presence did seem to trigger some memories I had of him.

I have a sinking suspicion that Yami had used his appearance as a trigger to open another door, but at the moment, I couldn’t be bothered. If I try to go into my mindscape now, it’d just be suspicious. I wish I knew just what the heck she planned.

“…Ugh… it’s you again,” sighed Shikaku the instant he took sight of me in the room.

“If it helps any, I didn’t break in this time.” I offered, lowering my mug from my lips.

“So I’ve heard,” drawled Shikaku as he slid the door close behind him and took the seat by the shogi board. “Well, did you pass your chunin exam yet?”

“Probably not.” I gave a shrug, finding his presence almost as calming as Shikamaru’s. Maybe I could get through this.

“Wait, you two met before?” said Inoichi in surprise.

“Once before,” replied Shikaku before resting his eyes on me. “Though, at the time, I hadn’t expected to have an oracle in our midst.”

“I’m no oracle.” I said quietly.

“Yet, Inochi noted you’ve locked away a memory that you’ve admitted to have never experienced before,” commented Shikaku.

I kept silent, my eyes lowered.

“He also mentioned you had an inferiority complex of sorts,” continued Shikaku. “I wonder is it really because you have no confidence in your own abilities? Or that you’re afraid of it. Knowing too much about the future would be quite stressful for someone your age.”
“If you want the visions, it would be much easier for Inoichi-san to just strip my mind. There’s no need for the guise of training.” I said quietly.

“I’m quite sure you’re not stupid. The method you’re speaking of would inevitably turn you into a vegetable, we would have your visions, but without context they’re all but useless,” noted Shikaku. “You already knew who I was and what I’m capable of during our first meeting. Which meant you hadn’t completely sealed off all your visions despite what Inoichi have believed when you had the panic attack in his presence.”

I glanced up at him, meeting his eyes. Such insight… Being who he was, I probably shouldn’t be surprised that he concluded that much from what little was available to him.

“…What do you want to know?” I asked.

“Before that,” interrupted Shikaku. “Tell me your allegiance. It’s obvious that neither you nor your father have any love for your old village, but at the same time, I doubt Konoha has curried your favor either.”

“My allegiance?” I paused, my steel resolve breaking as I blinked in surprise at the question. I get why he would ask the question, but at the same time… “I’ve never really thought about it before.”

“Never thought about it?” Shikaku raised a brow, skeptical of my answer.

I gave a shrug, there’s no point in trying to defend against that. I really haven’t thought about it at all. All this time, I’ve been doing my best just to get by, improvising as I went. Planning ahead… wasn’t something I thought about… though I probably should since I seem to get myself into these situations more times than not.

“…Even you could only go so long before you crack…” The memory of Yami’s words taunted my mind.

As if cracking would… wait… a thought flashed through my mind before my shoulders drooped and solemnness replaced the confusion on my face. My fingers curled around the mug as my body resisted the urge curled into itself and dropping to a fetal position.

“True, I hold no love for my father’s old village, but at the same time, I don’t feel loyalty to any particular village either. Why would I give my loyalty to a single entity that would toss me aside the moment I’ve outlived my usefulness?” I said with bitter animosity seeping from my voice.

“And you think it wise to confirm this with us?” noted Shikaku, choosing to not comment at the sudden change in my body language.

“What’s the point in trying to hide it when you can tell if I’m lying?” I said whispered.

“Are you saying you have no one you would claim loyalty to?” asked Shikaku, changing his line of questioning.

“No… that would be a lie.” I shook my head. “Everyone is loyal to someone... Some more than others.”

“And who are you loyal to?” asked Shikaku.

“You wouldn’t believe me even if I told you.” I said wryly. “No one in their right mind would anyway. Not without thinking I’m just saying it to save my own ass.”
“Then pretend I have no such reservations,” said Shikaku with a bored drone.

“Even then, you still won’t believe me.” I replied.

“Humor me,” drawled Shikaku.

“…Minato-san.” I answered, a faint smile tugging at the corner of my lips as my body relaxed at the name.

“Minato?” repeated Inoichi in surprise.

“You can accuse me of using Minato’s name as a ruse to garner trust as I’ve already admitted that my loyalties does not like with Konoha or any other village. I’m aware it’s quite audacious of me to claim I am loyal to him when I’ve barely known him in the short year I was in the village while he was still alive.” I continued, voicing out the thoughts no doubt was running through his mind.

“Why Minato and not your father?” asked Shikaku. “Even if I discard the suspicion of you using Minato’s name in vain, why pick him when you have no familial relations? Kushina would’ve been a believable alternative if you were trying to do that.”

“Blood… is not necessarily the strongest bound for loyalty.” I murmured as I glanced down at my mug once more. “…Sometimes… it’s just an act of kindness.”

“…Kindness?” repeated Shikaku, curiosity peeking through his carefully maintained expression.

“Shikaku-san, do you know what it feels like to be seen as an outsider?” I asked quietly as I brushed my thumb against the side of my cooling mug. “To be viewed as an enemy, a threat despite having done not a damn thing?”

The two men said nothing as they allowed me to take my time to continue.

“The feeling of not belonging. The feeling that you’re subpar and not worth a damn.” I whispered. “Sure, the first person I met from this village was Obito and he’s just as kind as Minato-san, but you know how he is. He sees only what he wants to see. To him, I’m just a happy coincidence. I’m not saying, I don’t like how things are with him right now. I still consider him a doofy big brother, but… to him I’m just a lost little girl he’s taking pity on…Pity is not something I’m fond of.”

I paused briefly staring down at my distorted reflection in the mug.

“Kushina-san on the other hand, though kind and loving, is just using me to help her fulfil her inner desires. She lost her entire clan and village. It’s understandable that she would want to cling onto whatever family she could find. I don’t blame her. If anything, I love her for holding me and dad so dearly, but again…”

I shook my head not wanting to continue on that line of thought.

“Minato-san wasn’t like them at all.” I said, a faint grin tugging at my lips again. “He was so bright, his smiles were like the sun. Even though he knew of my situation, I never felt like a stranger in his presence. He didn’t shun me or pity me, he treated me… like I was always a part of the village as if I was never an outsider to begin with.”

I glanced up at them.
“Even to someone like me. Minato-san made me feel welcome. That’s why I’m still here in
Konoha even though I could be discarded at a moment’s notice. He loved this village dearly and
everyone in it. I admit, I don’t have the same capacity as he does in caring and loving so many
people, but I will at least try to see what he saw and protect the legacy he left behind.”

“…I see,” murmured Shikaku. “Then is there any specific reason for you to want to hide
the fact that there will be a mass desertion in nearly every village? Quite possibly in the next ten
years or so.”

“Desertion? What do you…?” It took a moment before I managed to digest his words and
ran through the memory from the day prior.

My eyes slowly widened as the pieces finally clicked together and I saw exactly what
Inoichi saw when he saw the memory. The shinobi all shared the same hiatе, but their gear were all
from different villages. Shikamaru, Chouji and Ino all wore the same hiatе. The fact Shikamaru and
Chouji were down with Ino as their only medic amidst a large group of shinobi may have implied
that they were all spies. And with the situation seeming so dire and desperate…

No wonder Inoichi and Shikaku went through all this trouble to speak with me privately
and why the question on my loyalty. They wanted to make sure I wouldn’t oust their children out to
be traitors.

At best they’re forced into exile… at worse, they’d be executed for treason. It must’ve
been a nightmare for them to think that their children would be discarded in such a manner. I glanced
up to meet their gaze. I don’t need to be able to see through their carefully maintained indifference to
know that this was what they were really worried about. They’re just trying to protect their kids.

“Don’t worry, your children aren’t traitors.” I said quietly. “…They’re not one to desert
their village.”

Neither of them looked convinced.

“Whether you believe it or not, it’s your problem. I have no say in the matter.” I answered.
“As of now, there’s a chance that it might not happen anymore.”

“What do you mean might not happen?” frowned Inoichi. “Wasn’t that memory, a vision
of the future?”

I said nothing, deciding to glance over to the quiet and pensive Shikaku instead. No doubt
his mind was already processing, dissecting and reviewing the information in every angle possible.
Regardless how little I’ve revealed, I have a sinking feeling that he would be able to defer more than
what I’m comfortable with.

“No one event is definite,” murmured Shikaku after a moment, going through what his
mind managed to process. “The limit of your vision currently shows only a single possible future for
any given event. If the vision was observed by another or if the information was made available, the
chances of any viewed event occurring would decrease exponentially.”

I’m not sure if he was doing this as an intimidation tactic or if he was trying to trick me into
releasing more information. Either way, he’s practically got my so-called oracle abilities down to the
T.

“…I shouldn’t have expected any less from you Nara-san.” I said quietly. “You’ve pretty
much got everything.”
“Not everything,” said Shikaku with a lazy sigh as he pushed himself up. “But for now, this meeting has gone on for long enough.”

“…Wait, that’s it?” I asked, confusion crossing my face as he walked passed me.

“Yep, that’s it,” said Shikaku as he made his way to the door.

“But I’m… you’re not…” I trailed off in an incoherent mess, not even sure what I thought he was going to do. I turned to the remaining man in the room at a lost.

Inoichi gave a sigh of his own as turn to gaze at the door where Shikaku left through. “Your training will be postponed today,” said the man.

I’m not sure whether he was referring to the actual training or if this was a code for “we will continue this later.” Either way, that was my queue to leave. We said our farewells to Yoshino and left the compound. I was absolutely drained from the meeting. I’m really not looking forward to what’s to come.
Acceptance

Following the postponement of my training, Inoichi left me with a seal scroll, filled with a number of medical texts regarding to the mind and various sorts of mental traumas induced by physical experience and genjutsu attacks. Compared to the usual medical and training text, it read more like an action horror…which in itself is pretty interesting, but I don’t think Inoichi meant for it to entertain me.

Since the meeting with Shikaku, Inoichi hadn’t scheduled any further training. The closest to any instruction I had from the man was to meditate… Uh… yeah… about that…

I know how meditation is supposed to work, mind clearing, single focus, etc… I’ve read enough in my previous lifetime to know the drill. Unfortunately, knowing doesn’t equate to actually being able to do it. As I’ve been told many times before, it seems like my problem is on my ability to focus. However, contrary to what most people think, it’s not that I can’t focus. Rather I focus too much, to the point my thoughts betrays me and turns into crippling doubt.

Since the mind-walk, I’ve lost count of how many scenarios I’ve sifted through the past week. Some were believable and some were outright ridiculous, but most of them often ended badly. Trying to meditate with such grim view of the future was near impossible. The fact that Yami was silent for the entirety of this passing made it even more so unnerving. She claimed that she wanted recognition that would last long after our death, but I have no clue whether that was through fame or infamy.

Not that either of them made the situation any better. Getting myself on the radar of allies or enemies meant there was a higher chance of being targeted. And at my current standing as a genin-medic, I doubt it would take much for an experienced chunin to take me down. I supposed I could defend myself if I tapped into Isobu’s chakra… but then I run the risk of losing myself… which just brings me back to square one all over again.

“…I wonder how long it would take me to learn how to perform plastic surgery?” I grumbled, eye twitching as I read over the same line of text the past five minutes. “At this rate, I’m better off just changing my identity and joining a circus…”

With an annoyed sigh, I flipped a seal card between my fingers and sealed away the scroll before repeating the same motion, making the card disappear. In the week of studying, I’ve made no progress in my meditating or mental exercises. What I did manage to do in that same time period were a few sleight of hand card tricks… mainly because my brain revolted and refused to let me absorb anything I was studying unless I find something else that could be processed through muscle memory rather than my brain.

Considering I’ve already exhausted nearly all forms of physical practice during the chunin exam training binge, it was either card tricks or knitting… about that… let’s just say the things I knit could be categorized as a blunt weapon and that only thing I’ve tried thus far was about a foot’s worth of a scarf.

With an annoyed sigh, I flicked my wrist pulling forth my deck of seal cards and started shuffling through it. Absent-mindedly, I allowed my hands run through the various shuffle styles, listening to the cards hiss as they slid against one another. Personally, I thought it would’ve taken me more than a week’s time to learn and perform in the same caliber of a professional that practiced for years, but I guess having the dexterity from practicing hand seals and the steadiness from medical ninjutsu had some influence on the speed I picked it up.
“Cool!” shouted a number of excitable voices.

“How do you make the cards do that?” asked one little girl.

“What else can you do with them?” asked another little boy.

I found myself at lost for words at the sudden barrage of questions. With so many of them surrounding me, I had trouble trying to make sense who was saying what and matching a face to the voice.

“Show us! Please! Please! Please!” begged the children.

Not that I’m that much older than them. Physically, I had only turned nine several weeks ago while traveling back from Kiri, but comparing how they acted with my peers in the Academy, these children were… immature, even more so than they were. I always thought that the children of shinobi villages went through a desensitization period from a young age, much like what Tesuri and Somoku did when I was a child, going through the gory parts of war, preparing them, desensitizing them for what’s to come.

My mind paused briefly at my thoughts. No, that was presumptuous of me to assume that. It might’ve been just a situational circumstance with my situation. Considering both dad and mom were a part of Akatsuki and the rebellion against Hanzo. They might not have the luxury to raise me any other way. If they had their way, they’d probably raise me to be like these children… Ah damn it, I’m losing myself in the thoughts again.

I glanced at them once more before letting out a soft sigh. Well, Yami did say she wanted some recognition right? Though she never did say what sort she wanted. Gathering up my wits, I stood, plastering a wide grin on my face as I gave my young audience a flourishing bow.

“If it’s a show you want, then who am I to deny you?” I said cheerily.

With that announcement, I held my hands apart with half a deck in each hand and let the cards fly. Attentive eyes followed the flight of the cards as they crashed into one another in the air. For a moment, it seemed as though the cards would come tumbling to the ground in a messy heap. I could hear the intake of breath as the children readied to show their disappointment. However, before that exhale of breath could occur, the cards did the unexpected and shuffled itself into a neat pile in the air.

Using the confused and excited murmurs as a distraction, I went through a set of hand seals and disguised myself to look older and quite a bit taller with a transformation jutsu. The children looked baffled at my sudden change in appearance as I reached out a hand for the deck to land in a neat pile.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.” I announced clearly, the smile never leaving my face as I fanned out the cards with a single hand. “Pick a card and I’ll show you wonders like you’ve never seen before.”

“Me! Me! Me!” Delighted squeals came from the children as each and every one of them shouted, arguing to be the first to draw a card.

“Now, now, no need to fight. After all, the show has only begun!” I said, snapping one of my fingers before an explosion of petals descended from the sky.
Using a mixture of parlor tricks, ninjutsu and the handiness of storage cards, I managed to captivate my young audience with seemingly impossible feats. Whether it was using chakra threads to have the cards dance in the air or a having cow shaped mound of earth popping from one place to another at an almost instantaneously rate, each act never failed to draw applause and cheer.

I have no clue how long I went about with the performance, but I have to say, I haven’t felt this relaxed in ages. Not sure if it was due to the ridiculousness of pretending to be a stage magician or the fact that I have no clue of the future for any of these children. In this moment, I didn’t have fear and doubt weighing me down. I felt… happy.

Of course, happiness was not something I was allowed for long as I felt another spectator joining my audience at a distance. Doing my best to be discreet, I used my theatrical movements to glance about for my quiet observer. Much to my surprise, he wasn’t hiding his presence at all. If anything, he was grinning with amusement as he gave a vague gesture to continue my act.

…I guess that’s my queue to finish up.

“Now, I know you’ve all enjoyed my performance thus far, but as the saying goes. All good things must come to an end.” I announced. Disgruntle protests and whines came from the children before I raised a finger to settle them. “However, since you’ve been such a wonderful audience. I’ll have you all join in my final performance. Enjoy!”

Complaints died at their lips as I grasped onto the hand of the closest child and pulled her into a twirling dance. One after another, I switched partners weaving through each and every one of them as I performance a dance seal with them at my hand. A gentle swirl of wind picked up as the loose leaves and petals in the area joined our dance in a swirling frenzy.

I made sure to keep the output of chakra low as the children laughed and reached up to grab the floating leaves and petals. I waited until they were happily distracted before forming another set of hand seals to swap myself multiple times with each child, placing each of them to a new position until I reached the edge of the crowd and escaped into the trees.

Thoroughly confused and mystified by what happened, the children chatted amongst themselves excitedly as I canceled the illusion on myself and made my way to my quiet observer.

“Is this what you do on your day off?” asked Tenzo with a grin as I landed on the branch next to his.

“Not always.” I admitted. “Did you enjoy the performance?”

“I never picture you to be a thespian,” chuckled Tenzo. “But it seemed like you really enjoyed it. You looked happy. I’m glad.”

I raised a brow at his choice of words.

“Ah, don’t mind me. You were looking a bit stressed since coming back from Kiri. I was a bit worried that’s all,” said Tenzo.

A wry grin crossed my face. “You didn’t come all this way looking for me just to tell me that did you?” I said dryly.

“Well, you’re right about that,” nodded Tenzo as he pulled out a small scroll with the hokage’s seal on it. “Hokage-sama sent out a summons for you. He wants to see you ASAP.”

“Did something happen?” I fought the urge to tense.
“I wasn’t given the particulars, but it’s probably best not to keep him waiting,” commented Tenzo.

I nodded quietly. The summons would’ve came sooner or later, no point in running from it. Better just chin up and face the music.

“Lead the way.” I held out an arm, offering him to take the first step.

“You’re really taking this theatric thing seriously aren’t you?” said Tenzo with an amused shake of his head.

“What are we but actors in a play on a stage that is the world?” I drawled lacing my words with needless floridity.

“Then let us go then, shall we my lady?” said Tenzo with a grin as he took my hand and tugged me along.

Out of everyone, he was probably the only one that could see through the smiling masks I show the world and see the terror and nervousness hidden beneath it. Normally, when he catches me hiding behind these masks, he would make an effort to call it out and make me take the mask off. This time, for whatever reason, he decided to indulge me and let me keep the mask for once. Maybe he saw how terrified I was at being summoned. Whatever the reason was, I’m thankful for what little reprieve he’s allowing me to keep.

It didn’t take long for us to arrive at the admin building and even less time to Hiruzen’s office. Tenzo gave my hand a reaffirming squeeze one last time before he let go and knocked the door and we were invited in.

“Ah, Kasa-kun, glad that you can finally join us,” said Hiruzen as we closed the door behind us.

“Hokage-sama.” I greeted the man with a bow before feeling my heart drop at the sight of the other occupants in the room. Aside from Hiruzen, Inoichi stood at the corner along with my three jounin senseis. Doing my best to keep myself from dropping into a panic attack, I steeled my nerves and plastered on the smile once more. “How may I be of assistance?”

“No need for such stiffness Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen with a soft grandfatherly smile. “This isn’t a continuation of the reprimand you received in Kiri.”

That doesn’t make me feel any better. I glanced over to Inoichi, wondering what he’s told Hiruzen regarding to my foresight and then to my three jounin senseis. What role did they have here in this meeting?

“Your senseis have informed me of your progress throughout the chunin exams and Inoichi had expanded on your current situation regarding to the outbursts of Sanbi’s chakra and the state of your memories,” said Hiruzen, seriousness seeping into his voice as he continued. “In light of these facts, I cannot allow things to continue as it is.”

“I see.” I murmured quietly, closing my eyes as I let out a tired sigh. I’ve had my fun. It’s time I’ve acted my age. “I will accept any decision you make Hokage-sama.”

“Ho?” hummed Hiruzen in amusement. “Aside from that one incident with Obito, it seems that you’ve grown quite a bit since you’ve left for Kiri.”

“The credit goes to the excellent tutelage of my jounin senseis.” I said evenly, finding the
words a bit generic even to my own ears. “The student is only as good as their teacher.”

“And a flattering tongue as well,” noted Hiruzen as he grasped onto his pipe and gave an idle puff. “Very well, this makes my decision all the easier. Genin Kasa Mon.”

“Yes sir.” I acknowledged, my posture never faltering for a moment as I kept my eyes leveled to his. No more hiding, this was it.

“In light of your performance in the exams and the events that followed thereafter,” said Hiruzen with a firm and authoritative voice, making the whole announcement sound even more so official. “I hereby announce, your promotion to chunin.”

Goodbye free… wait what? Back up a sec! Did he just say…?

“Promotion?” I repeated in surprise before glancing at the other occupants in the room at a lost. “I’m being promoted?”

“Why are you so surprised?” asked Hiruzen in amusement. “You have performed quite spectacularly in the exams and along with your teams, you’ve all fulfilled the original intent of mission in drawing the interest of potential clients. Overall, I would call this endeavor a success.”

“But… my… condition…” I awkwardly stumbled over my words at the last second, unsure if it was safe to continue on that line of thought. At a lost, I glanced towards Inoichi with a questioning glance, but he was unreadable, giving no gesture or sign of what I should do. What’s going on?

“I have been made aware of your health issues,” said Hiruzen as he took another puff from his pipe. “Inoichi has assured me that your condition will not affect your continuing career as a kunoichi as long as you maintain your health.”

“I…see…” I did my best to keep my face blank as I snuck a glance at Inoichi. Why didn’t he tell him? What does he and Shikaku have planned?

“You don’t sound pleased,” noted Hiruzen. “Most would jump in joy for the chance of a promotion.”

“I am honored receive the privilege of a promotion, but… don’t you think there were better candidates than myself?” I asked. “It’s rather unfair when my teammates has done a much better job at the exam in comparison.”

It wasn’t that I didn’t want the promotion, but with that, it meant the mission ranks would go up. While I could handle a basic C-ranked mission with no issue, chunins were open to B-ranked missions too. With my current skillset and the whole situation about me being an oracle, I have no confidence that I could handle the work load without majorly screwing up the future. Adding to that, my gut was telling me something bad was going to happen if I accepted it.

“I wouldn’t sell yourself short, Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen in amusement as he idly lifted a half open scroll and started reading. “Psychological warfare, situational assessment, decision making, reactivity, flexibility and so on and so forth. In your team of nine, your overall score ranked highest, only bested by Itachi and Shisui in selected areas. You left quite an impression on your observing proctors.”

My eyes widened at his words. It wasn’t news to me that at the proctors’ praises, since they’re likely duped by my acting. Obito and Kakashi had mentioned the bit about being a Crimson Terror prior to the finals, but to be ranked highest? He’s kidding right? What on earth were the
proctors high on?

“I see you don’t believe me,” chuckled Hiruzen. “I do hope you get over the stigma of graduating dead last from the Academy. You have grown into quite a fine kunoichi for your age. It would be a waste to have your growth hinder by such a thing.”

“But… what about the others?” I asked, making a last ditch attempt to change his mind.

An amused chuckle escaped Hiruzen as he held onto his pipe. “Had you not suddenly developed a habit in disappearing on a whim, you would’ve received your summons about the same time as Itachi and Shisui. The two had received their promotions only hours earlier.”

“…Oh.” I said lamely.

“I’m pleased to find that you hold such loyalty to your teammates that you’d feel you’re betraying them for gaining a promotion, but I do hope you wouldn’t reject it because of that,” commented Hiruzen.

“No! No, of course not.” I raised my hands denying his claim. “I… feel privileged.”

“Good,” continued Hiruzen. “Then this will make my jobs much easier for what I’ve decided next.”

“Eh?” I met his eyes once more in confusion.

“As you might be aware of the protocols, newly minted chunins usually stay with their genin team for a time before they’re officially reassigned to a chunin team due to compatibility issues and availability issues. However, in the case of you and the two other Uchiha boys, you three are already acquainted and trained to work together,” said Hiruzen.

“…I’ll be teamed up with Itachi and Shisui?” I said in surprise before a frown crossed my face.

“Will that be a problem?” asked Hiruzen.

“No, no!” I waved my hand. “But wasn’t there an issue previously about the three of us being in a team due to our age? As I recall, that was what kept us from being a team when we graduated from the Academy.”

“Yes, that issue was brought up and kept in mind during the decision of promotions,” replied Hiruzen. “There was a brief debate regarding to the physical limitations due to the age of the three of you, but the exams results were also taken into consideration. In each portion of the exams, each of you have shown your adaptability and resourcefulness with situations in facing opponents that had more experience and physically developed more.”

“…I see.” I said quietly. “As I’ve said before, I’ll accept any decision you make Hokage-sama, but may I ask who is the commander to my new team?”

“That would be me,” said Kurei from the sidelines.

“Kurei sensei?” I blinked. “What about Tokuma and Santa?”

“They’ll be reassigned to Team Six and Thirteen to fill in the spots left by Itachi and Shisui,” answered Hiruzen with a wave of his hand. “Of course, team reassignments won’t be in effect immediately as your health is still of concern. Until Inoichi deems you’re ready for missions,
you’ll be under his charge and the teams will remain as they are.”

“I understand sir.” I acknowledged.

“I do hope you recover in good health soon Kasa-kun,” said Hiruzen pleasantly as he pulled out a scroll and a familiar looking flak vest, sealed in a plastic bag, and placed it at the end of his desk. “I see a bright future ahead of you.”

“…Thank you sir.” I bowed before stepping forward to pick up the proof of my promotion. It felt unreal to actually hold them in my hands. I didn’t doubt that I could advance to chunin at some point… but I never thought I would actually get it in my first try. It was just… unbelievable.

“Serve Konoha to your best, Chunin Kasa,” said Hiruzen.

“By your command.” I bowed once more.

“Dismissed,” said Hiruzen before Tenzo opened the door once more.

I waited for the jounins in the room to leave first before I followed suite. Even if I had a promotion, the protocol still calls for me to wait till my superiors leave before I could do so.

“Congrats,” whispered Tenzo with a small grin as I left and he closed the door behind me. Despite not wearing his mask, he was still anbu and likely still on the clock.

“Though you’re not obligated to take missions while you’re recovering, I do expect you to come to team training,” commented Kurei as we walked down the halls.

“The same goes for your morning training at the Hyuga compound,” added Hizashi not a moment later.

“Eh?” I glanced up at them in surprise.

“Just because you’re promoted that doesn’t exempt you from training,” said Hizashi. “While you done well to keep your manners in front of Hokage-sama, it could still use some work.”

“E-eh?” I found myself lost at their words. Neither of them sounded angry, but their sudden interest in talking about my training was a little offsetting. It wasn’t until a moment later that I found a small twitch at the corner of their lips that I realized they were just teasing me.

“Geez… Kurei sensei and Hizashi sensei!” I couldn’t keep the whine from slipping in my tone before I clapped a hand over my mouth.

My senseis hid a cough behind their fists, but I’m quite sure they’ve all snickered. I found my cheeks puffing in indignation, likely due to habit since I hadn’t felt an ounce of irritation at all. After a moment, I let out the air in my cheeks in a sigh and glanced down at the vest in my arms. Compared to what I wore, the flak vest felt heavy. While it’s not unbearable, the weight also reminded me the level of responsibility I have was growing and getting heavier… But that’s okay. I did say I’m going to accept it… right?
“Oh, it’s you again,” said Shikamaru with a deadpan voice when he greeted me at the door.

“Hello Shikamaru.” I returned with a bright grin.

The lackluster boy paused briefly at my response before pocketing his hands. “…You’re here’s to see dad and Uncle Inoichi right? I’ll take you to the study.”

“Pardon my intrusion.” I said in turn as I took off my shoes and followed him in.

“Dad, that girl from last time is here,” droned Shikamaru as he pulled the sliding door open.

“Thanks Shikamaru,” said Inoichi before the boy waved a hand and turned to leave, but not before giving me a side glance just like last time. I found myself giving him another smile before he walked off.

“You must have questions,” droned Shikaku once I stepped in and slid the door close behind me.

“You didn’t tell Sandaime, why?” I got straight the point, no need to go the roundabout way about this.

“I wanted to test a theory,” replied Shikaku lazily from his seat as he took a sip of his drink and rested his arm lazily on a propped up leg.

“About?” I asked.

“The extent of your oracle abilities,” said Shikaku. “While I’ve speculated that you’re limited to the events of a single future at the moment, I wanted to know if that extends to your own future.”

“My own future?” I asked in surprise.

“You can’t see the events connected to yourself, can you?” Shikaku’s comment made my mouth snap shut. “Judging from Inoichi’s recount of your meeting with Sandaime, you were not expecting a promotion, much less a team reassignment.”

“And?” I asked stiffly.

“Your father is a surprisingly accommodating man,” commented Shikaku. “Despite knowing of your abilities.”

“What are you implying?” My eyes narrowed dangerously.

“I’ve looked up some records the past week,” said Shikaku as he shook the ice in his glass. “Your father had done quite a bit to help you cover up your little slip ups. The biggest being the Kyubi incident.”

“If you think my dad would use me for—”

“Your father is not that sort of man,” interrupted Shikaku. “I’ve worked with him on more
than one occasion and while I can’t say I know all there is to the man, you and he can’t be any more different.”

“Different?” I paused in surprise at his words.

“If I have to give an analogy to your father, I would compare him to the rain. Soothing and gentle when he comes to treat his patients, be them civilian or shinobi. Ferocious and unforgiving when it comes to your safety. The amount of tenderness and care he gives to his patients has been praised many times just as much as his protectiveness. You on the other hand…”

His eyes met mine and I had to fight back a flinch. Despite his lazed posture there was a threatening pressure behind his gaze. I felt like I was under judgment from his gaze.

“You’re like the foreboding cloud that tells what the morrow brings, but like the obscuring mist you hide what’s to come. No one knows if you’d bring a gentle rain or if you’d strike down like lightning,” said Shikaku, his eyes never breaking from mines. “You said you’re loyal to Minato and you swore you would protect his legacy but—”

“Minato’s legacy will be carried on.” I grounded out getting sick of the accusations. “I don’t care if you don’t trust me or where my loyalties lie. I said I will do what I could to protect his legacy, but in the end Naruto would be the one to continue to do so and he will do so with his own power. I will support him only as needed.”

“As needed?” repeated Inoichi with a raised brow. “By your guidance?”

“I have no interest in becoming the next Danzo.” I retorted, voicing out the unspoken concerns. “It’s not my place nor do I have the power to decide on the future of Konoha. Not when there’s a more capable advisor that could decide such things.”

“…Singular,” noted Shikaku with a frown.

“Quality over quantity.” I countered with a snort before he could make any more assumptions. “Though with how slothful he is, the additional advisors are likely there just to drag him from his cloud gazing to finish up his paperwork. Staging a coup would be more troublesome than what it’s worth.”

If either of them was a lesser man, they be spluttering in disbelief. True, I’m totally pulling this out of my ass since I never saw what happened in the end, but it’s not like they could call me out for bull shit. I’ve said enough for them to draw their own conclusions and they’ve seen just enough to know my words carries some truth. It’s not like I’m completely lying.

In my memories, what little that was accessible, a surprising number of them included Shikamaru. He had said that he would take up the role as an adviser when Naruto became the Hokage. Much like how Tobirama did for Hashirama, he would stand by Naruto, making sure he would never have to face anything alone. I’m not sure if it was due to my wariness of the Nara Clan’s intellect or if it was due to Shikamaru’s frightful ability to come up on top when he’s grievously underpowered with nothing more than his wit and tactics to keep him going.

To this day, even though I’ve forgotten so many other things, I could still remember the entirety of what happened with Hidan and Kakuzu. Shikamaru was likely one of the few people that I would think twice before daring to cross. Not that he would take offense or react much towards petty pranks and harmless fun, but I know better than to threatening someone that he holds dear.

“And what makes you think that future would continue since you’ve revealed that tidbit to
“Naruto takes after Minato-san more so than you think.” I replied. “He would not need my machinations to bring forth his future. That will be done by his hand and his alone. The friends he make, the allies he gain, that would be solely on him. The only thing I can offer him and will offer him is the support of a family.”

“And if I decide to use this knowledge and turn the tables against him?” droned Shikaku.

“I can’t stop you if that’s what you’ve decided.” I answered.

“You won’t try to stop me?” continued Shikaku.

“Do you think I could stop you?” I returned. “Be it age, experience or skills, you outrank me in every possible way.”

“Then why tell me? Do you want me to ruin Naruto’s future?” asked Shikaku.

“You could try… but I wouldn’t recommend it.” I answered.

“Is that a threat?” said Inoichi with narrowed eyes.

“And what would I threaten you with?” I asked. “Uncertain futures that no one could prove?”

I allowed my words to settle for them to digest and interpret its meaning. It was a risky move to make them think my words held more than what it’s worth, but necessary if I don’t want them to continue treating me as an enemy. Unfortunately, the two people in front of me were likely the hardest people to fool. One, the head of a certified genius clan and the other the head of a mind-reading clan. Both were used to reading people and extracting information.

To have the galls to try to pull one over their eyes… If I was a guy, I’d say I have balls of steel for doing this… but since I’m not… hmm… what’s the equivalent for girls? Ovaries of steel? Good lord, that just sounds gross… wait, where was I again? Oh god, I spaced out again didn’t I? Biting my lower lip, I forced my mind back into focus as tears of pain welded up in my eyes, blurring my vision.

“It’s no coincidence that you returned on the same day as Kyubi’s attack… you knew Minato was going to die,” said Shikaku quietly. Through the blurriness of my unshed tears, I could vaguely see him directing his attention towards me.

“…Yes.” I admitted, my voice straining with a choke as I did my best to resist the urge to wipe my eyes. It won’t do for them to think I’m trying to act up just to get pity points. Even I would find that trick being one too obvious.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” demanded Inoichi.

“…Would that have helped?” I asked, lowering my eyes to the ground, blinking away the unshed tears. “Regardless what you do or how hard you try, major events couldn’t be changed so easily. Even if you manage to stop one person, another would just take up where the last left off.”

“Worsening the situation instead,” concluded Shikaku as he watched the ice melt and clack in his glass. “What happened when you tried last time?”

“Last time?” repeated Inoichi with a frown furrowing his brows as he glanced towards me.
Trust Shikaku to read the queues so flawlessly…

“…Konoha was only supposed to have one jinchuriki.” I answered quietly.

Dead silence fell over the room and I said nothing else. There were several outcomes I could already see from my revelation. One of three things could happen. One, they’re more wary of asking of the future and attempting to change it. Two, they lock me away or kill me so I couldn’t change the future. Or three… they call bull shit and promptly strip my mind of the knowledge not giving a damn if I turn into a vegetable and try to figure out the whole future thing on their own.

“How troublesome,” sighed Shikaku as he lowered his glass to a coaster on the ground. “What is with the Uzumaki clan that makes you all such trouble magnets?”

“Shikaku?” queried Inoichi as he glanced at the other man with a questioning gaze.

“Tell me, aside from your father and everyone in this room, who else knows?” asked Shikaku, ignoring the fact that I just admitted it was my fault that Isobu attacked Konoha.

The sudden change in questions placed me at a lost. I wish I knew how the man processed his thoughts. One moment he’s staring me down, daring me to say something wrong and the next he acts like I haven’t said a single word. Just what is going through his mind?

“…Rin-san and Jiraiya-sama.” I answered, not seeing the harm in answering truthfully.

“I see…” murmured Shikaku as he fell into a brief silence.

If I could, I would say a pensive look crossed his face as the gears in his mind worked, but the moment passed by so quickly, I barely even noticed that a thought even crossed his mind.

“The first time you snuck in, you said you wanted to find Minato’s kunai,” said Shikaku. “When I asked what you wanted to do with it, you said you wanted to use it to cut down traveling time.”

I frowned, unsure where he was going with this.

“Now let me ask you,” said Shikaku as his firm gaze landed on me. “With that extra time, what do you plan to do with it?”

The room grew quiet as I mulled over his words, trying to figure out what laid beneath it. What would I do with that extra time? He specifically noted time. If I thought about this with the old saying that time is money and in turn, money is power… the question would be what I do with that power.

When I first went after Minato’s kunai, the only thought I had at the time was to get out of the Academy without getting lumped into an apprenticeship with whoever Danzo manage to stick me with. I never really thought I could pick up where Minato left off and use the hiraishin in combat.

Power… wasn’t exactly something I desired. Sure, it’s nice to be a badass and to be recognized as such, but like Yami said… power requires a whole lot of effort to maintain and sometimes that meant unsavory dealings. I don’t think I have the right mindset for this sort of thing. Even if I had someone to deal with the dirtier parts of gaining and maintaining power, I…

“I don’t know.” I answered quietly.

“Maybe it’s time you took a step back and think about it,” said Shikaku. “Since you have
no clue what to do if you had extra time, why don’t you think about how to utilize what time you have better instead of wasting it like you have already?”

In another lifetime, Shikaku’s words would’ve completely gone over my head. If it was not for Hizashi and Kurei’s training, I wouldn’t have been able to pick up the subtleties of this conversation. All this time, I thought Shikaku was questioning my loyalty to Konoha, questioning my every action and inaction, but in reality he was questioning my resolve.

Yes, he knows I have the so-called foresight that would dub me an oracle in this world. He’s aware that every bit of information I reveal has repercussions. Even so, he was encouraging me to use that knowledge. Not only that, he didn’t seem bothered by the severity of the possible repercussions. Just what the hell is thinking?

“When you find out what you want to do with that free time, come tell me. Until then, I think it’s best you focus on your training with Inoichi with whatever time you have,” said Shikaku.

With that, our conversation ended and it would be quite some time before I saw the elder Nara again for another conversation. Inoichi still had some matters to deal with Shikaku, so I was left to show myself out of the Nara household. As I walked down the hall, I realized how different it felt compared to walking in the Uchiha district or the Branch House in the Hyuga compound.

Having walked through the latter two many times before, the first difference I notice between here and there was the amount of noise. In the Uchiha district, it always seemed so lively with the chatter and energy that they all give off. Sure, there were moments where they’re utterly unsociable with a stick up their asses, but even then you could still tell what passionate people they were by how they insult you.

The Hyugas were no different. Being more subdued and reserved compared to the Uchiha, their compound held a different sort of energy. One more on the side of peace and serenity rather than fanning the raging flames of a passionate fire. On more than one occasion, I found myself nearly falling asleep despite being under the Hizashi sensei’s scrutiny during morning training with Tokuma.

The Nara household on the other hand…felt dark, bordering on lifeless. Even the silence here was different from the quiet tranquility in the Hyuga compound. Odd, considering the Naras were likely the most laid back clan… Though, I supposed it makes sense for a clan of shadow users. Shadows were something to be seen, but rarely noticed. Ironically, it works very well with the phrase “You see, but you do not observe.”

Speaking of seeing, I glanced over to the open veranda and spotted the younger boy on the floor with his hands behind his head, staring out to the sky.

“Cloud gazing again Shikamaru?” I said in amusement, stopping briefly at where he laid. Shikamaru flinched briefly when I spoke before craning his neck a little to arc back to glance at me. I gave a faint smile as he sighed.

“Geez, don’t scare me like that, I thought you were my mom,” grumbled the boy.

“Sorry.” I held curled fingers against my lips, covering a giggle. Even with how uncomfortable it felt to be in the Nara household, something about seeing the carefree lazed expression on Shikamaru’s face just eased my nerves. “I’ll leave you to acquaint yourself with the clouds. Have fun!”

Again, he gave me an odd look as I turned to leave. I wonder what’s going through his
mind every time he looks at me like that. Ah well, I guess I’ll never know.

After nearly a month’s worth of training, for the life of me, I still couldn’t meditate for shit. However, Inoichi did manage to find another way for me to focus and clear my mind from succumbing to the debilitating thoughts brought on by overthinking. Turns out the best way to get me to stop thinking was to distract me with something that requires all my attention.

Such as…jutsu creation. And before any of you decide to jump to conclusion, no I’m not creating a JMD. I’d risk going feral if I tried pulling out more chakra than I’m currently using. Even though I’m already running on pure demonic chakra, my body was still human and a child one at that. The body could only take so much before it decides to say up yours and drop dead. Maybe when I’m a bit older, the body would be better adjusted for larger amounts of demonic chakra, but for now I’m stuck with what little I could access that my mind hasn’t already sealed away.

Speaking of sealed things, as it turns out, the sealed doors affect more than memories. According to Inoichi, after several sessions he realized that I wasn’t improving as quickly as he expected. You see, with the mental arts there was a certain level of learning curve for people. With my inability to meditate, my slower progress was expected. However, it was even lower than what Inoichi estimated and he decided to look into the reason why.

Apparently, sealed doors have a nasty habit of stunting mental growth and occasionally making the person regress both physically and mentally. That might just explain the feral tendencies and my absurd bouts of childishness. I’m quite aware I’m a grown woman stuck in a child’s body, but I’ll admit I’ve acted more like a child in more than one occasion and with the frequency as late, I couldn’t put it off as just an Uzumaki quirk anymore.

If Inoichi hadn’t found out… how far would the regression have gone? The thought was enough to send chills down my spine. Hence, the jutsu creation became more than just a distraction to keep me from overthinking. As I’ve said before, I’m not creating a combat jutsu, it just wasn’t something I could use without losing what little of my mind I still had.

Instead, I was trying to create a medical based jutsu that could repair damage left by the sealed doors. Can’t say I’ve made much progress since I’m the only test subject and I didn’t dare try any volatile experimental jutsu on myself that would blow up the fishes I tested it on. Due to my enforcer ability there was a slight issue of chakra oversaturation that causes cellular disruption.

What’s that you ask? Well, you know how Tsunade’s creation rebirth technique hastens the cell multiplication to repair whatever damage the body takes and continues to heal throughout a battle until she runs out of chakra? Her regeneration stops once the injury’s gone and running in the background until she’s injured again. My technique… doesn’t. Like cancer, the cells continuously divides and eventually engorging whatever it heals and blowing up… not exactly helpful for my situation… but I guess if I ever decide to get sadistic, I could heal someone to death… if that makes any sense.

Until I find a way to lessen the chakra saturation and stop the cellular disruption that leads to things blowing up, I doubt I could use it to heal anything, much less myself… How does Tsunade and Kabuto make this shit look so easy?

Poke…

“Damn it, Itachi! I snapped, raising a hand to cover my forehead before another poke could assault it, but paused when I realized it wasn’t Itachi that poked me. “Eh, Shisui?”
“Itachi’s going to be a little late, he told me to send you his regards,” said Shisui cheerily as he pulled back.

“Good lord, even when he’s not here, he’s still an utter ass.” I muttered darkly under my breath.

“How are you feeling? I heard that your health was acting up again,” said Shisui as he leaned against the tree I was sitting under.

A shrug. “There are good days and bad days, but I was told that it won’t affect my career as a kunoichi, so I guess that’s something to be happy about.”

“That’s good,” said Shisui as we fell into a brief silence.

Had it been with anyone else, I might’ve found the silence awkward, but with Shisui it’s pretty much normal. We had a weird dynamic where if we weren’t around the others, we really didn’t have much to say. He was always the accommodating one that gave into my whims and joined me in my impromptu displays of over-exaggerated drama. Aside from that one time during the chunin exams, I’ve never really had any arguments with Shisui.

“You know… I never really thought of you as the type to get sick,” commented Shisui offhandedly.

“Hmm?” I glanced up at him with a questioning gaze. “What do you mean?”

“How do I put this?” said Shisui as he grabbed his chin thoughtfully before raising a finger with a grin. “I guess, I’d compare you to the sun.”

“Sun?” I raised a brow.

“Bright and full of energy,” explained Shisui. “On top of that, you’re an iryo-nin so it’s hard to stay down for long with you around.”

“You say this like I’m infallible.” I said with a deadpan. “Have you lost count how many times I’ve been hospitalized already?”

“True,” chuckled Shisui as he crossed his arms and leaned back on the tree once more. “But that never stopped you for long.”

“Is that so?” I said with a snort. “Well, if you think I’m like the sun, I think you’re like the wind.”

“Why?” asked Shisui with a tilt of his head.

“Because you enjoy blowing people away.” I answered with a grin.

“Hmm?” Confusion crossed his face.

“When people think Uchiha, they usually think of someone like Fugaku-san or even Itachi. A bit snooty and arrogant to anyone they think is beneath them.” I said as I shuffled the cards absently. “You are more like Obito, you enjoy messing with people and surprising them.”

“I see,” said Shisui thoughtfully.

“You know, I’m starting to feel like a weather phenomenon with the comparisons I’ve been getting lately.” I answered as the cards hissed against each other.
“Oh?” asked Shisui with an amused grin. “What were the other ones you got?”

“Nothing pleasant, that’s for sure.” I said dryly before I noticed movement at the corner of my eye before Itachi appeared in a body flicker. I gave an annoyed snort. “Show off.”

“Itachi,” said Shisui cheerily as he greeted the younger Uchiha. “I thought you said you were going to be late.”

“I finished early,” said Itachi.

“That’s what she said.” I sang with a childish grin as the cards hissed against one another again.

“…Should I even ask?” said Itachi as he turned to the older Uchiha.

“Probably not,” replied Shisui with a chuckle.

“So, were you on a date with Naori-san?” A sly grin crossed my lips as I waggled my brow. “Are we going to have a happy announcement soon?”

Itachi reached out to poke my head, but I ducked and rolled out of the way before he could manage.

“Ha! Not today! Get me once shame on you, get me twice, shame on me.” I retorted.

“I seem to recall having poked you on more than one occasion,” said Itachi dryly.

“Those were on different days.” I countered.

“You’re in denial,” said Itachi with a wry grin.

“And you’re a prick.” I returned.

“Now, now,” said Shisui teasingly. “Both of you stop flirting. There’s plenty of time for that later.”

“Shisui, I’m hurt.” I said with mock sorrow. “How could you think I would try to steal Itachi from you?”

“Oh Kasa!” said Shisui just as dramatically, kneeling down on one knee to be at my height.

Itachi let out an exasperated sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose as Shisui and I went into yet another one of our impromptu performances.

“How many months am I going to be stuck with the two of you?” said Itachi with a sigh.

“You know you love us,” said Shisui with a grin as he hung an arm over my shoulder.

“Don’t mind him Shisui, he just likes raining on other people’s parades.” I said.

“Oh?” said the older Uchiha in amusement. “So we’re back to the weather phenomenon again?”

“Weather phenomenon?” repeated Itachi with a hint of curiosity in his voice.
“Right, you weren’t here,” said Shisui as he gave a wave. “Before you got here we were comparing each other to the weather. She said I was like the wind. What do you think?”

“Don’t bother Shisui, Itachi’s not the type to play this sort of—”

“I think Shisui’s more like a sun shower,” answered Itachi, ignoring the fact that he just cut me off to prove me wrong.

“You’re doing this on purpose.” I accused.

A smirk crossed his face as if to say, what are you going to do about it?

“Why sun shower?” asked Shisui as he tightened his arm around my shoulder to keep me from pouncing Itachi.

“Because you enjoy making people miserable with a smile on your face,” said Itachi in deadpan.

“Who me?” said Shisui cheerily with a bright grin as he wrapped his arms around my shoulders resting his chin on my head and his weight on my back. “I would never do that, right Kasa-chan?”

“No, I’ll have to agree with Itachi on that. Schadenfreude is definitely your sort of thing.” I grumbled trying to shrug him off. “Get off, you’re heavy.”

“But you’re just so much fun to hug,” chirped Shisui. “Right Itachi? Wouldn’t you say she’s like a big fluffy white cloud?”

“I thought you said I was like the sun?” I retorted.

“Nah, after thinking about it, you’re like a fluffy white cloud, always floating away when someone wants to get to know you,” said Shisui.

“Then I’m changing my comparison too! You’re like humidity.” I said in a deadpan. “You’re suffocating me.”

“Aw, isn’t she just cute Itachi?” chirped Shisui as he ruffled up my hair into a mess. “Just like a cute fluffy cloud.”

“Quit it!” I whined, trying to swat the older boy away. “Itachi, help!”

“No,” said Itachi.

“You dick!” I snapped. “When I get free from this I oughta—”

“I think she’s more like the sky,” said Itachi before both Shisui and I paused. “Sky?” the two of us chorused in confusion.

“Because she’s unpredictable and bipolar,” said Itachi bluntly. I gave him a death glare while Shisui snickered. “You could never tell what she’s going to be like. One day she could be as bright as the sun and another she could be unstable like a hurricane.”

“Isn’t that a bit extreme, Itachi?” asked Shisui with a chortle.

“I’d be doing people a disservice if I answered otherwise,” answered Itachi with such a
nonchalant expression on his face. “They should know how dangerous it is to deal with her.”

“Gee thanks.” I said sarcastically. “I’m so flattered you think this highly of me.”

“You’re welcome,” said Itachi with another smirk.

Oh, so he’s going be like that huh? Two can play that game.

“And you show my thanks, I’ll show you a trick!” I switched to a cheery tone as I fanned out my cards in front of him. “Pick a card.”

“You’re not going to blow it up in our faces and drug us, are you?” asked Shisui with a raised brow.

“Now why would I do that?” I chirped, not withdrawing the cards.

“Because it’s obviously a trap,” said Itachi, not bothering to pick a card as I suggested.

“Stop being a pretentious ass and pick one. I promise it’ll be funny.” I said with a honey laced chirp.

“No,” refused Itachi bluntly.

Before I could decide to just throw a card with an exploding cow at his face, Shisui loosened his arms around my shoulders and reached out to pluck one from the center.

“Shisui,” warned Itachi.

“What’s the worst that could happen?” asked Shisui cheerily. “Kasa’s not going to kill us even if she’s annoyed. Right?”

“And this is why I like Shisui more than you Itachi!” I said, sticking out my tongue at him childishly.

“So what’s the trick?” asked Shisui as he flipped the card curiously in his hand.

“Now watch closely and don’t blink.” I spoke as if in a performance, moving to tap the card three times as I counted down. “Three… two… one!”

The instant the countdown was over, I sent a burst of chakra, making the card explode into a puff of cloud. Shisui took a step back, expecting the reaction, but when he saw what was hidden amidst the smoke, he let out a hearty laugh.

“A rubber duck?” asked Shisui with mirth as he squeezed the little duck, making it squeak.

“I said it would be funny didn’t I?” I chirped.

“You’re right about that, but why a duck?” asked Shisui with a grin as he held the duck closer to his face to study the details of the toy.

“Why not?” I grinned. “Who would ever expect an attack from a rubber duck of all things?”

“Eh?” said Shisui before the duck’s squeak ended and another cloud of gas shot straight into Shisui’s face. Itachi jumped, backing away from the spreading gas. Spluttering, the older Uchiha coughed taking in a good breath of the gas before he fell into another fit of laughter. “L-laughing
“Surprise!” I said as I plucked the duck from his hand, unnoticed by him, there was a second seal on the bottom of the duck that stored the compound.

“Told you it was a trap,” said Itachi from a safe distance away.

“D-damn it Kasa, hahahaha!” laughed Shisui as he stepped away from me and clung onto the side of the tree for support.

“Kasa, what did I say about drugging your own teammates?” said Kurei as he approached us.

“You gave that speech to Santa.” I retorted as I resealed my ducky back into its card. “Besides, this one will wear off in a bit. The dosage in that one isn’t that strong.”

“Even so, that’s irresponsible of you to debilitate your teammates in such a manner. If we were on the field, you’d be placing him in danger,” said Kurei.

“But we’re not on the field, sensei.” I answered with a cheeky grin. “There’s no harm in these little pranks as long as they’re in the village right?”

Kurei gave an exasperated sigh. “And here I thought you’ve matured since the promotion.”

“Only when on duty, sensei!” I said cheerily. “So, what’s on the agenda today?”

“We’ll be taking missions today,” replied Kurei. “It’s about time you three start doing them again after such a long hiatus.”

“Sensei’s cold like a snowstorm. I just got back from health issues you know.” I said with a pout.

“At least your tongue hasn’t grown dull with disuse,” drawled Kurei. “I’ll make sure to ask for a mission that involves with at least one noble.”

“Serious?” I said, dropping the act with a whine. “I was just kidding around.”

“Just because you’ve gotten a promotion, doesn’t mean you get any special treatment,” said Kurei in amusement before his expression turned serious and our attention focused on his words alone. “From now on, I’m only an observer in missions. I will only step in if one of you are in danger. Otherwise, it’s on you whether the mission is a success or a failure. Got it?”

“Yes sir.” The three of us chorused, wiping away any signs of jest from our faces.

“Good,” said Kurei as he glanced at the three of us. “As of today, the three of you will be known as Team Karasu.”

Karasu…Crow… that is so not foreboding at all.
True to his word, Kurei sensei got us a B-ranked mission escorting a nobleman and his daughter to a birthday party… Yes, I know how stupid that sounds. We’re chaperoning a brat to a birthday party. Normally, I’d be bitching about the intricacies of noble folk and the backstabbing drama that goes with the political struggle for power. However, today it’s different story.

“Ttachi-san, can you tell me more about Konoha?” said our ten-year-old charge with a dreamy voice. “It must be such an adventure being a ninja.”

“I apologize, Lady Mitsuko, but information regarding to the hidden villages are confidential and restricted,” replied Itachi as he walked alongside the horse carriage.

“Aw…” pouted the girl as she rested her elbows at the window of the carriage and cupped her hands under her chin. “Then could you tell me what you do for fun? Hobbies? Likes and dislikes?”

I found it hard to keep myself from laughing my ass off as I listened to the conversation behind me. Before we set off on the mission, we’ve decided on a rotational schedule with one of us at the front, one in the back and one walking alongside the carriage for optimal coverage. I got the front position first due to the fact the boys have better eyes that’s more suited for later in the day and nightfall. The way the order was set up, I would be guarding the carriage by the end of the day while the two took the front and back.

Though, I had a sinking suspicion that the order was done purposely this way to take my “health issues” into consideration. Not sure if either of the boys have caught on to my jinchuriki status, considering they were in the middle of the exam when I last had a tail outbreak, but even so, I’m going to hold off on sharing that bit of information. It’s not like it’s pertinent for them to know anyway.

Anyway, back to our mission. If you haven’t already noticed, our charge was smitten with Itachi, doing whatever she could to draw him into a conversation. Itachi, while calm and collected, sounded quite miserable to those who was familiar with his speech patterns. To an outsider, they probably wouldn’t notice it at all. To me and Shisui on the other hand, I’m quite sure the older Uchiha was doing his best not to laugh just as I was.

Am I enjoying this mission so far?

You bet I am! I’m counting down the hours to when Mitsuko decides to switch over to calling him Itachi-sama instead. The mortified look on Itachi’s face was going to be sweet. I totally wish I had a camera to capture the moment.

“This is surprising,” commented Kurei, who walked alongside me at my pace. “I would think you’d be the one that’d complain the most out of this mission.”

“Who me?” I chirped brightly as I glanced up to my sensei. “I don’t know about you sensei, but I’m having a blast.”

“Is it because Itachi’s suffering?” drawled Kurei, an amused grin tugging at the corner of his lips.

“Why would you think so poorly of me, sensei? I would never wish for the suffering of a fellow teammate.” I said with a pout, but from the look on Kurei’s face, he could tell I was grinning
just like a Cheshire cat inside.

“Just remember not to over indulge. The mission takes priority,” lectured Kurei.

“Of course, I would never think to do otherwise.” I replied with a bright grin.

“Cheeky brat,” said Kurei as he tapped my head with his knuckles, but it was half-hearted at best. I could see a hint of fondness in his eyes as he slowed his pace to check on the others.

The morning was uneventful aside from Itachi’s obvious discomfort around our fan-girl charge. There were barely any signs of bandits or possible assassinations. If I didn’t have front guard duty, I might’ve fallen asleep on my feet at how dull it was. At least I thought I would until it was time for our rotation, where I took the rear, Itachi took the front and Shisui ended up walking alongside the carriage.

“By any chance, are you related to Itachi-san?” asked the girl eagerly.

“Ah, yes, we’re from the same clan,” replied Shisui in good spirits.

“Eh, then that means you know lots about Itachi-san right?” asked the girl giddily, her small hands clasping onto the opening of the carriage.

“Depends, what do you want to know?” asked Shisui with a disarming smile.

“Um… well…” mumbled the girl in a fluster as she tried to keep the blush invading her face at bay. “Do you know if Itachi-san has anyone he likes?”

“Hmm…Someone he likes?” hummed Shisui thoughtfully, tapping his chin as he glanced back at me.

Shisui… why are you looking at me like that? As if reading my mind, a sly grin crossed his lips and my eyes narrowed. What are you planning? The sly grin turned into a deceptively inviting grin. No… Are you doing what I think you’re going to do?

“Well, I don’t know about like…” started Shisui, his eyes never leaving mine as I gave him a death glare.

Oh, don’t you dare.

“But?” asked the girl anxiously as he turned back to her once more.

You better not do it you ass!

“But there is someone that he cares greatly for,” continued Shisui, drawing out the moment cheerily.

Are you serious? You’re really going to do this?

“Someone?” the girl’s eyes widened, looking as if her heart was about to crumble. “Who?”

I glowered, discreetly shooting out a number of chakra threads to loop around Shisui’s legs before sharply yanking them back. Unfortunately, before the threads could catch, Shisui made a skip and continued walking as if nothing happened.

“Well, it’s not my place to say who it is,” continued Shisui with good cheer. “But I’ll tell you, she’s someone very close to him.”
“Hmm…” the girl in the carriage frowned before she decided to glance back towards me.

I hastily turned my glower neutral and looked off as if I wasn’t paying attention to their conversation at all. However, in doing so, I spotted Itachi discreetly glancing back and glaring daggers at Shisui. Our eyes met briefly as we had a brief moment of mutual understanding. If either of us ended up killing Shisui in this mission, the other would gladly assist in hiding the corpse.

When it came from for my turn to walk alongside the carriage guarding her brattiness, Lady Mitsuko, killing Shisui was becoming more and more inviting.

“Switch with Itachi-san,” demanded the girl.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that Lady Mitsuko, that’s against our protocols if we are to keep you and your father safe for this journey.” I replied evenly.

“Itachi-san could keep us safe standing here just as well as up there,” retorted the girl.

“I’m quite sure Itachi is quite capable in doing so, but you have to understand my lady, that it would be unseemly for him to stay by your side at all times. People might—”

“Might what?” snapped the girl. “Who dares to slander me?”

“No one would dare. My lady is a prime example of a fine lady.” I continued with a civil tone. “Rather they would think Itachi would be uncouth and—”

“Itachi-san would never!” grounded out the girl.

“I’m glad you think so highly of Itachi.” I said pleasantly. “I’m sure he feels just the same if you tell him tomorrow morning when it’s his turn to guard you once more.”

“Itachi, Itachi, Itachi,” muttered the girl in annoyance. “Aren’t you being too familiar with him using his name with no honorifics?”

“Am I?” I asked, feigning ignorance. “I apologize if I seem boorish with such familiarity, but Itachi prefers to be more personable with his comrades. I’m sure if you got to know him, he would like for you to call him by name without such honorifics.”

“Really?” the girl flushed red.

“Of course.” I chirped, lying through my teeth. “I’m sure he’d love to hear you say his name so endearingly.”

“Kyaaaa,” gushed the girl as she cupped her face in excitement.

I’m not about to start adding san to Itachi’s name because of a jealous self-entitled bratling. If she likes Itachi that much, it’s her problem, but I’m not about to get roped into her random bursts of temper tantrums because Shisui decided to be an ass.

In front of me, I see the older Uchiha hide his amusement in a soft fit of coughs as his shoulders shook. If I still had all my old memories, I still would’ve never thought he’d have this side to him that utterly enjoys the misery of others. Even as I tried to appease Itachi’s bratty fan girl, I felt my patience wearing thin. While Hizashi’s training have done wonders for me to maintain a pleasant demeanor in the face of danger and overall unpleasantness, it does nothing to quell whatever’s hidden beneath it.
“I’m going to murder him in his sleep.” I muttered darkly under my breath as we all stopped to set up camp for the evening.

“Wait until after the mission,” said Itachi as he set up a small campfire.

“Don’t tell me you’re siding with him.” I hissed discretely as I retrieved ration bars from my travel storage scroll.

“I never said that,” droned Itachi as the fire lit up in a small blaze. “It’s just easier to hide the body with less witnesses around.”

“Pft.” I covered my mouth in a giggle as my shoulders shook with mirth. “Of course, how could I’ve doubted you?”

“I saw a nice patch of land about half a mile back, the dirt looks quite loose, it wouldn’t take much to dig deep,” commented Itachi.

“Ah, I know the spot.” I agreed. “There’s a good deal of foliage too, won’t be hard to cover up the upturned earth after we’re done.”

“Geez, you two are seriously planning my murder right in front of me?” said Shisui with a pout as he finished setting up the tarp, a tent would’ve hindered our movement if we were to be attack. “It was just a joke.”

“Murder? Who said anything about a murder?” retorted Itachi in a droll as he placed away his flint and clapped his hands clean. “You’re just clumsy and ran into your own kunai… repeatedly.”

“With your back.” I added with a cheerful chirp.

“That’s just cold,” sulked Shisui.

“Would you like to sit closer to the fire to warm up?” I asked sweetly.

“…Why do I get the feeling you’re going to shove me into the flames if I said yes?” said Shisui nervously.

“It’s just your imagination sweetie.” I said, cupping the side of my face in a harmless demeanor. “Why would I ever think to shove you into the fiery pits and watch your flesh burn off layer by layer?”

“…Kasa-chan, your inner sadist is showing,” muttered Shisui, taking a hesitant step away from me.

“Ohohoho,” I covered my mouth in a dainty mock laugh.

“Geh…” Shisui grimaced.

Before the situation could escalate any further, Itachi let out a quiet cough as if to remind us that we were still on a mission. Shisui and I both shared a brief glance before we returned to our duties, acting as if nothing happened in the first place. I had the first guard shift for the evening and was followed by Itachi and then Shisui. Kurei sensei, true to his word, kept out of our business and acted nothing more than an observer during the mission.

At the time it seemed rather insignificant, but none of us realized that it would become an
odd ritual for Team Karasu. Like Team Four, we bickered and argued, constantly trying to get on each other’s nerves as if it was a contest to see who snap first. However, unlike my previous team, Kurei sensei never stepped in to stop us or tell us when to stop.

Instead, Itachi seemed to have taken up the role as our keeper. Regardless how heated our bickering became, he would never fail to stop us before it escalates and in turn we cease all arguments and return to the mission as if it never happened. I had no clue what compelled us to follow Itachi’s lead without a question, but… it just seemed natural.

“Ten, nine,” counted down Itachi behind me the next day during my rotation at the front.

“Hmm?” hummed Mitsuko in confusion as to why my teammate started a count down.

Without turning my head, I darted my eyes towards my left in the 10 o’clock position and drifted my attention around the foliage. There was someone hiding in wait. I brushed a loose strand of hair behind my ear. In that same movement, I flicked my wrist, whipping a seal card between my fingers.

“Three, two…” I casually let the card fall from my fingertips before it shot towards the foliage with the help of my chakra threads. “One.”

POOF! CRASH!

“GAAH!” an inhuman scream screeched from our hidden assailant.

“Eh? What was that?” shouted Mitsuko fearfully.

“Must be the crows.” I commented light-heartedly. “They do have odd cries, don’t they?”

“…Crows?” said the girl in confusion. “What kind of crows make that sort of noise?”

“One that had a cow land on them.” I answered brightly.

“…Cow?” confusion plagued the girl even further. “Itachi-san, has your teammate lost her mind?”

“Just for the moment,” said Itachi as he shot me a glare that pretty much told me that I was meant to be discreet.

…Whoops?

His glare didn’t lessen.

Uh… Continue to act insane?

“Prin-cess, princess! Princess, love you, love you, I love you.” I started singing a ridiculously upbeat song as I continued walking forward pretending nothing happened. “Prin-cess, princess! Princess, twinkle, twinkle. As long as I have you and all my friends. I am in-vin-ci-ble.”

I’m quite sure by the end of the mission, a number of people on this trip questioned the soundness of my sanity. It didn’t help that we had quite a number of assailants trying to attack our clients. The three of us took turns in taking out whoever that came to attack, but compared to Itachi and Shisui’s take downs, mine were a bit noticeable… particularly due to the screams.

As you all already know, I’m not meant to be a direct combat fighter and since dance seals took quite some space to perform, I was left with my seal cards and senbons as my only form of
combat… So… pretty much I alternate between dropping cows on people and blowing up a variety of gasses and poisons in my arsenal. It ranged from the harmless sleeping gas to the debilitating fear toxin… though, they all end up screaming anyway.

“I must say, that little redhead kunoichi of yours is quite a terror,” said nobleman Masahiro in amusement in his own study at the end of the mission.

“I apologize if she offended your lordship in any manner,” said Kurei.

“No, no! Not at all,” chuckled the portly man. “I’m just amazed that Konoha had such talented young kunoichi like her. “

“…I see,” noted Kurei.

“Ah! Don’t misunderstand me, the boys did wonderfully as well,” said the man with a wave of his hand. “But that kunoichi of yours seemed to send the message across much better. She made every single one of them scream.”

“Pft,” snorted Shisui as he covered his mouth and turned away with his shoulders shaking.

“…Say a word and you’ll be screaming next.” I muttered under my breath, vein throbbing at the side of my temple.

“Itachi-san! Are you sure you don’t want a job at our home?” gushed Mitsuko as she did her best to stay in her seat and not jump up and latch onto Itachi’s arm. “I’m sure my father would gladly pay for you to become our bodyguard for full time.”

“I appreciate the offer, but due to family reasons, I’m afraid I cannot accept, Lady Mitsuko,” said Itachi civilly.

“Eh?” whined the girl with a dejected pout. “What sort of family reason?”

“He’s engaged,” chirped Shisui. Itachi shot him a glare at the girl turned to the older Uchiha in shock.

“To who?” Mitsuko nearly screeched before snapping her attention towards me. “To—”

“Nope.” I said sharply, hastily shooting a single hand up to stop her in her tracks. “Not even close. I like my men older and with a sense of humor. If Itachi was pit against a wall for standup comedy, the wall would win.”

“…What?” said the girl in confusion. “Standup comedy?”

“Just ignore her, she’s having her bouts of insanity,” said Itachi, eye twitching as he resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. I could see his fingers twitching as his fought to keep his hand down.

“Then you and she are really…” trailed off the girl.

“Just teammates,” concluded Itachi.

“For now anyway,” chirped Shisui before I moved to step on his foot and Itachi discreetly pressed a kunai against his back.

*Continue and die,* was our mutual message to the older boy.
“What do you mean for now?” asked Mitsuko. “Are you saying they’re actually—”

“Ah…haha…” laughed Shisui sheepishly. “I-I meant to say they’re only teammates for now. Our team placement isn’t permanent after all.”

“Oh…” said the girl. “Then—”

“Team Karasu, it’s time to go,” interrupted Kurei as he and Masahiro finished their conversation.

“Sorry to cut this short Lady Mitsuko,” continue Shisui with a smooth slide away from both Itachi and myself and moved to Kurei’s other side. “You’ve heard our commander. It’s time for us to part ways, my fair lady! Until we meet next time.”

“But…” protested Mitsuko.

“It was a pleasure serving you, my lordship and my lady.” I said, giving the girl and her father a bow.

“Such a polite girl,” laughed the nobleman. “I’ll keep in mind to request you the next time I require a bodyguard.”

“What? But father!” protested the girl.

“Have a safe trip home, Konoha shinobi,” said the man with a laugh as he waved for a servant to escort us out.

“Well… that was fun,” said Shisui cheerily.

“Hey Itachi.” I spoke up as we walked away from our client’s home.

“Hm?” the other responded with a grunt.

“The mission is done now right?” I asked.

“Yes,” replied the other.

“Where was that spot we found earlier again?” I asked.

“Oi, oi, oi!” shouted Shisui as he backed away from us.

“I believe it’s about five kilometers from here,” replied Itachi.

“Oh come on! It was the end of the mission!” whined Shisui. “She wasn’t going to bug either of you!”

“Say Itachi, how far do you think we have to go before there’s no witnesses around?” I asked.

“Ten… maybe fifteen minutes,” answered Itachi.

“Kurei sensei!” Shisui turned to our stoic jounin for help instead. “You’re my witness right? You’re not going to let them kill me right?”

“Sensei,” said Itachi firmly. “I would like to report that Shisui’s actions could have been detrimental to our mission. I request approval to enact punishment.”
“I concur!” I agreed. “And request to assist with his request.”

“Hmm…” Kurei pondered, grasping his chin thoughtfully.

“Kurei sensei!” protested Shisui as he clung to the older man’s arm. “You can’t really be thinking of letting them do it right? We’re a team! They can’t do that to teammates! Right? RIGHT?”

Kurei gave a sigh and glanced away. “I think I’m going to take a tea break.”

“I heard the sencha around here is pretty good sensei.” I chirped. “Do take your time and enjoy yourself. We’ll keep ourselves busy.”

“Kurei sensei!” cried Shisui, but his pleads were cut short as he dodged a flying kunai. “Itachi, old buddy, we could talk this through.”

“I’m not much one for conversation,” commented Itachi before he darted after the older boy.

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEHHHH!!!!!” screamed Shisui as he ran off ahead.

“…You do know you’re going to have to heal him afterwards,” commented Kurei.

“It’ll be good practice to keep my skills sharp. The two of them rarely gets hurt during missions anyway.” I chirped.

“I’ll be waiting at the tea shop along the route back to Konoha. Don’t take too long,” said Kurei.

“Of course, please excuse me sir.” I said with a polite bow before darting off after Itachi. “Shisui honey! I’ve cooked up something just for you!”

“No!” screamed Shisui who was quite a bit ahead with Itachi hot on his tail.

“I promise it’ll only scar you for the rest of your life!” I said cheerily as I pulled out my cards.

“How is that supposed to make me want to try it any more than I do now?” screeched Shisui before directing his attention to Itachi. Apparently, the other said something to him, but I couldn’t hear it from the distance. “Itachi, I don’t care if you think I’m being loud! You two are trying to kill me!”

I found myself giggling as Shisui attempted to flee from our attacks. Even though the mission was a total pain in the ass and Shisui did whatever he could to make us miserable, working with my new team ended up being more enjoyable than I thought.

…Though, Shisui still needs to be punished for riling up an Itachi fan-girl and making us bear through that for the entirety of the mission. After all, my pettiness demands retribution! I cackled insanely as I charged. Prepare yourself Shisui Uchiha and face the wrath of Team Karasu’s Crimson Terror!
“Rise and shine!” shouted Kushina cheerily as she slammed the door open.

“Go away, it’s my day off.” I whined sleepily as I buried my face into my warm pillow and hugged it tighter… wait, warm pillow?

Half-awake, I squeezed the pillow in my arms and found it squirming. Confused, I dug my fingers into the pillow before it giggled… Why would my pillow giggle? Cracking my bleary eyes open, it took a moment before I caught a hazy blur of yellow… when did my pillow grow hair? Experimentally, I dug my fingers into my pillow once more before it burst out laughing.

“Sasa-nee!” giggled Naruto as he writhed in my arms. “Stop! It tickles!”

“…Naruto.” I sighed, shifting back so I could see him better. “Stop climbing into my bed when you have school the next morning.”

“But you’re rarely home anymore!” pouted Naruto.

“Naruto,” chided Kushina. “Leave your Kasa-nee alone and go to school, she’ll be here when you get home.”

“Moooooom,” whined Naruto.

“Tell you what.” I sighed in exhaustion. “If you go to school now and let me sleep, I’ll go pick you up when classes are over.”

“Really?” said Naruto brightly.

“Have I broken my promise before?” I yawned and reached a hand up to rub away the crud in my eyes.

“Yeah! Sasa-nee’s going to pick me up! Wait till I tell Sasuke! He’s going to be so jealous!” cackled Naruto.

“Naruto, what did I say about rubbing your good fortune in other people’s faces?” I clapped my free hand on his head.

“But you do it all the time to Itachi-ni,” protested Naruto.

“… Do you want me to pick you up or not?” I said in a deadpan.

“Fist bump on it!” said Naruto as he held out a fist.

“Fine…” I sighed before reaching out to bump my fist against his. I had no clue when he started the ritual of fist bump promises. As far as I knew, Kushina-san made a practice of pinky promises, so I really have no clue where this fist bump thing came from.

“I’ll see you after school then!” chirped Naruto as he crawled out from under my covers and scrambled out of the room.

“You spoil him, you know that?” said Kushina in amusement as she leaned against the door frame.
“It’s not spoiling if I get a few more minutes of sleep.” I grumbled and dropped back down into my actual pillow, face first. “Please shut the door.”

“Geez, that Kurei. I don’t know what is with him always overworking you three. Most chunins would do a B-rank once a month at most and maybe an additional C-rank if they needed the money, but that man been having you three do either two B-ranks or a B-rank with several C-ranks.”

“Kushina-san?” I groaned, voice muffled by the pillow.

“Oh right! Sleep well!” chirped Kushina before she quietly closed the door.

Even with it closed, I could still hear the hustle and bustle as Naruto scrambled to get ready for school. I tried going back to sleep, but it was hard with Naruto’s constant chatter and headless chicken routine. By the time he left and the apartment grew silent again, I was wide awake.

“…God damn it, Naruto.” I muttered darkly and draped my arm over my eyes with an annoyed sigh. “So much for sleeping in on my day off.”

While Kushina wasn’t wrong about Kurei sensei putting us through the grinder with so many back-to-back missions, it wasn’t as bad as she claims. In general B-rank missions took about three weeks to a month for a roundtrip and mission completion. A C-rank mission, maybe slightly less time due to the lower difficulty. With the time average, it sound impossible to do more than one a month. Even more so with multiple C-ranks, but we have the benefit of having an organized jounin that knows how to stack missions.

Alongside the B-rank mission, the C-rank missions were all the delivery sort that were along the path or within a reasonable range. Normally, mission stacking was not something the admin office recommended or looked kindly on. Mainly because there was a chance that whoever took the missions could get killed and the village would lose the stack and its payment due to failure. Kurei had to get special permission from Hiruzen in order for our team to do so.

Nearly half a year passed since the forming of Team Karasu. My training with Inoichi was limited to the time that I’m not on mission, which was at most a week a month. With that time constraint, I’m surprised he managed to hammer in enough control into my brain to lessen the lapses enough to stop my mind from deteriorating any further. Can’t say I made much progress in damage repairs. Every now and then, I still have the odd craving for fish… the still living sort…

“…God damn it, not again!” I groaned before rolling out of bed.

I still had an issue with the feral tendencies, but for the most part it was manageable. Usually sushi or a particularly rare steak would curb the urges, but for the more physical aspect, I found myself taking part more and more in the confrontations during the missions.

I know I said I’m not meant for direct combat, but it’s not like I’m charging head first into a fight either. Between Itachi and Shisui, the two had the frontlines covered. I’m more like… crowd control? I took Kakashi’s suggestion on building the Crimson Terror’s reputation. There was an advantage being known and feared, it kept the weaker bandits and the superstitious lot from attacking, making the mission considerably less hectic without getting jumped every mile or so.

In order to solidify my title as the Crimson Terror, one of the things I took into my arsenal was Obito’s Demonic Illusion: Crimson Mist genjutsu. Not that it had any real use, like I said before the Hidden Mist jutsu was a far more logical out of the number of obscuring genjutsu to use. The only reason I took this jutsu was to stand out.
After all, it's a bit hard to pull off the name Crimson Terror with just red hair. There were other redheads in this world and I doubt most people would think “Oh! Red hair! That must be the Crimson Terror! Run away!”

Not that I made a habit to use it in actual battle, it served to be a hindrance rather than useful. Often times, I used it either in the beginning or the end of a conflict to scare the bejesus out of our enemies. If we were lucky, they’d run screaming … If not… well, there was always Itachi and Shisui. The distraction usually gave them more than enough time to knock them out or incapacitate them before they could regain their bearings.

Worst comes to worst, I still had my dances and seal cards. While I couldn’t match either Uchiha boys in raw power, not without resorting to Isobu’s chakra anyway, I could say my underhanded tricks and tactics could make a run for their money. The seal card dome I created as an intimidation tactic for the chunin exams was surprisingly more useful than I thought.

With it hovering above and around my immediate vicinity, it was immensely easier to attack and defend at a distance. Dropping cows, explosives and poisons was as easy as a twitch of my finger. As long as I played keep away and not get caught, I could nickel and dime our enemies down until they were utterly exhausted and easy pickings. Out of the three of us, I had the best agility when it came to evasiveness and being a pseudo jinchuriki of Uzumaki descent that only meant my stamina and endurance lasted longer than most.

This may sound impressive, but it wasn’t as glorious as it seemed. Reputation was a double-edge sword. It could scare away the lesser idiots that bought the façade, but it also meant it would attract the thrill seeking sadists as well. With our line of work, that was hardly surprisingly, but immensely annoying to deal with nonetheless.

It took some trial and error, but with the help of Kushina and Tenzo, I managed to add a couple more seal stamps into my collection to help out my situation. Up till now, I had used mainly storage seals and a variety of explosive seals in combat. I barely had to use the medical seals Tenzo created mainly because neither of my teammates ever suffered more than minor scrapes and bruises.

Anyway, back to the new seals… well, I call them new seals because I didn’t have it in my arsenal before, but technically they were just more Uzumaki seals I dug up from the information seals on my arms. Since I couldn’t draw for shit, I needed Kushina’s expertise in seal drawing in order for Tenzo to create the appropriate stamp I needed.

If it was an offensive seal, I could care less if it blew up in my enemy’s face, but since these were barrier seals, I rather not have that happen. Hmm? What was that? Why do I need barrier seals when I had the Angel Wing and Demon Wing seals hanging around my neck, you ask?

Good question. The answer…those seals only worked on me and me alone. I couldn’t extend that protection or use it on anyone else. The range for that seal was limited. My natural seal activator and enforcer skillset made no difference. Likely because the seal was made with only me in mind.

When I tried to use it to shield a client once, I found it didn’t help in the least. It wasn’t until later when I brought it to Kushina and had her look it over that I found the seals were specially made just for me… I guess mom didn’t want anyone else to steal them for their own use or use it against me.

“…Damn it, Kushina-san hasn’t gone grocery shopping yet.” I sighed in annoyance at the empty fridge. Annoyed, I pushed the door shut and dragged my ass back to my room to change out of my pajamas before leaving the apartment in search for food.
Where was I again? Oh right, the barrier seals. With my wing seals useless for anyone else beside myself, I needed an alternative. The seals created from Tenzo’s stamps were considerably more chakra consuming as those constantly drained at the user’s chakra in order to maintain the protection. The more chakra you poured into it, the sturdier it became, but that also meant you drain what useable chakra you have faster too.

Currently, I could hold up the barrier for a full minute before it collapses. If I tapped into the fullness of Isobu’s chakra, I could keep the barrier up indefinitely, but at the moment I don’t have enough control or resistance to keep myself completely losing it if I went full out biju mode… not that I intend to keep it up for long, considering how quickly both Itachi and Shisui handled our enemies.

Most of the time, I didn’t need to maintain the barriers for more than ten-fifteen seconds intervals. The barrier seals were used mainly for stray fireballs and projectile weapons. Last second protection if you may… good lord, this sounded more and more like a card game.

I know it was bad that I’m treating combat and my life as a game, but at the same time, I found it near impossible to function in an actual battle if I didn’t. I’ve tried to reason with myself that this wasn’t a game and actual lives were at stake, but when the target became more than just an obstacle and an actual human being, it was considerably harder to deliver a lethal attack.

To this day, I’ve yet to make my first kill. Sure, I maimed plenty and mentally scarred even more, but I haven’t actually killed anyone. Even with the mindset of treating the mission as a game, I couldn’t deliver the final blow. Itachi and Shisui managed their first kills within the first three months without even batting an eye. I, on the other hand, got physically ill the moment we were out of our client’s sight.

In the nine years I lived in this world, I saw numerous deaths, as a war refugee, as a nurse’s aide in hospital and more recently, as a chunin on the field. Death and I were not strangers, but at the same time, I O couldn’t go about my day as if nothing happened. The moment my mind broke out from what I call game mode, the traitorous thoughts of reality crashed back and invaded my mind. The harsh remained that the enemy wasn’t just an obstacle, but a live human being that had hopes and dreams, friends and family.

At those thoughts, I made myself ill after any mission where an enemy was killed. Shisui and Itachi tried their best to keep their kill counts low or at least not let me know when there was no other choice but to eliminate the enemy. Their subtly was obvious during our discussions regarding team formations and tactics. Anything they came up with was to keep me away from ever falling into such a position that I would need to kill. To the point even an idiot like me noticed.

While their concern was sweet it made me felt utterly useless when they went out of their way to accommodate me. One of the reasons why I continued to treat all these conflicts as a game was just so I wouldn’t have to feel like I was relying on them. I’m quite sure, I’ll end up killing at least one person before the end of my career, but I’m not sure what would happen when that day comes.

First kills usually went in two ways. One makes the person and the other breaks them. I have no clue if would I make it through or break under the moral ridden thoughts, but until that day happens, I’m going to go about my life as normal as if that would never happen.

“Hmm?” I paused when I spotted something I rarely see, Shisui and Hana chatting in a dango shop. “I didn’t know they hung out together on their own…”

It took all of two seconds before a grin plastered across my face and I suppressed my
presence and slinked behind a civilian, using him as cover as I made my way to the two. With the hustle and bustle of the by passers on the street, I couldn’t make out what the two were saying, but I could see them fairly well from where I stood. Shisui had his usual smile as he chatted away and Hana laughed with a shake of her head.

Aw… aren’t they cute? Too bad I have to do what every best friend must do when they see their friends being cute with a potential significant other.

“Hana-chan!” I sung cheerily as I popped up behind her, clapping my hands on her shoulders.

“K-Kasa-chan!” yelped the girl in a jump.

“Fufufu, what’s this? Do my little eyes spy a pair of lovebirds chirping nearby?” I said with a sly chuckle.

“I-it’s not what you think!” said Hana with flailing hands, face flushed as she denied my claims.

“Oh, no need to be shy, Hana-chan!” I said in a near cackle. “You could’ve told me! Now it makes sense why you always drag me off to the Uchiha district whenever I tried to avoid the place. You wanted to see Shisui!”

“Kasa-chan!” hissed Hana.

“It’s okay Hana,” said Shisui cheerily as he grabbed her hand and pressed his lips against the back of it. “Kasa can know.”

“Shisui!” said Hana, her face completely flushed as she yanked her hand back and shoved him back into his seat. He sniggered as he rested an elbow on the table and cupped the side of his face.

“Oh ho?” My grin grew even wider as I crossed my arms and pressed a hand on the side of my cheek. “Who would’ve thought that Shisui would ever cheat on Itachi? Hana-chan, you must be one heck of a temptress.”

“Alas, though I love Itachi, he doesn’t return such affection. His heart was taken by another, leaving mine broken and abandoned,” said Shisui dramatically as he held his hands to his heart. “I was despaired until Hana came and mended my broken heart.”

“Shisui!” snapped the older girl her face turning a deeper shade of red.

“Ah, my Hana must be so embarrassed if she could only say my name,” chirped Shisui.

“We’re not dating!” protested Hana, but neither of us heeded her words.

“Shisui, you better not break Hana-chan’s heart or I might have to kill you.” I sang the last bit cheerily.

“Worry not Kasa, the only heart to be broken would be mine and mine alone,” said Shisui cheerily. “I could never break the heart of a pretty girl such as Hana and yourself.”

“Stop flirting with your girlfriend’s best friend and third-wheeling her, Shisui.” I chided him. “You’re a horrible boyfriend.”
THUMP!

Hana dropped her head to the table, hiding her face in her arms. “I am not listening to this!”

I did my best to hold in my laugh, but lost when Shisui waggled his brow. A hiss escaped my lips before I burst into a maniacal cackle. My arms wrapped at my sides as I did my best to keep myself standing as I rode out the wave of laughter.

“Good lord Hana, you’re so easy to tease!” I stifled my cackling to giggles as I plopped down in the seat next to her to give her a hug.

“You two did this on purpose!” huffed Hana with a pout as she peeked out from her arms.

“You of all people should know how Shisui and I act when we’re on a roll.” I said with a cheeky grin. “So what were you two talking about?”

“Oh, nothing much,” said Shisui with an offhanded wave. “Hana was thinking of taking the next Chunin exams.”

“Oh yeah, wasn’t the last exam held here in Konoha about a month ago? Who won that one?” I asked.

I found myself getting drawn into the conversation by the duo as they updated me on the latest news around Konoha. Even though Shisui was out of the village just as often as myself, he seemed to be able to grasp onto the latest gossip and news around Konoha within hours of his return into the village.

It was strange, sitting here, chatting and just hanging out. With how peaceful everything felt, it was hard to imagine anything more to this life.

“I heard some Kumo delegates came to Konoha to discuss about forming a treaty,” commented Shisui.

“Is that so?” I sighed with my hands splayed across the table so I could rest my chin down. “I thought we were on good terms with them already. They seemed to be pretty willing to help us out during the Kiri exams.”

“That’s only because doing so would embarrass Kiri in front of the spectators if the Mizukage reacted poorly,” replied Shisui.

“Hmm, I guess I shouldn’t have expected the higher ups to do anything without reason.” I hummed in boredom for a moment before perking up and skipping out of the shop. “Whatever! You guys enjoy your date! Laters!”

“We’re not dating!” screeched Hana before she turned to the other. “Shisui tell her!”

“She wouldn’t believe me even if I said it,” said Shisui cheerily.

“Tell her!” snapped Hana with a growl.

“All right, all right,” sighed Shisui in fake exasperation before he wiped away all signs of joking from his face and walked up to me with a faint smile. “Kasa?”

“Yes?” I blinked in surprise at the sudden tone switch.

“I would have to agree with Hana that your guess is incorrect,” said Shisui in a pleasantly
calm voice as he leant forward and lifted my chin with the curl of his two fingers. His half-lidded eyes stared directly into mines as our faces were barely an inch apart. “Because the one I’m in love with… is you.”

This was… different. It’s not the first time he’d use that line on me, but every time he used it before now, it was always with a joking tone. This was the first time he’s ever used that tone. Why the sudden change? I found myself staring back at him briefly at a lost. I wasn’t sure how long it took before realization set in and a weak grimace crossed my face.

“…Shisui…” I whispered, my hands grasped onto his as I stared down, unable to meet his eyes. “…I love you too from the bottom of my heart, but…”

“…It’s not the same as mine, I know,” replied Shisui softly with a sullen expression as he grasped onto my hands and held them to his lips.

I faintly heard Hana’s breath hitch as she raised a hand to cover her mouth.

“Sorry.” I pulled my hands away and took a step back, distancing myself from him.

“…The person you like is Itachi right?” noted Shisui.

“That can’t happen either.” I murmured. “You know that. Not with…Naori-san…”

An awkward silence fell between us.

“Kasa…Shisui,” said Hana. She looked between us in distraught, uncertain to who she should comfort. “I…I’m so sorry! I shouldn’t have said anything. I didn’t kn—”

With sullen expressions on our faces, Shisui and I watched her stumble with her apology… for all of three seconds before a grin cracked across our faces and we burst out laughing.

“W-What?” said Hana in bafflement. “Why are you laughing?”

“You thought we were serious?” I wheezed with laughter as I leaned against Shisui. “Oh god, Shisui, I’m dying!”

“But he—you…what?” spluttered Hana incoherently. “You were joking!?”

I shared a glance with Shisui before we fell into another fit of laughter.

“Shisui, I can’t breathe!” I said, straining to breathe between laughing fits.

“It’s not funny!” snapped Hana. “What the hell was all that about then?”

“Hana my love! That is the art of subterfuge!” said Shisui in a cheer as recovered from his laughing fit first and hooked an arm around my shoulders. “A Team Thirteen specialty, though Kasa was a bit slow on the pick up at first.”

“Sue me! We haven’t done subterfuge training in months!” I retorted as I reigned my laughter into snickers. “Though, we should do it more often if that’s the reaction we get.”

“Kasa, Kasa, Kasa!” chided Shisui with a waggle of his finger. “You know better than anyone else that overusing one tactic would make it lose its effectiveness over time. It’s best to rotate and keep your audience guessing.”

“Right! Shisui-sempai!” I said with gusto. “How could I ever be so foolish?”
“Sempai?” said Shisui as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “I like the sound of that! All right my little kohai! We shall make it our life goal to perform and deceive our audience!”

“Yeah!” I cheered.

“You two were made for each other,” said Hana in a deadpan.

“Aw Hana, no need to be jealous, I’ll return your boyfriend after the performance is over.” I chirped.

“We’re not…” Hana sighed. “Why do I bother?”

“Because you love us,” chirped Shisui.

“…You two do this to Itachi on a daily basis don’t you?” droned Hana.

“Only until he starts spitting fireballs at us.” I replied cheerily.

“How has he not murdered the two of you yet?” sighed Hana with a shake of her head.

“Because he loves us.” I cackled, repeating Shisui’s line before I propped a hand at my hips. “Well, as much as I love to stick around and crash on your date with Shisui. It’s my first day off in a long while and I’d rather not sit around and chat like old biddies all day.”

Hana opened her mouth to protest, but ended up giving and sighing. “…You know what, just go,” said the girl as she fanned her hand at me to tell me to go away.

“See ya!” I sang as I turned my heel to skip away.

“I love you Kasa!” shouted Shisui when I was halfway down the block. I glanced back and spotted Hana facepalming in embarrassment.

“Love you too!” I shouted back with a grin as the by passers threw odd glances at us.

Between the two of us, I don’t think there was an ounce of shame that we don’t share.

With an uplifted mood and cheery bounce to my step, I found myself wandering the streets of Konoha wondering what I should do on my day off. In my academy days, I made it a habit to avoid everyone I know for the day, but for reason… I really wanted to see my old teammates.

With all of us on different teams, it was near impossible for us to meet up. Though I had the day off, I knew that Santa and Team Six were out on mission and likely wouldn’t be back before Kurei decided to send the team out on a mission again. Tokuma and Team Thirteen on the other hand would be back sometime later today… Hmm… I wonder should I sneak into the Hyuga Branch house to rig a prank in Tokuma’s room.

“If you keep that stupid grin on your face, it’s going to get stuck,” commented a dry voice.

“Hmm?” I glanced up and spotted a silver-haired jounin lounging in the tree above me. “Yo! Reading porn and/or smut out in the open again, Kakashi?”

“It would be rather rude of me to just throw them away as you’ve so kindly bought them with my own money, bent all the book spines so I couldn’t return them and shipped them directly to my house with a large and suggestive poster plastered over the door to my apartment for all to see,” commented Kakashi offhandedly as he turned the page.

“Study shows, repressing yourself is unhealthy. I was just doing you a favor.” I grinned.
“I’m quite sure the tenants in my building agree with you whole heartedly with all the letters I’ve received since then,” drawled Kakashi.

“I’m sure they all say the nicest things about you.” I sniggered.

“I’m sure,” continued Kakashi in dry sarcasm. “The ones your dad sent were especially thoughtful with how often he tries to benefit my health by disemboweling me and removing those pesky nonessential organs like the heart, lungs and kidneys.”

“Ah, good old dad.” I nodded, fighting back a snigger as Kakashi continued reading in his nonchalant manner. From where I stood, the book didn’t seem like any of the smut books Obito and I ordered the last time we decided to prank Kakashi.

While the silver-haired anbu had a sense of humor and resembled in personality rather closely to the original Kakashi, he was considerably more reserve and stoic. I’m not sure if it was the universe’s way to balance out the number of ridiculous characters in the world or if it was due to the survival of Rin and Obito that affected his personality. He did seem happier compared to what little memory I had of his old self.

“I’m surprised you’re not with your team,” commented Kakashi offhandedly as he turned the next page.

“I see them more than enough on a daily basis, if I stay around them any longer I’m going to develop a complex.” I chirped before eying his anbu attire. “Doesn’t seem the same for you though… are you allowed to hang out in the open in uniform and with your mask?”

“Pee break,” replied Kakashi bluntly.

“You must be getting old if you need reading materials to wait out your pee stream.” I commented with a cackle.

“You’ve been around Obito for too long,” drawl Kakashi in a dry tone. “You’re picking up his crude mannerisms.”

“You know we only say what we say because we love you.” I grinned.

“Your brand of love will get people killed,” said Kakashi.

“Exaggeration!” I said in mock outrage, grin never leaving my face as I rocked back and forth where I stood.

“Do try to maintain some semblance dignity for the next couple of days. It won’t do if you embarrass yourself while the emissaries from Kumo is in the village,” advised Kakashi. “It’d be a waste to ruin the reputation of the Crimson Terror after all the hard work you’ve placed in Kiri.”

My grin faltered for a second when I digested his words. It wasn’t chance that I ran into Kakashi. He sought me out and waited for me in an inconspicuous area where little to no people walked about. Unless an anbu wanted you to see them, you wouldn’t notice even if they’re on break.

“What ever could you be talking about?” I continued, a harmless smile plastered over my face as I slipped into what Inoichi deemed as my mission mode voice. A needlessly floral and pretentious speech pattern that I’ve grown reliant on since the chunin exams.

After using it nearly two months for the exams, my speech pattern defaulted to that act whenever it came time for a mission. Unless I was required to act differently, rarely would I slip back
into my regular speech until the mission was over. While I’m quite sure my teammates and Kurei sensei were aware of this peculiar habit of mine, Inoichi was the first to make note of it. He theorized that it might be a self-defense mechanism I’ve developed to handle mission jitters and stress.

“It won’t be likely that you’d run into the Kumo delegates or be summoned by Hokage-sama while they’re present,” said Kakashi offhandedly. “But it won’t hurt to maintain your image until they’re gone.”

“I’ll be sure to take that advice into consideration.” I said airily as my casual stance switched to a proper one.

“Ah, you do that,” continued Kakashi as he snapped his book shut. “My break’s coming to an end, I should get going.”

“Understandable and thank you for your considerate suggestions.” I replied.

Kakashi glance at me briefly with a snort of amusement before he disappeared in a silent poof of cloud with a body flicker. It took a moment before I continued walking on and even longer before my body finally relaxed and my hands finally parted from holding them properly in front of my legs.

“…God damn it.” I sighed as the stiffness melted away and I reached up rubbing my neck.

Judging by what just happened with Kakashi, I think Inoichi’s theory might have some truth to it. Mission mode did make it easier to distance myself when it came to the less savory parts of the mission like body disposal of the enemies killed by Itachi and Shisui. The two could easily do so by incinerating the corpses with a simple Grand Fireball Jutsu, but Kurei sensei was determined to have me get over my inability to kill.

...Not that it helped. I ended up detaching myself even further by sealing the bodies in storage cards and burning it with a cheap fire-style trick that was meant for starting campfires. With how simple and clean it was to get rid of the bodies, I found it hard to think much on it. It was as simple as a finger snap and the cards burned to nothing but a pile of ash. I don’t think Tesuri intended for me to use the campfire trick, but I suppose anything could become a weapon if the person using it was creative about it.

Another sigh escaped me as I stopped in the middle of the street. My mood soured by the turn of events. Even if Kakashi said it wasn’t likely that I would be summoned by Hiruzen, but I wouldn’t put it pass Danzo or whoever that planned the escort team to have delegates accidentally cross paths with either me or my teammates. Why? Let’s just say, this was the political version of saying “HA! We have something you don’t!”

Take away the threat of wars, the subtle dialogue and sniping remarks and all you’ll get are a bunch of immature grade school children fighting over who gets to play on the swing. Politics was nothing more than a school yard fight that got out of hand. My team just had the misfortune of being the newest and coolest toy in the market that everyone wants to either have or break it so no one else could have it.

This was going to be a nightmare…

“Another one please!” shouted Naruto cheerily as he slammed his empty bowl down with a satisfied sigh. After picking him up from the Academy, he demanded to have Ichiraku’s. I being the idiot I am, thought him being a four-year-old brat meant he couldn’t eat much, but I was wrong… Oh, so wrong.
“Naruto, you had five bowls already.” I interrupted, eye twitching at the small tower of bowls.

“But Sasa-neeeee!” whined the blond with the most pitiful puppy eyes I’ve ever seen.

“No.” I said as I went back to my tea.

“B-but, I thought you love me!” cried Naruto as his lower lip trembled.

“Oh no, you don’t get to use that on me.” I said, poking his nose upwards so he looked like he had a pig snout. “I didn’t teach you that just so you could use it on me.”

“Stingy,” said Naruto childishly as he stuck out his tongue.

“You had five bowls.” I replied dryly. “While I’m quite sure you won’t get sick, I would rather not deal with upchuck in case I’m wrong.”

“I’m not going to throw up!” huffed Naruto.

“You’re such a big softy.” I gushed, ruffling his hair into a mess.

In the little scuffle, I almost didn’t notice Sasuke sulking in his seat with an envious pout. A soft sigh escaped me before I reached out with my other arm to pull him into a headlock.

“Aw Sasuke, are you pouting? You two are just so adorable!” I gushed, ruffling up his hair into a mess. “That’s okay if Itachi is an ass, you can come hang out with us instead!”

Even though the two whined and complained, I could see the smile plastered on their faces despite their shouts of indignation. Ah, screw the Kumo delegates. It’s my day off. I do whatever the hell I want. What’s the worst that could happen?
“What's the worst that could happen?” drawled Yami in my native tongue, her bored voice echoed through the hazy darkness. “You of all people should know better than to invoke Murphy’s Law.”

What? I tried to speak, but found myself choking and gurgling on the familiar metallic taste of blood. Blood? Why could I taste blood? Whose blood was this? Mine? Am I drowning in my own blood?

“I wouldn’t worry too much about it,” continued Yami in a nonchalant manner. “I give it another ten seconds or so before Isobu’s chakra kicks in. It’s nice being a half-demon ain’t it? Unless your chakra is sealed off, nothing in short of a full decapitation could kill you.”

Kill me? What happened? What was I doing before this?

“You know, I’m rather glad that I’m a mental construct of your inner darkness rather a physical one. Otherwise it’d be impossible to talk to you as you skip in and out of death’s door. How much you want to bet that the god of death hates your sorry ass? Constantly waltzing in and out of his domain as if it’s a stroll in the park.”

Just ignore her and concentrate on the matter at hand. She said I got killed. Who killed me? What killed me? I found myself gagging on my own blood as panic set in. Calm down and assess the damage. Find the cause of fatality. Gods, why was it so hard?

“Blood loss is tedious isn’t it? Bad for brainwork,” droned Yami with an emphasis on the last syllable.

Blood loss… I’m dying from blood loss? If that’s the case, where am I bleeding?

“I will get him back even as he gloats,” sang Yami cheerily. “In the mean time I’ll practice on less honorable throats!”

Shut up already. How on earth am I supposed to concentrate with her singing about a barber slitting… Oh…

Jugular, carotid, vertebral and trachea, all severed in the most gruesome manner. The rips and tears indicated a jagged weapon. Three external arteries and my windpipe, what a messy kill. I should have passed out and died from blood loss long before I could drown. Whoever killed me must have been in a hurry.

Again… what was I doing before I got killed?

“KASA-NEE!” screamed an anguished child’s voice.

…Sasuke? Why was Sasuke here? Shouldn’t he be with Naruto?

The hazy darkness faded and I found myself staring at Konoha’s night sky. When was the last time I had a good look of the sky at night? My body convulsed, going into shock from the blood loss. I could feel the cobblestone ground beneath me. Interesting, there weren’t many of those around Konoha. Mostly in the lesser used paths by the parks near the Uchiha district.

… Right, I was walking Sasuke home after dinner. He didn’t want to stay the night and Kushina didn’t want him to walk home alone. We took the quieter path so that Sasuke’s excited
chattering wouldn’t bother the residents who were already asleep. We thought we were alone, but then Sasuke was snatched up from behind.

In my haste, I performed a body swap to switch places with him so I could get in physical contact with the enemy. Using my body as the conduit, I attempted to knock out the kidnapper using the defibrillation jutsu. Unfortunately, I didn’t realize our assailant had immunity towards lightning based attacks. Before I could continue my assault with any of my cards, he drew a blade across my throat.

“Shut up!” hissed an unfamiliar voice before Sasuke’s became muffled, quite possibly gagged.

Above me, I spotted an unfamiliar man expertly tied up Sasuke with ropes. The young Uchiha struggled and fought against his grip, but being so small, his efforts meant nothing.

“What did you do? We were supposed to take her back alive!” hissed another as the other stranger came into view.

“I had no choice!” snapped back the other. “She body-swapped with the brat! Who body-swaps themselves into danger? If I gave her a chance to retaliate, she would cause enough noise to draw attention to us. We got the Uchiha. Just cleanup and dispose of her body. Gashira-san should have the Hyuga by now. We need to rendezvous ASAP.”

“Now isn’t it convenient that they’re so loose lipped with their plans? People get so careless around the dead, no?” chortled Yami.

Hyuga… Hinata’s kidnapping… Hizashi’s…

A cold chill ran through my body. How could I have forgotten about this moment? Why haven’t I thought of anything to stop this? What happened that had them target Sasuke as well?

“Is this really the time to berate yourself for not doing anything?” drawled Yami in boredom. “At this rate, they’ll get away with Sasuke and then what do you think is going to happen?”

…As much as I hate to agree with her, she had a point. If I don’t do something Sasuke would be taken… but I could barely move.

“The gaping hole in your throat and the growing pool of blood might have something to do with that,” commented Yami in amusement.

Shut up, I don’t need your background commentary.

“Are you sure you want to brush me off? Even when Isobu’s chakra kicks in, it will take some time before you’re in any condition to move, much less fight against two possible Kumo jounins,” said Yami.

And why do you care?

“Caring is such a strong word,” corrected Yami. “I’m more on self-interest. After all, it would be rather dull if we lost one of the main players this early in the game. I’m sure the drama in the later years would make up for it, but I’m more of the here and now sort of person.”

…What do you mean?
“I’m your mental manifestation. I could easily take over your body and move about even in your current sorry state,” answered Yami.

…Are you offering to save Sasuke?

“I know what you’re thinking,” continued Yami. “What’s the catch, right? All I ask is to get dibs to kick his dumbass when he gets into full blown vengeance mode.”

That’s all?

“Well, you’re going to have to deal with the political backlash and all the annoying bureaucratic bullshit with what I’m about to do, but by all means you’re free to decline my offer.”

…Political backlash? What are you going to do?

“Spoilers,” sang Yami cheerily. “Also, they’re going to get away with Sasuke soon. Decide, decide my dear other self.”

True to her words, I could see the other ninja turning to leave with Sasuke. The remaining one looked annoyed as he reached down to grab me.

“Oh right, didn’t they say they’re going to dispose of your body? You might actually die if they decapitate you,” quipped Yami. “Come to think of it, you’ve very much like a zombie now aren’t you? Double-tap, bam!”

… Good lord, was this what I sound like to everyone?

“Pretty much,” chirped Yami. “Insane and incoherent. You might be able to pull of the insanity plead if you ever get arrested.”

…

“I’ll take your silence as consent… though in any other situation, that would be considered rape, no?” cackled Yami.

You’re disgusting.

“I love you too,” said Yami.

The world shifted. I found myself in the back of my own mind as a spectator, watching the events unfold like a scene in a play… Only, I’m not sure who held the role of the villain. Just as the other ninja grabbed onto my arm, Yami reached out with my other to grab his neck.

“W-What?” said the other ninja in surprise as he tried to pull back, but Yami held firm as she shifted her eyes towards him.

“Hello,” rasped out my darker half in an eerie manner with my torn throat. Even while spectating, I could feel the blood dripping from my mouth as the corner of my lips drew upwards. “Tonight’s a good evening to die, wouldn’t you say?”

“The hell? She’s still alive?” shouted the first ninja, the one who killed me. I could faintly hear the muffled scream from Sasuke, but I couldn’t make out what exactly he screamed.

“Let go,” growled the second ninja as he tried to yank the hand off, but before he could I felt a surge of healing chakra go up my arm and concentrated at his neck.
No… no please don’t do what I think you’re doing! Stop! Stop! STOP!

“Goodbye,” drawled Yami gleefully before the neck exploded, splattering blood and gore all over my body as the head rolled away.

She… killed him…

“Yotsuki!” shouted my killer in fury before he turned to face Yami. “You fucking bitch!”

She really… killed him…

“Now, now,” rasped Yami as she released the remains of the other ninja and rested a hand against my neck. Unlike the saturated chakra she used to blow up the other ninja, a gentle wave went up my arm and slowly sealed up the gaping hole. “No need for such language. After all, I was killed once already. It’s only fair.”

“I was the one that killed you! Not him!” snapped the man.

A low chuckle escaped Yami as she finished healing and move to peel off the specks of flesh clinging onto my skin and clothes. She made sure to touch each piece with the pads of my fingers rather than brushing it off with the back of my nails, knowing full well I could feel everything she felt.

“Then you really should’ve thought about it before you went for the kill,” drawled Yami as she strolled lazily forward.

“Take a step closer and I’ll kill the Uchiha,” snapped the man as he pressed the same bloodied blade that killed me against Sasuke’s neck.

“You do know, that the only reason you’re still alive is because he’s alive,” said Yami as she continued to walk forward. “What makes you think that you would live any longer if you killed him?”

“I’m not joking. If you come closer, I will kill the brat! Even if you kill me afterwards, he would still be dead,” growled the man.

A low chuckle escaped Yami before escalating into a dark sadistic cackle. The pain ripped through my newly healed throat as she took in a sharp wheeze at the end of her bout of laughter.

“Do you want to know why mother picked the name Kasa?” drawled Yami in amusement as she went off on a tangent, completely ignoring the threat of Sasuke’s life in front of my eyes. “She said Kasa would be the umbrella that protected others, but does anyone know what exactly that umbrella protected against?”

Before he could drive the blade into Sasuke’s throat, Yami flashed through a set of hand seals, swapping my body once more with Sasuke.

“DIE!” shouted the man, but he never managed a second killing blow as caught his wrists and sent another violent surge of concentrated chakra.

Within seconds, his wrists exploded. Blood spewed from the open wound, splattering my face with the warmth of the red liquid. I couldn’t do anything as I watched the blood drip from my hands and into the growing pool of blood. I couldn’t even scream.

“The downpour,” finished Yami with glee as he dropped to his knees before her.
“You monster!” screamed the man in agony. “You took my hands! You took my hands!”

“Monster? Ah, so you share the same fondness that she has in calling me such names,” chuckled Yami as she reached down and pulled him up by the hair. “But I’m afraid that particular nickname is reserved. If you must call me something, you may call me Rayne, the downpour of blood. An umbrella would be quite useful at this point, wouldn’t you say?”

The man continued to scream in agony at the loss of his hands.

“I’m sure you won’t be missed,” said the newly named Rayne as she reached out for his face.

I wanted desperately to close my eyes, but I couldn’t. I could only see what she wanted to see… and right now she wanted to see the man dead.

“KASA-NEE STOP!” shouted Sasuke as he tackled her away from the Kumo-nin.

“Sasuke,” growled Rayne in annoyance as she dropped the Kumo-nin and stumbled backwards.

“Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!” chanted the boy desperately as he clung to her waist. “You’re an iryo-nin aren’t you? You’re supposed to heal people not cause pain!”

“Good god, what the hell did you do with the traitorous brat?” snarled Rayne as she switched over to my native tongue. “He’s pulling an ‘It’s not you’ cliché! Disgusting!”

Sasuke…

“Let go of me you little brat,” snarled Rayne as she tried to pry the younger boy’s arms off her.

“No! Not until you return to your—”

My darker half showed no patience for reasoning and promptly knocked the boy out with a sharp strike to his neck. His eyes widened in a brief moment of shock before he slumped against my blood-drenched body.

“Now where was I?” sighed Rayne as she nudged Sasuke aside without a care. The boy crumpled to the ground in an unconscious heap.

No more… no more… no more… I chanted desperately in my mind.

“My darker half showed no patience for reasoning and promptly knocked the boy out with a sharp strike to his neck. His eyes widened in a brief moment of shock before he slumped against my blood-drenched body.

“Now where was I?” sighed Rayne as she nudged Sasuke aside without a care. The boy crumpled to the ground in an unconscious heap.

No more… no more… no more… I chanted desperately in my mind.

“Right, I remember now,” drawled Rayne as she strolled towards the writhing Kumo-nin.

She never reached her target as wooden pillars shot up from the ground, sprouted wooden vines and latched onto her. Within seconds, she was restrained.

“Tsk,” clicked Rayne in annoyance, but a slow grin crept in place when she recognized the restraining shrubbery. “Well, I had my fun, your turn.”

Without further warning, she surrendered control of my body. I found my consciousness thrust back into the front once more and my knees gave out. If not for the vines catching my shaking body, I don’t think I could’ve stood on my own. My breath grew rapid as I realized how my clothes clung uncomfortably with the wetness of the blood.

I forced out a weak laugh, using the searing pain in my throat as a distraction. The more I
laughed, the more it hurt. It was all I could do to keep from getting sick. I’m sure I sounded crazy, but I couldn’t do anything else.

As an iryo-nin, I had plenty of chances of being drenched in blood during my interim in the hospital. Whether from pinning down a patient in the emergency trauma ward or assisting in a caesarean section, blood and I were no strangers. I’d make a sad iryo-nin if the sight of blood could get me sick so easily.

No, what bothered me was the elation that coursed through my body during Rayne’s vicious actions. Though I’m quite certain what I felt was due to her using my body, but wasn’t she a manifestation of my inner darkness? Even if I wanted to deny any association I had with her, she existed because of me… which meant that deep down inside, I’m…

“Kasa,” came the rumbling of Kakashi’s voice.

“…Forget me, get to the Hyuga compound.” I rasped out after a particularly broken laugh. “They’re after the byakugan. These delegates are nothing more than frauds using the guise of a treaty to get in.”

“What?” whispered Tenzo in surprise. I could feel him move through the vines’ tug.

“Keep an eye on her,” commanded Kakashi. “She seems to be in control at the moment, but do what you must if that changes.”

“But—” started Tenzo, but the silver-haired jounin disappeared in a swirl of leaves.

“Change?” I rasped through a broken laugh. “I haven’t changed… forever the spectator, greedily watching as the world burns.”

“Kasa?” called out Tenzo softly. “Are you okay?”

“That monster needs no pity,” croaked the weaken voice of the Kumo-nin that loss his hands to Rayne’s abuse of the faulty healing technique.

“What?” said Tenzo in surprise as he pulled both me and Sasuke back with the help of his vines to dodge a glowing body.

“That… monster,” heaved the Kumo-nin with strained breathing, his body covered in a light-sheen of what seemed like lightning release chakra. “Needs to pay.”

It took a moment before I noticed beneath the glow of chakra, in place of his hands were badly burned stumps… he cauterized his own wounds to keep from bleeding out.

“You think you can fight in that condition?” said Tenzo in an icy tone as he shifted his stance. “You barely stood a chance when you had both hands. What makes you think you can fight when you have none?”

“It doesn’t matter,” growled the man. “If I die, I’ll die taking that monster with me!”

“As if I would let you do that!” snapped Tenzo in return as he skipped backwards, pulling both me and Sasuke along as he moved.

“I’ll make you pay!” continued the man in fury. “I’ll make you pay for everything you took!”
“Damn it,” hissed Tenzo as he continued to dodge the man’s violent charges.

Since the Kumo-nin could no longer fight with his hands, he covered his entire body in a cloak of lightning release chakra, using his own body as a weapon as he charged recklessly at us. Any other time, Tenzo could have easily handled him. Unfortunately, he was in a similar situation, unable to use his hands due to maintaining the wood release that held both me and Sasuke.

“Tenzo, let me go.” I ordered as he continued to dodge. “I’ll finish what I started.”

“If you haven’t noticed Kasa, this man wants you dead,” retorted Tenzo with a grunt as he formed a wooden shield to block the more enthusiastic charges. “In fact, he killed you once already.”

“He didn’t do a very good job.” I rasped out.

“You’re in no condition to fight,” reasoned Tenzo.

“And you are?” My voice strained. “How are you going to fight lugging both me and Sasuke around?”

“I’ll have a better chance than you,” grounded Tenzo. “You’re not in the right state of mind!”

“I’m fine.” I argued. “I can handle it!”

“No, you can’t!” growled Tenzo as he dodged another attack. “Stop hiding behind so many lies!”

“I’m not!” I hissed.

“You just went through your first kill!” snapped Tenzo. “It’s messy, rushed and overall a horrible experience. The fact you’re still shaking proves that you’re not okay!”

“I’m fine!” I grounded out stubbornly. “The shaking will pass!”

“Tell me Kasa. When did I become your enemy?” snapped the older boy.

“Enemy?” I found myself taken aback by his words. “You’re not—”

“If I’m not, why do you insist on treating me like one when I’m just trying to help?” retorted Tenzo. “Why do you constantly force yourself to do everything on your own?”

I grew silent at his words.

“I will not be ignored!” growled the irate Kumo-nin as his body crackled with lightning release chakra.

“Tch,” hissed Tenzo in annoyance. “This really isn’t the time for this sort of conversation. Just sit tight! We’ll continue—”

“I’ll see you two in hell!” screamed the man as his body glowed even brighter. It didn’t take long before we realized he started a suicidal attack.

“Damn it!” cursed Tenzo as he desperately forced his wooden vines to grow faster in an attempt to shield all three of us, but it wasn’t growing fast enough.

“Tenzo!” I screamed before a downpour of blood filled my vision.
Crimson Terror

The wood splintered and broke apart at the Kumo-nin’s impact. Being in such a close range and with both hands occupied, Tenzo had no time to react as the jagged wood impaled into his chest. I could see his eyes widened in shock before we all hit the ground. Terror ran through me when I felt the vines that bound me loosened. With a harsh tug, I ripped away the slacken vines and forced myself onto my knees.

“Tenzo!” I screamed.

Sasuke’s unconscious form fell a short distance away, bound in Tenzo’s slacken vines. Aside from the splatter of blood on his face and clothes, he seemed unharmed. The kumo-nin laid motionless in the remains of the broken wooden barrier, his body no longer glowed with the luminescence of chakra. There was a chance that he expended all of his chakra and died of chakra exhaustion. I couldn’t be certain until I gave him a check over, but I had no leisure time to waste on that.

“Tenzo? Tenzo!” I shouted through searing pain that came with each scream as I scrambled over to his fallen form.

All other thoughts blanked out from my mind as it raced through countless healing procedures at the sight of the growing pool of blood beneath his body. Immediate threats, punctured right lung and substantial blood loss. Priority actions: cease blood flow, remove obstruction and cauterize wounds. Secondary actions: drain excess blood from right lung, redirect excess into main bloodstream.

Side note: body may go into shock and cardiac arrest, time needed to complete priority and secondary actions should be under five minutes prior to enacting defibrillation and CPR. Patient’s blood flow and breathing should resume before the eight-minute mark to avoid excess stress to the brain and possible brain damage.

“Isolate, disinfect.” I muttered the procedures under my breath as I flipped several cards into my free hands.

With a pulse of chakra, a small decontamination field surrounded Tenzo’s body. A second pulse a burst of antiseptic gas filled the containment area. I forced my shaking hands to still as a soothing wave of healing chakra rushed up my arm.

Block out everything, the patient is priority. Nothing else matters, but the patient. My breathing steadied as I pressed a firm hand against the open wound and yanked out the stake. However, before I could start healing, a low groan sent terror coursing through my veins. My heart dropped as my eyes shifted to the figure at Tenzo’s feet.

The stake’s been removed. There was no time for recalculation. The kumo-nin’s not dead…

I barely registered the stake dropping to the ground as my arm darted towards the kumo-nin. No other thoughts entered my mind as my body went on auto-pilot. Protect the patient, eliminate all threats. No time for error. No time for alternatives. He needs to die. He needs to…

“Die.” I said with unblinking eyes as the kumo-nin’s skull bubbled and warped into a violent explosion. The gore splattered against the containment field, but none reached Tenzo’s body.
as I turned away and resumed my attention on the fallen wood user. “No time… no time…”

This wasn’t Rayne’s doing. This was my hand grabbing the back of the kumo-nin’s head. My chakra that pulsed through my arm… and my decision to blow his brains out… I had to do it. I needed to do it. There was… My eyes widened as I darted my attention to the shadows in the trees. There was one more!

“Sasuke!” I shouted, unable to move from my spot as the figure darted out and snatched up the young Uchiha.

What do I do? If I leave now, Tenzo would die, but if I stay, Sasuke would be taken away. Unlike the previous kumo-nin, this one had no interest in fighting for revenge was unlikely to get close enough for me to do what I did to the other two. No time… I don’t have time!

“Wood Release: Four-Pillar Prison!” shouted a familiar voice as wooden pillars shot out from the ground and trapped the fleeing kumo-nin.

“What?” gasped the kumo-nin in surprise, a woman by the sound of her voice.

“Wood Release: Wood Spikes Ring!” continued the previous voice. The pillars shifted and formed threatening spikes mere inches away from all sides of her body.

The woman couldn’t do anything as the vines around Sasuke came to life once more and pulled him safely away from her grasp. At the sound of creaking wood, I turned my gaze to a nearby tree and spotted a body phasing out and shaping into a familiar form.

“…Ten-zo?” I whispered with uncertainty, too afraid to look away in case it was just an illusion.

“You might as well surrender,” said Tenzo as he made his way to the woman. “You’ll be brought forth to Hokage-sama on charges of treachery, attempted murder of a Konoha shinobi, attempted kidnap of a renowned clan’s child and violating the treaty agreement between Kumo and Konoha.”

“Your shinobi just murdered two of my men,” said the woman coldly. “Had I not taken that child as a means of leverage, she would have killed me as well. You think you could just lay such claims on me to cover for your shinobi’s behavior?”

“You’re in no position to be laying blame on others, Mabui-san,” said Tenzo.

“Yes, and I’m certain that gore-drenched kunoichi right there is the prime example of a victim of circumstances,” snorted the woman. “Your words against mine. There are two kumo-nin corpses and proof of only Konoha’s hostility towards Kumo.”

So this was what Rayne meant when she said political backlash. With so many deaths, we had a delicate situation on our hands. No doubt Kumo would demand retribution and a sacrifice to be made in order to pay for these deaths. Unless Kakashi made it in time to stop Hisashi at the Hyuga estate, his death and his corpse would be their first priority.

“Kumo sure loves to play dirty don’t they?” drawled Rayne in amusement. “What are you going to do to thwart this political fiasco?”

I pulled my gaze away from the two and glanced down at the supposed Tenzo body under my hand. No longer was there any chakra running through its body. I watched as the finer details hardened and slowly morphed into a wooden figure… A wood clone… he tricked me with a wood
clone... I fell for the most basic misdirection tactic... Not only that, he used me as a decoy to lure out the enemy. Me! A decoy!

...A decoy?

"Heh... hehe." A slow giggle escaped me as I pressed a blood-soaked hand against my eyes. "Ha...hahahahahaha!"

"Kasa?" questioned Tenzo with a firm voice, no doubt confused and wary of my behavior. However, with an enemy in sight, he couldn’t afford to seem weak. I rasped out another fit of deranged laughter as I did my best to gather my bearings. It won’t do for me to lose myself, not at all.

"Hmph," harrumphed the kumo-nin Mabui as they waited out my laughter. "She’s definitely exemplifying the vision of—"

" Sanity?" I rasped out in the same sadistic drawl Rayne used just moments earlier as I dragged my hand down over the side of my face. "What a load of overrated bullshit."

"Excuse me?" said the woman, affronted by my choice in words.

"You think we’re afraid of Kumo? You think a threat of war could force us to overlook the misdeeds that took place here tonight?" I rasped out in a low condescending chuckle.

"You have no—"

" Shut up," I hissed, the wooden clone exploded beneath my hand, ceasing all words from the woman. "Don’t think for a moment that your diplomatic immunity would keep you safe from me. I’ve already killed two of your men as you’ve said, it makes no difference to me if I add you to my list."

"You’d risk starting a war between Konoha and Kumo?" snapped the woman.

"From what you’ve just said, it looks like war would happen regardless whether or not you live. So what difference would it make if I killed you now?" I said in a low rumble.

"You’ll be branded as the one who started a war! You’ll be hated by your peers!" shouted the woman.

"You seem to have the misconception that I care about what others think," I replied with a bemused chuckle as I pulled away my hand from my bloodstained face. "Have you forgotten what I could do?"

Wisp-like tendrils of chakra danced about my hand, weaving between my fingers in an almost haunting manner as dragged my feet towards the wooden prison. The faint-hearted would have suffocated from the killer’s intent I emitted long before I could finish this farce.

Chakra swirled about my body as if it had a life of its own, but in actuality it was just acute chakra manipulation. Aside from the visual aspect, the wavering chakra had no practical use. Even so, I could see Mabui resisting the urge to back away as the chakra licked at the bars of the prison.

Not many could claim mastery over the art of intimidation. True intimidation derived from one’s ability to be perceived as a threat. As long as the target submits and succumbs to the fear by mere presence alone, it didn’t matter who had the largest stick or the loudest voice.
“I must applaud the gutsiness of you Kumo-nins to think that you could kidnap children from not one, but two of Konoha’s most notable clans.” I rasped in amusement, my voice barely audible by the volume even as I reached the wooden prison. “However, you made a grievous miscalculation when you thought you could take me on while doing so.”

Mabui had all but stopped breathing when our eyes met and my chakra-encapsulated hands grasped onto the bars that separated us. The wood creaked and cracked under my grasp, its living cells in the wood began to multiply and grow in the presence of the healing chakra.

“True, kekkai genkais are held in high regard and valuable for potential powerhouses, but that potential cannot begin to compare to what I could do. What you’ve witnessed tonight barely scraped the surface of my abilities.” I continued as I kept my gaze on her widened eyes and rolling beads of sweat on her neck.

“That’s enough,” commanded Tenzo as he grabbed my shoulder.

“Do you want to know why I’ve been given the title The Crimson Terror?” I continued, ignoring Tenzo’s hand for the moment. “There are many uses for the word crimson, but which sort would you like to see if we ever meet in a war between Konoha and Kumo?”


“Can you really?” I spared him a brief glance at his expressionless face before brushing his hand off. I could see Mabui trembling at the corner of my eye, desperately trying not to hyperventilate.

Without another word, I turned my heel and I strolled towards the waiting vine that held Sasuke. The vine gave no resistance as I hauled the small Uchiha onto my back and continued down the cobblestone path. Even as I walked away, the adrenaline continued to course through my veins, keeping me on high alert.

One foot in front of the other, I had no clue how long I continued as autopilot kicked in and my mind focused on nothing but the possible threats around me. Faintly, I could hear the hissing and snarls of the strays I passed, but little else registered until I felt a hand at my shoulder. Had I not recognized the person who touched me, I would’ve blew him up next without fail.

“…Obito?” I whispered quietly in an exhausted daze.

“It’s okay, you can drop the killer’s intent,” said the older Uchiha as he ruffled my hair fondly. His fingers caught in the tangle clumps of hair and dried blood, but he didn’t seem bothered in the least. “Rin’s going to take Sasuke and handle the rest.”

“…Rin-san?” I repeated, eyes drifting over Obito’s shoulder at the older medic.

“I’m here,” said Rin soothingly as she came to my side. “I’ll take care of Sasuke, you go with Obito, okay?”

“…Okay,” I murmured, dropping the intent as she pulled Sasuke into her arms. The sudden lightness and the loss of adrenaline threw me off as my knees gave out and I collapsed into Obito’s waiting arms.

“Come on, let’s get you a bath and some clean clothes,” said Obito as he shifted me into an easier position to hold. “You can stay over at my place tonight.”

He carried me back to his apartment in silence. After what happened, no doubt the amount
of blood on me would be a cause for worry. I had no complaints in not going home. I don’t want to even think how Naruto would react if he saw me.

Once we made it back to his apartment, Obito ushered me into the bathroom while he went rummaging through his old clothes for something that would fit me. Caked from head to toe in gore, the blood-crusted clothing clung to my body like an adhesive. Peeling each layer off felt more and more like ripping off a scab.

I stood under the hot spray of the shower for ten minutes before the blood softened enough for me to start scrubbing. My face, my neck, my hands, the tub stained red as I scratched at my skin and picked at my nails, to get whatever blood off me. Even as I lathered my hair with Obito’s scentless shampoo, I found it turning to a light shade of pink.

By the time I finished, my skin glowed red from the scrubbing and heat. The clothes Obito ended up giving me were his old clothes prior to his denouncement of his clan. I haven’t seen him wear the Uchiha fan since then, but I guess he either held it for nostalgia sake or that he was too lazy to purge what remains of the Uchiha in his belongings.

Tugging on the black shirt, I noticed it reached my knees, but not big enough to fall off my shoulders. Surprising, considering how much the Uchiha liked their wide collars. I didn’t bother with the pants, even if I made more notches on one of Obito’s belts, the folded fabric against my stomach would’ve been uncomfortable.

The moment I stepped out of the bathroom, I found myself bundled up in a thick blanket before seated at the table with a warm cup of honey milk in my hand.

“…What’s this for?” I asked quietly, slightly confused.

“It’s for shock,” said Obito with a soft grin. “I can’t do anything to help with what you just went through, but I’ve heard from Rin that a blanket and a warm drink make you feel a little better.”

“…A shock blanket.” I murmured in amusement. “A little disappointed it’s not orange…”

Obito raised a brow. “Do you want an orange one?”

“No, this one is fine.” I answered, huddled in the bundle as I took a sip of the hot milk. It both burned and soothed my raw throat, but I wasn’t sure if it made me feel any better like he claimed.

“So… first kill huh?” started up Obito after a moment of silence. “Want to talk about it?”

“… Not really.” I murmured with my lips against the mug.

“You know, the first kill isn’t easy for everyone,” said Obito with the same soothing voice. “It’s expected in our line of work and very few could ever avoid it unless they’re low level genins.”

I remained quiet as I sipped the sweet liquid.

“…If you need someone to talk about it, you know you could always come to me. It’s not good to keep it all in… unless you want to end up like Kakashi.” Obito made a face. “Second thought, please don’t decide to replicate Kakashi. One Kakashi is more than enough.”

Though I didn’t show it, the urge to grin was underneath all the tired muscles on my face. My mind felt numb after all that happened, but it didn’t stop me from getting what little relief from Obito’s soothing chatter. I thought nightmares would plague sleep, but much to my surprise, I slept
without a single dream. I supposed I should be thankful for that little reprieve.

After the stunt I’ve pulled, I’m not looking forward to the prospect of Hiruzen’s summons. What I did was a reckless gamble at best. I essentially made myself into a decoy in hopes of drawing their attention. Even if Hisashi killed the head ninja, I technically killed two and traumatized a third into thinking I’m more dangerous in the long run compared to the slight power gain from obtaining a kekkai genkai. If my memory was correct, the third was Mabui a trusted assistant of Kumo’s Raikage.

If she viewed me more of a threat, they might just ignore the other clans… That or I just doomed Konoha to another war.

Rayne hasn’t spoken a word since she declared the aftermath my problem. She obviously knew of the political repercussions to come from our actions the night prior. We shared the same awareness and knowledge of the world around us. Whatever I knew, she knew, if not better. Yet, I can’t understand her.

She claimed it for the sake of entertainment and self-interest, but in what way? Nothing made sense, not her actions or her motives.

The only person to really gain anything from all this was Hizashi, but I doubt she suddenly found the goodness in her heart and decided to take an altruistic path. There must be something I’m missing, something that I’m not seeing. What point did she have in doing all this?

I pondered over these thoughts the next morning as I stared at the wall, curled up in bed with my back against Obito. It felt oddly comforting as it reminded me the times I stayed over during my Academy days and the only worried I had was not being dead last in ranks again… Somehow, that seemed so far away now.

**Knock, Knock**

I felt the sheets shift as Obito groggily rolled out of bed and made his way to the window.

“What is it Kakashi?” asked Obito with a yawn.

“Summons from Hokage-sama,” replied Kakashi in his usual mellow tone.

“So soon?” said Obito, sleep disappearing from his voice as he took in the silver-haired jounin’s words. “She barely had a chance to recover!”

“Tell that to the remaining delegates from Kumo. Between you and her, I’m not sure who has more of a knack in causing international debacles,” commented Kakashi dryly.

“Hey, you had a hand in the Kiri one too!” retorted Obito in a huff, but the irritation didn’t seem to reach his voice. It seemed like they wanted to keep the mood lighthearted, but their efforts fell short. “…But this isn’t the same is it?”

“No, it’s not,” agreed Kakashi with a solemn tone. “Two dead, one severely injured, one near catatonic and two clan-head children reasonably traumatized.”

“I’m guessing the Hyugas and Uchihas aren’t happy about this either,” grimaced Obito.

“It’s a political nightmare,” muttered Kakashi. “We’re fortunate that Hisashi didn’t kill Kumo’s head ninja, but that doesn’t excuse the ones Kasa killed.”
“What’s going to happen to her?” asked Obito.

“I wish I knew,” sighed Kakashi. “I doubt Sandaime would willingly punish her since she did act on self-defense, but then again…”

“…You’re right, this is a nightmare,” sighed Obito in agreement. “I’ll go wake her.”

“No need.” I rasped quietly, throat still sore from the night before. I kept my back facing them as I pushed myself up from the bed. “I’m up.”

“Kasa!” said Obito in surprise as he turned to face me. “How long were you awake?”

“Long enough.” I answered before glancing to Kakashi. “Do I have time to go home to get a change of clothes? I don’t think it’d help the situation if I went in with the Uchiha fan on my back… even less with my clothes from last night.”

“I’m afraid there’s no time for that,” said Kakashi, his tone almost apologetic.

“…I’ll salvage what I can of my old clothes and be ready in a bit.” I said as I crawled out of bed and made my way to the bathroom on bare feet.

My clothes were left haphazardly in the corner, misshapen by the crusted dry blood. I half-expected flashbacks from the night before to send me into a psychotic breakdown, but oddly it never came. Even as I dug through the pile for something salvageable to wear, I found the blood looking no different from the dried mud caked to the bottom of my shoes.

The only difference, mud broke off with ease when dried, blood clung like an obsessed stalker. None of my clothes could be salvaged without thorough laundering. If I walked in with the Uchiha fan on my back, no doubt the remaining Kumo representative might just demand an Uchiha as compensation. With a frown I went about flipping each article inside out, trying to see if I could just wear it in reverse.

Unfortunately, the blood soaked through nearly all my clothing despite the thickness of my winter garbs. Not that they were all that thick to begin with. With Konoha situated in the Fire Country, the weather rarely reached a point where it snowed. Only the obi managed to survive the downpour due to the special waterproof lining on the inside.

Considering a kunai pouch hardly matched a kimono-based wardrobe, it served as my storage compartment for my seal cards. It also doubled up as a as a barrier much like a Kevlar vest against stray projectiles as kimonos had little to no armor defense whatsoever.

Flipping the obi to the other side, I managed to improvise and turn the loose shirt into a short dress by tying the obi around my waist. It managed to cover up the lower portion of the Uchiha fan in doing so, but I’m not sure having a bright red dot on my back was any better. After staring at the mirror and debating for a moment, I unraveled the obi and slipped off the shirt.

If I’m going to wear a glaring target on my back… I might as well go all the way. Rummaging through my cards, I found the spare ink pad I carried about for my stamps and dipped my finger in. It was pointless to carry along a brush considering my crappy penmanship, so using my finger would have to do. It didn’t take long for me to make the necessary additions to the shirt before I slipped it back on and tied the obi around my waist once more.

“Ready?” asked Kakashi once I was out of the bathroom and sitting in the genkan to put on my okobos. It felt a little wrong to wear them without socks, but I had no other options.
“…Yeah.” I murmured as I moved to follow Kakashi out the window.

“Kasa,” said Obito catching my arm as I moved to leave. “Whatever happens, you know you can come to me for help right?”

“…I know.” I said quietly.

“Kakashi,” said Obito as he turned to the silver-haired jounin.

“I got it, I got it,” sighed Kakashi as he turned to leave. “Come on, we’re late as it is.”

A faint grin tugged at my lips as a slight snicker escaped. “I guess Obito’s rubbing off on us.”

“Ah, the world is doomed,” droned Kakashi in nonchalant bemusement.

“Hey!” retorted Obito with a huff, but the indignation was half-hearted at best as he released my arm. “See you soon, okay?”

“Yeah, see you soon.” I said, forcing some cheer into my voice as I turned to him. “And Obito?”

“Hmm?” hummed the older ex-Uchiha.

“Thanks for everything.” I said, rushing out before he could say anything else.

“…You know what’s going to happen when you get to Sandaime’s office, don’t you?” asked Kakashi as he caught up behind me.

“I have an inkling.” I replied as we made our way to the admin building via roof hopping.

“You have a plan of some sort?” noted Kakashi, his eye shifting towards the fingers I had pressed against my bare seal-covered arms.

“…If you can call it that.” I muttered as I juggled between travel and riffling through the information flashing through my eyes. Had I been less distracted, I might’ve made note that Kakashi seemed to take my word and actions without a question, but since I didn’t…

“Hmm,” hummed Kakashi. “Well, if you manage to get through this, I suggest taking some art classes. I’ve never see such pointed corners on a curve.”

“…Shut up.” I retorted, ignoring the obvious jab towards my horrible penmanship.

We made it to Hiruzen’s office with no interruptions. Being so early in the morning, the main gates weren’t even open yet for merchants and those with mission requests to approach the admin office. Save for Hiruzen and his hidden anbu staff, there were no one else in the building.

“Hokage-sama.” We both greeted him with a bow the moment we walked in.

“Kasa-kun,” sighed Hiruzen, his aged face looked older than usual as he sadden eyes rested on me. “Why must it always be you?”

“What can I say?” I replied with forced cheer. “I have a knack for this sort of thing.”

The man sighed. “Kasa-kun—”
“It’s okay.” I interrupted. “I will take on all responsibility for my actions.”

“… You do understand the severity of what you’ve done do you not?” asked Hiruzen, in a grave tone.

“The price is likely my life.” I said softly. “I know.”

“And even knowing this…” Hiruzen trailed off when he spotted my hands still on my seals.

“Hokage-sama…” I raised my gaze to meet his. “Respectfully, I would like to request a transfer of allegiance… to Uzushiogakure.”
“Transfer of allegiance…” said Hiruzen with a weary sigh. “I never thought I would ever hear that term again after Uzushio’s destruction. I was certain Kushina’s transfer would be the last.”

The purpose of the transfer of allegiance was a means to strengthen allied villages by sharing a pool of shinobi. Due to the close ties between Konoha and Uzushio, the transfer of allegiance often came into practice for marriages between shinobi. A prime example would be the marriage between Shodaime Hokage Hashirama Senju and Mito Uzumaki. Other transfers like Kushina were done out of necessity of a specific skillset like her chakra chains and her ability to contain the Kyubi.

Aside from Uzushio, transfer of allegiances rarely came into play. Those who were interested in another village defected usually after obtaining or stealing valuable information. It would be stupid for them to go through such formalities with betrayal as their motive. Still… there was still another use for transfer requests.

“Such exaggerations Hokage-sama.” I continued, forcing myself to focus as a stream of information raced across my vision. “You act as though Uzushio’s no more.”

Hiruzen raised a brow as if asking for an elaboration.

“Structures may burn to the ground, forces may diminished over time, a village may be in ruins, but it doesn’t mean it’s gone.” I glanced up through the haze of information. “There’s a saying that memories live on forever. Why not choose who it lives on in?”

It didn’t take long for my words to sink in before Hiruzen’s eyes focused on me with alarm.

“Are you insane?” boomed the man. “You want to plant fake memories into their minds?”

“Not fake, just outdated.” I corrected. “And I’m not suggesting we tamper with their minds… at least not in the manner you’re thinking.”

“Explain,” ordered Hiruzen.

“The mind is complicated. I dare not claim I understand it fully as there’s not a single seal or jutsu that could dominate another without obvious signs. Nor do I have the capability to do so even if there was one.” I explained. “What I had in mind leant more towards deception and misdirection.”

“Pray tell what would have them believe your fabrications?” challenged Hiruzen, the sternness of his gaze never wavered as his pressed on.

“Nothing as forceful as you make it sound, Hokage-sama.” I interjected. “Belief cannot be forced, only encouraged. I understand if you have your doubts, but if I may?”

Hiruzen sighed as he leaned back into his seat, grudgingly waiting for my explanation.

“Kumo purposely came to take from Konoha. No amount of reasoning could convince them to leave peacefully. Not unless we present a sizeable threat.” I reasoned. “In their eyes, my request for a transfer of allegiance won’t spare Konoha their reparation demands. The events occurred within the village walls; therefore they’ll claim their loss as Konoha’s responsibility.”
“Then why the request?” asked Hiruzen with a frown.

“The goal of my transfer wasn’t to shift the blame off Konoha.” I answered. “It’s to revive Uzushio in the eyes of the shinobi nations.”

“…Revive?” repeated Kakashi in confusion as he glanced towards me.

“Before its downfall, Uzushio was considered a sizeable threat due to their expertise in the sealing and healing arts. However, due to hubris, Uzushio overreached its control and lead to its own destruction.” My fingers remained pressed against the seals as I continued. “The village’s gone and its people scattered, but that doesn’t mean the strength of Uzushio’s forgotten. Who’s to say they’re not just waiting for an opportune time?”

“… You plan to bluff your way through with such a farce?” asked Hiruzen gravely.

“My life’s already a forfeit, this wager won’t affect Konoha in the least.” I answered. “Regardless what transpires, I aim to plant the seeds of uncertainty while I still can.”

“Even so, you’re willing to give your life for such a task?” asked Hiruzen.

“I personally have no interest in following the footsteps of my predecessors, but if I am to die, I wish to die by my own terms and actions.” I said firmly.

The room fell into a brief silence as Hiruzen breathed deeply through his nose.

“…And what exactly do you plan on doing to convince them?” asked Hiruzen as he glanced at me through his lidded eyes.

“An encore of the Crimson Terror.” I continued.

“That moniker of yours won’t work forever child,” noted Hiruzen, his voice unamused.

“A decoy doesn’t need to last forever.” I replied. “Just long enough to get the job done.”

Hiruzen let out a sigh as he lowered his hands to his desk. “Denied.”

“The transfer doesn’t need to be approved, just acknowledged.” I continued. “If worse comes to worse—”

“No,” continued the man bluntly.

“Hokage-sama!” I protested. “If you would just let me—”

“I see you’re still deciding on what to do with the jinchuriki,” droned an aged voice as the door opened behind me.

My mouth clicked shut quietly as I wiped away any expressions my face. At the corner of my eye, the bandaged man strolled past me from behind and made his way into the room. Of all the people, why did he have to show up?

“Danzo,” greeted Hiruzen crisply. “I don’t believe I requested your consultation.”

“Come now Hiruzen,” drawled the man. “You know I have full confidence in your ability to make sound judgments.”

“Then why are you here?” frowned the man.
“Sometimes you allow sentiment to cloud your decisions. I’m merely here to offer a friendly reminder to what’s at stake.” offered Danzo.

“Your concern is appreciated, but not needed,” said Hiruzen.

“I do hope that I’m not needed,” said Danzo as his single eye strayed towards me. “But I have warned you that this jinchuriki would be a threat to Konoha.”

“She has done a great service in keeping an Uchiha out of Kumo’s hands,” countered Hiruzen.

“Is it really for the sake of Konoha?” drawled Danzo. “The jinchuriki has an engagement contract with the Uchiha, had she allowed the Uchiha child to be taken, she would’ve been held accountable. Furthermore, if she really was trying to do Konoha a service, she should have taken them alive as bargaining tokens instead of killing two of them.”

“I agree,” interrupted Kakashi.

I turned my attention to him in surprise, disconnecting my chakra from the seals as my hand left my arm. He’s siding with Danzo? The silver-haired jounin kept a stoic expression, making it impossible to read his motives. From his conversation with Obito, I thought he would do whatever he could to keep me from surrendering myself to Kumo… but this? I did not expect this.

“…You agree?” noted Danzo with a raised brow. Despite his lack of reaction, he seemed just as baffled as I am to Kakashi’s standing on the matter.

“Under inner village protocols, I agree that she should have accosted the intruders and captured them for interrogations,” recited Kakashi. “Had she done so, this whole ordeal could have been avoided.”

Danzo eyed Kakashi speculatively. “If her fate was up to you, what suitable action should be taken for her actions?”

“Extract the demon, kill her and hand her corpse to Kumo,” said Kakashi bluntly without batting his eye.

“Is that so?” drone Danzo a faint twitch tugging at the corner of his lips.

“Of course, that choice would be logical if Kasa was a boy,” continued Kakashi in his relaxed posture.

“What does it matter if she’s a girl or a boy?” asked Danzo with a frown.

“Aside from Kushina-san, Kasa here is one of the last remaining of the Uzumaki clan. While the clan itself doesn’t have any kekkai genkai to speak of, wouldn’t you agree that their clan’s longevity and durability is a desirable trait for shinobi?” noted Kakashi.

…He’s not serious is he? Is he suggesting what I think he’s suggesting?

“Kakashi, this is not the appropriate—” Hiruzen started, but was promptly cut off.

“Is it not?” challenged Kakashi. “Kasa killed off two Kumo-nins on her lonesome. Their demands for her life is given. However, do you really think they would sacrifice a chance to strengthen the ranks of their future shinobi over revenge? Kasa’s almost at a child-bearing age. With careful planning, they could admass a number of useable shinobi in twenty years. Given they have
her bear a child in succession after each pregnancy.”

“Not if she’s eliminated first,” countered Danzo.

“Kasa survived having her throat slit open. How many jinchurikis out there are capable of doing so even with the help of demonic chakra?” retorted Kakashi. “Rather than giving the enemy useable pawns in the future. Why not keep Kasa here? As you noted Danzo-sama, she is engaged to the Uchiha clan, wouldn’t her addition to the clan make Konoha a more formidable village?’”

…I stopped listening, I couldn’t. How could anyone sit through being treated as livestock? The way they went on about the matter, forget about being human, forget about being a demon, to them I’m no better than livestock. Being a spy or a traitor sounded a whole lot less insulting in comparison.

“It’s risky to use a jinchuriki as a breeding subject,” countered Danzo. “Even if she’s not a full jinchuriki, to risk child-birth is to risk unleashing that hellacious demon chakra on the village.”

“A risk Kumo would no doubt take,” retorted Kakashi. “Instead of hoping that they would destroy themselves with a child-birth that gone awry, we have the advantage of having Kushina-san, a seals expert that could help maintain Kasa’s seal if it comes to that.”

“I’m sure we have a fine example of what happened the last time that occurred with the Kyubi,” said Danzo dryly.

“You seem rather determined to get rid of Kasa,” commented Kakashi. “If I wasn’t so certain that Danzo-sama is looking out for the benefit of Konoha, I might be incline to think you might have some ulterior motive in trying to get rid of her.”

“Unless you’ve found a way around Kumo’s demand for reparation, her staying in Konoha will only result in war,” continued Danzo, not acknowledging his subtle accusation.

“Then why not take up that challenge?” announced Kakashi.

“Kakashi,” interrupted Hiruzen with a grave tone. “Do you understand what you’re suggesting?”

“Yes,” replied Kakashi without a pause. “Though, I don’t believe Konoha should back down from such a threat just because we’re still replenishing our numbers from the war and last two demon attacks on the village. If we allow this injustice to stand, especially after they’ve attempted to kidnap children from two of our most prestige clans, what’s to say that other villages won’t attempt to repeat their actions?”

“Are you suggesting Konoha go to war for this girl?” challenged Danzo. “Do you know how many people would die because of this?”

“Countless,” replied Kakashi. “However, we’re not the only one to lose. Kumo did not leave the war unscathed, Minato-sensei made sure of that. If they decide to take arms and go to war, they would suffer losses. Not to mention, Iwa or the other villages would be watching and waiting until one of us falls and comes in to steal the victory.”

“Even so, how are you certain they wouldn’t still take up arms?” asked Hiruzen.

“Because we’ll drive the fear into their minds and make them regret ever thinking of taking what’s not theirs to take,” noted Kakashi.
“How do you propose to do that?” asked Danzo with a raised brow.

“With the very cause of this whole ordeal,” stated Kakashi as he turned his gaze towards me. “The Crimson Terror started this whole mess and she should be the one to finish it.”

“Kakashi…” I found his name slip pass my lips in surprise.

“While her reputation at the moment is nothing more than a slew of exaggerated rumors, who’s to say we can’t use this ordeal to build onto this terrifying visage?” continued Kakashi before anyone could interrupt him. “Aside from Minato-sensei in the last war, Konoha hasn’t had a single individual that held such a reputation to be feared since the Sannin.”

“Kakashi,” said Hiruzen firmly. “Kasa-kun does not have the training or skill to back up that façade. Furthermore, she’s only recently been promoted to chunin. She can’t—”

“I was promoted to chunin at six and jounin by age thirteen,” countered Kakashi. “With the appropriate training, it won’t be a façade.”

“You think it’s possible to have her do such?” queried Danzo.

“If she’s placed in a mentorship,” added Kakashi.

“Mentorship?” noted Danzo with a raised brow. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but were you not one of the many that opposed to that idea when it was first suggested?”

“I’ve seen the error to my opposition,” supplemented Kakashi. “Fortunately, it’s not too late to remedy the situation if she is taken off the roster for team assignments and placed under a mentorship instead.”

Danzo paused from a moment to speculate Kakashi’s words for hidden motives, but didn’t waste much time to take reign of the situation.

“She’s currently in the field of medicine, hardly threatening to most,” commented Danzo. “In short of Tsunade, there’s hardly any other iryo-nin mentoring under. She would have to change her field of specialty if mentorship is to make any difference.”

“Absolutely not!” I cut in before they could decide.

“You think you have a choice in the matter?” said Danzo with a raised brow.

“Being an iryo-nin was the main reason why I decided to become a shinobi, if you’re going to take that away from me, you might as well just kill me right now!” I snapped.

“What happened to taking responsibility for your actions?” challenged Danzo. “Was that just an empty promise?”

“Don’t twist my words.” I grounded out. “I will take any and all responsibilities for the deaths at my hand. Punish me however you like. Kill me if you must, but I will not cling onto life if it means to betray my values. I became an iryo-nin to save lives, not end them!”

“Is that a fact?” Danzo scorned.

“Yeah! It is!” I retorted, stomping my foot down as something inside me finally snapped and I pointed a rude finger at him. “And you know what? I had enough of dealing with your bullshit!”
“Excuse me?” said Danzo as a startled expression crossed his face.

“What the hell is your problem? What the hell is everyone’s problem?” I snapped, tears pouring from my eyes as I furiously wiped it away with my arm. “I know I messed up! I know I killed two people! I know I’m a poor excuse of a shinobi that can’t keep her emotions in check! But why do you insist on picking on me? I’m like nine! If you hate me that much just kill me and get it over with you old pricks!”

“Kasa!” hissed Kakashi, but I would have none of it.

“Listen here assholes! I’m not going to take your shit!” I snapped. “I’m not a puppet for your amusement! I’m human too!”

Before I knew it, I dropped to my knees, hiding my face behind my arms. Tears, snot, and drool drenched my face as I started bawling like the child I physically am. The pent up emotions came pouring out like a broken dam as I sobbed and hyperventilated. I don’t even care about the mess that I’m supposed to fix anymore.

“Why do you have to pick on me you big meanie!?” I wailed.

“In all my years!” huffed Danzo in annoyance. “Hiruzen, are you going to allow this to—”

“It seems that Inoichi was correct in his assessment,” sighed Hiruzen as he interrupted the beginning of Danzo’s tirade. “It’s impossible to present her to Kumo in her current state. Her mind has deteriorated even further after last night’s events.”

“Hiruzen, you do know what’s the consequences of refusing Kumo’s demands,” noted Danzo stiffly.

“Kakashi-kun, if you may. Could you please escort Kasa-kun home and keep an eye on her until she calmed down?” said Hiruzen as he ignored Danzo’s words. “The matter will be handled.”

“Hiruzen!” snapped Danzo.

“As Kakashi stated,” continued Hiruzen. “Kumo has done a disservice in attacking two of our clans and attempted two kidnappings. We cannot ignore this fact and let it go. I doubt Kumo’s in that much of a hurry to rush into another war. Compromises could be possible, if not we’ll take drastic action when time comes. Until then, the meeting’s adjourned.”

“As you wish Hokage-sama,” confirmed Kakashi, cutting off any complaint Danzo attempted to make.

I found myself hauled under an arm like a sack of potatoes as Kakashi carried me out of the office. Being in the state I was, there wasn’t much either of us could do as he sped through the village with me wailing in his grasp. An embarrassing sight to behold that I’m sure, but by that point my cries were silent as I could barely get enough air into my lungs to continue wailing.

My face burned, hot in agitation and sticky from the tears. I found myself coughing and wheezing as I gasped for air… Not that asphyxiation would likely kill me, but nonetheless, Kakashi delivered a sharp jab to my solar-plexus. Within seconds, I found myself welcoming the darkness, not caring whether he did it out of mercy or annoyance.

_Pa-chi...Pa-chi..._
A rhythmic clacking of wood against wood drew me back to consciousness as my brows furrowed. I fought back a groan as I draped an arm against my swollen eyes. Even with an increased healing factor that could bring me back from the brink of death, it did nothing for puffy eyes.

_Pa-chi…_

“Finally awake?” droned a familiar lazed voice.

“…Hey Shikamaru.” I whispered, throat sore from all the crying I’ve done.

“Some guy named Kakashi brought you here,” explained Shikamaru. I could hear the shifting of clothes and a light thud on the ground. Likely he planted his hands behind him as he leaned back to face me. “Dad’s talking to him right now.”

“…I see.” I murmured quietly.

“I’m supposed to take you to them when you’re ready,” said Shikamaru.

“And if I’m not ready?” I asked hoarsely.

“Then they’ll probably stop by later after they’re done,” replied Shikamaru, his clothes rustled once more as if he shrugged.

“…I don’t think I’m ready yet.” I mumbled.

“All right,” sighed Shikamaru as he shifted again. “Makes no difference to me.”

_Pa-chi…_

The sound of clacking resumed and Shikamaru went about the shogi board recreating a game, no doubt one he played against his father. Aside from the soft clacking, the room fell silent once more and I found myself alone to my own thoughts. Every inch of my body ached with exhaustion. Though I felt considerably calmer compared to when I faced Hiruzen and Danzo that held little to no comfort.

Rayne remained surprisingly silent for someone who claimed to have done all this for shits and giggles. I couldn’t understand her motives. She claimed that she prioritized my life above all else, but at the same time she placed me in a predicament that nothing in short of a death could resolve.

…I see, that’s wrong. Kakashi did find a way. He even made sure it worked well with what I tried to present as a suitable solution, but to give up iryo-ninjutsu… I just…

“…You’re not going to cry are you?” asked Shikamaru as the sound of clacking wood ceased once more.

“What makes you think I’m going to cry?” I asked and the boy fell temporarily silent as he observed me.

“…I don’t get you,” sighed Shikamaru, deciding to abandon his line of questioning. “Even though you’re not that much older than me, you always seem like you’re trying to act older than you really are and shouldering a weight that you can’t handle.”

“You say this as if I’m some tragic hero.” I said with a weak laugh.

“Are you not?” added Shikamaru. “You saved Sasuke didn’t you?”

The laugh died at my lips. “Who told you that?”
“You’d be surprise how much the senseis at the academy let slip when they think you’re not listening,” replied Shikamaru. “I don’t know the full story of what happened, but… you’re in trouble aren’t you? That’s why that Kakashi guy brought you here, to dad.”

I said nothing as I craned my neck to glance at him. By now, I should know better than to be surprised by the perceptiveness of those around me, but somehow I still get taken aback each time it happens.

“It’s troublesome to try to handle everything on your own, why not let someone do it for a change?” suggested Shikamaru.

“Shikamaru, what did I say about giving advice to situations you know nothing about?” interrupted Shikaku as he made an appearance on the veranda outside the room.

“Dad,” said the boy in surprise.

“…Shikaku-san.” I greeted the man as I pushed myself up from the futon and paused when I spotted Kakashi behind him.

“We have some things to discuss,” said Shikaku and the younger Nara sighed.

“All right, I get it. I get it,” said Shikamaru as he pushed himself off the ground and left the room. I caught him giving me one last look before he left the room entirely.

Shikaku and Kakashi waited until Shikamaru was long gone before either of them entered the room and closed the sliding shoji doors behind them.

“This wasn’t what I had in mind when I suggested for you to utilize your time better,” said Shikaku.

“I didn’t plan—”

“Of course you haven’t,” interrupt Shikaku. “If you had, you would’ve came to me first. Did you think you can handle an international incident all on your own?”

“No, that wasn’t my intention!” I protested.

“Then what was your intention? You placed two children at risk and not just any children,” said Shikaku. “Two from notable clans with valuable kekkai genkai. Had you came to me, this could’ve been—”

“Avoided?” I snapped. “How? I hadn’t realized Kumo’s intentions until they attempted to kidnap Sasuke! He wasn’t even supposed to be a target! Everything’s constantly changing!”

“Even so—” started Shikaku but I cut him off.

“So what?” I snapped. “What do you expect me to do? I’m not omnipotent! I can’t tell when things will or will not happen! I’m—”

SLAP

I fell silent at the sudden figure crouching in front of me with an outreached hand. My face stung, but I didn’t move to hold my hand against it. Kakashi lowered his hand, staring down at me with his single eye.

“If you’re quite done with your tantrum we’re going to skip on ahead to dealing with the
matter,” noted the silver-haired jounin. “What’s done is done, it’s pointless to hang onto what could’ve been. Time to move on.”

“…Kakashi, you could’ve handled that with a bit more…finesse,” commented Shikaku.

“We don’t have the luxury of letting her wallow in self-pity,” noted Kakashi. “Hokage-sama said he will handle the matter, but chances are that we would need to take drastic action. As things stand now, we have limited options.”

“It would be unfavorable for Kumo to get a hold of an oracle,” agreed Shikaku. I flinch, startled by how willy-nilly he revealed my supposed gift. “No need for such a face he has been aware of your status long before Inoichi brought you to me.”

“What?” I said in surprise as I stared at the young man in front of me. How did he—no, when did he figure it out? I wasn’t that obvious was I?

“You knew too much for your age,” reasoned Kakashi.

“If you knew, but why didn’t you…” I started, but trailed off when he gave me another stare as if to say I’m wasting precious time. My shoulders slumped as dejection replaced frustration. I suppose this really wasn’t the right time to ask. “Right… What do you want me to do?”

“As we are pressed for time, we’ve decided to go with the plan you’ve suggested to Hokage-sama,” said Kakashi.

“…My plan?” I said in surprise.

“It’s illogical and impractical to suddenly give you an unfamiliar script and have to perform as such,” said Kakashi. “We will however, supplement your performance with suggestions that you will incorporate yourself. It’s pointless to give a definite plan when it could go awry on contact with the enemy.”

“In other words, you want me to improvise and adjust as needed.” I muttered. “You’re putting a lot of faith in my skills…”

“We are aware that you cannot see into your own path,” said Shikaku. “However, it doesn’t mean you cannot see unto the paths of those you face. Your visions may be sealed off behind closed doors, but as Inoichi stated, as long as there’s the right trigger, you might be able to.”

“I… see.” I murmured. What more can I say to that? They have no clue that my so-called visions were nothing more than just pages on a book that I’ve read long ago… and I couldn’t tell them either. Why does it seem like I’m suddenly plunging deeper and deeper into a sea of lies?
“It’s raining…”

Outside, rain pattered against the window.

“It’s pouring…”

A flash of light lit the halls, followed by a thunder crash.

“The old man is snoring…”

My okobos clacked and scratched against the floor.

“He bumped his head…”

Bodies hit the ground with a faint thump.

“And went to bed…”

The anbu remained motionless on the ground.

“And didn’t wake up in the morning…”

With a tug, the door slid open effortlessly and I strolled into the room with no interruptions. On the bed sat Gashira, Kumo’s head ninja, calm and poised. In the bed next to him sat Mabui, terrified and tense under her covers.

“Good evening.” I greeted with a polite smile and a harmless tilt of my head.

“W-what are you doing here?” squeaked Mabui as she pushed herself against the back of her bed, trying to keep her distance from me.

“Mabui,” said Gashira, his voice rumbled in a deep baritone. “Calm down, she wouldn’t dare to do anything.”

“But, Gashira-san!” protested the woman, desperate to keep me in her line of sight as she spoke to him.

“No, he’s absolutely correct. I’m not here to kill either of you…” I chirped cheerfully as I slid the door close behind me. “If I wanted to, you’d both be dead and no one would’ve been wiser.”

“Bold words,” drawled the man. “Too bad it’s pointless for you to put this bravado. You’ll just fuel the fire against Konoha with each action you take here.”

The corner of my lips twitched upwards as I strolled idly into the room.

“I find it interesting that the two of you believe I give a single fuck about Konoha.” I drawled as I took the visitor’s seat between the two beds and folded my hands neatly on my lap. “The village could burn down for all I care. In fact, I wholly agree with your war suggestion between the two villages.”

“Am I supposed to be flattered?” snorted Gashira.
“If you wish to take it as a compliment.” I chirped. “Though, not many people take pride in willing signing their own death warrant.”

“Are you threatening us?” growled Gashira as he moved to toss his sheets aside. To his surprise, his arm dropped limp against his side unresponsive. “What did you do to me?”

“Don’t look so surprised. I did tell you that I could kill if I really wanted to.” I replied cheerily. “But worry not, it’s only a mild paralytic, it’ll wear off in a few hours.”

“You have a lot of nerve—” He grimaced as his tongue grew unresponsive and he ended up biting himself.

“Temper, temper.” I drawled. “Had I use poison, it would’ve circulated through your system even faster.”

Gashira’s eyes burned with fury, but he could say nothing due to the paralysis. I gave him another harmless smile, brighter than the one before.

“Now that we’re more agreeable, do either of you know why I would associate myself with these kekkai genkai holders even though I could easily destroy them on my lonesome?” I asked with a tooth-decaying sweetness to my voice.

Neither said a word, not that they could.

“The field of politics is an intricate system that involves amassing resources and allies. To play the game, one needs to keep an eye open for opportunities while guarding against backstabbers. It’s a difficult game to master and I do have to applaud those with the tenacity to continue playing.” I drawled.

The frown remained on the burly Kumo-nin’s face. Eyes still speculating the intent behind my actions and my words.

“I have little fondness for such games. However, for the sake of self-preservation it is a necessary annoyance for someone of my caliber.” I rested an elbow on the armrest as I planted my chin casually on my open palm. “I have low tolerance for idiotic weaklings. It is not in my nature to willingly submit to those weaker than me.”

Unamused annoyance crossed my face as I tilted my chin up haughtily.

“Not that associating with kekkai genkai carrier are any better. Do either of you know how tedious it is to associate with these pretentious pompous ass fools?” I sneered.

They remained silent.

“The answer is hard… frustratingly hard. The effort I have to put into suppressing myself is enough to drive a lesser being mad.” I said in a low rumble. “So when you impudent little insects decided it’s okay to come in and destroy what’ve I’ve accomplished thus far. There’s a problem.”

Gashira snorted and scoffed at my words.

“I see you’re unimpressed.” I continued with lower lids. “It’s okay, I’ve learned it’s better to be underestimated. After all, that was how you shinobi, you humans managed to capture and imprison my brethren.”

The burly Kumo-nin brows furrowed in confusion, but slowly realization set in and his
eyes widened in disbelief.

“Heh.” A low rumbling chuckle emanated from the base of my throat as green chakra wisped about my person. “Oh, such fools. Did you think a fleshy prison and a flimsy little seal can contain us? Did you mortals think we would remain idle?”

Gashira’s eyes widened while Mabui clenched hers close even tighter.

“You know nothing of your own kind. Nothing of the fragility in the vessels chosen to be the prison.” I reached out with an open hand, allowing the chakra to dance and writhe like untamed spirits. “This child is a prime example. You should’ve seen her, so innocent, so pure… so broken…. so delicious.”

My open hand clenched sharply into a fist and the dancing chakra ceased. I focused my eyes on Gashira as a sly grin crossed my lips.

“That host for my two-tailed brethren is no different.” I whispered with a sadistic giggle. “I could see her tethering precariously the last we fought. Oh, how desperately she clung to that thin line of sanity. These vessels, the more you push them to battle, the more you push them to become weapons, the weaker their wills become… until they completely break. I wonder how much longer she could hold on if Konoha and Kumo goes to war?”

Sweat beaded down the burly Kumo-nin’s dark skin. Even with the paralysis in effect the muscles became taut beneath the skin.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but Kumo has more than one of my brethren. Tell me, does that host have a habit of doing this?” I turned my wrist angling my arm into a fist bump motion. Gashira’s eyes widened and his face paled. The man had a horrible poker face.

“Ah… I see.” I said as I lowered my arm and slid off the chair to leave. “Rest well, I look forward to killing you on the field.”

“L-lies …” strained Gashira as he forced his numbed tongue to move.

I paused, tilting my head back to give him the sweetest smile. “Did you know the best way to lie, is to tell the truth? Thank you for contributing to the eventual freedom of my kind.”

Without another word, I slid the door open and stepped over the fallen bodies of the anbu as I left. There was a saying that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world he doesn’t exist. No doubt the Kumo-nin speculated whether or not the absurdity of what I’ve just pulled in there was real. A human pretending to be a demon that’s pretending to be a human it took over…

A migraine pulsed and throbbed at my head, I pressed two fingers in an attempt to abate the pain. I forced myself to focus as I made my way through the hospital. The Kumo-nins were placed in an isolation unit, aside from the knocked out anbu, there were little else that kept guard over the two. I didn’t have to go far before I spotted Kakashi waiting with his arms crossed and my umbrella at hand.

His outward demeanor gave away nothing. Unlike Gashira who wore his emotions on his sleeve, Kakashi guarded his like a dragon guarding its treasure. As I drew near, he unfolded his arms and held out my umbrella. Of all the things that changed, Kakashi was one of the few people that I found impossible to gage.

At times he acted like the laid-back perverted jounin I’m familiar with, but then there were
moments like these where he seemed so cold and indifferent. A true, cold-blooded shinobi.

My gaze lowered and I reached for my umbrella, determined to walk on in silence. To my surprise, Kakashi didn’t let go and I found myself staggered to a halt. I didn’t bother glancing at him to see why. I just want to go home….A moment later, his grip loosened and my arm sank down to my side as he disappeared down the hall…

My okobo echoed with the scratching noise as I dragged my feet down the halls and made my way out of the hospital. I didn’t even bother with the umbrella as I walked through the rain. Each icy drop soaked through my borrowed shirt and the more annoying ones clung to my lashes. I let out a shaking breath as I raised my head to the black clouded skies.

A dark and stormy night… how typical. I ran a hand over my face, rubbing the cold rain against my skin before I continued on back to the apartment.

When I opened the door, I hadn’t expected anything. It was late, no doubt everyone was already asleep. However, just as I walked in, a warm bundle crashed into my stomach and I found small arms wrapped around my waist.

“Sasa-nee!” cried Naruto as he stared up at me with his worried blue eyes, “Are you okay? Are you hurt? Sasuke said someone attacked you! Someone tried to kill you!”

“…Naruto?” I said, voice barely above a whisper.

“Kasa, sweetie,” said Kushina, her voice filled with worry as she reached out and cupped my face in her hand and brushed away the stray water droplets with her thumb.

“Kushina-san.” I managed before a fluffy white towel wrapped around me from behind me by Tesuri. “…Dad?”

“You don’t have to say a thing,” said my father as he did what he could as they ushered me into the bathroom for a hot bath.

Kushina stayed with me while he kept Naruto occupied. Kushina said nothing during the whole duration, but she placed the utmost care in helping me bathe. My limbs were numb by that point and the hot water stung when I stepped in. I found myself staring blankly at her worried face as she warmed mine with a hot towel.

By the time she was done, sleep called to me like a siren and she ended up having to haul me out of the tub before I drowned myself. When Naruto started to fuss, I barely heard a word he said. Only that Kushina hushed him as she tucked me in.

“Naruto!” whispered Kushina in exasperation.

“Kushina-san let him be,” said dad as he reached down and press a hand against my head and I felt a familiar warm pulse of healing chakra. “Sleep well Kasa…”

“Well… I have to say didn’t see that one coming , ” droned Rayne in wry amusement, her voice echoing more so than usual. “

My eyes drifted open and I found myself flat on my back, staring up at inner corridors of my mind. Here again… Most people would think their inner mind a sanctuary, but for me this place had become my personal hell.
“I’ve already did what you’ve asked. What more do you want?” I said in exhaustion.

“This is just the beginning my dear self,” drawled the other as the sound of her footsteps echoed as she neared. “You’ve started the wind of change. Things will only continue to spiral into a whirlwind of fun!”

“…There’s nothing fun about this.” I muttered.

“Quit complaining, at least they didn’t decide to go with Kakashi’s breeding program idea,” snorted Rayne. “You should be elated that you’ve beaten that pompous Uchiha to the promotion of badass!”

“That is hardly a promotion,” I mumbled.

“You have no ambition,” sighed Rayne as she plopped down next to my head and stared down at me unamused. “A second life is wasted on you.”

“I rather not fly too close to the sun and have my wings melted.” I retorted.

“Icarus, how needlessly poetic,” commented Rayne dryly as she tilted her head upwards to the sky in the exposed ceiling. “You do know the reversal, if you don’t fly high enough you’ll just end up swallowed by the sea instead.”

“Then let me drown in peace.” I retorted.

“We really need to get rid of that suicidal streak of yours,” said Rayne. “As much as you think I’m trying to get us killed, I actually want to live pass twenty-five this time around.”

“I’m sure you’re doing a wonderful job at keeping us alive.” I muttered in dry sarcasm.

“Of course,” chirped Rayne. “I’m making us part of the main cast and as you know, the survivability of those essential to the plot rarely dies.”

“On the contrary, I could list a number that dies despite of that essentialness.” I retorted.

“What you’re thinking about are backstory casualties in flashbacks,” noted Rayne. “And I’ve said before, I won’t become a memory.”

“You’ll only turn others into one instead.” I said.

“Now you’re getting it,” chirped Rayne. “So many memories, so little time.”

“I’m not going to do your bidding.” I tilted my head to glare at her.

“I don’t expect you to,” replied Rayne. “You’re the main personality, if you gave into me, then you’re nothing more than a useless puppet. That’s hardly a main character attribute.”

“Stop treating this like a game!” I snapped.

“I’ll stop when you stop staying idle and a spectator,” said Rayne.

“Then aren’t you just making me submit to your demands?” I shot up and swung an arm at her.

Rayne ducked forward and rolled away to dodge my attack, giggling as she plopped down to the ground with her hands behind her back.
“But it’s your choice to decide whether or not to do so, rather than blindly listening to my demands,” grinned the other. “See the difference?”

“Fuck off.” I snapped.

“Ah, look!” cheered Rayne. “Now there’s the will to live I was looking for! Pure unadulterated hate! If you rather not be a main character, you could still be the anti-hero, they don’t die either. On the other hand, they do end up as hermits… hmm… I supposed that’s not too bad of a trade. There’s hardly anyone worth banging anyhow.”

I glared and she grinned.

“You’re never going to give me a moment of peace are you?” I growled.

“For as long as you live,” said Rayne cheerily as a sly glint sparked from her pitch black eyes. “Oh, a friendly reminder in case you’ve forgotten… Oh, what am I saying? Of course, you’ve forgotten! Those memories are still locked behind closed doors.”

“What memories?” I scowled as she giggled.

“Since neither of us knows who took up Obito’s place as the new fake Madara, the Uchiha Massacre should take place in three to four years’ time. You might want to think about what to do when the time comes.” She pressed two fingers against her lips in a mock-scandalous pose. “Or maybe you’ve decided to do nothing and let everything play out as it did?”

“I won’t let that happen!” I snapped.

“Are you sure?” grinned Rayne. “Doing so would utterly throw the plot out of the window. There will be no—”

“So be it!” I snapped.

“Even if it means staining your hands further?” asked Rayne in amusement.

“My hands are already stained.”

“Heh, that’s what I like to hear!” said Rayne with a grin. “But let’s see how long that attitude actually lasts. I suppose in commemoration of such a decision, I should give you a freebie.”

“…Freebie?” I frowned.

“The next time you need help, just ask,” drawled Rayne.

“As if I’d ask you.” I snapped.

“Never say never, you never know,” sang Rayne before annoyance crossed her face. “Now get up and shut that annoying brat up. I could hear him from all the way in here!”

“Brat?” I said in confusion before I found myself kicked out of my own mind and staring at the white ceiling of my bedroom. I could see sunlight through the window.

“I’ll find a way!” shouted Naruto furiously, I could hear him through the door. “I’m not letting you take Sasa-nee!”

“Naruto?” I sat up groggily as I dragged myself out of my covers and dragged my feet to the door.
“And how are you going to do that?” asked a familiar bored voice of Kakashi.

My hand stopped short on the knob, what was he doing here?

“Only the hokage can decide what happens to her,” reasoned the man.

“Then I’ll become the hokage!” snapped Naruto.

“Being a hokage is a lot of work, not just anyone can take the job,” noted Kakashi.

“Then I’ll just make sure I’m not just anyone!” declared Naruto. “I’m Naruto Uzumaki! Konoha’s next hokage!”

“You’re not even genin yet. How are you going to become a hokage?” droned Kakashi.

“It takes years—”

“Then I’ll just have to become a ninja faster! Sasa-nee and Itachi-ni became ninjas at seven! And that I could do it too!” snapped Naruto.

I quietly turned the knob and peeked through the crack. Naruto stood guard in front of my door with his arms out to block Kakashi. The silver-haired jounin’s eyes shifted briefly to meet with mines before he returned his lazed gaze on Naruto. Kushina and my dad watched quietly behind him, no doubt failed in trying to convince Naruto earlier before I woke up.

“Then you work on that,” said Kakashi. “Until then Sandaime Hokage-sama has placed Kasa under my command.”

“Y-you! You big jerk!” Naruto stomped his foot furiously. “Just you wait! I’m going to become hokage! And I’ll change all the stupid rules! That’s a promise!”

I thought my eyes played tricks on me when I saw a ghostly double of an older Naruto mirroring his movements, but it disappeared almost as quickly as it appeared. Was that an echo of my previous memory of the original Naruto?

“Is that so?” droned Kakashi.

“Yeah! And the first thing I’ll do is to make sure no one would make her sad like that again! Then I’m going to make sure no one else has to go through what Sasa-nee has to!” declared Naruto and I found myself touched by his words. “I’m going to stop all this!

“Naruto…” I croaked out, my voice hoarse as I hastily pressed a hand over my mouth, desperate to contain myself from making a noise, but it didn’t make a difference as the door swung open.

“Sasa-nee?” Naruto shouted worriedly as he came crashing into me with a hug. “Sasa-nee! What’s wrong?”

“I-I’m fine.” I forced out, pressing my sleeve against my eyes to wipe away the unshed tears.

“But you’re crying!” protested Naruto with his wide worried blue eyes.

“I’ll be fine. Tears are just tears, they’ll pass.” I replied, ruffling his hair fondly.

“Well, I don’t think anyone should be making you should be cry in the first place!” huffed Naruto.
“Thank you.” I found a sad smile tugging at my lips as I pulled the younger boy into my arms for a hug. “And I think you’ll be a wonderful hokage one day.”

“You think so?” asked Naruto happily.

My eyes met with Kakashi’s purposefully as I spoke my next words clearly. “You’ll be the greatest and kindest hokage Konoha has ever known.”

Kakashi’s face remained stoic, giving no indication he disapprove my declaration.

“Well, even hokages need to go to school,” interrupted Kushina once she saw the situation had settled. “If you don’t get going now, you’ll be late.”

“But mooom!” protested Naruto. “That bastard Kakashi’s going to take Sasa-nee away!”

Bastard? When did he start calling Kakashi a bastard? I watched as Kushina manhandled Naruto and dragged him off to get ready for school.

“He’s not going to take your Sasa-nee away! He’s just going to have a nice little talk, am I right?” said Kushina with the coldest glare I’ve ever seen on her face.

“Of course,” said Kakashi calmly, not a single twitch appeared on his face. “Tesuri-san could make certain that I do not take her out of this house.”

Tesuri inclined his head as confirmation from where he stood and Kushina reluctantly left the room with a screaming Naruto in tow.

“I have half a mind to disembowel you right now,” threatened Tesuri coldly.

“If you’re worried about what I’ve suggested to hokage-sama, you’ll be relieved to know he doesn’t approve of any breeding programs without willing subjects,” said Kakashi as he reached into his back pouch for a scroll and tossed it to me.

I could see the murder in Tesuri’s eyes, but he kept himself in check. It wouldn’t do to kill Kakashi when the situation was still so volatile.

“…What is it?” I asked as I caught the scroll.

“Your uniform,” explained Kakashi.

“…Uniform?” I repeated.

“Starting today, you’ll be working under me as anbu,” said Kakashi.

“…Anbu?” I frowned. “But what about—”

“As of 0700 hours, Kumo declared the dead shinobi involved in the incident as traitors that acted under fictitious orders. The two planned to kidnap the children of kekkai genkai clans to throw the negotiations into disarray and use it as an opening to flee with the children. They had planned to sell them for breeding in the black market. Kumo placed bounty for each of them, you’ll be receiving the payment when we return the corpses.”

“…And the remaining delegates?” I asked, skeptical that it could be wrapped up so cleanly.

“A negotiations team will be escorting the two back to Kumo and finish the peace talk in
“Kumo instead,” answered Kakashi.

“Who’s—”

“Shikaku Nara, Inoichi Yamanaka, Akimichi Chouza and Mogusa of the Medic Corps,” cut in Kakashi before I could finish.

…So they resorted to the Ino-Shika-Cho trio and one medic. With Shikaku, no doubt they would be able to come to some sort of agreement in peace talks. In addition, Shikaku’s aware of my performance the night prior, he could easily feed them false information that would support the story I’ve told Gashira and Mabui.

As for Mogusa, I haven’t worked with him personally, but I’ve seen quite frequently with Tesuri in surgery… the man looked rather creepy with his large pupil-less eyes and dark markings. Having him would probably help with the intimidation factor, even if he’s just an iryo-nin.

“Just wait a second! Kasa’s going to be a part of anbu? She’s only nine!” snapped Tesuri.

“Would you rather she be placed in a breeding program instead?” asked Kakashi.

Tesuri gritted his teeth. I placed a hand on his arm before he could charge at the silver-haired jounin.

“…Dad, it’s okay.” I said as I gripped onto the black scroll.

“But Kasa!” protested Tesuri.

“There could be worse things.” I murmured. “Being in anbu might not be so bad.”

“Meet me at the third training ground when you’re ready,” said Kakashi before he turned to leave.

“Kasa…” Tesuri started once more, but I ignored him as I broke the seal on the scroll and rolled it out on the ground. He stayed in the room unmoving at first, but eventually he gave a tired sigh as he left, closing the door behind.

I pressed my hand against each seal with quick chakra pulses. A puff of cloud accompanied each activated seal and in its place was a set of black uniform tailored to my size, a set of light armor, gauntlets, a storage pouch and a white mask with black and red markings. I snorted when I recognized the face of the animal on the porcelain mask.

“A turtle… someone definitely has a sick sense of humor.” I murmured as I picked up the mask. The symbolism behind it felt heavier than it actually is… but I supposed it makes sense with what’s at stake.

I stripped away my pajamas and geared myself in my new uniform. Compared to my kimonos, the clothes were loose and unrestricted, a stark contrast compared to the responsibilities that came with the uniform. It took a moment for me to figure out how the straps on the armor and gauntlets, but soon they went on too, along with the leg pouch and the anbu standard shoes… I’m going to need to retrain myself to fighting with those.

I stocked up the pouch with my various seal cards, senbon and a vial of soldier pills and I strapped my umbrella to my back with the weapon holster they supplied. No doubt it was meant for a sword or a tanto of sorts, but since my weapon’s an umbrella and I have little to no skills in kenjutsu, it’ll have to do. I glanced towards the mask. It was the last thing among the pile.
My hand hovered over the porcelain surface briefly before my exposed fingers from the gauntlet brushed its smooth surface. I never would have thought that I of all people would become a part of anbu… but there really was no point on prolonging the inevitable. With a breath of determination, I pulled the mask over my face and left through the window.

So heavy…but I’ll bear through it. I’ll carry this weight and continue to move on.
Surviving the Rain

The third training ground, Kakashi’s preferred grieving spot as it was the training ground where his team formed and the location of the memorial stone. Though, with Obito and Rin still alive, it wasn’t much of a grieving spot as it was a spot for nostalgia. Compared to cannon Kakashi, this one still had his team, he still have those he valued close to him. It didn’t make his father and Minato’s death any less painful, but something definitely changed in Kakashi. What exactly changed…I don’t know.

“Kakashi.” I called out when I spotted him by the memorial stone, but before I could managed to get close, a flurry of shurikens came flying towards me.

My eyes widened, the muscles on my legs tense for a split-second before I kicked off the ground with the balls of my feet, jumping backwards, flipping and twirling out of the way as I dodge each shuriken that came at me. I barely had a chance to gather myself before I found Kakashi above me with his hands gathered in position for an overhead strike.

On instinct, my hands sped through the seals for a replacement jutsu and swapped myself just as he drove his arms down. I reappeared a short distance away behind a tree, but it made no difference. Kakashi body flickered behind me and sent a violent kick into my back, forcing my body into an arch and the air out of my lungs.

Before I could hit the ground, he caught me by my new uniform and slammed me into the tree. A violent cough wracked through my body as I wheezed desperately for a breath of air. I grimaced as I stared at him through the holes in the mask. His face remained stoic as always.

“Your cover’s not going to last very long,” said Kakashi quietly before he released his hold on my uniform and allowed me to drop to the ground.

“Is this some hazing initiation to anbu?” I coughed and wheezed as I crawled to my knees.

“No,” replied Kakashi as he offered a hand to help me up. I grabbed it without a thought and he hauled me up in one swift motion and slammed me in an arc into the ground. “This is much worse.”

“I see…” I grunted, my fingers dug into the ground as I pushed myself up. “Is this your way of preparing me?”

“If you don’t hate me already, you will by the time we’re done,” said Kakashi as he sent another kick into my side, knocking me some distance away. “You can’t afford to show weakness in front of other anbu if you want to maintain the lies you fed to Kumo.”

“Is that so?” I coughed, hugging my side as I forced myself off the ground. I grimaced, feeling my fourth rib for a possible fracture. “Then what do you expect me to do?”

“Fight back,” said Kakashi bluntly. “Show them you’re not one to be trifled with.”

“I see talking them to submission isn’t an option.” I noted with sarcasm as my hand glowed with healing chakra over my rib.

“You’re more than capable of fighting back,” said Kakashi. “It’s just the matter of getting you used to the ruthlessness that’s required.”
“Blowing out the brains of two men isn’t ruthless enough?” I retorted and lowered my hand once the rib healed.

“Can you honestly say you could give a repeat of that performance without the threat of Tenzo or Sasuke’s life on the line?” asked Kakashi, his half-lidded eyes focused on me.

I said nothing, even though I made my resolve to take on whatever comes my way… the thought of killing still proved to be a difficult concept to swallow.

“When the Kumo-nins attacked, instead of taking an aggressive stance, you took a passive approach to disable and incapacitate. Had you decided otherwise and blown off their limbs or severely injure them in some manner, it might not have escalated into the manner it did,” said Kakashi.

“Are you saying it’s my fault that I’m in this situation?” I asked icily.

“Not everyone’s a natural born killer,” interjected Kakashi. “You especially don’t have that inclination regardless what’s your current stand is on the matter. The fact that you’re an iryo-nin hinders you even further because of your healer’s oath.”

I grew quiet.

“If you want to remain a shinobi, you’re going to have to get over your reservations in harming another person.” said Kakashi as he charged at me with another attack.

I opened my hands with chakra threads at my fingers and dragged my arms apart. The seal cards shuffled out of the pouch and around me in an x-shaped shell as I activated one card after another. Kakashi weaved through the barrage of rock-shaped cows as he body-flickered closer and closer and drove a punch into my stomach that sent me flying.

With gritted teeth, I pulsed chakra into a number of cards surrounding the silver-haired jounin. The cards glowed dangerously, threatening to explode. Kakashi surveyed the situation with a glance and hastily went through a set of handseals and disappeared into the ground before they all went off.

My eyes darted about the ground trying to figure out where he would come out next to attack. However, before I could scream a hand darted out from the ground and grabbed my leg. He wasted no time in dragging me down and leaving only my head on the surface.

“If you continue the way you are now, you’ll not only hurt yourself, but the people around you as well,” answered Kakashi as he appeared crouching above me. “And if you think you can bluff your way out of everything with your foresight, think again. Eventually, someone will realize what you’re doing and call you out on it.”

A low growl emitted at my throat as the cards above me shot towards Kakashi and exploded with a screen of gasses. He retreated backwards with a well-timed jump and I used the opening to charge my body with a defibrillation jutsu to loosen the ground that trapped me. Just as I made my way out of the hole, a searing heat came through the cloud of obscuring gas and I found myself drawing my umbrella as a shield as a fire ball came crashing into it.

“You’ve already chosen the line that you won’t cross,” said Kakashi as he lowered his hand from the Grand Fire Ball jutsu stance and switched to a crouching stance that made my heart chill. “I’m going to force you cross it.”

The sound of chirping sang through the training ground and I found myself backing away
as his hand glowed with his signature technique.

“Chidori…” I whispered, the thought never crossed my mind that I would ever see it, much less see it used against me.

“Kasa,” said Kakashi, his eyes empty and emotionless. “If you continue to face me with your reservations, I will kill you.”

“Even if you say that, how do you expect me to kill you?” I snapped. “You outclass me in every field! I hardly have the skills or experience to take you on even if I go with the intent to kill!”

“Figure it out,” said Kakashi as he charged at me with the chidori.

What can I do? How can I do it? My mind became utterly blank as he came closer and closer. I don’t know! I don’t know!

Geez, he’s taking this too far.

My eyes widened at Rayne’s voice.

But I supposed this is his way of being nice.

What?

Scoot over, I need to have a chat with the scarecrow.

Stunned, I had no clue whether I gave her control or that she wrestled it away from me. I found myself in the background as she took control and slammed her hands into the ground with the cancerous chakra. Immediately, the grass around us sped up in growth, lengthening and tangling as it grew taller and longer.

Kakashi slid to a halt and the chidori died at his hand as the grass rapidly crept towards him and obscured his view. From Rayne’s position, I could still see him clearly as he debated on what to use to eliminate the sudden growth in shrubbery. Rayne on the other hand wasted no time in manipulating the cards still floating about to send the rock-shaped cows at Kakashi to force him further and further back.

What’s more she used the explosive versions of the cows for rock shrapnel to distract him further. I could feel her grin as she started the dance seals and charged at Kakashi with a fiery dragon. The silver-haired jounin’s eyes widened as he jumped and flipped out of the way as the fire beast crashed into the ground, taking out a good chunk of it with it as it phased out of existence.

“Hehe, hahaha! What’s the matter Kakashi?” said Rayne sadistic glee. “Didn’t you say you were going to kill us? What happened to those big words just now? Bring it on you little pissant!”

“...Us?” said Kakashi with a frown. “Kasa?”

“Sorry! Kasa-chan’s not here at the moment! It’s Rayne in the house!” cackled my psychotic darkness. “Or out… whatever floats your boat. Either way, I’m going to fuck you hard.”

“What?” said Kakashi with furrowed brows.

“Not that way… unless you want to?” said Rayne with a waggle of her brow.

“…You’re not Kasa,” growled Kakashi. “Who the hell are you?”
“Duh, I’m Rayne, weren’t you listening,” drawled Rayne as she waved her hand idly. “For a so-called genius, you’re rather slow.”

“Where is Kasa? What did you do to her?” growled Kakashi.

“Excuse me? What did I do? The better question is, what did you do? Mr. I’m-going-to-kill-you!” retorted Rayne in a mocking voice. “Just when I’ve finally got her hands dirty, you asshats went ahead and gave her all this shit about killing and then stuck her in anbu, which by the way specializes in killing! Making up your fucking mind. The carrot or the stick, if you use both, how the hell is anyone supposed to figure out what the hell you want?”

Kakashi eyed her suspiciously before he reached an epiphany. “…You’re the one who killed the Kumo-nins.”

“Correction, I killed the first one, the other one was done by Kasa,” said Rayne. “I prefer my kills with a certain amount of flair, being the evil other half and all. It’s a part of the job description you know?”

“Where is Kasa now?” demanded Kakashi.

“In here,” chirped Rayne as she tapped my head—our head. “Oh, don’t worry, she’ll have her body back as soon as you stop trying to kill us. I personally hate dealing with you lot so I rather not come out if at all. I really don’t see what she sees in you people. I would just let you all kill each other and be done with it.”

“You can take over her body at will?” asked Kakashi with narrowed eyes.

“Well…” drawled Rayne playfully. “I could say no and you don’t believe me or I could say yes, in which case you’d stop believing Kasa. Neither a preferable outcome, because we’re just going to go in circles with you not believing a word I say and me trying to convince you I’m not lying. So, how about I make a deal with you?”

“What makes you think I would agree to such a deal?” frowned Kakashi, cautious and wary of the abrasive Rayne.

“Now, now, don’t be so hasty. The only reason she’s in anbu is to keep her out of public view until she’s badass enough on her lonesome.” drawled Rayne. “But as we both know she’s hardly anbu material. She’d be ousted by her fellow anbu peers long before she managed to create and uphold her own rep.”

“And?” asked Kakashi with caution.

“Well, as you can see. I occupy a part of Kasa’s damaged little mind and contrary to what she thinks, I rather like being alive,” said Rayne. “So, here’s my proposition. I’ll do any dirty work she can’t handle and you keep her out of the bullshit politics that involves Danzo. Of course, you still need to train her to get over being squeamish about killing and maiming, I can only do so much.”

…Is she… haggling? What the hell does she think she’s doing? Haven’t she done enough already?

“Not very fond of Danzo?” noted Kakashi.

“Please,” scoffed Rayne. “As if you’re fond of him. Given the choice, you would probably join me in torching his saggy nut sack just for the fun of it.”
Kakashi said nothing.

“What? Did I disturb you with that image? My bad,” said Rayne with half-assed sincerity. “Well, whether you believe me or not I’ve said my piece. If you’re really a genius, you’d take up my offer. If you don’t…”

“If I don’t?” challenged Kakashi, obviously taking her trailing off as a threat.

“Hmmm… There’s really not much I could or would do to you,” said Rayne with a nonchalant shrug and a grinned stupidly as she gave a flourish bow. “For you are beloved by the goddess.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” scowled Kakashi.

“You mull over that,” said Rayne with a fake yawn and a wave. “I’m out!”

In an instant, my body went limp like a puppet with its strings cut. Rayne retreated and shoved my consciousness into the foreground before I could protest. Kakashi tense and retreated backwards in preparation for an ambush. Not that I could do anything. The sudden shift threw me off and I found myself disoriented in my own body. I stumbled drunkenly forward and I collapsed to my knees. Just before I could plant my face into the ground I managed to regain control of my arms and caught myself.

“…God damn it Rayne!” I screamed in fury, my fingers dug into the ground and closed over the dirt in a death grip. “Every time…. Every fucking time! Why do you insist of making my life a living hell?”

“…Kasa?” asked Kakashi with quiet caution.

“Shut up Kakashi!” I snarled as chakra flared viciously around me. “Suspect me, kill me, do whatever the hell you want. Just shut up!”

My chest heaved harshly with each breath as my body shook with fury. It was all I could do to contain the bubbling chakra that threatened to surface. Malicious intent rolled off me in waves as I released my grip on the dirt and buried my hands in my hair instead.

Calm down, I have to calm down! Calm down damn it! A scream escaped me as I smashed my head into the ground. The porcelain mask surprisingly survived the impact as I dragged it through ground while curling into myself.

Rip… tear… kill…

Every fiber of my being told me to hate him, to kill him. I curled into myself even tighter desperately trying to reign in those urges. I couldn’t tell if these thoughts were mine or just the primal influence of Isobu’s chakra.

I couldn’t tell how long this went on for, but at some point I must’ve screamed myself raw. My throat ached, my body shook with exhaustion and when it finally passed, I laid motionless on my side. My breath felt hot under the mask as I puff tiredly for air. I could barely keep my eyes open as I blinked and stared through the mask’s eyes.

Kakashi stood still and silent, waiting and watching. I couldn’t see anything from the chest up, but there probably wasn’t much to see anyhow. I rolled onto my back and spread my arms open on the ground. Despite how incredibly far away the sky seemed, there was something familiar about it. A hoarse chuckle burned through my throat when I realized why.
“…Don’t try… to look…so wise…” I rasped out, voice cracked and singing to a broken melody with a wry grin. “Don’t cry… cause you’re so… right… Don’t dry… with fakes…or fears… Cause you will… hate yourself…in… the end…”

I could feel the hot condensation of my breath under the mask… whoever came up with the idea of anbu needing masks should be shot. It’s hard, hot and overall uncomfortable. The immediate peripheral’s utterly shot, why does the wearer need turn their neck more than necessary when they’re likely placed on delicate life or death missions? How do they fight with these? Or are these masks a symbol the wearer’s badassery? Like saying they could still take the enemy on without being able to see everything?

Kakashi walked into my line of sight. I supposed with him, the mask wouldn’t be much of a problem. The silver-haired jounin said nothing as he reached down and hauled me off the ground. Without a word he slung me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

I had no clue where he carried me off to. It wasn’t out of the village boundaries as we haven’t passed any gates, but at the same time he hadn’t taken any of the pedestrian routes either. I don’t think we’ve run into a single person during the entirety of the trip. Then again, it’s not like I could see much out of the mask…

…My eyes drifted close, unable to stay open any longer. I’m sure he’ll wake me up when we get there… wherever there is.

…He didn’t.

When I woke up, I found a note stuck to my forehead and Kakashi nowhere in sight. My whole body ached from the abuse he put me through and my throat parched with a throbbing pain. Not bothering to get up, I grabbed the note off my head and flipped it between my fingers. On it were only one word.

**Survive.**

…Now isn’t that ominous? I let out an exhausted sigh and reached for my soldier pills… but the pouch wasn’t there. Against my aching body’s protest, I shot up and patted myself down. Nothing. I glanced about my surroundings and searched what seemed like a hollow tree for my equipment. Nothing.

On my hands and knees, I gritted through the muscle aches and moved through the cramp space to the carefully covered opening. I peeled a small corner away and peeked out… only to realize where he left me.

“…Oh, you asshole.” I rasped out, voice utterly destroyed.

Stripped of my gear and with nothing but the clothes and armor on my person, the silver-haired asshole dumped me in the middle of the forest of death.

“…I’m going to string him by the balls and skin him alive.” I muttered under my breath when I spotted a nest of ginormous spiders.

Under normal circumstances anyone in their right mind would’ve high-tailed out of the forest as quickly as humanly possible. However, being in my situation I had no clue which part of the forest I was in. I had no equipment on me whatsoever and my body’s screaming in pain and exhaustion from the beating I’ve received from Kakashi. Sure, I could have very well just chosen one direction and kept going until I got out, but this being the forest of death, everything wanted you
dead and I mean *everything*.

From creatures that looked like they’ve mutated from extreme radiation to man-eating fauna that varied between human-sized Venus flytraps and pitcher plants. It was near impossible to go more than a couple of meters without running into these nightmares.

The ginormous spiders screeched, I stumbled out of my hiding spot before they sealed it off with a spray of webs. I’ve faced these spiders once before during my evaluation spar with Tenzo in the forest. However, unlike last time, there were more than one and I had no equipment to help me get out of this mess.

“Shit!” I hissed through the pain of my throat as another managed to catch my leg with a spray of webs and trapped me in place.

With a rushed hand, I formed a chakra scalpel and cut myself free and rolled away before it managed to skewer me with the claw at the tip of its leg. I wasn’t fast enough and it managed to tear through the side of my uniform as I rolled to my feet and stumbled away. The standardized shoes made it immensely difficult to keep my balance, but I forced myself to run to avoid becoming food.

All thoughts from before emptied from my mind as survival took priority. I tried fleeing to the treetops, but that made no difference as the spiders were just as much at home as they were on the ground below. I found myself at an even greater disadvantage as I couldn’t even use my dances to fight back.

Eventually, overwhelming number of spiders surrounded me and found myself backed against the tree and trapped. The beady-eyed creatures clicked and screeched as they made their way towards me. My chest heaved and my heart raced. Even my breath became labored as they came closer and closer. The spiders screeched and charged with a jump.

“S-stay away!” I screamed, my eyes closed and held my arms in front of me in a defensive position as I let out a wave of cancerous chakra around me.

I could hear the spider screech in agony seconds before it body exploded and splattered all over me.

My breath hitched in short quick gasps as I unwillingly open my eyes to the sound of flesh and broken arachnid limbs hit the ground. The other spiders stopped in caution at the sight of their brethren blown to pieces. I didn’t even think as I summoned up the will to let out a wave of killing intent to scare them off before they decided to continue.

The spiders retreated and fled as their survival instincts kicked in. I peeled away the mask and backed into the tree behind me as I slumped down in a shaking mess, staring at the spider’s corpse and the hands that killed it.

…I killed it.

It took a moment for my nerves to settle from the adrenaline, but when I did my body shook with a broken laugh instead.

“…I really don’t want to die…” I whispered in tears as I buried my face into my hands. “I really don’t want to die.”

Two weeks… it took me two weeks to get out of that forsaken forest. By the time I managed to leave, my clothes were in tatters and my mask barely recognizable with the amount of
filth on it.

After the encounter with the spiders, finding food and shelter was likely the most difficult part during the first few days. Having to find food and water while recovering from Kakashi’s beating, my own mental breakdown and the various dangers in the forest, I had to improvise a great deal with what I could. The Academy standard survival training was nothing compared to this.

Chakra scalpels for hunting and disemboweling game. Spider webs as makeshift bandages and binding agent. Carnivorous plants as traps and defense against other predators. Medicinal herbs and roots for first aid as well as water purification. The cancerous chakra was used only as a last resort and even then, there was a limited range of two meters.

With everything in the forest wanting me dead… it oddly helped me put things into perspective. The shinobi world was very similar in this regard. It really didn’t matter who you are or where you’re from, as long as you existed you were open game. That’s just how this world worked. Either kill or be killed… Mercy was a luxury that not many could afford.

“…Kakashi.” I greeted evenly when I spotted him seated outside the fence surrounding the forest with a book in hand.

“How was your stay?” asked the man idly as he turned the page. Somehow, I don’t think he was really reading.

“…You know how you said I was going to hate you by the end of this?” I noted quietly as I walked up to him.

“And?” continued Kakashi as his finger slid under the next page in preparation to flip it.

“…I don’t hate you.” I said.

His hand stilled, but he didn’t look up from his book.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m still going to eviscerate you some point in the future for dumping me in the forest after beating shit out of me and robbing me of my equipment, but…” I took a breath. “It did help clear up my head a bit and I don’t see the point in hating you when you’re just trying to prepare me for the worse in anbu.”

“I see,” said Kakashi as he snapped his book close and turned to leave. “Stop by the hospital to see Rin before you head home. We’ll take mission requests once she gives you a clean bill of health. I’ll see to getting you a new uniform before then and introduce you to the rest of the team.”

“Kakashi…” I cut in before he could leave. “About Rayne…”

The silver-haired jounin pocketed his hands and glanced up to the sky. “I don’t see any clouds today.”

“But—” I started.

“And even if it does rain,” continued Kakashi as he glanced back. “We have a sturdy umbrella now. A little rain won’t have any lasting damage.”

Words died at my lips as he turned away and continued walking… I really can’t read him.
After fighting for my survival, it felt odd to repress the instinctive need to defend myself as I walked through Konoha’s streets. I’m quite sure, even with my lack of human interaction for the last two weeks that punching a civilian in the face for staring at me was not acceptable. Though, I supposed with the current state of my anbu uniform and the fact I’m only a 4’6 child in said uniform, the stares were understandable.

I see the point for the masks now. In addition to the intimidation factor, it also served to distance the wearer from the observers and civilians. No one approached me and no one spoke to me, just as it should be. Nevertheless, I still felt discomforted by the stares. So much that I decided to cut through the park via treetops to get to the hospital. I thought I could reached the familiar building without much hassle, but I should’ve known better with my luck.

“Crybaby! Crybaby! Forehead-girl’s a crybaby!” The familiar bullying chant caught me off guard and I nearly crashed into the tree before I caught myself.

What did they just say? I snapped my attention down below with narrowed eyes over the small cluster of little girls that’s not that much older than Naruto and Sasuke. Judging by their stances, they didn’t seem like Academy students.

“L-leave me alone!” whimpered a meek voice.

“Why don’t you make us?” sneered the girls as they reached down to grab her.

I couldn’t see the small figure they crowded over, but I could hear a quiet hiccup and sob that sounded distinctively like a girl. My blood boiled, not sure if it was due to the primal instincts I’ve grown accustom to while in the forest or the fact that I’ve reached my limit for thoughtless and inane children. Before I could contain myself, a wave of killing intent escaped and the jeers came to an abrupt stop.

The children whimpered in fear as they all dropped to their knees, some even wet themselves. Despite how I wanted to torment these little insects further, I reigned back my rage and killer’s intent. Had it continued, they would have all stopped breathing.

“W-what was that?” I had no clue which one spoke, but it mattered little.

I dropped down from the tree into the open space between them and the small figure in a low crouch with my hands on the ground and my back arched much like an animal. The look of pure unadulterated fear crossed their widened eyes as my chakra dance about my body.

“Scram, you little insects.” I said in a low growl.

Horrified screams rang through the park as they all scrambled to their feet and fled. I watched until they were out of sight with an annoyed hiss. I knew full well how children could be thoughtless and cruel, but it didn’t make it any easier to tolerate their bullshit. Call me petty, but brats like those could use a little trauma.

A terrified hitch breath reminded me of the small child still behind me. I slowly pulled myself to my feet. It was all I could do to not to whip my body around all at once. What were the chances of me running into her of all people? How old was she now? Three? Four? What the heck was she doing with civilian children? Shouldn’t she be in the Academy already?
I glanced towards the little girl that sat with her hands curled up in front of her face to hide the streaks of tears. Her shoulders shook as she fought back the sobs and hiccups, no doubt terrified from her bullies and my actions. She stared at me with fear and trepidation as if she expected me to attack. I stared at her messy mop of pink hair. Something wasn’t right.

“Tt.” I clicked my tongue in annoyance. “Civilian school or Shinobi Academy?”

“C-civilian school,” answered the girl as she stared at me with wide terrified green eyes.

Civilian… The next coming of Tsunade Senju… is a freaking civilian. How the hell did that even happen? What did I change?

With my memories sealed off behind closed doors, I have no clue whether or not her joining the Academy was ever elaborated. Sure, I have faint memories of her growing out of her self-esteem issues due to Ino’s influence, but aside from that I don’t recall anything at all. Did I change something that affected this somehow? Naruto and Sasuke were already in the Academy, but that might’ve been influenced by their shinobi pedigree.

In general, children from shinobi families were preferred more so than their civilian counterparts. Often due to the fact that children with shinobi parents were more likely to have an easier time to access their chakra earlier compared to children without such pedigrees. While everyone had chakra in their systems, the ability to access it varied from person to person. Unless they were natural prodigies, often times first generation shinobi wouldn’t amount to much even with hard work.

I had the benefit of descended from the Uzumaki line and my father being an active and competent iryo-nin. Had I been a civilian child, I might not have even gotten this far. With the lack of shinobi pedigree to speak of, the village had the option to decide whether or not it was worth nurturing a civilian child into a first generation shinobi. However, with the last war and two demon attacks, the village couldn’t afford to turn away everyone that didn’t meet their preferred criteria.

When I graduated the Academy, there was already a low enrollment of girls that could potentially fill up the kunoichi ranks. With such low enrollments, I would think they accept nearly all applicants if only as a crapshoot. What happened with her?

I took a step forward. She flinched and shuffled back in fear. Right, almost forgot about her low self-esteem issues. This timid personality of hers is going to be a problem. With a sigh, I pulled my filthy mask back and squatted down to her eye-level, which wasn’t really that far with my abysmal height. Caution still showed in her eyes as she tried to keep her distance, but she did seem to calm a bit without my mask covering my face.

“A-are you human?” asked the girl meekly.

“Do I not look human?” I asked with a raised brow.

“I-I don’t know, I never seen chakra move like that before,” said the girl as she ducked down her head.

“You mean this?” I said with my hand held out in front of me in a lazed manner with chakra flickering over it like dancing flames. She flinched at the sight, but her eyes gravitated to it nonetheless.

“What does it do?” asked the curious child, the fear in her voice dissipated somewhat as time passed.
She’s interested… that’s a good sign right? Maybe I could still salvage the situation.

“Absolutely nothing.” I replied and decided to get a little more familiar with her. If I could get her to feel comfortable around me, I could probably convince her to join the Academy somehow.

“Huh?” said the girl in confusion.

“Go ahead, touch it. It won’t do a thing.” I offered my hand.

“…Really?” asked the girl with hesitation as she gingerly reached out a single finger and poked at the harmless wisps. She giggled when it swayed out of her way. So innocent… an evil thought crossed my mind.

“Well… maybe it does do one thing.” I drawled, unable to stop help myself at seeing the childish wonder on her face.

“W-What?” She stared at me in horror as she hurriedly pull her hand back as if burned. “What does it do? Am I going to die?”

“No, you’re not going to die.” I said with a sigh as I rested my chin on the open palm. “Unless you got a heart attack from the scare, it’s about the only thing it could do.”

It took a second before the words sank in and realization crossed her face.

“All that and it just scares people?” said the girl in disbelief.

“I know.” I sniggered. “Isn’t it great?”

At first it looked like she didn’t know how to react, but eventually she started laughing. I thought I would just need to convince her with a couple of tricks before she confronts her parents on her own to sign up for the Academy. Unfortunately, what she said next crushed any hopes I had.

“You sound like Naruto when he pranks the teachers,” said the laughing girl.

I lost my grin.

“…How do you know Naruto?” I asked, a frown crossed my face. “I thought you said you went to civilian school.”

“Oh,” said the girl as she stopped laughing and glanced down to the ground again. “…I was in the Academy until about a week ago.”

My heart chilled. She dropped out? That’s worse than not joining the Academy. With civilians, if you dropped out from the Academy, you can’t join again if you changed your mind. What the hell happened?

“What do you mean until about a week ago? What made you drop out?” I asked.

“…I didn’t want to drop out,” mumbled the girl. “But mom and dad said it would be too dangerous since the village might go to war again and that I wouldn’t stand a chance.”

…God damn it.

“Ugh…” I groaned as I pressed a hand against my face and dragged it down. It was my fault.
“Are you okay?” asked the girl quietly.

“Peachy.” I drawled with sarcasm dripping from my voice.

My hand closed over my mouth as I narrowed my eyes in deep thought. There must be something I could do to fix this. It’s unthinkable to lose a key player this earlier on. While I admit early genin-Sakura was an annoying fan-girl, she did eventually grow out of it... sort of. Even so, there was no denying the fact that she grows to be a formidable kunoichi. To lose her would be too great of a loss.

“Um…” squirmed the pink-haired girl uncomfortably as she stared up at me.

Think, what are my options? There weren’t that many that knew of my so-called foresight and even then the one that have political power were occupied. Shikaku and Inoichi were out of the village, no telling how long it would be before they get back.

I don’t even know if I would be in the village when they do. Anbu missions differed from the typical missions at the admin office in both difficulty and time. Kakashi already had his hands full with just trying to keep me alive and out of Danzo’s hands. He won’t be able to do anything while he still had to watch over me.

What other options do I have left? I have no political pull of my own and even if I had who the heck would believe that a civilian with no pedigree could become as powerful as a sanin? It was unthinkable. The only way now for her to even have a chance to go back is if someone with political power vouched for... I paused.

“Oh…” A soft whispered escaped me. It might be a long shot, but it’s worth a try. I turned my attention to the pink-haired girl. “You still want to be a kunoichi right?”

“Huh?” Confusion crossed her face and she gave a hesitant nod.

“Then come with me.” I ordered as I grabbed her arm and pulled her up with me.

“W-wait, where are we going?” She stumbled after me as I dragged her through the park.

“We’re getting you a sponsor to go back to the Academy.” I answered.

“B-but what about my parents?” She protested.

“If I could get you that sponsor then it wouldn’t matter what the heck your parents think.” I grunted out. I’m not about to allow her to stay civilian because good-intention parents. Caution be damned. I’ve already nearly caused an international war. I might as well even it out with the threat of a civil war as well. Why not?

“Why are you helping me? I don’t even know you—you don’t even know me!” shouted the confused girl as she did her best to keep up.

“Oh, did we not do introductions yet?” I retorted. “Hello! I’m Kasa. What’s your name?”

“Huh?” squeaked the girl before shyly mumbling. “Sakura.”

“Nice to meet you Sakura.” I continued without a pause. “Now, as for why I’m helping you, let’s just say I have a good judge on character and leaving you as a civilian would be a crime and a waste.”
I didn’t give her a chance to protest and hauled her into my arms and went through treetops
instead. She might be half my size, but she’s not impossible to carry. Most shinobi were required to
be able to pull their own weight along with another person as part of their physical conditioning.
With my current weight and height, it would be difficult to carry an adult, but anyone smaller is
doable.

“Kasa-chan!? What on earth happened to you?” Mikoto nearly screeched when she saw
me at the door.

“Mikoto-san, I apologize for dropping in without notice, but I need to ask for a big favor
from both you and Fugaku-san.” I replied as I set Sakura down. The moment she touched the
ground, she scurried behind my legs and clung to my tattered pants.

“He’s not home yet,” said Mikoto as she turned attention to Sakura who peeked out
meekly. “Who is this child, Kasa?”

“An ex-Academy student.” I answered and surprised crossed her face.

“Ex?” asked Mikoto.

“Her parents took her out of the Academy after what happened two weeks ago.” The look
on Mikoto’s face changed when she realized the reason. “I know this is presumptuous of me to
request this, but could the Uchihas please sponsor this girl so that she may return to the Academy?”

“Eh?” said Sakura in surprise, no doubt recognizing the Uchiha name.

“Kasa-chan, you know that’s against protocols,” said Mikoto evenly.

“If a civilian child drops out from the Academy, there would be no second chances if they
decided they wanted to become a shinobi. I know that.” I took a breath and continued. “But it is
essential for her specifically to become a kunoichi.”

“And why is that?” boomed Fugaku’s deep baritone from behind me.

“Dear you’re home early,” said Mikoto as she raised her gaze from me to her husband, but
she paused when she met his gaze.

“K-Kasa-san,” squeaked Sakura as she shuffled around my legs to avoid Fugaku’s gaze.

“Because she would make a great kunoichi.” I replied as I turned to face him.

“She’s a civilian,” noted Fugaku, obviously hinting at her lack of pedigree.

“That only means her future children would be stronger.” I retorted. “Just because she’s a
civilian, doesn’t mean she won’t do as well as a shinobi’s child.”

“Bold words,” grunted Fugaku. “But that’s all it is, words.”

“I know I have no proof to convince you that this girl will become a formidable kunoichi,
but I would rather not call on the debt of saving Sasuke’s life.” I said with detachment.

“A life-debt? This coming from the child that nearly started the next shinobi war?”
remarked Fugaku in his usual stoic demeanor.

“Would you have rather I allow Kumo to take Sasuke instead?” I tilted my head up to meet
his gaze. “We wouldn’t even need peace negotiations if we just allowed them to take him.”
“Kasa!” shouted Mikoto in horror.

A wave of killing intent poured from Fugaku and Sakura nearly dropped to her knees in fear. I stood my ground and continued to stare him straight in the eyes. If he got any angrier and I’m quite sure his sharingan would activate. Sakura was close to tears when I planted a hand on her head and pulsed a comforting wave of chakra through her. It wouldn’t cancel Fugaku’s killing intent, but it would lessen the stress and mental trauma.

“You have the nerve,” said Fugaku as his voice rumbled dangerously.

“Only as much as you’re willing to allow.” I replied with quiet firmness as I blocked out the growing threat. “If Sasuke’s life was truly threatened, I am under no illusion that I would walk out of this door alive. As I’ve said before, I have no interest in calling the debt on Sasuke’s life, not because I want to save it for another time or a different favor, but because I don’t see it as a debt.”

“Then why bother bringing it up if you don’t intend to treat it as a debt?” Fugaku’s killing intent hasn’t lessened, but it hasn’t worsen either.

“I saved Sasuke not to gain something, but because I wanted to.” I glanced down at the frightened girl as I ruffled her messy hair to calm her. “It’s pretentious for me to use that as a means to explain my actions, but at the same time, it’s also the reason why I want to help Sakura.”

“How generous of you,” drone Fugaku. “While you may hand out that generosity of yours at a whim, the Uchiha Clan is not a charity,”

“Then don’t think of it as charity. Think of it as an investment.” I countered. “With the power and prestige your clan holds, can it really not afford to sponsor a single civilian child? Would it damage the clan’s image for it to do so?”

“Your words grow arrogant by the second,” sneered Fugaku.

“Not arrogant, but truth.” I challenged. “The Uchiha Clan’s pride has crippled and blindsided its clansmen.”

“How dare you!” roared Fugaku.

“I’m sure you’ve noticed the unrest growing amongst the Konoha populace towards the Uchihas.” I continued, ignoring his indignation. “People are talking about how the Uchihas are conceited. How they dominate the positions in the Konoha Police Force. How they’re abusing their position of power and unfairly treating the civilians. And with what happened with Kumo two weeks ago, how long do you think would take before they start blaming the Uchihas for things they haven’t even done?”

I could see the Uchiha patriarch about to cut in, but I pressed on, not giving him a chance.

“You said the Uchiha Clan is not a charity, but I digress. There are good people in the Uchiha Clan, kind and generous, but the rest of Konoha doesn’t see that. Even though we all live in this village, the Uchihas are all locked up in this little district. All the rest of the village sees are the Uchihas on duty and often times as shinobi we cannot afford to seem soft and often times, outsiders would see us as conceited, arrogant... monsters.”

As I spoke, Fugaku’s eyes studied me with great intensity. I couldn’t tell whether he furious or actually listening to my words.

“I’m not saying I’m better than anyone, far from it. I’ve screwed up so many times and
each time was worse than the last, but… due to the kindness and generosity I’ve been shown time and time again, I managed continue to go on regardless what happened. Kindness is not a weakness and it shouldn’t be treated as one. I know it’s naïve of me to think this way, but I truly believe that kindness will prevail over brute force. Otherwise it’s just the same misery repeated over and over again."

A shift in the air and I could feel his killing intent lessen. Sakura took a shaking breath, her knees shook as she desperately tried to pull herself back up. Progress? Maybe?

“I don’t see Sakura as just a civilian. I see her as untapped potential. Potential as a kunoichi, potential as a catalyst, potential as a bridge for the Uchihas to reconnect with the rest of Konoha.”

“…You’re a foolish dreamer,” said Fugaku.

“A dream is a wish the heart makes.” I replied. “Whether or not if it comes true is dependent on the person.”

The expression on Fugaku’s face remained unchanged as he lowered his gaze to the pink-haired little girl. I could feel her grip tighten at my pants and she leaned into me for comfort.

“Why do you want to be a shinobi?” asked Fugaku.

“Eh?” Sakura jumped at the sudden question and glanced up at me for guidance. I kept my face blank, but pulsed a small burst of soothing chakra to help her ease her nerves. She turned back to Fugaku with hesitation. “I…”

“Well?” noted Fugaku as if he was growing impatient.

“I… I don’t want to be the forehead-girl everyone picks on,” murmured Sakura quietly. “I want to show them that I could be strong and cool like Kasa-san.”

“…What?” I blinked in surprised as I glanced down to the red-faced girl.

A small giggle escaped Mikoto, but she quickly raised a hand to hide the slip as she glanced towards her husband once more. Fugaku shot her a glare and there seemed to be some internal conversation going on between the two not privy to my ears. Mikoto gave her husband a chiding stare and eventually, their gaze broke apart from one another and the Uchiha patriarch turned his attention back to Sakura again.

“Child,” said Fugaku and the small girl jumped to attention. “What is your name?”

“S-Sakura Haruno.” She squeaked out.

“Haruno,” said Fugaku, his intense gaze made her recoil once more, but she did her best to stay still. “I expect your grades to be on par with Sasuke.”

“Eh?” Surprise crossed Sakura’s face as her eyes widened. “You mean…”

“I’ll have someone deliver the sponsor letter to the Academy by tomorrow,” said Fugaku as he glanced towards me. “You will deal with the matter of her parents.”

“Of course.” I replied evenly.

“Don’t make me regret this,” warned Fugaku.
“I would never dream of it.” I answered and gave a formal bow from the waist. “Thank you Fugaku-san.”

Seeing my gesture, Sakura hastily mirrored me and ducked her head down in a bow and squeaked out her own thank you.

“Hn,” scoffed Fugaku as he slipped off his shoes and made his way into his house.

I waited until his soft footsteps disappeared down the end of the hall before lifting my head and turning to the Uchiha matron with another bow. “Thank you Mikoto-san. I’ll make sure neither you nor Fugaku-san would regret this.”

“…Kasa-chan,” sighed Mikoto in exasperation, she cupped a soft hand against my cheek and lifted my head to meet her eyes. I didn’t expect to be greeted with a genuine smile. “Despite how my husband may seem or act, he’s extremely grateful for what you’ve done and gone through in order to save Sasuke. So please, don’t burden yourself with such a simple request.”

“But—” I started, but her giggle made me pause.

“Even though my husband may put up a tough front, he has quite a soft side when it comes to children,” said Mikoto, her radiant smile made it hard to not trust her. I suppose there might be some truth to her words, but I have no time to spend to disprove her.

“…Mikoto-san, I really need to get going.” I said, unable to think of anything else to say. “I still have to escort Sakura home and inform her parents of her resumed attendance to the Academy.”

“All right,” sighed Mikoto again as she lowered her hand to my shoulder. “But do come back to visit when you have a chance. I’m sure Sasuke would be happy to see you again.”

“I’m not sure if it will be possible any time soon with my reassignment.” I answered.

“Whenever you have a chance,” said Mikoto gently before she turned to the pink-haired child next to me. “Sakura-chan, right?”

“Y-yes!” said Sakura as she glanced up to the Uchiha matron.

“I’m sure you’ll become a fine kunoichi one day,” said Mikoto encouragingly. “I look forward to seeing that day when it comes.”

“T-thank you,” mumbled Sakura shyly as she clutched onto the side of my pants.

“All right, I’ve kept you two for long enough,” said Mikoto as she turned her attention on me for one last time. “Kasa-chan, just know that you’ll always be welcome here, okay?”

“Mikoto-san… I…” I stumbled over my words as hers touched me. “Thank you.”

The Uchiha matron said nothing else as she opened the door for us. Sakura and I both gave her one last bow before we made our way out of the Uchiha district and towards the civilian district. It wasn’t until we were halfway into the civilian district that Sakura spoke up again.

“Hey… Kasa-san?” asked Sakura meekly.

“Yes?” I replied as I glanced down at her.

“…You were bluffing that whole time with Uchiha-san weren’t you?” asked Sakura.
We both shared a quiet stare. She with her green eyes staring up at me through her pink fringe and me with my steeled blue eyes. We managed the silence for a brief moment before both our cheeks puffed up and the two of us broke out in laughter.

“I didn’t think you’d pick that up.” I contained my laughter into a snigger as I finally settle with a grin.

“Weren’t you scared?” asked Sakura. “He was so scary!”

“As a kunoichi—no, as a shinobi, you will need to learn to hide your weaknesses and fears from your enemies. If you can’t match your enemy in skill, either have them underestimate your abilities to the point they ignore you or overestimate your abilities and they avoid you.”

“… You like them to overestimate you?” asked Sakura in bafflement. “What if they decide they’re not scared of you?”

“In that case, you either fight back or run away.” I answered. “…Or you can pretend to fight, but actually using the chance to run away.”

“…Huh?” Sakura looked at me with bafflement. “How do you do that?”

“Well—”

“KASA-NEE!” shouted Sasuke’s voice from behind.

Both Sakura and I paused in mid-step and glanced back. From where we stood, I spotted Sasuke on Itachi’s back. By the lack of his right shoe and swollen ankle, Sasuke must’ve sprained something. He looked rather stressed but otherwise happy to see me. Itachi’s eyes darted to the mask strapped to the top of my head and a look of surprise crossed his face. It disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Had I blinked, I probably would’ve missed it.

“…Yo!” I raised my free hand to greet them cheerfully. “How’s it going?”

“How’s it going!? Kasa-nee you’re covered in injuries! What happened!?” shouted Sasuke with concern.

I blinked, surprised that he wasn’t the least bit terrified of me even after Rayne killed without an ounce of remorse in front of him. If anything, he looked distraught over the fact that I was missing so long. Again, I have to ask how a sweet kid like him could ever turn into such vicious little traitor.

“Don’t worry about it!” I said as I idly waved it off. It doesn’t matter, I won’t let him turn into one this time around.

“Don’t—Kasa-nee you were gone for two weeks! No one knew where you were!” snapped Sasuke.

“Sasuke stop it,” interrupted Itachi quietly and the younger Uchiha glanced down over his brother’s shoulder.

“But—” protested Sasuke, but one look from Itachi made him fall silent and I was quite sure he was sulking too.

“Sasuke.” I called out, unable to keep the grin from my face and he raised his head to glance at me. “Sorry for worrying you. I’m in the middle of something right now, but once I get the
time, I’ll come and visit okay?”

“Middle of something?” asked Sasuke as he glanced down to Sakura who flinched at his gaze. “Who’s that?”

…I take back the sweet part.

“She’s in your class Sasuke, she was only gone for a week.” I said in a deadpan.

“She is?” asked Sasuke with a confused tilt.

…I could feel my petty side creeping up.

“…Sakura.” I turned to the pink-haired girl with a dark voice. “Once we get you back to the Academy, whatever you do, make sure you score higher than Sasuke.”

“Eh?” said Sakura and Sasuke in surprise.

“Beat him senseless in every subject.” I ordered. “Make him cry!”

“EH!” said Sakura in horror as I clapped my hands on her shoulder.

“Don’t worry, I believe in you. You can totally do it!” I encouraged.

“B-but Kasa-san!” protested Sakura.

“…Idiot,” muttered Itachi under his breath in his usual exasperation. A grin crossed my face as I could see him resisting the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Sasuke, we’re going home.”

“But ni-san!” whined Sasuke.

“No buts, we’re heading home. You’ve already hurt yourself during training today,” said Itachi as he turned to leave. “If we stay any longer, Kasa will infect you with her brand of stupid.”

“Up yours Itachi!” I retorted with an obscene hand gesture.

“K-Kasa-san!” said Sakura incredulity.

“You’re the same as always,” snorted Itachi as he continued off, but not before signing something quickly with one of the hands that propped Sasuke up on his back.

I blinked as I tried to decipher his message, while I recognized all the signs he made, the context it’s in was a bit weird. Sign language here wasn’t really meant for full conversations, its primary use was to pass on commands and vital messages between squad members quickly without the need to vocalize and attract enemy attention.

Comrades unharmed, proceed on. Rendezvous and debrief at base. That was the gist of what Itachi signed, but since we’re no on a field mission, my guess was that he’s glad I’m fine and that maybe we’ll catch up later? I think? It could also mean that everyone’s doing well and we have a mission tomorrow… but I’m not on Team Karasu anymore… so I doubt that would be it.

“Kasa-san?” asked Sakura in confusion.

“Come on Sakura-chan, let’s go talk to your parents.” I said as I had her lead me to her house
Regardless what he signed, I still have a pair of civilian parents to persuade to let their little girl go back to the Academy. Not to mention a checkup appointment with Rin and preparation to meet with Kakashi’s anbu team… so many things to do, so little time… but it’ll be worth it… I hope.
Parents

“This is it,” mumbled Sakura quietly once we’ve reached the entrance of the apartment building.

“All right, let’s—” I paused at the tightened grip around my hand. When I turned my attention to Sakura, she ducked her head down and shuffled her feet nervously. “What is it?”

“W-what if they say no?” mumbled Sakura quietly.

“Do you not want to be a kunoichi?” I continued.

“Huh?” She glanced up at me in surprise. “No! I want to! Of course I want to!”

“Then there you go. Just show your parents that’s what you want.” I said.

“But…” trailed off the little girl.

“Listen.” I sighed and squatted down to her eye-level. “Unless you show the determination that you want to be a kunoichi, it doesn’t matter if it’s the hokage that talks with your parents.”

“. . .Easy for you to say…” mumble Sakura. “You probably passed the genin exams with flying colors on your first try.”

“I failed twice and passed as dead last on my third attempt.” I replied bluntly. “The only reason I managed to pass at all is because of my training in iryo-ninjutsu.”

“Eh?” said Sakura in surprise as she stared at me in disbelief and confusion. “EH!?”

“Don’t get me wrong. Grades will improve your chances in becoming a shinobi, but out on the field grades mean nothing if you can’t survive outside the classroom. Shinobi aren’t measured like civilians.” I reasoned as I stared straight into her eyes.

“. . .How are they measured?” asked Sakura with uncertainty.

“Well, for one thing.” I reached up with my free hand to brush her unruly bangs out of her eyes. “That big forehead of yours isn’t a bad trait.”

“Huh?” said Sakura as she looked at me with confusion.

“There’s a saying that a big head means there’s a big brain.” I replied. “Physical prowess may be valuable on the battlefield, but without a sharp mind, all that brawn is nothing more than useless muscle.”

“But even in the Academy the other kids—” started Sakura.

“Your peers are not the ones that determines your future. They don’t have the authority or ability to gage your skills.” I continued. “It’s estimated that 80 percent of the Academy students would graduate from the Academy, but out of all those graduates, only 33 percent will go onto becoming shinobi. You have the potential to become part of that 33 percent.”

“But how are you so sure?” asked Sakura. “You say you’re a good judge in character, but how do you do that? How do you judge someone?”
“Do you want to be a shinobi or not?” I sighed in exasperation as I lowered my hand. “I know you’re probably just scared and all… But seriously, I’m running out of cool things to say and it’s really hard to keep looking badass while squatting you know.”

Sakura stared at me for all of two seconds before a snort escaped her and she hugged her sides in a giggling fit. She laughed so hard that tears peeked from her eyes. I found the corners of my lips twitching up as I pushed myself to standing once more.

“So, are you ready to go back to the Academy and become a kunoichi?” I asked.

The pink-haired girl looked up at me with a bright grin as she wiped away the laughing tears from her eyes. The things I do to make kids laugh. Her small hand reached to grab my mine once more before we both made our way up the steps. One problem down, countless more to go. I still have no clue how I’m going to go about convincing her parents.

“Good evening Haruno-san.” I greeted the woman once she opened the door. “I would like to speak you to regarding to your daughter’s resumption to the Academy.”

The woman stood baffled for a moment as she stared at me and then at Sakura who shuffled behind me nervously.

“Did you make a new friend today Sakura?” asked the woman with a forced grin.

“…Mom, this is Kasa-san. She’s a ninja,” mumbled the girl quietly.

“A ninja?” said the woman with a laugh. “Of course, of course you’re both playing ninja right?”

“Madam.” I interjected with no nonsense in my voice. “I come on behalf of Fugaku Uchiha, the head of the Uchiha Clan to inform you that the Uchiha Clan will be sponsoring your daughter in returning to the Academy.”

“Oh my!” giggled the woman. “A sponsor from the Uchiha Clan. You two sure have quite the imagina…”

“Haruno-san, contrary to what you think.” I pulled off my mask to reveal the hitai-ate still tied to my head. Her face paled. “I am not playing ninja.”

“We took her out of the Academy! They said as long as she drops out there would be no way for her to be reinstated!” snapped the woman.

“Under normal circumstances that would be true, but your daughter has received a sponsorship from the Uchiha Clan. A letter of recommendation will be sent to the Academy tomorrow morning. Your daughter will be expected to—”

“NO!” shouted the woman. “I will not have my daughter join the war! She’s just a—”

“Little girl?” I quipped as I glanced up at her and she tensed as she glanced down at me and my youthful face. “Madam, I’ve been a shinobi since I was seven, my current commander has been a shinobi since he was six. Age does not matter if the shinobi is capable.”

“She’s a fragile flower!” argued the woman. “The battlefield is no place for—”

“I’m quite sure a number of kunoichi would argue otherwise.” I continued and the woman flinched. “Haruno-san as you noted, there is a chance that Konoha might be face with war once
again. While the shinobi of Konoha and myself will do our best to protect those residing in Konoha, our numbers have been dwindle from the last war. There simply aren’t enough of us to be able to protect everyone.”

“Even so, why does my Sakura have to be the one to join?” snapped the woman.

“Would you rather her be defenseless if the walls of Konoha are breeched? Or would you rather her able and capable of protecting herself when the time comes?” I challenged. “She has a chance in making it as a kunoichi! Would you take that chance away because you’re afraid?”

“You’re a child! How would you know what a mother feels?” snapped the woman.

“My mother died protecting me as a kunoichi.” I said coldly. “I may not know what it feels like to have a daughter risk her life, but don’t you dare say I have no clue what my mother could have felt.”

She grew quiet and I used the moment to push on.

“Your fear is that Sakura would be placed in the frontlines if she becomes a kunoichi, but contrary to your fears most kunoichi aren’t frontline fighters.” I noted. “Due to the difference in physiology, most kunoichi are allocated into either battle support, reconnaissance or the field of medicine. Only a small number actually become frontline fighters.”

“And what field would Sakura be in if she joins?” asked the woman, her voice shaking.

“That’s dependent of her and the jounin sensei that takes her on when she obtains the rank of genin.” I answered. “As she is right now, there still some years before she would become genin, much less pick a field of specialty.”

“But you said you—”

“To every rule, there’s an exception.” I countered. “I said she had potential to becoming a kunoichi, I never said she would get advanced immediately.”

The woman eyed my uniform. No doubt fully aware that it was something only the Anbu wore. Though Anbu in general tried to stay out of view of the general populace, the distinct uniform and masks told that they were the elite that served only the hokage and no one else.

“…What field are you in?” asked the weary mother, a question that no civilian should ask an Anbu operative, but I really can’t fault her.

“In my opinion, your daughter would probably do well in the medical field.” I evaded her question. “Unless she becomes the next Tsunade-sama, it’s unlikely she would be asked to go to the frontlines. Of course, I’m not her jounin sensei, so it’s not my place to say what she’ll specialize in and where she would be station.”

“Even so…” said the woman. “I can’t just…”

“Your daughter is being sponsored by the Uchiha Clan.” I grounded out. “No other civilian child has been given that honor ever before. Can you say your daughter will be able to gain the same recognition if she continues as a civilian? Are you able to deny her such a chance?”

“At the cost of her life? Yes!” snapped the woman. Her chest heaved with frustration and anger. “I would rather she amount to nothing than to have her taken away! That’s what happened to those clan children right? They were taken away by the enemy because of their abilities! I won’t
have my Sakura taken away! I won’t!”

My eyes locked with the woman. She was close to losing all reason. Her eyes glared down at me with hot fury and I returned it with icy calmness.

“I heard you loud and clear but,” I replied quietly. “What about Sakura?”

She flinched and broke her gaze from me to stare down at the small figure hiding behind my leg. I could feel Sakura’s trembling grasp at my pants as she watched quietly.

“Have you asked what did she want?” I asked “Or does her opinion not matter?”

“Sakura,” whispered the woman as she reached out, but the girl yelped and hid behind me once more.

“So quick to push your own opinion on others, have you once take into consideration what your daughter wanted?” I asked.

“And you care?” snapped the woman. “You’re just desperate for more shinobi!”

“If Sakura truly doesn’t want to become a kunoichi, I will personally go retrieve that recommendation letter and tear it to pieces and you will not see me again.” I said with dead seriousness as I met her eyes once more.

“You… will?” frowned the woman in confusion.

“You have my word.” I replied before my expression became icy and I let out a small amount of killing intent. “However, if she says that she wants to become a kunoichi I will make certain that it becomes a reality. I don’t care if you’re her mother or if the hokage himself strip me of my ranks.”

The woman backed away and fell to her knees in terror as she kept her gaze on me. “M-monster.”

“K-Kasa-san!” shouted Sakura as she grabbed my arm and I cut off any killing intent before it reached her. “I think my mom gets the point.”

“All right then.” I said as I turned to Sakura. “I’ll be hearing news about you returning to the Academy tomorrow?”

“Definitely,” said Sakura with gusto. “I’ll make sure to get top scores like you said!”

“Good.” I said as I patted her head and ruffled her hair fondly. “But don’t think of this as an excuse to stop listening to your mom okay?”

“Huh?” said Sakura in confusion. I could see her mother sharing the same surprise at the corner of my eye. “But…”

“She’s still your mom and you have to respect and listen to her. After all…” I lowered my gaze. “You only have one mother.”

“…Okay,” said Sakura quietly.

“All right.” I said with a faint grin as I turned to leave, but not before sneaking one last glance at the older Haruno woman. Torn and confused… I supposed it’s better than angry and unreasonable.
Just as I left the Haruno household and made my way onto the rooftop, a thought hit me… there was one other over-protective parent I’m going to have to face along with another irate iroyonin. I sighed in exasperation with propped a hand at my hip and stared wearily at the hospital. That I do not look forward too.

“Kasa-chan!” Rin nearly screeched when she saw me enter the hospital in my tattered and filthy clothes. “What happened to you?”

“Ehe…” I said sheepishly. “Survival training?”

“What sort of survival training would get you into such a state?” asked Rin in disbelief as she grabbed me by the shoulders and looked me over.

“…Survival training in the forest of death?” I offered weakly.

“Forest of…” She was at a loss for words before she decided to drag me to the staff lockers instead. My tattered uniform was stripped away without much ceremony and shoved me into the showers.

“…Really, it wasn’t too bad… aside from having to improvise with what little I had.” I mumbled as she grabbed the shower head and hauled it over my head.

“What do you mean improvise? What happened to all your stored equipment?” asked Rin as she turned on the water. I lowered my eyes as the hot spray drenched my hair and brown water stained the ground as the blood washed out of my hair.

“Um… Kakashi kind of took everything before he left me there.” I answered.

Crack, The plastic on the shower head cracked under her grip.

“What do you mean he took everything?” demanded Rin icily and I found myself feeling a little sorry for Kakashi… only a little.

Rin was beyond livid as she pulled out my entire recounted of my stay in the forest. I must have sat there for an hour listening to her fume and rage as she cleaned and examined all my injuries. By the time she finished, I’ve come to the conclusion that medics are sadists when it comes to enacting vengeance. By the time she was done, I had bandages peeking out from the borrowed clothing she lent me.

With my small frame the clothes were utterly loose, but the uniform I came in with was unsalvageable with all its rips and tears. No amount of laundering would get the blood and dirt out of it. The only thing that survived in that pile was the anbu mask and I have to say… I’m starting to grow a little fond of the thing. I know I bitched about how it limits the peripheral vision, but it’s not that bad once I’ve gotten accustom to it.

“Where’s my dad?” I asked as I scrubbed my mask clean.

“Tesuri-san is in operations today, should be out soon,” noted Rin as she finished cleaning the layer of blood and dirt from the showers and turned to me with her hands at her hips. “Are you thinking about sneaking home before he gets out?”

“What makes you think I’d do that?” I asked as I did my best not to scrub my mask even faster.

“Can’t avoid him forever,” said the older girl.
“I know.” I mumbled as I paused in mid-scrub. “But… I kind of left without saying much to him.”

“Do you think he’ll be mad?” asked Rin.

“Mad? I don’t think he would be, but….” I stopped scrubbing altogether. “After seeing several protective parents today… I think I might’ve worried him a lot.”

“Are you feeling guilty?” asked Rin.

“Not really… Though, I probably should.” I mumbled and returned to scrubbing. “It’s kind of weird. Everything feels muted. I don’t feel particularly guilty or angry… or even happy. I laughed about an hour ago, but even then it felt empty and hollow… is something wrong with me?”

“You’re just tired,” interjected Tesuri as the sound of the opening door took me by surprise.

“Dad!” I flinched as I quickly tried to hide the bandages that peeked out from my clothes, but when I turned to face him I paused at the sight of his tired face… he looked so much older than I remembered.

“…Kasa?” asked Tesuri gently as he made his way over and squatted down to my eye-level when I said nothing. Were there that many lines on his face before? With him so close, I found myself reach out to gingerly touch his face. A look of surprise crossed both our faces when I realized what I was doing.

“…Sorry dad, you’re right, I must be more tired than I thought.” I mumbled as pulled my hand back, but before I could, he caught my hand in his and held it in his gentle grasp.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tesuri with a whisper as he gave me the most understand gaze in the world with none of the judgmental gaze I’ve seen the last two weeks.

“Nothing… it’s just…” I mumbled before I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around his neck and hugged him close. “Just… thanks. Thanks for being my dad.”

Tesuri was quiet for a moment before his arms wrapped around me and he patted my back in a soothing manner.
Anbu Kame

“…Nine? They let a nine-year-old join anbu?”

Whispers…

“I heard she was an early graduate, only a year shy of the youngest graduate record.”

Whispers…

“Serious? No wonder Hokage-sama sent her to the Kiri chunin exams.”

Even more whispers…

“Didn’t she pass with the best overall score in that exam? Not even the Uchihas that won the final bracket had her scores.”

So many god damn whispers…

“I heard she was involved in the Kumo fiasco…”

All this unwarranted murmuring and recognition is annoying. Whoever painted the stories for my reputation ought to be recruited into the public relations department for propaganda projects. I breathed softly through my nose as I did my best to ignore the whispers. My eyes stared through the holes of the mask and onto the anbu tattoo on Kakashi’s shoulder as I followed him through the building.

Due to the seals on my arm, I had to forgo the customary branding to avoid complications. In that sense, while I’m technically in anbu I’m not really a part of it… isn’t that sad? Outcast wherever I go, a victim of circumstance…Geez, this woe is I mentality is really getting on my nerves. Don’t I have more pressing matters to deal with?

“…I leave you alone for one evening and you go traumatizing civilian children and their mothers,” said Kakashi in a deadpan as we made our way through the Anbu building.

“Just letting off some steam” I replied bluntly, avoiding the question as I trailed after him. With him nearly two feet taller than me, the sight of me trying to seem serious must look humorous to some.

“Letting off some steam indeed.” Kakashi, who despite wearing his mask, somehow managed to convey displeasure at my actions by merely tilting his head towards me in a slight motion. “I heard you also stopped by the Uchiha district during your little steam-letting.”

“It’s still standing is not?” I asked as I tilted my head up to face him.

Kakashi said nothing as he turned his full attention to me. No doubt he’s berating me with silent scorn and asking if what I did was worth the risk. Had he not been aware of my so-called oracle abilities, what I’ve done with the Uchiha and Sakura the day before would’ve seen as reckless and completely out of hand without context. Keeping me alive was hard enough, but my perchance for attracting trouble didn’t help either.

“…I’m not saying sorry.” I droned with indifference for any spectators still lingering in the area.
“You’ll be meeting with the squad today, but it’ll be some time before you join them for group missions. Try to be on your best behavior,” noted Kakashi as he turned his attention forward once more.

I made no effort to say anything else. This wasn’t a place to make friends and fond memories. This was a place to build and maintain my exaggerated faux reputation. Kakashi made it quite clear the day before, but… it didn’t completely sink in until we stepped into the room with my future squad-mates.

Compared to Team Four and Team Karasu, the atmosphere in the Anbu Corps was dramatically different. Gone was the light-hearted carefree familiarity and in its place was cold reservation. It felt almost like everyone’s trying to out cool and out emo each other... I’m going to stop here before my thoughts get any more absurd.

“Captain,” greeted a number of masked anbu the moment we entered. The majority were men, not unexpected with the limited number of kunoichi available.

Kakashi gave the room a once over as he propped one hand at the side of his hip. “Good, you’re all here. This is Kame, you’ve probably heard rumors regarding to her joining the corp. Let me say this now, for your own safety do not test her.”

None of them showed any reaction to his words, but with their masks on, I supposed it’s impossible to tell unless I knew them personally. It really shouldn’t come as a surprise that they could keep their composure over this sort of news. After all, assassination was a common thing among them, it’s hardly a surprise to work with someone dangerous.

“She’ll be joining squad missions after she’s done with solo evaluations,” said Kakashi. Though, somehow that comment in particular threw them all for a loop as all hell broke loose.

“Solo eval—” the group spluttered in disbelief and broke into a flurry of outbursts.

“You’ve got to be kidding!”

“Those evaluations are meant for promoting team leaders!”

“She hasn’t even been in anbu for a day!”

“You’re pushing her for a promotion already?”

“Has she even gone on an assassination mission yet?”

“Forget that! Has she even gotten her first kill?”

The room fell into a frenzy as they each tried get their outrage through to Kakashi. He really doesn’t waste time in adding to my reputation does he? As the noise grew louder, I found it hard to keep my composure as a dull ache pounded through my head. No doubt Kakashi created this setup for me to leave a lasting first impression. I would have to be blind, deaf and stupid to not notice, but what does expect me to do?

A bluff might work for those first few seconds, but beyond that, any single one of these anbu members could wipe the floor with me. My hand rose to reach for my forehead, but paused in front of my face when I realized my porcelain mask was in the way. I closed my eyes in irritation and took a breath before I slowly released in attempt to recompose myself.
What I didn’t realize…. In breathing out under a mask, it echoed in a low hissing noise that sounded close to a long dragged out shush. At first, I didn’t notice through the noise, but then the room grew silent. Wary, I opened my eyes and found their attention focused on me. It didn’t help that my aborted attempt to calm myself in the usual manner made it look like I raised my fingers to hush them all.

As the last of my breath expelled, I found myself staring back at my quiet spectators. They said nothing and in turn I did the same. By the time I realized that they were waiting for me to speak, the silence bordered on awkwardness. Not knowing what to say, I fell back on Hizashi’s training. Bluffs may not work on this group, but that’s hardly the only thing that was pounded into my head during recon training.

“Would any of you like to take the solo-evaluations instead?” I asked in a soft, but clear voice as I lowered my hand. “I personally have no interest in leading others, especially those who doesn’t wish to be lead. If the captain has no qualms in my doing so, I’m willing to pass on the opportunity.”

The silence held for a mere moment.

“Are you insulting the Anbu Corps?” sneered the mouse-masked anbu. “You think anyone could take those evaluations?”

“I’m sorry.” I replied without an ounce of sincerity and purposely antagonistic. “Is that not what you implied when you questioned the validity of my taking the evaluations?”

“You think anbu is a joke?” growled the boar-masked woman.

“What does it matter what I think of anbu?” I replied with blunt indifference. “You all squabble like Academy students. It’s a wonder that any work gets done.”

“You rude little,” snarled the wolf-masked anbu as he body-flickered and disappeared.

My survival instincts flared up as I raised both hands to guard the entirety of my neck just as two hands darted out to grab me in a strangle hold. With my elbows pressed together to guard against any attempt at my throat from the front, I crouched forward with a widened stance I shielded myself with the both the Barrier Wing and Dragon Wing seals. I won’t make the mistake of forgoing either of them after the countless ambushes I’ve encountered in the forest.

Without further ceremony, I let out an amplified defibrillation discharge. The wolf anbu, as if able to sense my intent, shifted his weight and darted backwards to avoid the attack. However, even as he retreated I spotted him go through a set of hand seals at the edge of what I could see through my mask. I reached out my hand and pulsed chakra into the card hidden in my gauntlet and my umbrella appeared, open and at the ready to shield me from whatever attack.

However, before either of us could take the fight further the sound of cracking wood filled the room and the two of us were ensnared. Instinct took over as my mind perceived the threat and I dropped the umbrella. Chakra focused to my hand in an instant. I didn’t have a chance to restrain myself as my hand forcibly made contact. The wood cracked, splintering as the cells divided at an accelerated rate.

“Enough!” shouted Kakashi. “Tenzo, pull back now!”

“Argh!” grunted Tenzo painfully before the wood broke off and the wood in my hand exploded.
I turned my heel at the sound of his voice and spotted a bear-masked anbu on the ground, obviously Tenzo, with his one hand still in wood-form to hold onto the wolf-masked anbu and the other in a dreadful shade of red that bordered on first degree burns.

Shit, shit, shit! I moved towards Tenzo with all intents to heal him, but before I could reach him, Kakashi stepped between us. I glanced up at him in a panic, why was he stopping me? Can’t he see Tenzo’s hurt? I need to—

“Kame,” said Kakashi with the same tone as before. “You’ve proven your point, no need to kill them.”

Kill? Is he kidding me? I wasn’t going to—He let out a killing intent to snap me out of my panic and forced me to refocus. The act wasn’t over yet. We still had spectators. I forced my tense muscles to relax as I stepped out of my offensive stance and propped a hand at my hip. We have to finish this or else it would’ve been all for nothing.

“Tt.” I clicked my tongue in annoyance. “I wouldn’t want to deal with the paperwork or inquiry about killing an ally anyway.”

“You’re not off the hook just yet,” continued Kakashi as he crossed his arms. “You injured him, you fix him.”

“Hmph, if they kept their hands to themselves, I wouldn’t have bothered.” I retorted as I stepped around him with a great show of annoyance, but inwardly I was relieved that I had a chance to fix what I screwed up. “Arm.”

Tenzo glanced up at me, his face still hidden behind his bear mask. Without a word, he held up his arm to me with no hesitation whatsoever. Even after what I’ve done… I bit my lower lip as I knelt down and grabbed his arm. Stop it, focus on the act. I can’t slip up now!

I blocked out all other thoughts as I focused on Tenzo’s arm. It didn’t look like the cancerous chakra managed to make it to his skin. The redness and rash was likely just from him detaching from the infected wood in such a hurry that he didn’t have a chance to separate completely in a clean manner. Inwardly sighing in relief, I flicked my wrist using a sleight of hand trick to pull out a card and pulsed chakra into it.

With a poof, a small jar of burn-salve appeared. While healing chakra on its own could do wonders in healing, having the appropriate medicine to use in conjunction often would speed up the process. My thumb pressed against the jar lid before twisting it open with a flick. As the lid flew off, I used my pinky and ring finger to catch the wayward lid before using my index finger to form a chakra scalpel to scoop up the balm.

Applying the balm, closing the jar, resealing the jar and switching the seal card for bandages instead was done in one fluid motion with no wasted movement in between. I could’ve done without all the showmanship, but under the circumstances, I need whatever brownie points available. Even if it’s just a pointless parlor tricks.

“You could remove the bandages by tonight.” I noted once the chakra healing session was over and glanced over to the wolf-masked anbu still pinned to the wall. “As for you, aside from mild bruising, you’ve suffered no other injuries. There really is no point in healing you.”

“Kame,” said Kakashi in a warning tone.

“Fine, but I’m not touching him. He could apply it himself.” I sighed and whipped out
another card for a bruising balm. As a show of afterthought, I glanced back to Tenzo. “Kuma-san, you might want to let him go before I chuck this at his head. I don’t want the Captain to say I gave him a concussion next.”

Tenzo glanced to Kakashi for confirmation and the silver-haired captain turned to the ground with a firm stance.

“As I said before,” noted Kakashi as he focused his attention on the remaining anbu in the room. “Don’t test her. This will be the final warning. Any repeat of this incident and punishment will be dealt accordingly. Understood?”

“Yes sir,” answered the group. I didn’t need sensitive hearing to know the grinding teeth echoed from underneath the masks.

“See that you all remember that,” said Kakashi as he raised a hand to signal Tenzo. The wood-user retracted his hold on the wolf anbu without a word. “Kame, we’ll be starting your evaluations today. Let’s go.”

I followed Kakashi at a steady pace, not bothering to give the others a second glance as resealed my umbrella and passed them. The wolf anbu was the only one that received attention as I still had to give him the bruising balm. I wasn’t sure if I could throw it at him without breaking the glass, so I decided to plop it in his lap as I passed him. That’s condescending, right?

One thing for sure, this performance made me no friends and likely I won’t make any at all for my duration in anbu… This is going to be a pain in the ass for who knows how many years.

“Have you restocked completely?” asked Kakashi once we’re out of the anbu building and it’s long out of our line of vision.

“Pretty much, I have extra jars of that bruising balm and if anything, I could make more.” I replied. “Why?”

“We’re starting your solo-evaluation,” said Kakashi.

“Okay…” I glanced up to him with a frown. “What exactly is the solo-evaluation? They said it was meant for promotions, but I haven’t a clue what is it beyond that.”

“A-rank assassinations, among other things,” noted Kakashi bluntly.

“A-assassination?” I spluttered out, nearly tripping as surprise took me. “This soon? And A-rank at that?”

“Haven’t gotten over your squeamishness for kills yet?” asked Kakashi as he looked down at me. “I thought the forest of death has gotten you over that already.”

“Those were beasts! It was either kill or get killed! How do expect me to assassinate someone so casually?” I snapped.

“The same way you performed in front the anbu squad just moments ago,” replied Kakashi. “An admirable act.”

“Tenzō got hurt.” I muttered darkly.

“Sacrifices are to be expected,” drawled Kakashi. “He’s aware of the situation and it’s not
like he’s dead.”

“That doesn’t make me feel any better.” I grounded out.

“Too bad,” said Kakashi. “If we want the Crimson Terror to appear as its namesake, it will have to be done.”

“…I wish I hate you.” I muttered darkly.

“You could still hate me if you want,” offered Kakashi.

“Nope.” I turned my head away and crossed my arms childishly. “If I hate you, you’re just going to feel guilty and emo and possibly hate yourself. So, I’m going to forgive you and have you guilty for having such an understanding and kind subordinate that you’ll treat to whatever the hell I want when we’re done with whatever nightmare that is the solo-evaluations.”

“… I don’t see how that’s any better,” said Kakashi. “Besides, with the A-rank missions pay grade, you can buy your own dinner.”

“That’s not the point!” I grounded out. “If I’m going to suffer, you’re going to suffer with me! Even if it’s just your wallet!”

After a brief moment of silence, Kakashi relented. “…Fine.”

“Serious?” I said in surprise.

“I supposed it’s a healthy method of coping compared to some others,” replied Kakashi. “Tenzo did say you have a habit in acting particularly cheerful and carefree before and after trauma.”

“…Tenzo said that?” I asked quietly.

“Among other things,” said Kakashi as he pulled out something from his back pouch. “Before I forget, he also asked me to give these to you.”

“For me?” I asked as he dropped it in my hands. I blinked when I recognized the shape. “…Seal stamps?”

“To help with your assassinations,” noted Kakashi. I glanced up to him again. “They’re stamps for gravity seals, the idea is to place it on the skull of your target and activate it away from splattering range. Tenzo was quite certain you wouldn’t be able to use the same technique you did with the Kumo delegates.”

“…He spoke to Kushina-san about this.” I murmured.

“She’s aware, if that’s what you’re asking,” offered Kakashi.

“I…” I started, but the words died at my lips as I gripped the stamps in my hands. “How long do you think it would take for me to put the Crimson Terror into the bingo books?”

“That’s dependent on you and how many kills you can put under your belt,” replied Kakashi.

“… I see…” I took a deep breath. “So… where’s my first mission going to be?”

“The Land of Snow, your mission is to assassinate whoever deems a threat to the Daimyo Sosetsu Kazahana,” noted Kakashi.
“Land of Snow?” I repeated in surprise. Isn’t that… I halted altogether, unable to take a step more.

“Something wrong?” asked Kakashi when he noticed I stopped and grew silent.

“Nothing… it’s just that…” I trailed off.
You know exactly who you need to kill. Well, aren’t we in for a lucky break? Who do you want to kill first? Shall I pull up a list of names?

“Kasa?” asked Kakashi.

“I’m… fine. Just… Just give me a moment.” I whispered as I fought to gather myself. My face felt hot and my breath felt heavy. I had to pull off the mask at one point just to take another breath.

“…Did you…” Kakashi trailed off, but I could tell he was asking whether or not I just had a vision.

I released a shaky breath as I looked down at my mask. There’s no denying the foreknowledge I have. That’s a luxury I can’t afford anymore.

“…The Crimson Terror will rise.” I murmured quietly as I strapped the mask back on.
“The Land of Snow will be stained red.”

…Rayne, please give me that list.
Attack on Clones

Contrary to what most people think, assassinations aren’t cool or all that interesting. Aside from the actual killing, the brunt of the work for an assassin involved stalking and waiting for the right moment to kill their target. A good assassin would leave no trace of their deed, but under my circumstances, I actually need the world to know in order to upkeep my faux reputation.

“Names, equipment and even jutsus. This is quite a bit of information,” commented Kakashi as he glanced over the page of information I wrote out as we left Konoha’s gates.

It was surprisingly not as much as I expected, but then again she did say that the demon chakra was the main reason that the memories were preserved at all. Demon chakra wasn’t introduced into my system until I was four. My memory must’ve faded some before that.

“Not as much as I would like.” I muttered. “There’s a chance that there might be more than the ones on the list. The three on the list are likely jounin classed if not high chunin, if there are more that might pose a problem. Especially if they all use that chakra draining equipment.”

“If we plan this right, that wouldn’t be an issue,” noted Kakashi. “We have the advantage of surprise on our side.”

“I hope that’s enough.” I muttered.

“…The mission was a failure in your vision,” droned Kakashi with absolute confidence in his bluntness, not the least bit bothered by his conclusion. “What happened?”

“You don’t—never mind.” I sighed and pressed a hand against my head. “The daimyo dies, his brother takes over and you flee, taking the princess to safety. You could’ve taken them down, but not while protecting the princess.”

“I see…” murmured Kakashi with a frown. “You mentioned nothing regarding to yourself. I’m guessing you still can’t see into your own future.”

I shook my head. “My vision might not be definite anymore since you’re aware of it. There might be more.”

“We’ll have to raise our odds then,” noted Kakashi as he glanced over the notes one last time before setting it aflame with a snap of his fingers.

“…I hope that doesn’t include a mini-skirt army.” I muttered under my breath.

*Ha! I see what you did there!*

“Mini-skirt army?” questioned Kakashi with a frown.

“Sorry, wrong future. Not relevant to the elemental nations.” I waved it off.

“…Are you having trouble with your visions?” asked Kakashi, a slight concern hinted at the edge of his voice. “You seem to be having a lot of them as of late.”

“The visions hasn’t increased or decreased.” I reassured him. “I do it often enough around Itachi and Shisui anyhow and they haven’t suspected anything yet.”

“How reckless,” droned Kakashi, unamused by my deceitful confession.
“Aside from you, at the moment, no one ever takes it seriously.” I waved it off. “Besides, most of the ones I randomly spew out aren’t likely going to happen in our lifetime or even in the elemental nations.”

*Or this world for the matter, you bogus oracle.*

“No one would think it’s anything more than pointless drivel and insane babbling.” I continued, blatantly ignoring Rayne’s background commentary.

“I supposed you could add an instability factor to your façade and use it to your advantage,” said Kakashi thoughtfully.

“I’m quite sure anyone who heard of my moniker already thinks I’m crazy.” I replied with a droll. “I doubt my reputation has reached the Land of Snow for it to be any use in this mission. We’re outnumbered at least three to two if not more. What was that you said about raising our odds?”

“Your chakra control is near perfect by now, yes?” asked Kakashi.

“I assisted in surgery before the chunin exams you know.” I said dryly.

“Good, then it shouldn’t take you too long to learn a new clone jutsu,” said Kakashi.

“Clone?” I repeated as a slow dread snuck up on me.

“Something wrong?” commented Kakashi. “You don’t look happy at the prospect of expanding your repertoire.”

“No, it’s not that.” I murmured as I clenched my hands together for reassurance. “It’s just… the clone technique. It takes a part of your consciousness in order for it to work independent from the user, right? What if the consciousness it takes when I use it is from…”

I’ve read enough fanfics and humored countless possible ideas that could possibly go wrong with using a clone with my current condition in my previous life. If I make a clone, there was a possibility that Rayne could just take control of it and who knows what she would do with a body of her own.

“Would that really be a bad thing?” asked Kakashi.

“Huh?” I glanced up at him in confusion. “Of course it’s bad! You’ve seen what she could do! What she would do! Why would you even humor the thought that she could possibly be a good thing?”

“From what I’ve seen of her actions thus far, she appears and acts only on the threat of your life,” said the silver-haired jounin. “While I will agree that her actions and behavior has caused a great slew of problems for you and the village, her motive seem to revolve solely on your survival. She even went as far to offer her services to ensure your survival.”

“That’s what she wants you to think!” I snapped. “There’s no way her motives are that simple! She’s just trying to lure you into a false sense of security and then once you’ve fallen for it, she’ll wreak whatever havoc she wants! She can’t be trusted!”

“Do you have those desires?” asked Kakashi.

“What?” Confusion laced my voice as looked at him.
“Though she calls herself by another name and you deny her association with you, she’s still you… or at least a part of you that you wish to deny,” said Kakashi.

“She…” I trailed off and gnawed at my lower lip.

“She is,” continued Kakashi calmly. “I won’t claim I have complete expertise on the mind and how it works, but it does seem like you’re subconsciously holding yourself back to the point that she manifested. While it might become an inconvenience if she does take over one of your clones, we might be able to use her to our advantage against enemies. She doesn’t share your reservations when it comes to killing and at the moment, we need that ruthlessness.”

“And if she goes after our client?” I asked quietly.

“Cancel the jutsu. I’m sure you could do that in time before she manages anything,” replied Kakashi as he focused his single eye on me. “Or will you just let her?”

“No.” My hands clenched into fists by my sides as I glanced up at him with determination. “I won’t let that happen.”

“Good,” said Kakashi as he cracked his knuckles and weaved his fingers together to stretch them out. “I’ve already spoken to your sensei and your father regarding to your previous training. Since you have no elemental affinity, we’ll go through each clone jutsu I know and see which one suits you best… and which one she can’t take over, since you’re so worried”

My eyes widened at the last of his words as he gave a wry grin underneath his mask. I found a grin tugging at my lips as raised my arms together in a determined pump.

“I’ll do my best!” I said brightly.

The trip from Konoha to the Land of Fire border took a week, traveling at shinobi speeds. In order to save time and not postpone the mission, Kakashi had me practice the hand seals as we travel without pushing any chakra into the jutsu. Doing so saved time and also conditioned my mind and body to be able to go through the motions on a fly if need be. Of course, with close to perfect chakra control, memorizing and practicing the hand seals took longer than learning the jutsu itself.

“Ready to try?” asked Kakashi during one of our breaks.

“…Well, now or never.” I sighed as I took one last swing of my drink and hopped to my feet and flicked out one of my cards as I went through the hand seals. “Smoke clone!”

In a poof, a perfect copy of myself stood before me mirroring my stance. I eyed it cautiously waiting for Rayne to take over and say something outrageous, but that never happened as the clone crossed her arms and turned to Kakashi for instruction.

“Looks good so far,” said Kakashi as he got up. “Let’s see how well it holds up in a fight.”

The clone took a step forward and I walked off to the side to watch, but before I could, Kakashi charged at me. I barely dodge out of the way of his punch.

“What the hell?” I snapped as I rolled away from his attack.

“You’re not going to have the luxury of standing aside and watching your clone do you work,” explained Kakashi as we got into a rather one-sided spar. “Best learn how to fight alongside your clones.”
“Fuck my life.” I muttered darkly under my breath as I retaliated with my clone at my side.

I managed probably five minutes through the spar before he killed my clone. Just as its namesake, it exploded into a cloud of red smoke. Kakashi, knowing this would happen, darted backwards to avoid the smoke. I clasped my hands together in a tiger seal with a pulse of chakra before drawing my hands apart with both my middle and index fingers held erect with the other fingers curled to the base. As my hands drew apart, I forced it through sharp motions to draw the smoke around Kakashi.

While the smoke clone is capable of combat, the true purpose the silver-haired jounin taught this to me was to use it in conjunction with one of my smoke concoctions. In short term, it served as a temporary partner. As the battle draws longer, it serve as a useful decoy and a method for me to use my gasses out in open areas.

Of course, at my current level, it made no difference to Kakashi as he avoided my smokescreen and body-flickered behind me with a kunai at hand. I barely managed to summon my umbrella in time to block the attack, but then everything was over in a second as he swung a roundhouse kick. It felt as if the world was slowed for a second before hastily speeding though as I slammed into the ground. I gave a violent cough as I hugged onto my stomach and curled into myself.

“Ah, sorry that kick was a little too hard,” said Kakashi offhandedly as he lowered his foot and squatted over me. “You okay?”

“N-not sure what’s going to kill me first, the missions or your training.” I grunted out as I coughed.

“We’ll take a ten minute break, think you’ll be able to travel by then?” asked Kakashi.

“You are so taking me to a five-star restaurant when we get back.” I wheezed out as I pushed myself up to sit.

“Of course, of course,” droned Kakashi offhandedly, but I could see the mirth in his eyes. The bastard thinks this is funny.

“I’ll make sure to eat every damn penny you earn from this mission.” I muttered under my breath darkly.

We repeated the process at each rest stop with me practicing a different clone jutsu and Kakashi kicking my ass in a spar. By the fifth day, I found the smoke and water clone jutsus most compatible with my existing style. The flexibility and fluidity of the two post-dispelling meshed well with my dance seals and the various poisons in my arsenal. The water clone in particular worked frighteningly well with red dye, giving the illusion of my horrendous bloody death. Other clones like the earth, haze and mist ones were either too time consuming or unnecessarily complicated to use with my attention span.

“We’ll reach the border between the Land of Fire and the Land of Rice Fields soon,” started Kakashi on the sixth day. “We won’t have as much freedom to test out more jutsus and spar in non-native territory once we cross the border. So, we’re going to try one last clone today and work on getting you familiarized with the ones that work by the end of tomorrow.”

“…Does this mean I’m getting a serious ass-kicking after this?” I sighed dejectedly.

“Pay attention,” said Kakashi as he lightly thwacked me over the head. “This one in
particular killed off a number of its reckless users, but it’s likely the most useful out of the bunch you’ve tried already.”

“Gee thanks, I could always use more things to kill me.” I sniped sarcastically.

“I won’t be showing this one multiple times,” replied Kakashi as he ignored my jibe.

“Yeah, yeah.” I huffed with crossed arms, but my annoyance didn’t linger long as he formed the familiar hand seal. My body tensed as every worst case scenario popped up in my mind. I did my best to hide it, but no doubt Kakashi already noticed.

“Shadow clone,” said Kakashi as he poured in the exact amount of chakra and an exact copy of himself appeared next to him. The two stared at me with unsettling eyes. “This jutsu made you uncomfortable. Is there something wrong with it?”

“There’s…nothing wrong it. I-I just have the feeling that this might be the one she takes over that’s all.” I shook my head. “It’s okay. If that happens, I’ll just cancel it like you said right? Everything will be fine. Everything—”

I felt a hand on top of my head as glanced up to Kakashi in surprise. There was no change in his expression. His eye remained in its usual half-lidded disinterest gaze, but there was something else there that I couldn’t put my finger on that was different. He waited until he was certain I wouldn’t go off babbling again before he dropped his hand.

“Quit babbling and get a move on,” said Kakashi. “There’s no point in dawdling in what ifs.”

“…Right. Sorry.” I murmured as I clapped my hands together to refocus and concentrate my chakra. “This is the last one. I can do this.”

Breathing in a deep breath, I took a moment to settle my nerves as I slowly breathed out. Rayne or not, I really shouldn’t pass up the opportunity to learn one of the most useful techniques in the series. If I could master it, training would be immensely easier and the time it needed would likely cut down by at least half. Pros outweigh the cons, just think of it that way. Once my mind finally settled, I moved my hands into the correct position and poured in the chakra.

“Shadow clone!” I shouted before a poof appeared next to me and revealed a perfect clone of myself. I waited for Rayne to take over, but much to my surprise the clone only did what all the other clones did before her. She crossed her arms and turned to Kakashi for instruction.

“Looks like this one won’t be a problem either,” commented Kakashi as he turned his attention to me once more, but my attention remained on the clone with a frown. “Something wrong?”

“…Shadow clones are bit different from the other clones right?” I asked as I circled my own clone. Her gaze followed my movements, but she didn’t say anything.

“Compared to other clones, they do retain your personality and act according to how you act,” said Kakashi.

“Okay… then let me ask you this…” I murmured and pointed to my clone. “Why isn’t she freaking out at the notion she’s not real and I could cancel her at a moment’s notice?”

“Why would she?” asked Kakashi.
“Wouldn’t you freak out if you realize you’re just a clone and your existence won’t last for more than a moment?” I asked.

“…Don’t tell me you’re having a philosophical breakdown now,” sighed Kakashi as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Seriously! Why the hell would I want to obey if I’m just going to—”

THWACK! I found myself whacked upside the head before I hastily turned to my assailant. Only to see my own clone glaring at me.

“Gods, I never knew how annoying I am when I’m in a mental breakdown. Get a fucking grip on yourself!” snapped the clone.

“…Is that Rayne?” asked Kakashi as he eyed the clone suspiciously.

I stared at my clone in disbelief as she glared back at me… that’s not Rayne.

Pft… hahahaha! Oh man, I wish I could see the look on your face when you did that to yourself! You’re probably the first one to make mutinous clones! Rayne died with laughter in my head.

“Up yours Kakashi! As if I have time for her shits and giggles,” retorted the clone as she flipped us the bird. “My time is limited so I will do whatever the fuck I please until it’s over. And fuck you too main body! I’m out of here.”

“H-huh?” Confusion set in as the clone up and walked off. Is it… leaving?

“Kasa, cancel her,” ordered Kakashi.

“Oh screw you Kakashi!” snapped the clone as she turned around.

“Kasa! Now!” snapped Kakashi.

Fumbling, I weaved my fingers together and yelled out. “KAI!”

The clone barely made two steps before she disappeared in a puff of smoke. What the hell just happened? The clone wasn’t Rayne, but at the same time… it seems to have its own consciousness and motive? How is that…? What?

“…Kakashi… can you explain to me what just happened?” I managed to force out despite my confusion. “My clone just… it’s not even… I don’t understand…”

“Best not to use that one for now,” said Kakashi. “That’s the first time I’ve seen it happen with that jutsu, but it’s possible that it’s affected by either your condition or your mental state. I had hope you’d be able to get that one the most out of the six, but you’ve still managed to get two other so that’s not a complete waste of time. We’ll revisit this one when we return to the village.”

“You want to continue with this?” I asked in disbelief.

“It’s not just for your own benefit,” noted Kakashi. “If another user runs into the same issue in the future, your experience and discoveries would prove to be useful.”

“I… guess.” I mumbled.

“Since we’ve decided which clone jutsus would be most suitable for you, we’ll be
working on incorporating those in combat for the rest of today. Once we’ve crossed the border, I want you to create two clones, one of each type and maintain it for as long as you can as we move through that territory. It will be taxing, but it will build up your stamina and control in maintaining them for periods longer than five minute spars,” said Kakashi.

“…Even while I’m sleeping?” I asked.

“Even then,” said Kakashi. “If your clones go out, I’ll wake you up to reestablish them,” said Kakashi.

“But wouldn’t that exhaust us before the mission starts? We can’t afford to—” I protested.

“The ship to the Land of Snow takes a week. You’ll be resting then,” said Kakashi. “Once we get to the Land of Snow, there won’t be any further training. We’re going to have to stay out of sight at all times or blend in as part of the palace staff. Our priority is to keep the daimyo and his daughter safe while we root out the traitors in their midst. The list you’ve made would be useful, but until we have solid proof of their treason, we can’t freely kill them.”

“Of course, there’s always that.” I muttered under my breath.

“That’s always the most bothersome part of the job, but at least we know where to start looking,” said Kakashi.

“Right…” I sighed.

“Take five, we’ll start sparring once you’ve regained your bearing,” said Kakashi.

“Sure.” I mumbled before I dropped to the ground on my back and stared up at the sky.

Despite the good weather, I still found myself in a foul mood. If the anbu life was this exhausting already, how many more years of this do I have? And what the hell is with that clone? Gods… Just thinking of this is making me exhausted.
Assault on Kazahana Castle

In the nine years I’ve lived in this world, I’ve seen and done a number of things that could make stomachs turn. From screaming newborns to screaming trauma victims, I would like to claim my body had a strong constitution. However, the fates seem to despise me as my trip to the Land of Snow was plagued by a violent bout of seasickness.

“Bleagh.” I hurled into a bucket I’ve claimed as my own for the duration of the week.

“How are you holding up?” asked Kakashi as he leaned over the railing at the back of the ship.

“Please kill me and end the misery… ugh.” I groaned in misery and rested my head against the rim of my bucket.

“Of all the things I thought that would make you hurl, seasickness was not one that crossed my mind,” commented the silver-haired jounin. “I don’t recall you getting sick with the water-walking exercise.”

“That’s different from riding—bleagh…” I hunched over and hurled violently into the bucket once more.

The thing with any form of motion-sickness, it’s due to the body’s inability to regulate its equilibrium to jarring movements. With water-walking or even horse riding, there was still a level of control that one could enforce over the movement. However, with ships and other forms of transportation, that control is taken away. This was a common occurrence to people who seldom take transportation.

In a previous life, that would’ve never posed a problem as it was near impossible to go anywhere without transportation. With this life, transportation was sparse and expensive. On top of that, Kurei sensei found that manual traveling conditioned the body better than most other training. Never once did he ever decide we should take transportation even if the client offered. Which ultimately lead to my inability to travel in any other mode of transport that’s not either my own two feet or the steady pace of a piggyback ride.

“We could probably use your misfortune to our advantage,” drawled Kakashi. “Who would ever expect a sickly little girl to be of any threat?”

“You can suck my non-existent hairy balls.” I belched. “That defeats the purpose of putting me in anbu in the first place if they’re not scared of me.”

“The purpose of putting you in anbu isn’t to make you look physically scary nor to make you easily identifiable,” said Kakashi as he lightly thwacked me over the head. “While we are trying to build your reputation into a fearsome one, it would do us no favors if our enemies are tipped off and it becomes a hindrance.”

“Urk… Then how are we going to go about this?” I groaned.

“You don’t reveal yourself until the mission’s near complete,” said Kakashi. “At the moment, it’s still far too early for you to freely throw your name about. It would do more harm than good if you screwed up.”

“So take credit for jobs well done and deny, deny, deny if I fail. Got it.” I muttered.

“Get some rest,” suggested Kakashi. “You won’t be able to once we land.”
Post disembarking, Kakashi dragged me off to the palace and we met with Sandayu Asama. The man who, if we fail, will guide the princess back to the Land of Snow when she’s grown and ready to lead. He debriefed us on the details of the mission and countermeasures for if we failed. In other words the usual precaution and contingency plans. As I’ve noted before, the majority of assassinations involved waiting and keeping a low key until the appropriate time. Kakashi and I ended up taking jobs to blend in with the palace staff in the two weeks we skulked about hunting for information and scoping out the entirety of the palace.

Doto was a cautious man, had I not have the foreknowledge of his treachery we would have never pegged him as a usurper. In court, he was always supportive of his brother’s decisions, seldom raising any protests against the daimyo. Outside of court, he was reserved, but never unkindly to those around him. The solidity of his act almost made me second guess my foreknowledge.

If not for the Yukigakure shinobi mixed in with the staff, Kakashi and I might’ve had to reconsider our approach. Not that they were blatantly obvious about them being shinobi. To a casual observer they wouldn’t notice a difference between them and a civilian. However, having endured Hizashi’s Spartan reconnaissance training, it wasn’t hard to spot the lightness in their steps and the subtle confidence they exuded.

Around them, I was always careful to show myself as absentminded or clumsy. Kakashi on the other hand played off being friendly and aloof. An odd sight to behold after suffering through being his personal punching bag on the way here. We seldom spoke to one another out in the open, if we had to update each other on the progress on the mission we would write coded messages in the guise of family letters.

We interacted with the palace staff daily, but it gave none of the comfort like the team missions I had with Team Karasu. To constantly hide behind a mask without a single person that I could freely talk to, felt… lonely. I knew anbu missions would be immensely different compared to the chunin B-ranks… but it didn’t make it any easier.

In the time we spent scrounging about, we also laid out traps and contingency plans in case they enacted the coup before we could procure the proof of their treachery. Due to my gender and age, I ended up becoming Princess Koyuki’s personal handmaiden. Often times, she treated me more of a companion than a servant. It was hardly a bad situation, but in the realm of politics and the royal court, a companion or a favored servant meant an opening for the more ambitious nobilities to influence the royal family.

“Good night Kana!” chirped the princess once she was tucked in. She was likely a year or two older than me, but considering she was a civilian and a princess on top of that, she seemed much younger with her mannerisms.

“Sleep well, Princess Koyuki.” I replied softly with a grin as she closed her eyes.

I waited until she was sound asleep before I turned to leave the room. The routine was the same nearly every night. For a shinobi, that was dangerous, it meant you’re open and vulnerable for an attack. However, in my case, it created the perfect opening to lure unsuspecting murderous ninjas to reveal themselves.

When I left her room and closed the door, I had to fight off all instincts to defend myself as a hand clasped over my mouth. I gave a meek scream of protest and retaliated with half-hearted slaps against the offending hand as the stranger dragged me off my feet and hauled me off to an unused part of the palace.

“Quiet, unless you want me to cut up your pretty little face, Kana-chan,” drawled my kidnapper as I
felt a cold blade against my cheek.

What are you, a clichéd villain? Mild annoyance crossed my mind, but I forced my body still as I let out a shaky breath under his hand to keep in character. The fact that he still called me Kana meant he had no clue I’m a ninja. Otherwise, it would be stupid for him to allow my hands to flail free like this.

“Good girl,” whispered the man. “I could see why the princess is so fond of you.”

“W-who are you? What do you want?” My voice shook with a meek whimper when he allowed me to talk.

“I want you to continue being the good little girl you are and help me give the little princess a little snack tomorrow,” drawled the man. “As for who I am, you don’t have to know… unless you want me to pay your mommy dearest a visit.”

… Is he serious? Mail interception? Oh whatever, I don’t care anymore.

“N-no!” I stuttered out. “N-not my mother! Please!”

“Then you’ll continue being a good girl won’t you?” drawled the man.

“O-Of course!” I squeaked.

“Good, then give this to her tomo—” His never finished as his body stilled.

“About time.” I sighed in irritation as I pried myself away from his hold and rummaged around his pockets for whatever it was he wanted me to give to the princess. I scoffed when I found the small packet of white powder. “Cyanide, typical royal court murder. How unoriginal.”

“What would you have chosen then?” noted Kakashi as he stepped out from the shadows with his sharingan revealed.

“Push them down the stairs when no one looking and snap their neck if they’re still alive when they reach the bottom.” I muttered as I sealed away the packet of cyanide, no need to throw away perfectly useable poison.

“Someone’s murderously violent today,” drawled Kakashi.

“Bite me, I’m tired…” I mumbled under my breath.

“Just hold out for a bit more,” said Kakashi. “It shouldn’t be much longer now that we have him.”

“So, what did you decide to plant in his head?” I asked as I crossed my arms.

“Compulsion triggers,” replied Kakashi as he finished whatever he was doing and covered his eye with a bandage eye patch once more. With the coldness of the region, a facemask wasn’t out of place for him to wear, but he could hardly use his hitai-ate or a bandana to cover his eye. “He’ll help us draw out his comrades and indict the rest of them.”

“What’s he going to remember of tonight?” I asked to prepare myself for the following day’s act.

“An uneventful stake out,” replied Kakashi. “He intended to draw you into the conspiracy, but he never found a moment where you were alone. Another maid came to get you before you left the princess’s room.”
“And the missing poison?” I waved the storage card idly. It’d be stupid for us to hand it back even if it’s to avoid suspicion.

“He’ll conveniently forget that he had it and thought to have you push the princess down the stairs instead,” replied Kakashi with a twitch at the corner of his lip.

“Plagiarist.” I scoffed.

“With any luck, we should be able to end this soon,” said Kakashi.

“We can only hope.” I sighed.

“Homesick?” asked Kakashi.

“Aren’t you?” I retorted.

“I’m used to it,” replied the silver-haired jounin. “Get some rest, we can’t afford to be careless now.”

“Yes, mom.” I droned as I pocketed the card in my obi. “You should get some rest too, your hair’s going to turn—oh wait, you’re already grey.”

“Cheeky brat,” murmured Kakashi.

“Old geezer.” I retorted.

“Go to bed,” huffed Kakashi.

“Fine.” I grumbled and left.

—We thought we had time. We thought we could use this one Yukigakure ninja to lure out the rest, but we were foolish. The coup was already in motion. The poison was nothing more than just a precaution to kill off the one and only heir that could challenge Doto for reign on the country.

“Your majesty!” shouted a flustered and injured soldier as he crashed through the door and stumbled into the lounge.

“What happened?” demanded Sosetsu as he stood protectively in front of Koyuki.

“I-it’s Do—” the soldier never finished as his face was smashed into the ground and a swarm of at least ten Yukigakura shinobi stormed the room.

The servants yelped in terror as they backed themselves to the wall before the royal father and daughter was surrounded. As I was closest to Koyuki at the time, she clung to me in terror in her seat. I shot a glance to Kakashi who joined the other servants by the wall, but he made a discreet hand sign to tell me to hold my position. I circled my arms around the princess protectively, but at the same time kept my hands free in case I needed them.

“What is the meaning of this?” demanded Sosetsu as he stood protectively in front of Koyuki.

“Dear brother, are you really that blind that you couldn’t tell what this is?” drawled Doto as he strolled into the room without a care. “You were always too soft… and unfit to be a leader.”

“Doto! How dare you,” boomed Sosetsu. “This is treachery!”
“This is the change to a new era,” retorted the man. “Hand over the hexagonal crystal.”

“Never to the likes of you!” snapped Sosetsu.

“No matter. I could always just pry it from your cold, dead hands,” shrugged the younger man as he raised his hand. “Goodbye brother.”

“Kasa, now!” snapped Kakashi as he darted towards the daimyo and snatched him off the ground.

“Got it!” I shouted as I stomped my foot to the ground with a violent charge of chakra.

Several things happened as I did this. One, the Yukigakure shinobi raised their arms to shoot us down with whatever contraption they had equipped. Two, the chakra I sent through the ground, quickly activated the preset seals I’ve planted in the room. Three, the ground caved into itself and the four of us fell through, narrowly missing the barrage of grabby contraptions the enemies wore.

I adjusted my hold on the princess and slipped protection seal cards into the obis of the father and daughter. Both Kakashi and I used the falling debris as stepping stones to adjust the speed of our descent. Once we hit the ground, I shoved the princess over to Kakashi and immediately went into the fire dragon dance seals.

Agonizing screams and charred flesh filled the air as the number of shinobi met with a fiery death when they jumped into my attack. The sound and the smell was almost enough to make anyone sick, but I couldn’t let it up. One managed to make it through the flames with the chakra devouring armor. We were fortunate that the armor’s volatility in close proximity with another made it hazardous to use in large quantities. Otherwise, we would be swarm with these chakra devouring armors.

Kakashi cut mid-way through my dance with a flurry of taijutsu moves to give me a moment to retreat. I grabbed the princess’s hand and dragged her along with the daimyo stumbling close behind as we distanced ourselves away from the conflict. With the chakra devouring armor, we couldn’t afford to use many jutsus and purely relied on taijutsu and tools.

“Kana!” shouted the princess as more Yukigakure shinobi cornered us.

“Tch.” I clicked my tongue as I activated the protection seals on the royal father and daughter before drawing my deck of seal cards around me.

While I still had some reservations in killing another person, it was hard to hold onto that thought process when they were trying to kill us. I found myself turning to more and more ruthless options as their numbers descended on us. I dropped ceilings with gravity seals, decapitated foes with skillful wire-work and used whatever underhanded tactic available.

By the time Kakashi caught up, I was thoroughly drenched in blood, guts and who knows what. Neither of us were in the mood to talk, relying mainly on short hand signs to trade messages as we did what we could to protect the two. If not for Kakashi’s careful planning and strategic traps planted throughout the palace, I might not have managed to survive long enough for him to rejoin.

Unfortunately, no amount of planning could stop the inevitable. We were only two shinobi against what seemed almost like a legion of shinobi. Doto prepared for an all-out war. There were just too many of them.

“Retreat,” ordered Kakashi as we raced down the burning halls of the palace. “We won’t be able to fight and protect them at the same time.”

“Considering the situation, we don’t have much choice.” I muttered darkly as I wiped away the
blood on my face with my sleeve.

Not that there was much of it left that was clean. The once pristine kimono was disheveled mess, covered in rips, tears and gore. It barely hung onto my shoulders with how much I moved. I have no clue when I gave up all pretense of looking proper, but at some point I yanked loose the lower half of the kimono just so I could stand in a wider stance and move with as little restriction as possible. Hizashi sensei would probably foam at the mouth if he saw me now.

“We won’t be able to escape together, there are too many of them and they’ll converge on us if we remain in a group… We need to split up,” noted Kakashi with reluctance creeping into his voice. “I’ll take the daimyo and you’ll take the princess. We’ll rendezvous at the agreed location.”

…That was the worst idea I’ve ever heard, but at the same time, what else could we do at this point?

“The palace is on top of a snowy mountain. Getting down to the docks would be an issue with pursuers on our tail.” I noted.

“Do what you can. Any plan we make now will collapse in itself the moment we make contact with the enemy. The priority now is to survive,” said Kakashi as his mismatched eyes met mine. “You better not end up as a corpse.”

“Same goes for you.” I retorted. “Don’t think I forgot about eating every penny you have from this mission.”

“Hmph,” snorted Kakashi in mild amusement. “I’ll see you then.”

With that, we parted ways. Splitting up was not my preferred decision, but with the amount of people after us, staying together wasn’t any better. At first, I thought getting down the mountain would be the greatest challenge… However, when I encountered another group ofYukigakure shinobi, I spotted something useful in their arsenal that might just help on the descent down.

My shoes crunched over the snow as I slipped into my dance seals and whipped up a flurry of snow in a wind vortex. I made quick work of the group of shinobi, using the lowered visibility from the snow to release a number cow boulders into the spinning vortex to knock them senseless… I don’t care how stupid that sounds, it works. Once they were down, I hastily threw gravity seals over the unconscious shinobi and sent out a violent pulse of chakra.

Under the pressure of the seals, their skulls cracked, followed by a revolting squelch of flesh and brain as the corpses stained the ground red. I wasted no time in snatching up two snowboards, sealing one in an emptied storage card, and broke all others with my remaining gravity seals. With such a dire situation, allowing them live or leaving useable gear unattended was a luxury I couldn’t afford.

“Princess, hold on tight.” I ordered her as I carried her in a piggyback. “When I tell you to lean, you follow, got it?”

Chakra snowboards works somewhat like regular snowboards right? It’s been years since I’ve been on one and never once in this body. In theory, I have the knowledge and the knowhow to ride a snowboard, but I lack the physical memory of actually riding one. Well… Let’s hope for the best I guess.

“K-Kana,” whimpered Koyuki, obviously terrified and confused from the whole ordeal.

“Just keep your eyes close.” I grunted as I attached my feet to the board via chakra and sent a pulse to the back of the board to push us forward.
Koyuki clung to my neck in a death grip as we descended. I gritted my teeth as I struggled to breathe while trying to find the perfect balance in carrying her and maneuvering with the board. Though I boarded in my previous life, I was far from an expert. Aside from not falling, I could do little else, but at least then I had the benefit of being decked out in full winter gear.

Here, on top of trying to not fall, I had to deal with a screaming princess, pursuing murderous ninjas and an icy breeze cutting through my tattered kimono. The best I could do was to coat my lungs with chakra to keep it warm, but the rest of my body was still vulnerable to the elements. I’d be lucky not to catch pneumonia at this rate. Speaking of which, the princess was far more vulnerable compared to myself.

The barrier seals I’ve placed around her worked against chakra and physical-based attacks, but does nothing to guard her from the elements. Even at our current speed, it would still take a good half an hour on foot to travel once we reached the base of the mountain. She might die from exposure before we could find shelter and safety.

Hiss, scrunch, scrunch, scrunch, hiss…

I didn’t need to spare a glance back to recognize the sound of a board hissing and crunching the snow beneath it to know that someone caught up. Judging by the sound, it was just one person cutting through the rough terrain with ease as it drew closer and louder. I made a quick mental count of the cards I still had left and grimaced when I realized there weren’t much offensive seals left. The majority of the remaining cards that remained were either medicine or poisonous gases.

“Princess.” I called out over the sound of rushing air around us. “No matter what happens, don’t let go.”

“What?” shouted the girl, unable to hear me over the wind.

“Just hold on!” I shouted as I whipped out three cards before I forced my hands through the appropriate hand seals.

With a poof, a single clone appeared and fell behind to confront our pursuer. I’m under no illusion that any clone of mine could take on a shinobi on its own, but I’m hardly using it for combat. POOF!

At the sound of my clone disbursing, I hastily maneuvered my hands to direct the red mist that followed to shroud the pursuers. Had I just used the mist alone, I wouldn’t have been able to control its movements against this wind. However, with a smoke clone, I could for a brief moment before it’s completely blew it away. I had but a moment to obscure their vision, but a moment was all I needed as I activated the second card and sped through another set of hand seals.

This time, two clones appeared alongside me. One in my image carrying the other, in the image of the princess. Shifting my weight, I dove for the cover of trees, narrowly catching a branch and swinging us on top as the clones took hold of the chakra board and continued to lead the pursuer down the mountain. A woman with pink hair. At this distance, I could see her speeding through a set of hand seals.

A flock of snow white swallows appeared and dive-bombed towards the clones. I watched as the clone maneuvered out of the way as each bird crashed and burrowed into the ground. In that time, the pink-haired kunoichi closed in on them by lowering her stance and speeding even faster down the slopes. As she got closer she went through another set of hand seals and an ice pillar shot up from the ground below to skewer my clone.
The clone tossed the princess clone aside before it was skewered and exploded in a violent spray that drenched the Yukigakure kunoichi and the surrounding area. She kept a wary stance, eyeing the area as she inched towards the fallen princess clone. I couldn’t hear what she said, but judging by the clone’s terrified body language, she’s probably giving her the usual “I’m going to kill you” spiel. It didn’t take long before she destroyed that clone too and found herself completely drenched.

“Come out you little coward!” roared the kunoichi, her voice echoed in the open mountain. "K-Kana, what do we do?” Koyuki shivered and her icy hands clung to my tattered clothes in desperation and fear.

“Everything will be over soon…” I murmured quietly before I lifted a finger with a single, but long thread of chakra that reached all the way towards where the snowboard the clones used, attached to a single explosive tag.

I gathered myself with a steady breath and watched the white mist dissipate into the air for a moment before I finally pulsed chakra through that thin line.

BOOM!

An explosion rocked through the air followed by the blood-curling scream of the kunoichi down below. A wave of heat washed over us as I watched the kunoichi down below desperately trying to put out the flames on her person. Even though she dropped into the snowy grounds and rolled about, it didn’t help since her clothes were thoroughly drenched in the rubbing alcohol from the two water clones. She would probably survive the makeshift Molotov cocktail I’ve created, but I doubt she would be in any condition to continue pursuing us.

I didn’t stay long to watch as I pulled out the storage card with the remaining snowboard I stored earlier and sped down the mountain on another path. It wasn’t clear if that kunoichi was the last on our tail, but somehow we managed to make it to the village and sped straight towards the docks. Good thing the board propelled on chakra, or we would’ve had to run the whole way there. I fought back a grimace when I spotted no ships or boats at the docks.

So much for the stowaway option. The rendezvous point was on one of the many islands that made up the Land of Snow. I paused briefly at the dock’s edge debating what to do. It’d be stupid to hide in town when Doto will no doubt send his men to check the area for the missing princess and her father.

“Kana… I’m cold…” whimpered Koyuki, her teeth chattered.

Right, I still had that to deal with. Not to mention the blood on me had long dried and caked uncomfortably on my skin. I glanced about the quiet town, with the weather, people rarely ventured out unless it was absolutely necessary. I adjusted the output of chakra on my feet and zoomed off once more. It took some time for me to completely to get a hold of the thing on flat grounds, but I’m not going to complain if it could keep us alive for even just a moment longer.
“…Kana,” murmured Koyuki tiredly as I sped away from the village and into the forest.

“Just bear with it for a bit longer.” I replied as I darted my eyes around for a good secluded spot.

Once I found one, I drew out the two cards I kept in my socks. Unlike the ones I kept in my obi, these weren’t meant for combat or healing… though, I could probably turn camp-gear and a change of clothes into weapons… Whacking someone with a cast-iron pan could be a thing, right?

“Here, change into this.” I shoved a set of my travel kimono into her arms and her into the pop-up tent once it was setup.

Had the situation been less dire, I might make note about the skewed levels of technology in this world, but I had work to do. While the princess changed, I pulled out a small scroll I kept strapped in a kunai holster on my leg and quickly went through the process of unsealing and restocking what I’ve used back in the palace. With how volatile seals were, I couldn’t seal preloaded cards in seals. Doing that was just asking for the seal matrix to collapse in itself and implode.

The scroll sectioned off with multiple seals, each storing different tools, herbs, seal stamps and card blanks. The first I unsealed were the blanks and stamps, I sorely needed to replenish the gravity and explosive seals I’ve used. Unlike the storage seals, those were often one-use due to them getting either buried, bloodied or incinerated.

As I went about my restocking, I kept an ear and eye out for more pursuers. I managed to shake off the last wave of pursuers, but that didn’t mean more weren’t on their way. I sped my way through the restocking as quickly as I can before returning the scroll to the kunai pouch. Every second wasted was a second the enemy could use to ambush us.

Even as I stood guard, the silence sent a wave of unease over me. I tried to brush it off as paranoia from the adrenaline rush. Often, elevated levels of adrenaline could drive anyone batty and quick to the offense. However, I soon realized it wasn’t paranoia. It really was too quiet.

“…Princess.” I breathed out in realizations as I darted to the tent and ripped it open.

On the ground, laid Koyuki, unconscious…unmoving. I dove in, dropping to my knees as I rolled her over and rapidly tapped her face to get her to wake up. Her lips were blue and he skin was ice. I dug my hand through the collar of her clothes to feel for the artery at her neck. It was just as cold as the rest of her body.

My hands shook from the chill as I desperately tried to feel for a pulse. I pressed against her neck again and again, but I couldn’t find a pulse. I gave up on trying to find one on her neck and pressed my ear against her chest instead… nothing.

“No, no.” I whispered as I pulled back up and pressed my hands against her chest. “One-two-three-four-five…”

I continued until the count of thirty before tilting her chin and pinching her nose. I forced two full breaths into her and resumed doing another thirty compressions and another two breaths. I pressed my ear against her chest.

…Nothing.
Get up. Another thirty, another two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

Nothing…

Get up. Thirty, two, thirty, two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

Nothing…

Get up. Thirty, two, thirty, two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

…Nothing.

I pulled back, taking a shaking breath before breathing into my hands. There was no white mist. It was just as cold as the air around us. I pulled her body against mine, desperately trying to share some of my body heat with her. The tent fabric was too thin, it won’t be able to retain enough heat to warm her.

My teeth chattered and I clenched them close. I needed to warm her. In this cold, she could go an hour with her heart stopped, but if I don’t get her warmed up and her heart restarted, she will die.

“Fire… I need fire…” I murmured to myself, but a simple campfire’s not going to be enough. “A big fire…”

I lowered the princess and scrambled out of the tent. Outside was a forest… that’s a lot of wood right? It should be enough for a big fire… Yeah, that should be good. I forced whipped out several explosive seals as I forced my stiff limbs to move into the appropriate dance seals. With the cold, I could barely move enough to do the full dance from start to finish. Instead I ignited the explosive seals to help along with the creation of the fire dragon. I wheezed with every move, finding it harder and harder to breathe as the dragon came to life and lit the forest on fire. I dropped my arms tiredly to my sides and I crawled back into the tent to haul the Koyuki out.

“Come on princess, there’s a fire now.” I wheezed as I resumed CPR on her again.

Thirty, two, thirty, two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

Nothing…

Get up. Thirty, two, thirty, two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

Nothing…

Get up. Thirty, two, thirty, two. Defibrillation. Ear to her chest.

…Nothing.

“Come on.” I wheezed out, clinging to her as I struggled to catch my breath. “Princess… wake up…”

I had no clue how long I clung to the princess’s cold…lifeless… body, but by the time I realized there were footsteps approaching, my body had already stopped shaking from the cold.

“Stupid Land of Fire brat,” muttered the Yuki-nin as he stopped right next to me. “Running around in that, it’s a wonder she didn’t get hypothermia faster.”

Hypothermia? Ah… right, that’s what happened to the princess. It’s happening to me now too…
“…Heh…heh…hehehehe.” A slow giggled escaped me as I turned my head against the princess’s chest as I turned to glance up at them, there were at least ten—no, twenty of them.

“She thinks this is funny,” snorted the Yuki-nin.

“Just leave her, she’ll eventually die,” said another as he reached down to pull me off Koyuki. He wore a face mask. That must be…warm… My fingers twitched at the thought.

“Hey… do you want to see a magic trick?” I whispered with a painful grin stretching across my stiff face as my fingers twitched again.

“What?” frowned the man, I could see his facial movement under the mask.

“Pick a card… any card…” I whispered before my chakra threads came to life and the cards darted onto the back of each shinobi. Each Yuki-nin quickly backed away and clawed at their backs trying to get the seal off, but it was too late. With another twitch of my fingers, all the shinobi hit the ground face first.

“Fuck! I thought you said she had hypothermia!” snapped one of the men.

“Hey… You’re… warm right?” I slurred tiredly as I dragged myself off Koyuki’s body in an unbalanced sway. “I’m… cold…”

“She does have hypothermia!” retorted the other, but he couldn’t say much with his face pinned to the ground.

“Your… blood… ssss… warm… right?” I mumbled incoherently as I pushed myself off the ground with a drunken giggle.

“S-she’s fucking lost it,” shouted another Yuki-nin as I stumbled unsteadily to my feet.

“No… no… noooo,” I slurred raising a finger to refute them… I’m so… tired… “Cooorrection… I’m… I’m the f-fucking… Crimson… Terror… haha… hahahaha!”

I found a laugh escaping my chest that turned into an uncontrollable cackle. I stumbled along into another dance, swaying and staggering as I did so. An unstable fire dragon came to life from the burning trees, crashing and stumbling along as I did before it crashed into the ground… over… and… over… and… over… into each… and… every… Yuki-nin.

“Stop! Stop!” screamed the Yuki-nin that the dragon barely missed only to find it coming back and devouring their bodies.

“Ha… hahahahaha!” I cackled as I stumbled about in a drunken dance and started to sing in my native tongue. “Joy to the world for burning-nin. I barbequed their heeeeads!”

“No, no! NO!” screamed another before he was silenced.


More screams.

“I burned, I burned, I burned…” I had no clue how long I danced or sang for… but eventually it grew quiet again and the only sounds that remained were the dying embers from the flames. I stumbled into a stop as I lolled my head about to look around. Everything smoldered.
“…Oh…” I whispered with a giggle before turning my heel and losing my balance. I dropped to the ground and found myself on top of Kokyuki’s body… huh, I must’ve danced around her…

“…Rayne?” called out Kakashi’s familiar voice with hesitation.

“Oh right… I could’ve called Rayne…” I switched back to a language Kakashi could understand before breaking into another cackle. “She could’ve made a BIGGER fire…wait no…rain puts out… fires…? Oh! Hey Kakashiii, look what I did! Human bonfire! I killed them and burned them!”

“…Kasa?” said Kakashi, horror crossed his voice as he looked down on me.

Move over.

I found myself thrust into the backseat as Rayne took over.

“Fuuuck! It’s cold,” shouted Rayne as she hopped off the ground and started jumping in our body.

**Heeeey Rayne, you cold?**

“Scarecrow, where the fuck were you?” snapped Rayne as she rubbed our arms and forced the body to shiver. “Forget that! The princess is dead. Get me somewhere warm before the idiot fucking freezes to death from hypothermia! She stopped shivering about half an hour back and she’s about as coherent as a fruit loop.”

“The princess is…” Kakashi trailed off as he looked down to the body on the ground and came to his own conclusion. “Right, we’re heading back to the palace. Doto’s dead.”

“You killed him?” grunted Rayne as she stomped over to the tent and grabbed the spare clothes I gave Koyuki earlier and pulled them on. “Good, then that means the Daimyo’s alive. Let’s get paid and the hell out of here. Hell! That might even better than this frozen nightmare at this point.”

Kakashi said nothing as he gave the scene one last glance before picking up Koyuki’s dead body. As he raced back to the palace, Rayne snatched a snowboard that wasn’t incinerated and followed in turn. I found myself humming the same song while they made their way back up. Aside from Rayne’s slew of curses about the cold, the trip remained relatively silent.

By the time we reached the palace, servants that survived the assault had begun cleaning the bloody mess left by the conflicts. The maids gasped at the sight of the princess in Kakashi’s arms, but flinched when they spotted the bloody state Rayne was in. She ignored them in favor of pulling the extra clothes over our body tightly and muttered even more curses about my idiocy.

“KOYUKI!” shouted the daimyo in anguish when we stepped through the halls and raced to pull his daughter from Kakashi’s arms.

“Your majesty…” started Kakashi quietly.

“No…no! No! How could you let this happen?” snapped Sosetsu angrily as he turned to us and scowled down at Rayne. “My daughter’s dead! You were supposed to protect her!”

“Tt.” Rayne clicked our tongue in annoyance as he glared up at him. Kakashi cleared his throat as if to give her a warning and she grounded out some semblance of a civil response. “My apologies your majesty that the princess fell to the elements of your country. I was busy handling your snow-nins that wanted to kill her.”

“You! You!” his face turned an angry shade of red.
“Furthermore,” cut in Rayne sharply. “According to our contract, the mission parameters was to protect you and eliminate anyone that posed a threat to your person. There was no mention of the princess within this contract. We have fulfilled our duties as per your request.”

The man huffed, both in anger and grief, unable to say anything as he dropped to his knees and clung to his daughter’s dead body.

“I believe the princess enjoyed the mountain’s view?” grunted Rayne as she stared down at the pitiful man. “I suggest burying her on the west side. The other side’s covered in the blood and ashes of your traitorous Yuki-nin. Konoha won’t charge an extra fee for their clean up disposal."

“That’s enough,” said Kakashi in a low hiss as he grabbed Rayne’s arm.

“Fine,” huffed Rayne in annoyance as she crossed our arms.

“Your majesty, you have our utmost apologies and condolences for the princess’s passing. However, as you’ve witnessed first-hand, Lord Doto admitted his treachery to the throne and his orders to his men to eliminate the princess to retrieve the hexagonal crystal,” said Kakashi professionally. “While Kasa is an established kunoichi, she is still just a single person. There’s only so much she could do in her lonesome.”

“She managed to kill all of them didn’t she?” snapped the man in fury. “She said so herself! There’s only blood and ashes left of them!”

“Yes, but while doing so, she couldn’t have seen the signs of hypothermia on the princess. She had her hands full just keeping her would-be assassins at bay,” reasoned Kakashi. “If you have any further issues with our performance, please submit an official complaint to Konoha’s mission bureau. As we have completed our mission parameters, we will be taking our leave, your majesty.”

“Get out!” shouted Sosetsu in grief. “Just get out!”

“May the Land of Snow prosper… Your majesty,” drawled Rayne with a mocking bow before she left the room with Kakashi.

Once out of the room, Kakashi planted a firm hand on our shoulder and forcibly steered us to the closest bathroom with a shower. Rayne went along without a word and waited patiently as he locked the door and hurried to turn the showered to its hottest setting. It didn’t take long before the room began to steam from the splattering of hot water.

“So… how was your day?” asked Rayne with a jovial drawl.

*Rayne, I’m burning up… can we take off the haori?*

“Give control back to Kasa,” ordered Kakashi icily.

*Actually, can we take everything off? It’s hoooot.*

“No can do,” said Rayne with a shrug and he turned to us with possibly the most dangerous glare I’ve ever seen. “She’s still not out of it yet.”

*Rayne!*

“Rayne,” said Kakashi with a dangerous tinge to his voice.

“Unless you’re looking for a strip show, I wouldn’t recommend giving the idiot control of her own
body right now,” retorted Rayne.

*Can we? It's really hot. I'm dying Rayne...*

“...She’s at the paradoxical stripping stage now?” frowned Kakashi.

“Worse, her chest feels tight and it’s getting a bit hard to breathe,” grunted Rayne as she took a forceful breath and tried to rub out the tight in our chest, but then a slow numbing pain crept up our left arm and shoulder. "Ugh… and there goes the pain in the left arm… You might want to catch her and start CPR. She’s going to into cardiac arrest.”

With that, Rayne fell forward and straight into Kakashi’s arms before he hastily laid us on the ground and pulled away the hand rested on our chest. I could feel the searing burn with each breath she struggled to take. Rayne let out a painful grunt as she clenched our teeth tight. Our heart must've stopped. Kakashi was quick to place his hand over our heart as he began the compressions.

One-two-three-four-five…

Ten-eleven-twelve…

…The world turned hazy as I lost count of Kakashi’s compressions and I began to slip in and out of consciousness. At some point, I felt his calloused fingers tilt my chin up in the same manner I did for Koyuki before I felt a rush of warm air flooding my lungs. That happened at least two more times before I felt a jolt of lightning release go through my system.

“Fuuuck!” cursed Rayne through the pain as she took another wheezing breath.

Hmm? Did Kakashi always—oh right, he has a lightning affinity.

“Rayne, are you able to swallow soldier pills right now?” asked Kakashi.

“Do I look like I can swallow shit right now?” coughed Rayne as she clenched a fistful of shirt at our chest.

At this point, I could barely see shapes through Rayne’s sight of the outer world anymore. Despite the heat from the steam, the feverish heat I felt before disappeared and my body grew chilled once more. Rayne let out a shaking breath as our body began to shiver. I felt a hand under our neck as we were lifted up into a seated position.

Another hand pinched at our nose and forced Rayne to breathe through our mouth instead. However, before she could wheeze for another breath, another mouth closed over ours and a bitter liquid poured into our mouth. Unable to breathe, unable to fight, our body choked and swallowed as much of the vile fluid as it could before coughing and spluttering what it couldn’t.

“Fuck!” coughed Rayne violently as the remaining liquid dribbled down from the corner of our lips. “Are you trying to drown us?”

“Can you swallow on your own yet?” asked Kakashi again.

“You’re going to drown us to death with mouth-to-mouth force feeding,” retorted Rayne, but shook her head anyway in response.

“Her core temperature needs to warm up faster than this,” said Kakashi as he popped in more soldier pills into his mouth and crunched them in his teeth. “The soldier pills will help the chakra circulate through her system faster and the warm water will help along raising her body temperature.”
“I know that dipshit!” growled out Rayne before Kakashi took another swing of warm water from a nearby cup and lowered his face over ours once more.

At a later time, I would probably be disappointed that my vision was too hazy to take a good look of Kakashi without his mask. However, at the same time I would probably be mildly disgusted to be treated like a chick being fed by its mother through regurgitation. Rayne was correct in that our body was incapable of chewing, much less swallowing. Kakashi’s method, while disgusting, was the best option we had at the time.

With him chewing the pills for us and forcing it down our throat via mouth-to-mouth with water, he assure that our body would get the most of the soldier pills with the least amount of spillage. There was nothing tender or romantic about the action. It was an act of pure desperation.

I was near unconscious by the time Rayne and Kakashi managed to force a good amount of soldier pills and water down my throat. However, even with barely any coherency of the outer world I could still feel my body shivering desperately against the chill. Firm arms wrapped around us as a warm body held us tight to lessen the tremors. Kakashi likely held us to share whatever he could. The steam made it hard to breathe, but the heat it produced in the air warmed our chest with each breath.

It felt like ages before the tremors finally stopped and Rayne relinquished control. There was no inch of my body didn’t ache in pain. My shallow breaths echoed softly in the bathroom alongside the pitter-patter of the running shower. I desperately wanted to sleep, but I couldn’t. Not with the events of the day crashing down on top of my already exhausted body.

I found myself shaking again, but this time in misery as I sobbed against Kakashi chest. He said nothing as he cupped a hand behind my head and held me close. As much as I wanted to cry, I was too tired for tears. We stayed in silence for a long while before I finally caught the steady sound of Kakashi’s heartbeat against his chest. Slowly, but surely, I found myself lulled to sleep by the sound and I knew no more.
Intoxication

I suspected the lack of nightmares might’ve been Rayne’s doing. Throughout the return trip, she had been uncharacteristically quiet since we left the Land of Snow. I’m not sure whether she took this time to catalogue the memories of this mission or if she was plotting to further my misery at a later date. With her, it seemed impossible to tell when she would decide to pull out my locked memories at a whim.

Between the trauma of Koyuki’s death, the post-hypothermia and bout of seasickness, I was close to a catatonic state by the time the ship docked. Kakashi ended up having to haul me through the Land of Rice Paddies before I managed to regain any semblance of lucidity. My awareness of my surroundings were half-assed at best. Sure, I could still deal with my own bodily functions to avoid much embarrassment for Kakashi, but aside from that, he still needed to shove ration bars and cooked game into my hands just so I remember to eat.

It was easy to tell that I wasn’t quite all there. Neither of us had much reason to talk, not that Kakashi was much of a conversationalist to begin with. He did however, keep a close eye on me whenever a cool breeze brushed past us. My body tensed and flinched at the slight change in temperature. A ridiculous reaction to something so insignificant, but Kakashi did make an effort to keep the breeze at bay with what bedding and camp gear we had.

I had no clue if he managed to get any sleep for the travel duration through the Land of Rice Paddies. Normally, we took turns in the taking the night watch so the other could rest, but with my current state, I couldn’t, even if I wanted to. Yet, somehow he managed and we made it to one of the border outposts between the Land of Fire and the Land of Rice Paddies. By then, I regained some of my faculties and stopped piggy-backing Kakashi like an oversized koala.

Not sure if that was a blessing or a curse, but the façade of the Crimson Terror had to resume the moment we encountered fellow Konoha-nin. The entirety of the act relied on enforcing the image and expounding on the foundations of the reputation. There was no reprieve even in the presence of allies. I found myself wishing that I could say fuck it all and toss everything into the wind, but that wasn’t a possibility.

“Everything looks to be in order,” said the border patrol as he cleared the two of us for safe passage. “Be careful on your way back to Konoha.”

“Careful?” asked Kakashi with a frown. “Did something happen?”

“Kumo’s been declared hostile,” replied the other.

Hostile? I fought back a grimace at the news. The negotiations with Kumo must’ve failed while we were gone. Even without looking, I could feel Kakashi’s gaze on me as I schooled my face from showing anything.

“Has there been any skirmishes or conflicts yet?” asked Kakashi as he pressed for more information.

“Nothing yet, but it’s likely that Kumo and Konoha are both gathering their forces for the fight to come,” answered the other man. “The northeast border patrol hasn’t reported any Kumo-nins slipping through their watch. It’s not likely you would run into any Kumo-nins on your way back to Konoha, but it’s best to be safe than sorry.”

“We’ll keep that in mind,” said Kakashi as he placed a hand on my shoulder and ushered me along.
“Is she okay?” asked the border guard as he eyed me curiously.

“She’s fine, just a little post-mission exhaustion,” said Kakashi.

“I bet it was exhausting,” said the border guard.

“Hm?” frowned Kakashi at his words. “What do you mean?”

“You probably heard the rumors already since you came from the direction of Rice Paddies, but there’s a rumor going around among the travelers that some insane shinobi enacted genocide over in the Land of Snow. You guys no doubt had to keep an eye out right?” explained the border guard. “It’s crazy what some people would do nowadays.”

“… Yeah,” murmured Kakashi as he pushed me along.

What a fine mess I created. I started a war, got a princess killed and slaughtered what may have been a sizeable fighting force of a relatively small hidden village. My presence seem to do more harm than help. Though, I have to admit with a morbid sense of humor that my exploits reached the Land of Fire before we did, even though we left only a day or two after the incident. It seems bad news always traveled faster.

“…Captain,” greeted the anbu manning the administration desk. We had gone directly to the administrative building to hand in the mission report after returning to Konoha.

“Mission success, client might have some complaints, but we’ve fulfilled the mission parameters,” said Kakashi as he handed in the mission scroll. He likely wrote it during trip at sea.

“And… Kame’s solo-evaluation?” asked the anbu as she raised her head to glance at me.

“Kame won’t be promoted anytime soon,” reasoned Kakashi as he glanced down at me. “At least until she curbs her blood lust.”

“I got the job done, did I not?” I replied mechanically, unable to force any more emotion into my voice.

“After needlessly slaughtering several platoons of Yuki-nin,” droned Kakashi.

“P-platoons?” repeated the anbu in disbelief.

“Just leave her file as is under my command,” said Kakashi as he placed a hand to steer me out of the admin building.

“…Can I go home yet?” I asked quietly after we distanced ourselves from the admin building.

“What happened to eating my wallet empty?” asked Kakashi.

“…I just want to go to bed.” I murmured.

“Kasa—” He paused and the two of us snapped our attention to the sudden shift in the air. Someone was attacking. Someone—Kakashi’s grip on my shoulder tightened as he pulled me back.

“DYNAMIC ENTRY!” shouted an exuberant voice before a blur of green flew pass us in a cloud of dust.

I blinked, barely able to comprehend what happened. Was that….?
“Kakashi, my eternal rival!” announced the man with an unsightly bowl-cut and caterpillar eyebrows as he struck a pose. “I see you’ve finally returned from your prolonged mission! Come! We must continue our epic rematch!”

“Gai, this really isn’t the time,” sighed my silver-haired commander as he planted a hand to his face.

“Oh?” said Gai with a frown before his gazed dropped on me. “I see you have a youthful maiden in your company.”

“Like I said, this isn’t a good time,” said Kakashi with another sigh.

Gai shifted his attention between the two of us for a moment before an indescribable expression crossed his face. “Kakashi my rival… this girl…”

“What?” replied the silver-haired jounin as he tried to keep exasperation from his voice.

“Are you trying to woo her?” frowned Gai with all seriousness on his face. “I know you’ve been having trouble trying to find a suitable woman that’s to your taste, but the age difference with this girl —”

“What are you even talking about?” snapped Kakashi.

“Now, now,” said Gai soothingly. “No need to get flustered and embarrassed, people do have their… unique tastes, but you have to know this is highly inappropriate, she can’t be older than—”

“She’s my subordinate!” grounded out Kakashi.

“Subordinate?” repeated Gai before he huffed. “That’s even more inappropriate!”

“Gai!” growled Kakashi.

“Really Kakashi, you of all people should—”

“Pft.” A snort escaped my lips as I hastily raised a hand to cover my mouth. My shoulders shook as I desperately tried to hold myself back as the argument between the two escalated further and further. I found myself tearing before I finally couldn’t hold it in anymore and broke into a fit of genuine laughter. “Hahahahaa!”

I laughed until my sides hurt, I laughed until my lungs burned. I laughed until tears poured from my eyes and I couldn’t tell if I was crying or laughing anymore. Both Gai and Kakashi grew quiet as I covered a hand over my eyes and I tried my best to reign in the tears and laughter.

“…Kasa?” asked Kakashi gently as he waited out my laughing fit.

“S-sorry.” I said as I raised a sleeve to wipe away the tears. “I just didn’t think I could laugh like that again, not after… It’s nothing…”

“Kakashi?” queried Gai for an explanation from his fellow jounin.

“She recently completed her first A-Rank, a guard and assassination assignment,” replied Kakashi.

“Oh…” murmured Gai in realization. It took a moment for him to digest the information before he turned to me with… what was likely the most enthusiastic thumbs up I’ve ever seen in my life. “This calls for a celebration for a job well done!”

“I really—” I started, but the green eye-sore would have none of it.

“Nonsense!” said Gai as he grabbed Kakashi by the arm and me by the shoulder. “There’s always
“Gai—” Kakashi started to protest, but even he had no sway over the other jounin.

…Somehow, Gai ended up dragging us to a bar of all places and I found a cup of sake in my hand before I could protest about underage drinking. I supposed he was just trying to help in making me forget whatever trauma I faced in the last several weeks. Very sweet of him to do something like this for a person he barely met, but also quite questionable of him to willingly urge a minor to drown their problems out with alcohol.

“You don’t have to drink it if you don’t want to,” said Kakashi under his breath as Gai proceeded to order food for the three of us.

“…No, its fine.” I murmured as I took a slow sip. The alcohol gave off a slow burn as it swished over my tongue and down my throat. I held back a grimace, it tasted just as nasty as it did in my previous life.

Regardless what connoisseurs have to say about the fragrance or the uniqueness of each alcohol, I still say they all taste like shit. No one drinks alcohol because it tastes good, anyone who says that is lying through their teeth. People drink alcohol to get drunk… and yet…

“…Kakashi, I think Gai’s wasted.” I murmured several hours later as I took a sip from the bottle.

I gave up the sake cup around three bottles ago when I realized I was barely getting buzz from the amount I drank. Apparently, I seemed to have gotten speculated jinchuriki trait of not being able to get drunk due to accelerated healing… or something of the sort. Brain… not working… Quite sure I’m inebriated to some extent after so many drinks, but not sure by how much. With my age and body type, I should’ve been out after the first cup.

“Naw, I’m not drunk,” mumbled Gai as he sprawled over the table, red-faced and wasted.

“How are you fairing?” Kakashi glanced at me.

“Better than him at least.” I drawled offhandedly. “But I would very much like to be in my bed right now.”

“Come on Gai, time to go home,” said Kakashi.

“But… celebration…” protested Gai.

“Kasa wants to go home,” said Kakashi. “And as a good little girl, she needs to go to bed early.”

I snorted at the comment as I took another swing of my bottle. Good little girl my ass, this little girl just drank a full grown man under the table.

“Yes! Early to bed, early to rise makes a child healthy, wealthy and wise!” hiccupped Gai.

“Quite sure he said that phrase wrong.” I murmured as Kakashi hauled the man’s arm over his shoulder and pulled him to his feet.

“You too Kasa, let’s go,” said Kakashi as he eyed me to put down the bottle.

“Yes mother,” I drawled as I took one last swing to finish the last of the bottle before I stood and followed him out of the bar.
It’s a good thing that shinobis have their own bars, otherwise the civilians would have a fit at seeing an under-aged girl like me drinking enough to give most people alcohol poisoning. Though, considering my body reeked of alcohol, it probably didn’t make a difference. Shortly after we managed to drag Gai back to his own apartment and drop his ass in his own bed, Kakashi in turn walked me back to Kushina’s apartment.

To our surprise, we found the door locked and the apartment empty. Dad was likely at the hospital and Kushina must’ve stepped out to do some shopping or she was over at the Uchihas with Naruto.

“Well, this is a pain.” I murmured with a yawn. I didn’t have keys, not that I really needed them in the past, usually someone was home by the time I got back. “I could probably break in through one of the windows.”

“…Doesn’t Kushina-san trap those with seals?” noted Kakashi dryly.

“…Oh right.” I covered my mouth in another yawn. Shit, the post drink drowsiness was kicking in. “I supposed I could just nap here until they get home.”

“If you’re going to do that, you might as well just sleep at my place until tomorrow,” said Kakashi in a deadpan.

“No,” I replied with a childish pout as I rubbed my eyes. “I want my own bed.”

“…Why did I let Gai give you alcohol?” muttered Kakashi darkly under his breath as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

Click

The sound of a door opening from the next apartment drew our attention as we both glanced over in confusion. Since when did someone move in next door? Most people avoided the apartment like the plague because of Naruto’s jinchuriki status. Even the desperate ones avoided renting the apartment if they could avoid it.

SLAM!

“Hands off Sasa-nee you kidnapper!” shouted Naruto as he crashed out from the other apartment and darted in front of me with his arms out and open. “Don’t worry Sasa-nee, I won’t let him take you again!”

“…Naruto?” I blinked sleepily as I stared down at him... Am I that drunk to not realize I was at the wrong door?

“Naru!” said a tired and exasperated voice from the apartment before an unfamiliar man walked out. “How many times did I tell you not to—”

The man trailed off and glanced between the three of us with an indescribable frown. I’m quite sure he was in his twenties, but the black bags under his eyes made him look older. Everything about his posture and stance screamed civilian. The clean white bandana that kept his messy hair back, the comfortable looking jinbei and the indiscriminate smudge of black ink on his face. He seemed more of an artist or scholar than a fighter. There was something vaguely familiar about him… but at the same time it felt like he didn’t belong here either. This doesn’t make any sense.

“…Is that alcohol I smell?” asked the man before a scowl crossed his face in realization. “Were you brats drinking?”
“Who are you? I don’t believe we’ve met,” interjected Kakashi with a cautious eye over the stranger.

“That should be my question,” retorted the man. “That girl’s Naru’s sister, right? What were you planning to do with her after getting her drunk?”

Silence.

It took a moment for the man’s words to sink in, but when it finally did Kakashi and I both had different reactions.

“Pft.” I raised a hand over my mouth to hide the tugging grin at my lips as I glanced over to Kakashi with mirth in my eyes.

“…What?” said Kakashi in a deadpan as disbelief crossed his face.

“I don’t know who you are, but what you’ve planned is just sick! She’s barely a few years older than Naru,” grounded out the man.

“...Twice,” muttered Kakashi darkly as he took a breath to calm himself and pressed a hand against his brow. “Why does everyone think I’m a cradle robber?”

“Have you no shame?” continued the man, not hearing a word of what the silver-haired jounin muttered under his breath.

I found myself fighting back a giggle as Kakashi’s patience grew thin with each ridiculous accusation given by the man. Who would have thought a civilian could drive him up the wall in the same manner as Gai? By law, we shinobi can’t do anything to rowdy civilians unless they attempt to attack us, but this man didn’t seem like he was going to go beyond a severe tongue lashing.

“That’s right you kidnapper!” joined in Naruto, but was quickly silenced by the stranger with a cheek tug.

"You don’t get to talk Naru!" scolded the man. “How many times did I tell you not to go running off without telling me?”

“Buh, Seishuu senseh!” protested Naruto incoherently before the man returned to scolding Kakashi again.

Seishuu sensei? I blinked in confusion. The man’s a teacher? Of what? Isn’t he being a bit too familiar with Naruto? My brows furrowed as I studied the man and how he angled himself protectively between Kakashi and Naruto. I hadn’t realized it before out of the confusion of his sudden appearance, but he didn’t seem to have any reservations against Naruto aside from genuine concern. Naruto in turn seemed to show complete trust in the man… too much.

Something’s not right. This guy didn’t exist in the original story. I don’t remember anyone with the name Seishuu. Why was he here? What brought him here? And why was he so close to Naruto? Was it something I changed? Is his presence good? Is it bad? Does it mean something? Does it—

“Kasa-chan?” Kushina’s voice drew me out of my panicked thoughts with a gasp.

The world shifted as I glanced up at her and the worrying thoughts faded. My face grew warm and dull aching pain pulsed through my eyes and into my head. I swayed unsteadily as I pressed a hand to ease the pain. What’s going on?

“Sasa-nee?” whispered Naruto in worried confusion as he turned to glance up at me.
“I don’t feel good…” I murmured quietly before the world spun and I hit the ground with a wave of nausea washed over me.

“Sasa-nee!” shouted Naruto in alarm as he dropped to his knees next to me and placed his small hands on my face.

“Damn it, how much did you let her drink?” snapped the man named Seishuu as he hastily brushed Naruto back and patted my cheek to get me to focus on him. “Hey, don’t fall asleep, stay awake!”

The world spun into a blur and the voices jumbled up into incoherency. Everything became an indistinguishable colored blurs and garbled noises. Hmmm, I guess I don’t have the alcohol immunity after all. I could just drink a whole lot more before I succumb to alcohol poisoning. Good job, me. Good job…

“Sasa-nee!” shouted Naruto as everything turned black.

When I woke next, it was to the angry whispers between Kushina and Kakashi. Naruto laid curled up and asleep against my side while I remained limp and sluggish from the alcohol poisoning. The nausea was mostly gone, but the pounding headache didn’t subside. The gnawing feeling in my stomach told me they likely pumped it or emptied it in some manner. Ugh, curse this hangover, why did I think drinking was a good idea?

“This can’t go on,” hissed Kushina in a low voice.

“This is the matter of her survival,” argued Kakashi.

“What survival?” hissed Kushina. “She nearly drank herself to death! What were you thinking taking her drinking of all things after a mission like that?”

“She didn’t show any signs the first four drinks! I didn’t expect this to happen,” grounded out Kakashi.

“And exactly how much did she drink?” demanded Kushina. “Even if she’s a jinchuriki, her body’s still a child. There’s only so much that being a jinchuriki could do.”

“It’s better than having her in the catatonic state she was in before this!” retorted Kakashi.

“What do you expect dragging her into the Anbu Corps?” snapped Kushina.

“What other choice do we have?” growled Kakashi. “Kumo’s declared itself hostile. The situation with Kiri hasn’t completely cleared up yet. If we don’t give her a means to protect herself—”

“At the cost of her sanity,” challenged Kushina. “I know you mean well Kakashi, but not everyone is meant for this, especially not someone with Kasa’s fragility.”

“She’s already begun to create a name for herself. If we take her out of anbu now, it’ll undo everything she’s accomplished!” argued Kakashi.

“But—”

I stopped listening at that point as I felt Naruto wrapped his arms around my waist and cuddled closer with a content sigh. I found the corner of my lips tug as I curled up further with Naruto wrapped in my arms. He definitely has the right idea… fuck this shit. I’m going to bed.
“You disappear without a word for two months and when we finally see you again, it’s because you were hospitalized for alcohol poisoning,” said Santa in a deadpan as he hovered over the side of my bed. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Hmm….,” I hummed in thought. “Yes.”

“Yes is not an answer!” snapped Santa as he thwacked me upside the head.

“Ow!” I whined and held my head. “I’m supposed to be the recovering patient here!”

“Who’s the genius that decided to let you of all people to drink anyhow?” asked Tokuma dryly from where he stood with his arms crossed.

“Kakashi and his eternal rival Gai.” I chirped cheerfully.

“…Eternal rival?” my former teammates repeated in disbelief.

“Yep, he’s a bit of an odd ball, but a nice guy.” I paused before raising a hand to wave it off. “Ignore the unintended pun.”

“Hmm?” hummed Santa as he gave me a speculating stare.

“What?” I asked with a wry grin.

“Nothing, just thought you would probably have a harder time adjusting to anbu,” said Santa as he took a step back with his arms crossed. “You look… no different than usual.”

“Geez, thanks.” I said dryly. “Glad to know you think so well of me.”

“Though, I’m more surprised that you’ve asked nothing about your Uchiha boyfriends,” scoffed Santa. “What kind of girlfriend are you?”

“The platonic sort.” I retorted dully.

“Ah,” sighed Santa dejectedly. “I miss the days where you’d get flustered and deny, deny, deny….”

“Idiot, that just means she’s grown,” snorted Tokuma.

“Her? Never!” scoffed Santa. “What was that she told Itachi? Growing old is inevitable, but growing up is optional?”

“People could change dumbass,” said Tokuma dryly.

“You haven’t,” retorted Santa. “You’re still the same with a stick in the mud with a stick up your ass.”

“Are you trying to pick fight?” grounded out Tokuma with narrowed eyes.

“What are you going to do about it pretty boy?” challenged Santa.

I found a faint smile tugging at my lips as I watched the usual Team Four bickering commence, but as much as I would like to join in, the covering nurses probably wouldn’t appreciate it.
“Now that you’ve mentioned them, where are Itachi and Shisui anyway?” I asked, if only to distract them before they get kicked out of the hospital.

“Mission and team building,” said Tokuma with a vague wave of a hand. “They got a new teammate after you were reassigned.”

“Oh? Anyone I know?” I asked curiously.

“Probably not,” said Santa. “She’s a Chunin a couple years older.”

“She? A kunoichi?” I said in surprise, that’s rare. There weren’t many kunoichis around. “What’s she like?”

“Psychotic,” said Santa in a deadpan. “I swear she could give your Crimson Terror façade a run for your money.”

“She can’t bad.” I snorted.

“While normally I would agree that Santa could be exaggerating at times. I would have to say his assessment of her would be correct,” said Tokuma.

“Hey!” shouted Santa indignantly.

“She’s said to be Orochimaru’s last apprentice before he disappeared from the village,” continued Tokuma as he ignored Santa. “If her expertise with snake summons was anything to go by.”

...Snake summons and Orochimaru?

“Their teammate is Anko Mitarashi?” I blurted out in surprise.

“Oh, you’ve heard of her,” said Santa. “That’s surprising considering how out of touch you’ve been the last two months.”

“Just because I’m out of touch doesn’t mean—”

“I said I’m sorry you damn brat!” shouted a young woman’s voice outside of my room.

“Speak of the devil…” Tokuma muttered under his breath.

“Hmm?” I glanced to him curiously before the noise outside grew louder. “Ah crap, she’s coming this way,” said Santa with a cringe.

“Stop ignoring me!” growled the voice, followed by the sound of a minor scuffle.

“…Are they fighting?” I managed to get out before the door opened and Shisui slipped in.

“Hey!” said Shisui cheerily when he saw me and closed the door behind him, but not before I spotted Itachi with a heavily bandaged arm trading blows with a purple-haired kunoichi that was quite a bit taller than him.

“…Hey?” I returned the greeting awkwardly as I pointed to the door. “What happened?”

“Team bonding. Don’t worry too much about it,” chirped Shisui as he made his way over. “How are you?”

“Get back here Uchiha!” snarled the young woman outside before the sound of footsteps went
running off.

“…Fine?” I said with uncertainty as the sounds of nurses screaming in the distance could be heard. “Are you sure they’ll be fine?”

“GAH!” The girlish scream rang through the halls. “I’m going to kill you Itachi Uchiha.”

“Yep,” said Shisui with an unchanged grin. “Absolutely fine.”

“… Do I even want to know?” I asked.

“DIE UCHIHA!” screamed Anko, her voice came from outside the window this time, followed by the sound of destruction.

“Probably not,” said Shisui.

“…Pft.” I snorted as I fought back a laugh. “Nice to see you guys are getting along with your new teammate.”

“You call that getting along?” said Santa in bafflement.

“As long as Itachi manages to play keep away from Anko and not get killed, this could be considered as getting along,” said Shisui,

I found myself in a fit of laughter about the whole ordeal as we caught up with each other on what happened in the last two months that we were all out of contact. I haven’t told them the specifics of the events that took place in The Land of Snow. It was an anbu mission and therefore it was classified to anyone without the right clearance. The most I could tell them was the miserable weather and my bouts of motion sickness.

My former teammates on the other hand had no restrictions and freely told me of the mishaps that they’ve faced while I was gone. Tokuma, who joined Team Thirteen that’s lead by Hizashi sensei continued on with reconnaissance based missions, dealing with primarily noblemen and the occasional royalty. Santa, with Team Six, led by Hayama sensei continued onto escort and delivery missions.

Though the members of both teams didn’t get promoted in our previous chunin exams, it was obvious that a number of them were more than ready to handle C or B-ranked missions. If not for the current conflicts with the other villages, they would’ve likely passed the next chunin exams. Unfortunately, due to the current situation, all promotional events like those exams were temporarily suspended. If they were to receive a promotion, it’d likely be a field one.

As for Team Karasu… It seemed that Anko and Itachi were constantly at odds since their first meeting. Between the difference in fighting styles and difference in personality, the two clashed at nearly every opportunity. For the sake of his sanity, Shisui appeared to have developed an aloof approach to dealing with Anko and Itachi’s antics.

“So, when’s your next mission?” asked Shisui.

“I wouldn’t know until I get it. My missions at the moment are determined by my commander.” I said with a shrug. “Unless I get promoted to captain, which I doubt would happen anytime soon, I doubt I’ll be able to determine when I get my missions.”

“I supposed that would make it hard to keep in contact if your missions are so irregular,” noted Shisui.
“Aw, did you miss me that much?” I said teasingly.

“Every day,” said Shisui cheerily. “Without you around, it’s just not as fun to tease Itachi. Though, Anko does a great job in keeping his blood pressure up.”

“I could imagine.” I said dryly. Hard for anyone not to when the snake mistress is on your tail calling for blood.

Knock, Knock…

“Sorry to interrupt, but morning visiting hours are over,” said Rin as she walked in.

“Aw, do they have to leave?” I pouted that the older kunoichi.

“No exception,” huffed Rin. “You need your rest.”

“But I haven’t seen them in ages!” I protested.

“Well, now you know not to drink yourself into the hospital,” chided Rin before she glanced towards the boys. “You can all visit her in the evening hours if you want, but right now, she needs her rest.”

“Spoiled sport.” I huffed.

“Everyone out,” said Rin as she ignored my childish jab.

“Team Six and Thirteen have joint missions today, if you’re still in the hospital when we get back, we’ll visit again,” said Santa cheerily.

“…You make it sound like you want her to stay in the hospital,” said Tokuma dryly.

“I said no such thing,” scoffed Santa as he crossed his arms. “Anyway, we’ll see you around okay?”

“Sure.” I said in amusement as they moved to leave.

“I’ll probably stop by again later with Itachi if he gets away from Anko,” said Shisui as he followed the two out. “Get some rest okay?”

“Rin-san won’t have it any other way.” I laughed as I waved bye to them.

Once gone, Rin wasted no time in replacing the near empty saline pouch that kept me hydrated and scanned me with a medical jutsu. Though I’ve already gotten my stomach pumped and went through several rounds of dialysis, the alcohol level in my system were still rather high. A normal person would’ve been long dead in my position, but whoop-de-doo, death apparently hates me and doesn’t want to see my sorry mug at his doorstep.

“Still high,” sighed Rin as she finished and handed me a bottle of medicine. “Finish this and rest. I don’t know what Kakashi was thinking when he took you drinking.”

“To be fair, Gai was the one that dragged us drinking and Kakashi did tell me I didn’t have to drink.”

“Don’t try to defend him Kasa-chan!” huffed Rin. “You could’ve died!”

“But I didn’t.” I said before I gulped down the medicine in one shot and shuddered at the taste. “Blegh… Though, I kind of wish I did. This is nasty.”
“Well, you’re going to have to drink at least two more of that today,” said Rin as she took the bottle form my hand and tucked me in. “Rest and I better not find you out of bed again until I get back.”

“What if I need to pee?” I retorted.

“Stop being a wiseass,” said Rin as she knocked my head lightly. “Now rest!”

“Okay, okay!” I huffed and wiggled lower into the covers to appease her. “I promise I’ll stay put, happy?”

“I’ll be back to check on you in a bit, behave,” said Rin as she turned to leave the room.

“Yeah, yeah.” I scoffed and closed my eyes so I wouldn’t have to see her reproachful expression.

Seeing she got her message through, Rin left and I found myself alone in the room once more. With the amount of times I’ve nearly died… or actually died, but won’t stay dead I should probably claim the title The-girl-who-won’t-fucking-die. My hospital track record would certainly vouch for me inability to stay dead. Dad and Rin weren’t joking when they said they were going to get me a permanent room in the hospital. I’m quite sure this was the same room I stayed in the last few times too.

I sighed in exasperation and pulled a hand in front of my face. Tendrils of chakra weaved and danced over my open hand. I idly wondered how much of the cancerous chakra would it take to actually kill me. It’d probably hurt, but if I pour enough chakra in, I might be able to make it quick. Just pour everything in and—

“I hope you’re not going to do what you’re thinking of doing,” said a light-hearted voice, but there was no amusement in it.

“Tenzo?” I said in surprised at the figure hovered above me before he clamped a hand over my wrist and pulled it away from my face.

“Kakashi senpai told me to keep an eye on you in case you decided to do something reckless,” said Tenzo as he took a seat on the side of my bed.

“He’s being paranoid. I’m fine.” I scoffed as the chakra petered away from my hand and he finally let go.

“Your mask is flawless as usual, but your words aren’t reaching your eyes again,” said Tenzo. “Even if you appear to be happy or angry outwardly, that’s not what you’re feeling inside is it?”

No smile crossed his face as his dark eyes stared down at me. He was displeased. Neither of us traded any words as the annoyance melted from my face and a cheerful smile plastered over in its place.

“What are you going to do about it?” I said cheerily.

“You can’t hide behind a mask forever,” said Tenzo.

“Afraid I’ll snap and kill everyone?” I chirped.

“You’d likely kill yourself first,” frowned Tenzo.

“Are you implying I’m suicidal?” I asked.

“There’s no implying,” countered Tenzo as he stared me down. “I’ve seen your mask broken before
“Remember?”

“If you think my broken mask is so dangerous, then why are you trying so hard to break it now?” I asked.

“Because there’s already a large crack in it,” replied Tenzo gravely. “And chances are, the next time it breaks it would be your death if we don’t fix it.”

“And if I don’t want to fix it?” I murmured as the cheeriness slipped from my voice.

“Kasa…” said Tenzo as his eyes softened with a grimace.

“I’m tired Tenzo.” I sighed in exhaustion and he grew quiet, uncertain of how to respond.

If I was in his shoes, I wouldn’t know what to say either. All I could do right now was to switch from one act to another depending on my audience. I’m so tired, so exhausted from everything.

“If you’re tired, then go to sleep,” grumbled an unfamiliar voice as a small weight jumped onto my bed and padded its way up to me. “A shinobi’s life is not nice nor is it easy, the best you could do is to grit your teeth and bear through it, hoping for the best.”

Curiosity got the better of me as I craned my neck and spotted a little pug with a hitai-ate on its head and a matching blue vest. A talking nin-ken? I frowned for a moment at familiarity of the little dog, but after a moment my memory finally clicked.

“…Pakkun?” said Tenzo in surprise at the sight of the nin-ken.

“Yo,” drone the dog as he sat on the other side and raised a paw in greeting.

“What are you doing here?” asked Tenzo in bewilderment.

“I’m the cute and cuddly back up,” offered Pakkun with a straight face. “If your pep-talk fails, I’ll let her touch my paw.”

“… What?” said Tenzo in confusion. “How would that even—”

“Don’t underestimate the bounciness of my paw!” boomed out Pakkun as he raised it for all to see. “It can drive away any sorrow!”

Silence fell in the room as Tenzo and Pakkun stared at one another with an unwavering gaze.

“… Are you serious?” asked Tenzo in a deadpan.

“If you don’t believe me, touch my paw,” said Pakkun. “You’ll be sent into a world of euphoria.”

“I’m not going to touch your paw!” snapped Tenzo.

“Then don’t question its greatness!” retorted Pakkun.

“That’s just—”

Poke

A giggle escaped me as the two paused at the sight of my outreached finger that poked at Pakkun’s pink paw.
“Kasa?” said Tenzo with uncertainty in his voice.

“Tenzo, I know you’re trying to help. I know I’m not okay.” I said with a forced smile. “I’m under no illusion that a simple action like this would make everything better, but…” I shook my head. “Please, just let me cling onto that illusion a bit longer and pretend everything’s okay. There’s no harm in pretending right?”

“It’s—” Tenzo started, but the swish of someone entering the room via body-flicker interrupted him.

“…No, there’s no harm in that,” interjected Kakashi as the leaves settled around him.

“Why bother sending me in, if you’re going to come in anyway?” huffed Pakkun in mild annoyance at the sight of his summoner.

“Rin-san’s not going to be happy about the litter.” I said wryly as I eyed the leaves scattered on the ground.

“She’s already angry at me,” said Kakashi casually.

“Senpai!” said Tenzo in surprise. “What are you doing here? I thought you said you can’t visit because of a restraining order.”

“Restraining order?” I repeated with furrowed brows in confusion.

“It’s more of a death threat,” expounded my silver-haired commander.

“Ah… from dad?” I asked.

“And Kushina,” added Kakashi.

“What sort of threat?” I asked to change the topic. Thankfully, Tenzo didn’t make a fuss over it.

“You know, the usual evisceration, decapitation and whatnots,” said Kakashi.

“Sounds about right… so… why exactly did you send Tenzo and Pakkun in if you were going to visit me anyway?” I asked.

“To avoid said promise of death,” answered Kakashi. “Kushina planted sensor seals around your room to alert them at the presence of my chakra.”

“I see… so… how long do you think it’ll be before they get here?” I asked before the door slammed open, followed by a wave of killing intent.

“HATAKE!” roared Tesuri as he entered the room. “I thought I told you to stay away from my daughter.”

“And here’s my cue to leave,” said Kakashi, but before he could an evil thought crossed my mind and I jumped up from bed and tackled him with my arms around his neck. “Kasa?”

“But daddy! I love him!” I shouted dramatically.

The room fell silent and Tesuri’s killing intent temporarily dissipated.

“What?” said Kakashi in a deadpan.

“WHAT!?” repeated Tesuri in a roar.
“Kakashi, don’t tell me you’ve forgotten all those times you held and embraced me during our mission together.” I said tearfully as I looked up at him.

“What?” growled Tesuri as his killing intent returned.

“Am I nothing to you? All those intimate moments we shared!” I said with a choked up voice and Kakashi stared down at me with a twitching eye.

“…This is getting back at me for the forest thing isn’t it?” said the silver-haired jounin deadpanned and unamused.

“Ha…ta…ke…” growled Tesuri in fury. “What is the meaning of this?”

“I could never hate you even after that.” I said as I fought back the strong urge to grin.

“…We’ll talk about this later,” said Kakashi as he dropped me on the bed and made a hasty retreat.

“GET BACK HERE HATAKE!” roared Tesuri as he raced out through the window.

“…Kasa?” asked Tenzo with uncertainty as I wiped away the unshed tears in my eyes. “You and senpai…”

“Pft.” My shoulders shook as I fell into a fit of hysterical laughter, unable to restrain myself any longer.

“I do hope you haven’t gotten Kakashi killed over this stunt,” drawled Pakkun.

“No worries, if worst comes to worst, I’ll adopt you and you can be my nin-ken.” I chirped cheerily before the pug snorted and chased after my dad and Kakashi.

“Kasa-chan!” snapped Rin as she appeared at my door once more. “I thought I told you to rest! And you! Visiting hours are over!”

“Uh-oh,” Tenzo managed to get out before he too fled the room and Rin descended upon me with all her fury while I was still trying to recover from my laughing fit.

“Rin-san wait, I could expla—”

“Um…Sasa-nee, why are you all tied up?” asked Naruto hours later when he came to visit.

“Ah, I kept rolling off the bed while I slept, so Rin-san was kind enough to tie me down so that wouldn’t happen.” I said with a sheepish laugh, my head being the only thing that was free from the bindings of the chakra restraining rope, while the rest of my body looked like it was in a cocoon.

“Sasa-nee you’re a horrible liar,” scoffed Naruto.

“You tried running away didn’t you?” interjected Sasuke with a grin. “I know you did because Rin-san did this to Naruto a couple of weeks back.”

“I did not try to run away!” I scoffed before my mind back tracked and glanced over to Naruto. “What do you mean Rin-san did that to Naruto? Did you get hurt?”

“I’m fine!” flushed the blond little boy. “I wasn’t even that hurt!”
“He blew up your room,” snorted Sasuke.

“You blew up…what?” I said in disbelief.

“I didn’t mean to!” shouted Naruto.

“How?” I continued, curious to what could’ve caused my room to get blown up.

“Naruto found one of your training scrolls and thought he’d give it a try,” answered Sasuke.

“You were going to try it too!” accused Naruto.

“Not after you got yourself blown up,” retorted Sasuke.

“Training scrolls?” I frowned.

“Mom said they were chakra control training scrolls,” huffed Naruto dejectedly.

“Chakra control…” My eyes widened as I realized they were the ones Tsunade gave me that I dubbed the bomb diffusing exercises. “You were playing with those!?”

“I wasn’t playing with them honest!” said Naruto with a pout. “I thought I could get better if I used them.”

“And you did this without any supervision…” I commented and he gave a reluctant nod. If I had a free hand, I would face palm so hard at this. “You could’ve gotten yourself killed!”

*My, aren’t you the hypocrite? Weren’t you the one being talked down from suicidal stunts?*

Shut it, Rayne.

*Just saying.*

I’m coping.

*Even if it’s just a lie?*

“But Sasa-nee!” protested Naruto.

“No buts!” I chided with a stern front. “That was reckless of you!”

…Even if it’s just a lie.
“…Rin-san, I don’t need an escort home. I could walk back on my own.” I grumbled as we walked through the halls.

“This is just a precaution,” reasoned Rin. “You’re not completely well yet.”

“But why him?” I asked thrusting a thumb towards the dark-haired man that’s somehow my new neighbor and Naruto’s sensei of some sort. “He’s a civilian, what’s he going to do if I dropped dead in the street?”

“You’re nine. He could easily carry you if he needs to,” huffed Rin. “And you’re not going to drop dead in the street.”

“If I’m not going to drop dead, then I don’t need an escort.” I scoffed. “What, am I going to get stopped by truant officers and dragged to school if I don’t have a chaperone?”

“Stop complaining.” sighed Rin as she turned to the man. “Sorry for troubling you Seishuu sensei. Kasa-chan normally isn’t this difficult.”

“I’ve handle Naruto on a daily basis, I’m sure I could handle his sister just fine,” said Seishuu as he waved it off and planted a hand on my head.

“I can kill you in your sleep.” I grumbled and stared up at him in mild annoyance.

“Kasa-chan!” chided Rin, but before I could retort, the man reached down and pinched my cheek.

“Agh!” I grimaced as I reached up to swat his hand away, but before I could, he let go and crossed his arms thoughtfully.

“Hard to believe you’re a kunoichi,” murmured the man as he stared down at me with a curious expression over his face.

“Hard to believe you lasted this long in a shinobi village.” I grumbled and rubbed my cheek in irritation.

“You’re a grumpy little kid aren’t you?” drawled the man as he started walking again. “Are you coming?”

I glanced up to Rin briefly and sighed at her stern gaze. There was no talking out of this. She’s determined to have me chaperoned.

“Fine, fine.” I grumbled and trailed after the man.

Expected, the trip back was at a dreadful civilian pace. I could’ve made it back at a third of the time via rooftops had I been alone, but instead I was stuck with this Seishuu sensei person.

“You’re… very different compared to how Naruto spoke of you,” said Seishuu offhandedly as they strolled pass the orphanage.

“Bite me, I’m hung over.” I grumbled.

“Do all shinobi children turn out like you?” asked Seishuu curiously.
I ignored him and said nothing.

“Did I offend you somehow?” asked the man with confusion over his face.

My face kept blank as I eyed him with suspicion. I’m quite sure I’ve never met him before, but something about him seemed familiar and not in the sense that he’s a part of this world. For a civilian, he seemed rather aloof and surprisingly unimpressed by the shinobi lifestyle. Then there was his fondness for Naruto… most civilians that are ignorant to the truth often scorned him and saw him as Kyubi himself.

He has no reason to like Naruto unless… I gnawed at my lower lip. Unless he was like me? Another person who ended up here somehow, but if that’s the case… Why would he choose to be a civilian? Civilians were nothing more than fodder in this world. One would have a higher chance of survival if they learned how to use chakra, but with this guy he looked like a complete civilian. The thoughts and theories ran amuck in my head before I shook them away. I shouldn’t be speculating and running wild theories. Things were chaotic enough already, I don’t need more uncertainty, but then again… it never did hurt to ask.

“Depends on what your answer is. Who are you? And where are you from?” I asked in my native tongue with uncertainty. No one else in this world, knows this language right? The man paused in surprise and glanced down at me with the tilt of his head. I felt my chest tighten at the action, he knew this language.

“…Where did you learn to speak Western common?” asked the man curiously.

“Western… common?” I blinked in surprise. I hadn’t expected that answer.

“It’s a language used in the far west beyond the Land of Sand. The language we’re speaking now is considered Eastern common. I’ve only heard Western a couple of times near the port cities that does business with the countries by sea,” replied the man with bewilderment. “Where did you learn it? You sound almost fluent.”

Beyond the west? Other countries?

“There are… more beyond the Elemental Nations?” I blurted in surprise.

“You really are Naruto’s sister,” said the man as he snorted with laughter. “Did you really think the world revolves around Konoha?”

… To my surprise, I found my mind saying yes. In the nine years I’ve lived in this world, I never thought there was more beyond the events in the Elemental Nations. I always thought the world’s geography was very much like Pangaea where there was nothing more than just a huge slab of land. The maps never indicated that there were more, I never thought there could be more.

“Where are you from then? You don’t seem like you’re a Konoha native.” I said slowly, uncertain about my words.

“Neither do you,” quipped Seishuu.

“Quid, pro, quo. You answer my questions, I’ll answer yours.” I offered. He gave me an odd look. “What?”

“Do all shinobi children turn out like you?” Seishuu repeated his earlier question curiously.

“I’m special.” I replied dryly. “So who are you and where are you from? Naruto called you sensei…”
“But what exactly is it that you teach?”

“I thought it’s one question each,” said the man blandly.

“You can do rapid fire question afterward if you want.” I shrugged, eager to through with the line of questioning and figuring what was so familiar and strange about this person.

“I’m a well-known calligrapher from the main capital,” said the man with a huff, but deflated a moment later. “But I supposed it probably doesn’t mean much in a shinobi village.”

“A… calligrapher?” I blinked and stared at him. “What are you even doing here? A shinobi village is probably not the best place to get exposure for your work.”

“I was hired by Kushina-san to tutor Naruto in calligraphy,” sighed Seishuu.

“And you came all the way from the capital?” I said in surprise. “Why?”

“…She was,” he shuddered as if remembering something horrifying. “Persuasive.”

… Good lord, did Kushina kidnap you? Do we have a kidnap victim right here? But… I guess I could understand why she would get a tutor for Naruto specifically in calligraphy. If she was to pass on her sealing arts to Naruto, he would need to be able to master calligraphy before he could move onto the more advance sealing arts. The thing with seals it’s one part penmanship, one part affinity and an intimate understanding of seal matrixes. I fall under the affinity bit and could grasp a good deal of the seal matrixes, but utterly fail in the penmanship bit.

Seal creation reminded me a lot of coding, one wrong code and the whole thing could collapse. Not to say anyone with a neat handwriting could go into the sealing arts with no problem, but it would help. If not for Tenzo, I probably wouldn’t be able to use any of the seals I have, but I’m getting off track. This explains why he’s here, but that hardly explains why he seems familiar.

“So, where did you learn Western common?” asked Seishuu as he snapped me out of my thoughts and he waved his hand in a vague gesture. “Konoha’s far too deep in the Land of Fire and a hidden village on top of that.”

“In my previous life.” I replied offhandedly.

“What?” said Seishuu with a confused frown. “What kind of an answer is that?”

Hmm… I guess my theory about him being like me wrong then.

“Don’t worry about it.” I waved it off. “It’s just a bunch of wibbly wobby timey wimey sort of thing.”

“…Not sure if it’s all shinobi children or just you and Naruto,” sighed Seishuu as he pinched the bridge of his nose. “But neither of you ever make sense.”

“Well, I could provide you with some help if you like,” drawled a sultry voice.

Both Seishuu and I paused and glanced towards the source and found a girl lounging about in one of the many trees around Konoha. The shadow from the leaves made it a little hard to make out her face, but she looked about Tenzo’s age. I could faintly make out a smirk as she let out a sound of amusement and slipped off from the branch where she sat.

“So, you’re Itachi and Shisui’s little girlfriend,” grinned the young woman in amusement as she
planted her hands at her hips and hunched forward to get a better look at me.

“Excuse me, who are you?” said Seishuu defensively as he pulled me back and behind him. Not that the action meant anything since he was obviously a civilian and the purple-haired girl in front of us a kunoichi… wait, purple? Anko? I eyed her spikey ponytail and toothy grin. Compared to her older self, she was considerably less developed in the chest area and overall a bit gangly. That would likely change in a few years, but for now, she shared the same bravado of her older counterpart.

“I’m whoever you want me to be,” drawled the girl in a teasing tone as she draped her arms around Seishuu’s neck. The older man flinched and backed away as he tried to untangle himself.

“Aren’t you a little too young to be doing this sort of thing?” huffed Seishuu as he put some distance away from her, but not before she snatched me out from behind him and into her arm as if I was a teddy bear. “Hey! Let go of Kasa!”

“Aw, don’t be like that. I’m just going to borrow her for a little bit, that’s all,” quipped the girl cheerily as she skipped backwards to avoid Seishuu’s outreached hand to grab me back.

“Give her back,” growled Seishuu.

“Maybe later! See ya!” chirped Anko before she took off to the roofs and fled with me in her arms… am I being kidnapped?

“Um…” I started after Seishuu’s furious voice faded into the distance. “You’re Itachi and Shisui’s new teammate right?”

“Yep and you’re their former, right?” noted the girl as the scenery sped past us.

“Pretty much.” I shrugged. “Where are we going?”

“You seem rather calm for someone who just got kidnapped,” noted Anko with a raised brow.

“Kurei sensei’s quite fond of hostage exercises.” I drawled. “Besides, this is to get back at Itachi for whatever he did yesterday right? How can I help?”

“Help?” repeated Anko in surprise.

“I enjoy making Itachi’s life miserable. It’s a hobby,” I chirped.

“…Pft,” snorted Anko before she bellowed in laughter. “I think I’m going to like you.”

However, before we managed to get anywhere, I found myself snatched again. This time, instead of being held like a teddy bear, I was treated like a sack of rice under someone’s arm.

“Kasa, you really shouldn’t make a habit of growing attached to your kidnappers,” sighed a familiar voice before I realized it was Kakashi.

“Yo, managed to get away from my dad before he killed you, eh?” I rested my chin on my hand as I glanced up to him with a smirk.

“You should also break the habit of trying to get your superior officer killed,” droned Kakashi.

“You know I do it out of love.” I grinned and Kakashi ignored the comment.

“Sorry, but any plans you have with Kasa today would have to be postponed, she and I need to have a little chat,” said Kakashi as he directed his words to Anko.
“Oh, ruin my fun,” huffed the purple-haired kunoichi as she propped a hand at her hip and strolled towards us. It seemed like she’s trying to use her kunoichi wiles to her advantage, but it was considerably amateurish and somewhat obvious.

“You have the Uchiha boys to play with,” retorted Kakashi dryly. “Go bother them.”

“Oh, I will,” drawled Anko before a sly grin crossed her lips. “But as you said, they’re boys, if you ever get bored with playing with little girls…”

Before any of us could react, Anko grabbed onto Kakashi’s shirt and pulled him down for a kiss. Kakashi and I both went wide-eyed at her forward action. It lasted no more than a moment before she pulled away with a wink before disappearing over the edge of the roof. I had no clue how long we stayed stunned on the roof, but by the time we snapped out of it, Kakashi reached for whatever it was she sneakily slipped into his pocket.

“What’d she leave you?” I asked curiously.

“…Nothing,” muttered Kakashi in a deadpan as he shoved it even deeper into his pocket.

“Hmm?” I hummed with a wry grin. “You do know this totally doesn’t help fight against your growing rep of pedophilia right?”

“No thanks to you,” grumbled Kakashi.

“By the way, your mask has a wet spot.” I added brightly. I caught a brief twitch of his hand at the corner of my eye, but he deliberately kept himself from reaching for his mask. “So, what do you want to talk about? If it’s about setting my dad off on you yesterday, I’m totally in my—”

“You should have Rayne do the assassinations for you,” said Kakashi abruptly. His words killed off whatever humor I had in seconds. I shouldn’t have expected anything else. “She can handle the kills better than you can.”

“…I’ll still be watching and I’ll still remember.” I murmured quietly.

“But you won’t have to do it yourself,” noted Kakashi. “She did offer to do it in your place once before.”

“I know.” I closed my eyes and murmured quietly. “It probably would be better if she handle that, I don’t know what to feel right now.” My eyes drifted close. “It feels like everything’s happening so quickly, but at the same time, nothing happened at all.”

“Kasa?” questioned Kakashi as I felt the control slipping from my grasp and Rayne took the foreground.

“Hello, Kakashi,” drawled Rayne in amusement as she opened her eyes to glance at a surprised Kakashi.

“Rayne,” said our silver-haired commander as he dropped her and took a defensive step back.

“Hey, watch it!” huffed Rayne as she adjusted her fall and caught her footing on the roof. “And here I thought you were starting to miss me.”

“Just because I suggested that you take over her assassination assignment, doesn’t mean this is an invitation to assume control,” said Kakashi coldly.
“Come off it Kakashi,” drawled Rayne with a careless flap of her hand. “You get what you ask for.”

“I asked for your assistance in assassinations only, I never mentioned about anything else,” grounded out Kakashi.

“Then be clearer next time,” snorted Rayne with crossed arms and upturned nose. “I’m not a clown for hire.”

“Kasa will still be performing anbu missions, you’re only in charge of assassinations,” said Kakashi.

“Of course, of course,” sighed Rayne dramatically as she turned her back to him. “Who am I to say otherwise? You’re the boss after all.”

“Return control to Kasa,” ordered Kakashi.

“Hey, Kakashi,” said Rayne with a disarming grin as she glanced back. “Have you ever heard of the phrase sticks and stones may break my bones, but words could never hurt me?”

Kakashi frowned, uncertain to where she was taking this.

“It okay if you’ve never heard it, but just to let you know that phrase is full of shit,” chirped Rayne. “Broken bones mend easier compared to a broken mind.”

With that, she slipped back and I was thrust into the foreground of my mind once more and I found myself nearly tumble off the roof had Kakashi not grabbed the back of my shirt and hauled me back up. Something about Rayne’s demeanor felt oddly out of character for once. I wonder why?

“Kasa?” asked Kakashi with uncertainty in his voice.

“It’s me.” I replied quietly before he set me back down on the roof. “I need to get over the disorientation if Rayne’s to take the foreground more often.”

…I didn’t mean to suggest that she should replace you,” murmured Kakashi in almost an apologetic manner.

“It doesn’t bother me, I have to admit that she is comparably better than me in that sort of thing.” I mumble and absently ran a hand through my hair, only to find my fingers caught in tangles. “…Could we head back now? I’m quite sure they probably gave me a sponge bath or something of the sort in the hospital, but I much rather take a hot shower right now.”

“…Of course, let’s get you back home,” said Kakashi before grew quiet and our conversation died off.

Our stays in Konoha rarely lasted more than a week and there were times where we would be gone for weeks if not months depending on the mission. Kakashi had taken to mission stacking, much like what Kurei sensei did when I still served under his command. For every A-rank mission we took, he stacked five other missions varied in B and C-ranks.

The lowered ranked missions posed no problems as they were most guard, retrieval and deliver missions. Those I handled with little to no issues at all. The A-ranked missions though…

“What the—” gasped the target as Rayne grabbed a hold of the many guards and turned him into an explosion of blood and gore. “Run!”

“Scatter her enemies,” sung Rayne in our native tongue as enemies tried to scatter and surround her.
Not that it mattered as gravity seals shuffled out of her hands and planted onto the enemy’s head and dropped them to the ground. “And make them fall.”

“We can talk about this!” protested the target as she strolled towards them with a bright smile. “What do you want? Do you want money? We’ll pay you double whatever—”

“Confound their politics,” continued Rayne with a harmless smile as she knelt before the man and offered up a hand to him, but just as the man gained a hopeful look on his face, she planted her hand on his head and caused it to explode. “Frustrate their knavish tricks.”

…Is she singing God Save the Queen?

“I’ve killed your boss, would you like to join him?” asked Rayne cheerfully before they all screamed and fled. She was about make chase, but Kakashi grabbed her wrist and pulled her back. “What? You want me to kill them right?”

“It will take forever to build a reputation if you keep killing off witnesses,” reasoned Kakashi.

“But if I did that, no doubt I’ll have wannabe heroes come at me for revenge,” huffed Rayne. “Any good evil overlord knows better than to leave loose-ends that come back and bite their ass. Letting people survive out of whim is just stupid when the survivor’s anger will fester and grow into an unbending will for vengeance.

“They have family and friends,” retorted Kakashi. “They could help spread news of your actions.”

“Oh right,” said Rayne in realization. “We should probably kill off their family and friends too. Otherwise I’m just going to have random kids come up to me in ten-twenty years’ time saying ‘You killed my father!’ or some nonsense like that.”

…Good lord, I’m surrounded by psychopaths.

“Excuse me, I’m a high functioning sociopath,” retorted Rayne.

You stole that line from Sherlock.

“You point?” snorted Rayne.

“…Are you talking to Kasa?” asked Kakashi. “Was she—”

“You can talk to her yourself,” said Rayne as she raised her hands over her head in a stretch. “My job here is done. You guys deal with the cleanup.”

Rayne you lazy—

Before I could finish my thought, she had returned control to my body and I stumbled forward with my hand outreached as if I was trying to reach her before I took control again.

“…Welcome back,” greeted Kakaashi once he recognized it was me in control again. “We need to take the head back as proof for the client. Will you be able to do that much?”

I lowered my hand and glanced back to the body of our target. He was already dead, so decapitating him shouldn’t be too bad right? “…Yeah, I think I can.”

And I did. Missions continued on in the same manner as my birthday came and went. It was rather odd to spend my birthday on a mission. Normally, Kushina would’ve whipped up a feast and threw a party on the spot. Though, I supposed it didn’t really matter. A birthday’s just another anyway.
Missing one won’t matter. Not when there were deaths to be caused and reputation to maintain.

Rayne killed ruthlessly and Kakashi stopped her before she manages to kill off the much needed witnesses that would work to spreading the Crimson Terror’s horrible reputation. Eventually, I found myself growing numb to watching Rayne’s handiwork and thought there would be nothing that she could surprise with. Of course, any time I think something’s impossible, something improbable occurs to prove me wrong.

“It’s no fun dying alone,” drawled Rayne with a giggle. “How about I kill all of you so you’ll all have some company?”

When she sent out the wave of cancerous chakra, I braced myself with the idea that I would be scrubbing off the chunks of flesh and blood from my clothes and body that evening, but to my surprise, none exploded. Not only that, the injuries they’ve all sustained from Rayne’s merciless attacks… healed. Even Rayne was taken aback that they were not only alive, but healthy. Though, the surprise only lasted for a moment before another evil grin crossed her lips.

“But first, let’s have a little more fun,” cackled Rayne as she recovered from her surprise and continued her assault.

It’s ironic, I who never wanted to kill, created a cancerous chakra that killed indiscriminately within seconds of exposure. Rayne, who seemed to enjoy killing, ended up creating a technique that healed anyone within her range. I spent hours mulling over that fact and theorized how this technique worked. Naturally as an enforcer, I amplify things that are around me.

Tesuri mentioned in one of his examples that my ability to magnify existing seals and other people’s jutsus. However, he also mentioned that I could also maintain the same strength of seals and jutsus and spread them across into a wider field. Rayne, who aimed to expand the field, kept the cancerous chakra at the same level, but with so many people within the range, the chakra became diluted and the speed of the cell division dropped to a manageable rate that eventually faded over time.

To top it off, there seemed to be a swirling breeze whenever she repeated the action. Apparently, she hadn’t believe that she created something that resembled Healing Wind and attempted several other times as a means to correct it to what it’s supposed to do.

“You’ve got to be shitting me. I managed to replicate Healing Wind!? This is bullshit! I call bullshit on this bullshit!” raged Rayne after the enemies were long dead, decapitated and sealed.

“Healing Wind?” questioned Kakashi.

“It’s a technique the idiot’s been trying to create,” lied Rayne with a grumble. It was hardly an original creation, but neither of us were in the mood to make up intricate lies in using our oracle abilities to steal skills from other people. “And I fucking completed it! What the hell?”

Even after Rayne departed, I could still hear her rant and rave about the ridiculousness of it all. Despite all the annoyance she had over the new technique, she still ended up using it during interrogations to keep the target alive for torturing before she killed them. It added another level of gruesomeness to the Crimson Terror’s reputation, where rumors now stated that I’m some sort of sadist that enjoyed prolonging the misery of others.

The Crimson Terror’s reputation grew more and more horrible with each retelling. By the next time that Hiruzen summoned me, I’ve been in anbu for two years and was listed in the Kumo bingo books as an A-rank kunoichi, even though I’m quite sure I’m no more than a B-rank at best. Fearsome how rumors could go so far.
“Hokage-sama,” I greeted the man alongside Kakashi when we entered the room.

“Kasa-kun, how have you been?” asked our aged leader with a sad smile.

“Fine.” I replied curtly.

“Kakashi’s informed me of your performance in the last two years,” continued Hiruzen with a soft sigh. “And I believe it’s about time that you became a part of an anbu team.”

“Is that wise?” I asked quietly. “This ruse we’re doing could only work if no one else knows of—”

“Your commander will remain as Kakashi,” interrupted Hiruzen before I could continue. “As for your remaining teammates. I don’t believe an introduction would needed.”

“…Hokage-sama?” I asked with a frown.

“Bear, Wolf, the two of you can come in,” said Hiruzen evenly before I felt two presences behind me.

I fought back a flinch in surprise at the names. Bear I was already aware as Tenzo, but Wolf… I didn’t get along well with him during our first meeting. Why would the hokage put me on a team with someone that obviously didn’t like me? Anbu’s line of work is dangerous, to do something like that is just reckless and irresponsible. I took step forward, ready to protest against the team assignment, but before I could I felt Kakashi’s firm hand on my shoulder.

“Why don’t you take look at your teammates before you say anything,” suggested Kakashi before he released his grip.

A look? I glanced back with a frown, but it quickly disappeared when I spotted the person who wore the wolf mask. It wasn’t the older anbu I confronted during my initial introduction. Did the man get replaced? Or did he retire? This person was younger and…familiar? My eyes darted toward Bear, who I still recognized as Tenzo, but—

**Poke**

I blinked in surprise as two fingers back and away from the top of my mask. “…Itachi?” I said slowly with uncertainty as I looked up.

“You’re an idiot as always,” said the other in his usual drone. It took a moment for me to recover before a scowl crossed my face.

“…Did you grow taller?” I huffed in annoyance noting that he had grown at least two inches if not more.

“Hn,” hummed Itachi a tinge of amusement hidden under his voice.

“I presume there won’t be any complaints with this team assignment?” asked Hiruzen with a wry grin as he drew our attention back to him.

“None at all, Hokage-sama,” said Tenzo with a cheery tone before he turned to me. “Right, Kame?”

I glanced to Kakashi, then back to my teammates again and found a grin tugging at my lips despite there not being any real reason for me to be happy. Even so…

“No problem.” I said quietly, a smile hidden under my mask. I’m allowed to have a moment of happiness right?
Loving Teammates

The moment of happiness I had at Tenzo and Itachi becoming my new teammates was short-lived when I realized that they would eventually encounter Rayne. Kakashi decidedly chose to keep quiet about her and left the choice of informing them on my own volition. Of course, being the person I am, I kept quiet about Rayne even after three B-ranked missions.

"Are you okay?" asked Tenzo.

"Hmm?" I glanced up to him with a cheery tone in my voice. "I'm fine, why?"

"Because we can tell you're lying," droned Itachi.

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "I may run, I may hide, but I never tell a lie."

_You totally stole that line from Duo Maxwell. You're a liar and a thief!_

You're one to talk Gollum.

_Touché my precious._ Rayne cackled in the back of my mind. I think if we were on better terms, we might actually spend a whole day talking to each other through references.

"You neither run nor hide," scoffed Itachi as he poked the top of my mask again. "Unless it's from your problems. What's so bad that you find the need to hide it from us?"

I swatted his hand aside and glanced to Kakashi for help. Our silver-haired commanded made no indication that he would help… the ass.

"It's nothing, you're thinking too much about it." I said cheerily before pointing forward. "Hey, look! There's our target! You want to do the honors newbie?"

Itachi sighed as he adjusted his mask, no doubt taking the mission in front of us priority over my evasiveness. Maybe he'll forget about it after a while and I could avoid the whole thing.

"We'll talk about this later," murmured the Uchiha before he pulled out his sword and jumped down from our hidden perch.

So much for that plan, I thought morosely. While Itachi went for our target, Kakashi, Tenzo and myself ran interference and stopped anyone that came to close. The good thing about having Itachi and Tenzo on the team, they took over most of the killing in the missions and I was relegated to support and interference. Had this been a normal chunin team, I would've been miffed at being assigned decoy duty. Considering decoys are usually the least useful member on the team.

However, in this case, I fully welcome the assignment. It meant I didn't have to kill and that in turn meant Rayne didn't have to come out. If I could, I would like to avoid ever letting anyone else know about Rayne's existence, but the chance of that happening was unlikely. I know I should tell them, just so they know that I wasn't being controlled by an enemy. Unfortunately, with Rayne, you could never tell if she's an ally or enemy.

"Kame, watch out!" shouted Kakashi.

I turned around at his warning and for a moment I found myself in a deer-caught-in-headlights moment. The enemy raised a blade above my head and was already in motion to plunge the blade
down into my skull. I barely had a chance to gasp when my body suddenly moved on its own. By time I realized what happened, the man in front of me exploded and covered me in his splattered remains.

The blade clattered harmlessly to the ground as I stared at my outreached hand, wide-eyed and dumbfounded. I open and closed my hand slowly to test out whether or not I still had control of my body. I did. At the threat of being killed, my body reacted just as if Rayne was in control. I found a horrifying giggle escape my lips as my hand shook.

This was muscle memory. Rayne had killed so often with my body that it automatically acted on its own when threatened. I turned my attention to the rest of my team and the remaining enemies. Despite still locked in combat with Tenzo and Kakashi, they all watched me with avid caution. Itachi had finished off our target and moved on to assist.

I couldn't see his or Tenzo's expressions over the mask, but I found another laugh escape me as I took a breath. Then I took another and another before it felt like I was going to hyperventilate. Just before I could completely lose it, I found my consciousness shoved into the background and Rayne took control with a gleeful cackle.

"Down, down, baby, down by the riverside," sang Rayne as she darted towards the enemies without mercy.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM

Bodies exploded in quick succession as she slapped her hands on them as if she was playing a clapping game.

"Sweet, sweet, baby. I'll never let you go," chirped Rayne with a skip in her step as she moved onto the next one. I could only watch in silence as she eventually finished and let out a pleased sigh. "Ah, that felt much better."

"…Kasa?" questioned Tenzo with uncertainty as he turned to face us.

"Not quite," said Rayne with a waggle of our finger. "It's rather rude of Kasa-chan to not introduce us, but I supposed she'd rather keep me a secret."

"And you are?" asked Itachi evenly.

"Rayne the Downpour, at your service," drawled Rayne playfully as she gave a flourished bow.

"That's enough Rayne, give control back to Kasa, the mission's over," ordered Kakashi.

"I'm afraid she's a bit indisposed at the moment," replied Rayne as she pulled up from her bow.

"What happened?" demanded Kakashi, I could hear the scowl in his voice.

"Muscle memory, she freaked a little," shrugged Rayne carelessly. "It was bound to happen. Aren't you glad it happened in such an insignificant mission though?"

"How is she right now?" asked our silver-haired commander.

"Kakashi senpai?" questioned Tenzo in confusion as he turned to our silver-haired commander.

"Plain and simple," explained Rayne as she decided to save Kakashi the trouble, though I doubt it was out of kindness. "Kasa developed a split due to her inability to cope with killing among other
shit and you get me! Tada!"

"A split?" repeated Tenzo.

"Yep, I'm everything she hate and despise," said Rayne cheerily. "I do everything she doesn't want to, including telling you lot of my existence."

"Why?" asked Itachi evenly.

"Well," drawled Rayne in amusement. "One, this pisses her off and two, I rather neither of you try to kill me when I show up. Otherwise I would have to you blow up like these fine gentlemen here."

"Rayne," said Kakashi in a warning tone.

"Oh don't worry, I won't blow up anything essential," chirped Rayne.

I found myself wishing to bury myself further and further into the back of my consciousness. They're going to see me as a monster. They're going to think I'm no different from Rayne. They're going to—

"Empty threats," said Itachi before he pulled his hand back from poking our head. "Quit fooling around and collect the bodies."

"Did you just..." Rayne spluttered out in shock. "DID YOU JUST HEAD POKE ME YOU LITTLE DICKWAD!?!"

"Instead of wasting energy on your dramatics, we could go home sooner if you sealed up the bodies," droned Itachi as he turned to leave.

"You! You!" Rayne continued to splutter with indignation as she tried to regain control of the situation.

I found myself in hysterics as she stomped after the Uchiha heir with promises of death and permanent maiming. However, with Kakashi present, she couldn't very well enact on her promise and eventually retreated into the background huffing and fuming. When I regained control, my stomach immediately went into stitches as I continued laughing. Tears poured from my eyes as I laughed to the point I couldn't even breathe.

"O-only you Itachi." My body shook with laughter as I wheezed and struggled to regain any semblance of composure.

"Come on idiot, get off the ground," sighed Itachi as he grabbed me by the arm and hauled me to my feet.

While assassination missions still remained stressful, it felt slightly easier to cope compared to before. Tenzo still had some reservations whenever Rayne took control, but Itachi didn't seem bothered at all. To my amusement and Rayne's annoyance, he seemed to treat her violent threats as if it's nothing more than one of Naruto or Sasuke's squabbling arguments. If she tried to maim him, he was usually fast enough to dodge or retaliate in defense.

"Hold still!" growled Rayne as she attempted to murder him after one of our missions.

"Don't feel like it," drawled Itachi as he sidestepped her attack and continued on without a care. I guess he's not a prodigy for nothing.
"Itachi," sighed Tenzo on the sidelines. "You really shouldn't antagonize her."

Without me realizing it, somehow a year passed and the conflict with Kumo worsened. Missions became more and more frequent as each side tried to find a way to one up each other. At one point, all anbu teams were disbanded and assigned escort duty to shadow reinforcement squadrons of shinobi that relieved the injured along with the severely fatigued.

Kakashi was reluctant about the disbanding, but with enemies slipping pass the borders, it was imperative that the line of support and reinforcements didn't get cut off. I ended up escorting the demolition squadron in charge of sabotaging the area, laying traps and whatnots to catch those who managed to slip through the border.

Due to Santa's specialization in said traps, he was a part of the squadron with Tokuma as his partner. Naturally, things always seemed to go wrong wherever I go and the squadron encountered enemy forces before they could finish their handiwork, I jumped in and created the mass illusion of a ginormous dome of cards. Saboteurs as their namesake suggested, excel with traps and underhanded tactics. Give them enough time and toys they could make the battle field rain in blood and fireworks, but as frontline fighters, they were a bit lacking.

"Return to base! I'll hold them off!" I shouted over the battle cries as cow-shaped boulders rained from the sky and crushed several enemies in the process. The group stood dumbfounded for a moment before Tokuma and Santa decided to speak up.

"What the hell are you all waiting for? You heard her! Move!" snapped Santa before the squadron continued on to the base camp.

"Santa you go on ahead," continued Tokuma as he pulled out his shamisen and joined in with his own layers of genjutsu on top of mines.

"Like hell I'm leaving the two of you!" snapped Santa as he reached into his pouches and drew out a number of shurikens and his own variety of gas bombs. "Team Four fights together or not at all!"

The battle was violent, bloody and ruthless. Rayne took over at one point when I've finally ran out of cards and I didn't have enough time for dance seals.

"Bring it bitches!" roared Rayne with a cackle as she descended on them like a demon.

Out of the corner of her eye I could see Santa and Tokuma spare a glance towards use as they fought against their opponent. They hadn't even batted an eye when she blew up one body after the next. Barely any words passed as we were all engaged in fights. At one point Santa lost his footing and dropped to the ground. The opponent, who saw a chance, lunged at him with a kunai at hand.

"SANTA! I screamed and Rayne turned her attention to my fallen teammate.

"Tch, god damn it." She growled and turned heel to race towards him. I wasn't sure why she was racing to help him, but I didn't complain. I couldn't just let Santa die!

Before she could reach him, surprise crossed both of us as a familiar evil grin passed Santa's lips. The shit eating grin that meant he rigged the fuck out of the area with traps and the sucker coming at him was in for hell. Rayne spared a second to whistle as his handiwork unfolded.

"Damn, your teammate has some balls," quipped Rayne before she turned heel and dove back into battle. There were still too many around to relax.

By the time the battle was over, the three of us collapsed to the ground heaving in exhaustion with
our backs sprawled on the ground.

"So…" started Santa casually. "That's what three years in anbu looks like eh?"

"…You could say that." I huffed in exhaustion and started up to the cloudy sky. Rayne had retreated when the battle was over stating she didn't want to socialize after such an exhausting fight.

"Man, I'm kind of jealous," laughed Santa. "You're became more badass than either of us."

"Speak for yourself," snorted Tokuma.

"You want to say that to my face?" huffed Santa, but he was already spent.

"You're both idiots." I said with a laugh.

Things went on, I continued my escort missions with the Santa and Tokuma's demolition squadron. We've encountered several other Kumo teams that snuck through the border with little hassle. As I've noted before, Santa could be a frightful enemy if given sufficient prep time to lay out his traps and with Tokuma covering all his blind spots, the two were often near unstoppable when it came to dwindling the enemy's numbers.

When I wasn't with them, I was with my anbu team doing the occasional A-rank mission. Everything looked up despite me not knowing the extent of the war. It seemed like we were winning with how desperate Kumo looked each time they've encountered the saboteur team, but considering I was nothing more than a specialized grunt, it could mean anything.

By the time I turned thirteen, the war with Kumo headed into its fourth year. I don't know how long wars generally lasted, but I do know that peace rarely lasted more than ten years a time in this world… well, at least before everything changed. It couldn't have been more than four years between this war and the last. There should've been eight more years of peace, but because of my interference, that twelve years of peace became only four. My grasp in this world's future was fading fast and I couldn't do anything about it.

"I'll be on a mission for an undetermined amount of time. I won't be in contact for that time period," noted Kakashi when we crossed paths going to and leaving from the Hokage's office.

"Classified?" I asked curiously as I wracked my brains trying to think of any significant missions that he could go on. My brain came up with blank and Rayne didn't seem to have any that she wanted to supply either.

"To an extent," nodded Kakashi as he eyed me as if asking if I knew what his mission was about.

"…Good luck? I guess…" I murmured, not sure what else to say.

"You can't see much anymore can you?" asked Kakashi.

"Not really." I mumbled and ran a hand through my hair.

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" continued Kakashi.

"Not sure. I… really don't know what's going to happen right now. There was still a chance for things to go either way."

"I see," noted Kakashi to himself.

"Have hope?" I offered sheepishly.
"You seem to have plenty of that nowadays don't you?" grinned Kakashi wryly as he ruffled my hair into a mess. "Your hair's starting to get long."

"Yeah, was thinking about cutting it again, it's a pain to get the blood out, even after washing it there are still some left that clumps up my hair." I huffed and tugged at the tangled mess he made before eying his pristine silver-hair. "How do you keep your hair so clean anyway?"

"…Of all things you can ask me, you ask for beauty tips?" said Kakashi with a raised brow.

"What else should I ask? Your sex life with Anko?" I snorted.

"And here I thought you've finally given up on sullying my reputation," sighed Kakashi.

"Anko's technically 18 now, so it really shouldn't be a problem." I chirped.

"Stop trying to play match maker," sighed Kakashi as he pressed a firm hand over my head and I had to flail to get out of his hold.

"All my hard work in making sure you don't get blue balls and this is what I get?" I huffed and ran my fingers through my hair to untangle the mess.

"…I'm not going to dignify that with a response," said Kakashi bluntly with distaste.

"Aw, never saw you as a prude before." I grinned cheekily.

"While I'm quite sure your kunoichi classes cover quite a bit in that particular subject, I really question where you get these colloquial terms," muttered Kakashi before he shook his head.

"Anyway, behave yourself and be careful."

"Yes, mother." I chimed in before he shook his head again and left.

After going through so many field missions, sleeping on the dirt ground was expected. The luxury of shelter and a nice soft bed was not something that could be found outside of a town, but even so… don't I normally put down my sleeping bag before I decide to take a nap out in the middle of nowhere? And why am I face down on the ground?

"…sa!" a faint voice shouted through my muddled thoughts and ringing ears. Why were my ears ringing?

My body felt cold and heavy, even my eyes refused to cooperate. I tried to force myself to move, to do anything, but everything felt stiff and unresponsive. What happened?

Wake up you idiot! WAKE UP!

Rayne? The sound of her panicked voice cleared out some of the mind fog before my eyes dragged open to the carnage of an ambush. What… happened? I opened my mouth to take a breath and searing pain ripped through my lungs. Blades, there were blades stabbed into my back and through my lungs. This heavy coldness wasn't exhaustion, it was blood loss.

"Oh? She's still alive," drawled a woman's voice before I felt a foot against my back and yanked out one of the many blades in my back.

"Geh." I hacked out as blood spewed from my lips and my hands dug into the ground from the pain.

"Let her go!" snapped Santa a short distance away.
My eye blearily glanced towards him as he and Tokuma were on their knees and tied up not too far from me. I opened my mouth to say something, but no sound came out as the woman stepped harder into my back and forced another gush of blood spewing from my lips. Rayne… why aren't you taking over?

Don't you think I've tried? They have some sort of suppression seal on demonic chakra! I can't take over!

... This ambush was meant to target me. Why else would they have demonic chakra suppression seals?

"I don't think so," snarled the woman as she stabbed the blade back into my back again. "You three in particular have been a thorn in our side the last year. Do you know how many of our men you've killed?"

"If you don't want to die then stay out of our territory," retorted Tokuma icily. "This is war and—"

The woman hopped off my back and delivered a sharp kick to his face.

"Tokuma!" shouted Santa as he struggled against his restraints, but the Kumo-nin holding onto them shoved him to the ground.

"This is war," repeated the woman icily as she grabbed onto a handful of Tokuma's hand and yanked him up. "Don't take me for an idiot you brats. I'm not naïve enough to think that there wouldn't be any casualties, but with her." She turned to me with such hateful eyes. "No one ever survives an encounter!"

"This…" I croaked out as I pressed my arms against the ground and tried to push myself up, but the woman didn't give me a chance to as she dropped Tokuma and turned back to plant a foot on my head to keep me down.

"Hey!" snapped Santa as he lunged forward, but was yanked back before he could make more than two steps.

"This ambush is just to get you," growled the blonde woman as she continued to stomp at my head. "You filthy monster!"

"Stop it!" growled Santa as he fought to stop her. My vision swam with each blow and I found it hard to focus. "I SAID STOP! MIND TRANSFER JUTSU!"

The blows stopped and the enemies sudden roared into a chaotic flurry as the woman pulled away and charged at her allies. Santa must've somehow taken her body.

"Samui—" a squelching noise told me she had slit the throat of one of her allies.

"Kasa? Kasa!" shouted Tokuma when he was freed from his restraints and he scrambled over to me.

"P-pull off…" I gasped in pain with each breath.

"You're going to die from blood loss if I pull out the blades!" snapped Tokuma.

"Su…ppression…seals." I wheezed desperately.

It didn't take long for him to realize what I was trying to do and hastily pulled off anything that resembled an enemy seal off my body. He showed some reluctance with the blades, but even if he
didn't pull it out, I've already suffered a great deal of blood loss. Between the relentless head stomps and the decidedly lack of blood, my body shivered and the world spun.

However, as soon as the blades were out, he made quick work in forcing many of the tenketsu in my body open so that the chakra could flood my system. As soon as I grasped a substantial amount of chakra, I pulsed out two waves of Healing Wind around myself and Tokuma. The waves barely did anything for the injuries I sustained, but it looked as though Tokuma was slightly less worse for wear compared to before.

"Can you fight?" I asked Tokuma as I popped a handful of blood replenishing pills into my mouth, hastily chewing the copper-tasting pills and swallowed them Normally, no one should take more than two at time, but considering the amount of blood I've loss, I'm making an exception.

"Are you crazy? You could barely stand on your own," shouted Tokuma as he caught me by the elbow.

"We're not leaving Santa!" I protested, but before we could argue further, Santa let out a horrendous scream back in his own body.

"Santa!" Both Tokuma and I cried out as we turned to his fallen body.

However, we could do anything as the blonde woman named Samui descended upon him and drove the tanto, soaked in my blood, into Santa's skull. The blade buried hilt deep before the woman twisted the blade and cracked the skull open. Santa's blues eyes quickly dulled as his body slumped lifelessly to the ground.

"No…" whispered Tokuma as shocked and horror crossed his face. "SANTA!"

"…Santa?" I shook my head in disbelief, unable to take in what I was seeing.

"None…" snarled the woman as she turned her hateful gaze to us. "Of you are leaving."

"Kasa move!" Tokuma shoved me out of the way as Samui's reinforcements joined in the attack.

I dropped the ground, grimacing at the pain on my back as Tokuma dropped over me in a protective manner. While my hearing wasn't the best, it didn't take much for me to recognize the familiar sound of blade digging into flesh.

"To…kuma?" I whispered out, voice broken and scared.

"Run," wheezed out Tokuma before he coughed and I felt a splatter of his blood land on my cheek.

No… I stared up at him with wide eyes. No, no, nonononono. Why was this happening? Things were going so well? Why? Why did this happen?

"Kasa, you have to get out of here," Tokuma coughed before he was violently kicked away from me.

"Tokuma!" I screamed as I scrambled to my knees to get to him, but when I reached him and pulled him up into my arms… he was already gone.

My breath shook as I fought back a broken cry. My eyes burned as I clenched tightly to Tokuma's still form. No… no this can't happen. This can't happen! They weren't supposed to die! They weren't supposed to die!
"All that's left is you now. Do you think you could get away monster?" snarled Samui as she and her men surrounded us.

_Move over!

"No…" I whispered, voice cracking as I felt the tears pour down from my eyes.

_Idiot, what are you doing?

"No?" scoffed Samui. "You're not given a choice."

_Give me control! If we don't run, we're going to die!

"No…" I repeated as I rested Tokuma's body on the ground and with my shaking hand, I swept his eyes closed. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Bold words," spat Samui. "Let's see how well you—"

She never finished as I charged forward with cancerous chakra in my hands. The woman dodged, skipping away from my assault and I slipped into the more aggressive Uchiha style taijutsu. Kicking and punching whoever I could reach and ignoring any injuries I sustained from bladed weapons. Any contact I made on the enemy was immediately dosed with an unhealthy about of cancerous chakra seeping from my pores. Be it the contact by hand, by foot or even by the fucking headbutt I gave one of the enemies.

Within seconds, limbs were blown apart and a single head went flying into the distance. Their open wounds quickly healed over with a stub in place of the missing limb, but I gave none of them reprieve as I switched to the Hyuga style taijutsu with chakra scalpels at the tip of my fingers. I showed no mercy as I dug my hand into the enemy's chest and forcibly tore out their hearts.

In the frenzy of violence and grief, my mind blanked out. The rest of my body went on auto-pilot going purely on ingrained muscle memory from all of Rayne's kills. I wasn't even bothered by the fact that it wasn't her in control, killing all these people. This was me… all me…

By the time I came to my senses, everything was dead silent. Bodies and limbs strewn across the field as if someone had raided a puppet shop. With the exception of my own body, the rest of the corpses on the field looked relatively unscathed, with their healed over stubs. No one would've been the wiser to think these Kumo-nins had died in full health if not for the one body with the missing head have the opening of the neck heal over, the countless missing hearts and quite possibly a number of other missing organs.

Absently, I reached for the storage scroll attached to my thigh and whipped up a number of storage seals. The numbness didn't fade as I went about collecting the remains of each shinobi, either categorized under arms, legs, head, organs and torso. As I drew to a finish, I almost humored the thought of reassembling each corpse with their correct body parts, but when I reached Santa and Tokuma's bodies, the thought quickly faded. For them, I made them each a seal card instead of dumping them into a pile like I did the others.

"…I'm sorry…" I whispered as I clasped a hand over each of theirs before sealing them away. "I'm so… sorry…"

"W-whoa! What happened to you?" jumped back the anbu manning the mission desk when I returned later that week. I hadn't bothered with bathing or even changing, the blood had dried and caked over my skin and body like a harden shell.
"Ambush, all dead." I murmured quietly as I planted a deck of cards on the desk.

"All dead!??" said the other in disbelief before he turned his attention to the deck I set down. "And what is that?"

"Remains of the ambushing squad. You're going to need to put their bodies back together though. It took long enough for me to gather up their limbs as is." I murmured quietly.

"And… the saboteur squad?" asked the man hesitantly.

"Most of them are in the top card, their bodies should be mostly intact." I replied before flicking out two more cards into my hands. "These two though… I'll deliver these to their families personally."

"And the written report?" asked the man.

"Didn't feel like writing it, in short they ambushed and killed the saboteur team and I killed everyone in sight after that." I replied as I flicked Santa and Tokuma's corpse cards back into storage. "If hokage-sama demands a written report, I'll deal with him then."

"…Okay," murmured the other with uncertainty as I turned heel to leave. I probably didn't make it all that far before from the anbu building when I spotted Kakashi returning from a mission.

"…Kasa?" started Kakashi with an uncertain frown until his eye widened in recognition of the dry substance caked all over my body and clothes. "What… happened?"

"Heh, guess what Kakashi." I said cheerily with the biggest smile on my face. "I've finally managed to kill without Rayne's help anymore!"

"Kasa…" murmured Kakashi with an indescribable expression over his face.

"And it only took Santa and Tokuma's deaths! Isn't it great?" I said with forced cheer. "Think of all the missions I could do now! I—"

Kakashi pulled me in for a tight hug. "Stop…"

"What's the matter Kakashi? I'm fine." I said with a grin against his chest.

"Just stop…" whispered Kakashi. "You don't have to keep up this mask anymore."

"…I don't think I want to drop it anymore…" I replied quietly, the cheer disappearing from my voice as I leaned into his hug.
Insubordination

When I woke, it was to the familiar smell of Mikoto's cooking. I had no clue how I got there or why I was there, but it hardly mattered. The room was warm and the covers only made it worse. I rolled over until I was on my hands and knees before pushing myself up from the futon on the ground. The covers slipped off and I noticed I've been cleaned and changed.

Absently, I noted the size of the clothes and reasoned they were probably the ones Itachi's outgrown after his growth spurt. Had I been in a better mood, I might've made some sort of comment about always ending up in Uchiha clothing... but my heart wasn't in it.

It took a moment for my mind to catch up from the haze of sleep, but when it did my eyes widened in horror as darted my eyes around the room in a frantic panic as I searched for my things. Where are they? Where are Tokuma and Santa's cards!?

Not seeing my things anywhere in the room, I slammed the sliding doors open and stumbled out of the room. I crashed into the wall on the other side of the hall before I regained my bearings and raced down towards where the living room was with the veranda.

"Kasa-chan!" said Mikoto in surprise when she saw me. "What's the matter? You look—"

"Where is it!?" I snapped.

"Where is what?" asked Mikoto as she slowly rose from her seat on the ground.

"Where are my things!? Where are my cards? Where—"

"Kasa-chan calm down!"

"No! You don't understand! Santa and Tokuma are in those cards! I have to…" I bit my lower lip as I pressed a hand against my eye as I tried to keep myself from crying. I wasn't crying before, why am I crying now? "I have to…"

Mikoto silently pulled me into her arms and hushed me with soothing words as she brushed her hand over my hair. "You did your best Kasa. It's not your fault."

"But," I choked and wrapped my arms around her as if she was a life line. "You did your best Kasa. It's not your fault."

"But," I choked and wrapped my arms around her as if she was a life line. "If it wasn't for me, they wouldn't have…"

"People die in wars Kasa-chan, that's just the fact of life," said Mikoto softly as I choked back more sobs. "I know it hurts, it always hurts, but it'll get better with time."

"But I…" I clenched onto the back of her shirt as I buried my face into her chest and found myself bawling my earnest as tears, snot and whatever else came pouring out.

"Shh… shh…" murmured Mikoto soothingly. "Just cry it all out."

By the time I gathered myself again, my eyes were red and swollen. Mikoto had washed my blood-caked clothing and left them outside to hang dry and sorted my belongings into a neat pile in a box. My hand reached out and the chakra threads immediately connected to the cards before they floated into the air around me. There weren't many cards in the pile after the fight, I had no trouble finding Tokuma and Santa's cards before dropping the rest back into the box again.
…Santa and Tokuma.

The cards drifted into my hand as I stay seated at the edge of the veranda staring out into the yard. It was late in the afternoon and the sun's dying rays stretched over the walls, casting a looming shadow into the yard. My eyes didn't really focus anything as I flipped the two cards between my fingers in a practiced motion. To anyone else, this would likely seem as a great disrespect that I would play with the corpses of my teammates in such a manner, but… I can't bring myself to put them away or just simply holding onto them.

… My dear teammates.

I will eventually have to return them to their families for a proper burial, but at the moment I couldn't bring myself to face them. I've been to the Hyuga compound many times before and I've met with Inoichi, the head of the Yamanaka Clan several times for my psyche sessions, but I can't say that I've ever met Santa and Tokuma's immediate family… It just never came up. Between the missions and the countless crises that kept coming up, the only reason they've only met my family was because of my constant hospitalizations.

…Both dead.

And now… I'll see them for the first time, but I will have to deliver the news of their son's death. My hand stilled and I caught the two cards between my fingers and clenched my hand into a fist. The cards jutted up as though telling me to move and return them, that I have no right to keep them after causing their deaths. I took a deep breath and fell backwards in a sprawl on the wooden floors with my arms draped over my eyes.

…Dead, dead, dead.

"…You're a strange one," murmured Itachi as soft footsteps stopped next to me and he plopped down on the ground. "You rambled endlessly on things you could care less about, but when you quiet down to your own thoughts, you look like you were ready to cry."

"I'm not crying." I murmured.

"What were you thinking about?" asked Itachi.

It took a moment for me to digest the familiarity of his words before a weak grin tugged at my lips.

"…Pft, we had this conversation before didn't we?" A weak half-hearted laugh escaped my lips, but I didn't lower my arms.

"Even after all this time, you still can't deal with the silence," said Itachi.

"I guess I'm still the same useless idiot." I muttered. "Always fucking up."

"Same idiot, yes," said Itachi. "Useless, not so much."

"Yeah, right." I muttered.

"You managed to bring them back didn't you?" asked Itachi.

"Dead." I scoffed.

"That's better than most other KIAs," replied Itachi.

"…Stop trying to cheer me up, it's not working." I grumbled.
"You're not crying," said Itachi in turn.

I pulled my arm away from my eyes and swung it at him. He caught my arm and I swung my leg next to kick him. He shifted to his knee and used his other hand to catch my leg. Annoyed, I used my free hand and snatched up the remaining seal cards in the box. His took one glance at them before he let go my limbs and rolled off the veranda and into the yard.

"Tch." I hissed in annoyance and scrambled to my feet.

With my cards, I tossed out cow-shaped boulders at him as I jumped off the veranda and into the yard. He in turned, dodged and closed the distance between with a series of punches and kicks from the Uchiha style taijutsu. Cards empty and the boulder out of range to be resealed and thrown again, I pocketed Santa and Tokuma's cards before switching to the defense, using the Hyuga style taijutsu to block and redirect his blows.

"Ngh," grimaced Itachi when a jolt of defibrillation shot up his arm, but he hastily jumped back and shook it off before I could take advantage of his temporary stunned state. He glanced at his hand briefly before slipping back into stance. "Definitely, not useless."

"Shut up Itachi." I grunted before charging forward to attack again.

He side-stepped, careful to avoid any contact with my hands or any part of my body before dropping down with a leg sweep. I jumped back to avoid his attack, but he reached forward to snatch my leg and stopped my backward momentum. I threw my hands behind me to brace for the fall and swung the other leg at him again. He caught my other leg before hauling me off the ground and hung me upside down.

"Hey!" I protested as I tried to get enough momentum to swing backwards to get at him, but he kept counter balancing my swings. "God damn it Itachi! Put me down!"

"Make me," said Itachi with a drone.

"Fuck you little weasel! Put me down!" I growled.

"Don't feel like it," replied Itachi.

"Um… Brother? Kasa-nee?" said Sasuke with uncertainty on the veranda, messenger bag still strapped over his shoulder and Akuma in his arms as he stared at us with bewilderment. "What are you two doing?"

"Sasuke, your brother's an asshole, don't grow up to be like him." I snapped.

"Kasa, watch your language around my brother please," droned Itachi as he avoided the swings of my fist.

"Screw you duck boy!" I growled.

"Itachi! Put her down right now!" snapped Mikoto before he promptly released my legs and I landed face first on the ground.

"Ow!" I hissed as I pushed myself off the ground and pressed my hands over my face.

"Itachi!" scolded Mikoto, but she thought better as she stepped off the veranda to pull me up from the ground. "Kasa-chan are you okay?"

"Fine." I grumbled and shot a glare at Itachi, who seemed nonchalant as he climbed back up the
"What's wrong with Kasa-nee?" asked Sasuke in a whisper to his brother.

"She's just in a bad mood," said Itachi as he glanced back at me. "She'll be okay eventually."

"After I wring your neck." I muttered darkly.

"You're welcome to try," said Itachi with a wry grin tugging at the corner of his lips.

"Just wait till you go to sleep tonight." I growled.

"Itachi! Stop antagonizing her!" huffed Mikoto before she turned her attention back to me again.
"Kasa-chan, you should really be resting. Put away your boulders and we'll have some tea and snacks."

My anger slowly faded as I let out a huff and went to reseal the boulders back into their cards. My hand stilled and lingered after I pocketed the cards before I joined Mikoto and the Uchiha brothers in the living room for tea and cookies. As much as I hate to say it, Itachi did manage to distract me from Tokuma and Santa's death, even if it was just a little while.

"...Mikoto-san?" I murmured quietly once Sasuke had dragged Itachi off to help him with his homework and training.

"Yes?" asked Mikoto as she turned her attention to me.

"I'm... going to go to the Yamanakas and the Hyuga compound for a bit... to let them know the news." I murmured quietly as I nursed my cooled tea.

"Are you sure?" asked Mikoto, her brows furrowed with worry. "You could have someone else—"

I shook my head. "I want to do this myself."

"Do you want someone to go with you?" asked Mikoto.

"No," I fought back a snort of amusement as I shook my head. "I'll be fine on my own."

"You're sure?" asked Mikoto again.

"Yeah." I nodded. "I'm going to head home afterwards, so don't worry."

"Okay," said Mikoto with reluctance. "If you need anything, you can always come back here."

"Thanks." I said with a faint grin before I pushed myself off the ground and gathered my things.

The Uchiha matriarch saw me off to the door and gave me one last hug before I left her home and district. The walk from the Uchiha district to the Hyuga compound took some time, but it gave me a chance to think of what to say before I got there. None of the guards there gave me much trouble since I've been there so many times to train with Hizashi sensei and Tokuma... but I guess that's going to change now.

"Hizashi sensei." I greeted the man once I've made it through the various halls of the branch household and reached the veranda where he trained with his son Neji.

"Kasa," returned the man with his usual formal greeting, but frowned when he took a good look at my face. "What happened?"
"...I'm... here to return Tokuma to his family." I murmured quietly.

The man's eyes widened in surprise. "Tokuma's..."

"I'm sorry." I gave a deep bow from the waist. "I couldn't save him. I—"

I felt a hand rest gently on my head.

"You've done what you could," said Hizashi gently and pulled his hand back. "I'll deliver him to his family."

"But..." I glanced up to him, but paused at his sullen face. "...Yes sir."

I handed Tokuma's card to him and bowed once more before I left the Hyuga compound and left for the Yamanakas next.

"Welcome to the Yamanaka..." greeted a blonde little girl at the counter of the florist shop, but she trailed off at the sight of me. I'm not sure why she stared, but judging by her age and appearance, I'm guessing this was Inoichi's daughter, Ino.

"Hi, is your father home?" I asked quietly with a strained smile on my lips and she nodded slowly. "May I speak with him please?"

"Um... sure..." said the girl in bewilderment before she hopped off from her chair at the counter and scrambled towards the stairs. "DADDY! Someone's here to see you! DADDY!"

"I hear you! I hear you!" shouted Inoichi back as he came down the stairs. "Who is...Kasa?"

"Good evening Inoichi-san." I greeted quietly and a frown crossed his face.

"Do you need to talk about—"

I shook my head. "I'm just here ask for directions to Santa's home... I just want to return him to them."

The frown melted from Inoichi's face in understanding. "Of course, I'll take you there."

I wanted to protest and say that I could go myself, but I couldn't find the energy to do so.

"Daddy?" asked Ino with confusion over her face.

"Tell your mother to start dinner without me. I'll be right back," said Inoichi before leaving the shop with me following behind him.

The walk was silent at first, but eventually, I found the energy to speak up.

"Do you want to know what happened?" I asked.

"Is it essential that I know?" He glanced at me.

"...Not really." I mumbled.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Inoichi.

"No... I just thought maybe you wanted to know." I answered.

"You don't need to tell me if you don't want to, but if you feel better talking about it, feel free to
"come to me," offered Inoichi. The silent, I will keep your secrets was left unsaid.

"… I don't want to say anything right now… but if I do in the future… could I?" I asked.

"Of course," replied Inoichi.

The rest of the trip remained in silence as we made it to Santa's home. His mother was a shapely woman with flushed cheeks. It took a moment for me to notice the resemblance to some of the Akimichi clansmen. Huh… I guess all this time I mentally joked about him being part Akimichi was true… a bit sad that I only found out now.

The woman covered a hand over her mouth to fight back the tears as I apologized and handed her the card that stored Santa's body. She shook her head in disbelief before letting out a heart-wrenching sob. Inoichi stepped in to console the woman before signaling for me to leave. I gave them both a bow before I left the woman at Inoichi's capable hands.

As I made my way back home, I took a deep breath. The weight of Santa and Tokuma's death still lingered heavily on my heart. Even though I've returned them and apologized, it didn't make me feel any better. My fingers twitched, longing to hold their cards again, but that wasn't going to happen.

"I'm home." I announced softly when I entered.

"Sasa-nee!" cheered Naruto as he bounded over and hugged my around the waist. "You looked tired, are you okay?"

"Naruto," chided Kushina as she glanced at me with a worried expression. "Leave your Sasa-nee alone. She just got back."

"But mooom!" protested Naruto.

"No, it's fine." I reassured her as I ran a hand through Naruto's hair and ruffled it fondly. "How have you been? Did you learn anything new at the Academy?"

"Of course!" chirped Naruto as he dropped his hands from around my waist before grabbing my hand and dragging me further into the apartment. "I got to tell you about what happened to Sasuke and Sakura-chan! You won't believe what she did to him today!"

"Yeah?" I humored him with a faint grin as I allowed him to drag me to the couch while he rambled off.

Naruto's ramble about his day and his recount of what happened between Sasuke and Sakura became a comforting background noise as I did my best to abate the grief of the death of my teammates. I couldn't block it off completely. How could I? They were my teammates. They were… my first connections that wasn't a part of the grander scheme of things. Around them, I never had to worry about changing the future for the worst or affecting the outcome somehow.

They were supposed to be safe. They were supposed to be…

"Sasa-nee?" asked Naruto quietly that night when he cuddled up next to me in bed. Despite being eight, he still acted like a child whenever I was home and demanded to sleep in my bed.

"Yeah?" I murmured quietly.

"… You're not going to disappear are you?" asked Naruto quietly.
"No… why do you ask that?" I murmured with my chin rested on top of his head.

"It's… nothing," mumbled Naruto as he hugged me tighter. "Just don't… disappear without saying anything okay?"

Isn't this sad? Even Naruto noticed something was wrong with me. I gave a sigh and returned his hug. I almost forgot, this was all for his future. All this change was for a better future for him and everyone else.

"I promise." I murmured and pressed my lips on top of his head. "I won't disappear."

"Kakashi?" I said in surprise the next morning after Naruto's left for school. Kushina glared dangerously at him at the sight of him, but restrained herself as he wisely stayed at the door. "…Do we have another mission?

"No," said Kakashi with a shake of his head. "Hokage-sama wants to speak with you."

"Oh…" I murmured as I took a step back. "Give me a moment, I'll get changed into my gear."

"That won't be necessary," interrupted Kakashi before I could turn to leave.

"…Why?" I asked.

"You're being reassigned," said Kakashi.

"Re… assigned?" I repeated uncertainly. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," said Kakashi quietly. "You did nothing wrong."

"Then why…" I trailed off.

"It'll be explained when we speak with the hokage," said Kakashi as he glanced towards Kushina. "Sandaime said you may come as well if you like."

"I damn well will," growled Kushina as she planted a hand on my shoulder. "If he had given Kasa-chan another mission so soon, I would have a few choice words with him."

"Kushina-san, I'm fine… Really." I patted her hand with a forced grin.

"Don't worry Kasa-chan. You take as much time as you need to recover," said Kushina as she glared at Kakashi.

Kakashi said nothing else as we left for the Hokage's Tower. Kushina stood firmly between us throughout the whole trip. At another time, I would've found this hilarious. Hiruzen's sadden eyes rested on me when we made it to his office.

"Kasa-kun," greeted the man. "How are you?"

"…Could be better." I shrugged.

"I'm sure Kakashi's already given you the reason why you're here today," noted the man.

"I'm… being reassigned?" I replied.

"Yes," agreed the man.
"…May I ask why?" I frowned. "If I did something wrong, I could—"

"This isn't a punishment," interrupted Hiruzen.

"Then why are you taking away Kakashi, Tenzo and Itachi?" I asked quietly.

"It has been brought to my attention that you're no longer ideal for the Anbu Corps," continued Hiruzen. "As such, you will no longer be Kame and will be reassigned accordingly."

"…Doing what?" I asked, not bothering with manners anymore.

"I'm promoting you to tokubetsu jounin and reassigning you to teach the first aid and iryo-ninjutsu curriculum at the Academy," replied Hiruzen.

A pause. I'm… being promoted? And…

"…What?" I said in a deadpan when the later portion sank in.

"I said it quite clearly, do you need me to repeat it?" asked Hiruzen.

"…Put me back in anbu." I said bluntly.

"Kasa-chan!" said Kushina in surprise.

"As I've said before, you're no longer suitable for anbu," said Hiruzen.

"Put me back in anbu." I demanded.

"Kasa-kun," sighed Hiruzen.

"No!" I snapped and pointed a rude finger at him. "If you think that giving me a promotion and sticking a murderer like me with a bunch of brats is going to make things better then you're fucking insane and senile! Put me back in anbu!"

"No," said Hiruzen calmly.

"A monster like me has no right to be around kids! I'm just going to get them killed just like I do everyone else!" I growled.

"We need more healers than fighters on the field," reasoned Hiruzen. "Kakashi has noted that you've developed a healing technique that's capable of healing multiple targets at the same time. I want you to pass that knowledge on."

"That technique can kill if used incorrectly!" I snarled. "I'm not teaching it!"

"I'm ordering you to teach it," said Hiruzen with a firm tone and a stern gaze. "This is not up for discussion. Teach the class and find suitable candidates that are capable of learning and using it."

"If I don't, then what? You're going to kill me? Turn me into a breeding pig? Toss me to Kumo?" I spat before Kakashi covered a hand over my mouth and pulled me back.

"Kasa Mon," boomed Hiruzen, his eyes lighted dangerously.

"Hokage-sama, please forgive her," said Kakashi as I scratched at his arm, trying to get him to let go. "She's not in her right mind at the moment. Just give a couple of days to cool off and she'll be back to normal."
"Kasa-kun," said Hiruzen dangerously. "While I understand you are grieving over the death of your teammates, I am still your leader and you will obey me. This blatant disregard for authority and insubordination is not acceptable. A repeat of this misconduct and I will have you punished accordingly. Are you clear?"

I glared at him, but Kakashi hastily shoved my head down in a bow.

"She is, Hokage-sama," replied Kakashi before he hissed against my ear. "Stop it, this is not the time or place for this."

With much reluctance, I nodded and Kakashi released his hold on me.

"Kasa-kun?" said Hiruzen as my attention turned back to him.

"Crystal." I grounded out as I returned to the standard anbu posture. "Anything else, sir?"

"You may take the rest of this week to recover, but I expect you at the Academy next week to look over your curriculum and plan your classes accordingly with the other Academy teachers," said Hiruzen as he released a slow breath. "I expect you to do this to the best of your abilities and not sabotage any of the potential shinobi candidates."

"Yes sir." I said and resisted a scowl. As if I would let my grudge against the man ruin the lives of the children he so willing tossed into the grinder. "May I be dismissed sir?"

"Leave," said Hiruzen with another sigh.

"Hokage-sama, may I have a word?" asked Kushina as I turned to leave the room.

"Of course," said Hiruzen as he turned his attention to her next.

I felt the childish urge to slam the door behind me, but thought better and stomped off. I don't even care anymore, I just wanted to get out of that room.

"Kasa," said Kakashi as he chased after me.

"Not talking to you!" I snapped and stomped my way out of the building.

"Kasa!" repeated the man as he continued to follow.

"Go away! I don't want to talk to you!" I shouted and took to roofs, but I didn't get far before he grabbed onto my arm and pulled me back.

"Stop and listen to me," snapped Kakashi as he gripped tightly to my arm.

"You told him to take me out of anbu didn't you?" I snapped. "Why? You put me there in the first place! Why would you take me out now of all times? I just got the hang of it! I could kill—"

"That's the anger talking," said Kakashi as he cut me off. "You don't want to be in anbu and you can't be in anbu anymore. You've already done your job solidifying your reputation as the Crimson Terror. If you continue to go onto the field now, they will target you. You've become a true threat in their eyes now. You're a solid A-rank, bordering S-rank at this point in their bingo books. There's a kill-on-sight order for you!"

"You think I care?" I growled.

"You may not care for your life, but there are still other people who do!" snapped Kakashi with a
"Did you think about how your dad would feel if you died? About Naruto when he asks what happened to her Sasa-nee? About Obito? And everyone else that you leave behind if you died? Are you okay with making them sad too?"

I grew quiet.

"Your life is not worthless. You are not worthless," grounded out Kakashi. "If I have to beat you senseless and toss you into the Forest of Death for another week for you to realize this, I will."

"Shut up! Shut up! SHUP UP! I HATE YOU KAKASHI! I HATE YOU!" I snapped, but regretted it almost immediately at the neutral expression that crossed his face.

"That's okay," said Kakashi quietly.

"Kakashi… I—"

"It's okay," said Kakashi as he released my arm. His hand looked as though he was going to ruffle my hair, but he held back and dropped it instead.

"I didn't—" I tried to say, but he already disappeared in a flurry of leaves. "Kakashi…"

*He knows you only said that out of anger…*

"…Rayne, I…" I shook my head and dropped my shoulders dejectedly. "Never mind… Just forget it."
A week later, I stood in front of the Academy gates, reluctant and annoyed. I never thought I would find myself back here and as a teacher of all things. Shouldn't graduation mean that you would never have to come back?

"...Here, I go." I muttered under my breath darkly as I dragged my feet forward, but before I could, a firm hand pressed onto my shoulder.

Instinctively, I ducked down and caught the stranger's wrist. Chakra rushed halfway through my hand before I violently clamped it down. Despite having left the battlefield for nearly two weeks, my body still reacted the same as though I was still there, still fighting. Towards anyone unfamiliar, my body screamed to stun, to kill, and to get away from any and all threats. If I had been a second later, the stranger's offending hand would've been blown off.

"What are you doing here? There are no classes today," chided an unfamiliar voice.

"I'm not a student." I replied and released his wrist without a second glance.

"Don't lie to me, those moves you just did could hardly come from a civilian school student," said the stranger.

"I told you I'm not a student." I huffed in annoyance as I turned to leave.

"Hey, I'm not done—"

Before he could grab me this time, I reached out with an open palm to meet his out reached hand and sent out a light jolt of the defibrillation jutsu. With a yelp, he dropped to one knee and grabbed the shocked arm in pain. I had intended to walk away after that, but paused at the sight of a familiar scar across the bridge of his nose. Where have I seen that before?

"Iruka sensei! Kasa sensei what on earth are you two doing?" shouted Daikoku sensei as he raced out from the Academy to meet us.

My eyes widened a slight margin when I realized why the man on the ground was so familiar, but the surprise disappeared almost as quickly as it came when Iruka turned to me with his own look of disbelief.

"Sen...sei?" he blurted out in shock. "This kid is a sensei? She's barely older than our recent graduates!"

"I'm sure it's disorienting." I droned with a deadpan as I crossed my arms.

"She couldn't have been a shinobi for long! How could you let her teach—"

"I graduated to genin at age seven, chunin at age nine and tokubetsu jounin in the field of iryo-ninjutsu last week. Do you need more or should I write up a resume for you?" I drawled.

Iruka wisely clicked his teeth shut closed his mouth while Daikoku sensei laughed sheepishly at our exchange. Apparently, I wasn't the only new teacher in the staff roster for this semester. Iruka was
reassigned to the Academy after he had taken injury during a mission. Compared to her, he had several more weeks under his belt when it came to handling kids. I should try to be nice since we were technically colleagues, but I couldn't even muster the energy to try. Call me childish or petty, I don't give a damn.

I'm tired of pretending that I'm not.

"Onto the new syllabi for the classes offered this cycle," noted Daikoku as he continued on with his orientation. "As some of you may have noticed, first aid classes are now mandatory for all students due to the recent losses in the war. Admission rates…"

I stopped listening and idly doodled on the orientation packet I was given. It was like sitting through classes all over again. Even if this was a necessary evil to ensure the next cycle of classes go smoothly, I hate the bureaucracy of it all. The only reason why I'm even here was because I supposedly developed a multi-target healing technique. Of course, they never consider that if done incorrectly that same technique could very well kill everyone.

…Unless that was what they were aiming for.

My hand stilled and I raised it to rest my chin on its backside. Prior to this, the Academy never offered any classes relating to iryo-ninjutsu. Simply because not everyone is suitable for iryo-ninjutsu. On top of the need for perfect chakra control and stamina, the field of iryo-ninjutsu was highly dependent on the person's affinity to the medical arts. Those who became iryo-nins either have a strong interest in the field or like me, have family or family friends in the field to teach them.

Most won't learn about iryo-ninjutsu unless they choose it as their specialty after they reach chunin. That was the main reason why my medical knowhow wasn't considered in my grades towards graduation until my last try. The Academy just didn't teach iryo-ninjutsu. Not that I could blame them. It was already hard enough to handle immature brats with sharp pointy weapons and developing chakra coils, including iryo-ninjutsu in the curriculum was just asking for trouble.

…Which brings me back to why the hell did Hiruzen put me here as a teacher? Was he doing this for shits and giggles? Oh, you've just slaughtered an entire squadron of enemy shinobi? Great! Let's put you with poor impressionable children and traumatize them with a mass murderer. Maybe with any luck, we'll get more psychopaths like you!

*High-functioning sociopath.*

Shut up Rayne.

My eyes followed the twitch of my pen as I absently rocked it between my fingers. I don't want to be here. I fought back a sigh as I resisted the urge to brush my hand over the doodles with burst of chakra just so it would register as a faulty seal and blow up… Good lord, I sound like a kid trying to get out of class by pulling the fire alarm…

"…sa sensei? Kasa sensei!" called out Daikoku before I snapped out of my thoughts and glanced up to him with disinterest.

"I heard you the first time, just say what you want." I muttered, not showing any indication that my attention drifted.

"Well… you are in charge of handling the majority of the first aid classes and have final decision on who can advance to your iryo-ninjutsu class," noted Daikoku. "I just thought you would like to expound on what you plan to do with those classes?"
"Are there any other senseis that will be teaching this class?" I droned.

"No, but—"

"Then there's no need for me to say anything." I replied. "As none of you are iryo-nins you have no authority on my teaching methods."

"We're just concern—"

"About my ability to teach or my age?" I retorted, not giving them a chance to continue. "I'll admit, I have no interest in being here nor any interest in teaching either."

"What?" the room broke into a flurry disbelief murmurs.

"Unless there is anything else that's relevant to my classes, I find no need to continue sitting through this mockery of an orientation. It's obvious that my reassignment to the Academy is not taken with high regard." I said as I stood up. "If any of you are concerned about my teaching methods, you may sit in during one of my classes. Whether or not I take your critique afterwards is up for debate."

"Kasa Mon," snapped Suzume, my former kunoichi sensei as she took stood from her seat. "Just because you've advanced to tokubetsu jounin does not mean you can disrespect us as though we're beneath you."

"On the contrary, Suzume sensei, I'm the one that's being demeaned as though I'm still an Academy student." I drawled with heavy condescension as I swept up the orientation packet and strolled towards the door. "I have no interest in humoring your frivolous power play just because you all have an inferiority complex over having a former student as a colleague. Now, if you will excuse me, I will be taking my leave."

Before any of them could say another word, I was out of the room and down the hall. I don't even care if that was just all pointless confrontation. If they have a problem with it, they could lodge a complaint with Hiruzen. With any luck I probably annoyed them all enough for him to send me back to the frontlines. Anything was better than being here.

"Hey wait!" shouted Iruka behind me as his footsteps grew closer.

"Touch me again and I'll make sure you'll be writhing on the ground in agony." I warned icily before he came a few steps short from me.

"What is your problem?" snapped Iruka. "There's no need for your behavior back there. You did nothing more than make yourself look like a spoiled little brat."

"And what if that was my intention, Iruka sensei." I dragged out in a challenge. "I've already said I have no interest in teaching. Why would it matter to me if I crossed every sensei in the Academy?"

"I don't understand how you even made it to the rank of tokubetsu jounin! If you can't even get along with your colleagues, how could you get along with—"

"You want to know how I earned this fucking rank?" I spat furiously as I grabbed him by the collar and yanked him down to my eye level. "I earned it by watching my teammates die in front of me. I earned it by staining the battlefield red with the blood of the bastards that killed them."

Iruka's eyes widened as he grew quiet at my words.

"You think I want this rank?" I snapped, heat building up in the back of my eyes. "You think I
wouldn't give everything I have just to get them back? Do you?"

"I… didn't know," said Iruka quietly.

"It doesn't matter what I do." I muttered darkly as I shoved him away. "Nothing will bring them back."

Iruka remained awkwardly silent as I turned my heel and continued down the hall. I'm not sure if he decided to follow, but I made a beeline for the bathroom in case he did. With the door closed behind me, I made my way to the sink and hastily turned the knobs. I cupped my hands under the stream of water before I ducked my head down and splashed my face over and over again until I was drenched.

"Damn it… damn it… damn it!" I hissed in frustration as I gripped at the sides of the sink. I hate this. I hate feeling like this! Why the hell am I… my eyes widened as I felt a familiar sensation trickle down my leg.

…You've got to be kidding me.

Pft… haha!

It's not funny.

Of course it's funny. Here, I thought the grief drove you into an emotional asshole, but it turns out you were just going through puberty and PMSing. Oh, the hilarity of it all. Now, I don't have to worry about a potential crazed avenger! Oh happy day!

I'm going to ignore you now.

Ignore me all you want, you know you're an asshole.

Not listening.

Time to whip out the sekihan! Red beans and red rice! Time to cele—

Shut up Rayne!

As much as Rayne's incessant teasing annoyed me, her presence did help with the fluctuating spectrum of emotions. Instead of directing my anger outwards towards the world, she redirected them inwards and onto herself. In a way, she was sort of doing what Itachi tried to do before, distracting me by making herself a target. Normally, I would question why she would do something like this to help, but… I can't help but feel a little grateful for what she did…

You do know you're going to have to go say sorry right?

I take that back.

Uh huh… Did you happen to have packed for your current situation?

…

I'm sure Suzume sensei probably has some, but if you're determined to be an ass, you could always just walk home leaving a trail of blood… or rooftop and rain—

"I'm going!" I cut her off before she could continue.
Thought so.

"...I hate you." I muttered darkly as I did what I could to clean up.

I love you too.

Mentally, I tossed every insult I had at Rayne as I dragged my feet back to the staff room. When I made it to the door, I found my teeth gnawing at my lower lip with reluctance. I had left in a bout of childish temper tantrum... to go back and apologize was a bit... embarrassing. With a deep breath, I raised a hand to rap the door, but it slid open before my knuckles could knock against it.

A surprised Daikoku sensei stood on the other side with a number of senseis behind him, all ready to leave. The orientation was already over.

"Kasa?" said the man evenly as I shuffled uncomfortably with my head duck down.

"I'm..." I forced the words from my throat as I bow down sharply. "I apologize for my behavior. I shouldn't have...I mean..."

The words wouldn't come out. While my body was technically still a teenage girl, I have the memories and experience of a full grown woman... maybe not all of it anymore, but enough trigger that stupid sense of pride that won't let you suck it up and apologize. What I did earlier was stupid. Regardless how angry I am at the whole damn situation, antagonizing the people I have to work with would only make it worse. Hiruzen wasn't going to reassign me because of a couple of complaints.

"...Kasa-kun, while I and the other senseis appreciate that you've gained enough maturity to admit you were wrong in your outburst, you have to understand you are a teacher now, not a student. We could sweep this incident under the rug and pretend it didn't happen, but I highly hope that there will be no repeat performances in front of the students when classes start again," noted Daikoku with his usual lecturing tone.

"Yes sir." I murmured quietly as I raised my head to meet their eyes again. "Um... can I... speak with Suzume sensei privately please? If she doesn't mind?"

The man blinked in surprise before turning his body to glance back at the woman. She raised a brow at the request, but nodded in silent agreement. She waited in the room while the rest of the senseis cleared out. Iruka gave me an indecipherable look before he broke his gaze and followed the rest of them out. Aside from me, he was the youngest sensei among the group. I wonder what sort of first impression I left on him...

The thought didn't linger for long as I stepped into the room and closed the door behind me quietly. Suzume sensei stared at me with furrowed brows, no doubt wondering why I requested to speak with her privately.

"Um..." I started awkwardly looking at my feet as I did my best to keep my legs together.

"What is it?" asked the woman evenly as she did her best to keep her tone civil despite my childish tantrum earlier.

"Suzume sensei... would you..." I mumbled, face flushed red with embarrassment. "Happen to have a sanitary napkin that I could use? I... just..."

The room stayed silent. I hesitantly glanced up to meet the woman's eyes. She seemed to be at a loss for words as her furrowed brow rose in surprise.

"...Is this what that was about?" said the woman in disbelief.
I ducked my head down further, partially in embarrassment and partially in annoyance at the stupid fluctuation in pubescent hormones. Instead of being able to properly grieve over the deaths of my teammates, I'm being tossed around in the unpredictable spectrum of teenage emotions. How am I supposed to tell if what I'm saying was really what I intended or it's just another bout of uncontrollable teen angst?

"Come along, I have some in the office," murmured the woman as she waved for me to follow. She didn't look as upset as she had earlier, but it didn't mean she was completely sympathetic to my plight.

*Think of it this way. She'll be more understanding of your bitch fits if you have another anytime soon.*

You're enjoying this too much.

*Just a smidgen.*

I hate you, you know that?

*Always.*

Hours later, the waves of unbearable pain descended upon me while Rayne laughing at my misery. It's been so long, I've forgotten what it felt like.

"Someone please kill me." I gritted my teeth as I pressed a hand against my lower torso to stem the pain from my insides tearing itself apart.

This was one of the few things I did not miss about adulthood and unlike my previous life, pain killers did little to help. Due to my built immunity towards poison and drugs, my body broke down anything I took within the first hour. The only thing I think I haven't built up against yet was alcohol, but I doubt anyone would give me another drop with my previous bout of alcohol poisoning.

*I find it amusing that despite having died several times in some of the most gruesome manners imaginable, you find this more unbearable.*

"Why don't you take over instead then?" I growled miserably under my breath as I forced myself through one of the many training forests in Konoha in search of herbs and whatnots needed for the next day's lesson plans.

*Nah, I'm good, you seem to have the hang of it.*

"If I could, I would gut you with an honest to god smile on my face." I muttered darkly.

*You say the sweetest things.*

I hate you… I hate you so much…

"Sasaa-nee, what's that bunny for?" asked Naruto the morning after, by the time I made it home the night before, he was already asleep.

*Class.* I grumbled out darkly as I nursed the hot cup of tea against my head. After trying various remedies, the best I've found to deal with the pain was a hot water bottle and hot drinks.

"Oh! You're going to start teaching today?" chirped Naruto cheerily as he poked a finger in the cage and scratched the rabbit's ear. "…But what are you planning to do with a bunny in class? Aren't you teaching first aid?"
"Naru… I'm glad you're curious, but please leave Sasa-nee alone for now, she's in a lot of pain." I murmured miserably, not caring that I spoke in third person.

"Hmm?" He tilted his head with innocent confusion over his face. "Why are you in pain?"

I gave a tired sigh and reached out to plant a hand on Naruto's head. "Naru, one word of advice for when you get older. If ever you see a girl acting like I am now. Be a sweetheart and get them a hot drink and some painkillers."

"Okay… why?" asked Naruto, confusion still prevalent on his face.

"They'll be less inclined to kill you if you piss them off." I murmured.

"Um… Huh? I don't get it," said Naruto.

"You'll get it when you're older." I muttered and ruffled his hair.

"Shouldn't you two get to school? You're going to be late," said Kushina as she picked up our empty bowls and plates.

"Yeah! This is going to be so cool! Sasa-nee's going to go to school with me!" cheered Naruto.

"…Can I call in sick?" I muttered darkly and dropped my head to the table in a loud thump.

"Kasa…" said Kushina gently as she rested a hand on the top of my head. "I know you don't want to do this, but it's better than cooping yourself up at home."

"Ngh…fine…" I grunted reluctantly before I chugged the hot drink down and scalded my throat as it went. With another dark grumble, I got up, grabbed the cage with the rabbit and stomped towards the door.

"Eh? EH! Sasa-nee! Wait for me!" shouted Naruto before he scrambled off to grab his bag and chased after me.

The walk to the Academy was filled with Naruto's chattered about anything and everything that came to mind. If I was in a better mood I would humor him and respond, but with my current state, he should be happy that I bothered giving him grunts of acknowledgment.

None of the students gave us more than a passing glance, but the few parents that accompanied the younger students did. Naruto seemed oblivious to them, so I didn't bother with a confrontation… for now. If they dare start that isolation bullshit then there would be hell.

"I'll see you at lunch okay?" shouted Naruto to me as he darted into his classroom.

A smile tugged at the corner of my lips as I shook my head and continued on to the staff room. With my hands occupied, I couldn't slide the door open. I thought about using chakra on my foot to stick to the door and slide it open that way, but before I could go through with it, the door opened and Iruka was on the other side.

"…Good morning." I greeted after a moment of awkward silence.

"…Good morning," returned Iruka quietly as he took a step back and allowed me to enter first.

I blinked in surprise at the courtesy, but dismissed it a second later as I stepped in and moved towards my desk. I still had to grab my notes and student roster before I went to my first class.
"About yesterday," murmured Iruka.

"Hmph?" I glanced back at him and noted an uncomfortable expression across his face.

"I'm sorry," mumbled the man. "I didn't know about…"

"Forget it." I said. "I wasn't in the right either. Regardless what happened, I should've kept my temper instead of acting like an Academy student. I'm probably not suited for teaching, but orders are orders and I have to do as I'm told. Don't you also have lessons to teach today?"

"About that," said Iruka sheepishly as he scratched that side of his face. "I'm supposed to sit in on your classes the next couple of days to give you some pointers and to... stop any mishaps if they happened. The other senseis suggested it before you came back at the end of the orientation."

No doubt because of my bratty behavior from the day before.

"Understood." I nodded.

"I'll refrain from interrupting your class while you teach, but if things go sour…" He grimaced. "Please don't get offended if I cut in."

"...You're surprisingly very accommodating after what I did yesterday." I said with a raised brow.

"Well, we are colleagues now and... you technically outrank me," said Iruka sheepishly.

"Huh... I do don't I?" I said offhandedly with a shrug. "Since you're being so amiable... I guess I'll refrain from petty retribution."

"Um... did you have something planned earlier?" asked Iruka worriedly.

"Nothing permanent or seriously detrimental." I commented as I stacked my files on top of the rabbit's cage. "I don't make a habit in killing my colleagues, but... let's say covering their undergarments in itching powder or drugging them senseless isn't above my moral code."

"...That's a joke right?" said Iruka with a sheepish laugh.

"It would have been." I replied with a sadistic grin.

He paled and I found a sadistic sort of glee run through me as I picked up my things and moved towards the door again. I was always aware of my own pettiness, but I have no issue with it. Something about outranking someone older than you and messing with their head just seemed funny. This would be construed as bullying, but I'm taking whatever pleasure I could get from this shitty predicament I have. It's not like I'm turning the man into my gofer or torturing him unjustly. Keep telling yourself that.

I ignored Rayne's comment and continued forth towards my first class. Things will be fine. How hard could it be to teach a bunch of brats about first aid? Sasuke and Naruto seemed to pick it up pretty easily when I ran a mock lesson with them the previous week. Besides, my first class is with the oldest batch of Academy students that's due to take their graduation exams soon. What could possibly—

"Hey, isn't that Kasa?" said one of the students as I walked in.

"You're right!" said another. "It's really Kasa the Umbrella!"
"What happened dead last, did you suck at being a ninja so much that they demoted you back to an Academy student?" jibed another.

Oh right… I forgot… I graduated early. If I followed the standard graduating process, I would've been in this class. I found myself taking a deep breath as I collected myself. I can handle this.

"Welcome back Kasa the Umbrella!" mocked the little brats.

This is going to hell isn't it?

Rayne only laughed louder in my head.

…Shit.

Chapter End Notes

Year x772 Ages:
Age 8: Rookie Nine, Gaara, Suigetsu, Karin
Age 9: Team Gai, Sai
Age 10: Team Sound, Kankuro
Age 11: Haku, Deidara, Temari
Age 13: Kasa, Itachi
Age 14: Hana
Age 15: Kabuto, Shisui
Age 18: Zaji, Muta, Kotetsu, Izumo (RIP: Santa and Tokuma)
Age 19: Tenzo, Iruka, Mizuki, Anko
Age 21: Kakashi, Obito, Rin, Gai, Zabuza
Age 22: Asuma, Ibiki, Kurenai, Shizune, Ebisu
Age 32-39: (The "Adults")
Age 45: Jiraiya, Tsunade, Orochimaru
Age 60+: Hiruzen Sarutobi, Danzo
"Welcome back Kasa the Umbrella!" mocked my former classmates.

I felt a twitch under my eye as I took a slow breath. Rayne continued to laugh in the back of my mind while Iruka look as though he was about to step in.

"Kasa—" started Iruka, but I interrupted him before he could continue.

"Please take a seat Iruka sensei, I can handle this." I said as I walked over to the podium and set down the cage and notes.

He looked hesitant, but said nothing else as he took a seat by the board where a lone chair sat. The class look confused as they glanced between him and myself. During that time, the rabbit's cage was on the podium and I stood off on the side to clearly show the hitai-ate tied onto of my obi. They grew quiet when they realized I wasn't here as a student.

"Since you all know who I am already, I'll skip the basic introduction and get straight to the point." I said as I glanced over the vaguely familiar faces. "As of today, I will be your first aid sensei and if any of show an affinity for the medical arts, you will be given the chance to continue onto my iryo-ninjutsu class after the completion of this one."

Silence befell the room for a moment before a maelstrom of disbelieving cries followed.

"What? You're the sensei?"

"You're kidding right?"

"How could that happen? You're a dead last!"

"No way, this is a prank isn't it? Isn't it?"

I took another breath and tapped my fingers impatiently against the podium as I waited for them to get this out of their system. It was pointless to say anything while they were still in their state of disbelief and I had no interest in screaming over these brats. At the corner of my eye, I could see Iruka shifting as though he wanted to speak up, but before he could I narrowed my eyes and sent out a carefully measured wave of killing intent to silence the rowdy room.

"May I remind you that these first aid classes are mandatory." I said lowly as they all dropped into their seats with their breaths held and fear clear on their faces. "As in if you do not pass this class, you will not be qualified to even take the genin exam, much less graduate."

"Kasa sensei," said Iruka as he fought back the urge to yell stop. He was worried that I would go too far with the killing intent and stop all their hearts in the process.

To ease his concerns, I lessened the wave of killing intent and the students gasped in a much needed breath, but kept silent as they stared at me with wide and terrified eyes. Some even pressed their hands over their mouths to keep from making a sound.

"Don't mistake me for Daikoku sensei, Suzume sensei or even your own mothers. I'm only here to teach you how to keep yourself and maybe your teammates alive if you even manage to make it to genin." I said as I lowered my lids and kept my voice even. "I will not coddle you. I will not take your bullshit and I definitely will not give a damn if you decide to leave my class. Now, if you're still
interested in becoming shinobi, I suggest you pay close attention in this class."

I canceled the last of my killing intent before their tense bodies slumped onto their desks, some even fought against the urge to cry. Iruka looked as though he wanted to jump up to reassure them, but stopped when I turned to grab the class roster and flipped it open.

"When I call your name—"

"Y-You can't do this!" stuttered a boy as he slammed his hands on the desk as stood up glaring at me.

"And why is that?" I drawled and rested the bottom of the book against the podium.

"You have no right to—"

"If you have a problem with me as your sensei, then take it up with Hokage-sama." I brushed him off. "In short of Hokage-sama, the only other people that outrank me are full ranked jounins. So unless you become a jounin or the hokage himself. I don't care what you think."

"Iruka sensei! You're going to—" He turned to the only other sensei in the room.

"Iruka sensei is a chunin." I cut him off. "I am a tokubetsu jounin specialized in the medical field. In no way does he outrank me in rank or specialty. Now sit down."

"I refuse to—"

SLAM!

"Kazuhiko-kun!" shouted his fellow classmates as they stared at him struggling to push himself off his desk.

"Kasa sensei," said Iruka as he tried to stand up, but only found himself dropping back down once more. I had tagged everyone with a gravity seal while they were distracted by the killing intent. "What on earth?"

"Kazuhiko, is it?" I drawled as tapped the roster book against the podium in a soft thrum. "I don't care if you call me sensei. I don't care if you call me dead last, Kasa the Umbrella or any other inane name you think up. My job is to make sure you lot are capable of performing first aid."

"Y-you," grunted the furious boy as his sharp blue eyes glared at me.

"Once you could do that, then neither of us would have to see each other's face again, but until then you're stuck with me, got it?" I said as I twitched a finger and sent a tiny bit more chakra into the gravity seal.

"G-Got it," said Kazuhiko before I canceled the chakra.

"Good boy." I said before I canceled Iruka's seal as well and went back to my roster. "Now, when I call your name, answer. Iwata Taiten."

"H-here!" yelped one of the other boys in the room.

The rest of the class went without another incident. Most were too scared to say anything or ask any questions… I probably will need to fix that later when I test their levels in chakra control to see if they had the potential to advance to my next class, but for now it works. I have no qualms in them fleeing the moment class ends.
"Kasa sensei," said Iruka once the room emptied. "Don't you think that was a bit extreme for a first class?"

"Iruka sensei, you know full-well the battlefield is neither kind nor glorious." I replied as I flicked my wrist and retrieved the unused gravity seals. "While I have no interest in teaching, I won't carelessly pass anyone who can't even pass basic first aid."

"…Are you sure it's not out of…" started Iruka hesitantly. "Pettiness?"

"Hmm?" I glanced back at him with a dull gaze. "I could hunt them down outside of the Academy and slam their smug little faces into the ground if ever I felt like it. Trust me when I say I don't need to fail them in order to sate my pettiness."

"And the killing intent?" asked Iruka.

"Subtle conditioning." I shrugged. "They'll have to face it eventually and if they can do first aid while under the stress of that, even better."

You totally pulled that out of your ass.

What are you going to do about it?

…I like this new you.

"Are you going to use the same method on the younger students?" asked Iruka worriedly.

"Iruka sensei, do you have a problem with my teaching methods?" I sighed.

"It's… a bit ruthless," noted the man. "While trauma does build strength in character, it can also become detrimental as well."

"…Fine, I'll limit the mental scarring." I muttered under my breath as I collected my things and grabbed the cage.

"Thanks…" murmured Iruka before he pointed to the cage. "So, what's the rabbit for? You didn't actually do anything with it in class."

"Morale and motivation purposes." I replied bluntly. "Children do have a fondness for cute and fluffy things don't they?"

"Uh… I guess?" said Iruka with uncertainty.

"If they get too traumatized, they can hold Mr. Bunny." I said in a deadpan. "Anything else?"

"…I guess not," finished the other.

"Good, then if you'll excuse me… I some business to attend to." I muttered darkly and stomped off the staff room to drop off the rabbit and my things before heading towards the bathroom.

On top of dealing with the headache that was my previous classmates, now students, I also had to deal with the random gushes of blood while teaching. While Tsunade has developed medicine that could temporary halt a kunoichi's menstruation cycle, it's not something that should be taken often as it raises the risk of health issues like stroke, heart attacks and the usual list of unfavorable side-effects.

Normally, the use of the medication was reserved for sensitive missions like assassinations or scouting where the scent of blood would compromise the kunoichi's safety. However, for village-bound kunoichi like Rin, Kushina and myself, there was no need for us to use it. As annoying as
having to deal with this minor inconvenience it was better in the long term if I refrained from the medicine. This technically being my first menstruation and it's best not to mess with the natural progression of puberty unless I want screw myself over.

In the time that it took for me to teach first aid throughout the various classes, Mr. Rabbit was handed to countless students to curb their tears and terror at the supposed fearsome reputation I've gain from the first class. There were vague whispers about soul stealing or some other nonsense, but I didn't really pay attention about it. It didn't matter what they said about me as long as they don't give me problems.

"Kasa-sensei!" called out the same idiot from my first class, Kazuhiko Nemoto.

If only that reputation and first impression worked on everyone.

"What is it?" I sighed as I turned away from the board and glanced back at him with muted annoyance. Even if I found him annoying, as a teacher I had to keep an objective mindset when it came to students.

"What's the point in first aid if we have iryo-nins?" asked Kazuhiko smugly. "We could be using this time to learn better—"

SLAM!

"Hiee!" screamed his surrounding classmates as I waved my hand idly.

"What's the point in learning better things if you're not alive long enough to use it?" I droned. "Not every team has an iryo-nin and even if you do end up in a team with one, what happens when you get separated and end up bleeding to death because you don't know how to stop it?"

"K-Kazuhiko-kun?" whispered one of his other classmates as he twitched on his desk.

I did my best to limit the corporal punishment I dish out to the students… but this idiot doesn't know when to let up.

"Iryo-nins are lame! They can't even fight, always in the back—"

SLAM!

"We'll be covering the medical protocols set down by one of Konoha's most profound iryo-nins, Tsunade-sama." I said without glancing back as I wrote out the list of procedures and rules on the board. "Who, by the way, is an expert iryo-nin and formidable kunoichi in combat."

"Kazuhiko, you should really stop," hissed his friends as classes continued.

With the way the curriculum was organized, first aid classes took no more than a week. All students were required to take a refresher course once every two cycles until they graduate. That meant, I spent the following weeks to scout out potential students with reasonable chakra control and inclination towards iryo-ninjutsu before actually starting iryo-ninjutsu classes.

Most of the scouting involved sitting through countless ninjutsu classes as a spectator and unnerving any and all students that had taken my first aid class Unfortunately, children often have abysmal chakra control due to their still developing bodies. Very few possessed the natural talent in chakra control unless they were clan children or trained extensively on top of classes outside the Academy. I barely found nine students across all the classes… well, there were more, but those turned down the
invite.

*I wonder why?* Rayne drawled sarcastically in my mind.

When I had wrote out the list of students that I saw as potential iryo-nin material, I didn't expect to see so many familiar names. Of course, having taught almost all the first aid classes, I've seen nearly every students' name at least once. However, that wasn't what surprised me.

What did surprise me was the final class roster for those who accepted. A number of them I had only included to show I was being fair throughout all the grade levels... They weren't supposed to accept.

"Yo, *Kasa sensei,*" drawled Kazuhiko with a smug grin.

SLAM!

"Ow! I didn't even do anything that time!" protested the dark-haired boy.

"Pain builds character." I droned as I glanced over the class roster and fought back the urge to smash the book against my face as I read through the names. "Sakura Haruno."

"Here!" chirped the pink-haired girl as she looked at me with the brightest grin on her face. She seemed genuinely happy to be in my class. A faint grin tugged at my lips before it disappeared again.

"Hyuga Hinata." I murmured.

"Here," said the Hyuga heiress softly, but to my surprise there was no meekness that quavered in her voice. If anything there seems to be an underlying air of certainty... interesting.

"Hyuga Neji." I continued.

"Here, *Kasa sensei,*" replied Neji respectfully. He didn't seem all that different, but with how often I've been to the Hyuga compound and trained with Hizashi sensei and Tokuma, he was less likely to treat me with disrespect compared to some other people. Hmm, that's to be determined.

"...Kazuhiko Nemoto." My eyes darkened at the name of one of the few people I didn't want to see in my class.

"H-here," croaked out the idiot before I sent another wave of chakra to slam him into his desk again. "W-what did I do now?"

"Nothing, my hand slipped." I replied.

"You weren't even using—"

SLAM!

"Whoops." I said in a deadpan before continuing. "Keiko Sasaki."

"Here!" shouted the brown-haired girl with a ponytail in a panic as though afraid I would do the same to her as I did to Kazuhiko. She was an underclassman a year younger than me when I was still in the Academy, but aside from that I had no other memory of her.

"Nozomu Kusnoki." I ticked off as he sat up straighter in attention... this one I have no clue who he was, but his chakra control seemed pretty good during my observations and his performance in my first aid classes weren't that bad. "Tenten."
"Here sensei!" shouted the girl just as excited as Sakura. I haven't interacted with her much beyond the first aid class, so I really had no clue why she was happy to be in my class. I supposed it had something to do with her dream of becoming the next Tsunade, but I really didn't care.

"Sasuke Uchiha." I noted as I glanced to the smiling Uchiha. Him, I did not expect to see in my class at all, considering my memories had him as a combat specialist. Why was he here?

"Here Kasa-nnn sensei," corrected Sasuke in the last second as he tried to make it seem like he didn't almost slip up and called me Kasa-nee.

"Ino Yamanaka." I continued and fought back the dread pooling at my stomach. There were too many people in this class connected to Naruto's future.

"Here!" said Ino with her usual bout of confidence. Unlike most of my other students, she disregarded most of the rumors that floated around, but kept a healthy amount of respect to my authority. I don't imagine she would give me much trouble.

I glanced over my nine students… or at least it was supposed to be nine.

"…Naruto, why are you here?" I sighed at the grinning blond who sat next to Sasuke.

"I want to learn iryo ninjutsu too!" said Naruto brightly.

"You didn't pass my chakra control assessment." I replied dryly.

"But—" protested Naruto.

"No," I said bluntly. "Iryo-ninjutsu is volatile and without good chakra control, you run the risk of hurting yourself and whoever you're trying to help."

"But I'm practicing chakra control every day!" whined Naruto as I grabbed him by the back of his shirt and hauled him out of the room.

"Then can come back when you've mastered them." I said as I dropped him lightly outside the door, opposed to chucking him out into the hall if he was anyone else.

"Aw, but you let Sasuke and Sakura join!" pouted Naruto.

"Go complain to Iruka sensei and stop interrupting my class." I said before flicking his forehead and sliding the door close.

"Stingy!" shouted Naruto on the other side with a huff before he stormed off.

"Now that's over." I muttered under my breath as I turned back to the remaining students in the room. "Let's start today's lesson."

"Um… Kasa sensei?" asked Sakura with a raised hand.

"Yes, Sakura?" I acknowledged.

"Can't Naruto still sit in with the class even though he has bad chakra control?" asked the girl in confusion. "He could still learn about other iryo-nin related stuff while he trains up his chakra control can't he?"

"If this was any other class, I would have no problem in letting him sit in." I replied as I walked over to the podium where the cage sat with Mr. Rabbit. "However, like I've told Naruto, iryo-ninjutsu is
considerably more volatile compared to any other type of ninjutsu, screwing up a transformation or a clone jutsu is less detrimental compared to a healing jutsu."

"But how bad could it be if he did?" asked Tenten curiously. "Wouldn't it just not work?"

I breathe out through my nose as I opened Mr. Rabbit's cage and pulled him out. I had hope to save this lesson for a later date, but if Naruto continued to persist to join in the class before his chakra control issues were resolve it could only mean trouble. Under normal circumstances, it wouldn't be too much of a problem as most people wouldn't have enough chakra to cause lasting damage.

However, with Naruto as a jinchuriki with one of the most potent bijuus in existence, his potential to screw up was higher than even me. I ran a hand over the rabbit's soft fur before I turned my attention back to the class again.

"This here is Mr. Rabbit. I'm sure you're all quite acquainted with him by now," I started evenly as confusion crossed their faces. "Like all living things Mr. Rabbit is vulnerable to getting injured."

"What… do you mean?" asked Ino with uncertainty, her voice sound discomforted by my words.

"I'll show you." I said as I switched my hold on the rabbit to its ears to keep it from running.

"Wait, Kasa sensei what are you—" Hinata spoke up, but never finished as a chakra scalpel materialized in my hand and I stabbed it into the rabbit's foot.

The class screamed in surprise, shocked that I would act so ruthlessly with such a short and abrupt warning. Blood dripped to the ground as the rabbit whimpered and shook with fear in my hand.

"This is what happens when anything alive gets stabbed." I continued as I ignored the pale faces of my students. "The skin rips, the muscles tear and blood gushes from the open wound."

They all watched with wide and terrified eyes.

"With a skilled iryo-nin, such an injury is a simple fix." I brushed a glowing hand over the screaming rabbit's foot before the small stab wound sealed up with nothing more than the bloodstain as proof of its injury. I shifted back into my arms and petted it soothingly to ease its terror. "However, that wasn't what you've asked was it Tenten?"

"K-Kasa sensei," said the previously excited girl as she shook her head in horror and disbelief.

"Your question was… wouldn't the healing jutsu not work, if someone screws up." I repeated calmly and despite the fact I haven't released any killing intent, they all remained stunned and horrified in their seats. "In some cases, yes, nothing happens if the person doesn't have ample amount of chakra to perform whatever medical jutsu they're trying to do. However, in the case of the person having more than enough chakra to perform the jutsu and screwed up…"

No one said anything, all too afraid to trigger another bout of unexpected violence from me to the rabbit. I glanced down at the shaking rabbit with a half-lidded gaze as I continued to brush a hand over its soft fur.

"I'm sure you're all smart enough to come to your own conclusion of what would happen in that case." I said as I brushed a soothing wave of healing chakra over the rabbit's head and lulled it to sleep. "If ever, any of you dare to fool around in my class, you can be certain Mr. Rabbit will demonstrate first hand on what would happen when you screw up. Do I make myself clear?"

Sweat beaded down the side of their faces as they nervously nodded, still too terrified to talk.
"Good." I said as I continued the lesson with rabbit still in my arms. It wasn't until I returned it back into its cage at the end that any of them dared to relax and take an easy breath.

"So… how was your first class?" asked Iruka after I made it back to the staffroom.

"Hmm…” I hummed thoughtfully as I set my things on the desk and pulled out the rabbit to clean off the blood. "Better than I expected, I guess."

"…Kasa sensei, why is there blood on the rabbit?" asked Iruka.

"It's menstruating." I replied bluntly.

"…Isn't that rabbit male?" pointed out Iruka.

"It had a sex change." I added.

"…Okay…” dragged out Iruka awkwardly.

"So how were your classes?" I asked cheerily as if nothing had happened.

Knock, knock

"Kasa-nn sensei," said Sasuke as he opened the door, a grimace crossed his face when he realized he nearly slipped up again.

"Still having trouble calling me sensei?" I said dryly before he flushed red.

"Did you want something, Sasuke?" asked Iruka as he passed a confused glance between the two of us.

"Nah, he's just waiting for me to finish up. I'll be a done in a bit, go get Naruto and we'll walk home together, okay?" I said as I went back to cleaning the rabbit and his cage.

"…Wait, walk home?" asked Iruka in confusion. "Kasa sensei, you live close to the Uchiha district?"

"Not really." I answered as I placed in some clean newspaper into the cage before putting the rabbit back in. "But it is on the way home."

"And you mentioned… Naruto?" noted Iruka with a frown. "He's not even one of your students."

"What are you talking about sensei? Naruto's her little brother," pointed out Sasuke. "Of course they would walk home together."

"Little… what?" said Iruka in disbelief. "But you two don't even—"

"We're not blood related, but it doesn't mean he couldn't be my little brother." I replied as I fixed the water bottle and food dispensing unit and closed the cage. "Heck, Sasuke's pretty much my little brother too."

"Euck! Kasa-nee! Your hand's dirty!" protested Sasuke as he dodged my hand when I tried to reach over to ruffle his hair.

"…What?" said Iruka, dumbfounded.

"Stop being such a big baby. Where's Naruto?" I asked and I went back to shuffling my books into a
"Oh, he went ahead," said Sasuke with a shrug. "I think he's still sulking about the class."

"Still? I guess I'll have to talk to him when I get home." I sighed before clapping my hands clean and glanced to the baffled chunin with a grin. "I'll see you tomorrow Iruka sensei."

"Bye Iruka sensei!" said Sasuke politely before he followed me out of the staff room and we left an utterly confused and lost Iruka behind.

Compared to my morning walks with Naruto, the walk home with Sasuke was considerably quieter. While the young Uchiha still talked, he didn't do it in the hyperactive manner like Naruto and most of the topics he brought up were either class related or something to do about Itachi's inability to keep his promises. I fought back a snort at Itachi's hypocrisy and refrained on making a comment on how he always gave me grief about keeping my promises.

"Well, say hi to your mom for me." I said as I dropped him off at his house.

"You sure you don't want to come in? I think brother might come home later tonight," said Sasuke.

"Nah, I have a sulky Naruto to deal with. See you in class!" I waved with a grin and left for home.

"Bye, Kasa-nee!" shouted Sasuke brightly as he returned the grin and wave.

My smile lasted for as long as I was in the Uchiha district. Once I left, the smile faded and I let out an exhausted sigh. While the classes at the Academy kept me plenty busy during the day and the boys kept me distracted the rest of the time, I was just barely coping. Whenever I found myself with a moment of down time, my thoughts trailed back to Santa and Tokuma.

It's been a month since their deaths. At times I still found it hard to believe that they were gone. I kept imagining that Santa would out of the blue just show up with his usual grin and tease me mercilessly about anything he thought would annoy me. Tokuma would follow up with calling us both idiots and telling us to grow up. I gritted my teeth and pressed a hand to my face as a forced a grin to my lips.

I'm such an idiot. That's not going to ever happen again. My breath hitched as I fought back the tears that welded in my eyes. However, before a sob could escape a single sprig with blue flowers appeared in front of my face. I blinked in surprise when I recognized the small thing as forget-me-nots and glanced over them to see who held them out.

"…Shisui?" I said in confusion at the sight of the older Uchiha.

"Yo," greeted the older teen with his usual grin. "Long time no see."

"Yeah…" I murmured and waved a vague hand at the flowers. "What's with this?"

"What? I can't randomly decide to give people flowers at a whim?" chirped Shisui.

"Who are you and what did you do to Shisui?" I droned with a raised brow.

"What makes you think I'm not me?" asked the other with a mischievous grin.

"Well, for one thing, you haven't declared your undying love for me." I drawled and crossed my arms.
"Oh! How foolish of me!" said Shisui with mock horror as he dropped to his knee. "Kasa, my love, my darling, my eternal light! Could you ever find it in your heart to forgive me?"

"… Pft." I covered my mouth in a snicker. "Be careful Shisui, what would Hana think if she saw you doing this?"

"Eh, she'll understand," said Shisui cheerily as he hopped back to his feet and tucked the sprig of flowers dead center at the top of my headband as if my head was a pot.

"You have no fashion sense whatsoever." I snorted in amusement as I pulled the flowers from its perch and rolled the stem between my fingers.

"I do my best," said Shisui offhandedly before we started walking again and slowly caught up with what happened since the last time we've seen each other.

I can't really remember when was the last time we really spoke with each other after the disbanding of Team Karasu. It wasn't like we haven't seen each other in between missions, just only there were rarely enough time to do anything more than annoy Itachi in passing. Come to think of it, I have no clue what sort of missions Shisui was on while I was in anbu. Was he still chunin? Or did he become jounin already?

"So, sensei huh?" drawled Shisui.

"Don't even start on that." I huffed in annoyance.

"That bad?" laughed Shisui. "Well, I for one wouldn't mind going to school again if I have Kasa sensei to teach me."

"Most of my students would argue otherwise." I retorted in a deadpan.

"Ah, they just don't know Kasa sensei is just a big softy inside," snickered Shisui.

"To them, you're either insane or a masochist." I snorted.

"Oh, then punish me Kasa sensei, I've been a bad boy," joked Shisui with a falsetto voice and fluttered his lashes playfully.

I found my sides in stitches and I wiped away a stray tear as Shisui continued to make a fool of himself just to make me laugh. By the time we made it back to the apartment, I had almost forgotten the dark thoughts I had in the brief moment I was alone.

"Hey Kasa?" said Shisui before we parted at the stairs.

"Yeah?" I grinned back at him.

"Just know you're not alone okay?" said Shisui with a soft grin. "If you ever need a laugh, come get me and we could go stick Itachi in a dress or something."

"Hehe." I snickered at the thought. "Sure… and Shisui?"

"Yeah?" replied the other with a grin.

"Thanks for cheering me up." I said.

"Think nothing of it," said Shisui as he turned to leave. "Try to relax a little okay? You're going to end up as high-strung as Itachi one of these days if you keep stressing yourself out."
I snorted at the thought and he laughed before finally leaving. As I made my way up the stairs and towards the apartment, a small grin tugged at my lips and I shook my head. Joking with Shisui, oddly, reminded me of Santa. While it still hurts whenever I think about my teammates, it didn't hurt as much as before. Maybe with time… everything will be okay…
"I'm home." I said as I walked into the house.

"Ah, Kasa-chan! Naruto told me to not tell you that he's over at Seishuu sensei's," chirped Kushina cheerfully.

"…But you're telling me." I noted bluntly.

"Oh did I?" laughed Kushina, even though it was clear she did it on purpose. "He seemed upset, when he came back. Did something happen at school today?"

"I'll go talk to him." I sighed as I turned to leave. "He's probably just sulking because I wouldn't let him join my iryo-ninjutsu class."

"Go easy on him okay?" said Kushina cheerily.

"… Go easy?" I raised a brow at her.

"It's okay to be Kasa sensei at school, but don't you think Naruto would listen better to Sasa-nee at home?" quipped Kushina.

"…Right." I murmured.

"Dinner will be ready in a bit, be a dear and drag Seishuu sensei over when you're done," said Kushina.

"Got it." I said as I left the apartment and walked next door.

Maybe I was a bit harsh or him. He probably just wanted to be in the class because Sasuke and Sakura. I'm not surprised to his attachment to Sasuke since they practically grew up together with Mikoto and Kushina's closeness. His attachment to Sakura was a bit surprising, considering how all his blabbering about Sasuke and Sakura painted the two as enemies and rivals rather than friends. Under normal circumstances, I might have assumed he had a crush on the pink-haired girl, but he hardly seemed interested in her in that manner.

Knock, knock…

"Who is it?" came Seishuu sensei’s voice from the other side.

"It's Kasa." I replied. "Can I speak with Naruto please?"

"TELL HER I'M NOT HERE!" shouted Naruto.

"Naruto, I can hear you." I said with a grin tugging at my lips.

"NO YOU CAN'T!" shouted Naruto.

The door opened with an exasperated Seishuu sensei on the other side.

"Take him home and take him now," grounded out the man with black bags under his eyes.

"…Have you not been sleeping well Seishuu sensei?" I asked curiously at the tall man that looked more wraith than human.
"I'll be fine once you get him home," said the man darkly.

"You look like you're about to murder someone." I chirped cheerily.

"I just might," muttered Seishuu sensei.

"I'll get him out of your hair." I held back a snicker as I walked passed him and into his home.

Compared to our apartment next door, this unit felt almost sparsely sparse with the lack of
decorations and homeliness. The scatter of calligraphy brushes and drying scrolls on the ground
made the place looked like an art studio, but what really made it looked lived in was the sulky little
blond boy curled up under the short table in the middle of the room.

"Naru." I called out to him as I made my way in.

"I'm not here," huffed Naruto as he made a great show of ignoring me.

"Are you angry at me for not letting you in my class?" I asked as I plopped down next to the table.

"No." He puffed up his cheeks and did an odd crabwalk underneath the table to turn away from me.

"Are you sure?" I asked with a tensing tone as I crawled around the table and laid on my stomach to
meet his eye level.

"I didn't want to take the class anyway," muttered Naruto under his breath with a pout.

"Then why are you sulking?" I asked.

He said nothing and buried his face in his arms.

"Naruto?" I reached out and poked the bit of cheek that was still exposed.

"...I though having Sasa-nee as a sensei would be different," mumble Naruto.

"Different?" I repeated with a raise brow. "Did you expect I coddle you and give you good grades
without you putting any effort?"

"No!" shouted Naruto as he shot up, but promptly smacked his head into the table above him and
dropped back down cradling his head. "Ow..."

"Then what did you expect to be different?" I asked.

"I... I don't know," mumbled Naruto dejectedly. "Most of the senseis doesn't seem to like me."

"Are they being unfair?" I asked with a frown.

"...Not, really?"

"What do you mean not really?" I asked.

"...They were at first... but when mom found out, she went to the Academy and scared everyone
senseless... It was kind of embarrassing."

"Ah..." I said with an understanding grimace. I could see Kushina turning into a mama-bear and go
out for blood for whoever wronged her baby unjustly.

"I just thought... with Sasa-nee, I would finally have a sensei that didn't hate me," mumbled Naruto.
"...Do all your senseis hate you?" I asked quietly, with all the changes that happened, I'm not sure what stayed the same and what changed.

"I want to say Iruka sensei is different, but..." He trailed off.

"But?" I asked.

"...Never mind, you won't understand even if I told you," mumbled Naruto.

"Is that so?" I raised a brow at his words, the bout of emo-ness in his words was a bit surprising, but I supposed kids could start their angst early. "What do you want to do about it then?"

"Huh?" Naruto glanced up at me with confusion.

"The reason why you want to be in my class is because you want thing to be different right?" I asked. "Since I've already told you that you can't be in my class for your own safety, what are you going to do instead to make things different?"

"...I," mumbled Naruto at a lost before he deflated. "I don't know."

"When you figure it out, let me know." I said as I reached over and ruffle his hair. "As long as it doesn't hurt you or anyone else, I'll see what I can do to help."

"Really?" asked Naruto in surprise as he glanced at me.

"Have I ever broken a promise to you?" I huffed.

"Itachi-ni said you always break your promises to him," pointed out Naruto.

"Are you Itachi?" I asked in a deadpan.

"No," answered Naruto.

"Then it doesn't apply." I said certainly.

"But how come you treat Itachi-ni different compared to me?" asked Naruto curiously.

"Because Itachi is an ass." I retorted.

"So, it's okay to break promises if the other person is an ass?" asked Naruto with a confused frown.

"Kasa, what the hell are you teaching him?" sighed Seishuu as he stood over both of us.

"The extremities of my inner pettiness." I answered easily.

"...Why are you a teacher?" groaned Seishuu as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I'm not doing this by choice you know." I answered.

"You're a horrible role model," muttered Seishuu.

"Would you like a hand at imparting Naru with your oh so wise advice on how to deal with people then?" I quipped dryly.

"Er..." grimaced Seishuu as he looked down at Naruto's wide innocent eyes and attentive face.

"Well, Seishuu sensei?" I grinned mischievously as the man looked like he bit into a sour lemon.
"...There is no one definite rule on how people should treat each other. Some people go by the treat others how you want to be treated. Others, like your sister, treat people at their own whim..." lectured Seishuu awkwardly.

"And what method do you use to interact with others sensei?" I scoffed.

"Glad you asked," said Seishuu as he reached down and hauled us both by the back of our collars. "I prefer the throw them out and hope they get the point method."

With that, he dropped the two of us outside his apartment and slammed his door shut a moment later. I sat there dumbfounded for a second before I hopped up with indignation.

"How is that any better than what I do?" I snapped at the door, but received no response in return.

"Hehe," sniggered Naruto as he glanced up at me with a grin from where he sat. "Seishuu sensei does that a lot to everyone that goes into his place for too long. Mom said he's shy."

"Shy my ass." I huffed as I clapped the back of my clothes clean. "Anyway, what have we learned today from this little chat?"

"...People are complicated and we should try to be more understanding?" offered Naruto uncertainly with a tilt of his head.

"Nope, everyone's an ass." I said bluntly and propped both hands at my hips.

"...Are you sure?" asked Naruto.

"Definitely." I said as I reached out a hand to pull him up. "I say just go with your gut instinct on how to deal with people. If you want to be nice, be nice. If they upset you... just don't get caught when you do otherwise."

"...Don't get caught?" repeated Naruto with a frown as he grabbed my hand and pulled himself up.

"There's nothing wrong with playing harmless pranks on people you don't like as long as no one gets hurt." I shot him a bright grin.

"Pranks?" said Naruto before a mischievous grin crept across his face.

"Yep, if they're going to be annoyed and angry anyway, why not give them a reason to be annoyed and angry about?" I nodded curtly.

"Really?" asked Naruto excitedly.

"Just make sure you don't get caught." I repeated again to get the point across before giving an evil grin of my own. "Nothing would piss them off more than to not know who did the prank."

"Right!" agreed Naruto with a happy nod. "Um... but you're a sensei... aren't you supposed to..."

"As far as I know, I haven't seen or heard you plot anything against anyone." I said offhandedly. "And as long as you don't do it in front of me, I wouldn't be lying when I said I had no clue who did what."

The smile that lit up Naruto's face was brighter than any sunny day I've seen in weeks. I found myself with an armful of a laughing blond little boy before I hugged him back and ruffled his hair again.
"All right, now that it's settle, we'll start our initiative with dragging Seishuu sensei over for dinner." I declared.

"Go away!" shouted Seishuu from the other side of the door.

"Yeah! Let's get Seishuu sensei!" cheered Naruto before we promptly broke into our neighboring calligrapher's house and dragged him out to join us for dinner.

"Damn it you brats! There's a reason for locks on the door! You're not supposed to come in!" snapped Seishuu as Naruto dragged him by the hand and I pushed him from behind.

"Seishuu sensei, you keep forgetting about one thing." I chirped.

"And what's that?" grumbled the man as he glanced back down at me.

"We're ninjas, those rules don't apply to us." I cackled.

"All right! Everyone here?" I called out to my small little group. Most of them looked half dead and cranky at the early morning.

"The sun's barely up," whined Kazuhiko with a loud obnoxious yawn. "And it's Saturday, why do we have class on Saturday?"

"Because I said so." I retorted, but generously didn't slam him into the ground as I usually would. It was rather early in the morning, so I'll give leniency to the whining.

"Um… Kasa sensei," asked Sakura hesitantly. "Why did you say to meet outside of the Academy instead of in the classroom like usual?"

"Good question Sakura." I said brightly as I flipped out several cards and activated them on the spot. A number of rods and gear poof into existence and collapsed into each other in a messy pile. "We're going fishing today!"

"…Fishing?" the group droned in sleepy unison of disbelief.

"Yep, we're going to start practicing basic iryo-ninjutsu on the fish you catch." I said before waving a hand towards the gear. "Now everyone pick up a bag, a rod and a bucket and let's get going."

"Kasa sensei, couldn't we have practice in school?" asked Ino curiously as she stared at the pile of equipment in distaste. It was obvious that she had no appreciation for the great outdoors.

"Well, we don't have any other test subject in the classroom aside from Mr. Bunny, but if you want to—"

"No!" shouted Hinata loudly before she hastily covered her mouth and corrected herself. "I mean… Fishing sounds great, right Neji-ni?"

"…Yes," agreed Neji quietly as he resisted a sigh.

"Would anyone else rather we stay in class and practice on Mr. Bunny instead?" I asked before a string of vehement head shakes followed. "Good! Then let's get going."

"…Couldn't you have unloaded all this when we got there?" grumbled Kazuhiko.

"Think of it as endurance and stamina training. Otherwise, we're going back and practicing on Mr.
Bunny." I said brightly before they all hastily grabbed the bags, rods and pales.

The trek to the closest training ground with a lake didn't take that long. Much to the surprise of the group, a certain blond waited for us there.

"Sa—I mean, sensei! I got the firewood and everything!" shouted Naruto as he waved at us.

"...Kasa sensei, I thought you said Naruto can't join our lessons," said Tenten in puzzlement when he spots Naruto jumping about with a fire set up next to him.

"I never said he can't join our fishing trips." I said with a shrug. "Besides, he'll be cooking the fish you guys fail to keep alive."

"...Sensei you really know how to not waste things huh?" commented Keiko awkwardly as they continued.

"Well, the fish is going to be dead anyway, it's pointless to throw them back into the lake. Besides, there are no other shops around to buy lunch. So if you can't catch a fish, you guys won't get lunch either." I chirped happily.

"What!?!" shouted the group in disbelief.

"You guys better start fishing now if you want lunch." I said before each of them gloomily set up a spot with their equipment and grudgingly started to fish.

"Kasa-nee, you're evil, you know that," commented Sasuke when I made my rounds to check on everyone's baited hooks.

"Quit complaining, you have Naruto to keep you company." I said before I flicked his forehead and moved onto the next group.

While some of them, like Kazuhiko, Keiko and Nozomu have completed their basic survival training, the younger students in the class have yet to do so. Otherwise, I would've booked the entire weekend as a survival training trip on top of iryo-ninjutsu training. In case any of them ever separated from their teammates in the future, they should know how to forage off the land and gather useful herbs and plants that could use for food and medicine.

The class separated into their little groups, either by friendship or familiarity. Sasuke and Naruto naturally formed one group, even though Naruto technically wasn't a part of my class. Sakura and Ino formed another, they set up quite a bit away from Sasuke likely due to the pink-haired girl's determination to make Sasuke her rival. Ino still seem to have a fan girl crush over the Uchiha boy, but since Sakura didn't share that same interest, their friendship seemed to remain intact. Albeit with the occasional argument of why Sasuke is great or horrible, depending on which girl spoke.

Much to my surprise, Hinata joined Neji and Tenten's group. The Hyuga girl seemed to look to her cousin whenever she felt uncertain and the older Hyuga boy responded in turn with subtle reassurance. An odd dynamic that I never expected to see this early, but it happened. What was more surprising was Tenten's addition to the group. I would have thought she would group up with either Sakura or Keiko, the only older girl in the class, but I guess since Neji were in her regular classes, she felt more comfortable being in his group.

The last group consisted the oldest three in the class, Kazuhiko, Keiko and Nozomu. Unlike the other three groups, these three clashed horribly or rather Kazuhiko clashed horribly.

"I'm telling you that's not how it's done!" protested Keiko.
"Shut up, I know what I'm doing!" grumbled Kazuhiko as he casted his line out into the lake.

"You know Keiko's right," droned Nozomu sleepily as he stared out into the lake.

"What do you know, Nozomu!" snapped Kazuhiko.

A grin tugged at my lips as I watched the weird dynamic that went on among my students. I still haven't gotten used to the idea of being a sensei yet, but oddly, I found it very enjoyable.

"All right! Every have their lines set up?" I clapped my hands shouted over the chatter before they all turned their attention to me. "While we wait for the fish to bite, we're going to start on some basic chakra control exercises."

While they all had considerably better chakra than most of their peers, it was far from perfect. I had them all go through the opposing hands exercise that mom taught me when I was a child. Compared to tree walking and water walking, this used considerably less chakra. It also had the benefit of training them to be ambidextrous with their hands regarding to chakra.

In the field, you never know if either of your hands would go out of commission. To have the ability to use either hand to heal also freed up a hand for things like chakra scalpels or in my case, the use of my seal cards. My interim in anbu may have had me as a combatant more often than an iryo-nin, but whenever my medical expertise was needed, I had to do it on top of defending myself and my patient.

Hmm… come to think of it, I should probably add a defense lesson at some point.

"Ha! I got it! I got it!" shouted Naruto excitedly.

"Naruto if you get too excited you'll lose your concentration and—"started Sasuke, but he never finished.

"Aw… I don't got it," sighed Naruto dejectedly as the leaf under his hand fluttered away.

I fought back a laugh as Sasuke sighed in exasperation and Naruto chased after his wayward leaf to start again. Eventually, the lines they've all set up got a bite and we moved onto practicing with the fish. Since Naruto's chakra control was far from passable, I had him start the fire for the fish grilling later. One after another, they all set up their fishes on a healing scroll and started on their practice.

With most beginners, the adjustment to their normal chakra into healing chakra was difficult due to the unfamiliarity to it. Healing scrolls, while not particularly strong on their own, worked as training wheels to help the adjustment. During my training, I didn't need to use the scroll as often. Not because of innate talent, rather I needed so many healing sessions with dad or Rin throughout my younger years that I've grown familiar to how the healing chakra should feel.

"And… your fish is dead." I said as I marked down the duration that Keiko managed to keep the fish alive. "Descal, gut and clean your fish and then take it to Naruto for grilling."

"Did I… do a bad job?" asked Keiko sadly as she stared down at her dead fish.

"It was your first try, don't think too much about it." I said reassuringly.

"Um…Kasa sensei, if you don't mind me asking," asked the girl with hesitation.

"What is it?" I didn't glance up as I made some notes next to her name.
"Have you… lost anyone?" asked Keiko quietly.

A twinge of pain shot straight through my chest and my pen stilled.

"Why do you ask?" I spoke up as I finished writing and snapped the book shut with the pen as a place holder.

"You just… seem so strong," mumbled the girl.

"Strong?" I repeated before a bitter chuckle escaped me. "There's nothing strong about me."

"But—"

"It'll take some time to clean your fish and have it cooked, get going. I still have to check on the others." I cut in and left before she could press on for more.

Odd, how I could be smiling in one moment and then get reminded what I've lost in the next. Regardless how time could dull the pain, it couldn't erase the memory of it. I wonder how long would take before it becomes more bearable.

The class continued on. I marked off the duration of exact student's attempt. No one had managed to keep their fish alive, not that I expected them to with their first try. Even if they did though, I would have had them kill and gut the fish for lunch anyway. Despite the fact that this was supposed to be a training exercise, it eventually diverged into a fieldtrip outing with ample amount of horseplay and people getting shoved into the lake for laughs.

"Kasa sensei! Sasuke shoved me into the water!" protested Sakura, once she broke the surface of the water and clung to the ground on the edge of the lake.

"Did not! You trip and fell in yourself," retorted Sasuke childishly, but he too found himself shoved from behind and into the lake with a splash.

"Haha!" laughed Naruto gleefully as he pressed a hand to his stomach in mirth.

"Damn it Naruto! You're supposed to be on my side!" scowled Sasuke after he spat out a mouthful of water.

"Oh come off it Sasuke! You're the one who started it anyway!" snickered Naruto before Sasuke grabbed onto his foot and dragged him into the lake too. "Whoa!"

*SPLASH!*

"How do you like it now?" scoffed Sasuke as Naruto turned into a spluttering mess as he treaded the water.

"Now you're just playing dirty," huffed Naruto childishly.

"What are you going to do about it?" retorted Sasuke before a wave of water got him from behind, courtesy of Sakura.


"Sakura!" growled Sasuke as he turned to the pink-haired girl, who childishly stuck her tongue out at him.

"All's fair in love and war!" replied the girl.
"You want war? You got it!" shouted Sasuke before he retaliated in turn.

Eventually, the innocent horseplay turned into an all-out splash war between the three of them with each of them recruiting their other classmates into their respected teams. Of course, not everyone wanted to join at first, but they all changed their mind when Naruto climbed out and proceeded to shove everyone in. I was surprised that he managed to get the older ones in the class in as well, but I supposed that he built up some stealth skills through the countless pranks he helped me with in the past.

"You seem like you're having fun," said a familiar voice in amusement.

"Tenzo!" I snapped up in surprise. I must be out of it if I haven't even sensed him approaching. "I thought you were away on mission. What are you doing here?"

"Just thought I stop by to see how you're doing," said Tenzo cheerily as he dropped down for a proper greeting and I tackled him in a fond hug. "Whoa, I guess you missed me huh?"

"I haven't seen you in ages, missing doesn't cover it." I replied dryly as I pulled back. "How are missions? Are you still in the same team with Kakashi and Itachi?"

"No to the first and you can ask the second one yourself," replied Tenzo in good humor.

"Huh?" I blinked in confusion before he nodded his head upwards. Above in the trees, sat Itachi, hidden by a branch and the shadow of the leaves. I must really be losing my touch if I haven't even noticed that. "Oi! Itachi quit skulking around and get down here."

Surprisingly, even though I visit the Uchiha district more often than not due to Sasuke, I haven't seen Itachi all that often. He was always away on missions. I have no clue if it had anything to do with my leaving, but someone would have to pick up the mission load I left behind. Without a word, Itachi slipped off from his perch and landed softly next to me. I raised a brow when I noticed he wasn't meeting my eye.

"Something wrong?" I asked in confusion when he said nothing.

"Ah, don't mind him," chuckled Tenzo as he planted a hand on his shoulder. "He's probably just a bit cranky from the return trip.

"Cranky?" I repeated in surprise before a mischievous grin crossed my face. "Oh-ho… Is someone jealous that I hugged Tenzo senpai? Don't worry Itachi, you can have senpai all to yourself."

"Don't be ridiculous," huffed Itachi as he turned to face with me with a scowl.

"Is that a hint of redness I see on your face?" I teased as I tried to draw out any reactions from the older Uchiha even though his expression kept to a pale poker face.

By now, I should expect him to brush off any teasing jokes that either Shisui or I throw at him. Anyone who spent ample time with either of us would have to if they wanted to keep their sanity. Normally, I wouldn't go about teasing Itachi without Shisui at hand, but today Itachi seemed a bit off. While my former teammate had always been the quiet sort, he seemed even more so than usual. I wonder if it's the pressure of being in anbu.

Not that I should be one to talk, he probably handled being in anbu considerably better than I did. Even so, he looked like he lost some weight since I last saw him. Maybe…

Poke
"You're letting your thoughts wander again," said Itachi quietly as he pulled me back to the present.

"Geez." I sighed and pressed a hand over my forehead out of habit. "I'm fine you know."

Itachi raised a brow at this as though to say he didn't believe a word that came out of my mouth.

"Really." I huffed with my hands at my hips. "I'm doing better now. If anything, I should be worried about you. Have you been eating at all? You look like you lost a lot of weight."

"I'm fine," said Itachi offhandedly.

"Then, when was the last time you got a checkup?" I asked haughtily.

"You're really going to mother me here," drawled Itachi, unamused by my sudden attention.

"If I really wanted to mother you, I would strip you down to your boxers on the spot and give you a full examination." I retorted just as dryly.

"You worry too much," replied Itachi.

"Just go get a checkup when you have a chance okay?" I sighed and crossed my hands. "Unless you want me to hunt you down and give you a personal checkup."

"Hm," snorted Itachi in amusement, a grin finally tugging at the corner of his lips. "I'd like to see you try."

"Is that a challenge?" I quipped.

"Kasa!" shouted Kazuhiko before we broke our attention away from our conversation and glanced towards the dripping Academy student that ran towards us.

"Your students call you by your first name and without your title?" asked Tenzo curiously.

"Just this one." I sighed.

"Why?" continued Tenzo.

"Because he's a major pain in my ass." I grumbled before Kazuhiko slid to a stop a foot away from us. "What is it?"

"Uh… we sort of need a ref," said Kazuhiko sheepishly.

"A ref?" I repeated with a deadpan. "You guys been splashing water at each other for the past hour. Why would you need a ref now?"

"How would we settle anything without a ref?" huffed Kazuhiko.

"What exactly is there to settle?" I sighed.

"Uh… well…" said Kazuhiko awkwardly as he scratched the back of his head before he spotted Itachi. "Hey! Itachi, long time no see! Since Kasa doesn't want to play ref, you want to instead?"

"…Do I know you?" asked Itachi with furrowed brows.

"What!" snapped Kazuhiko in disbelief. "We were in the same class!"

"Sorry, I'm afraid I don't have much recollection of my time in the Academy," replied Itachi.
"Pft." I covered my mouth as I turned away with my shoulders shaking with mirth.

"Oh come on!" protested Kazuhiko. "Not even a little?"

Itachi said nothing as he looked away, which only served to piss off Kazuhiko even more. By the time my rowdy student challenged Itachi to a fight, I was clinging onto Tenzo to keep myself standing up straight from all the repressed laughing. Somehow their exchange oddly reminded me of Kakashi and Gai, which only threw me into another fit of repressed laughter. I swear, one of these days, Itachi’s going to make me laugh myself into a coma.
When I said one day Itachi was going to put me into a coma… this wasn't what I meant.

"Ugh… Shisui… continue without me… keep me… in your memories…" I groaned out before my body gave out and I collapsed.

"No, Kasa! Don't leave me…" croaked out Shisui as he reached for my hand, but stopped short just inches away before it fell limp.

Flame continued to roar in our ears as metal clanged against metal. It scraped violently against one another as the metal hissed.

"…You two are idiots," muttered Itachi, not even bothering to glance back at us as he cracked an egg open and dropped the contents onto the sizzling wok.

"Why are you still cooking?" I whined and pressed a hand against my mouth to keep from upchucking whatever I've already eaten.

"No one told you two to eat everything I make," droned Itachi as he tossed the contents in the wok and went back to scraping the bottom with his spatula before reaching over to pour in the plate of chopped mushrooms.

"But if we don't eat it, you're just going to toss it." I whined.

"Yeah… never thought you would be a stress cooker, Itachi," belched Shisui before he dropped his head on the table.

"I'm not stressed," grumbled Itachi and scraped the contents of the wok onto a plate and moved onto washing his wok.

"Of course not," sighed Shisui sleepily. "It's obvious he's perfecting his cooking skill for a lunch da —MMPH!"

Shisui shot back in his seat with both hands fanning at his mouth at Itachi's sudden attack with spoonful of hot rice. I couldn't even snicker at his plight as I curled up my arms in front of my face miserably.

"Don't be silly, Shisui." I bemoaned with drooping eyes at Itachi's tense form. "It's not a date if he hasn't confessed to—"

Itachi moved to shove a spoonful of rice into my mouth next, but I wisely guarded against it with my cleared plate. I glanced up at Itachi with a grimacing grin and he stared down at me with a glowing scowl. The two of us shared an intense staring contest for all of ten seconds before I crumpled with a bellyache.

"Okay, you win…" I whimpered and hid behind the safety of my plate.

Some may ask what the hell was going on in Shisui's kitchen and why were we gorging ourselves with Itachi's cooking. However, the answer was rather simple. None of us were of age to go to a bar and all three of us had a reputation to keep. Itachi, the heir of the Uchiha Clan, Shisui of the Body-Flicker and myself the Crimson Terror… Well, it's not that we can't goof off around the village, but the stares we get were rather unsettling when we did.
Since neither Itachi nor I had a place of our own, we ended up invading Shisui’s place, who until now, I haven’t realized, lived alone. His father had died some time during the third war and his mother not long after. By the time I first met Shisui, it had been already a year since he lost both parents… but this was hardly the time to delve into Shisui’s tragic backstory.

"Stop moaning," sighed Itachi as he set down a cup of tea each and joined us at the table.

"Ha… tea." I sighed happily as I nestled my cheek against the warm cup. "You will always be my greatest love."

"Kasa, you can't fall in love with a beverage," said Itachi in a deadpan as he sipped his tea calmly.

"Says you." I huffed and nuzzled my drink happily.

"Careful Itachi, she might actually elope with a pot of tea just to prove you wrong," laughed Shisui.

"I'd like to see that happen," snorted Itachi.

"I'll send you an invite to the wedding." I scoffed as I took a sip and sighed in bliss.

"That's mariticide," retorted Itachi behind his cup.

"I'm a black widow." I stuck my tongue out childishly at him.

...Most of our get-togethers usually end up something along the lines of this. Itachi being his usual stoic self, but doing something seemingly out of character. Shisui and I goof off and do something outrageous or stupid that would end with Itachi enacting some sort of retribution on us. Then we eventually laugh it off and do it again the next outing.

It oddly reminded me of a Saturday morning cartoon that never went anywhere. The story would always start the same and end the same with no progression whatsoever… and I'm okay with that, but reality rarely worked like that.

"Kasa sensei, you have a visitor," said Iruka during my lunch break.

"Who is it?" I leaned back in my chair for a better glanced at the door and noticed a gentle Hyuga woman standing at the door.

"You're… Kasa sensei?" questioned the woman in surprise.

Hinata's… I restrained myself from reacting to her words. Why was she still alive? My eyes studied over her briefly and noted that she showed no signs of sickness or fatigue. If anything, she looked
utterly healthy. Didn't she die from giving birth to Hanabi? Or some other complications with her health?

"Is there a problem?" I asked. "As far as I know, Hinata's been doing well with my course load and is considered one of my better students."

"Hinata's performance in your class in not a problem," interrupted the woman. "I understand you're a strict grader and you wouldn't pass anyone who does not meet your standards, but that's not what I'm here for."

"...Okay?" My brows furrowed in confusion.

"I am no stranger to the shinobi lifestyle," continued the woman. "Death, pain and loss are not foreign concepts to me. Anyone who's been on the field would learn of the pain brought by these tragedies."

I said nothing, still confused at the direction the woman steered this conversation.

"What I'm trying to say... is that I'm grateful that you would incorporate these lessons into your curriculum and have the children learn of such horrors in the safety of our village rather than on the cruel battlefield," said Himawari.

"Hyuga-san..." I trailed off as her words sunk in and I realized why she was here.

"My Hinata... her constitution isn't as strong as her father would have liked, but I could see her growing stronger from your lessons. For that, I thank you," said the woman as she gave a polite bow, not a deep one as I would give to the hokage, but a slight bow of thanks from one equal to another.

"I was just..." My eyes widened in shock as I took a step back with held hands, flustered and uncertain to how to respond. I've been so used to angry and terrified parents. I never even thought of how to handle a grateful one.

"Hinata was always a shy girl and lacked a great deal of self-confidence," explained Himawari. "But you saw her potential and nurtured it. While your methods may seem a bit harsh for some, I see you've taken great efforts on each and every one of your students."

"Hyuga-san you're giving me too much credit." I protested.

"You are a wonderful teacher and I'm quite sure you're just as good of an iryo-nin as your father," complimented the woman.

"...You know my dad?" I asked curiously.

"Yes, he delivered my Hanabi and if not for him, I might have died due to complications," said the woman gently.

"Oh..." I said in realization and the changes finally made sense.

Tesuri was an expert in midwifery and surgery iryo-ninjutsu. While I'm quite sure there were a number of people in Konoha's hospital could likely do the same, they haven't had his experience in delivering children in rural villages that didn't have the benefit of sterile conditions a hospital offered. A number of complications included infections, hemorrhaging and whatnots, but since I wasn't there for the delivery I couldn't say what dad did to change Himawari's fate.

"I'm sure I've taken enough of your time Kasa sensei," said the woman as she reached out to grasp
my hands in hers. "But I really wanted to let you know, how much I appreciate your lessons and your efforts to teach the students."

As she left, I found myself dumbfounded at what just happened. She thanked me. All the changes I've done, all the mess I've caused and she just... thanked me. I was at a loss for words as I stared at the spot where she stood just moments ago.

"Kasa sensei, are you okay?" asked Iruka before I snapped out of my daze.

"...I'm fine." I murmured quietly and turned my gaze to my hand. The warmth from the Hyuga matriarch hand was already gone, but the shock of being thanked still remained. After all the things I've done, I never once expected to be thanked. This was... "Hehe..."

"Kasa sensei?" asked Iruka hesitantly.

"Nothing." I turned to him cheerily. "It's just a surprisingly change that's all. I'm so used to angry parents coming to yell at me, I'm a little lost at what to do with a happy parent."

"Oh," said Iruka with relief. "It's always good that the students are doing well and the parents are happy, right?"

"...Yeah." A smile tugged at my lips and I found myself believing those words for once. Not all change is bad, I suppose.

"Oh, before I forget, Kasa sensei, do you have a moment?" asked Iruka.

"Sure, what is it?" I asked.

"I have some concerns with Naruto," said the man with a frown.

"Naruto?" I fought back a grin thinking it was likely due to the up rise in pranking complaints by the staff. "What's wrong?"

"I'm sure you've heard about the string of pranks that's been going on in the Academy lately right?"

"Iruka sensei, unless these is proof that Naruto have done any of them, I don't appreciate—"

"Kasa sensei, we all know it's him, you included," noted Iruka with a deadpan. "This is not about the disruptiveness of these pranks. Most of them are harmless and relatively easy to clean up. On top of that, they're usually done at the end of classes in order to keep the disruptiveness to a minimum."

"Okay..." I frowned, not seeing the problem. "I'm not agreeing that Naruto has a hand in this, but what's your point?"

"You don't see it?" said Iruka in disbelief. "It's obvious with the level of these pranks being executed, Naruto—"

"If it's Naruto." I interrupted.

"If Naruto," sighed Iruka grudgingly, not bothering to refute my insistence. "If Naruto was the one to pull these pranks, he's performing at a higher level than shown in his academic performances."

"You mean..." I trailed off in understanding.

"There's a chance that Naruto is purposely suppressing his skills and hiding his true capabilities," finished Iruka.
"But why would he…" I gnawed on my lower lip with a frown.

"I've tried confronting him several times regarding to this, but he managed to slip out from my grasp every time," explained the chunin sensei.

"He what?" I said in disbelief. Naruto was only eight, there was no way he could slip pass a chunin that easily, even Itachi would have some trouble at that age.

"Do you see my point?" asked Iruka with an open hand to his side. "He has enough skills to elude a number of his chunin senseis, myself included. If his stealth and agility skills are at this level, I really wonder how much of his regular poor performance in class is an act. Not to mention the amount of bad habits he'd develop by constantly sabotaging his own progress."

"Have you spoke with Kushina— I mean his mother about this?" I asked.

"I was hoping maybe you can speak with him first before we reach out to his mother. After all, the issue here is his level of trust regarding to us. If he can't trust his senseis, how could he trust his future jounin sensei or be trusted to follow orders when given?"

"Of course." I murmured dutifully rather than agreement as I curled my fist against my lips. Personally, I could care less for the chain of command, but I doubt Iruka would agree with me otherwise. "Thanks for bringing the matter to me Iruka sensei. I'll talk to him about it."

"Let me know if you run into any trouble or if you need additional help," offered Iruka. "It would be a waste for talent like that to go to waste."

"…If you don't mind me asking." I glanced up at him with a cautious eye. "You're about the only sensei in the Academy aside from me that showed any interest in Naruto's growth and potential in the Academy. Since you're older than me, I'm quite sure you…"

"…You're not wrong," admitted Iruka reluctantly with a grimace. "At first I did think he's no different from… well, you know."

"What changed your mind?" I asked as I crossed my arms.

"Eh…" started Iruka sheepishly as he scratched the side of his cheek. "To tell the truth… You were kind of the reason."

"…Me?" I blinked.

"Regardless if you liked your students or not, you still gave them your undivided attention. Whether they were rowdy or well behaved, you taught them until they understood your lessons. If they didn't…" another sheepish laugh escaped him. "Well, they'll eventually learn."

"I… see?" I finished awkwardly.

"Your methods may be a bit… harsh and… violent, but I think you're a good teacher," said Iruka.

"Ehe… you don't have to force yourself Iruka sensei." I took pity on him and waved it off.

"It's not really forcing if it's the truth," reasoned Iruka with a grin. "Enjoy your lunch Kasa sensei."

With that, he left me to my own thoughts on what happened. Between Hinata's mother's heartfelt gratefulness for bringing out her daughter's potential and Naruto's seemingly self-sabotaging routine in the Academy, I had no clue how to take any of this. I noted early that change wasn't always bad,
but with the amount of changes happening, I couldn't grasp any of it in time to make sense of the whole situation.

Naruto, prior to my machinations, was supposed to be a failure by all counts, but here he's showing potential that wouldn't be discovered until much later in life. Understandable since he had Kushina and various other people in his life to encourage such improvement, but why hide it? And he wasn't the only one to improve. A number of late bloomers were developing their skills sooner than expected even if it was indirectly caused by me.

"And then Kiba called Chouji a fat ass and oh man, you should've seen how angry he got," cackled Naruto on the walk home after we dropped Sasuke off at his house.

"Naruto." I interrupted his recount of the day's event quietly.

"Yes, Sasa-nee?" chirped the boy happily as he looked up at me, hand still clutched in mine. Despite his age, he didn't seem to care that anyone would tease him for still holding his sister's hand while walking home.

"Iruka sensei came to me about your pranks." I started and his face paled.

"But I was careful! They can't prove I did it!" protested Naruto.

"That's not what I want to talk to you about." I continued as I reached a hand to ruffle his hair.

"Oh… then what did you want to talk about?" asked Naruto with a tilt of his head.

"Iruka sensei said you are purposely failing your class assignments." I caught him flinching at my words. "Can you tell me why he would say this?"

"I… don't know?" said Naruto sheepishly, the lie obvious on his face. "Maybe he's just joking with you."

"Naruto." I said calmly.

"I'm not—"

"I'm not angry." I continued. "If you have a reason, I will listen to it. If you have a problem, I will help."

"But you can't!" blurted out Naruto before he clasped his hands over his mouth.

"Why do you think I can't?" I asked with a frown.

"Umm… Umm…" shuffled Naruto uncomfortably.

"I promise, I won't be angry." I repeated soothingly as I knelt down to his eyes level as he started gnawing on his lower lip. Idly, I wondered if he picked up that habit from me.

"If I do well in class, I won't end up in the same team as Sasuke and Sakura when I graduate," muttered Naruto as he kept his eyes to his feet.

"…What makes you think you'll end up in Sasuke and Sakura's team if you did poorly?" I asked, a chill went through my body as I listened to his words.

"Um… well…" fumbled Naruto as he shuffled his feet and looked everywhere to avoid meeting my eyes. "That's how you ended up in a team with Itachi-ni right? He got the best grades and you got
"Naruto… Itachi and I weren't on the same team until we became chunin." I frowned.

"Eh? But the team allocation—" Naruto bit his own tongue to stop himself from saying anything further and clasped his hands over his mouth again.

"Under normal circumstances, I would have ended up in Itachi’s team, but due to age…" My frown deepened. "How did you know about the method of team allocation?"

"Um…" Naruto shifted nervously.

"Naruto…" I pulled his hands into mine and held it in front of my face as I stared at him patiently.

"…Promise… you won't laugh and say I'm lying?" mumbled the blond boy meekly.

"As long as you're not lying, I won't laugh." I replied.

"But what if you don't believe me?" protested Naruto.

"I can tell if you're lying or not. Don't take me as someone that's easy to fool." I reassured him.

"…Are you sure?" frowned Naruto. His face was like an open book, I doubt he could lie convincingly for another couple of years.

"Get on with it." I sighed.

"…Okay," said Naruto before he took a deep breath and looked at me with the most serious expression I've ever seen from him thus far. "Sasa-nee, I've been… seeing things."

"Seeing things?" I repeated with furrowed brows. "What things?"

"It's weird…" murmured Naruto. "Sometimes, when I talk to Sasuke, I suddenly see things that happen, but I don't think they've happened yet? I'm not sure how to explain it."

No way, he can't possibly…

"It's almost like they're things that happens later? Sasuke and Sakura seems to be older in them… and Sasuke looks different… like he's angry and… sad?" mumbled Naruto with an uncertain frown before he looked up at me worriedly. "I don't know what's going to happen to Sasuke, but if I don't —"

I clasp a hand over Naruto's mouth and confusion crossed his face.

"Naruto, have you told anyone else about this?" I asked as I fought back a shallow breath and a panic attack.

"No," managed Naruto with a shake of his head before I glanced around warily for eavesdroppers.

"Listen to me Naruto." I said as I stared at him seriously. "You can't let anyone know about this."

"Sasa-nee, you know what these—" started Naruto before I covered his mouth again.

"Shh." I cut him off with fear seeping through my body. "I'll explain to you later, but not here."

Naruto hesitantly nodded before I finally pulled my hands away from his face and we made our way
to a secluded training ground. My mind raced frantically and tried to make sense of this impossibility that was before me. When I made the lie that I was an oracle, I had relied on the fact that there were no oracles in this world, beyond the senile toad that was in a whole other plane. I knew the Uzumaki Clan was a clan of people with hidden potential, but never did I expect one of them to be this. With how Naruto was blatantly ignored until his later years, this could have been part of his untapped potential.

Argh… how could things suddenly change so drastically?

"…Sasa-nee?" asked Naruto, cutting through my tumult of thoughts.

"How long have you been having these visions?" I asked wearily as I glanced down towards him.

"A while…" shrugged Naruto with uncertainty. "I don't know when it started, but it seems to happen a lot when things seemed… familiar?"

"Familiar, how?" I asked.

"Like if something lined up?" frowned Naruto as he scratched his head. "Sort of like when Sakura gets angry at Sasuke, I would see glimpses of an older version of Sakura yelling at… me? I'm not too sure… but you know what these are right, Sasa-nee? You see them too right? What are they? Why are we having them?"

"Naruto…" I whispered as I pressed my hands on his shoulders. "Listen carefully to me, you absolutely can't tell anyone about these visions."

"Why not?" asked Naruto with worry. "What's so bad about them?"

"They're visions of the future… maybe not the immediate future or even a definite one, but that's what they are. If you tell people about them, bad things could happen. I tried to explain with a firm voice, but it cracked and wavered as it went on. "If people knew you could see these visions, you'll be in danger. That's why you absolutely need to keep this a secret."

"Is that… why you were gone for so long?" asked Naruto quietly. "Someone found out that you could see it and you had to go away?"

I grew quiet for a moment as I looked at his worried blue eyes. When did he get so perceptive? And also… his vision of the future seemed an awful lot like the one I knew… I'm quite sure Naruto is… Naruto, but on the off chance…

"The future you saw wouldn't happen to be the one from our world would it?" I asked in my native tongue to be sure, but Naruto looked even more confused than he did before.

"…What did you just say Kasa-nee?" asked Naruto with a tilt of his head, a frown furrowing at his brows. "It sounded… weird."

"Nothing…" I said with slight relief as I pulled him in for a hug. He might not be like me, but it didn't mean anything. "Just keep those visions to yourself and let me handle the rest. You don't have to keep sabotaging yourself in school."

"…Sasa-nee…" murmured Naruto quietly as he returned the hug.

Just hold onto that innocence a bit longer. Let me handle the changing future.
Self-Preservation

Let me handle the changing future... Even though I have no clue where to start... no that's a lie, I know where to start.

"...Rayne?" I called out from where I laid with my hands folded at my stomach and stared up at the orange sky above the Academy.

Classes let out about an hour ago, but I stole away to the roof before then to avoid the walk home with Sasuke and Naruto. There was too much on my mind that I needed to clear up.

No.

"But I haven't even started yet." I muttered darkly and my eyes drifted close to enjoy the sun's dying heat.

You're psychotic if you think you can handle everything on your own. I'm not helping you unlock your memories just so you can get yourself killed.

"From the sound of it, there's not much time left, is there?" I murmured.

Don't be stupid.

"I said I won't let the future run the same course. I intend to keep my word."

And you say I'm one for the dramatics? Are you listening to yourself? You sound like a fucking martyr.

"Why do you care so much that I live?" I murmured. "It's not like you have much of a life with me alive. You only ever wrestle control from me when I'm in danger!"

...Go ask for help.

"And who exactly can I turn to regarding to these visions?" I challenged.

Gee, I don't know. Tesuri? Rin? Shikaku? Kakashi? People who are aware of your so-called oracle abilities? You're not some tragic hero with no one to turn to. Go ask.

"...Why are you so determined to keep me alive?"

Are you stupid?

"I don't believe it's just selfish desire to stay alive. Why cling to life when you're not even living it?"

Why? If you remembered— She stopped short.

"What?" I asked.

Forget it.

"But you—"

I said forget it. I'm not helping you until you've gotten help. If you try to access the memory on your own, I will seal everything up so tightly that you'll go into a coma.
"You wouldn't…" I trailed off when the door opened and craned my neck just in time to see a familiar pineapple-haired boy with one hand on the door and the other in his pocket. "Shikamaru?"

"Naruto and Sasuke left after they couldn't find you," commented the Nara boy as he closed the door behind him.

"Oh, I must've lost track of the time." I lied casually. "But thank you for telling me."

"…Something's bothering you," noted Shikamaru with no reservation and before I could throw out another lie, he cut me off. "You were lenient in class today."

"I made three of your classmates cry." I raised an eyebrow at his comment.

"Kasa sensei," huffed Shikamaru out of exasperation. "You take our safety as first priority. Those three were being idiots in your class. They may have cried, but that was because you didn't punish them as you normally would with anyone messing around in your class."

I stared at him for a long moment without a word.

"On top of that," continued Shikamaru. "Aside from the days you have tests to grade, you always walked home with Sasuke and Naruto every day with no break in the routine. You haven't given out any tests or quizzes this week."

Perceptive, as expected from a Nara, but his age and inexperience showed. True to his family name, he carried himself in a lazed and relaxed slouch, but his eyes showed intensity that didn't match his stance. They were focused and alert. His brows furrowed and his lips tugged down in a contemplative frown. It was almost adorable. The Naras weren't the type to show anything beyond laziness and exasperation, but if you knew where to look, you'll notice their subtle quirks.

"Is that a problem?" I turned my gaze back to the orange sky.

"Something bad is going to happen and it's going to happen soon, right?" noted Shikamaru.

"What makes you think that?" I asked and closed my eyes to enjoy what's left of the setting sun.

"Sensei," continued Shikamaru, exasperation clear in his voice. "You and Naruto have the same habit of wearing your heart on your sleeve, but unlike Naruto, you hide it better. Whatever it is that's going to happen… Can't you talk to my dad about it? Or that Kakashi guy?"

"Shikamaru." I murmured quietly. "How much of what you've said right now was staged?"

The boy grew quiet, no doubt surprised by my words, but it didn't last long as an exasperated sigh left him again.

"What a drag," grumbled Shikamaru. "I knew this was going to troublesome."

"Well?" I pressed on with an amused grin.

"…Probably a third of it," muttered Shikamaru. "I was supposed to come up with my own explanation to make it sound natural. What gave me away?"

"Your dad told you not to give advice about things without the full picture." I replied and a snigger escaped. "That and you normally would consider something like this too troublesome for your effort."

"Figures," murmured Shikamaru as he turned to open the door.
"Are you going to relay the conversation?" I asked.

"No need," replied Shikamaru before I felt a shadow loom over me. "He listened through the whole thing."

My eyes drifted open and spotted a familiar silver-haired jounin standing above me.

"…Kakashi." I greeted quietly.

"Kasa," greeted Kakashi in return as his single eye glanced down.

"You guys do what you do, my job's done," droned Shikamaru before he made his escape from the roof.

A wise decision on his part as he had incomplete knowledge of what was going on. It would be stupid, if not dangerous for him to put his nose in business that didn't concern him. Kakashi and I caught ourselves in a battle of wills as we stared at each other, waiting to see who would submit first. It started with quiet intensity that eventually fell into awkward silence.

Neither of us were going to apologize for what happened the last time we spoke. Kakashi did what he thought was in my best interest and I… well, I'm not going to make any excuse. I lashed out violently at the loss of my teammates and the onset of PMS.

"…Let's move this conversation elsewhere," said Kakashi after the silence has long become dull and boring.

"Lead the way." I agreed with a sigh before rocking myself up and onto my feet.

Kakashi and I both left the Academy roof and he led me into one of the many training grounds. To my surprise, though I really shouldn't be, he took us to the memorial stone. I guess even with Obito and Rin alive, there were still some things that won't change.

"So… What do you want to hear first?" I asked quietly before giving another shrug. "Since you're already aware that there's a shit storm brewing and coming."

"… You look tired," commented Kakashi as he glanced down at me at the corner of his eye.

"And you look the same." I scoffed at him as I turned my gaze back to the stone. My eyes slowly drifted over the names and searched for Santa and Tokuma's names. I found them eventually and grew solemn. "… Santa and Tokuma's families both invited me to their wake."

"Did you go?" asked Kakashi.

"…No." I murmured and raised a hand to brush my fingers over their names. "I don't think I could've kept my composure and… I didn't want to ruin the last moment for their families by breaking down while they said their goodbyes."

Someone else might've tried to continue the conversation, but Kakashi fell silent. By now the sun had long set and the moon rose in its place for light. It was near impossible to read the names anymore and I pulled my hand back from the stone and turned to face him. He towered over me and I found myself mildly irritated at my short stature.

With a sigh, I clenched my hand into a fist and raised it to deliver a light tap to his chest. Kakashi made no move to dodge and looked surprised when there was no strength behind the hit.
"…Kasa?" questioned Kakashi.

"It's too troublesome to stay angry." I muttered and dropped my hand.

"Too troublesome?" repeated Kakashi with a raised brow. "Is Shikamaru rubbing off on you?"

"What do you take me for? A pedophile?" I huffed, but a grin tugged at my lips when Kakashi rolled his eyes at my juvenile attempt at humor.

"You're incorrigible," muttered Kakashi with a shake of his head.

"You know, in another five years, I'll be eighteen." I teased.

"Don't you even start," sighed Kakashi as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Pft." I sniggered. "Just fucking with you."

"I hope not the way you intend to misconstrue to others," retorted Kakashi in a deadpan before seriousness returned to his face. "All joking aside, what did you see this time? And… how severe is it?"

"…I don't know." I lowered my gaze and mumbled. "I know there's something big coming… but Rayne wouldn't give me access to it."

"Why not?" asked Kakashi.

"She said if I want that information, I need to have someone by me when she gives me access." I mumbled.

"…Did she say why you need someone to be with you?" asked Kakashi carefully. I could tell by his body language that he didn't like where this was going.

"She said…" I didn't meet his eye. "I'd get myself killed."

"Kasa," said Kakashi as he placed his hands on my shoulders and knelt down to my eye level. "Regardless what you see and what you decide to do, I'll support you the whole way."

"W-what?" I said with wide eyes.

"If you want to change it or leave it, just say the word and I'll stand by your side," said Kakashi with calm seriousness. "But not if it's at the cost of your life."

"Kakashi…" My mouth suddenly felt dry as the words caught at my throat.

"There's still time right?" asked Kakashi.

"I…" I lowered my head. Could I take the risk? If Kakashi helped, there was a chance that I could stop the Uchiha Massacre, but on the off chance that he might… "Yeah… there's still time."

You fucking idiot! He offered! Just take it!

"If anything comes to mind." I continued with a faint smile and ignored Rayne's vehement rants. "I'll be sure to ask you for help."

Kakashi stared at me with an unwavering eye as if trying to figure out whether I was lying or not. I kept to the faint grin and my usual relaxed demeanor to reassure him. He eventually let out a faint
hum of amusement and reached up to ruffle my hair like he always did. It felt a bit empowering that I could fool even Kakashi, but at the same time, that empowerment left me feeling sad that it was possible.

"You should probably head home soon before your father throws a fit and rounds up a search party for you," said Kakashi as he stood and pulled his hand away.

"Yeah, I probably should." I laughed sheepishly and ran a hand to fix the mess he made in my hair. "Going to walk me home?"

"I thought you weren't angry anymore," commented Kakashi with a raised brow.

"Never said I wasn't petty." I retorted cheerily.

"Hmph," snorted Kakashi in amusement as he pocketed his hands. "It's good to see you smiling again."

"Nice to talk to you again." I returned with a grin.

"And we'll talk again soon, I'm sure," said Kakashi as he turned to leave, but paused when he noticed I wasn't moving.

"You go ahead, I kind of want to stay a bit. Sort of… a private chat with Santa and Tokuma. It's been…" I trailed off sheepishly and Kakashi nodded in understanding.

"Don't stay out too long, okay?" noted the silver-haired jounin.

"You got it!" I chirped before he finally took to the trees and left.

...You god damn idiot, are you seriously thinking about tackling the Uchiha Massacre on your own? He offered! OFFERED! You're not forcing him you stupid...argh!

"Like he said... there's still time right?" I murmured quietly and sighed.

Time!? You insufferable—

"You are surprisingly a very hard person to catch alone," said an unfamiliar voice behind me.

I turned with a start, when did someone... My eyes stilled at the figure before me and dread drop to the pit of my stomach. The stranger wore an unmarked anbu uniform. Even though it's been some time since I've seen another anbu up close, out of habit, my eyes always darted towards the discreet locations where a marker would identify the anbu's squadron and team. However, what's even more jarring to the uniform was the fox mask... no one in anbu had that mask.

"Or were you avoiding me on purpose, Oracle-san?" chirped the stranger.

My face paled and my mouth went dry. He called me an oracle... He knows... How does he know? To what extent does he know?

"Who are you?" I asked evenly as I did my best to seem unaffected by his presence, but that proved to be difficult as my hands felt clammy and cold.

"No need to play stupid around me," said the man as he gave a vague wave of his hand. "You know the answer already."

I said nothing, neither proving nor disproving his words. Without knowing how much he knew, I
couldn't risk giving him more information. The fox mask had only appeared one other time before, during the Kyubi attack. My guess, this was Obito's replacement since he could no longer be Tobi... but who could Madara have found that could replace him?

"What do you want?" I asked and did my best to keep my voice from shaking.

"Straight to the point eh?" chuckled man. "You probably know this already, but Danzo's aware of your little gift."

...No, I did not know this. I fought back a grimace at the thought of Danzo being aware of my foresight. This wasn't good.

"And?" I continued icily.

"He's going to try to recruit you," said the stranger with a vague gesture. "But I don't see you as the type to follow his sort of method of operation. Despite your bloody reputation, you're not as ruthless as it makes you out to be."

"Oh?" I drawled with a nonchalant tone as I desperately tried to pull up the visage of the Crimson Terror even if it was just to hide behind it. "What makes you think that?"

"You're an iryo-nin," reasoned the man. "Regardless how bloodstained your hands are, you still follow the healer's oath."

"And what do you know about that?" I challenged his words in a nonchalant manner.

"Heh, it's really cute how defensive you're being," chuckled the stranger. "You're not the type to allow anyone to carelessly abuse knowledge of the future for their own gain."

"I'm sorry to burst your bubble, but you're under the impression that I could see the future. I am no oracle." For once, I told the truth.

"I understand you don't want that sort of information floating around for all to know, but you're not exactly doing a good job of keeping it a secret," said the other with another wave of his hand.

"...What are you trying to propose?" I said slowly as it took a moment for me to find any underlying message in his words.

"See," said the other in good humor. "I didn't even have to say much and you already knew what I was doing. Anyway, you're probably aware of the organization I'm from right?"

My eyes narrowed, organization? Does he mean Akatsuki?

"Of course you do," continued the stranger with utmost confidence in his words. "I'm here to—"

"Not interested." I replied, not giving him a chance to finish.

Did he really come all this way just to invite me into Akatsuki of all things? If he's so certain that I have oracle abilities, what makes him think I would join an organization that's trying to extract all bijus from the jinchurikis? Was this just a blatant show of power to tell me that he could still do what he set off to do even with an oracle against him?

"You haven't even—" He held his hands up as if trying to calm me.

"No." I grounded out as I glared at him "You listen to me. I have no interest in joining any organization regardless of what you say. I won't let—"
"Easy, easy," said the man jokingly. "You don't have to make up your mind now. I'm merely just giving you an option escape all this."

"I'm not changing my mind." I growled.

"You're a stubborn one aren't you?" sighed the other as he pressed his fox mask firmly in place. "No matter, I'm sure you know where to find me if you change your mind."

…Know where to find him?

"Have a nice day," chirped the other with a fond wave.

Before I could ask what he meant, the fox-masked stranger disappeared in a flurry of leaves. A frown crossed my face as I recognized it as a Konoha styled body-flicker. Whoever Madara got as a replacement was from Konoha.

I don't trust him.

That made two of us. I stared darkly at the spot where the man stood just moments ago. From his build he didn't look all that old, but then again Yagura didn't look that old either. The manner he spoke was usually used around friends or people you trust; of course, he could likely just use that tone to mislead me. What's worse, I didn't even catch his name in hopes to get some clues to who he is.

What are you going to do?

…I don't know.

What do you mean 'I don't know!?' go tell someone! The fucker's in Konoha coming and going as he pleases! We don't know who he is or what his motives are! We're completely blind here!

"No." I grounded out and stomped off away from the memorial stone.

If you haven't noticed yet, he said you are a hard person to catch alone, which means he's been stalking us for god knows how long. He's just toying with you!

"I know that!" I snapped as I darted my eyes around the area and pooled out chakra around me in an attempt to spread my senses further. I hadn't sensed him approach, but it possibly could have been my slip in training, but there was no way everyone else around me could've missed this. Kakashi was with me up until moments before he appeared.

Then what are you lollygagging for?

"It's because I know that!" I snapped. "Think for a second would you? He could come and go freely if I—"

You have got to be shitting me! Don't you pull that I can't drag others into this bullshit! You've already pushed away help to deal with the massacre and now you've gotten the attention of possibly the most dangerous person in this world!

"This is my burden." I grounded out.

No, it's not! It doesn't even have to be your problem! You're just being a fucking martyr! Stop trying to throw away your life!

"It's my life, my choice." I retorted. "You can't stop me."
Rayne said nothing, but I could tell she was still fuming. That should've clued me in that something was wrong, but in my own anger, I hadn't realized I went too far. Instead, I continued to egg her on like the idiot I was.

"What are you going to do? Put me in a coma like—" The world turned black and I knew nothing more.
Promises

A soft groan escaped my lips as the dark fog around my mind slowly petered out. My eyes drifted open to sight of my own body tangled and ensnarled by vines.

"What…?" My voice rasped in confusion as I looked around and tried to make sense of the situation. Where was I? How did I get here? I gave another grunt and groan as I tugged and yanked at the vines, but they remained stubborn and unwilling to give way.

After a moment of struggle, I fell limp against the vines' hold and did an amount of re-step. I'm in an unfamiliar place without any recollection of how I got here. Before I woke up here, I blacked out in the middle of arguing with Rayne… who was trying to get me to... to what?

I wanted to press a hand against my head to clear the fog that was seeping into my mind again, but with my arms bound and held back by the vines, I found it impossible to do so. What happened while I was arguing with Rayne? The blackout… My eyes widened in recollection as I dug myself through the foggy thoughts with anger as fuel to push me on.

"Rayne!" I roared in fury as I struggled and tugged at the vines. "You asshole! You seriously placed me in a coma!?

No response.

"Rayne! I know you can hear me!" I screamed and struggled harder, but the vines holding me refused to budge even the slightest. "RAYNE!"

My screams fell on deaf ears as I ranted and raved like the mad woman I am. The longer I stayed here, the closer the massacre drew near. If I don't find a way out, Rayne might as well keep me here until everything was over.

"Rayne, please…" I begged as I hung limp and tired in my restraints. "You can't keep me here! They're all going to die if I don't do something!"

Silence.

Nothing I did mattered. Regardless how I screamed or begged, Rayne never responded. More than once my eyes threatened to drift close, but through pure will, I kept myself alert. Each time I allowed my guard to drop, the vines slithered closer and my eyes grew heavier in turn. Rayne was determined to keep me under for as long as she could, but she couldn't possibly keep this up forever could she?

Without any outside source, I had no clue how long I remained in the silence of my own mind. Rayne never once came to talk to me. I would have thought she'd come to mock and berate me at least once through this whole ordeal, but she never did. The fact she ignored me sent waves of anxiety through me. If I was in here, did that mean she was out there? And if she was out there… what exactly was she doing?

Beyond keeping me alive, she never showed interest in anything else. It was as if she had no other desire aside from keeping me from death. I understand that if I died she would cease to exist, but what was the point in clinging onto a life that's not even yours? What's more, even though she urged me to seek help or tell others of the events to come, she never made any effort to do it herself.

How strange…
All this time, I dreaded the thought of her doing something irreversible while trapped like a prisoner in my own mind. However, when I paused to think about what she might actually do in my absence... I can't think of a single thing. Rayne didn't care who dies as long as I live. She didn't care what happens unless I'm involved. Her only motivation was to keep me alive, but if I wasn't involved... what would she do?

Idly, I toyed with the thought of relinquishing my body to Rayne. If only to find out what she would do if I wasn't...

"...sa!" A faint muffled voice came through the wall of vines.

At the sound, my eyes drifted up toward its source, but they were reluctant and heavy. The vines came to life once more and slithered against one another as it came closer. It gave off a soft hiss that almost resembled the rattling of leaves on a windy day.

So... tired...

I almost humored the thought of resting my eyes, but I clung onto consciousness... Can someone technically be conscious in their own mind? My body could be asleep for all I know, but...

"Kasa?" The voice came through again, this time loud and clear.

I gave a tired blink as my vision grew hazy, but it lasted no more than a moment before it refocused and I found myself staring at a concerned silver-haired jounin's face.

"Kashi?" I whispered with uncertainty as I blinked a few more times to get rid of the mind fog before I realized I was no longer in my mind.

"Good, she kept her promise," said the man in relief as he shifted me in his arms and gently pushed me back.

"...Promise?" My brows furrowed as I reached up to press a hand against my head, but stopped at the throb of pain in my arm.

A frown crossed my face when I finally took notice of the familiar smells of sterility and the white walls of the hospital room. My clothes had been replaced with hospital robes and I was in bed. The sight of the saline drip that hung next to the bed told me that I've been out long enough that they needed to rehydrate me through IV instead. How long was I out?

"What can you remember?" asked Kakashi as he carefully propped me against pillows and knelt down to my eye level.

"...Rayne." I murmured quietly with a deepened frown. "She..."

"If you can't remember, don't push yourself," said Kakashi evenly. "You've been out for over a week."

"A week?" I repeated and glanced up to him in puzzlement.

"After our conversation, you never went home," explained Kakashi as he filled out the holes of what happened while I was out.

Tesuri had gathered up a search team to look for me not long after that. They found me unconscious by the Memorial Stone, but when they tried to rouse me, I wouldn't respond. Not to chakra, not to medication, nothing they did could wake me and never once did I wake up either. My body was
essentially comatose and unresponsive.

Wait…

"…You said…she kept her promise." I furrowed my brows in concentration as I tried to make sense of it all. "What promise?"

"…To give you back," explained Kakashi quietly.

"Give… me back?" I repeated slowly. "What do you mean?"

"When you didn't respond to any of the treatments, Inoichi went into your mind and attempted to draw you out manually. However, when he went in, Rayne grew hostile and violent," continued Kakashi grimly.

"What happened?" I asked.

"She wouldn't tell us what happened," replied Kakashi with a shake of his head. "She lashed out at nearly every person that tried to reason with her, Inoichi, Shikaku and even Tesuri."

"…Then how am I…" I mumbled in confusion.

"She made an exception when I tried," answered Kakashi.

"Exception?" I asked.

"She promised to let you out if I could convince you to confide in me, but if I couldn't convince you…" trailed off Kakashi as he gripped onto my hand and gave me a firm stare. "Kasa, I know you just woke up, but you have to trust me. Otherwise, she'll put you under again and I don't know if anyone could negotiate with her again… For your sake, please…"

I blinked slowly as I digested his words. The gogginess of being under for so long made it difficult to gather my thoughts. Eventually, I managed to grasp enough coherency to think, but what I concluded from Rayne's actions confused me. While I was under, she didn't give Kakashi or anyone else a warning of what's to come, even though she wanted me to do so myself.

Instead, she lashed out at anyone who tried to help. She only relented when Kakashi tried, but even then she threatened to put me under again if the results were not to her desire. Why was she going such a roundabout way to do this when it was so much easier for her to just outright tell them? Was she afraid that they wouldn't believe her? Or…

"Kasa?" called out Kakashi gently as he drew me out of my thoughts.

"…Why wouldn't Rayne tell you herself?" I asked.

"She…" Kakashi frowned. "Her only concerns are for your safety, things that involve the future only matter to her if you're involved. Anything else…"

"I see…" I murmured quietly and stared down at his hand in mine.

"As I've said before, regardless what you see and what you decide to do, I'll support you the whole way," murmured Kakashi gently. "So please… trust me."

The room fell into a brief silence as I digested his words and weighed my options. Not that there was much of a choice. Rayne practically gave me an ultimatum, either I trust Kakashi or she puts me back under again and miss the chance to change anything.
"…The Uchiha might possibly be planning a coup due to the frustration with the council and distrust the village and council placed on them… but they're going to get massacred by one of their own before that could happen." I murmured quietly.

"…Tell me everything," said Kakashi quietly as his eyes steeled over with seriousness.

And I told him. I told him about the distrust the council had on the Uchiha after the Kyubi incident. I told him about the rise in discontent among the villagers because of the Uchiha's monopoly in the police faction. I told him about how Itachi would eventually kill everyone in his clan in order to stop a civil war between the Uchihas and Konoha from breaking out… and I told him about the masked man at the Memorial Stone.

I told him as much as I could while I kept out any details regarding to how Obito would've been the masked man in the original sequence of events. Even if I trusted Kakashi to tell him what I knew, I still couldn't bring myself to telling him about everything.

"He knew of your oracle abilities?" said Kakashi in alarm.

"Yes." I nodded solemnly.

"What of the organization he spoke about?" asked Kakashi.

"Akatsuki." I swallowed as I supplied the name. It felt so jarring to actually say it out loud, but I knew I had to tell him if things were to change. "They're a misguided group that… hunts jinchuriki to extract the bijuu inside them."

Kakashi's eyes widened.

"But… that won't be a concern for several more years to come. At this point, they're incomplete… the more concerning detail right now, should be that Danzo knows about my abilities… he is the one that orchestrates the Uchiha Massacre."

"…What did you plan to do on your own if you hadn't told me?" asked Kakashi gently.

"I… don't know." I whispered out brokenly as tears welded up in my eyes. "I just know I needed to stop this from happening, but I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if I've changed enough of the previous events to stop it from happening. I just…"

"…You said Itachi will be the one to do it," noted Kakashi slowly even though it was obvious he was trying to switch topics to make me feel better. "Are there any warning signs that we could keep an eye out for?"

"It happens shortly after his promotion to Anbu Captain." I blinked away the unshed tears and noticed a grimace crossed his face. "What's the matter?"

"…Itachi was promoted three days ago," replied Kakashi reluctantly.

My eyes widened as I found my breath hitch and hyperventilation set in from the news. Kakashi hastily placed a firm hand on my shoulder to keep me from breaking down in a panic attack. Why? Why was it happening so quickly?

"Calm down, that can't possibly be the only sign," said Kakashi firmly. "What else? What other signs? There should still be some time left."

"R-Right." I took in a deep breath as I searched through my memories. Unlike before where my
mind came up with blanks, the information flowed through gently as though the memories were no longer blocked. I paused at the thought and settled. I have access to my memories… Rayne must've…

Ask if Shisui is still alive… if he is, then we still have time.

"Kasa?" called out Kakashi gently as he pulled my attention back to him. "Are you okay?"

"I…" My hand closed around his tightly as I fought back the terrified tremble that wracked through my body. "S-Shisui… is Shisui still alive?"

"…Yes," answered Kakashi as his features softened as he gripped my shoulder to give me reassurance. "And we'll make sure he stays alive."

"We…" A weak chuckle escaped my lips at his blatant use of the word. Not I, not myself, but we. "I like the sound of that."

"All right," continued Kakashi as he reached up and ruffled my hair with a fond grin. "Let's make some changes, shall we?"

"Yeah…" I nodded in agreement.

Kakashi went into plotting out our next steps in order to make the necessary changes to stop what's to come. Most of it at first were really just what he would do and I inputted suggestions and more background information. Then it went into who we could trust and who we couldn't and whether or not the changes I've made already affected anything else. However, what threw me off the most was what he said next.

"We're not likely going to be able to cover everything with just the two of us," reasoned Kakashi as he looked straight into my eyes. "Would it be a problem if we included Obito?"

"Obito?" I said, startled by the suggestion.

Logically, it shouldn't be a problem as he was no longer Tobi, but at the same time… I'm not sure if including Obito would be the wisest decision. As much as I loved the man like a brother, he wasn't exactly the most subtle of people. The danger of including him might just be that he couldn't keep his mouth closed.

"Not good?" asked Kakashi with a frown.

"No, it's not that…" I murmured quietly.

He's not Tobi, but don't forget Tobi was once him as well.

Right… Even if Obito was silly and a total goofball, there was something in him that made him frightfully formidable as Tobi. I can't underestimate him just because he's no longer as ruthlessly driven.

"It shouldn't be a problem." I mumbled before repeating myself again with more confidence. "I trust Obito. There should be no problem including him."

I changed his fate that should count for something. I should be able to trust him as much as I trust Kakashi.

"How much are you willing to let him know?" asked Kakashi.
"…I rather him not know I'm an oracle if possible, but everything else I've told you… should be fine." I murmured before glancing up at him. "Shikaku-san and Inoichi-san are likely trustworthy as well, but as for Hokage-sama… I don’t… it's not him but…"

"It's his advisors and Danzo," finished Kakashi. "You don't trust him to keep the information from them."

I nodded. "Hokage-sama means well, but his trust is misplaced and often times, he lets certain things slip by that shouldn't be allowed."

"He'll get an abridged version then," noted Kakashi. "We can't keep him completely in the dark. This does concern the well-being of the village as a whole."

"Right." I agreed. "But what exactly should we tell him?"

"Nothing for now, at least until we've gathered some solid and physical proof of either Danzo or the Uchiha's plans. Until then, we just have to keep Shisui alive and Itachi from murdering everyone right?"

"Easier said than done." I scoffed, but a glimmer of hope tugged at my heart. "But… we're going to be able to do it right?"

"You better believe it," said Kakashi with a grin.

It took a second for his words to register in my mind before a grin tugged at my lips and I fell into a fit of laughter. I hadn't realized how much I needed that laugh until I felt Kakashi's hand brush away the tears on my face and I glanced up at him with a bright smile.

"Sorry, you just said something that… never mind." Another fit of laughter escaped me before I felt his hand on my head again. "Kakashi?"

"I'm just glad you're smiling again," said the silver-haired jounin before he gave my hand he was still holding a firm squeeze. "Get some rest, I predict there will be quite a rowdy bunch visiting you soon enough."

"Is that so?" I drawled with a teasing tone in my voice before he finally pulled away and casually pocketed his hands.

"Some things, you don't need to be an oracle to predict," shrugged Kakashi in good humor.

"I guess so." I chuckled and clasped my hands together and twined my fingers together and glanced down with a sullen smile.

"It'll be fine," repeated Kakashi just to reassure me and to my surprise, I actually believed him.

"…Yeah, everything's going to be okay." I agreed quietly.

"Rest, I'll go let your father and Rin know you're awake," said Kakashi before he left the room.

Despite his advice, I didn't want to go back to sleep. I was comatose for a nearly a week, I had no interest in going back to sleep now that I'm finally back in control of my own body. However, much to my irritation, I felt the familiar brush of genjutsu coming from the door that Kakashi just closed and I found myself drifting off to sleep once more… Kakashi you ass…

When the genjutsu finally wore off, Tesuri's concerned face greeted me upon opening my eyes. No
words could describe the utter relief the crossed his face as he drew me into a tight hug.

"Dad, I'm fine." I patted his back comfortingly with the one arm that was free from an IV.

He went on a scolding tirade and gave me every single possible lecture he could regarding to my safety and recklessness. It was rather cute how worried he was, I almost felt guilty to have had him go through that. I sat through all his diagnosis jutsus and went through any and all physical exams he gave me just to appease him. By the time he was done, I was assaulted by another barrage of visitors.

"SASA-NEE! YOU'RE A WAKE!" screamed Naruto in delight when he crashed into the room and dashed to my side. However, before he managed to reach me, Tesuri caught him by the scruff of his shirt and pulled him back before he could tackle me with a bone crushing hug.

"Naruto!" scolded Tesuri him as he pulled him back. "No roughhousing until she's better."

"B-but Uncle Tesuri!" whined Naruto. "She's finally awake!"

"Naruto," sighed Sasuke as he followed into the room shortly after with exasperation. "Did you forget your first aid classes already? You're not supposed to jostle the patients when they're still recovering."

"Hey Sasuke." I greeted cheerily when he glanced towards me. A dark scowl crossed his face as he stormed over.

"Kasa-nee! Don't act like nothing's happened after waking up from a week long coma!" scolded Sasuke. "We were so worried!"

"I'm fine, really." I chuckled at his concerns before a thought occurred to me. "Oh right… I've been out for a week, what did you guys do during iryo-ninjutsu class while I was out?"

Sasuke stared at me in disbelief. "You wake up from a week-long coma and the first thing you ask is about our lesson plans?"

"What?" I huffed indignantly. "It's a genuine concern."

"Kasa-nee! That's not what you're supposed to be concerned about right now!" grounded out Sasuke.

"Of course it's a cause for concern!" I scoffed. "You're all going to fall behind on your studies."

"Kasa-nee!" growled Sasuke and much to his annoyance, a giggle escaped me. "You're not allowed back to the Academy until you're better!"

"You're such an overachiever, Sasuke." I teased playfully before he blinked in confusion. "Not even an iryo-nin yet and you're scolding patients like you're already one."

"K-Kasa-nee!" spluttered the boy indignantly as a pink flush crossed his face.

"Rin-kun's been taking over your iryo-nin lessons at the Academy," supplied Tesuri after he managed to settle Naruto down.

"Rin-san?" I repeated in surprise. "She took over teaching my lessons?"

"Only temporary," replied Tesuri. "A rotation would've started if you didn't wake up sooner."

"Rotation?" I questioned with confusion.
"Unlike you, who were specifically assigned to teach at the Academy, the iryo-nins at the hospital have surgeries and patients they have to tend to. A rotation would be needed in order to allow Rin-kun and the other iryo-nins to continue their work at the hospital while teaching."

"Oh, I see." I murmured in understanding.

I guess the head iryo-nin made some contingency plans in case I was indisposed. As I've said before, most iryo-nin potentials won't get a chance to learn iryo-ninjutsu until they were at least chunin ranked. By then, most would be tempted by more tantalizing glory of being a combat shinobi than the boring iryo-nin that patches up said combat shinobi. Iryo-ninjutsu class actually bolsters the chances of creating more iryo-nins just by exposure.

It's not surprising that the head iryo-nin would want to continue the lessons even while I'm out and incapable of teaching. The downside of a rotation would be the lack of familiarity between the teacher and student, but I supposed it would work to helping with the desensitization and getting the students to work objectively with their patients rather than forming attachments.

"Now that you're awake, how long before you can come home, Sasa-nee?" asked Naruto as he plopped down with his elbows on my bed and his chin cupped around his hands.

"When huh?" I glanced over to Tesuri with a questioning glance.

"Not any time soon on my watch," grounded out my father as he knocked a light fist against Naruto's head. "I know you miss your Sasa-nee, but letting her leave before she's better will only make it worse."

"Stingy," grumbled Naruto under his breath as he stuck his tongue out at Tesuri's turned back.

"What was that?" said Tesuri icily before Naruto quickly retracted his tongue and looked away innocently.

"Nothing!" said Naruto hastily with a disarming grin when Tesuri turned to give him a skeptical glance.

"I'll try to get better as soon as I can, okay?" I chuckled and ruffled his hair fondly as he grinned up at me.

"Promise?" urged Naruto as he stuck out his pinky.

"Promise." I agreed and hooky my own pink around his.
"...How is it possible that despite being an iryo-nin, you end up in the hospital more times than Shisui and I combined?" droned Itachi while he sat next to my bed and peeling an apple.

"Pure talent." I retorted with a huff and stared jealously at his ability to keep the peeled apple skin in one long continuous strand.

"That's not a very good talent," retorted Itachi in a deadpan.

"Oh shut up." I huffed and reached out to childishly break off the perfect strand of apple peel with a pinch.

He raised an eyebrow at my action, but said nothing as he finished peeling the rest of the apple and sliced it up into neat little wedges with their core carved out. He was due to leave for a mission soon, but came to visit me anyway despite his busy schedule as a newly promoted to Anbu Captain. Idly, I wondered if Kakashi had a hand in his busy schedule.

"Are you just going to stare at it all day or are you going to eat it?" asked Itachi dryly as he grabbed one and popped it into his mouth.

"I'm eating it, I'm eating it," I grumbled and grabbed a piece to munch on before I noticed Itachi's expectant eyes on me. "What?"

"You spent nearly three years in anbu," noted Itachi quietly. "Teaching Academy students cannot possibly fatigue you to the point that you fall into a coma."

"...I'm fine. You worry too much." I stuffed another piece of apple into my mouth to evade his question.

"People don't just fall into comas out of the blue," reasoned Itachi as his dark eyes met with mine. "What happened?"

"Itachi, I really—"

"Kasa," interrupted Itachi firmly without once raising his voice.

Any bullshit I had ready at the tip of my tongue was cut away with a single glare from him. He looked almost as angry as he did during the chunin exams after he and Shisui torched my bloody prank clone. I wisely clicked my teeth together and closed my mouth. He wasn't going to let me off as easily as he did in the past. I lowered my gaze and toyed with the strand of apple skin I pinched off earlier. My fingers stuck uncomfortably together from the apple's juice.

"It's really not something I want to talk about." I murmured and attempted to roll the skin back into the shape of an apple. It was easier to talk while my hands worked at a mindless task. "But you're not going to accept that as an answer are you?"

"No," agreed Itachi as he crossed his arms. "I'm not."

"I figured as much." I mumbled.

"Figured what?" cut in a cheery voice before the door opened and revealed a grinning Shisui on the other side. "Yo! I see you're finally awake."
"Shisui!" I said with a relieved smile as he slipped into the room and made his way to my bed.

"How are you feeling?" asked Shisui in good humor as he plopped down on the chair next to Itachi.

"You come in at the most inopportune times," grumbled Itachi darkly.

"Don't be like that 'Tachi," teased Shisui as he nudged the younger Uchiha with his elbow. "Kasa just woke up. Can't you wait until she's out of the hospital before you go full T&I on her?"

"Shisui, she was in a coma," grounded out Itachi.

"And you think interrogating her while she's still recovering is a good idea," commented Shisui dryly. "Honestly Itachi, I know you care, but you really need to work on your bedside manners."

"You know how she is," retorted Itachi in annoyance. "If we don't—"

"What is this we thing you're talking about?" cut off Shisui with a waggle of his finger. "This is all you."

"Then you're just going to ignore the fact she went into a coma for no reason," argued Itachi.

"No," countered Shisui. "I'm not going to ignore it as you so kindly put it. I'm going to politely ask what happened instead."

"How is that any different from what I'm doing?" glared Itachi.

"Unlike you, I'm not going to force Kasa to tell me," replied Shisui brightly. "I'm just going to ask and let her answer when she feels like it. You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar."

"…Shisui are you calling me a fly?" I said in a deadpan, but I couldn't help the grin that tugged at my lips.

"Of course not," chirped Shisui. "You're definitely cuter than any fly I've seen."

"Pft." I covered my mouth in a snicker as Itachi continued to scowl at him.

"So," continued Shisui without breaking his smile. "Where were you when you went under?"

"Where?" I raised a brow at the odd question. Of all the things he could have asked, I half expected him to ask what I was doing rather than where I ended up passing out.

"You never know, it could've been something in the area," shrugged Shisui casually. "You could have an allergic reaction or walked into a trap. We wouldn't know until we get all the details."

"Is that so?" I drawled out in amusement before deciding it wouldn't hurt to tell him where. There was hardly had anything significant there for them to conclude anything… at least I didn't think so. "I was at the Memorial Stone."

"Memorial Stone?" repeated Itachi in surprise. "But you haven't gone there even after…"

It took me a moment before I caught onto his train of thought and fought back a grimace. He must have thought I was there because of Santa and Tokuma. Shisui's expression changed too, but it seemed a little different from Itachi's. Unlike the younger Uchiha, the look on his face wasn't so much surprised as it was upset.

"Like I said, I really rather not talk about it." I continued and the expression Shisui's face turned sheepish.
"Sorry, I didn't mean to… well, you know," said Shisui with an awkward wave of his hand.

"I know both you and Itachi mean well, but… really stop worrying about me. I'll be fine." I continued with a sheepish grin of my own. "I'm having it looked into right now so it probably shouldn't happen again anytime soon."

"…Anytime soon?" repeated Itachi with a frown. "Does that mean it could happen again?"

"Well… I'm not the one controlling this so… I can't say it won't happen again." I shrugged. It wasn't a lie. Rayne could probably put me into another coma at her whim if she decides I'm too much of an idiot to keep myself alive. "But… if anything were to happen… can I ask you two to do me a favor?"

"If… what are you talking about Kasa?" grounded out Itachi. "Why are you talking as though you're —"

"I'm not dying." I hastily cut him off with a scowl. "I know I have a bad tendency to end up in the hospital, but geez. I won't die that easily! Have a little faith would you?"

"You make it hard to do so," droned Itachi as Shisui hid a snigger behind his hand.

"And the award of the most supportive teammates go to…" I waved my hands dramatically.

"All right, all right, we know you're not going to die, but with how serious you made it sound, what sort of favor are you looking for?" asked Shisui as he reigned back his mirth and gave me his full undivided attention.

"If… either of you plan to do anything reckless…" I ducked my head down and mumbled quietly. "Could you… at least come talk to me first?"

"Reckless?" noted Itachi with a raised brow. "You're lecturing us about—"

"Itachi," interrupted Shisui with a stern glance before the younger Uchiha sighed and relented.

"On one condition," said Itachi.

"Hm?" I glanced up before I found Shishui shifting behind me to place his hands on my shoulders.

"You gotta kiss him," whispered the Uchiha mischievously.

"Damn it Shisui! I don't want a kiss!" snapped Itachi as he gave a half-hearted swipe at the other.

"He's just shy," teased Shisui before he dodged the attack and continued laughing. "Cute little Itachi's all grown up and—oomph!"

"We'll come to you if we ever decide to do anything reckless, only if you come to us when you need help," said Itachi once he managed to catch Shisui in the stomach with a sharp elbow jab.

"What he said," grunted Shisui as he rubbed at the spot where Itachi jabbed him.

"You'll absolutely, absolutely come talk to me first, no matter what?" I pressed on even though my words started to sound more and more like Naruto's.

_Poke._

"Idiot," said Itachi as I raised a hand to rub at the spot he poked on my forehead. "We agreed on no
more promises, so this is a guarantee, okay?"

"…Okay." I nodded with a faint grin on my lips.

My stay in the hospital didn't last long as I had no real injuries aside from the impromptu coma induced by Rayne. The worse I had from the whole ordeal were grogginess and muscle stiffness from sleeping so long. Once Tesuri cleared me from all his tests and deemed me fit to leave, I was back teaching at the Academy by the third day. While I was given more time to rest and recover, I found it near impossible to sit idly and let Kakashi handle everything on his own.

"Good morning my little ducklings!" I greeted cheerily as I slammed the door to the classroom open and startled the group inside to jump out of their seats.

"K-Kasa sensei!" chorused the group in shock. "You're okay!"

"I hope you've all been keeping up with your studies while I was away." I said brightly as I strolled in as slammed the door behind me with the same fervor. However, before I managed to make it to the podium, the group hastily surrounded me with worry over their faces.

"What happened sensei?" asked Sakura, her hands clenched nervously into fists as she held them to her chest. "You suddenly just disappeared last week and Rin sensei who covered your classes wouldn't tell us anything."

"Are you okay?" continued Ino with the same urgency.

One after another, each one of them bombarded me with their questions of concern. Even Kazuhiko, who normally went out of his way to annoy me, seemed genuinely worried. I blinked in surprise and confusion at the attention before raising my hand to cease all their inquiries.

"Instead of all of you bombarding me at once, how about we turn my absence as a diagnosis practical?" I suggested cheerily.

"What?" murmured the class in confusion.

"Of course, you're all going to be graded on this." I chirped.

"WHAT!?" shouted the group in disbelief.

"All right, I'm going to write down the symptoms on the board, you all have ten minutes after I'm done to come up with a diagnosis. The person furthest from the correct diagnosis…" An evil grin crossed my lips as I moved to the board and started writing. "Well, I'll let you find out on your own what happens."

"W-Wait!" protested the group as they all scrambled back to their desks to grab paper and pen.

I probably shouldn't find such enjoyment in terrorizing my students over something as trivial as class assignments, but after all that I've gone through, it's about time I found some sort of pastime. Some picked up smoking, some picked smut reading… I picked up terrorizing impressionable children… Hmm, Rayne's claim of us being a sociopath was beginning to have more merit.

By the time the impromptu diagnosis quiz was over, the majority of the class had nearly forgotten about their initial worry about my sudden disappearance. At my dissection of the symptoms listed on the board and the possible diagnoses from the list, they listened with rampant attention and took generous amount of notes. I never thought there would be a day I would say this, but… Oddly, I found teaching relaxing, almost comforting even.
"Kasa sensei?" called out a meek voice with uncertainty.

"Yes, Hinata?" I glanced over to her as her voice broke me out of my thoughts.

"...Are you sure you're okay?" asked the girl quietly and while the rest remained quiet, I could see it in their eyes that they wanted to asked the same.

A smile tugged at my lips, their concerns warmed my heart more so than I ever would have thought. It was a touching sight, but at the same time, I have to wonder if they're all closet masochists. Unlike Iruka or any of the other senseis, I don't coddle my students... not that the other senseis coddle their students, rather they were less incline to traumatize them as I do for mine... It's quite possible that they've developed some semblance of Stockholm Syndrome after being in my tutelage, but I cannot allow that attachment to go any further.

"One day, you will encounter someone you won't be able to save." I said quietly and the room grew dreadfully silent. "Whether from sickness or injuries, people die and that's just an unfortunate fact of life. As iryo-nins we can only do our best to extend that life to the best of our abilities, but in the end we're all still just mortals. For some of you, it could lead to steeling away your hearts to protect yourselves from the pain and grief. For others, it could drive them to madness with anger and vengeance."

They remained silent, listening intently to my words.

"Each person take it differently, there is no right or wrong way in coping." I murmured as I rested my gaze on all of them. "As such, what I say next could be disregarded, but I do hope you take a grain of it to your heart if ever you come to face such a situation."

I paused to give the words a moment to sink in. A variety of expressions crossed their face in the short duration, from concern to confusion. None of them had an inkling of the reason behind this speech. As much as it was meant to mentally prepare them for the possibility of losing a patient in their future, this speech was geared to curb Sasuke's avenger tendencies if Kakashi and I were to fail. I have no confidence that this would work at all, but every little bit counts, right?

"Losses will never be easy, whether it's your first or your hundredth." I continued. "Keep them in your memories and use it as your drive to push on forward. They may be gone, but you're still here and you could still make a difference in their stead."

"...Kasa sensei," murmured Tenten quietly with a nervous expression over her face. "I know you're just trying to prepare us for the future... but why does it sound like you're going to..."

At the corner of my eye, I spotted several thoughtful frowns over the other students as they took in her words.

"Don't worry your little heads about it." I chirped reassuringly as I propped a hand at my hip with a grin. "I have no intention of going anywhere until I see each and every one of you become full-fledged iryo-nins."

Surprise crossed their faces at my declaration before bright grins followed. I gave them all a moment to enjoy the praise before promptly popping their happy bubble.

"Now, can anyone tell me what happened to Mr. Rabbit while I was gone?" I changed topics.

Silence.

"Did no one feed him while I was gone?" I raised a brow.
"No!" protested Hinata before she covered a hand over her mouth.

"Okay…" I raised a brow. "Did you guys eat him?"

"Sensei!" snapped Sakura out of horror.

"Seriously, if you ate Mr. Rabbit without me, I'm going to be very upset!" I huffed in annoyance, but secretly enjoyed the look of mortification on their faces as they all screamed over one another to yell at me.

In the end, they refused to reveal what happened to Mr. Rabbit, but I have a good guess that he's in capable hands. Between their stubborn mortification and my natural inclination of being an utter troll, class sped by in a blink of an eye and the majority left in good spirits. Three months ago, they would've been too terrified to even talk, but now they're bold enough to steal Mr. Rabbit away to protect him. It was almost enough to make me wipe an imaginary tear away.

"Hey, Kasa sensei, can I talk with you in private?" called out Kazuhiko as he approached me outside of the room and the rest had moved onto their next class for the day.

"In private?" I raised a brow at the polite request, it was unlike him to not be a total pain in the ass for a change. "Is something wrong?"

"Ah…well…" Kazuhiko coughed into his curled fist as he shifted uncomfortably. "Are you sure you're really okay?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The symptoms you listed in class made it seem like overexertion, but… that speech you gave afterwards," murmured Kazuhiko quietly as he looked down at me, sometimes I really hate being so short. "It sounded like a goodbye. You said you weren't going to go anywhere until all of us became chunin but…"

I blinked in confusion as he ran a hand through his hair awkwardly. He paused when he realized what he was doing and quickly dropped his hand to his side.

"I mean… I can't say I understand what it's like to lose people like you have, but if you need someone to talk to and…Itachi and Shisui aren't around, um…"

It took a moment, but slow realization set in and I found myself gaping at the conclusion he came to.

"…You think I'm suicidal." I noted in surprise.

"I don't think you're suicidal!" protested Kazuhiko, but it was obvious that was what he thought. "Just that… you're probably just stressed and…"

"Pft…" A snicker escaped me before I manage to stifle it behind my hand.

"Huh?" Kazuhiko looked at me with confusion on his face.

My shoulders shook with mirth as I desperately tried to contain my laughter. I've almost forgotten that I'm physically not much older than 13 and that Kazuhiko was no different. To him, I must seem like a broken soul at the brink of snapping the last thread of sanity. No jounin, tokubetsu or otherwise would end up teaching in the Academy for as long as I have.

On top of that, even though I was an iryo-nin, I haven't tended to a single patient in the duration I acted as an Academy sensei. It's really no wonder that he came to that conclusion. Among the
various topics taught in the shinobi curriculum, suicide prevention was one of them. How to recognize the signs and what to do to prevent the undesirable outcome. Kazuhiko's approach was almost near textbook form with how he handled it, but it seems he skipped the step of bringing the matter up to someone that could actually handle me if I were to attempt to kill myself.

"Kasa?" noted Kazuhiko with worry in his voice.

"A-ah, don't mind me." I stifled a giggle as I wiped away the stray tears of laughter. "Your concern is appreciated, but I'm afraid you've mistaken with your diagnosis of my problem."

"Oh… then you're not…" His face flushed red in embarrassment as he rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly.

"…You're going to be a wonderful iryo-nin in the future." I said with a bright smile. "I look forward to the day it happens."

"T-that is… I…" His face turned a deeper shade of red as he spluttered incoherently.

SLAM!

"What do you think you're doing?" grounded out Sasuke furiously as his hand left the door and he stormed into the room.

"Sasuke?" I noted with confusion as he stood in front of Kazuhiko with a furious glare.

"It's none of your business," griped Kazuhiko as he returned his glare.

"Of course it's my business! You were trying to hit on her!" snapped Sasuke.

…Say what now?

Kazuhiko turned into an interesting shade of red as he swung a fist at Sasuke, but the younger boy sidestepped and dodged the attack.

"Admit it! You like—" before Sasuke could finish, Kazuhiko managed to catch him in a headlock and covered a hand over his mouth.

"Shut up!" hissed the older boy as the young Uchiha fought against his hold. "Why does it matter?"

I could only watch in disbelief as an unexplainable twitch started under my right eye. This was not happening. I am not witnessing the bullshit that is a puppy crush from my students.

"Gah!" shouted Kazuhiko in surprise as Sasuke bit his hand for force him to let go. "You little—"

"It matters because she's engaged," growled Sasuke as he kicked off from Kazuhiko and placed some distance between the two of them.

"Engaged?" said Kazuhiko in surprised as he shot a glance towards me. "To who?"

"To me!" snapped Sasuke as he charged forward to attack, but before he could, I grabbed him by the back of his shirt and haul him off his feet.

"…What?" My voice dropped to a dangerous deadpan as glared at the younger boy. "When the hell did that happen?"

"Wait… you really are engaged?" asked Kazuhiko in bewilderment.
"You out." I snapped without sparing a glance towards him. I was too focused in traumatizing Sasuke into submission. "And you explain."

"Y-you…menstruated?" offered Sasuke meekly as he cowered at the killing intent that leaked from my body.

"When the fuck did they decide that as the age of majority? You're not even physically mature enough to reproduce yet! What sort of bull shit is this!?" I snapped before turning to Kazuhiko with a glare. "Why the hell are you still here? I thought I told you to scram! NOW!"

Kazuhiko manage a squeak when my killing intent flared up and he wisely turned heel and fled.

"I'm waiting Sasuke." I snarled.

"B-brother's engagement with Naori-san was the same!" stammered Sasuke as he stared up at me in terror.

"The same as Itachi and Naori-san?" I repeated with a frown. "How?"

"I-I don't know, I just happened to overhear father talking with mom about your engagement," explained Sasuke.

"…Wait." I blinked as the intent faded by a fraction. "Did either of your parents say specifically that I'm engaged to you?"

"Not… really?" said Sasuke sheepishly. "It's just that… Brother is the heir to the Uchiha Clan. Naori-san was chosen to be my brother's fiancée because it would give them a higher chance of producing a child with a powerful sharingan."

"…What does that have to do with you concluding that we're engaged?" I droned, unfazed by the detached assessment to the reasoning behind Itachi's engagement. Any other child, I might've been surprised, but Sasuke was in my iryo ninjutsu classes. It would be strange if he remained oblivious to how biology and the human reproductive system worked.

"Well, Kasa-nee is a powerful kunoichi and you have an engagement with the Uchiha. Naturally, father would likely set the engagement to me in order to create more powerful Uchiha generation… right?" asked Sasuke meekly as he noticed the lack of amusement on my face.

"And you have nothing against this arrangement?" I scowled.

"…Should I?" asked Sasuke with a genuine confused frown. "Aside from when you get really angry, I don't see what's wrong. If Kasa-nee becomes my wife then Naruto would become my brother too right? We'll just be one big family."

"Sasuke…" I stared at him in disbelief at the innocent conclusion he came to before I remembered I was talking an eight-year-old.

Shinobi child or not, he was still a child. He didn't see marriage beyond familial pride and connection. To him, this engagement just meant strengthening the connection he already had with me and Naruto. He didn't understand the social politics that's behind the concept of marriage. The killing intent drained away from me as my shoulders slumped down and I dropped him back on the ground. I gave an exasperated sigh as I clapped my hands over his shoulders.

Times like these, I almost wished I wasn't dealing with an innocent, pre-massacre Sasuke. How am I supposed to explain this to him? Unlike normal marriages, arranged marriages were all about power
and politics. Itachi and Naori's engagement was a prime example in that the pairing was made solely to produce a powerful Uchiha heir to follow after Itachi. If my engagement to Sasuke was finalized, it would likely be the similar, not so much in producing an heir, but to expand the Uchiha's reputation with my own.

After all, that was the original reason why this engagement business existed to begin with. The Uchiha backs me and defends me against the political bullshit brought up by the Danzo and the council and in turn they get to claim the Crimson Terror as their future bride to be.

"Kasa-nee?" question Sasuke in confusion as he glanced up at me.

"Sasuke, that's not why you should get married to someone." I sighed again as I looked at him with a weak grin. "You don't need to marry me in order to see Naruto as your brother or me as your family. To me you are already my little brother. I changed you and Naruto's diapers for gods' sake."

"Oh… then… what's wrong?" asked Sasuke with a confused tilt of his head.

"What I'm trying to say…" I struggled to find the right words for this to make sense to a child. "Is that marriage should be with someone you want to spend the rest of your life with. I know you wouldn't mind spending that time with me, but… it's not the same, at least not in the way you're thinking."

"…I don't get it," said Sasuke.

"Ah… well… you'll get it when you finally find that person." I said with an awkward grin. I'm probably not the best person to talk about these sort of things since I've yet to find a person like that for myself. "But until then… How about not telling people I'm your fiancée?"

"But that Kazuhiko jerk keeps trying to—"

"Sasuke." I said evenly. "I know you love me like a sister, but you don't have to go out of your way to do what you did with Kazuhiko."

"But—"

"Are you saying a tokubetsu jounin like me can't handle a minor Academy student?" I scoffed in amusement.

"Well… no, not really," mumbled Sasuke. "But he's such a jerk! You… don't really like him like that do you?"

"Pft." I snorted. "What do you take me for?"

"Heh… I guess… I was little silly," laughed Sasuke sheepishly as his face flushed in embarrassment.

"Only a little?" I asked with a raised brow.

He ducked down his head in further embarrassment before I raised a hand to ruffle his hair fondly.

"All right, get yourself back to class." I said before turning him around and ushered him towards the door. "I'll be grading the quizzes you all took today and catching up with whatever you've all worked the pass week. So you can head home first with Naruto today okay?"

"Okay…” mumbled Sasuke under his breath.

"I can't hear you." I sang teasingly.
"Yes, Kasa-nee," sighed Sasuke in exasperation before I opened the door and gently pushed him out.

"And no more wild declarations okay?" I added.

"Okay, okay! I get it!" huffed Sasuke with puffed up cheeks as he stomped off sulkily.

I watched him round the corner before I shook my head in amusement and made my way back to my desk. The grin faded from my lips as my mind drifted back to Sasuke's claim over my engagement. While he noted that it was only something he heard in passing spoken by Fugaku, the fact that he heard anything at all, meant there was considerations about my engagement to the Uchiha.

As I've noted before, my reputation was nothing to scoff at. The fact that I am of child-bearing age meant they would try to find the optimal setup for the most political gain. An engagement with Sasuke would actually make a whole lot of sense as the Uchiha head's second son. Logically, they would try to keep the power to the main house as much as they could.

In that regard, they had similar practice to the Hyugas in that the members in the main house takes priority more so than the branch members. The only difference was that the Uchiha didn't go into the practice of using birdcage seals to reign in people from their branch house.

"...I'm probably just overthinking it." I mumbled to myself as I pulled out the sheets from my previous class and started marking up the answers with corrections and explanations regarding to their diagnosis and reasoning.

Mikoto and Kushina would never let me get paired off for something as trivial as political gain. Hell, dad would probably freak out and try to kill anyone who dared to try. A grin tugged at my lips at the thought and I shook my head again. Yeah, I'm probably just overthinking it.

By the time I was done grading and reviewing everything that's gone on for the past week, the sun had long set and most people had gone off home for the day. Others that seek for nighttime excursions or just food and drinks were usually in the downtown area and nowhere near the Academy. Under normal circumstances, I would've been home by now and having dinner with Kushina, Naruto and sometimes my dad.

However, after the facing the bombshell that Sasuke dropped on me earlier in the day, I don't think I could keep it together long enough to hide this tidbit of information from either Kushina or dad. As much as it would be hilarious and entertaining to watch either of them rip the Uchiha a new one, I rather not gamble with pushing the Uchiha in the precarious position they're in. I know I'm being paranoid, but you could never know with the Uchiha's hair-trigger tendencies.

So lost in my thoughts, I didn't even notice someone approaching me.

"Kasa," called out Shisui from the shadows and I nearly jumped out of my skin at his sudden appearance.

"Good lord, Shisui!" I yelped in surprised and pressed a hand against my pounding heart. "Give some warning before you just pop out of shadows! I—"

The annoyance died at my lips when I suddenly found myself pulled into a tight hug.

"...Shisui?" I whispered in confusion as I awkwardly returned the hug. "Is...something wrong?"

"Kasa, I..." He took a shaky breath and held me even tighter. "I'm glad to have met you."
"W-what are you saying?" Dread dropped to the pit of my stomach at his words as my nose finally caught the familiar scent of blood and sweat on him. My hands gripped at his shirt tightly as I tried to pull back and get a better look of Shisui's face, but it was near impossible with how he held me.

"Shisui don't you dare—" I hastily charge a defibrillation jutsu at my hand to zap him to submission, but before I could…

"…Goodbye," whispered Shisui against my ear, his voice final and regretful and I suddenly found myself grasping at air.

"Shisui!" I cried out as I stumbled forward, he had slipped from my grasp using a body flicker.
"No…"

Horror crossed my face as I stared my empty hands. Frantically, I snapped my attention to my surroundings and I glanced at every possible direction to see where he disappeared to.

"Don't you fucking do this to me!" My voice shook as I choked on my own words. Unwanted tears welded up in my eyes as I clenched my hands into fists at my sides and I screamed. "Come back here Shisui!"

No response.

"Shisui!" I shouted desperately as started running in search for him.

I had no clue where he went or where he would go, but regardless how much I screamed or cursed, Shisui never responded… he was gone.

"No, no, no!" I rambled incoherently as I continued my desperate search.

Had I been a bit more sensible, I would've probably noticed my default panic state involved me rambling nonsensical denials. I ran a hand through the mess of hair that clung to my heated face. Frustration bubbled in my chest as my eyes grew heated with the dull pulse of blood behind it. My hands clenched onto fistfuls of hair as I took in deep breaths of air to force myself to calm down.

I can't panic, I don't have time to panic. If I want to save Shisui, I have to calm the fuck down and think. I took another breath and held it to keep myself from taking another and plunging myself further into another panic attack through hyperventilation.

At the sudden deprivation of air my mind focused and broke through the fog of panic. Shisui was going to go after Itachi next to say his goodbyes and entrust him with his remaining eye…but where the hell do I find Itachi? Was he even back from his anbu mission yet? Where did he find Itachi in the original timeline? Where…

SWOOSH

A sudden presence halted my thoughts and I swiftly turned to confront whoever it was that decided to drop in. I didn't have time for…

"You…" A faint whisper escaped my lips as my eyes widened in shock.

"Yo," greeted Kakashi cheerily with a casual wave of his hand, but my eyes gravitated to the prone body he held under his other arm. "I believe you've misplaced one of your ducks."

"Kakashi… is he…" I croaked out, unable to take a step forward in fear of his answer.
"He's still bleeding out from his missing eye, but it should be something you can handle right?" said Kakashi gently as he brought Shisui over and knelt down in front of me so I had better access over Shisui.

"How did you even…" I couldn't finish as tears of relief poured from my eyes. I tried to stem the flow with my sleeve, but it kept coming.

"I said we'll keep him alive didn't I?" replied Kakashi gently. "Did you think I wouldn't do my part?"

"Kakashi…" I choked back a broken, but joyous laugh.

"Come on, he's still bleeding out. It's your turn to keep him alive," said Kakashi as he glanced down at Shisui.

No amount of words could express how I felt at the moment as I hurriedly held my hand over Shisui's empty eye socket with a gentle flow of chakra to stop the blood. I found myself wiping away the tears of relief as I went on treating every injury I could find on Shisui's body. Kakashi crouched patiently and waited until I was done before he cupped a hand behind my head and pulled me into a one-arm hug. All the while he kept a careful hold of Shisui with his other arm.

I found myself sobbing into his shoulder for the second time in my life, but this time was different. This time… I was happy.
From the moment we went into the hospital, I stayed by Shisui's side with his hand clasped in mine. I was too terror to even think of leaving him for a moment. What if Danzo or Tobi's replacement came and sweep him away? I couldn't risk it.

"Kasa, go rest, I'll stay and watch over him until he wakes up," said Kakashi gently. He had dealt with the paperwork and questioning from the hospital staff. They had tried to drag me out several times, but Kakashi convinced them otherwise to let me stay.

"I can't." I shook my head, eyes barely staying open at this point. "If I leave…"

"You're not going to do anyone any good in your current state," reasoned Kakashi.

"But if I—"

"If you're that worried, you can sleep here with me watching over both of you. You left the hospital not too long ago yourself. You need to rest," chided Kakashi.

He was right, in my current state I wouldn't be able to help anyone. Between recovering from my brief bout in coma and the stress from nearly losing Shisui earlier, I was beyond exhausted. Even so, leaving Shisui was not an option, especially when he lost an eye to Danzo. The very eye that could give out a single irrefutable command that the target wouldn't even realize it's against their will.

As my traitorous eyes began to drift close from exhaustion, I clung desperately to Shisui's hand with both of mine as I pressed it against my head in attempts to keep me awake. However, sleep eventually overtook me and I found myself slumped over the side of the bed. Vaguely, I felt Kakashi drape a blanket over me before darkness finally took over.

I had no clue how long I slept, but a rough awakening ripped me from the grips of sleep when the door crashed open and angry shouts filled the room.

"Where is he?" demanded a familiar voice.

"Uchiha-san, this is not the time nor the place to—"

"Shut it, Hatake!" growled the man. "This is clan business and doesn't concern you."

Half-awake, I couldn't pin down who the voice belonged to, but at the violent tone, I reacted against the threat. My chakra flared up with a wave of killing intent and I reached out a hand towards the voice.

"Kasa!" shouted Kakashi as he caught my wrist and clenched it tight until the pain woke me up.

When I opened my eyes, I tensed at Fugaku's familiar face. Had Kakashi not woke me, I might've…

"Fugaku-san…" I greeted with a quiet murmur before Kakashi released my wrist.

"Kasa," returned Fugaku with a slight incline of his head.

"If you want to speak with Shisui, he hasn't woken yet." I said evenly as I collected myself and face him.

"I can see that," retorted Fugaku. "When will he wake?"
"Fugaku-san, Shisui is hurt, whatever questions you have for him can—"

"He lost his eye!" snapped Fugaku. "This is clearly an attack against the Uchihas. We need to find the culprits."

"Even so, he's not going to wake up anytime soon." I grounded out. "He did just lose an eye. Shisui loss a great deal of blood and suffered a number of other injuries. Rushing won't help the Uchiha Clan any—"

"Who are you to determine what is best for the Uchiha clan?" sneered Fugaku. "I may have humored you when you came to me regarding that civilian girl, but do not think for a moment that gives you the power to decide what's best for my clan."

"Best for your clan?" I snarled, eyes heated with a glare. "The only thing you care about is the damn sharingan!"

"How dare you—"

"How dare I what? Point out your bureaucratic bullshit?" I cut him off with a challenge. "Shisui is a part of the clan, but instead of caring about his well-being, you're more concerned about the asshole who took his eye. You have no clue how close he came to dying, all because of—"

"Enough," said Kakashi as he placed a firm hand on my shoulder to stop me from saying more. "Everyone is upset over what happened to Shisui, but as I've said before this is not the time nor the place for an argument. Until Shisui wakes up, it's pointless for either of you to continue arguing."

"Then wake him up," ordered Fugaku as he reached out to grab me. "There are ways to rouse—"

"Uchiha-san," cut off Kakashi coldly as slipped in front of me to block Fugaku from approaching any further. "Your concern for you clansmen is noted, but I believe it's best you leave right now."

Fugaku glowered at his intervention, but took a step back when he realized it was not lucrative to pursue on while the silver-haired jounin was there. Had he not, I might've done something drastic to stop him from getting any closer to Shisui.

"Fine," said Fugaku in a low rumble. "But I expect to be informed when he's finally awake."

Without another word, Fugaku turned his heel and left. I hadn't realized I held my breath until he was gone. Kakashi and I waited in silence to give the man sometime to go out of hearing distance before the silver-haired jounin turned to face me.

"You almost told him about what was to happen," noted Kakashi.

"I know, but…" I gritted my teeth and clenched my hands furiously at my sides. "For the sake of the clan and Konoha, Shisui was ready to… but Fugaku still couldn't care enough to think beyond what's in front of him. If you didn't find Shisui, then he would've…"

"He's still here," interrupted Kakashi as he placed a hand on my shoulder. "We haven't lost him."

"…Yet." I mumbled.

"Are you giving up on him?" asked Kakashi.

"What?" I glanced up at him in surprise before scowling. "Of course not! How could I abandon—"

"…K-Kasa?" croaked out Shisui hoarsely before I spun around and rushed to his side.
"I'm here." I said as I grasped onto his hand and sat at his bedside. His half-lidded eye darted about in a quiet panic as he tried to make sense where he was and I patted his hand reassuringly. "You're in the hospital."

"No…" grunted Shisui in protest as he tried to pull himself up. "I can't be here…"

"What do you think you're doing you idiot?" I snapped as moved to push him back down. "You're in no condition to be moving!"

"There's no time," protested Shisui weakly as he continue to fight against me.

"When I told you and Itachi to come to me if you decided to do something stupid, I didn't mean for you to say goodbye and then go through with it!" I snapped as I struggled to keep him from scrambling out of bed.

"Kasa," protested Shisui as he grabbed onto my arm and tried to push me back. "I didn't want to get you involved! It'll be dangerous for you if you're caught up in this mess!"

"She's already involved," interrupted Kakashi as he stepped in and pushed him down with a single hand and a firm stare. "If you continue to pursue whatever you're trying to do before, you're only going to make her cry again. Do you really want to do that?"

I glared at the silver-haired jounin, he remained unfazed and ignored my eyes on him. Shisui met Kakashi's gaze defiantly, but grew quiet and settled back down without further resistance.

"I want to speak with Kasa, alone," said Shisui, suspicion still clear in his voice.

"No," replied Kakashi without missing a beat, not humoring Shisui's demand even for a second. "Your current track record in staying put is against you."

Shisui looked as though he was about to get up once more, but I hastily interrupted before he could do so.

"Whatever you need to tell me, you can tell Kakashi too." I reassured him and glanced towards Kakashi. "I trust him."

"…Are you sure?" asked Shisui as he kept a wary eye on the silver-haired jounin.

"Positive." I nodded and squeezed his hand reassuringly. "So please, don't fight us anymore."

Shisui drew his gaze away from Kakashi and stared down at our hands before he finally glanced up at me with a tired gaze.

"…I'm limited to what I can tell you, but not due to my own volition," started Shisui as he shot a glance back to Kakashi again.

"This has to do with Danzo's Root faction in anbu, right?" noted Kakashi before surprise crossed the Uchiha's face.

"How did you…" Shisui trailed off with a shake of his head. "Not important now. What you need to know is the man in the fox mask."

"Fox mask?" repeated Kakashi repeated with a frown, but his eye darted to me in question. I averted my gaze.

"You met him the day you fell into a coma," said Shisui as he tightened his grip over my hand. "He
knows that you're an oracle. My eye, you know what it could do. You know what could happen, would happen. You have to be careful. They're planning to—ngh!"

"Shisui!" I shouted when his whole body suddenly spasm and he keeled over the edge of the bed. I barely had enough time to catch him before he completely fell off. "What's wrong? Shisui? Shisui!"

"Kasa move," ordered Kakashi as he picked up Shisui from my arms and dragged him back onto the bed before he pulled the Uchiha's head up to meet his eye. "Focus on my voice, stop thinking about anything Root related."

Root related? A flicker of memory flash through my mind with an image of an unfamiliar seal on someone's tongue. My brows furrowed and I hastily pressed two fingers to my arm and sent a burst of chakra through the seals to find a match. The familiar rush of information flooded my mind as I skimmed quickly through the various seal theories to decipher the seal. Through the barrage of information, I could see Shisui slowly relaxing from his spasm and fell limp against the silver-haired jounin.

"...It's the silencing seal," murmured Kakashi as he adjusted his hold on Shisui and tucked him back into bed, the Uchiha had lost consciousness shortly after the spasms ended. "Danzo placed on all his Root operatives to keep them from spilling any information regarding Root."

"We can remove it, can't we?" I asked as I pushed more chakra into my seals trying to find a means to cancel it.

"Not easily... and not likely in time for it to be any use," replied Kakashi as he glanced towards me.

"Then what?" I asked with a grimace as the information came to an end. "Do we just watch him suffer and wait for someone to finally end him?"

Seal breaking was an ability privy to seal masters and seal breakers. As a seal activator and amplifier that was a near impossibility for me. Like what Kakashi just said, even if I made an effort to try, I wasn't likely going to be able to break it in time.

"That just means we have to work even faster to neutralize the threat," said Kakashi as he turned his gaze to me. "We've already prevented his demise once."

"...And we'll be able to do it again." I murmured uncertainly even though I desperately wanted it to be true.

Knock-knock…

Kakashi and I both tensed and turned our attention to the door, but relaxed when we saw it was only Rin. She gave us both a weak smile as she quietly closed the door behind her.

"I know it's been an exhausting day for everyone and I would rather the two of you get some rest, but Kasa was requested at the conference room," said Rin gently

"By who?" asked Kakashi with a frown. "The hokage?"

"And the council elders," answered Rin with a grimace.

"Is Danzo there?" pressed on the silver-haired jounin, his brows furrowed.

"No," said Rin as she shook her head. "At least, he hasn't come yet. You might want to talk to them before he gets there."
"But what about Shisui? I can't just leave him!" I protested.

"Kasa," said Rin as she knelt down in front of me and clasped my hands in hers. "I may not know what the situation is right now, but you can trust me, can't you? I'll protect Shisui for you, in your place."

"Rin-san…" I murmured.

…That's right, Rin knew of my oracle abilities. While I haven't told her anything about what happened with Shisui or what's to happen, she knew that I was involved and working to change an unsavory future. I glanced to Kakashi for guidance and by the look on his face, he agreed. My shoulders slumped dejectedly as I nodded.

"…All right." I held onto her hands tightly. "Please take care of him for me."

"Of course," said Rin reassuringly before she glanced up to Kakashi. "You're going along with her, right?"

"I'll keep an eye on this one," scoffed Kakashi as he rested a firm hand on my shoulder. "Watch that one, he's more slippery than Obito when it comes to fleeing from help."

"Hmph," snorted Rin in amusement. "Even you can't escape me under my care. I'll be able to handle it."

"Who said I wasn't going easy on you?" retorted Kakashi.

"Go," sighed Rin in exasperation and took a step back to let us pass.

With that, Shisui was left under Rin's watchful eye. However, even as Kakashi tried to steer me out into the halls and towards conference room, I found myself unable to keep myself from glancing back every few steps.

"He'll be fine," reassured Kakashi. "Rin's there, she won't let anyone get to him."

"I know…" I murmured.

The trek felt like impending doom as we drew closer and closer to the conference room. Kakashi's firm and reassuring hand on my shoulder calmed my nerves some, but it hardly settled the raging torrent in my stomach.

"Kakashi, I believe we've only requested the presence of Kasa Mon," said Koharu evenly as we made our way in.

"So you have, Koharu-sama," replied Kakashi in turn with a pleasant tone and made no move to leave. The woman frowned, obviously heckled by the blatant disrespect he showed.

"He may stay," continued Hiruzen before the woman could begin her berating. "After all, Kakashi is aware of the circumstances. Isn't that right, Shikaku?"

"I would say so," droned Shikaku with a lazy drawl as our eyes met with an even stare. "Regarding to her oracle abilities."

"…You told them." I somehow managed to keep my voice cool and steady despite the panic coursing through my mind.

"You knew?" noted Homura with a raised brow at Kakashi. "And you never thought to inform us
"I believe it was in Konoha's best interest that the fewer people who know the better," replied Kakashi. "You never know who might be plotting a mass genocide with such information."

"Careful with your words Hatake," chided the elderly man. "Some may take them as dangerous accusations."

"They're idle speculation at best," countered Kakashi. "Accusations require some form of proof after all."

"Yet, its rumors from such thoughtless speculation that ultimately brings everything to ruins in the end," grounded Koharu as she gave him a reproachful stare.

My head throbbed at the exchange. Why can't anyone ever just get to the point and say what they want to say instead of being a bunch of pretentious assholes? At this rate, the Uchiha massacre might as well have occurred, cleaned up and swept under the rug of Konoha's dirty history. This is why I hate bureaucracy.

"Hem," coughed Shikaku as he cleared his throat and drew all attention to him. "I would like to note that Kasa's visions are not fixed. Depending what actions or changes occur, the events may result differently. I think it would be wiser if we find out what differences might have occurred and work from there."

"Sound suggestion," agreed Hiruzen as he turned his aged eyes on me. "Shikaku mentioned a possible coup from the Uchihas. Could you clarify why?"

"Why?" interrupted Koharu with a scoff as she turned her attention to him. "Is it not obvious? That clan has always craved power and control over Konoha since its founding. You don't need an oracle to tell you that. You could see it for yourself in their arrogance and disregard for anyone outside of their own clan."

"Arrogance, or pride?" queried Hiruzen as he puffed on his pipe. "The Uchiha Clan, while pretentious at times, are not completely unfeeling. Their pride keeps them from showing it on the surface, but like anyone who's human, they're affected by wary eyes and hurtful accusations by the very people they're trying to protect."

"Are you implying that the Uchiha's plan for a coup is due to hurt feelings?" scoffed Homura. "Don't be ridiculous."

"Improbable," amended Hiruzen but he didn't let up. "But not impossible."

"If I may be impertinent," cut in Shikaku casually as he sent me a passing glance. "Rather than speculating the reason for the coup, we should be focused on preventing it from happening."

The room grew reluctantly silent as all eyes turned to me. I fought the urge to hide behind Kakashi as I kept my breathing even and I stared back at Hiruzen and the council elders.

"As of now." I started quietly once I gathered my nerves. "Kakashi and I have prevented Shisui's death, one of the causes for the Uchiha coup. However, since Shisui's missing an eye, the chances of the coup occurring is still high."

"Temporarily ignoring the fact that you didn't see fit to inform us on the matter," jibed Koharu as she stared me down. "What happened in the vision you saw? Did the coup succeed? Did the Uchiha take over?"
"…No." I replied with a lackluster drone. "The clan was massacred before they could enact the coup."

"Massacred?" repeated Hiruzen regretfully. "By who?"

"…Itachi." I continued as I gazed at him with an icy stare.

The room grew silent as they digested the weight of my words. Between Itachi being an Uchiha and the fact he was willing to massacre his own clan for the sake of the village, they faced a peculiar situation. On the one hand, they could eliminate the coup d'état without dirtying their own hands, but on the other they face the decision of forcing a child to bear the weight of killing his own family. Ethically, there shouldn't ever be a choice regarding this.

Realistically… they had a village to worry about and a civil war was not something they wanted to happen… but that didn't make it any better.

"Before any of you make a decision, I would like to remind you that Itachi is on a mission," inserted Shikaku and broke the silence. "He's unlikely to return in time if a coup was to happen."

"What?" snapped Koharu as he turned to the man with a scowl.

"It would be easy wouldn't it?" continued Kakashi with a nonchalant air. "Passing off that responsibility to another person… even if said person is a child."

"You knew this would happen. You sent him away didn't you?" accused Homura as he glared at Kakashi.

"Mission assignments are dealt out by the Hokage. I have no such power to do so," reasoned Kakashi with a drawl, but he focused his steely eyes on him. "But I won't deny that I may have suggested to Hokage-sama for Itachi to be placed on an extended mission away from the village."

"Hiruzen, this is clearly treason!" declared Homura heatedly. "Hatake is actively trying to sabotage the village."

"On the contrary," cut in Kakashi without much ceremony. "I'm trying to prevent Konoha from making one of its biggest mistakes in history."

"Prevent?" snapped Koharu furiously. "How exactly are you going to prevent anything if the coup ends up ruining Konoha?"

"If you eliminate the Uchihas there might not even be a Konoha left in ten years' time." I snapped. "The Uchihas aren't the problem! The problem is—"

*Shut up, shut up!*

"The problem is?" a low drone cut through the air as the door opened. A cold sweat clung to my neck as Danzo appeared and made his way in.

"Kasa?" questioned Kakashi as he glanced down at me, but I couldn't keep my eyes off the man.

He had Shisui's eye. The very eye that could order anyone to do anything he wants. If I tried to warn them all now, he could very well just use it on Hiruzen and have him kill me on the spot. It doesn't even have to be Hiruzen, he could use it on Kakashi or Shikaku and have them do it instead.

"… The Uchihas might not even be staging a coup anymore." I remedied. "In the last several years
they have attempted to mend relations with the civilian sectors, providing letters of recommendation for potential civilian children that were interested in becoming shinobi and actively worked to improve their current situation."

"But that's not a definite is it?" countered Danzo smoothly as though he was a part of the conversation from the beginning. "It would be better that the Uchihas are taken care of and eliminated before they could become a problem."

"Danzo, these are lives of Konoha citizens we're talking about," frowned Hiruzen. "We are not discarding their lives away as if they're nothing!"

"Hiruzen, you've always been a soft hearted old fool," droned Danzo as he glanced towards him. "Can you really put the innocent lives of the rest of the village at risk because you feel that there's a chance that the Uchiha could be trusted? You know as well as I do that they've been at odds since the forming of the village."

As the man spoke, I kept a close eye on Hiruzen to see if the elderly man would get swayed by Danzo's words. Shisui's eye worked subtly, anyone affected wouldn't even know they're being brainwashed even after it's too late. The best I could hope for is to catch it and tell Kakashi and Shikaku and hope they could do something.

"It is because they've been at odds that we cannot do this to them!" argued Hiruzen. "As one of the founding clans, they should never have to feel the alienation that they've felt, but they have. I will not continue to allow this mistake to continue on. I believe the Uchiha can be reasoned and the matter can be resolved peacefully!"

I fought back the urge to gnaw at my lower lip, at the moment Hiruzen didn't seem to be swayed by his words. If anything, he seems even more adamant to refute Danzo's claims. Maybe the man was saving the eye for another time.

"Peacefully?" scoffed Danzo. "If it could be done peacefully it would have been done years ago."

"We will not eliminate the Uchihas, this is final!" grounded out Hiruzen.

"…As you wish," replied Danzo evenly before he turned to leave. "But I do hope you can sleep well at night when the streets of Konoha run red when the Uchiha executes their coup. I doubt will they share the same kindness you have for them."

To my surprise, he left without any further problems and I stared at the empty space before me in cold dread. Why did he give in so easily? Why didn't he put up more of a fight? What would he gain by keeping the Uchihas alive?

"Hiruzen, are you sure about this?" asked Koharu with a deep frown. "Such trust on the Uchihas…"

"As Shikaku said before, Kasa's visions are not definite," reasoned Hiruzen. "And Kasa-kun noted that the Uchiha have been making progress in improving and attempting to join with Konoha once more. Rather than punishing them, they should be given a chance."

"But what if that trust is misplaced?" reasoned Homura. "It won't just be the death of Konoha shinobi, as Danzo said, the Uchihas aren't likely to spare civilians or children if that were the case."

"Did you not hear me when I spoke to Danzo?" boomed Hiruzen with a low rumble. "This conversation is over, you're all dismissed."

"Hiruzen!" argued Koharu, but a firm look from Hiruzen ended any further protest she may have.
"…By your leave, Hokage-sama." I said quietly with a bow before Hiruzen left the room, followed by Koharu and Homura. The two elders didn't look please at his decision, but neither of them seem like they were going to do anything to refute him.

Danzo didn't do anything… why didn't he do anything? He couldn't be sure the coup wouldn't happen. I'm not even sure the coup isn't happening anymore. What if… he wants the coup to happen? What if it's all just a ploy for Konoha to go to war and he puts the blame on Hiruzen and rips control of Konoha from him, claiming the man's senility brought destruction and bloodshed on the village? It would make sense, no one would even refute him if he decided to take the Hokage seat.

"Kasa?" spoke up Kakashi before I snapped out of my thoughts and glanced up to him. The room had cleared and it was only us and Shikaku in the room "What's wrong?"

"…Danzo has Shisui's eye." I lowered my gaze. "It has the ability to give a single command that cannot be resisted or countered."

"Did he use it?" asked Shikaku with a frown.

"I… don't think so." I murmured with uncertainty. "I'm not even sure about the coup."

"Why didn't you say anything?" pressed Shikaku.
"I thought he was going to use the eye on one of you or worse, use it on Hokage-sama." I protested. "There would have been no way for us to fight against it if he did so. Hokage-sama could have just ordered for our deaths if we tried to explain if Danzo gave him the order."

"How often can this ability be used?" asked Kakashi.

"After it's been used once, it takes years before the eye recovers enough for another use." I answered. "But… he didn't use it."

"Why not?" frowned Kakashi.

"…I don't know." I shook my head. "He's planning something… It's probably best if we kept an eye on him… though, it'd be hard to do so without making eye contact with him."

"I'll cover the surveillance on him," answered Shikaku. "Anything in particular I should take note?"

"Probably anyone significant he comes in contact with… I'm not certain he won't use the eye on someone else." I replied before glancing to Kakashi. "Can you…"

"Shisui will be taken care of," reassured Kakashi as he rested a hand on my head. "Obito should be back from his mission soon and we'll have another hand to help. Everything will be fine."

"…Right." I murmured quietly and lowered my gaze to the ground.

"Why don't you head home and get some rest?" suggested Kakashi gently. "Everything will be better in the morning."

"…Yeah, it'll be fine in the morning." I agreed quietly before he ruffled my hair and ushered me out through the doors.

Everything will be fine in the morning…
Broken Apologies

As Kakashi suggested, I went home and mulled over what happened in the hospital with Danzo. With the way things are now, the coup might be an uncertainty. Hiruzen may have declared the massacre an unacceptable alternative to deal with the Uchihas, but the fact that Danzo didn't do anything left me worried. With the current conflict against Kumo and Kiri, the village was already pressed on two warfronts. Konoha can't afford to go into civil war. Just what on earth was that man planning?

"I can't deal with this." I sighed in exasperation and dropped down on the futon with an arm draped over my eyes.

This was just trading one misfortune for another. The massacre threat might be over, but that didn't mean coup d'état threat was gone. What was the cost of the coup? How many essential people would be loss in the exchange? Could Konoha afford such losses?

If the Uchiha went through with the coup, there was no doubt the other clans would step in to retaliate. If not for their treasonous act, then their arrogance. The Hyuga and Inuzuka would likely be the first to rise against them, be it due to pride or a sense of loyalty. Other clans like the Akimichi and Yamanaka might take point depending on how Shikaku direct the Naras. Hell, even the quiet clan of Aburame might rise up to the fight.

Even so, the Uchihas still had a number advantage against them in the village. With the war on two fronts, the number of shinobi in the village were already stretched thin. With the Konoha police, the Uchiha had the number advantage of more clansmen while the other clans had to work with what numbers they could scrounge up.

And if the Uchihas decided to be ruthless… who's to say they wouldn't enact their own massacres in order to secure their hold in Konoha? They wouldn't even need to have that many people with the magenkyo sharingan. A handful of Uchiha with full matured eyes could probably do enough damage on their own.

In that case… who would be among the massacred? I frowned as I shuffled through my memories for potential targets. The first being Hiruzen with him still being the hokage. No doubt, they would try to kill him in order to rip the power from the old man. Another would likely be anyone would could challenge them, be it power or kekkai genkai, the Hyugas… then lastly, anyone that could possible challenge them for their seat of power… the descendants of a hokage.

The chance of Tsunade returning on her own to challenge the Uchiha was unlikely, so that left the Sarutobi Clan and…Naruto.

My breath stilled as the thought ran through my mind. They couldn't possibly go through with killing Naruto… would they? Sure, he's Minato's son, but Naruto's Sasuke's best friend. They could practically be brothers at this point… but what were the chances that the Uchiha elders would see this and care? What were the chances that Naruto and Kushina would be able to sit by and accept the destruction the Uchihas wrought?

I took a shaky breath and crossed my other arm over the first as I desperately tried to clear my mind of such dark thoughts, but I couldn't. The breaths turned ragged, my face grew heated with frustration. Blood pounded through my ears as though it was the drums of war.

"I can't…" I whimpered through unshed tears.
The Uchihas can't enact their coup. The Uchihas can't be allowed to take over Konoha. The Uchihas... need to be taken care of and eliminated before they can become a problem...

"...Heh... heh... hahahaha!" I forced out a broken laugh as tears streamed down my face. "...This is going to be how it is... huh?"

I pressed a hand against my face as I stifled the lackluster laughter and I dragged myself to my feet. Tears dripped from my face as I staggered through my room to my storage scrolls before I plopped down and started unsealing and creating seal cards. Hilarious, how my greatest worry just hours ago was their survival and now...

"The Uchihas need to be taken care of...the Uchihas need to be..." I choked back the words as I rubbed away the tears furiously with the back of my hand.

By the time I left the apartment, Kushina haven't returned from her grocery shopping. Which was probably a blessing on my part as she would have likely stopped me from doing what I was about to do. Hell, if dad wasn't at the hospital, he would probably stop me too. After all... who in their right mind would try to take on the entire Uchiha Clan alone?

...Well, in another time, Itachi would've done so... but right now, he wasn't even here.

I lowered my gaze to the anbu gauntlets on my hands as I sped away from the apartment and towards the Uchiha district. Aside from some choice equipment from my anbu gear, I kept my attire close to my normal kimono to keep from raising suspicion. In order for me to have any chance against the Uchihas, I needed surprise to be on my side and strike preemptively before any of them could retaliate.

...Not that it was difficult. None of the Uchihas expected a thing as I walked through the district from the main entrance. I've been such a common sight in the district through the years, no one even bothered giving more than a brief glance as I passed. To them, it just seemed like I was visiting Mikoto-san as I have all the other times I've come through the district.

Little did they know... I planned to visit her last, if only to keep her alive for as long as I could.

Out of all the Uchihas, Mikoto was the person I least wanted to kill. The woman was like a second mother to me in ways that Kushina wasn't, but... she was also an Uchiha. I pushed the thought away as I made my way to the shrine, careful to keep out of sight as I entered the main hall. It was empty now as it was late in the afternoon, but after what happened in the hospital today, I didn't doubt that Fugaku would hold a meeting with the elders and all the available and battle-ready Uchihas regarding to the coup.

My eyes glanced towards the ground as I counted the tatami mats. If my memories served me right, it should be the seventh mat from the right. It didn't take much effort to find the right one and peeled it back to show the door that lead to the Uchiha's secret meeting place. With the use of chakra threads and careful maneuvering, I made my way down the passage and carefully tugged the mat back into place as I closed the door above me. It wouldn't do for them to see something out of place before I could act.

The dark passage didn't pose much of a problem as there was only one room at the end of the path. With careful precision, I hid seal cards behind strips of camouflage cloth throughout the passageway and linked each card with the finest of chakra threads I could manage. The sharingan may be able to spot chakra, but with so many other people around, it would be hard for them to take notice of something as minute as a chakra threads as thin as a spider's web.
Once I rigged the ventilation duct's airflow to seal off on command, I made my way back up into the shrine and hid myself away in the ceiling above the room and remained in wait for the Uchihas to gather.

I have no clue how long I waited, but by the time the Uchihas made their way into the shrine and down to the secret room, the sun had long set. They came in twos, threes and sometime even more between ten minute intervals as to keep their movements discreet. I kept silent and hidden in the rafters as I listened to the quiet shifts in the air. As shinobi, their footsteps and breathing were near silent, but it didn't mean their clothes did the same.

Every move, every rustle could be audibly heard in the quiet night. I waited until the sound of all movements ceased and the quiet thump of the hidden door close before I dropped a seal card over it. With one last deep breath, I gathered my nerves and held out my hand as I did a mental countdown.

"...I'm sorry." I murmured quietly and pulsed out a violent wave of chakra.

Several things happened at once. The card on the door activated and unsealed a large boulder over the opening, the air vents in the hidden room sealed off from circulating fresh air, the various cards hidden unsealed and gassed the unexpected Uchihas with both paralytic and sleeping gas. From where I sat, I could hear the faint coughs underneath the door as feeble pounding attempted to push its way out.

With the weight of the boulder and the awkward angle on the stairs beneath it, it would be difficult if not impossible to get enough leverage to push the boulder out of the way. In addition to that, the design of the room below made it dangerous to shoot of any sort of destructive jutsus without bringing harm to those already in the room. It was likely ten minutes before the sounds of struggle finally stopped and the room grew silent once more.

I waited another ten before I bothered to go down. Shinobi could hold their breaths for a considerably long time. The drugs I gassed the room with were fast acting, but unless they've breathed it in, there was a chance that some were still awake. I planted a hand on the ground and sent out an amplified wave of defibrillation jutsu through the door before I sealed away the boulder and pulled the door open.

Sprawled on top of the stairs were a number of unconscious Uchihas. I fought back a grimace as I knelt down to the closest one and cupped one hand on his chin and the other on the top of his head. I lowered my head in prayer as I stared down at the unfamiliar man's pale face.

"...Forgive me." I whispered before I twisted his head sharply and a resounding crack echoed through the narrow passageway. The body fell limp to the ground as his head slipped from my hands and I moved onto the next body.

I'm sorry.

SNAP…

Please forgive me.

CRACK…

I'm so sorry.

THUMP…

I lost count how many times I said those words as I went through each and every one in the secret room. I wanted to make their deaths as clean and painless as possible by having them unconscious or
paralyzed, but it didn't make the act any easier. By the time I reached the inner area of the room, I've gone through most of the lesser clansmen and all that were left were the clan elders and Fugaku.

…Like Mikoto, I wanted to leave Fugaku last as I dealt with each of the elders. Even though the man was strict and stringent regarding how I acted during my stay with the Uchihas, he was kind and even humored me when possible. If not for him, I don't think I could've gotten anyone else to vouch for Sakura to continue in the Academy. He was like a stoic uncle that didn't want to seem soft-hearted.

As I went through each of the elders, I found one that was paralyzed, but still awake. He must've tried to hold his breath for as long as he could.

"… It would've been easier for you if you were unconscious." I mumbled under my breath as I knelt down and cupped his face in my hands.

He stared at me with wide terrified eyes and ragged breath. His sharingan flickered to life briefly, but I snapped his neck before he could do anything else. I fought back a shaking breath as I turned my attention to Fugaku... the last Uchiha in the room. My hands shook as I staggered over to his body and I placed my hands on his face. Tears pooled at my eyes again as I stared down at him. Despite his unconsciousness, his brows remained furrowed brows. His harden features didn't differ from when he was awake

"F-Fugaku-san." I bit back a sob as I closed my eyes. My hands gripped onto his head firmly and twisted it in one sharp motion.

SNAP…

Fugaku's body dropped lifelessly to the ground as I released his head from my hands. My stomach turned violently as I stumbled to my feet and out of the secret room. My head spun, my fingers tingled. I found myself hyperventilating if only to keep myself from throwing up. As I stumbled out of the shrine, the cool air hit my heated face and brought my mind back into focus.

There were still more I had to do. There were still more Uchihas that needed to be eliminated. This emotionally driven clan. These avenger-prone individuals. None of them can be allowed to survive. None of…

"Kasa?" said a familiar voice and I looked up to see a purple-haired kunoichi… Itachi's fiancé. "What are you doing here?"

She wasn't at the meeting… Did she just get back? Or was she standing guard? If so… were there more guards?

"Naori-san." I choked back the tears as I raised my arm to rub away the tears.

"What's the matter?" asked Naori, a concerned gaze crossed her face as she made her way towards me.

"I… the Uchihas..." I hiccupped and sobbed as she reached out to comfort me.

"The Uchihas?" frowned Naori as she pressed a hand to my shoulder and knelt down to my eye level. "Did something happen?"

"I'm sorry." I whispered and sent out an amplified wave of defibrillation jutsu to my shoulder.

Naori's eyes widened and the surge of chakra and hastily retreated with a sharp jump back.
However, not before her hand caught the shock from the defibrillation jutsu. I fought back the hiccups as she shook away the shock from her arm and narrowed her eyes at me with caution.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the woman as she slipped into a defensive stance with one hand at the hilt of her sword.

"… If only you weren't an Uchiha." I murmured quietly as my seal cards slipped out from my obi and stared floating around me. "I'm really… really sorry."

Naori's brows furrowed in thought for a moment before his face soften regretfully.

"… How cruel," whispered Naori sadly. "They sent you to deal with us?"

"Please forgive me." I croaked out, not having the heart to tell her that I was doing this on my own volition.

"You've already killed the elders and the others already, haven't you?" asked Naori.

I said nothing.

"…And now you're going after the rest of the clan," concluded Naori.

"It has to be done." I murmured.

"It doesn't have to," said Naori gently. "The coup is over. There's no way the Uchiha Clan could go on now."

"You don't… understand." I forced out with a shake of my head. "They have to die. Everyone has to die."

"Why?" asked Naori calmly. "Why does everyone have to die?"

"I'm sorry." I cried out. "I'm sorry!"

"Kasa, wait—" protested Naori, but I didn't give her a chance to continue as I slipped into a series of dance seals and summoned up a gust from the wind vortex.

Naori was quick to shield her face from the sudden gale and hastily retreated as I unsealed a number of boulders from my cards and sent them crashing towards her like a meteor strike. The woman skipped and dodged as she weaved through wave after wave of flying boulders. For those she couldn't dodge from, she swapped away with a replacement jutsu instead.

"You don't have to do this!" shouted Naori over the roar of the wind vortex as she drew on her blades.

I said nothing as I continued my line of attack. With the wind vortex, I made it near impossible for Naori to use any fire-based jutsu, unless she wanted to create a firm maelstrom in the middle of the Uchiha district. The flying boulders kept her at a distance so that she couldn't come into range with that sword of hers. However, that hardly stopped her as she simply just replaced herself with one boulder after another to get into range with me.

"I don't have a choice." I screamed back before sending another wave of chakra through the chakra threads connected to the explosive seal on each boulder.

I briefly caught sight of Naori's eyes widening before she moved to hide behind the shrine gate's pillar as the boulder shrapnel rained from the explosion.
"…I'm starting to think that you might be right," replied Naori from her hiding place. "Kasa, I don't want to kill you."

"…And I don't want to kill you either." I replied regrettably.

"Then, this will make it much easier," said Naori before she darted out from behind the pillar and towards me with a sword at hand. "You're doing this against your will."

"…Naori-san, why can't the rest of the Uchiha Clan be like you?" I murmured and slipped out a card from my gauntlet. With a poof my umbrella appearance and blocked her descending blade.

"What's to say the Uchiha aren't?" reasoned the woman as she pushed her blade against my umbrella. She had the advantage in size and weight, I made a swift parry and sidestepped backwards as she pressed forward with her attack.

"The Uchihas are a threat. They need to be eliminated!" I shouted and opened my umbrella as a shield to guard against her flurry of sword strikes.

"What threat?" continued Naori calmly. "You've already killed the majority of the shinobi. You've killed the elders. You've even killed the head of the clan. What other threats are there?"

"Survivors. Avengers." I argued before unsealing a boulder above Naori. The woman sidestepped and dodged the falling boulder before she circled around. I didn't manage to raise my umbrella in time as she charged forward. Her blade thrust into my shoulder and she slammed me into the ground.

"What's remained of the civilian sector are children, elderly and the disabled. What can they do?" asked Naori as she stared down at me.

"You don't understand!" I growled as I grabbed onto the blade to keep it from going any deeper.

"What don't I understand?" challenged Naori.

"The survivors would bear the hate. The children would grow up to be avengers." I snapped.

"And what will happen?" asked Naori.

"Don't you get it? They'll become monsters!" I roared and reached out with my free hand to slam a burst of cancerous chakra into her stomach.

Naori's eyes widened in shock and pain and she abandoned her blade and hastily stumbled back as the surface of her stomach exploded. Blood coated her clothes as she dropped to the ground. Had I have full function of my body and not distracted by the pain of being skewered, I could've charge up enough chakra to have her innards explode rather than just the surface of her stomach.

"Kasa…" grimaced Naori as she raised her head, sharingan flaring in her eyes.

"If they become monsters, Konoha would fall." I rambled on as I reached up and yanked the blade from my shoulder. "I need to eliminate them before they could become a problem."

"Are you sure?" whispered Naori as she watched me approach with her sword in hand.

"That's why they have to die. That's why…you have to die." I stared down at her with gritted teeth and regret. "I'm sorry Naori-san."

Just as I plunged the blade down, I noticed the color in her right eye suddenly turn white. She did nothing as the blade continued on and impaled her through the back of her neck.
"…I'm sorry." I repeated and pulled the blade back.

"I know," replied Naori and I suddenly found myself impaled in the shoulder once more.

"W-what?" I gasped out as she pinned me to the ground again, looking no different than she have a moment ago before I slammed the cancerous chakra into her stomach. "How did you…?"

"Like I said before," said Naori softly. "I don't want to kill you… and it's obvious that you don't want to kill me either. So why don't you just—"

"You have to die!" I charged up another handful of cancerous chakra and slammed it into her stomach and once against she stumbled back grimacing as I yanked the blade from my shoulder and slammed it into the back of her neck.

"Why?" asked Naori before I found myself skewered again.

"The Uchihas need to be eliminated before they become a problem." I repeated through the haze of pain. Why did it feel as though I was being skewered for the first time again?

"And how are the Uchihas a problem?" asked Naori.

I found myself slamming my hand into her stomach again before stealing her blade and plunging it into her neck once more. Only to find her blade back into my shoulder and her looming over my body as though nothing had happened.

"…How are you doing this?" I grounded out as I slammed my hand into her stomach again and the scene repeated over and over again.

"This is Izanami," answered Naori after what might've been the tenth repeat of her death. "Until you can see the truth in the lies you're locked in, you'll be experience this loop again and again from now till eternity."

"…Izanami?" I repeated with a cold chill running down my spine before I finally realized that she had used the magenkyo sharingan before I plunged the blade into her neck. "No, no, no. You can't keep me here! You can't keep me in this loop! I have to get out! I have to eliminate the Uchihas before they destroy Konoha! Before they become monsters!"

"But are we monsters?" asked Naori at the start of the next loop, blade still plunged into my shoulder.

I had no clue how many times I've gone through the loop. Again and again, I plunged the blade into Naori-san's neck only to find myself impaled again with her looking over me. Never once did she try to kill me. All she did was ask me if the Uchihas were monsters. If they were a threat. If they should be killed.

Each time, those questions were met with death, over and over again. I know what izanami was and I know it's impossible to leave unless you changed your mind, but… how could I? The Uchihas were a threat that needed to be eliminated. They needed to be dealt with before they could become a problem….

A problem?

Were the Uchihas really ever a problem? Aside from the Madara fiasco and maybe Tobi from the original timeline… have the Uchihas ever done anything that was truly problematic? They planned to enact a coup d'état… but even in the original timeline, it never went through… because Itachi killed
them. He killed them... by himself.

"Are we a threat?"

If they were dangerous... how could anyone kill them alone? No... that's not right.

"Are we monsters?"

Itachi managed... but I'm not Itachi... if I could kill the Uchihas... then...

...out of it! You're being used! WAKE UP YOU DUMBASS!

My breath hitched as the blade stopped before it could skewer Naori again. That voice... I haven't heard it all day.

"...Rayne?" I croaked out in confusion.

Finally! You utter idiot! Who the hell stares directly into the eyes of someone who has a sharingan?

"...But—" I started as I stared down at Naori on the ground.

I'm not talking about Itachi's fiancée! You've been fucked over by Danzo!

"Then... the Uchihas..." I frowned and dropped the blade to the ground.

"Are not a threat," interrupted Naori as she glanced up at me with a faint smile. "I'm glad you've finally come to your senses."

"Naori...san?" I said in confusion before I shook my head and dropped to my knees next to her. "Oh my god, what did I do?"

What do you think you did genius?

"I...killed them... it's my fault." I stared down at my surprisingly bloodless hands. How did I manage to kill so many... but my hands are...

"It's not your fault," grunted Naori as she shifted her position from the ground with a hand still over her stomach.

Of course it's Danzo's fault. So stop wasting time here chatting up Itachi's future wife! We have a wrinkly piece of shit to murder.

"Don't move, let me fix that first." I ignored Rayne's background commentary as reached out with healing chakra on one hand and a chakra scalpel on the other.

Tenderly, I sliced away the excess skin that grew under the influence of the cancerous chakra and corrected the lingering chakra to heal over the wounds properly. It was fortunate that the chakra only lingered on the surface and hasn't seeped in deeper into her organs.

"Kasa," said Naori as she rested a hand over my wrist. "This isn't your fault, you weren't acting on your free will, but... whoever it is that made you do this... might have someone watching to make sure you complete the job."

My hand still as I glanced up to her mismatched eyes with worry. "...What should I do?"

"Fugaku-sama and the clan elders are all dead, right?" asked Naori quietly and I nodded. "Then
Itachi is now the head of the Uchiha Clan, but since he's gone, Mikoto-san will be temporarily in charge until he returns. You have to go make sure nothing happens to her."

"But what about you?" I asked.

"I can still use genjutsu," replied Naori as she glanced towards the various trees and fauna in the area. "Just help me hide, I'll be able to handle myself until then."

"Are you sure?" I asked with worry as I helped her up and towards the shadows by the trees.

"I'll be fine," reassured Naori as I propped her against the tree. She glanced towards the wound on my shoulder with a frown. "You should probably heal yourself too before you get to Mikoto-san. Otherwise she'll worry."

"... But I killed Fugaku-san..." I murmured quietly. "How could I even..."

"Go," ordered Naori firmly. "You have to make sure no one will finish what you've started."

"But—"

"Itachi is thirteen, just like you. He has no children, if he dies in the line of duty, Sasuke would be the next in line for clan head. Do you want Sasuke to be taken advantaged?" snapped Naori.

I flinched at her words and made no further protest.

"... I'll be back with help once Mikoto-san is safe." I promised before I finally stood and dashed off towards the residential area in the district.

_

This is a horrible idea! Who the hell cares about Mikoto? You need to deal with the bigger threat first! Clan politics can wait! Oi! Are you listening to me?
_

As hard as I tried, I couldn't block out Rayne's rage. She kept shouting for me to go after Danzo, to look for Kakashi. Hell, she even went as far as to tell me to look for Obito of all people for help, but Naori was right. I needed to make sure Mikoto was okay. I needed to make sure Sasuke was okay. Until Itachi returned from his mission, they held power and control over the Uchiha Clan.

I pressed a hand to my shoulder, healing it as I went. Even though I had Isobu's chakra coursing through my body, I didn't regenerate in the same manner as Naruto. My eyes darted warily about as I looked for possible threats as I made my way towards Mikoto's home.

What should I say? How should I say it? I shook my head. It doesn't matter. I should find some way to drag Mikoto and Sasuke to Kushina or Shikaku. With that set in mind I double my determination to make it to the house with Rayne screaming and ranting in the back of my mind as I raced faster and faster to my destination.

"Mikoto-san! Sasuke!" I shouted as I scaled over the wall, not bothering with the front entrance of the household.

"Kasa-chan!" said Mikoto with exasperation in her voice as she made her way to the veranda. "Could you please come through the front door next time?"

"There's no time!" I shouted as I jumped down and bounded towards the veranda where she waited.

"Just what is the—Oh my goodness! What happened?" Mikoto fussed over me once I was within reach.
"Don't worry about me? Where's Sasuke, is he home?" I asked as I pushed her back into the house and glanced behind me warily.

"He's at Naruto's, but he should probably be back soon. Kasa-chan, what happened? Why are you hurt?" asked Mikoto as she tugged at my kimono to get a better look at the wound.

"I'm fine, I've treated it already." I brushed her hand away and tugged her towards the back door. "Mikoto-san, you have to get out of here and get to Kushina-san, or Shikaku-san or even Hokage-sama. The Uchihas are in danger. You have to—"

"Calm down, I can't understand a word you're saying," said Mikoto as she rested two hands on my shoulder to stop me from rambling on.

"There's no time, most of the Uchiha that are shinobi are already dead." I grabbed onto her hands. "You have to get out of here."

"What?" said Mikoto in disbelief. "How?"

"It's…" I grimaced and reluctantly glanced up at her. "It's my fault."

"…What do you mean?" asked Mikoto in a whisper.

"I—"

SCHWING

"K-Ka…sa…" Mikoto's eyes widened in shock and protruding from stomach was a length of blade.

"Mikoto-san?" I stared at the blade in horror as it slowly drew back and out of her body from behind. "MIKOTO-SAN!"

"...Mission complete, Uchiha coup d'état thwarted, threat eliminated," came Shisui's familiar voice as Mikoto slumped forward and into my arms. With one eye bandaged, his other with the sharingan looked even more prominent compared to before.

"Shi…sui?" I rasped out in shock as Mikoto's blood dripped onto my lap and pooled onto the ground. In my stupor, I almost didn't have enough sense to flip the woman onto the ground and press my hand over the wound to keep her from bleeding out and hastily charged up healing chakra to my hands. "Hold on Mikoto-san, I can fix this. Just hold on!"

"Why bother?" droned Shisui as he idly flicked his blade clean and glanced down at me.

"What are you talking about Shisui?" I snapped as I did what I could to keep Mikoto from going into shock. The wound was too sudden and she was quickly losing a great deal of blood. Did he hit an artery? Why is there so much blood?

"She's a part of the problem, just let her die," said Shisui as he reached down and grabbed my arm.

"No!" I snapped furiously keeping my hand down on Mikoto's wound as I tried to knit together the bleeding opening.

"Like always you never look at the bigger picture," growled Shisui. "Your attention is on the wrong person! I warned you!"

"I don't care!" I shouted back at him. "I'm not going to let Mikoto-san die!"
"You self-absorbed idiot! Can you for once listen to me?" barked the Uchiha as he knelt down to pull my hands away from Mikoto. "There's no point in saving her!"

"No!" I screamed as I sent a wave of defibrillation on the surface of my arm. Shisui yelped in surprise as he released my arm and took a staggering step back.

"Can't you see?" growled Shisui. "She's no different from the others. The elders may be dead, Fugaku may be dead, but if you allow her to live, she'll just carry on that tradition! It's a never ending cycle!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" I snapped as I stared up at the unfamiliar sneer on his face… I've never seen such a look on his face. "Didn't you try to warn me at the hospital? Didn't you want me to save them?"

"Save them?" scoffed Shisui as the corner of his lip quirked up into an obnoxious smirk and knelt down to my eye level to cup a hand on my face. "They're the very reason why I can't have you. Why would I want to save them and their archaic traditions? If not for them, we could have been—"

"Enough of the dramatics," sighed another voice from outside the veranda. "We're a bit pressed for time and it seems like Kakashi and Obito caught wind of your little stunt at the hospital."

"I thought I said I can handle it," grounded out Shisui as he dropped his hand from my face and turned to the newcomer.

"Yes, but you wouldn't imagine who I found outside while I waited for you," chirped the man, it took me a moment before I recognized it as the voice of the man with the fox mask… and what did he mean by…

"Kasa-nee!" shouted Sasuke and I snapped my attention to him and the man outside.

"Sasuke!" I called out, but found myself unable to move since I was still trying to heal Mikoto. A glare crossed my face as I directed my attention to the man holding onto the younger Uchiha. "What do you want?"

"Who me?" asked the man as he pointed to himself cheerily. "Well… Nothing really. All I was trying to do was help you. I did offer you a way out, you know."

"What do you want?" I growled. "Whatever it is, I'll give it to you. Just let Sasuke go!"

"I don't want anything," said the man cheerily. "You have nothing I want… but if you want to leave Konoha to get away from this mess, you're free to come with me. You can even take this kid with you if you want."

"...What?" I said stiffly.

"Kasa-nee, don't listen to him!" shouted Sasuke. "He's just trying to trick you!"

"Trick her?" repeated the man in mock hurt. "How could you say that I was just trying to be ni—"

"MREOW!" screeched Akuma as the red feline pounced and attacked.

"What on earth?" said the man out of surprise as he released Sasuke and swatted at the cat.

"The cat?" said Shisui in surprise as he moved to intercept, but I hastily raised a hand and chucked chakra senbons at his face before he could do so.
"Sasuke run!" I shouted as I sent one last wave of healing chakra into Mikoto before I jumped to my feet in offense. The healing job was far from done, but hopefully it would last long enough until help could come. The fox-masked man mentioned that Kakashi and Obito was tracking them right? If I could just hold out for a bit longer.

"Tch," hissed Shisui as he dodged the unexpected attack with ease due to his familiarity with my fighting style. However, I didn't give him a chance to recover or retaliate as I sent a seal card towards him and smashed him through a wall by the unsealing of one of my cow-shaped boulders.

"Kasa-nee!" shouted Sasuke as he scrambled up the veranda and rushed to my side.

"Take your mother as far as you can." I ordered as I kept a close eye on the hole where I sent Shisui through and the masked man still trying to untangle himself from Akuma's assault.

"But what about you?" protested Sasuke.

"I'll buy you time, now go!" I snapped and shoved him to his mother.

There was no way that he could carry Mikoto out of here, but he could at least drag her to the next room or at least somewhere out of sight while I tried to deal with Shisui and the masked man.

"This is ridiculous!" huffed the man as he finally managed to grab hold of Akuma by the scruff of her neck and held her an arm's length away. "You know, you would have had a better chance of getting away if you just ditched the kid's half-dead mother and just ran with the brat."

"I told you, I'm not giving up on Mikoto-san!" I snapped and weaved out a web of chakra threads as my seal cards floated around me once more.

"I guess the Uzumaki stubbornness runs strong in you," sighed the man as he casually as he chucked Akuma over the wall and curled a mocking finger at me. "Okay, come at me with all you've got."

"No, don't go at him with what you've got! Are you crazy? He's going to kill us! Can't you see he doesn't even see us as a threat? He just fucking chucked the demon cat over the wall as if it was a stray ball! Listen to me for once will you? Run! Take Sasuke if you have to. Just fucking run!"

I ignored her and charged in, throwing one seal card after another at the man. However, before any of the seals managed to reach him, they disintegrated and the contents of the cards imploded in a hot gust of air. The man seemed amused as he strolled idly towards me, either disabling or destroying my seals as he came closer and closer.

It couldn't have been more than a couple of seconds before he had a hand on my bad shoulder and pressured me to the ground with a tight grip. I fought back a scream of pain as tears flooded my vision.

"Is that all you've got?" asked the man in good humor as I grabbed onto his hand to stop his merciless grip.

"N-no." I growled out through the tears. "But you've just made a big mistake!"

With my grip tightened over his arm, I charged up as much cancerous chakra as I could to flood through his system, enough to blow up his arm and then some…However, it never happened. His arm remained intact and his grip was tighter than ever on my bad shoulder. Why didn't it work? I didn't even push out even a tenth as much as I had earlier on Naori, how could this have no effect on him?
"I always wondered if that little trick of yours would work on me," mused the other. "I guess that answered my question. Anything else you want to try?"

"W-who are you?" I stared up at him in horror.

"Just someone who cares," drawled the man as he tilted his head, giving the fox mask an inquisitive appearance. "Shisui is convinced that you would never abandon Konoha, but I really have to ask you this. What has Konoha ever done for you? Besides pain and misery?"

"Why do you care?" I grounded out as I did my best to avoid glancing into the sharingan that's no doubt behind one of the holes in the fox mask.

"What can I say, I'm a nice person," laughed the man. "My offer still stands if you would like to leave Konoha with me."

I grabbed onto his masked face and head-butted him in response.

"Ow!" protested the other as he stumbled back in surprise as the sound of his mask cracked and crumbled.

"I'm not going to leave Konoha with the likes of you!" I snarled, but I paused when I caught sight of the face underneath the mask. My heart nearly stopped. "...Minato-san?"

"What?" said the man in surprise as he glanced towards me before back down at himself. "What part of me looks like that idiot?"

Startled, I took a better look at him and I realized he was right, he looked nothing like Minato. Late teens, hardly a man, but with how his voice sounded, it was easy to make the mistake. His hair was a dirty blond, his skin had a slightly more reddish hue even though it was deathly pale with a flaky texture to it. His eyes... were mismatched, one with the sharingan and the other... a golden brown, but the whites on both were blacken as though... it's...

"...Edo tensei?" I gasped in realization. The new Tobi is a walking immortal corpse? Was that why my cancerous chakra didn't work on him? It's because he's already dead!

"I'm surprised you don't already know, Miss Oracle," said the young man in amusement. "And to mistake me for one of Jiraiya's students? Please, as if I'm anything like him."

"Who the hell are you?" I snapped. "I've never seen you before! You were never in... you..."

"...Interesting," drawled the man thoughtfully. "Can it be that your visions are limited to those who are alive?"

"Who the hell are you!" I demanded, but found myself staring into his sharingan as he pinned me down once more with a hand to my bad shoulder.

"It hardly matters who I am, since you can't see me in your visions," sighed the man as the tomoes in his sharingan spun. "But I suppose you may call me Naki... not that you'll remember. Pity, I had preferred not to completely wipe your memories. For that I sincerely apologize Miss Oracle... but this is for the best."

"Wait! You can't—"

"Goodbye Miss Oracle," said Naki before the world froze and shattered into a million pieces.
I vaguely heard Rayne screaming and cursing in the distance as I plummeted into the unending darkness. Thoughts became hazy and muddled. Before I know it… knew it?

… It's dark… and quiet… what are those again?
"Sasuke, take your mother and get as far from here as you can," ordered his Kasa-nee as she stood defensively in front of him and his mother.

"But what about you?" protested Sasuke.

"I'll buy you some time, just go!" snapped the older girl as she charged towards Shisui with her seal cards floating around her.

Sasuke wanted to protest further, but even he could tell that there was nothing he could do if he decided to stay. With a firm resolve, he darted over to his mother's body and proceeded to drag her out by the shoulders. He knew there was no way that he could take his mother far, he simply didn't have the strength to carry a grown woman, but he could at least drag her to the next room and keep her out of Kasa's way.

The whole process was slow and nerve wrecking. With each step he made, a trail of blood was left by his mother's body. A loud crash told him that Kasa drove Shisui into the next room, no doubt with one of her signature cow-boulders. She had an odd fondness for them whenever he caught sight of her sparring with his brother. Sasuke shook his head to bring his attention back to his mother. He still couldn't believe that Shisui would do such a thing to his mother.

For as long as he could remember, the older Uchiha was always so kind and playful. To suddenly see him show such anger and distaste for the clan, he couldn't wrap his mind around it. It was ridiculously, unbelievable. To Sasuke, Shisui was never without a smile, always joking and playful. How could he suddenly decide to hate the clan so much?

And that man… that man with the fox mask. Who was he? What was his relation to Shisui? What did he want from them?

"I'm not leaving Konoha with the likes of you!" screamed Kasa from the other room.

Sasuke snapped his head up in surprise. The man wanted her? He wanted to take her away? The raven-haired boy gritted his teeth as he hastily glanced down to his mother's pale, pain-filled face and reached over with his hands to her wound for a quick scan. He could feel Kasa's lingering chakra over the opening.

There was nothing else he could do for his mother. He, with his amateur understanding of iryo-ninjutsu, could only standby and watch. Kasa had already done the brunt of the healing, but it was certain whether or not his mother would make it. The raven-haired boy gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. Never before had he felt so useless. While he hid away in the next room with his mother, Kasa was left alone to face two enemies on her own.

He needed to do something, anything to help, but what?

"Wait, you can't—!" objected Kasa with a fearful shout before the room grew silent.

Sasuke's eyes widened as he looked towards the wall where her voice came from. No… that can't be. Numbly, he dragged himself to his feet. Slowly at first, but then picking up speed as he crashed out of the room and rushed back to where Kasa's voice last came. He skidded over the trail of his mother's blood before he stumbled into view of what was once his living room.

The place was decimated. Blood was on the ground, soot and scorch marks decorated the walls and
scattered all over the room was debris and broken furniture. He couldn't have been gone for more than a minute and already it looked like a warzone. The fox-masked man was without his mask, looming over Kasa's still form with an empty gaze in her eyes.

"You're still here?" sighed the man as he ran a hand through his messy dirty blond. "Does the term self-preservation mean anything to this generation? Anything at all?"

"Y-you!" snarled Sasuke as he clenched his fist furiously.

"Yes, me," humored the man with amusement.

"Take your hands off Kasa-nee!" demanded Sasuke.

"Or you'll do what? Bite my ankles?" chuckled the man as he hauled the auburn-haired girl's limp body from the ground and slung her over his shoulder. "Get it through your head. You're outmatched kid."

"I don't care how strong you are! Give her back!" snapped Sasuke as he charged at him. However, before he could even reach the man, a hand snatched him by the back of his shirt and hauled him off the ground. When he glanced back, his eyes widened at the dark eyes staring back at him. "Shisui-ni…"

"Oi Shisui, leave the kid," said the man in exasperation. "We don't have time for this."

"No," droned out Shisui.

"No?" repeated the man with a raised brow. "What do you mean no?"

"...Shisui-ni?" said Sasuke hopefully, but that glimmer of light faded immediately at the look on the older Uchiha's face.

"If it wasn't for you, Kasa would have been mine," said Shisui in a low threatening hiss.

"W-What?" said Sasuke in shock before he found a hand to his throat.

"W-What?" said Sasuke in shock before he found a hand to his throat.

"Seriously?" sighed the man out of boredom. "If you haven't noticed yet, we're a bit pressed for time. You've already killed the kid's mother and we got your little girlfriend already. What more are you going to do?"

"Don't worry, this won't take long," said Shisui as his eyes flashed red.

"S-Shisui-ni!" choked Sasuke as he stared up at him in pain and tears.

"You only have yourself to blame for being born to this wretched clan," growled Shisui in a low rumble. "Goodbye Sa—"

"Yeow!" yelped the man holding Kasa and before any of them could realize what was happening, an explosion followed, knocking the man clean out of the room.

Shisui turned to face the attacker, but a leg came at him in a roundhouse kick and knocked him aside. Within a split second, the grip on Sasuke loosened and he found himself snatched out of Shisui's possession and carried off the Uchiha property. Coughs wracked through his body as Sasuke struggled to catch his breath and blink away the tears in his eyes. Just who on earth saved him? And what about…

"Kasa-nee?" surprise and disbelief crossed his face at seeing the older girl run away with him under
"How are you—weren't you…"

"Shut up, stay quiet and we might both get out of the shit alive," grumbled the girl as she shot wary glances over her shoulder every few seconds.

Sasuke snapped his jaw shut, unable to comprehend what was happening. He saw her… he heard her scream… was that all an act? But…

"I told her to run, but noooo, god damn fucking idiot had to play hero and now her damn brain's scrambled into soup! And on top of that, I'm stuck babysitting the future homicidal brat," muttered the girl darkly. "What the hell did I ever do to serve this load of bull?"

"Kasa-nee…?" tried Sasuke timidly.

"Didn't I tell you to keep your trap shut?" snapped the girl.

A frown crossed Sasuke's face, something wasn't right. This wasn't how his Kasa-nee acted. She would never talk to him like that with such vulgar language and abrasive attitude. What was going on? First Shisui-ni and now Kasa-nee? Did that mask man do something to them?

His thoughts were cut short when Shisui appeared in front of them through a body-flicker, the older Uchiha excelled in using that technique. There was no surprise to why his field moniker would be Shisui the Body Flicker.

"…Kasa?" questioned the Uchiha with an uncertain frown on his face and the girl responded with a sneer.

"Sorry, I've reached my quota for dumbasses and assholes for the day. So fuck off," retorted the girl as she snapped her wrist and a seal card exploded in a red mist.

Sasuke fought back a yelp of surprise as Kasa plowed them through the red mist, desperate to get away from Shisui and the strange man as quickly as possible. However, she didn't manage to get far as earth rose up and latched onto one of her legs. The older girl cursed vehemently as they were yanked from the air and slammed into the ground.

"I have to say Miss Oracle, you surprised me," said the man in amusement as he strolled casually towards them. "How did you manage to keep your mind intact after that?"

"Oh you know, this and that," said the girl sarcastically. "I'm more surprised you've managed to remain on this plane for as long as you have Naki."

"So, can you see my future now? Or are you just bluffing?" grinned the man named Naki as he squatted down to their eye level.

"I can make an educated guess," scoffed the girl. "There aren't many people who could use that cheap ass technique."

"Cheap…?" repeated Naki in bewilderment before he started laughing. "That's an interesting way to view the reanimation technique, Miss Oracle."

"Reanimation my ass, you fucking zombie!" spat the girl. "So what's your problem? Dead girlfriend? Dead teammates? Or were you one of the snake bastard's boy fetishes?"

Sasuke found himself lost at the words traded between the two. Oracle? Reanimation? Zombies? Boy…fetishes? What on earth were they talking about?
"Oi, oi," droned the man as the humor left his eyes and a dead serious expression crossed his face. "That's not funny."

"Oh, did I hit a nerve?" spat the girl, but froze when a blade press against her neck.

"Shisui-ni what are you doing?" shouted Sasuke when he spotted Shisui on the other end of the blade.

"You're not Kasa," snarled Shisui. "Who are you?"

"Not…Kasa-nee?" said Sasuke in surprise as he glanced up at the girl.

"My, my, my," drawled the girl in sadistic glee. "What do you think would happen when you willy-nilly wipe someone's mind clean pretty boy?"

"Wiped… clean?" said the Uchiha as his eyes widened and his face grew pale. He snapped his attention to Naki in fury. "You weren't supposed to wipe her mind completely! That wasn't the deal!"

"And exactly what deal are we talking about here, hmm?" interrupted a low drone.

"Kakashi?" jolted Shisui as he jumped away from ground as a hand shot out from below,

Sasuke blinked as he suddenly found the world shift and suddenly both he and Kasa—no, not Kasa. This… person who has control of Kasa's body, but it hardly mattered at the moment. Their world shifted, going from the strange man named Naki to darkness and then back to surface once more in the span of seconds. The young Uchiha blinked several more times to have his eyes readjust before he glanced up at their savior.

"You two okay?" asked Kakashi as he hovered over them with furrowed brows.

"Told you long enough," grumbled the girl exhaustedly next to him before she slumped again the older man. "I'm at my limit…"

"Rayne?" called out Kakashi with worry.

Sasuke frowned at the name. That's not Kasa-nee's name, but why would Kakashi call her by another name?

"They wiped her," murmured Rayne drowsily. "They wiped Kasa… I'm just barely holding on."

"What?" whispered Kakashi in disbelief. "What do you mean wiped her?"

"Do me a favor… Don't wake me…" grumbled the girl as she struggled to keep her eyes open.

"Rayne! Answer me, what do you mean—" protested Kakashi as he grabbed her, but the girl had already fell limp against his body. "Rayne!"

"…Kakashi," started Sasuke quietly as he stared at the girl's still form. "What's going on? What's wrong with Kasa-nee?"

"Sasuke, she's…" trailed off Kakashi as though he heard something in the distance.

"Kakashi?" questioned Sasuke worriedly.

"Stay here," ordered the silver-haired jounin as he shifted Kasa's unconscious body and laid her
down on the ground.

"Where are you going?" asked Sasuke.

"I'll be right back," replied Kakashi as he got up and pulled his hitai-ate away from his hidden sharingan.

"But what about Kasa-nee? You're just going to leave her here? What if Shisui-ni comes and try to take her?" protested Sasuke.

"There's nothing we could do for her right now and Shisui's not going to get a chance to get near her," replied Kakashi.

"What do you mean there's nothing we could do?" snapped Sasuke. "And how are you so sure Shisui-ni's not going to find her? He tried to kill my mother! He's even working with that strange man so he could take Kasa-nee away!"

"Sasuke, this is not the time for—"

"Why is he acting so strange? Why is Kasa-nee acting so strange? Why are you calling her Rayne? Why won't you tell me anything!?!" screamed Sasuke.

"Because you're nothing more than a liability right now!" barked Kakashi as he loomed dangerously over the boy.

Sasuke flinched and grew silent at his words.

"If you want to be of any use, you will stop this tantrum and stay by Kasa's side," ordered Kakashi. "I'll deal with Shisui and the man who did this to Kasa. Stay here, be quiet and don't draw any attention to you or Kasa. Unless you want her to end up taken as you've noted."

"…No," mumbled Sasuke as he lowered his head.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," huffed Kakashi before he turned his heel and disappeared in a flurry of leaves.

Sasuke gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. A liability… he was a fucking liability. He hated how useless he was in a time like this. He had no clue how Shisui-ni suddenly change so much. Was the older Uchiha always like this or has everything about him been one big lie? What's worse, he didn't know if his mother was okay and even less of a clue of what's going on with Kasa-nee. How could things have gotten this bad? What the hell was going on?

Frustrated, Sasuke made his way back to Kasa's unconscious body and plopped down next to her with his knees drawn up to his chest. He was scared and confused. He wanted badly for all this to be nothing more than a nightmare. He wanted his brother to wake him and tell him everything was okay. He choked back tears when it never happened.

Out of desperation, he reached out through the darkness and grasped onto the older girl's hand to take whatever comfort he could from the warmth of another person. The moonless night made the world around them darker and more frightening than it seemed. He sat there for what felt like an eternity, not knowing whether it was safe to go anywhere else.

Sasuke found himself trembling despite the summer's eve warmth. Tears welded in his eyes as he fought back a sobbing whimper. He wanted to go home. He wanted to go back to his mother… just as he was about to break down crying, he felt a comforting squeeze from the hand he held onto.
"…Kasa-nee?" croaked out Sasuke hopefully, but the older girl remained unconscious. Even so, her hand kept a comforting grip on his. He blinked away the unshed tears and he rubbed his dripping nose against the shoulder of his sleeve. "…Right, I have to be strong."

With Kasa-nee out and Kakashi gone, he was the last line of defense for both of them. He needed to stay strong if he's to protect both of them. His resolve confirmed, Sasuke took a deep breath and focused on the surrounding area. This time he will protect Kasa-nee. This time, he won't be useless.

The world around him suddenly looked sharper as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. He kept an even breath as he tried to focus chakra to his hand while keeping his eye on the lookout for potential threats. Up to now, he had only read up on theories regarding to forming chakra scalpels, but with their current situation as his weaponless state, he needed whatever he could get as a means of defense.

Chakra fluctuated at his hand as the scalpel took an uneven form. He could feel the strain it took to maintain it for more than a few seconds at a time. His breath grew ragged and he could hear the blood pounding in his ears as he became hyper alert of everything around him. Every little rustle, every little breeze, he could see them all.

The moment he spotted a shadow through the darkness, his immediate response was to charge forward and lash out with the unstable chakra scalpel. However, he never made contact as a hand grasped onto his wrist and he found his feet swept under him.

"Let go! I won't let you! I won't let you take Kasa-nee!" screamed Sasuke as he thrashed and fought against his captor. "I'll kill you before I let anything happen to her!"

"Sasuke! It's me! Calm down!" snapped a vaguely familiar voice, but he couldn't make sense to who it was.

"No!" struggled Sasuke as he continued to thrash and protest.

"Sasuke, if you keep this up, you're going to die from chakra exhaustion!" snapped the other again.

"You're just trying to get my guard down and take Kasa-nee!" screamed Sasuke.

"Enough Sasuke!" barked Kakashi's voice before he snapped his head towards the silver-jounin's voice. "…Kakashi?" said Sasuke breathlessly as his eyes focused on the silhouette of the man, but before he could bombard the man with questions, he found himself gazing into a single sharingan before completely losing consciousness.

"…already?" murmured a soft familiar voice in the midst of a broken conversation.

"Ngh…" a pained groan escaped him as he struggled to open his eyes, everything felt heavy. The familiar scent of antiseptic and bleached linens assaulted his nose. He's been to the hospital often enough to have that smell burned into his memory.

"Sasuke?" called out the familiar voice before he felt a soothing hand with healing chakra on his head.

"…Rin sensei?" croaked out Sasuke, as his eyes slowly focused and the young woman came into view.

"Easy there Sasuke, you're suffering from chakra exhaustion. Try not to exert yourself too much,"
said Rin as she hovered her hand to scan his vitals.

"Chakra… exhaustion?" frowned Sasuke as he tried to make sense of his situation. "…How?"

"You activated your sharingan kiddo," chirped a cheery voice behind Rin before Obito's familiar face popped up over her shoulder.

"Obito?" murmured the younger Uchiha in confusion. "My sharingan? How…?"

"Must've been from the stress," reasoned Obito offhandedly as though activating one's kekkai genkai for the first time was a common occurrence. "Good thing, you now have the sharingan. Bad thing, you kept it on for who knows how long and by the time Kakashi and I got to you, you were close to death. A bit delusional too I might add."

"Delusional?" repeated Sasuke, somehow his mind couldn't do anything beyond parroting what the older Uchiha said.

"Yep, kept threatening to kill me if I tried to take Kasa away," said Obito brightly. "Kakashi had to knock you out before we could drag you here."

"Kakashi…" murmured Sasuke with a frown as he vaguely recalled the silver-haired jounin barking at him. His brows furrowed in thought as he tried to piece back the events of the previous night and when he did so, his eyes widened in panic. "Kasa-nee! Where is Kasa-nee? And my mother! Where —"

"Sasuke, settle down!" shouted Rin as she pinned him back into the bed. His arm flailed limply against her as he tried to pull himself up. "Your mother's fine! She's in the ICU, but she'll recover with time."

"She's fine?" whispered Sasuke weakly as he stillled.

"Yes, once you've recovered you can go visit her," said Rin gently. "She lost a lot of blood, but thankfully none of her organs were damaged. She'll be just fine."

"Just… fine…" repeated Sasuke with a shaking breath of relief, but the reprieve didn't last for more than a second as he turned his gaze to Obito again. "…What about Kasa-nee? Is she okay? Did they manage to take her?"

"No, they didn't take her," answered Obito and shot him with a grin. "Kakashi's with her right now, along with her dad."

Sasuke gave him an unwavering stare.

"What?" asked the Uchiha.

"…You didn't say if she's okay," said Sasuke quietly.

"Sasuke," started Rin, but he didn't let her finish.

"Is she okay?" begged Sasuke. "Please tell me she's okay."

"…We don't know," answered Rin quietly.

"What happened?" asked Sasuke and the two grew silent.

"You really need to rest," pressed Rin as she tried to change the subject.
"Please, Rin sensei! Obito! Just tell me what's going on!" shouted Sasuke. "I promise I'll be good and rest afterwards! Just please! Please tell me what's wrong with Kasa-nee!"

"That's the thing… We don't know what's wrong," said Obito evenly, a blank expression crossed his face as he did his best to keep himself from grimacing. "She… just won't wake up."

"But she's been in a coma before," reasoned Sasuke. "She'll wake up in a week, like last time right?"

Neither of them said anything.

"Right!?" snapped Sasuke, tears welding in his eyes as their gazed lowered and shifted away from his desperate gaze.

"…We don't know," answered Rin. "Tesuri-san is trying what he could right now, but until he's finished, we're not sure what the situation is."

"… What about… Shi—Shisui?" said Sasuke as he corrected himself in the last second. He almost called that person Shisui-ni out of habit. After what he saw the previous night, he wasn't sure he could continue to call the older Uchiha by that endearment.

"He got away, along with that weird guy with him," sighed Obito as he ran a hand through his hair.

"What? But—"

Knock-knock CRASH!

"Sounds like someone's awake!" shouted a cheery voice as the door slammed open.

"Anko!" chided Rin as she turned her attention away from Sasuke. "This is a hospital! Please refrain from causing such a ruckus! There are patients resting!"

"Eh?" blinked the purple-haired kunoichi as she glanced towards Sasuke. "He sounds plenty find to me with all that shouting he just did."

"Anko!" growled Rin as she circled around the bed and stood defensively between her and Sasuke.

"Oh come off it Rin," scoffed the young woman as she propped a hand to her hip. "If he's anything like that asshole brother of his, he's going to be perfectly fine. Besides, I'm not here for pleasantries."

"…Then why are you here?" frowned Rin.

"I need to take a statement from the kid, recounting the events that happened last night," replied Anko with a shrug.

"What?" snapped Rin. "He just woke up! He's in no condition to be interrogated and why were you of all people sent to take the statement?"

"Excuse me for not being the most brat friendly, but we're a bit understaffed and swamped at the moment," scowled Anko as she crossed her arms. "And I still have a couple of other statements to take after the kid, so if we could just get this over with…"

"Other statements?" frowned Sasuke as he looked to Anko, he recognized her as one of his brother's and Shisui's teammate after Kasa-nee was reassigned. Occasionally, he spotted his brother running away from the woman.

"…You haven't told him yet?" asked Anko as he glanced to Rin and Obito with a frown.
"He just woke up!" snapped Rin.

"Tell me what?" demanded Sasuke.

"Anko!" protested Rin.

"He's going to find out sooner or later," said Anko as she brushed her protest aside. "Either you tell him or I will. I don't need him blubbering in the middle of asking him questions."

"Find out about what?" snapped Sasuke before he felt a firm hand on his shoulder. When he glanced up, he saw Obito's solemn face looking down on him.

"Last night…" started Obito as he fought back a grimace. "A majority of the Uchiha Clan shinobi were slaughtered along with the clan elders and… the head of clan."

"What…?" whispered Sasuke as he found his voice escape him. "So dad's…"

"Sorry you have to find out this way Sasuke," said Obito apologetically as he tried to console the boy.

Sasuke grew speechless as he took in the news. Disbelief and denial was on his face as he shook his head. How could something like this happen? First his mother, then Kasa-nee and now… his father, his clan…

"…He did it," whispered Sasuke as cold fury overcame him.

"What?" frowned Anko as she stared at the boy. "Who did?"

"It's Shisui! It's him! He did all this! He tried to kill mom! He tried to take Kasa-nee!" snapped Sasuke furiously.

"Sasuke! Calm down!" snapped Rin as she turned back to keep the boy in bed.

"He said he hated the clan! He said it's because of them that he couldn't have Kasa-nee! He must've killed everyone!" screamed Sasuke as he fought against Rin's hold. "It's his fault! I'll kill him!"

"Sasuke, turn off your sharingan right now!" snapped Obito as he moved in to help Rin pin him down.

"I'll kill him! I'll make him pay!" screamed the furious boy as something warm and wet streamed down the side of his face.

"Shit, Rin is he supposed to be bleeding?" shouted Obito.

"No," said the other before she pressed a hand against Sasuke's head. "Sorry, Sasuke, but this is for your own good!"

A pulse of chakra shot through his mind and Sasuke found his body fall limp and his eyes drifted close. Frantically, he tried to cling to consciousness for as long as he could, but it was fading fast.

"Damn," whistled Anko through his hazy thoughts. "Itachi's family is just filled with nutters ain't it?"

"You got your statement," growled Rin. "Now leave!"

"But…"
Faintly, he could hear the two kunoichi argue before everything faded to silence. With one last conscious thought, Sasuke vowed to get his vengeance. He vowed to kill that man if it was the last thing he did. And he vowed… to never let Shisui to ever get his hands on Kasa-nee again.
...I'm sorry," apologized Kakashi quietly as he stood next to Tesuri's hunched over and trembling form.

The blue-haired man fought back tears with each shaking and uneven breath. He traded no words, there wasn't a need for them. The loss of a child, the loss of his last and remaining family, Kakashi could relate with the man's pain. Unexpectedly, it reopened old wounds he thought long closed. Beyond an apology, he could say nothing else as he watched Tesuri hold onto Kasa's small hand. He pressed his daughter's hand against his forehead as though in prayer for none of this to be true.

Kakashi's gaze lowered guiltily as he left the room to give the man a moment of privacy. They miscalculated—no, he miscalculated. He should've noticed something wrong with Kasa. He shouldn't have left Rin alone with Shisui. He closed his eye and leaned back against the wall with a sigh. Too late for should haves and shouldn't haves... Kasa was already gone.

Inoichi came in an hour ago and ventured into the girl's mind to see if there was anything he could salvage. What he found was a black void filled with broken doors and shriveled up vines. The memories that were beyond reparable. Even if he managed to gather all the pieces, he wouldn't be able to put them back in the right place without intimate familiarity with the girl's mind. He tried to look for Rayne, but the girl's inner darkness was nowhere to be found. She was just as lost as the rest of the girl's memories.

"How's she?" asked Obito, his voice breaking him out of his thoughts.

"Inoichi couldn't do anything," replied Kakashi morosely as he rubbed a hand over his face.

"That bad?" sighed Obito dejectedly as he crossed his arms. "Sasuke woke up not too long ago... he's taking the news pretty bad."

"He did just lose a good number of his clan," reasoned Kakashi.

"You should be careful with that one," said the other, a distinct change in tone was audible in his voice.

"Tobi," greeted Kakashi as he glanced to the serious expression over his friend's face. "What do you mean?"

"Vengeance is a harsh motivator, it blinds all," said the other cryptically as he glanced towards the door to Kasa's room. "You said you spoke with Rayne before right?"

"Yes, but Inoichi wasn't able to find her when he went into Kasa's mind," frowned Kakashi as he looked to the former Uchiha. "...Why do you ask?"

"How angry would you say she was before she went under?" asked Tobi.

"How..." Kakashi's brows rose in surprise. "You think there's a chance..."

"No clue," replied Tobi with a bright cheery tone. Kakashi's eye narrowed at the change in tone and focused his attention to their surroundings. Someone was listening in on their conversation. "But it can't hurt to hope! After all, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

"Kasa's not exactly a woman yet," said Kakashi dryly as to make the conversation sound casual.
"But joking aside, how long are you going to be staying?"

"A bit," replied the other as he picked up his subtle question on when Obito will regain use of his own body. "I want to check on Kasa before I leave."

Leave? Kakashi frowned, uncertain to what the Uchiha's split meant. However, he didn't get a chance to dwell on the thought as their observer finally made his presence known.

"Kakashi Hatake," said the masked anbu. A quick glance on the man's uniform noted he was unaffiliated with any of the regular anbu forces, one of Danzo's Root operatives. Kakashi kept a blank face as he turned his attention to him. "You've been requested by Hokage-sama and the elder council to meet with them in Hokage-sama's office."

"For what reason?" asked Kakashi.

"You've been requested," replied the other in the same drone before he disappeared with a body flicker.

"Tsk," clucked Kakashi in annoyance as he took a breath to calm his nerves. "What is that man planning this time?"

"Why don't you go and find out?" commented Tobi offhandedly.

"What?" frowned Kakashi and turned to the other.

"I'll wait until you come back," replied Tobi as he gave a casual wave.

Kakashi couldn't brush off the feeling that Tobi might know more than what he's revealing. He was half tempted to arrive late to the meeting just so he could find out what this split was hiding from him.

"You don't want to be late now do you?" smirked Tobi as he read his thoughts. "Being late is my shtick."

"Hilarious," droned the silver-haired jounin, unamused by his care-free behavior.

"I'll keep an eye on her on this end, you handle the other," said Tobi, his voice lit with a hint of seriousness.

Kakashi caught the underlying message easily. The ex-Uchiha was going to do what he could for Kasa here, while he should deal with whatever bureaucracy that no doubt sprung up after the previous night's disaster. The silver-haired jounin gave a slight nod to his friend before he pushed off from the wall and sped his way out of the hospital through an open window.

It unsettled him that one of Danzo's Root operatives would be the one to send him the summons, but then again the village was short on man power after last night's fiasco. Most of the able bodies were likely in the Uchiha district on clean up duty or taking statements. Root operatives weren't delegated to such tasks.

Kakashi frowned. Danzo… Root… Why did it seem like more and more of their problems were coming from them? As he neared the administrative building a sense of dread dropped in the pit of his stomach. He didn't like this one bit.

"Hokage-sama," greeted Kakashi evenly once he stepped into Hiruzen's office.
Whatever conversation that went on before his arrival immediately ceased. A quick glance around the room showed him the three council members along with Inoichi and Shikaku. Hiruzen's eyes expressed the graveness of the situation as he held his folded hands in front of his face.

"Since Kakashi is here now, why not have him recount the previous night's events prior to making any final determination?" suggested Inoichi as he restarted the discussion.

At the Nara head's words, Kakashi grew cautious. Hiruzen and the council were likely trying to decide on a scapegoat to take the blame to avoid the internal panic that was to ensue once news got out about the massacre. The fact that Shikaku didn't mention any names meant a possibility of multiple individuals. None of which was Danzo, if the man's nonchalance was any indication. Any proof or connection of him to the massacre was likely destroyed or eliminated before the meeting commenced.

"If we must go through such formalities," droned Danzo with disinterest. "From the evidence and various witness accounts, I believe it's quite obvious already Hiruzen. At this point, this is merely just a formality."

"If I may ask," started Kakashi as he focused his full attention on the man. "What exactly would you like me to recount of the previous night? Quite a number of things have occurred and it may be faster if you specify which detail you are looking for."

"The matter regarding Shisui Uchiha of course," droned Danzo. "Unless you believe the massacre was done by the oracle?"

Kakashi forced himself to keep a stoic expression to ward away the disbelief that threatened to creep up on him. While the man's tone remained droll and mocking, it sounded almost as though Danzo was trying to protect Kasa. What was he playing at?

"Of course not," murmured Kakashi in reluctant agreement. "Kasa was rather adamant in vouching for them."

"Yes, quite," hummed Danzo in disinterest. "Recount away, even though I'm quite sure we don't need it."

"Kakashi, if you would," continued Hiruzen as he shot the bandaged man a disapproving look. "Shisui was under your observation was he not? How did he manage to slip away under your watch?"

"A careless mistake on my part," replied Kakashi as he did his best to push back his suspicions and answer the man to the best of his abilities. "At the time, I thought Rin was enough to guard the boy. Our concerns was to protect him from harming himself. Furthermore, his body was still recovering from the effects of a silencing seal. He shouldn't have been in any condition to move, much less escape."

"Silencing seal?" repeated Hiruzen with a frown as he glanced towards Danzo.

"Hmph," scoffed Danzo as he turned his nose up haughtily. "Shisui Uchiha may have been one of my Root operatives; however, it has been quite some time since he actually reported under me."

"What do you mean?" questioned Hiruzen.

"He seemed to have taken after Kinoe's—I apologize, he calls himself Tenzo nowadays, footsteps in leaving Root," droned Danzo in distaste.

"And you didn't stop him?" said Hiruzen in surprise.
"I had assumed this was your doing," drawled Danzo. "After all, you were quite ferocious when it came to acquiring my previous operative."

"A possible third party then?" suggested Homura with a speculative frown.

"Let's not be too hasty," interrupted Shikaku with a firm hand raised. "Kakashi has yet to finish his recount of the previous night's events."

"Yes, do continue," said Danzo offhandedly. "I have to say you've peaked my attention with this new bit of revelation you have on Shisui."

If Kakashi didn't know any better, he might have believed Danzo had no connection to Shisui at this point. His explanations worked smoothly to explain everything to the point that it couldn't be happenchance.

"As I've said, we did not expect him to be able to move, much less overpower Rin and make his way out of the hospital," continued Kakashi.

"According to Rin Nohara's witness account, she was the only one with Shisui Uchiha at the time," noted Koharu as she glanced over the notes in front of her. "Where were you Kakashi?"

"Recruiting assistance," replied the silver-haired jounin. "According to Kasa's visions, Shisui's sharingan holds a particular ability that's not commonly known. It's capable of planting a single irrefutable command on anyone and at the time, Shisui was missing one of his eyes. It was a security risk that needed to be followed up on."

"His eye can do what?" rasped Homura in disbelief. "Why was this not brought up before?"

"It would be hard pressed to pass on any information if the one with the eye decides to order us to keep silent," noted Kakashi.

"If he has the ability, why would he not just use it on the hokage and be done with it?" asked Koharu with a frown.

"I doubt that Shisui Uchiha acted with much sensibility," retorted Danzo. "If the Uchiha child's testimony was anything to go by, the boy has an unhealthy infatuation regarding to the oracle. Rather than wasting time here, I think it's more prudent to deal with the traitor and find out who exactly did he give his eye to."

"Like that masked man?" continued Kakashi and he found a grin tugging at the other man's lips.

"Precisely," answered Danzo. "It is obvious that he is aware of the oracle's abilities and used it to his advantage to draw our attention elsewhere. As I've said before, it's been quite some time since Shisui Uchiha has been under my command. He could have utilized the boy to plant the suggestion in the oracle's mind that the Uchihas were planning a coup d'état. There might have never been a coup d'état in the first place."

"Yet, you were the one who wanted the Uchiha to be eliminated the most in the previous meeting," noted Kakashi with a frown.

"Prior to this we were never given doubt over the oracle's foresight. Naturally, I would advise to take the most favorable path for Konoha's sake," reasoned Danzo before he focused his attention on Kakashi. "I assume you were doing the same when you supposedly stopped Shisui Uchiha from committing suicide and it was happenchance he was left alone when you went in search for assistance and later saved your subordinate in the nick of time, hmm?"
"As you've said, it's just happenchance," cut in Shikaku before the man could continue further. "Kakashi had no clue what Shisui's eyes were capable of prior to saving him. More importantly, a final determination must be made for the public, regarding the Uchiha Massacre. The dip in morale is to be expected, but with proper damage control, it could be kept to a minimum."

"There's still the matter regarding to Kumo," inserted Inoichi. "If they hear about the massacre, no doubt they would view this as a moment of weakness and resume the conflict."

"The northern border will need to be reinforced," agreed Hiruzen as he continued. "Currently we have…"

The conversation faded into the background as Kakashi forced himself to keep his clenched fists at his sides. He didn't manage to do a single thing to Danzo. Every time he thought he had a leverage over the man, the other would show him he was five steps ahead.

"But wouldn't that mean…"

Useless, utterly useless. Kakashi did his best not to lock eyes with Danzo, but he found it hard not to notice the faint grin tugging at the corner of the man's lips. The old ghoul was mocking him, treating him as though he was a child… compared to him, he might as well be. The man had lived through three wars and lorded decades of experience over him. If only he had proof, if only he had something to—

"Hokage-sama, if I may, I would like a private word with Kakashi," said Shikaku as his words cut through his thoughts.

Startled, Kakashi glanced to the Nara head in confusion before he noticed the mild annoyance on the two council member's faces and the amusement underneath Danzo's stoic expression.

"If you must," sighed Koharu before she and the rest of the room resumed their discussion.

"My gratitude, Koharu-sama," said Shikaku before he grabbed Kakashi by the shoulder and steered him out of the room.

Confusion crossed the silver-haired jounin's face at the council's disinterest towards him. No… not just disinterest… they were … dismissing him. Kakashi moved to voice out his thoughts, but Shikaku's grip on his shoulder tightened as he pushed him out the door. "Not here, not now," warned Shikaku.

"But—"

A glare from the Nara silenced him before he quietly followed the man out of the administrative building.

"Why did you stop me?" demanded Kakashi once they were away from prying ears.

"And let you walk into Danzo's trap?" countered Shikaku smoothly.

"…Trap?" frowned Kakashi.


"What do you mean?" asked Kakashi. "What trap?"

"Had I not interrupted Danzo, he would have implicated you as an accomplice to the Uchiha
massacre," explained Shikaku.

"What?" said Kakashi in disbelief.

"You were the one to find Shisui after he lost an eye. You were the one who conveniently disappeared when the boy escaped the hospital and you were the one to find him again after the Uchihas had been massacred. Kasa, the oracle that supposedly foresaw all this, was taken out of commission," continued Shikaku. "Do I have to spell it out further?"

"You know I would never do that!" snapped Kakashi.

"I know," agreed Shikaku with a dark frown over his face. "But that doesn't necessarily mean the council share my views. To them, you withheld information, you blatantly disregarded the council and their authority."

"What choice did I have? Did we have?" snapped Kakashi. "With how Sandaime allows Danzo to get away with all his stunts! He might as well be under the man's control already."

"And this is exactly why you're a child," droned Shikaku as he crossed his arms. "I thought you knew better than to allow your emotions to get the better of you. Or have you allowed Obito and Kasa's recklessness rub off on you?"

A grimace crossed Kakashi's face as he grew silent at the man's words.

"You cannot afford to walk the same tightrope they're on," warned Shikaku. "Unlike them, you still have a level of credibility to your name that could give you a voice with Sandaime and his council. It won't help anyone if you choose to throw that away now."

"Then what do you expect me to do?" asked Kakashi.

"Be patient," advised Shikaku. "As you are now, Danzo and the council members are out of your league."

"And how long do you expect me to wait?" grounded out Kakashi. "He's already taken out the Uchihas! How many more—"

"This is a delicate situation and it would be unwise to needlessly challenge Danzo in his field of expertise," interrupted Shikaku. "We need to take our time and choose our battles. We've already lost regarding the Uchiha massacre. It's pointless to pursue the matter when we have more pressing situations to deal with. If you've forgotten, Konoha is still at war with Kumo and Kiri. Danzo's not that stupid as to dwindle our numbers any further and put the village at risk."

"...I understand," murmured Kakashi as he looked away.

"Do you?" continued Shikaku.

The silver-haired jounin grew silent.

"Go rest or visit Kasa or something," sighed Shikaku as he reached his hand back and craned his neck. "I'll see what I can do regarding damage control."

Without another word the Nara made his way back to the administrative building and Kakashi was left to his own devices. He clenched his fists with simmering frustration as he replayed the meeting and Shikaku's lecture in his mind. He couldn't recall when he last felt this way. To be dismissed and casually cast off as though he was insignificant. He was always praised as a prodigy and viewed as
Had his pride and hubris lead him into Danzo's traps so easily as Shikaku claimed?

Kakashi took a deep breath as he shook his head to clear his mind. He can't allow himself to dwell in these thoughts. As Shikaku noted, the battle's lost and they have more pressing matters to tend to. He refocused his attention and glanced towards the hospital in the distance.

…Such as Kasa in her comatose state.

At the thought of his former subordinate, his fists slowly unclenched and he found the anger melting away to guilt. With a resolute sigh, he squared his shoulders and made his way towards the hospital. He promised that they would bring about change together and he intend to keep that promise.

When he walked into Kasa's room, he spotted Obito seated in the chair next to the bed with his arms crossed and his eyes closed. Under normal circumstances, he might have thought the Uchiha was asleep, but he knew better. While the other was far from an expert of the mind, he was far more familiar with Kasa compared to Inoichi. He would have a better chance in aiding Kasa's recovery… if recovery was even possible.

Kakashi took the remaining seat by the bedside and sank down in exhaustion. His gaze drifted over the girl's comatose form briefly before he turned his attention to the ceiling. Idly, he wondered if this was what the girl felt all this time. To know what's to come, but powerless to do anything to change it.

"I'm guessing it didn't go well?" murmured Tobi quietly as he broke the silence.

"Any luck with Kasa?" asked Kakashi, not bothering to refute the question.

"Her mind's a scattered mess," said Tobi quietly as he turned his gaze towards him. "Broken thoughts and memories all over the place."

"What about Rayne?" asked Kakashi. "Did you manage to find her?"

"…What's left of her," murmured Tobi as he glanced towards the girl.

"…What do you mean?" asked Kakashi with a frown.

"Whatever they did to her last night, practically turned her feral," explained Tobi. "She lashed out the moment I found her and vehemently screamed for me to get out. She even went as far as attacking me to do so."

"But that means she's still there. There's still a chance that Kasa—"

"Don't get your hopes up," interrupted Tobi. "The chances of recovering from an attack like that is slim. As of now, there's little we could do to help her. Whether or not she recovers is dependent on her."

"Nothing?" said Kakashi darkly. "There's nothing whatsoever that we could do to help?"

"You can make sure no one messes around with her body while she sorts this out on her own," suggested Tobi as he pushed himself up from his seat. "Otherwise, no. There's nothing you can do."

"…And how long exactly would this sorting out take?" asked Kakashi.
"That depends on her," replied Tobi as he made his way to the door. "She's the stubborn sort, so there's a possibility, but I wouldn't get my hopes up over that slim chance."

"…I see," murmured Kakashi.

"Say Kakashi…" said Tobi as he rested a hand on the door knob. "What sort of alibi would you say is the most outrageous?"

"What?" frowned Kakashi in confusion, but the other said nothing more before he left the room with a dangerous smile.
For a week, Sakura haven't seen either Sasuke or Naruto. She suspected that it had something to do with Kasa sensei's sudden disappearance since she hadn't come in either. Iryo ninjutsu classes were taken over by another iryo-nin while Rin sensei returned to her duties at the hospital. Sakura had no clue what was going on, but as the days dragged on, she began to hear whispers, quiet murmurings about an attack on the Uchiha Clan.

Then the rumors started, each one more outlandish than the last. It went from Sasuke being sick, to the slaughtering of his clan. Sakura tried to brush it off as nonsensical gossip, but doubt gripped at her chest and worry flooded her mind. The Uchihas were the ones who sponsored her and made it possible to continue pursuing her dreams of becoming a kunoichi. To her they were infallible and untouchable. Who could possibly be powerful enough to take on the prestigious clan? Who would be crazy enough for the matter?

…Someone was, apparently.

Halfway into the second week, the Academy senseis intervened when the rumors became disruptive in class. From there, the pink-haired little girl learned about the Uchiha massacre, the reason for Sasuke and Naruto's absence. There were no specifics given regarding to the massacre, but that alone was enough to drive the Academy students' imagination wild with what supposedly happened.

"…Do you think Naruto and Sasuke are going to come back?" asked Sakura as she glanced towards the empty seats where the boys normally sat.

"Do you miss them?" teased Ino playfully.

"What?" spluttered Sakura in disbelief. "What makes you think that?"

"Oh come on now, you like Sasuke-kun don't you?" grinned the blonde girl. "Or do you have a thing for Naruto?"

"I do not have a crush on them!" grounded out Sakura, hands clenched and face flushed red with irritation.

"Hehe, kidding, kidding!" laughed Ino as she held up her hands defensively. "You're too easy!"

"Be serious," huffed Sakura with a pout.

"Okay, okay," appeased Ino as she propped up an arm on her desk and rested her chin on her palm. "Honestly, I don't know. They'll come back eventually I think."

"How are you so sure? Aren't they going to get kicked out after being absent for so long?" asked Sakura.

"They're not going to get kicked out," sighed Ino in exasperation.

"How are you so sure?" asked Sakura.

"Sasuke's from a shinobi family, unless he drops out, I don't think they would kick him out," said Ino offhandedly. "Besides his grades were always good, he'll catch up in no time even with so many absences."
A thoughtful look crossed Sakura's face. She forgotten that they weren't civilian-born like her. Even so…

"But what about Naruto?" asked Sakura.

"Naruto?" repeated Ino with a raised brow. "It's not going to make a difference whether he comes or not, he has the worst grades in class. It might be kinder if they would just kick him out and have him go to a civilian school instead."

"Don't you think that's a little mean?" asked Sakura. "Naruto tries hard."

"I'm just saying as it is, not everyone's meant to be a ninja Sakura," reasoned Ino. "Besides—"

The door slid open and the class suddenly grew silent. The two girls paused in their conversation and turned to the door. Sasuke walked in with a solemn expression over his face and Naruto was merely steps behind, followed by Mizuki sensei. Neither boys said a word as they quietly made their way in. With Iruka in the room, no one dared to bother the Uchiha boy as he took his usual seat by the window.

Naruto on the other hand caught sight of them staring at them before he shot them a weak grin and took the seat next to Sasuke. The bright mischief that usually lit his eyes was disturbingly absent. Sakura had never seen him so sullen and lackluster. She sorely wanted to ask Naruto and Sasuke what happened, but her nerves got the better of her and she remained guarded and silent. She wasn't sure if they would answer even if she asked.

"Looks like they're back," murmured Ino quietly as she glanced over to them.

"Yeah," mumbled Sakura as she turned back to the lesson.

Classes resumed as normal. However, neither boys were paying attention as Sakura noticed. Even though Sasuke was diligently taking notes, his eyes remained glazed with a frown as if he was in a far off thought. Naruto on the other hand kept a close eye on the Uchiha as though the other boy would disappear if he looked away for even a moment.

"Naruto, I know it's been a while since you've been to class, but please pay attention," called out Mizuki before the blond flinched and hastily turned his attention back to his notebook. A chorus of quiet giggles broke out in the classroom before the man smiled warmly. "Thank you."

Sakura rested her chin on her hand as she tried to focus on the lesson. While Mizuki sensei was more soft-spoken compared to Iruka sensei, the man was no less firm regards to his teaching methods. The silver-haired chunin may have joined only for a scant few days, but he had already familiarized himself with all his students and their quirks. The rowdier students were immediately dealt with if they dared to do anything during his lessons.

By the time lunch break came, Sasuke had made himself scarce and disappeared before anyone could approach him. Naruto in turn, followed after him like as if he was the other boy's shadow.

"Poor Sasuke-kun, this must be hard on him," murmured one of the Uchiha boy's many fan girls.

"Maybe we should do something to cheer him up," said another.

"Oh shut up, you just want to get close to him!" spat another girl.

"Am not!" retorted the first and the group fell into a volley of insults.
Sakura did her best to block out the noise before Ino grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her out of the room.

"Where are we going?" asked Sakura in bafflement as she stumbled to keep up with the girl.

"Away from those harpies," replied Ino. "Sasuke-kun had the right idea when he left."

"Are you sure you're that's not just an excuse to go talk to him?" noted Sakura dryly.

"Say what you want," chirped the blonde brightly. "We're going to go talk to him."

"Why do I have to go? You're the one who likes him, not me," said Sakura in a deadpan.

"But you're his rival!" huffed Ino. "You have a better excuse to talk to him."

"And what excuse is that?" asked Sakura with a raised brow.

"Really?" Ino rolled her eyes. "Iryo-ninjutsu class!"

"You're in that class too," refuted Sakura.

"Just go with me!" huffed Ino with a pout.

Sakura eventually relented and allowed the other girl to continue dragging her along. She knew her friend had a crush on the Uchiha, but unlike all his other fan girls, she took a different approach in showing her affections towards him. She mentioned something about putting herself a level above the rest, but Sakura didn't bother to listen beyond that as she had no interest in Sasuke. It wasn't that she hated the boy, but ever since Kasa sensei helped her reenroll in the Academy, she wanted to do the older girl proud by beating the Uchiha boy in every subject like she requested.

"Sasuke-kun," greeted Ino reservedly when they found him on the roof with Naruto. The Uchiha pointedly ignored them in favor for his lunch, Naruto tried nudging him, but he refused to respond.

"Sorry Ino," said Naruto sheepishly when her face fell. "He's not very talkative today."

"It's okay," replied the girl in surprise when she noticed he was trying to cheer her up. "We were just wondering if Sasuke wanted the notes from iryo-ninjutsu class. There are some new—"

"I don't need your help," said Sasuke darkly. "You two-faced romance obsessed waste of space."

"Oi," hissed Naruto with a warning tone, but before he could say anything else, Sasuke got up and turned to them with a scowl.

"It's people like you that has no business taking away people and things that doesn't belong to you," spat Sasuke.

"But I'm just—" protested Ino, but he wouldn't let up.

"You're annoying, a pest and a two-faced bitch," snarled Sasuke. "You probably didn't even take iryo-ninjutsu class because you wanted to be one!"

"Sasuke that's enough!" snapped Naruto. "You're taking this too far!"

"S-Sasuke-kun," whimpered Ino as tears welded in her eyes.

"Get out of my face," hissed Sasuke. "You disgust me."
Without another word, the blonde girl broke into tears as she turned around and ran towards the stairs sobbing. Sakura tried to catch her friend before she passed, but she darted off before she could.

"What the hell Sasuke?" snapped Naruto. "You didn't have to be so mean to her!"

"I didn't do anything wrong," scoffed Sasuke. "She's just the same as the rest of them. She's—"

BAM!

"Sasuke!" shouted Naruto in surprise when the other boy was sent flying by a punch to the face.

"You take that back!" snapped Sakura as she pulled her fist back. "Ino's nothing like them!"

"Why you…" growled Sasuke as he pressed a hand to his face and climbed to his feet, but before he could get up Sakura ran up to him and smashed a side kick into his face.

"You have no right to treat her that way!" snarled Sakura as the other was thrown into the ground again. "She was trying to be nice you big jerk!"

"What do you know?" spat Sasuke as he pushed himself up. "She's just—"

"Insult her one more time! I dare you!" snapped Sakura as she grabbed him by the front of his shirt and hauled him up to meet her scowling face. "I don't care if it's your family that sponsored me to return to the Academy, but if you insult my friend one more time, I'll make you regret it! GOT IT!?"

"Tch," hissed Sasuke as he glared back at the girl. He was about to grab her arm when another hand caught his wrist.

"You know…" said Naruto as he pulled Sasuke away from the pink-haired girl and pushed him back. "Sakura's right, you're being a big jerk."

"Naruto, what are you—"

"Sakura, nice kick," said Naruto cheerily as he complimented the girl. "Next time, kick harder. That's what Sasa—I mean Kasa sensei, would have wanted."

"O…okay," said Sakura in surprise before the blond grabbed her wrist and dragged her towards the stairs.

"Come on, let's go look for Ino and tell her how much of a jerk Sasuke is," said Naruto as they left Sasuke behind. Once the Uchiha boy was out of sight, he released her wrist and walked alongside her quietly. He had a troubled look over his face. "Sorry about Sasuke, he's just… having a hard time. It doesn't excuse him for anything but…"

"Why are you apologizing for him? He was the one that said those things, not you," said Sakura.

"I know, but I don't want him to push everyone away," replied Naruto with a sheepish grin. "That and I'm afraid you might kick his ass again. You're kind of scary."

"What?" said Sakura in disbelief before irritation crossed her face. "I am not scary!"

"Don't hit me!" pleaded Naruto as he darted away from her, but an obvious grin was over his face as he did so.

"Come back here Naruto!" snapped Sakura, her anger towards Sasuke temporarily forgotten as she chased the blond down.
At some point, she lost sight of him and decided to go in search for Ino instead. Her friend was likely still crying from Sasuke's harsh words. She wanted to comfort her as the Yamanaka girl had done when she was bullied by Ami and the other girls in the Academy. The search didn't take long, but to her surprise, Naruto was already there. He had squatted down to her level with his arms wrapped around his own legs as he spoke softly to her.

"Go away!" hiccupped Ino as she tried to hide her crying face behind her arms. "I don't want to talk to anyone!"

"Aw, but don't you want to hear what Sakura did to Sasuke after he said those mean things?" whined Naruto. "Sakura totally kicked his ass!"

"W-what?" sniffled Ino as she glanced up at him.

"You should've seen her!" said Naruto excitedly. "She went POW! And punched him in the face! Sasuke went flying and then she rushed him, WHAM! And sent him flying again with a kick! She was so scary!"

"Sakura scary?" repeated Ino before she snorted a laugh. "Sakura's not scary."

"She's definitely scary!" argued Naruto. "Scarier than Kasa sensei!"

"Pft." Ino burst out laughing. "She is not!"

"Is too!" countered Naruto, but a grin was clear on his face.

"Who's scary now?" said Sakura when she finally decided to join into the conversation.

"Geh! Sakura!" shouted Naruto as he jumped to his feet in surprise before he turn to Ino with a sheepish grin. "I gotta go! Cheer up Ino!"

Before Sakura could call out to him, the blond boy had already darted off. Ino on the other hand chuckled lightly as she wiped the remaining tears away from her eyes.

"You okay?" asked Sakura as she stepped closer to the other girl.

"Yeah…" said Ino as she glanced up to her with a grin. "I never thought Sasuke-kun would be such a jerk and Naruto of all people would be the one to cheer me up."

"The world's strange that way isn't it?" murmured Sakura as she glanced back down the hallway where Naruto ran off in. "Who would've thought…"

"I feel kind of bad for what I said earlier now," laughed Ino sheepishly. "Now, I hope he won't fail and end up in civilian school."

"Hmm?" hummed Sakura as she glanced back at Ino in surprise.

"N-Not that I like him or anything!" huffed Ino as she looked away.

"…Is that so?" noted Sakura with a hint of amusement.

"I do not!" grounded out Ino, her face flushing red as she stood and stomped her feet.

"I didn't say anything," chirped Sakura cheerily in turn.

"Sakura!" huffed Ino with indignation.
"Okay, okay, I believe you!" laughed Sakura as the other girl turned her heel and stomped off. "Ino! Seriously, I believe you!"

Sakura chased after her friend in good humor as the other girl continued to deny her budding crush for Naruto. It was a bit odd to see someone crushing on Naruto for a change, but knowing Ino, the girl would probably get over her crush in a couple of weeks after Naruto pulls off another one of his untraceable pranks.

Untraceable… the thought made Sakura do a mental double take as she thought back to all the times that pranks went off in the Academy. If Naruto was truly as bad as they thought him to be… would he be able to pull off those pranks without leaving a single trace?

…Huh. She would have to look into that when she had a chance… Not that she ever got one as she got into fights with Sasuke almost daily after that day, both verbal and physical.

"You want to say that again to my face Uchiha?" snapped Sakura as Ino did her best to pull her back.

"As if I'm scared of you forehead girl!" retorted Sasuke with Naruto instead to hold him back.

"Let me at him Ino!" roared Sakura as she attempted to pull away from the blonde girl.

"Damn it Sakura! Stop letting him rile you up!" shouted Ino over their screaming.

"Sasuke! Didn't she kick your ass the other day? Stop pissing her off?" reasoned Naruto, though it was questionable to whether he was trying to stop the fight or egg it on further.

"She caught me off guard that time!" snapped Sasuke.

"That's not what it looked like to me," said Naruto offhandedly.

"Are you on my side or hers?" growled Sasuke as he turned his attention to him instead.

"Neither!" said Naruto defensively. "I'm just saying, she kicked your ass, maybe it's not—Woah!"

Sasuke lifted both legs to shift his entire weight on Naruto. At the sudden shift in balance, the blond stumbled forward. Sakura and Ino hastily backed off when the two toppled and Sasuke used it as a chance to flip Naruto over. The blond landed on the ground soundly on his back and Sasuke hastily moved to regain his footing on the ground. However, he misjudged his landing and found himself slipping in the last second.

"Pft," snorted Sakura as she covered her mouth with her hand.

"Oh my…" gapped Ino as she mimicked Sakura's actions.

Sasuke had landed face first on Naruto and their lips smashed together in an upside down kiss. The moment lasted for no more than a second before the two boys broke apart screaming. Sasuke was busy retching while Naruto seemed to be a rambling mess.

"No, the future can be changed, the future can change! That didn't happen! THAT DIDN'T COUNT!" screamed Naruto in an incoherent mess before he got up and ran off. "SASUKE DIDN'T JUST KISS ME! SASUKE DIDN'T KISS ME!"

"God damn it Naruto! Don't scream that in the school!" shouted Sasuke as he got up and chased after him.
"Did we really just see…” started Ino as she glanced over to Sakura.

The two of them stared at each other for a second before they both broke into juvenile giggles. Sakura thought the embarrassment would keep Sasuke at bay for at least week, but it didn't seem to be the case when she found him confronting her again, but this time Naruto was standing a good meter away from him.

"So… did you come to show your love to Naruto again?” teased Sakura in good humor before the two boys turned green at the thought.

"You saw nothing," hissed Sasuke.

"Sure…” drawled Sakura. "I'm sure Ino didn't either."

"Pft," snickered Ino as she did her best to hide her laugh behind her hand.

"What do you want in exchange to never mention that ever again?” scowled Sasuke.

"Hmm?” hummed Sakura in amusement before a vindictive idea came to mind. "How about a date?"

"W-what?” said Sasuke with wide eyes.

"Kidding," snorted Sakura as she crossed her arms. "As if I would date a jerk like you."

"Then what the hell do you want?” growled Sasuke under his breath.

"Take back every mean thing you said to Ino and apologize,” demanded the pink-haired girl.

"I'm not going to—"

"Hey Ino! Is that Ami over there?” interrupted Sakura as she tiptoe and looked over Sasuke’s shoulder. "Hey A—"

"I'm sorry!” snapped Sasuke in a hurry as he reached out and covered Sakura's mouth. "I take everything back! Happy?"

Sakura's eyes narrowed as she pulled his hand away from her mouth. "Say that to Ino not me."

"...I'm sorry," muttered Sasuke grudgingly under his breath as he turned to Ino. "I didn't mean any of the things I said that day. I was…”

"You were?” pressed Sakura.

"...I was a jerk,” grumbled Sasuke as he looked away. "Happy?"

"Ecstatic,” said Sakura dryly.

"So you're not going to talk about it?” grumbled Sasuke as he turned his glare at her.

"I just have a couple of questions,” said Sakura.

"What?” snapped Sasuke. "If you want embarrass me further, you can—"

"...I want to know what happened to Kasa sensei,” murmured Sakura quietly before the anger on Sasuke's face melted away and he looked away with a grimace. "Something happened to her right? That's why she hasn't been to classes the past two weeks."
"…She's in the hospital," mumbled Sasuke quietly and Ino gasped quietly in horror.

"What happened?" asked Sakura with a gentleness in her voice that she didn't use before with him.

"I don't want to talk about it," said Sasuke as he turned to leave, but Sakura grabbed his wrist before he can.

"Just one more question and I promise I won't tell anyone about what happened," said Sakura before he stopped completely and she released his arm. "…Can we go visit her? I just… Kasa sensei was really important to me and…"

As her words trailed off, the halls grew silent. It seemed like Sasuke was going to ignore her last request when he started to walk off without another word.

"…You can come with us to visit her after classes," mumbled the Uchiha quietly as he continued on down the hall.

"Really?" perked up Sakura as she stared at his retreating back.

"Only if you keep your end of the bargain," huffed Sasuke as he glanced back at her and darted his eyes towards Ino. "That goes the same for her too."

"As long as I get to come too!" countered Ino with her arms crossed. "Your apology sucks!"

"Too bad!" retorted Sasuke. "That's the only one you're going to get and I'm not repeating it!"

"Sasuke," hissed Naruto as he carefully inched away further away from Sasuke. "Quit pushing your luck! They said they won't tell anyone already!"

"Fine!" grumbled Sasuke as he shot another look to Sakura. "Meet us at the hospital after school. If you're late, we're leaving without you."

"We share the same classes," retorted Sakura in a deadpan. "We'll get out at the same time. Why can't we just all leave together?"

"Do you want to go or not?" scowled Sasuke.

"Sasuke's shy about walking next to a girl," whispered Naruto slyly with a hand cupped to the side of his face.

"I AM NOT!" roared Sasuke as he turned to punch Naruto.

"STAY AWAY!" screamed the blond as he jumped backwards and darted off. "I'm not going to let you kiss me again!"

"SHUT UP NARUTO!" shouted Sasuke.

"They're like slapstick comedians," commented Ino in amusement.

"Clowns more like it," snorted Sakura, but she couldn't help but smile a little. She was going to get to see Kasa sensei again, even if it was through the jerk Sasuke.

Classes couldn't end any faster for Sakura as she anxiously watched the seconds tick by on the clock above the board. She wasn't sure what she would find when they visited. Sasuke never told her the reason behind Kasa sensei's hospitalization nor her condition. All she knew was that the older girl was there and she was going to be able to visit her.
"Ino and Sakura," said Rin sensei in surprise when she saw the two of them at the hospital later that day. "What are you two doing here?"

"I promised I would take them to visit Kasa-nee," grumbled Sasuke under his breath.

"Sasuke," chided Rin with a frown. "You know you can't just bring anyone into Kasa's room. You have to—"

"But it's just Ino and Sakura! They're Sasa-nee's students! I'm sure if she was awake…" trailed off Naruto dejectedly. "She would probably be happy to see them visiting."

At the solemn look on the boy's face, Rin let out a sigh and relented.

"Just this once," conceded Rin. "But next time you have to ask permission before you bring any visitors."

"Definitely!" chirped Naruto brightly. "Thanks Rin!"

"If anything happens, you know where to find me," said Rin before she let them pass through the hallway to Kasa sensei's room.

"Naruto, what did she mean by if anything happens?" asked Ino as they made their way to the room.

"…She's in a coma," answered Sasuke when Naruto grew silent.

"Coma?" repeated Ino quietly. "Will she… eventually wake up?"

"That's what we're hoping for," mumbled Sasuke before they stopped a door and opened it. As they walked in, they quickly noticed another person in the room with their comatose sensei.

"Sasuke," greeted a dark-haired teenager dressed in what looked like an Anbu uniform.

Sakura noticed the Uchiha boy tense with a gasp as his eyes widened in shock. However, before he could say anything else, Naruto darted around him and towards the stranger.

"Itachi-ni! You're back!" shouted Naruto happily.

"Naruto," returned Itachi quietly with a nod before he turned his attention to Sasuke, but the boy didn't seem as happy as Naruto to see him.

"Where the hell were you!?” snapped Sasuke angrily as he charged at his brother with his fists swinging, but the older boy caught his wrists with ease.

"Sasuke," said Itachi as the boy continued to scream.

"Where were you when we needed you? Where were you when Shisui-ni killed everyone?" cried Sasuke with tears streaming down his face as he struggled to pound his small fists into Itachi's chest. "Where were you when he had that masked jerk break Kasa-nee? Where were you?!"

"…I'm sorry Sasuke," apologized Itachi softly.

"Ino," whispered Sakura as she reached for the other girl's hand. "Maybe we should leave…"

"You two are Kasa's students, am I correct?" interrupted Itachi before either of them could decide to leave. The two girls nodded silently. "Stay, since you obviously came to visit her, I'm going to take Sasuke outside and calm him down."
"Itachi-ni, you're not going to leave again are you?" asked Naruto before the teen could leave the room.

"Not anytime soon," replied Itachi as he manhandled Sasuke under his arm as he moved towards the door. "I'll be back later. Keep Kasa company until then."

"Got it! See you soon!" said Naruto before the teen left the room.

"So… who's that?" asked Ino nosily. "Is that Kasa sensei's boyfriend?"

"What?" said Naruto in disbelief. "No way! Itachi-ni has a fiancée already!"

"Hmm, really?" said Ino disappointedly. "And here I thought it was going to be something romantic like him standing longingly over her or something."

"Ino, you do know Kasa sensei is in a coma right?" sighed Sakura in exasperation.

"What? Just because she's in a coma doesn't mean she couldn't have a boyfriend!" retorted the girl.

Sakura opened her mouth to refute her claim, but in the end decided to keep her mouth shut. There really was no point in challenging Ino's sense of logic when it comes to love and romance. Just let the girl be and her friend would eventually forget about it. She took the chance instead to look back at their sensei. The auburn-haired teen looked like she was just sleeping, but from Sasuke's outburst, this was not an ordinary coma. Something bad had happened to her role model and they had no clue whether or not she would recover from it.

"Don't make that face," said Naruto as he cut into her thoughts.

"What?" said Sakura as she glanced over to him.

"She's not gone, she's still here," said Naruto. "Like she promised."

"That's right," said Ino quietly. "Kasa sensei said she won't go anywhere until she sees each and every one of us become iryo-nins. We can't let her down!"

"Right," agreed Sakura as she nodded as she firmed her resolve.

Kasa sensei promised that she will see all of them become iryo-nins. They have to keep up their end of the promise and make that come true.
"If... either of you plan to do anything reckless... Could you... at least come talk to me first?"

Reckless? Itachi fought back a scoff at the thought. Out of three of them, she was the most reckless in the group. She should be the last one to talk lecture someone about recklessness, but... the look on her face when she said it that day told him that there was something more she wasn't telling him.

"Are you okay?" asked Tenzo as the older teen broke him out of his thoughts.

"...I'm fine," replied Itachi as he muffled a cough behind his hand. Thankfully, they were on an espionage mission rather than an assassination. Coughing as a seemingly harmless civilian was less worrisome compared to coughing as an undercover assassin.

"You're still coughing, did you get that check out at all?" continued Tenzo casually as he sipped his tea. To avoid suspicion, the two stopped in a teahouse for drinks and snacks while they observed the ongoing in Kumogakure.

"It's a passing cough, nothing to worry about," said Itachi as he took a bite out of his dango.

"Don't make me tell you know who," warned Tenzo. "She will pin you, then strip you and possibly probe you just to make you miserable for not getting that checked out."

"Hmph," snorted Itachi as he hid a grin behind his cup. "She would do that."

"I will help her if I need to," threatened the older teen with a stern glare.  

"Is that so?" Itachi raised a brow at his words.

"What's with that look?" frowned Tenzo in confusion.

"Nothing, I just never thought that you would have the same sense of humor as Kasa," commented Itachi as he reached for another skewer. "If Shisui was here, he would note that it's quite kinky."

"Wait wha—" Tenzo paused when his mind finally caught up with what he just said as his face flushed red. "Have you been talking with Rayne again?"

"I'm not the one spouting lewd threats," said Itachi dryly before he took notice of a hawk flying pass above the village. His eyes narrowed when he recognized it as one of Naori's summons. "We should probably get going."

"Hmm?" Tenzo took once glance at the loss of humor on the younger teen's face before he placed down the payment for their drinks and snacks.

Without a word, he discreetly left with Itachi in tow. A frown crossed the Uchiha's face as they did their best to separate from the crowd without being noticed. Naori knew he was on a mission, it was unlike her to risk exposing his cover to send a messenger hawk. Something must have happened back in Konoha. Otherwise, she would never break such protocols.

While hawks were quite common in the mountainous areas in the Lightning Country, it was still suspicious for one to fly over a shinobi village. For Itachi to attempt to even get in contact with the hawk was reckless, if not suicidal. If spotted, they would need to abort their mission and flee. Fortunately or unfortunately, they had barely made pass the outskirts within the village border.
Escape would be easy, but all the efforts they've invested in getting into the village would be wasted.

"What does it say?" asked Tenzo after they located the hawk and Itachi retrieved the message in the barely noticeable carrier on its leg.

"...We're being recalled," murmured Itachi with a frown as he read through the short message, surprise crossed his face when he noticed the order was from their hokage.

"Already?" asked Tenzo in surprise. "Why?"

"Doesn't say, but we're to abort and return ASAP," said Itachi as he snapped his fingers and burned up the short message before whispering to Naori's hawk. "We're heading back now."

Without a single squawk, the bird gave its wings a mighty flap and took flight to the cloudy skies. Itachi and Tenzo made haste to leave, but before they could do so, a number of mouse-like fireballs rained from above and forced them to dodge out of the way.

"Leaving so soon, Itachi Uchiha?" drawled an unamused voice before a woman stepped out from hiding. "I must say, I'm surprised that you managed to get this far into the village with nothing more than a turban and that high-collared cloak of yours as a disguise."

Itachi's eyes narrowed coolly as he took in the sight of the blonde and identified her as Yugito Ni. He faintly recalled her as one of Kasa's match up during the finals in the chunin exams. The woman lost to the younger girl's scare tactics and eventually dropped her guard enough for a well-placed defibrillation jutsu, though not before she managed to skewer his auburn-haired teammate first.

"Did you really think that would be enough?" scoffed Yugito.

"Yugito Nii," greeted Itachi evenly as he glanced to the older woman. "You're in good health."

"Spare me the pleasantries," snorted Yugito as she tilted her head aside in disinterest. "You know why I'm here."

"In that case, pardon my bluntness," replied Itachi courteously. "As you've already noticed, beyond sampling the local tea and its delicacies, we haven't ventured all that far into Kumogakure. A conflict would be needless and unnecessary. Neither of us have anything to gain."

"On the contrary, we would have plenty to gain in killing you," smirked Yugito as her nails extended into claws. "Your performance at the chunin exams was quite admirable. Taking you out will make one less Konoha dog to deal with and we get those pretty eyes of yours."

"I see..." murmured Itachi regretfully as she dropped into a combative stance. "That's unfortunate."

Without ceremony, Yugito charged at him, with her claws at the ready to gouge out his eyes. Itachi stood unblinking as a length of tree trunk shot up from the ground and intercepted her attack.

"Time to go," said Tenzo before the two made haste towards the village border.

Itachi spared a glance behind him and noticed mouse-like fireballs burn through the tree that barred Yugito's path. The woman scowled as she swiped at the burning remains with her claws to clear her way and sped at them in pursuit. The Uchiha's dark eyes narrowed in calculation before he drew a handful of kunai and shurikens.

With practiced precision, he turned his body in one fluid motion and snapped his wrist to send his projectiles flying and whistling through the air. Yugito scoffed at his attack and casually swatted the
weapons aside without a second thought.

"If you think such flimsy attack would work on me, then I'm sorely disappointed in—"

BOOM!

The kunais around her exploded and the shockwave from the blast knocked Yugito off her feet. Itachi didn't bat an eye at the furious expression on the woman's face before she crashed into the ground in a tumble. He surmised that he and Tenzo had roughly half a minute before more would come to investigate the noise.

Unfortunately, Yugito was more durable than expected as the blonde staggered to her feet. Itachi gave her no chance in thinking about retaliation as he raised a handful of ninja wires to his lips and clenched them between his teeth. On the end of the wires were the shurikens he threw out earlier with his explosive kunais. He then sped through a series of hand seals and gathered a lung full of chakra.

When he finally released his fiery breath, the flames ran along the ninja wires and engulfed Yugito in flames. The woman screamed as she dropped to the ground and attempted putting out the fire torching her hair and clothes. Itachi released his mouthful of wires to avoid getting dragged by the woman's desperate tossing and turning on the ground.

Had there been no recall order to return to Konoha in haste, he would have made sure the woman was dead. Itachi found no enjoyment in killing, no enjoyment in wars, but that didn't mean he couldn't see the tactical advantage of showing no mercy when the opportunity arose. From her match with Kasa during the chunin exams, he could tell the Kumo kunoichi was a ruthless opponent. If he underestimated her for even a moment, he doubt that the woman would pass the chance to skewer him through the heart with those claws of hers.

"Itachi, incoming!" shouted Tenzo in warning before the Uchiha's eyes flared red and took in their surroundings for all possible threats.

In an instant, he spotted the approaching teams of three, more than he expected. A frown crossed his face as he glanced to Tenzo. His partner gave him a firm nod before the two them halted in their escape and turned to face the onslaught of Kumo-nin. Itachi sped through another set of hand seals discreetly as they waited for the group to draw near.

Once the Kumo-nins were in range, Itachi's half-lidded eyes opened fully in concentration as he let off his jutsu. Within seconds, a dazed expression crossed their faces as they fell into Itachi's cleverly weaved genjutsu. Slowly, dazed confusion turned into terror as the Kumo-nins all began to scream in horror.

"I-It's the Crimson Terror!" shouted the men in a panic as they stumbled backwards, flailing their arms at an enemy that wasn't there.

Tenzo in turn weaved his own set of hand seals before slamming his hands into the ground. Roots slithered from his arms as it took hold of the illusion-bound Kumo-nins. They made quick work in killing a handful of them before they made their escape.

When Kasa left anbu, Kakashi requested for him to use genjutsu that involved her Crimson Terror façade. With the auburn-haired girl teaching in the village it was unlikely for her to continue field work. After the fiasco with Santa and Tokuma's death, he agreed with their silver-haired commander that it was best for her to stay in the village until she recovered from the grief. Between him and Kakashi, they were confident that they could keep up the ruse until she recovered.
Once done with the primary patrol teams, both Itachi and Tenzo disappeared underground with the use of Tenzo's Earth Release: Tunneling Technique and sealed off the opening with a new tree. While Tenzo dug through the ground, Itachi kept a firm hold onto Tenzo's shoulder. He allowed the chakra to bleed away from his eyes and grew blind to the world around him. A soft sigh escaped his lips as the adrenalin rush ended and he felt a little weak-kneed.

"Itachi, you okay?" asked Tenzo with concern when he felt the shift in weight on his shoulder.

"Fine," replied Itachi quietly as he regained his footing. "I just didn't expect the mass genjutsu to take as much chakra as it did."

"You sure?" pressed on the other. "Because I can—"

"I'm fine," assured Itachi. "If you're that concerned, you can worry all you want once we get back to Konoha."

"You're stubborn, you know that?" snorted Tenzo.

"As you've informed me on multiple occasions," said Itachi dryly.

"I'm serious," scowled the older teen. "If you feel even the slightest bit unwell…"

"I'll tell you," said Itachi in stoic exasperation, but the amused grin never left his lips as they distanced themselves from Kumogakure and took to traveling above ground once more.

Though the two did what they could to rush back to Konoha quickly as possible, they were human and needed rest. They each took turns on night-watches to allow the other to rest and replenish their energy. Soldier pills along with other pill-based supplements had detrimental side effects with long term use. They were taken only as a last resort. It took four days to return to Konoha, in that time, Itachi found himself yearning the days he took missions with Team Karasu and Team Ro.

At least then there were more people to take the night watch. Humorously enough, he and Kasa were never placed on the same watch cycle as the girl would likely get into an argument with him and end up waking their other team members. Both Kurei sensei and Kakashi made certain to not pair them together when it came to the safety of their sleep.

"Itachi!" shouted Izumo in surprise when he and Kotetsu spotted him and Tenzo speeding towards the village gates, the two were on gate duty. "You're finally back?"

"Sorry, Hokage-sama wants us to report to him immediately upon returning," said Itachi as he began the necessary procedure to reenter the village.

"But… are you okay?" asked Kotetsu in concern.

"Why wouldn't I be?" replied Itachi, a reserved frown crossed his face as he tried to make sense to why his teammate was concerned over him.

"Why wouldn't—" gapped Izumo in shock. "They were your family! Don't you care at all?"

"…What are you talking about?" asked Itachi in confusion.

"Wait you don't…" Kotetsu's eyes widened before he looked down with a grimace. "You don't know…"

"Know what exactly?" asked Itachi, his frown deepening as he studied their sullen faces. "What
"...We really shouldn't be the ones to tell you this, but...Something happened while you were away and..." started Kotetsu, but he couldn't continue as he looked away.

"A large number of your clan was massacred," continued Izumo when he realized his partner was unable to answer. "We don't know the exact details of what happened, but there's rumors that Shisui's the culprit."

"What?" responded Itachi in a quiet disbelief.

It can't possibly be Shisui; the older Uchiha wouldn't do something like this. This had to be a misunderstanding. However, before he could mull over the supposed rumor, another thought drew him out in near panic as he grabbed Izumo by his chunin vest and pulled him to eye level.

"You said a large number of the clan was massacred, but that means there are survivors," reasoned Itachi coldly as his grip tightened. "Is Sasuke among them? Is he okay? Is he hurt?"

"Itachi," said Tenzo as he placed a hand on the Uchiha's shoulder, warning him to back off.

"Tell me!" demanded Itachi.

"H-he's fine," reassured Izumo as he raised his hands up in surrender. "At least that's what I've heard, but beyond that, I have no clue. We haven't gotten a chance to stop by and check on him."

"...He's fine?" said Itachi, the uncertainty in his voice switched to relief as his grip on Izumo's vest loosened and hastily took a step back to return his teammate's personal space. "My apologies Izumo."

"Don't worry about it. I'd probably act the same way you are if I heard news like that," said Izumo as he straighten his vest and glanced back to Itachi once more. "Why don't you go ahead and report to Hokage-sama? The sooner you're done, the sooner you can check on Sasuke yourself."

"Hmm," hummed Itachi with a nod.

"Let us know if you need anything. We'll help however we could," offered Kotetsu.

Itachi doubted that either of his teammates could help, but he appreciated the offer. He gave the two another nod before he and Tenzo took to the roofs and sped towards the administrative building. Unless there was an emergency, rooftop travel was often reserved for shinobi messengers and hasty deployment. Occasionally, an overzealous genin could be seen skipping over the rooftop shingles after they've mastered the tree-walking exercise, but the novelty wore off quickly once they been lectured by the commanding jounin in keeping the rooftops clear.

"Itachi," greeted Hiruzen when the teen entered his office, but at the Uchiha's silence, his expression grew somber. "I assume you've already heard news of what happened."

"Hokage-sama," started Itachi quietly as he glanced up to the man. "What happened? Why would Shisui... it's not like him to do something like this."

"I understand that this is all very difficult to take in, but according to a number of witness accounts, they've all identified Shisui as the culprit of this massacre," said Hiruzen.

"...Witness accounts?" frowned Itachi.
"The majority of the massacred were shinobi," answered Hiruzne grimly. "Aside from the Uchihas that were dispatched on missions, Naori Uchiha is the only shinobi that survived, if only by Kasa-kun's intervention."

"Kasa?" repeated Itachi in surprise. "She was there?"

"She was among the first responders to the incident," answered Hiruzen. "According to Naori, after Kasa-kun treated her injuries, she immediately went off to the Uchiha district's civilian sector to intercept Shisui from slaughtering the remaining Uchihas."

"…And Kasa confirmed that Shisui's… turned traitor?" asked Itachi with restrained reluctance.

"No," said Hiruzen with a shake of his head. "Kasa-kun's testimony of the account has not been taken."

"What?" said Itachi in surprise. "Why not?"

"Her encounter with Shisui left her indisposed," said Hiruzen regretfully. "In your brother's testimony, Kasa-kun fought against Shisui while trying to save your mother from a near fatal sword wound and all the while trying to protect Sasuke as she bided time for reinforcements to arrive. She's currently comatose."

"I see…" said Itachi quietly as he tried to keep annoyance from showing on his face.

The idiot hasn't even been awake for a month and now she's put herself in another coma! So much for her warning of not being reckless. On top of that, he haven't the faintest clue to why Shisui would turn traitor. It was unlike the older Uchiha to do something like this. Itachi could feel a faint throb under his eye as it threatened to twitch out of sheer annoyance.

"In light of what happened," continued Hiruzen as Itachi was mulling over his thoughts. "I've recalled all Uchihas that were on mission to return to the village and I'm taking you off the mission roster for anbu."

"Hokage-sama!" protested Itachi as he met the man's gaze.

"As you are the clan heir, the Head of the Uchiha Clan title is now yours. In your absence, your mother has been acting as your proxy regarding to clan matters and the state of the Konoha police. However, now that you've returned, those duties will fall back to you."

"But—" protested Itachi.

"I would prefer to keep you in anbu due to the current conflicts we have with Kumo and Kiri, but as it is now, the Konoha Police force is in a state of disarray," continued Hiruzen with a frown. "With a large number of its force from the Uchiha Clan, it's currently understaffed."

"…You want me to take over the Konoha Police?" asked Itachi with a frown. "I'm afraid I don't have much experience in that regards Hokage-sama. Surely, there is someone more suited for the position?"

"You misunderstand me," said Hiruzen with a shake of his head. "As you are the Head of the Uchiha Clan, the affairs of the Konoha Police force is under your jurisdiction as it has been for your family for generations. It's part of your responsibility to choose a suitable candidate to run and re-staff the force."

"… I decline my inheritance as the Head of the Uchiha Clan," said Itachi.
"Itachi!" said Tenzo in surprise as he looked down at the younger teen.

"I believe my skills would better serve the village out on the battlefield rather than internal affairs within the village," explained Itachi.

"Itachi-kun," protested Hiruzen, but the Uchiha teen's resolve would not break.

"For now, I will take up the responsibilities as expect of me. If the police force is in such a disarray as you claim, I will do what I can until I find a suitable candidate to take my place," said Itachi.

"But Itachi, this is your birth right," said Tenzo. "Are you sure you can—"

"I have no interest in over glorified things such as birth right," droned Itachi. "And with my current age, my lack of reputation in the field of politics, it would be hard pressed for anyone to take me seriously much less listen to my views," continued Itachi before he glanced towards Tenzo. "I do better working on the field alongside you."

Tenzo stared at him in disbelief before he eventually sighed and relented. After working alongside Itachi for so long, he knew better than to argue otherwise.

"While I admire your resolve and your loyalty to the village," noted Hiruzen. "The pool of candidates to take your place is quite limited and of course, there is your younger brother to consider. Normally, if the heir declines succession, the younger sibling will supersede the position in their place. However, your brother…"

"If Sasuke wishes to challenge for the seat of clan head, he may do so when he's reached jounin status, but until then, I'll deter him from doing anything reckless," replied Itachi.

"…Very well," sighed Hiruzen. "I won't stop you if you're that determined."

"I am," replied Itachi.

"I'm sure you're anxious to see how your brother and mother are doing," continued Hiruzen as he waved a hand towards the door. "Tenzo can debrief me on the status of the mission prior to your withdrawal."

"Thank you Hokage-sama," said Itachi and gave a polite bow before he turned to leave. Tenzo gave him a reassuring grin and the hand sign for rendezvous as a promise to meet up later.

Itachi left without another word shortly after. He was anxious to see if Sasuke. However, it wouldn't do for him to interrupt his brother's classes just to reassure himself that he was fine. Instead, he marched his way home if only to clear out whatever clan duties he could so that his reunion with Sasuke would stay uninterrupted. What he didn't expected when he reached home was to find Naori with his mother.

"Itachi, you're home!" said Mikoto in surprise as she gingerly moved to greet him, but Itachi hastily stopped her when he noticed caution in her movements.

"Best not to force yourself," suggested Itachi as he pressed a firm hand on her shoulder and urged her to sit back down. "How are you injuries? Hokage-sama said you were attacked by Shisui."

"I'm fine," reassured Mikoto as she patted his hand on her shoulder. "Shisui didn't manage to hit anything vital."

"I see," said Itachi quietly with furrowed brows.
"Kasa-chan managed to stop me from bleeding out. If it wasn't for her, I probably wouldn't be here. And now she's…" murmured Mikoto with a soft shake of her head. "That poor sweet child. What has she ever done to have deserved such a life?"

"I'm sure she'll eventually wake up, Mikoto-san," said Naori soothingly as she glanced up to Itachi. He could clearly see the one eye that was clear white, a sign that it was blind and no longer useable. "Isn't that right, Itachi?"

"It's not the first time she's been in a coma," commented Itachi offhandedly as he focused his attention on his fiancée instead. "What about you? Hokage-sama noted you were injured during the conflict with Shisui."

"I was fortunate to have run into Kasa-chan when I have," replied Naori as she rested a hand against her stomach. "Otherwise, the situation might've been worse."

"…Quite fortunate," agreed Itachi as his eyes lingered over her blind one. The room fell into an uncomfortable silence. Naori made no attempt to expand on what she shared and that in itself seemed suspicious.

"All right, I think that's quite enough mulling for today," said Mikoto quietly as she broke through the silence and gripped Itachi's hand on her shoulder. "As much as the loss of your father and so many of our clansmen pains me, we have to be strong to continue leading this clan."

"Mother," started Itachi, but she shook her head with a forced, thin-lipped smile.

"You're the clan head now, Itachi," said Mikoto as she gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "On top of upholding the image of the Uchiha Clan… you would have to rebuild it as well. I would much rather not push this but…"

Itachi felt the throb return the underside of his eye when he realized his mother's attempt in steering the conversation. The topic wasn't one he wanted to consider at the moment, much less talk about it out loud.

"Mikoto-san, I believe it's best to save that conversation another time," interrupted Naori as though she sensed his discomfort about the topic. "It's still too soon to consider… especially with what's happened."

"Right…" said Mikoto with a breathy whisper, grief still audible in her voice.

"It's probably best that I get going, why don't you and Itachi use this time to catch up?" suggested Naori as she pushed herself up from her seat.

"We have all evening to do so," waved off Mikoto before she glanced up to her son. "Itachi, why don't you walk Naori home?"

"Mikoto-san—"

"Certainly," interrupted Itachi before the kunoichi could speak up. "It will be my pleasure."

"Wonderful," said Mikoto with a smile and Naori found herself unable to refute the decision.

"All right then," said Naori softly as she reached over to pat the woman's hand. "I hope you a hasty recovery Mikoto-san."

Without further pleasantries, the two left the house in amiable silence until they were long out of
range of the Main Uchiha household. The streets of the Uchiha district were disturbingly calm with barely anyone out on the streets. The children were either in the Academy or civilian school. The few that were out and about were the elderly and the shopkeepers.

"What really happened?" asked Itachi. She glanced to him silently with a tilt of her head as if to feign innocence. "You didn't face Shisui that night did you?"

"How did you conclude that?" inquired Naori, neither denying nor agreeing with him.

"There are only two jutsus that could render a sharingan blind and you're not the type to casually resort to such tactics unless you were absolutely certain that it would work," drawled Itachi as his eyes narrowed. "If you used Izanagi you would have either kill Shisui or injure him severely enough that he would never think to go onto attacking my mother. She may be a retired kunoichi, but she was a kunoichi nonetheless. If you had placed him in Izanami, he would've been trapped in a loop until he changed his mind."

"And?" replied Naori evenly as she studied him with an appraising gaze.

"Sandaime said the massacre was primarily the shinobi, the civilians were relatively untouched with the exception of my mother. Shisui couldn't have killed all those people if you never encountered him to begin with." Itachi frowned as he continued his deduction. "What's more, if Shisui was truly trying to my mother, it would be child's play for him to hit any of the number of vitals that could kill her in an instant. Instead, she suffered a wound that was hardly a challenge to heal. Especially for the likes of Ka…"

Itachi grew silent as comprehension crossed his face. Naori stopped in her tracks and turned to face him in a passive stance, patiently waiting for him to complete and conclude his deductions.

"…Kasa was part of the initial responders and she healed you," said Itachi quietly as he glanced towards the older Uchiha. "She was the one that…"

"Perceptive as always," commented Naori as her expression grew solemn. "But in this instance, she was used."

"Used?" repeated Itachi with furrowed brows.

"When I found her, she was in tears rambling about how the Uchihas must die as though she was possessed," explained Naori with a frown. "She kept apologizing and wishing that she didn't have to kill everyone. I suspected that it might be some sort of coercion or mind manipulation jutsu."

"…You used Izanami to break her out of it," concluded Itachi as he studied her with a confused frown. "You even went as far as to shift the blame onto Shisui in order to protect her… why?"

"Ever the perfect shinobi," sighed Naori with a shake of her head. "Instead of asking why, the question you should be asking should be, why not. Kasa is one of your closest and dearest friends is she not? Would you damn her for something that's out of her control?"

"You would be the first to not do so," commented Itachi as he glanced to Naori with reverence.

"Most unfortunate," replied Naori evenly as they finally reached the front of her house and she turned to Itachi with quiet confidence. "When you decide to visit her, I hope you will show her mercy on the account of your friendship."

Without another word, the woman bid him farewell with a nod before walking into her house. Itachi stood dumbfounded for a moment before a wry grin tugged at the corner of his lips in amusement.
This was the first time he ever spoken to Naori at a length without his mother chaperoning them. While the purple-haired woman was proper and everything the Uchihas would deem bride-worthy, her level of passive-aggressiveness was far more interesting and engaging.

He gave the house one last look before he took note of the sun's position in the sky. Even with the time he spent visiting his mother and talking to Naori, it was still far from the Academy letting out. With an exasperated sigh, Itachi ran a hand through his loose bangs before he decided to make his way towards the hospital. He might as well go visit the idiot while he still had time to spare.

"Itachi-kun," said Rin in surprise when she spotted him walking through the halls towards Kasa's usual room. With how often she stayed in the hospital, he didn't bother stopping at the reception desk, she practically claimed ownership over the one room during her last coma. "When did you get back?"

"Just this morning," replied Itachi courteously as he turned to greet her. "Have there been any progress in figuring out what Shisui did to Kasa?"

"So you've already heard..." trailed off Rin with sullen realization. "Sorry, you probably don't want to talk about it right now."

"It's fine," said Itachi quietly. "You don't have to worry on my account."

"You're just as stubborn as Kasa sometimes," sighed Rin with a soft shake of her head.

"Hardly," scoffed Itachi as his thoughts drifted back to his idiotic friend and teammate. "She would out stubborn a bull if only to prove a point."

"She would, wouldn't she?" laughed Rin before she turned and motioned for him to follow her. "Come, you look like you were going to go to Kasa's usual room, she's in the secured ward now. I'll show you the way."

"The secured ward?" repeated Itachi with furrow brows. Why the sudden change?

"Kasa's... in a fragile state and needs closer monitoring than when she was here the last time," explained Rin. "We've been doing what we could, but so far none of the treatments been taking effect."

Itachi nodded silently and accepted her answer. There was nothing he could say, nothing he wanted to say. Rin led him the rest of the way in silence, he was never much of a conversationalist. When they've reached the room and entered, they found Kakashi hunched over a chair as though he was in a conversation with Kasa's motionless form.

"Captain," greeted Itachi as the silver-haired jounin glanced up to him.

"Itachi," returned the man as he pushed himself up from his seat and pocketed his hands.

"Kakashi," sighed Rin in exasperation. "I thought we spoke about this."

"Sorry," apologized Kakashi with a jovial tone that reminded Itachi of Kasa's faux inflictions of cheerfulness. "Just thought she could use a little update of what's been going on. Keep her mind stimulated even if she's a bit of a vegetable at the moment."

"That's what you say every time I catch you in here. Aren't you due for a mission soon?" asked Rin as she continued to chide Kakashi and his visiting habits.
Itachi watched with interest as he studied his former Anbu captain. In the time he worked with the man, he had always been cool and collected. He was the epitome of professionalism. It was odd to see his slip snippets of Kasa's mannerisms into this faux façade of his in order to deal with Rin's reproachful exasperation.

"Well," interrupted Kakashi without breaking his cheerful tone. "Since Itachi's here, I'll leave her to his capable hands."

"Kakashi—" protested Rin, but in a swirl of leaves, the silver-haired jounin was gone. "Argh! How many times do I have to… ugh, never mind…"

"Does he visit that frequently?" asked Itachi with a hint of curiosity in his normally droll voice.

"Not as frequent as Naruto or Sasuke, but then again, he rarely adhere to the visiting hours, so who knows," answered Rin with a sigh as she knelt down to pick up the scatter of leaves Kakashi left behind. "…I just wish he would choose a better way to cope. He's not the only one that's been affected by what happened."

Itachi said nothing as the room fell silent and Rin finished up cleaning the mess that Kakashi left behind. When she finished, she shot him a sad smile and told him that he could stay as long as he wanted and if he needed anyone to talk to, he could go to her. He nodded in acknowledgment, but thought it was unlikely for him to take up her offer.

While he understood why she thought he needed counseling, it wasn't something he likely peruse. Even now, he couldn't feel the least bit saddened by the loss of his clansmen. If anything, he felt indifferent and mildly annoyed as he stared down at Kasa's tranquil face. He seen this face countless times before, he still couldn't get use to the lack of expressive tension that normally graced her face, whether in joy or anger.

Idly, he toyed with the idea of taking her pillow and smothering her to death out of irritation. However, the thought of Tesuri on a murder rampage quickly pushed away such thoughts. He was hardly terrified of the blue-haired Iryo-nin, but he couldn't in good conscience humor the thought when there were so many people affected by her comatose state.

"…What did you two idiots do?" murmured Itachi, his voice barely above a whisper.

Unlike Shisui and Kasa, Itachi wasn't the talkative type. He found no need to vocalize his thoughts in every turn. Tenzo knew him well enough that he seldom needed to speak during missions beyond keeping up appearances. His conversations with Kasa were often one-sided with her blowing and making some sort of inane threat or challenge by the end. Shisui on the other hand took pleasure in absurd ramblings to incite a response from him. A futile effort, but still amusing to watch and listen to as the older Uchiha rambled away.

When Team Ro disbanded and Itachi continued on in anbu, he took comfort in those memories during his rare bouts of homesickness. He never deluded himself into thinking that they would always be there, he couldn't, not with the uncertainties of shinobi life. Even so, it didn't keep him from looking forward to seeing them again whenever he finished a grueling mission.

But now… he felt strangely alone.

"…Promises, promises," mused Itachi with wry nostalgia as he reached out to poke her head. "You were always bad at keeping them…"

He half expected for her to jump up and yell at him with indignation, but she gave no response as his
fingers tapped against her head. Her body remained unnaturally still as she slept on. Itachi's eyes
drifted, half-lidded as he allowed his hand to fall to his side. There was no point for him to stay any
longer, but before he could decide to leave, he heard a number of familiar voices drawing closer to
the room. Sasuke's voice was among the few.

When the door opened, he could hear his brother's gasp and he turned to face the group. His
experienced eyes surveyed the younger Uchiha with a quick glance over. Relief flooded though him
as Sasuke stood in shocked disbelief.

"Sasuke," greeted Itachi before he noticed Naruto darting around his dumbfounded brother and
rushed to his side.

"Itachi-ni! You're back!" shouted the blond happily.

"Naruto," nodded the older teen in acknowledgment before he turned his attention back to Sasuke
once more, but the younger Uchiha shared none of Naruto's enthusiasm.

"Where the hell were you!?" exploded Sasuke as he charged at him with flailing fists.

"Sasuke," said Itachi as he effortlessly caught the other's wrists and halting his attack.

"Where were you when we needed you? Where were you when Shisui-ni killed everyone?" cried
Sasuke as he struggled to free his fists, just so he could pound them into Itachi's chest. "Where were
you when he had that masked jerk break Kasa-nee? Where were you!?"

Angry tears and grief were prominent on Sasuke's face. Despite the younger boy's effort to seem
stoic and serious to impress their father, Sasuke was the type to allow emotions to rule him.

"...I'm sorry Sasuke," apologized Itachi softly as he drew Sasuke in.

"Ino," whispered the pink-haired girl, to her notably blonde Yamanaka friend. Itachi recalled her as
the girl that Kasa helped to get a sponsorship from his father. "Maybe we should leave..."

"You two are Kasa's students, am I correct?" interrupted Itachi before either of them could decide to
leave. The two girls nodded silently. "Stay, since you obviously came to visit her, I'm going to take
Sasuke outside and calm him down."

Sasuke fought back a hyperventilating sob as his body jolted with uncontrollable hiccups. He was
about to leave the room when Naruto stopped him with an uncertain question.

"Itachi-ni, you're not going to leave again are you?" asked Naruto as he looked up at him hopefully.

From experience, Itachi knew that Naruto could get as emotional as Sasuke at times, but the blond
showed great effort in controlling himself.

"Not anytime soon," reassured Itachi as he manhandled Sasuke under his arm. He made sure he had
a firm grip on his brother before he moved towards the door. "I'll be back later. Keep Kasa company
until then."

"Got it! See you soon!" said Naruto as a relieved smile crossed his face.

As per usual, Itachi kept his silence and left the room with Sasuke under his arm. He took his time to
allow the younger Uchiha to gather himself as he made his way up to the roof.

"Have you collected yourself?" asked Itachi once Sasuke's hiccups settled into a sloppy, wet sniff.
"Y-yeah," said Sasuke as he wiped his nose on his sleeve.

"Good," said Itachi and without much ceremony he began his own interrogation. "Now, from the beginning, tell me what happened while I was gone and who was this masked man that was with Shisui."

Something didn't seem right, nothing of what he heard added up. Between Hiruzen's debriefing, Naori's fabricated witness account and Sasuke's emotionally driven words, he found himself unable to see the clear picture. A missing detail, a key factor that connected these disjointed stories, whatever it was, he would find it and make sense of this all.
"I see…" frowned Itachi as he digested the information he gathered about the massacre.

He knew even less of the situation than when he started. Under all accounts, Shisui was indefinitely guilty of the massacre. However, from his conversation with the hokage and Naori, he found that Kasa was the one that slaughtered the majority of his clan, if not all. She may not have done so voluntarily, but he still found it difficult to reason Shisui being the culprit for her manipulation. The claim of Shisui’s jealousy-induced desertion seemed too absurd for him to even consider.

Then there was the questionable existence of this Naki character. Sasuke’s description of the man unsettled him. A pitch black eye with a golden iris, a single sharingan, no doubt stolen from the corpse of one of their fallen clansmen and skin as flaky as a molting snake. He recalled no one in the bingo book with such a description and even more so, aside from Kakashi, there were no other known successful implants of the sharingan to a non-Uchiha.

"…Are you going to make them pay?" asked Sasuke and broke Itachi out of his thoughts.

"Hmm?" Itachi glanced towards him inquisitively.

"Well? Are you?" pressed on his little brother. "They tried to kill mom! They put Kasa-nee into a coma! Aren't you going to do anything?"

"Things aren't that simple," reasoned Itachi quietly. "I can't—"

"Can't what?" snapped Sasuke. "What more reason do you need? Or do you not care?"

"Sasuke," said Itachi quietly as he reached out to him, but the younger boy dodged his outreached hand.

"No, tell me!" growled Sasuke with clenched fists. "Do you not care? Does the clan mean nothing to you?"

Itachi fell silent as he lowered his hand.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" screamed Sasuke. "Are you really that heartless?"

"What's happened can't be changed," replied Itachi quietly. "There's no point in dwelling."

Sasuke stared at him in disbelief before his eyes grew cold. "You're the worst."

Itachi made no move to stop Sasuke as the younger boy slammed the door open and stomped his way down the stairs. His eyes lingered briefly on the door as it quietly swung shut and he found himself alone on the roof.

"That could have gone better," noted Tenzo from behind, maybe not as alone as he thought.

"Finished with the debriefing already?" commented Itachi as he turned his gaze to the older teen behind him.

"Not much to debrief aside from the brief skirmish we had in trying to get back," shrugged Tenzo before he shot him a worried gaze. "You’re going to be okay?"

"I'm fine," brushed off Itachi as he glanced away.
"Don't give me that," sighed Tenzo as he propped a hand on his hip. "I know you better than this. What Sasuke said—"

"Is out of anger," cut off Itachi defensively. "He'll get over it."

"…That doesn't mean it hurts you any less," inserted his partner gently.

"…I'll be fine," assured the younger teen quietly as he lowered his gaze. "There's no time to—"

"You've suffered a great loss. It's okay for you to grieve," interrupted Tenzo.

"There's no point in grieving," reasoned Itachi.

"No…point?" repeated Tenzo in confusion.

"It's as Sasuke said… I don't care," replied Itachi.

"You're just saying that," sighed Tenzo, but paused in surprise when he took notice the expression on Itachi's face. "Wait… you really don't?"

"Hard to care when you barely know any of them," answered Itachi offhandedly.

"But aren't they your clansmen?" asked Tenzo in bafflement.

"Aside from name and blood, there's little else that's worth claiming as an attachment, commented Itachi.

"You can't mean that," argued Tenzo. "You were worried about Sasuke when you heard about the massacre. That was genuine concern. You couldn't fake that."

"Sasuke's… an exception," murmured Itachi.

"Is he the only exception?" asked Tenzo quietly.

Itachi glanced at him with a scoff. "You know the answer already."

"Heh," chuckled Tenzo. "Just making sure."
"Best get to sorting out the police force," said Itachi offhandedly as he strolled towards the door.

"So soon?" asked Tenzo in surprise. "You just got back."

"The sooner I deal with that mess, the sooner I could go deciding on the new clan head," said Itachi as he opened the door. "Fortunately, the pool of possible candidates is abysmally small."

"Itachi," grimaced Tenzo as he followed him. "At least try to pretend that you care."

"Should I make a show of tears?" droned Itachi as he glanced back to him. "Or a show of anger?"

"That's not what I…" trailed off Tenzo before he sighed in exasperation and threw up his hands. "Never mind, forget I said anything."

Itachi thought the matter with fixing the Konoha Police force could be resolved within a week once he decided on the new head of chief. What he didn't know was the extent of how much the Uchihas have fallen in the eyes of their non-Uchiha peers. By inheritance, he may be the Uchiha heir, but that mattered little to the men and women of the Konoha police force. The majority of the force was
compiled of retired chunins that could no longer take field missions and experienced genins that never managed a chunin promotion.

Aside from the Uchihas, no jounin ever took point in the Konoha police force; their skills were more valuable on the field rather than internal civil disputes among civilians and drunken off-the-clock shinobi. It left a skewed hierarchy system with the Uchihas taking most of the commanding positions and bitter resentment from the non-Uchiha force.

Including him, Naori and the denounced Obito, he counted no more than six active Uchiha shinobi in the whole village. Three, like him, managed to avoid the massacre due to their field missions. However, he didn't view their survival as pleasant. If anything, they were an annoyance that he much rather see dead with those who perished in the massacre.

"Having trouble, Itachi-sama?" drawled Naka Uchiha with a condescending smirk as he hovered at the door of Itachi's temporary office with his arms crossed and his shoulder leaned against the door frame.

"Thank you for your concern, but your assistance will not be required," noted Itachi as he pointedly ignored the older Uchiha. This wasn't the first time the jounin stopped by since he returned.

"Are you sure?" continued the other as he tilted his head up.

"Problem?" commented Itachi.

"You haven't taken up your place as the head of the clan, nor have you chosen another successor to take your place. I'm starting to doubt that you have any concern over what remains of our clan," said Naka coldly as the humor slipped from his face.

"You are displeased by my actions," noted Itachi offhandedly as he spared a glance at the older Uchiha.

"Certainly not," scoffed Naka mockingly. "How could I ever doubt the commanding presence of our esteemed clan's heir?"

"I see," said Itachi as he lowered his brush and focused his attention on the other. "You want the position of clan head."

"Hm," smirked Naka in amusement. "I knew that prodigal reputation of yours have some merit."

"And why should I give that to you oppose to another Uchiha that escaped the unfortunate demise of our kin?" questioned Itachi.

"Need you ask?" continued Naka, the confidence—no, more like arrogance, didn't fade from his voice. "I'm the most qualified out of the selection you have."

"Is that so?" droned Itachi with indifference as he kept his attention on the other Uchiha. "Enlighten me, what do you deem a good leader?"

"If you insist on dragging out this unnecessarily," drawled Naka as he held out a hand in an offhanded shrug. "While a good majority of our clan still lives, almost all of it consist of civilians. As one of the founding clans of Konoha, it wouldn't do to pick a non-shinobi to take the place as clan head. The Uchiha clan needs someone who can both lead and protect the clan if necessary."

"Agreed," nodded Itachi as he waited for him to continue.
"As you already know, there are less than ten active shinobi in the entirety of the clan. The selection is quite limited, but it should also make your choice even more obvious," reasoned the man. "Among those who remain, I am the most well-versed with the magenkyo sharingan. I lead the team that consisted of our remaining clansmen. They are familiar with my leading capabilities. There would be no questioning or conflicts regarding to my leadership."

"And?" continued Itachi, unimpressed.

"What more proof do you need?" scowled Naka. "Aside from me, no one under me is capable! Naori is blind in one eye! Obito renounced his ties to the clan and Shisui's a traitor! Your brother's not even a shinobi yet, much less of age!"

"Are you done?" asked Itachi calmly.

"I'm telling you, there is no one else except me!" said the man firmly. "If you don't want to lead this clan, let me do it!"

"Your concern for the clan is quite admirable," continued Itachi as he picked up his brush again and returned his attention back to the scrolls in front of him. "I'll take your input into consideration."

"Itachi," growled the other lowly.

"Yo! Itachi!" interrupted a cheery voice before a familiar head of black-spiked hair peeked in through the door.

"Obito," greeted Itachi evenly before Naka took a step back and settled from his riled position.

"Heard you've been buried in paperwork and bureaucracy!" chirped Obito brightly as he walked pass Naka without a single greeting and hooked and arm over the younger Uchiha's shoulders.

"I'm busy," said Itachi.

"Apparently too busy to eat," snorted Obito. "Come on, you're due for some fresh air and lunch."

"Maybe later," said Itachi offhandedly.

"What do you mean later? This is your body, young man! Feed it!" chided Obito in a mock motherly fashion.

"If you haven't noticed, I am in a meeting," noted Itachi, a twitch threatened to tug at the corner of Itachi's lips when he noticed Naka growing irritated at Obito's presence.

"Meeting?" said Obito with a puzzled tone before he finally took notice of the other occupant in the room. Itachi was certain the man was doing it on purpose. "Oh hey Naka! Didn't see you there man! How's it been?"

"Don't give me that," scowled Naka as he glared down the other Uchiha. "What are you playing at? You've already cut ties with the clan!"

"I'm not sure what you're here for, but I'm here as a concerned senpai to drag out my overworked kohai for lunch," continued Obito casually. "I can't help it if he happens to be an Uchiha, but if you're that jealous, you can join us for lunch."

"Cut the act, you think getting friendly with Itachi would make him give you the position of clan head?" spat Naka.
"Clan head?" scoffed Obito. "What idiot would want that position?"

"What was that?" growled Naka.

"Come on Itachi, the papers aren't going to run away because you went to lunch," continued Obito as he pointedly ignored Naka's indignation.

"He already said—" started Naka with a growl.

"I think I will take up your suggestion after all," interrupted Itachi as he watched Naka turned to him with a look of disbelief.

"Excellent!" cheered Obito before he hauled Itachi from his chair and proceeded to drag him out the office. "I'm in the mood for some hearty proteins, what about you?"

"Preferably something light," replied Itachi as he allowed himself to be led by the older Uchiha. "I rather not face a bout of drowsiness from a heavy meal."

"Itachi, are you really indulging this outcast?" snapped Naka in irritation, but paused when the younger Uchiha turned to him with an indifferent gaze.

"As I've noted before," drone Itachi mechanically. "I'll take your input into consideration."

"You…" trailed off Naka as he turned speechless at Itachi's words.

"Later Naka, good luck… with whatever you're doing!" sang Obito cheerily before he left with the younger Uchiha in tow. Neither of them spoke as they turned the corner, both of them were too busy trying to listen to the last of Naka's self-control snap.

"You enjoyed that," commented Itachi once he heard Naka's quiet cursing fit fade into the distance.

"What makes you say that?" grinned Obito, not bothering to deny the fact.

"I see who Kasa takes after," mused Itachi as they made their way out of the building and onto the streets of Konoha.

Lunch was a private affair. The two shared a meal in one of the usual shinobi haunts and took up their conversation in a booth away from prying ears.

"How are you holding up?" asked Obito as he stole a sip of sake from his cup, Itachi didn't comment about the early hour.

"Fine," replied Itachi tersely as he watched the steam rise from his cup.

"Really?" noted Obito dryly as he glanced over the rim of his cup in amusement.

"…I may have wished more of my clansmen to not have come out unscathed on several occasions," admitted Itachi quietly as he took a sip of his tea.

"Pft," laughed Obito, shoulders shaking with mirth as he set his cup down. "That bad huh?"

"I doubt you dragged me to lunch with the concern of a senpai," continued Itachi.

"Who's to say I didn't do it just to annoy Naka?" chirped Obito as he draped an arm over the back of his chair.
Itachi raised a brow at him as their waitress came with their meals and set the plates down on the table. Obito gave the woman his thanks before she left them to their meal.

"Joking aside," said Obito, the humor dropped from his voice and the light in his eye grew dim. "What are your plans now concerning the Uchiha Clan?"

"I don't understand your question," replied Itachi as he took note the sudden change in the older man's expression.

Gone was the light-hearted joking and in its place was a stone-faced warrior, almost as if he was a completely different person. He shouldn't be surprised that Obito could swap demeanors at a drop of a hat, most anbu could do so in order to protect their identity during missions. Kasa, herself, took it to the extreme and developed reputation with hers.

However, with Obito… Itachi studied the man with half-lidded eyes… he wasn't acting.

"With Shisui gone and Kasa no different from a corpse, where do your loyalties lie?" asked the man, not Obito.

"…You're under the impression that they are the only ones in my life," commented Itachi.

"I would say excuse me, but you and I both know of the curse," said not-Obito as he casual brushed his hand aside, but he and Itachi both knew he meant their eyes and the curse of hatred that follow.

"And you are concerned?" asked Itachi as he allowed himself to frown, uncertain to why the man would be interested over the matter.

"… Talking to you is like pulling teeth," sighed the man in annoyance after a moment. "Do you or do you not have any connection to a man named Naki?"

"I can't say I have," replied Itachi truthfully. Sasuke mentioned the name once during their conversation on the rooftop. Aside from that brief mention, there were no mention of the man in any of the reports. Either someone was doing a poor job of the investigations or someone was actively hiding the information.

"You don't?" said the other in surprise. "But Shisui—No, I'm assuming too much."

Obito's awareness of this mysterious man made him suspect the latter, but the menagerie of micro expressions flitted across Obito's normally cheerful face made him realize that he had no connection to such a cover up. Furthermore, it seemed like the older Uchiha was actively trying to root out their mysterious stranger.

"Who is Naki?" asked Itachi, wanting to know more. "Did he have anything to do with what happened during the massacre?"

"Are you sure you want to know?" asked the dark-haired man as he focused his eye on the younger teen.

"Why wouldn't I?" countered Itachi.

"I'm sure you've already noticed the discrepancies regarding to the events of that night," commented the man solemnly.

Itachi remained silent. He noticed and attempted to unravel the mystery shrouding that night, but all he found thus far was Naori's fictitious witness account and Kasa's involvement in the massacre.
There were still so much more that he didn't know. "You might not like what you find," continued the man with a wry grin as though he could see the uncertainty on Itachi's face.

"I find it hard to take you seriously if you insist on being ridiculous," droned Itachi, unamused by the man's sudden change in demeanor again.

"Hmph," scoffed the other. "Is it really that hard to say yes?"

"Our food's getting cold," commented Itachi and glanced to the untouched meal on the table. He received an exasperated sigh in return before the man poured himself another cup of sake and knocked it back with ease. It oddly reminded him of Kasa whenever she calls herself Rayne. "… Obito, but not Obito."

"…What did you say?" asked them an as he focused his attention on him once more.

"That's what you are, aren't you?" asked Itachi. "Just like Kasa. Idiotic and dangerous."

"Oi, oi," droned the other unamused.

"Do you need help?" asked Itachi, a surprised expression crossed the older Uchiha's face. "You're going after this Naki character, are you not?"

"…You're just full of surprises aren't you?" drawled the other with a shake of his head as he refocused on the matter at hand. "Do you recall the border skirmish with Kiri about a year back?"

"Tenzo and I wiped out most of the stragglers," replied Itachi as he recollected the memories of that conflict and mused. "I almost died by Zabuza Momochi's sword."

"Right…" continued the other as he brushed off the surprise from Itachi's input. "During that time, I managed to infiltrate Kiri for an espionage mission and much to my surprise that's where I first found out about our friend Naki. Apparently, he has a taste for politics."

"In what manner?" asked Itachi with a frown.

"Let's just say the Mizukage is no different from one of Suna's puppets," drawled the older Uchiha. "The skirmish against Konoha was a means to root out the opposing clans in the village."

"… I did happen to see several interesting bloodline users prior to facing Zabuza," murmured Itachi thoughtfully.

"The Hozuki Clan was the main opposition. You've quite possibly ran into one of their members," pointed out the other. "Regardless the details, whatever Naki had planned for Kiri must've failed and he seemed to have moved onto his next target."

"… Konoha," concluded Itachi with a frown. "What did he plan to gain by massacring the Uchiha?"

"Quite possibly the favor of someone with power," murmured the other darkly.

"Who?" asked Itachi.

"No one you have to worry about," added the man as his eye narrowed, underlying anger simmered beneath the surface of his icy gaze.

"What do you want me to do?" asked the younger Uchiha.
"At the moment?" sighed the other as he folded his hands in front of his face. "Just make sure no other civil conflicts prop up inside of Konoha."

"Were you planning to kill me if I failed?" asked Itachi.

"Hmph," grinned the man. "Maybe not you."

"I'll see what I can do," said Itachi and he finally picked up his chopsticks. "I grow tire of paperwork."

"...For your health, you should probably pay the doctor a visit," commented the other as he did the same and started his meal.

"Hm?" hummed Itachi as he glanced to the man inquisitively.

"I doubt you've gotten a good night's rest since you've started with the bureaucratic bullshit," commented the older man. "There's a nice and quiet room in the hospital that you can rest without being disturbed."

"You mean Kasa's room," reasoned Itachi in a deadpan.

"Of course you would have to go through Tesuri's scrutiny, but you've been long overdue for a physical anyhow," chirped the Uchiha.

"And here you jest again," droned Itachi dully as he continued his meal.

"Your funeral," shrugged the other casually. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

Itachi glanced over the rim of his bowl and noticed the expressions on Obito's face change from serious to light-hearted once more as the other poured another cup of sake and knocked it back once more.

"Man, I'm never going to get used to this," sighed Obito as he popped a pickle daikon into his mouth and munched quietly.

The rest of the meal continued without much ceremony. Obito resumed his usual joking manner and by the end of it they parted ways with Itachi returning to the Konoha Police building. As Itachi continued to rifle through potential candidates to take over the police force, he found his vision wavering as drowsiness threatened to sweep him away to sleep.

The suggestion to visit the hospital grew more appealing as the day turned to evening. As much as he loved Sasuke, he didn't look forward to his brother's jabbering the moment he returned home. He drew in a low breath as he pressed a hand against his chest. On top of exhaustion, his chest had bothered him for quite some time. Maybe he should get his physical as suggested by Tenzo and Obito. When he finally decided to make his way to the hospital, the sky grown dark and visiting hours were long over.

"Come to visit Kasa?" asked Rin with a grin when she spotted him in the halls. "A bit late, don't you think?"

"It's quieter in the evening and I could use your expertise," reasoned Itachi.

"Are you feeling sick?" asked Rin with concern.

"A bit fatigued and under the weather, it's probably nothing," reasoned Itachi.
"Ah, did Tenzo finally coerced you to get a checkup?" grinned Rin.

"Obito," corrected Itachi.

"Obito?" repeated Rin in surprise before scoffing. "He's one to talk, he hasn't even gotten his annual physical yet."

Itachi found the corner of his lip tug in amusement, but said nothing as the woman lead him to Kasa's room and began her examination there. It wasn't as if she needed any other tools aside from her iroyo-ninjutsu to give him a once over and with Kasa comatose, privacy wasn't an issue either. Rin asked several questions as she hovered a glowing hand with the diagnostic jutsu over him, but paused when her hands reached his chest.

"...Itachi, how long did you say your chest was bothering you?"

"Over a month, going onto two," replied Itachi. "Is something wrong?"

"... I think it might just be a case of bronchitis, but I need a second opinion," frowned Rin as she pulled her hand back. "Stay here, I'll be right back."

Itachi did as he was told and stayed while she left the room. He let out another soft sigh as he turned his attention to Kasa's unmoving form. It's been some time since he visited and it didn't seem like anything changed since he was last there. Idly, he glanced to the cabinet next to the bed and noticed a vase with a single sprig of blue forget-me-nots, appropriate for her condition he supposed.

"I almost wish that you were awake just so this would end faster," murmured Itachi quietly as he leaned back in his seat next to the bed. "Your examinations never took this long."

Kasa remained still and unaware of the world.

"...How long do you intend on staying asleep?" asked Itachi even though he knew his questions would remain unanswered. "Did teaching at the Academy feel as dreadfully tedious as dealing with clan politics? I—"

The door opened and Itachi found his one-sided conversation abruptly cut off as Tesuri entered in haste with Rin close behind. The man gave him a speculative glance and made his way to his side without a word. In seconds his hand glowed green and Itachi felt the familiar tingle of a diagnostic jutsu run over him once more.

"Cough," ordered Tesuri as he pressed a hand against his chest.

Itachi did as he was told and made himself cough as the man's brows furrowed in concentration.

"Tesuri-san?" questioned Rin worriedly.

"It's as you've expected Rin-kun," murmured Tesuri with furrowed brows before he turned his attention to the young Uchiha. "Why didn't you come in sooner?"

"...What exactly do I have?" asked Itachi quietly.

"It's a rare bacterial infection that can only be contracted by shinobi and other chakra users," replied Tesuri with a frown. "It feeds off the chakra emitted by the carrier... and judging by how far the infection has already spread through your lungs..."

"Can it be treated?" asked Itachi.
"…The bacteria is antibiotic-resistant," murmured Rin with a grim expression. "As long as it could latch onto your chakra it will only continue to spread. There's no definite cure at the moment."

"… So even if I stopped using chakra now, it…" trailed off Itachi quietly, his hands gripped onto the fabric of his pants despite the stoic expression on his face. "How long do I have?"

"If you limit your chakra usage, maybe ten years," calculated Tesuri. "Fifteen if you stop using chakra altogether."

"...Konoha's at war, that's not an option," reasoned Itachi.

"The infection has already spread through a quarter of your lungs. It hasn't worsened because you haven't gone out on missions since your family's…" trailed off Tesuri with an uncomfortable pause before he continued. "However, if you decide to return to active duty, you might not live beyond two years."

"...Two years," said Itachi quietly as he squeezed his eyes shut. "That's how long I have if I rejoin the war effort?"

"At the moment, yes," replied Tesuri solemnly.

"...At the moment?" repeated Itachi with uncertainty as he opened his eyes and glanced up to him.

"What you have is rare, but not unknown," replied Tesuri as he pressed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "You're not the only contracted this disease. Research has already started in hopes of finding a cure for this, but for now we have some preliminary trial treatments available if you wish to give it a chance. With any luck, it may give you a few extra years until a cure's found."

"I… see," said Itachi quietly as he unclenched his hands from his pants. "Can I… have a moment? I'm…"

"Of course," said Tesuri with understanding as he pulled his hand back. "Take as much time as you need, we'll be back later if you want to talk more regarding to treatments."

"…Thank you," said Itachi civilly, barely able to contain his voice as the older man move to brush a hand briefly over Kasa's hair before he left with a worried Rin in tow.

It took a moment before a shaking breath escaped Itachi's lips and he crumpled forward with both hands buried into his hair. His chest heaved as he took in large gulps of air in an attempt to keep calm, but failed. Silent gasps wracked through his body as the steel resolve he clung onto the past weeks crumbled to nothing.

He tried so hard to keep himself together, but in the end it didn't matter. The Uchiha Clan was a mess, Shisui was gone, Kasa was in a coma and he was dying from a disease that has no cure. On top of that, he was certain his mother wanted him to marry Naori as soon as possible. He was so tired, so exhausted from it all.

Itachi shifted a hand and pressed it against his mouth as he took another shaking breath to calm down. It's been a long while since he lost control of himself. Kasa's supposed death during the chunin exams had been the last time he encountered such strong feelings.

…It terrified him.

He almost wished Tenzo was with him, but he had no clue where the older teen was. His only company was Kasa and she… He slowly lifted his head and glanced to her still form. She was still
here, albeit in a coma, but here. Limplly, he dragged himself out of his chair and reached out to grasp onto the auburn-haired girl's hand.

"…Kasa, please wake up. I can't… I can't handle this anymore," whispered Itachi brokenly.

She remained still and silent.

Itachi clenched his eyes close as his hand tighten even more over hers. When he opened his eyes again, they were red with the magenkyo sharingan. Before he knew it, he found himself in a broken mindscape with shattered debris along with torn and withered greenery floating about.

"…You Uchihas really don't get the concept of personal space, do you?" rasped a familiar voice.

 Surprise crossed his face as he snapped his attention to the speaker. In his search, spotted a familiar auburn-haired girl in front of a rusted door old door with blood red script scrawled across its surface. With her back against the door she had one leg propped up and the other crossed underneath. Her blue eyes were encapsulated in blackness. Her once porcelain-like face was covered with cracks. She held a thoroughly disgruntled expression even with the exhaustion that seemed to permeate around her.

Despite the girl's decrepit state, he found the faintest sense of relief tugging at his chest in her presence.

"…Kasa," whispered Itachi.
"Sorry to disappoint, but my name is Rayne," rasped the girl in mild irritation as she glowered at him. "I'd say your princess is in another fucking castle, but we both know that's not true. Kasa's gone."

"No," refused Itachi as he took a step towards her. "She's not."

"Are you the one who resides in her body and mind?" spat Rayne in distaste. "I'm telling you, she's gone. It doesn't matter whether or not you believe me, but that's the truth!"

"Then why are you still here?" asked Itachi quietly. "If Kasa's truly gone, wouldn't you be also? You're a part of her, aren't you? Even if you go by another name, you're still Kasa."

"…Get out," snarled Rayne in a low growl.

"Kasa," protested Itachi, but before he could make another step towards her, the thin vines clenched in her hands came to life and lashed out at him.

"GET OUT!" roared Rayne.

Itachi stood unmoving as the vines lashed out at him. One vine, two, he stood still as he was struck again and again. Even as he was knocked to the ground, he refused to retaliate. The blows continued, but as time stretched on, he found them weaker and weaker until it stopped altogether.

"Why the fuck are you even here?" sneered Rayne as the anger drained away in exhaustion. "Do you have nothing better to do than to intrude in someone's mind?"

"I… want to know what happened that night…" murmured Itachi quietly as he stared up at the void of darkness that surrounded them.

"...Ha?" deadpanned Rayne in confusion before it slowly turned into disbelief. "You came in… for that?"

"If you're concerned that I will take vengeance on Kasa for her involuntary slaughter of my clan, I'm not," said Itachi. "What's done is done. I… have little care for my clan and its actions."

"You…” started Rayne in a low whisper as she scrutinized him with a speculative gaze. When she was done, a soft cackle escaped her. "You utter psychopath! Hahahaha!"

Itachi glanced towards the laughing girl as her shoulders shook with each wheezing breath. The laughter turned into coughing as she kneeled over in a fit. She looked in pain as she glanced up towards him again in amusement.

"My, my, aren't you the heartless one… I like that," grinned Rayne as she tilt her chin up. "Unfortunately, there's not much I could tell you beyond what you already know. Kasa's involuntary involvement as you noted was not of her free will. She was under the coercion of a sharingan."

"…Was it Shisui?" asked Itachi quietly.

"Shisui?" snarled Rayne. "Don't even mention that name in front of me. If ever I get out of here, I'm going to make the damn son of a bitch pay."

"…What exactly happened?" asked Itachi.
"Please, as if you're interested in what happened," scoffed Rayne. "I think they question you want to ask is why. It's obvious you couldn't give a single fuck about your clan. You just want to know why Shisui left right? You want to know why he left you with alone with all this mess, without even Kasa to fall back on. Isn't that right?"

"That's not—"

"Spare me your excuses, you're just a selfish little brat," smirked Rayne as she lowered her eye lids. "People are so selfish."

Itachi said nothing as he looked to her.

"But you know what?" continued Rayne with amusement. "I'm no different."

He watched as she pulled herself back up and leaned back into the door with a tired sigh.

"You know," murmured the girl as she continued. "If Kasa hadn't interfered, it would've been you instead of Shisui that turns traitor."

"...What?" said Itachi in confusion.

"I have to say, the bit about him being an over-possessive stalker had never even crossed either Kasa or my mind," mused Rayne. "Makes me wonder how much of that is real or just an act... regardless which, I'm still going to kick his ass if he ever shows his face again."

"What do you mean it would've been me?" pressed on Itachi with a frown.

"Shisui should've been dead," replied Rayne. "If not for Kasa ensuring his survival, you would've been tasked with slaughtering the traitorous Uchiha Clan for conspiring a coup d'état."

"... How are you so certain?" asked Itachi.

"Hehe, haven't you realized it yet?" chuckled Rayne with a sly grin. "The idiot's an oracle. She foresaw this, the moment you both met. Stupidly, she tried to change it and this is what happens! She should've just left things as they are and let you and your clan burn."

"But she didn't," murmured Itachi.

"Fat lot that did, in the end she was the one that needed saving," snorted Rayne before a thought crossed her mind. "Which reminds me, what did happen to Naori? Did she manage to survive?"

"She did," replied Itachi as he studied the girl's solemn expression. "She lied about Kasa's involvement and directed all the blame to Shisui."

"Did she now?" murmured Rayne quietly and let out a sigh. "Isn't that sweet of her... Now, if only there were more Uchihas like her. Compared to you assholes—you included, of course—she's definitely more admirable."

"If only..." repeated Itachi as he brushed off the insult and pondered over the thought. "You might be right."

"Of course I'm right," snorted Rayne before she frowned. "...What are you planning?"

"It's not much of a plan, but you've given me some ideas," commented Itachi as he pushed himself off the ground.
"Well, la-di-fucking-da good for you," grumbled Rayne. "Now get the fuck out."

"Kasa—" started Itachi, but he wasn't given a chance to continue before he found himself ejected from her mind and he woke to the sterile hospital room once more.

"...Thank you," murmured Itachi as his grip tightened once more over Kasa's hand. "Sleep well. When you wake up, neither you nor anyone else will have to go through this again."

By the time Tesuri and Rin returned to check on him, Itachi managed to rebuild his mask and act as though nothing happened. The Mon patriarch walked him through the particulars regarding the experimental treatment, a combination of chakra beta blockers and non-chakra based medicine. The treatment wouldn't rid him of the infection, but it'll at least keep it from spreading while he's at rest.

If he decided to actively draw on his chakra during battle, the treatment won't make a difference. The infection would take hold and continue to spread. If he was to survive past the projected two years, he needed to make adjustments to his fighting style. He could no longer afford to abuse his chakra-consuming arsenal of ninjutsu and genjutsu.

Fighting on the frontlines would be impossible unless he switched to a more tactical strategy. However, before that he could concern himself with the war, there was still the matter of the home front he needed to attend to.

"...Itachi?" said Naori with a confused frown when she found him at her door.

"When we spoke last, you asked me to show Kasa mercy," started Itachi as he looked straight into her mismatched eyes.

"And?" replied the woman quietly.

"...You protected her," continued Itachi. "It didn't matter if she was an Uchiha or not. You protected her despite of everything, even as far as giving up your eye to do so."

Naori said nothing.

"What the Uchiha needs now is not power," continued Itachi as he focused on her. "It needs someone that could lead them away from its destructive traditions."

"You can't mean..." trailed off Naori in surprise when she realized the path the conversation took.

"I want you to become the new clan head," said Itachi with utmost seriousness.

"There will be objections to your decision," replied the woman.

"If you become clan head, you can dissolve the arranged marriage if you wish," offered Itachi.

"Oh?" said Naori in amusement. "Are you sure you're not the one that wishes for the arrangement to be dissolved?"

"Think what you wish," replied Itachi indifferently as the older woman shook with restrained amusement.

"I really wonder, who is it that caught your eye," drawled Naori with a wry grin.

"Will you take the position?" asked Itachi as he pointedly ignored her prodding.

"What is the real reason for passing on the title?" questioned Naori as she crossed her arms. "I doubt
"As you've said before, I'm the perfect shinobi," replied Itachi with nonchalance. "I have no interest in leading the Uchihas nor do I have the patience for it. I do better on the field serving our hokage."

"…Mikoto-san will be displeased about this," continued Naori. "This isn't just the matter of breaking tradition."

"This is no longer the Uchiha Clan run by my father and the clan elders. This clan will be kinder and more understanding. If she doesn't like it, then she'll have to deal with it."

"Hn…" hummed Naori in amusement as she tilted her head aside. "No, I think I quite like the idea of a kinder Uchiha Clan."

"Then I'll leave the clan to your capable hands," said Itachi as he turned to leave.

"What will you be doing while I lead this new Uchiha Clan?" asked Naori with a wry grin as she crossed her arms and leaned against her doorframe. "Pursuing your newfound freedom from a marriage arrangement?"

"Hardly," droned Itachi with a dull glance back to her. "There are still two wars to deal with."

"Ah," agreed Naori as she closed her eyes and let out a light-hearted sigh. "So many things to do, so little time to spare."

"…Compared to what you're about to endure, I rather face the frontlines," commented Itachi.

"Hehe," laughed Naori melodically. "Try to live a little while you still can, Itachi."

"If I managed to survive," acknowledged the younger Uchiha before he nodded a farewell and left.

"…So, you've decided on Naori Uchiha," murmured Hiruzen as he puffed idly on his pipe.

"She is the best candidate out of the available selection," explained Itachi. "She's not driven by pride and she genuinely cares for others even if they're not in the Uchiha Clan. Under her guidance, I don't think the Uchiha Clan would cause any further trouble in the future."

"I supposed she would make a good deterrence," sighed Hiruzen as he lowered his pipe. "Will she be able to handle the remaining Uchihas that are still active shinobi?"

"I've looked through her records," continued Itachi. "She worked with them during one time or another. There might be a power struggle at first, but I'm certain she can handle it."

"If you are confident of her capabilities," said Hiruzen as he twirled his piped and tapped out the ashes on a nearby tray.

"I am," said Itachi with certainty.

"Very well," murmured the aged-leader as he rested his arms on his desk. "Let's move onto the next pressing matter."

"By your command," said Itachi dutifully with a bow.

"It was recently brought to my attention that Danzo has disappeared," noted Hiruzen as a frown
"...Is Elder Danzo dead?" asked Itachi with furrowed brows. "Or possibly kidnapped?"

"While Danzo's age may compare with my own, he is hardly a defenseless man," said Hiruzen as he waved a hand. "I've dispatched an investigations team to his estate. They've found no messages or clues to indicate his whereabouts. His home was immaculate and untouched, a kidnap in his own home was unlikely, but after interrogating a number of his Root operatives, they haven't been able to contact him either."

"...Shall I investigate?" asked Itachi.

"No, that's being handled," said Hiruzen with the shake of his head. "Though, the search may have to be abandoned soon if nothing else is found."

"...Nothing was found?" inquired Itachi in confusion.

"It's as though he vanished out of thin air," sighed the man. "It's not something you have to worry about."

...Worry.

A nagging feeling tugged in the back of Itachi's mind as he digested the information he was given. At first he had no clue why such a word would bother him, but then...

"...No one you have to worry about," echoed Obito's voice as he recalled the last conversation he had with the former Uchiha. "...Quite possibly the favor of someone in power."

It can't be... Itachi had to keep the surprise from visibly showing on his face as realization set in. As Hiruzen noted, Danzo was far from a harmless old man. He was a veteran, a shinobi that's lived through the last three wars. Yet... he disappeared without a single trace.

When did the former Uchiha become so fearsome? He will need to keep a closer eye on the aloof man in the coming future.

"If not assist in the investigations, what would you like me to do then, Hokage-sama?" asked Itachi.

"In light of Danzo's disappearance..." paused the man briefly as he lowered his eyes and took in another breath. "His Root operatives are now without a commander."

"Root?" repeated Itachi curiously.

"A sub-section of anbu that's under his command," explained Hiruzen.

"If I may be bold," continued Itachi with a frown. "Anbu serves directly under you, Hokage-sama. Or am I mistaken?"

"They are," agreed Hiruzen with a weary sigh. "But I am only one man and there are only so much I could do on my lonesome."

"Enough that you would allow Danzo, a man who has gone against your decisions again and again, to have leadership over an anbu splinter cell," challenged Itachi quietly.

"Allow... is not the word I would choose," noted Hiruzen.

"Coerced then," corrected Itachi. "It still doesn't change what you've let pass."
"…It doesn't," agreed the man with a nod as he rested his gaze on Itachi. "Which is why I want you to take command of Root."

"…What?" said Itachi in surprise.

"With Danzo gone, I'm left with a squadron of shinobi that I know little to nothing about," admitted Hiruzen. "However, I do know how Danzo operates and as much as this pains me to say this… the majority of them won't likely be able to assimilate back into the regular shinobi force. They might not even be able to assimilate into anbu."

"...Tenzo managed," said Itachi.

"Yes… he did. There are probably others like him that could still be saved," sighed Hiruzen before he refocused. "I'm assigning you along with all Root operatives to the Kumo frontlines."

"They're not going to survive," reasoned Itachi. "The majority of them are trained for covert missions, not frontline battles. They won't last against Kumo's heavy hitters and defensive jutsus."

"I'm aware," said Hiruzen with a sullen expression over his face. "Unfortunately, we don't have the time or leisure to rehabilitate each and every one of them. Those who manage to adapt and survive will have a better chance in rejoining the village. Those who can't… will be placed in good use for the sake of the village."

"In other words, they're cannon fodder," droned Itachi, unamused. "I'm beginning to understand why Danzo managed to remain in your service for as long as he has."

"Save as many as them if possible," said Hiruzen grimly. "But not at the risk of your own life."

"…Like Kasa?" said Itachi.

"What happened to Kasa-kun was unfortunate, but you have to understand that not every person is equal," expounded the man. "The ability to make the differentiation is a fine line between a good leader and a tyrant. While the village may come first, sacrifices made on its behalf should not be forgotten. Those we lose should be remembered and mourned. It is their lives that ensured the safety and prosperity of the village. It is their compassion and kindness that allows for us to thrive. Never forget that."

Itachi said nothing else as he allowed the words to sink in. The closest he ever gotten to showing compassion was mercy killing.

"I'll be assigning Tenzo to go with you," continued Hiruzen. "As a former Root operative, he may be of assistance to you."

"Yes sir," said Itachi dutifully.

"What do you think?" asked Tenzo during one of their breaks on the way to the frontlines.

"Eleven adults and six children," listed Itachi as he glanced towards the resting group a short distance away. "Three are children from major clans, two Aburame and one Yamanaka. The rest are clanless. Probability-wise, the children would probably be easier—"

"Itachi," sighed Tenzo.

"What?" asked Itachi.
"...If Danzo-sama gotten his hands on you, you would've been his ideal Root operative," commented Tenzo dryly.

"Then tell me how you managed to break away from his training," brushed off Itachi. "If we could replicate that—"

"I had a unique situation and I highly doubt we could replicate it even if Kakashi senpai decides to agree and traumatize the rest of them," droned Tenzo.

"What do you suggest we do then?" asked Itachi.

"I would say treat them like you would anyone else... but then I remembered who I was talking to," grinned Tenzo before Itachi lightly punched him on the shoulder. The older teen chuckled and turned his gaze to the younger Root operatives. "...Being treated like a person rather than a weapon does help though."

"Is that what Kakashi did?" asked Itachi.

"He showed me mercy," replied Tenzo quietly. "Even though I was ordered to kill Kasa."

A startled expression crossed Itachi's face as he turned his full attention to his partner. This was the first time he heard of this. With how friendly Tenzo and Kasa were around each other, he never would have thought that the older teen was ever a threat to the auburn-haired girl.

"Does Kasa know about this?" asked Itachi.

"To be fair, she tried to kill me too," laughed Tenzo. "Didn't quite manage it since she was rather inexperienced at the time. I probably won't fair that well against her now if she decides to go Crimson Terror on me."

"...You find this funny?" asked Itachi in bewilderment.

"More like nostalgic," mused Tenzo.

"In what ways?" frowned Itachi.

"Don't you remember? The first time we met was in the hospital shortly after Kasa blew herself up during her performance evaluation," pointed out Tenzo.

"...Right, her father put her in a restorative coma at the time," murmured Itachi as the memories of that time resurfaced.

"She has a knack for getting herself in a coma doesn't she?" joked Tenzo offhandedly, but the humor didn't quite reach his eyes. "I wonder how long it will take her to come out of it this time."

"She's a stubborn idiot, she won't stay down for long," reassured Itachi.

"Confident," grinned Tenzo.

"Logical," countered Itachi. "As long as she's not dead, she'll keep coming back. Though, even if she dies, she might come back out of spite. I wouldn't worry too much about her."

Tenzo laughed heartily at his words and Itachi found himself relaxing in the older teen's presence. However, neither could enjoy their moment of peace as one of the Root operatives sped towards them.

"Commander," said the other quietly once he was in range. "A squadron of Kumo-nins are heading
in our direction. What are your orders?"

"That was fast," commented Tenzo as he glanced to Itachi.

"What do you expect?" droned Itachi as he stood as he looked to the Root operative. "Prepare to engage. I want everyone either in pairs or triples. No one is to engage alone."

"Yes sir!" chorused a number of voices varying in young and old.

Even as the battle begun, Itachi refrained from activating his sharingan as he darted his eyes about to survey the enemy. He needed to avoid chakra as much as he could, but at the same time he couldn't ignore a possible threat if it presented itself. Fortunately, among the Kumo-nins there were none listed within the bingo book. Their scouts probably didn't think much of his ragtag squadron of shinobi in varying ages.

In a logical stand point, such a team made no sense in the frontlines. A squad of shinobi in their prime ready for battle may seem threatening, but a team with a number of Academy-aged children seemed like easy pickings or a trap. The fact that there was no one from the bingo books meant they didn't see them as a threat, but it didn't mean that these Kumo-nins weren't scouts.

While his mission was to weed out the Root operatives that couldn't adapt and assimilate into the main Konoha force, Itachi couldn't help but draw his eyes to the younger operatives in his squad. It wasn't as though he felt any attachment or pity towards their situation, but he found himself fascinated by how they handled themselves. Unlike the older Root members who fought mostly by their individual specialization, the younger ones worked in tandem with each other.

"Ink Flush!" shouted the youngest in the group. Code name Sai, the boy was a clan-less child not much older than Sasuke and Naruto. A puddle of ink rose from the ground and latched onto the enemy, while another boy, code name Shin, with grey blue hair dove in and slaughtered the captured target in a flurry of slashes with his tanto.

Itachi returned his attention back to his opponent as he idly parried his attack and drove his blade into the other's throat. He'll survey the survivors after this fight. At least that was what he thought before a familiar sensation he hadn't encountered in months appear behind him.

"Kasa?" said the Uchiha in surprise as he turned to the sound of exploding flesh and screaming men.

Instead of a familiar mop of auburn-hair, he spotted a teen with ash-grey hair and round spectacles, the teen went by Kabuto. He gave Itachi a passing glance as he pushed his blood splattered glasses up the bridge of his nose and darted off to deal with the next target. The older Aburame teamed with him served as a distraction as he shrouded the enemies with a swarm of bugs and the other teen moved in with chakra scalpels at the ready to slice away at the enemy.

Itachi shook his head as he refocused himself to deal with the matter at hand. He couldn't afford to be careless. He wiped away any lasting thoughts in his mind before he dove in and added to the bloodshed.

For the next several months, Itachi and his squadron of Root operatives faced one Kumo ambush after another in rising difficulty. As he initially suspected, the first wave were a scouting squad aiming to test the waters and see their power standing. However, with each succinct group that followed, they grew in strength each time. During that time, they lost half of the adult shinobi, but the children in the squad remained strong.

It seemed Danzo had all his child operatives paired with another for training and for their graduation
exam, they were to face their partner in a battle to the death. It eerily reminded him of the Uchiha practice in developing the magenkyo sharingan. Since he was the clan heir, it was predetermined that he would have a close friend that he may have to kill in order to obtain magenkyo.

He still recalled the day where Shisui came into his life. It was shortly after the older boy's parents died during the end of the third war. Despite his losses, the older Uchiha still decided to take up the role as a sacrifice for Itachi's growth. Had Kasa not activated his magenkyo through her faux death, the clan elders might have made him face Shisui in the same manner.

Not that it mattered anymore... he already has his magenkyo and Shisui was long declared a traitor and enemy to Konoha. More importantly, he still had the Root operatives to handle and the one who replicated Kasa's explosive touch proved most interesting.

During one of their conflicts with Kumo, the spectacle teen was in the midst of blowing up another Kumo when a large dark-skinned man dropped next to him and caught his wrist.

"Yo, yo!" shouted the man. "That ain't nice, this little tryst should not suffice. Your dangerous touch is just too much!"

The ash-grey haired teen's eyes narrowed as he swiped at the man with a chakra scalpel with his free hand, but the older man dodged with the nimbleness that's unexpected of his large stature.

"You fight and fight, but you'll lose against might!" roared the man as he hurled him into the air and bounded off the ground with his legs at the ready to pummel the smaller teen with no mercy.

However, before he could do so, Itachi interjected with a substitution jutsu and took the place of the other. A look of surprise crossed the rapping Kumo-nin as Itachi blocked and parried his punches and kicks with the flat of his blade.

"Oh ho, what's this?" chuckled the man in amusement as they landed a short distance away from each other after the brief exchange. "It's the Uchiha from Konoha!"

"Killer B," greeted Itachi evenly as he stood dignified and with his blade at the ready. "I'm surprised they sent you to deal with me and my squadron. I don't believe I'm worthy of the time of someone of your caliber."

"Hey, hey, watch what you say, flattery will not get you your way," rapped B as he moved his hand in a disk scratching motion. "Though with what you did to Yugito Ni, I must say you're brave not to flee."

"I offered a peaceful way out, she chose not to take it," reasoned Itachi.

"You may talk the talk, but that don't mean I'll walk the walk," rapped B as he dropped his hands forward in emphasis. "You get me?"

"I see," murmured Itachi as he flicked his sword up in challenge. "Then we're done talking."

Their conversation ended and the Kumo-nin dove in with a flurry of attacks using all eight of his swords. Itachi blocked and parried each attack in turn. His eyes flickered between his opponent and his blades as he dodged, skipped and slid out of the way of the ones he couldn't avoid. With how fast the Kumo-nin moved, he was hard pressed, unable to form any hand seals that were necessary for jutsus.

In such close combat, it was near impossible to draw out his shurikens and ninja wires to use to its fullest. The best he could do was bid for time as he waited for an opening, but opportunities were
few and far in between. He intended to avoid using his sharingan as much as he can in favor of his health. However, in this situation there was little else he could do.
"Tsukuyomi," whispered Itachi as his eyes flickered red and gazed deeply into B's unexpected eyes. The world turned red and the Kumo-nin suddenly found himself swinging at air.

"Oh, ho?" mused B as he glanced about the reddened world. "Red for dread, so this is what the infamous sharingan can do."

"For the next 72 hours you will—"

"Ain't nobody got time for that!" scoffed B as he crossed his arms and in an instant, his form changed into that of an octopus.

Itachi barely managed to brace himself as a violent wave of demonic chakra lashed out from the man's body and broke through his illusion effortlessly. He hardly took two steps before he found the transformed jinchuriki's octopus-like arms slithering towards him at lightning speed. His eyes widened in shock as he realized, he wasn't going to be able to get out of the way.

With how quickly everything sped by, he had no time to process either fear or panic. The ground crumbled beneath him and before he could be ensnared by the jinchuriki's faux limbs, roots ripped from the ground and formed a protective cage around him.

"Itachi!" shouted Tenzo in a panic over the conflict around them.

"No time to play, no place to stray. We end this today," rumbled B's voice from the monstrous form above them.

Itachi's red eyes widened once more when he saw a mixture of red and blue meld together into a giant purple sphere. The amount of chakra concentrated in it was immense. If the man was to use it against them, they wouldn't—the sphere shot off and came directly at them. No time to think, he had to act now!

"SUSANO!" roared Itachi as his eyes became blood-shot and chakra flared up around him in a violent squall.

In a split second, a ghostly skeletal form materialized around him and his squadron. It scarcely managed to intercept in time with the violent purple sphere. An explosion followed and cloud of dust kicked up into the air. By the time it cleared, a shield could be seen in place where the sphere would've made contact. The giant mirrored Itachi's stance in a crouch as it stared ahead at the transformed jinjuriki. Despite the various cracks strewn about the giant's form, it stood firm and protective over those it hovered over.

"Damn," whistled the jinchuriki appreciatively. "Not a man to mess around, I see."

Itachi was in no mood for words as he lashed out with his blade at hand. The giant above him mirrored him once more as a blade appeared and swiped at the jinchuriki's body. Tenzo in turn planted his hands into the ground and the roots came to life once more and latched onto B's form in order to give Itachi a clearer shot. B could do nothing as they hacked off one of his eight suction cup covered limbs.

"Yo bro, so not cool! Two against one should be against the rules!" protested Killer B as the blade continued to descend down on him over and over again until all eight limbs lay lifeless on the ground.

"You seem to have the misconception that Konoha operates with such honor code," droned Itachi.
He made a slow stride over with the towering giant mirroring his every move. "Unfortunately, you will just have to deal with it."

With a snap of his wrist, he flipped the grip of his blade and held it over his head. The giant hovered over the monstrous form in an executioner's stance for a moment before it plunged down and pulverized its target without remorse.

"B-sama!" screamed the remaining Kumo-nins in horror. "H-he killed B-sama!"

Eight limbs lay scattered around the unmoving jinchuriki's monstrous body. The skeletal giant around Itachi stood unmoving as a frowned crossed his face. Something wasn't right. It was far too easy to take down a jinchuriki, especially one that managed to break free from his Tsukuyomi so effortlessly. It had to be a ruse. This was a trap.

"What are you all waiting for?" barked Itachi as he glanced to the awestruck Root operatives that stood stunned at his actions. "Take them out before reinforcements come. Show no mercy."

Driven by renewed morale and the look of fear on the remaining Kumo-nins' faces, the Root operatives charged in pursuit as the enemy retreated. Itachi turned his attention back to the scattered remains of the jinchuriki he fought before speeding through a number of hand seals before raising his hand to his lips.

"Amaterasu," whispered the Uchiha before black flames darted towards the remains and began to burn it to nothingness.

"Hot holy hell!" yelled Killer B as he fled from one of the many limbs on the ground, narrowly avoiding the licking black flames as he resituated himself. "Man oh man, this is not swell! We need a game changer out of this hell."

With Susano at the ready, Itachi was going to finish what he started and finish off the man with one last swipe from his giant guardian. However, before Susano's blade could descend onto B a flash of lightning appeared and knocked the blade astray. Itachi pulled his arms in defensively as the lightning shifted to attack him, but it met Susano's shield instead. Once the lightning faded a burly man stood before him and glared down with the intensity that could match the flames of his amaterasu.

"Raikage-dono," greeted Itachi evenly as he stared at the man through half-lidded eyes. "To what honor do I have to be graced by your presence?"

"Konoha has a knack for creating monster children doesn't it?" returned A, the Raikage, unamused.

"Yo bro, no need to fret, together we could make a fool out of him yet," continued Killer B, but could continue at the older Kumo-nin cut him off.

"Shut up B," snapped A. "This is no time for your inane rapping. Take your men and cover their retreat."

"What?" retorted the other in disbelief. "So not cool! You're making me look like a fool!"

"This is an order!" roared A. "Retreat now!"

B looked reluctant to do so, but at the man's no nonsense sternness, he relented and made haste to help his men retreat.

"This is not the end!" shouted the man as he pointed to Itachi. "We will meet again and next time, I
That blundering idiot," rumbled A darkly under his breath as he refocused on Itachi. "You may have bested him today boy, but you won't be able to do the same with me."

"True," agreed Itachi evenly. "I wouldn't be able to beat you on my lonesome, but I could make it difficult and dwindle you down for another to take you."

"Do you have no self-preservation, boy?" frowned A.

"I could ask you the same," droned Itachi in a low whisper. "You and your men are on the retreat. Konoha's pushing on in pursuit. Tell me, what are you going to do now Raikage-dono? You can hold us in the mountains, but only if your troops stop retreating. You're running out of time."

"Is that a threat?" snarled A.

"No more than what we're already doing," said Itachi as a faint smile quirked up at the corner of his lips.

"Enjoy your boasting now, Kumo won't fall to the likes of Konoha," growled A in a low rumble.

"I look forward to seeing that," replied Itachi in turn before the man disappeared in a flash of lightning. The moment he and the rest of the Kumo-nin were gone, Itachi turned to the youngest operative. "Send message to the main camp, Kumo's on the retreat, we're going in pursuit."

"Yes sir!" said the boy as he pulled out an ink well and a blank scroll before he started drawing a messenger bird.

"Those who are injured, tend to your wounds, the rest scout ahead for traps and disable any that may prove hazardous for the pursuit team to follow," ordered Itachi. "Report back with your findings in an hour."

"Yes sir!" shouted the remaining the operatives before they all made haste and followed their orders.

"Itachi," started Tenzo worriedly, but the younger boy shook his head.

"Tend to the others first. I'll be fine," brushed off Itachi. "I'll make sure the area is secure."

Once certain that there were no further threats, Itachi made his away from the view of his men before releasing Susano and allowed his sharingan to fade. The moment it did, he collapsed to his knees with a hand to his mouth in a violent coughing fit. Blood seeped through his hands as his other reached into his pouch for the medication Tesuri gave him.

His hands shook from the exhaustion and his vision faded in and out as his coughing worsened. At one point he thought he was going to drown in his own blood, but then a comforting hand pressed against his back and he felt the warmth of a healing jutsu wash over him. Startled, he glanced back and spotted the soothing green glow of healing chakra against Kabuto's solemn face.

"...You probably shouldn't have fought so aggressively," murmured the teen as he worked to soothe the aches and pains in his chest.

"Hn," scoffed Itachi as he sat quietly through the other's treatment. "It's not an option. With the war on two fronts, if Konoha doesn't make a stand and push forward, it'll eventually get overtaken and all we've fought for would be for naught."
"And that validates the reckless treatment of your own body?" quipped the bespectacled teen with a raised brow.

"A necessary sacrifice," replied Itachi.

"If you continue on like this, you would be sacrificing more than this," deadpanned the other. "In a few years, the research done on your condition should be able to develop something to halt the spread of the infection and maybe a couple of years after that they'll be able to eliminate the infection and you can start properly healing with your own chakra."

"I am aware," stated Itachi.

"Then why are you still so reckless?" snapped Kabuto. "I expected that behavior from Kasa, but you?"

"You never told me how you came about replicating Kasa's technique," continued Itachi offhandedly.

"I know you're trying to change the topic," scowled the other as he waited for an answer. When it never came, he slowly relented and answered. "At the base level, all cells are preset to deteriorate and die off after a certain amount of time and then replaced by newer cells through the replication process. That process can be sped up with the introduction of healing chakra, but that applies to all cells. Kasa's technique simply oversaturates the cells until the replication gets out of hand and… well, boom."

"…Like the infection I'm afflicted with," reasoned Itachi.

"Not exactly, the infection you're afflicted with has the unique property of doing the same with regular chakra rather than healing chakra. I would love to delve deeper into researching the reasoning behind the mutation that allowed this, but Tesuri-san insisted I focus on finding a cure first," explained the teen.

"If you're a part of the research team, why were you dispatched here with the rest of Root? It's obvious you have no problem adapting and assimilating with the rest of the regular shinobi force," frowned Itachi.

"You have your mission and I have mine," said the other as he pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose with a wry grin. "Someone has to make sure our future hokage doesn't kill himself."

"…Pardon?" noted Itachi with a sharp glance to the other.

"And here I thought you were the child prodigy," drawled Kabuto. "The hokage doesn't give his anbu operatives, albeit ones from Root, to just anyone. Danzo may have been an exception after the death of the Fourth and was near impossible to get rid of despite the numerous issues that arose. Did you think he would so readily just give command of it to someone else so soon after he's finally gotten them back?"

"…What?" whispered Itachi in disbelief.

"He's grooming you to take his place," reasoned the other. "This mission with Root is nothing more than a bolster to your reputation when the candidacy is finally announced."

This… was ridiculous. Itachi said nothing still trying to digest the news. He knew the hokage trusted him a great deal more than some of his other operatives, but this… he didn't expect this. How on earth did the man expect him to lead a village, when he barely even wanted to lead his own clan?
What was he going to do as a hokage? What would…what would Kasa do in this situation?

The haunting thoughts were brushed away as he returned his attention to the war effort. None of that mattered now. For all he knew, he wouldn't live long enough to get nominated. Candidacy or not, he needed to finish this war.
"All three of you, fail," droned the disinterested jounin at fallen Academy graduates. "Report back to the Academy tomorrow morning. We're done."

"What?" said Kazuhiko in disbelief as he scrambled off the ground and stumbled towards the jounin. "You can't be serious! I passed the exams! I did all the work! If anything, you should be failing these two losers! They were the ones that's dragging me down!"

"Losers?" snapped Takahiro, the blond boy as he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "You're one to talk Kazuhiko! You glory hogging asshole!"

"Yeah!" agreed Noboru the mousy looking boy. "You big jerk!"

"Well, if you idiots used your brain, then I wouldn't have to take charge!" snapped Kazuhiko in return as agitation drove them to an aggressive stance.

"And that is exactly the reason why I'm failing the three of you," inserted the jounin with a stern glare, halting any attempt they had in starting a scuffle. "What do you think the point of this exam is?"

Confusion crossed their faces before the three fell silent.

"These are your teammates, your comrades and allies," frowned the man. "On the battlefield, there will be no one else to help you but them. Instead of trying to help each other, you three spent that time sabotaging one another."

"But—" protested Kazuhiko, but the man would not have it.

"My word is final," said the man as he stared them down with a wave of killing intent. The three of them dropped to their knees in fear as he turned to leave. "Maybe another year in the Academy will teach you what you need."

Unable to cease his shaking Kazuhiko gritted his teeth and dug his fingers into the ground as he resigned to his fate. How could he have failed?

"Hey Kazu! Looks like you failed too huh?" chuckled one of his many classmates the next day he attended the Academy. He recognized more than half of them in the graduating class he was in just the day before.

"Don't lump me in with you loser," scowled Kazuhiko as he tossed his bag on the desk and plopped down in his seat, annoyed.

"Get off your high horse," waved off the other offhandedly. "Since we passed the written exam, we'll have another chance at the genin exam in a couple of months. It's not the end of the world."

"For you maybe," grumbled Kazuhiko as he turned away disgruntled as he rested his chin on his hand.

The other sighed in exasperation before deciding he was a lost cause and moved on to mingle with the rest of the failed graduates. Kazuhiko could hear each of them trading stories about what happened the day before and did his best to block the chattering out. He was supposed to be a ninja
by now, not sitting back in the Academy again.

When time came for class, he turned to the door with reluctance. No doubt it was either Iruka sensei or Mizuki sensei that would lead the class, but it wouldn't do to look like a poor student. To his surprise, a familiar face he hadn't seen in years entered the room instead.

"Hey, is that Kasa?" exclaimed someone in surprise.

"You're right!" said another gleefully. "It's really Kasa the Umbrella!"

"What happened dead last, did you suck at being a ninja so much that they demoted you back to an Academy student?" jibed another.

A grin quirked up at the corner of Kazuhiko's lips when he noticed a slight twitch at the smaller girl's eye. He had briefly wondered what happened to her after her supposed early graduation. Who would have thought she was stuck repeating the Academy with the graduate failures. It's been how long since he last saw her? Four? Maybe five years? Now that's embarrassing.

"Welcome back Kasa the Umbrella!" mocked the entirety of the class as Kazuhiko rested his weight on his hand while he watched the girl take in a deep breath to reign in her temper.

Even after five years, her temperament hasn't changed a bit. She was still as easily riled up as he remembered.

"All right, who's the dipshit that put this in my hair?"

He could still clearly remember the day that he crossed the small girl. For someone who looked seemingly harmless, she was vicious. Unlike all the other girls in the class, she didn't shy away when teased. She didn't scream at the sight of worms or whatever disgusting things they could find for the sole purpose of tormenting the other girls. She fought back. She stood up against them.

This was going to be an interesting year in the Academy… or so he thought.

"Kasa—" started Iruka as he turned to the younger girl, but she brushed him off as she moved forward with the rabbit cage in her arms.

"Please take a seat Iruka sensei, I can handle this," said the auburn-haired girl evenly as she set down the cage and books in her arms.

Kazuhiko frowned, as did the rest of the class when Iruka sensei hesitantly obeyed and moved to take the lone seat by the board. What on earth was going…? Kazuhiko's eyes widened in surprise when she moved and the familiar hitai-ate he held for only the brief few hours the day before was shown prominently tied on top of her obi… She wasn't a student.

"Since you all know who I am already, I'll skip the basic introduction and get straight to the point," droned the girl dully as she gave them all a cool gaze. "As of today, I will be your first aid sensei and if any of show an affinity for the medical arts, you will be given the chance to continue onto my iryo-ninjutsu class after the completion of this one."

Silence overtook the room for no more than a brief second before the room fell into a flurry of disbelief. Kazuhiko continued to stare at her, unwilling to believe the words that were being said. There was no way she was a ninja. No way was she their teacher! Hell, she even had the worst grades in the class! How the hell did she become a ninja when he… A sharp spike of fear shot into his chest and found himself crumble forward, barely able to keep himself upright as the girl spoke again.
"May I remind you that these first aid classes are mandatory," said Kasa icily. It felt like the room's temperature dropped with each word she spoke. "As in if you do not pass this class, you will not be qualified to even take the genin exam, much less graduate."

Kazuhiko could barely force himself to look at her as she continued. When on earth did she get so terrifying?

"Kasa sensei," called out Iruka, but Kazuhiko could barely hear him as he struggled to keep himself from shaking and wetting himself.

He had no clue how long it lasted, but when the terrifying pressure finally relented, he found himself wheezing for air as he pressed a hand to his chest and the other against his mouth to keep from screaming.

"Don't mistake me for Daikoku sensei, Suzume sensei or even your own mothers. I'm only here to teach you how to keep yourself and maybe your teammates alive if you even manage to make it to genin," continued Kasa evenly as she glanced over them with disinterest. "I will not coddle you. I will not take your bullshit and I definitely will not give a damn if you decide to leave my class. Now, if you're still interested in becoming shinobi, I suggest you pay close attention in this class."

As she reached out for what he assumed was the attendance book, the last of the pressure was gone and he found himself able to gather his wits. It had to be a genjutsu. There was no way he was scared of her. She was a dead last! He shouldn't be scared of her!

"When I call your name—" before she could continue, he slammed his hands to the desk loudly.

"Y-You can't do this!" shouted Kazuhiko, but much to his annoyance, he found his voice quavering with a stutter. Even so, he glared at her, unwilling to back down. There was no way she was better than him. He refused to believe it!

"And why is that?" drawled the auburn-haired girl as she rested the bottom her book against the podium.

"You have no right to—" started Kazuhiko, but she didn't let him continue.

"If you have a problem with me as your sensei, then take it up with Hokage-sama," brushed off the girl as if he was an annoying insect. "In short of Hokage-sama, the only other people that outrank me are full ranked jounins. So unless you become a jounin or the hokage himself. I don't care what you think."

He glowered at the dismissal and turned to Iruka sensei for support. The man was their sensei! He should know better than her.

"Iruka sensei! You're going to—" He started, but again, wasn't allowed to finish.

"Iruka sensei is a chunin." She cut him off. "I am a tokubetsu jounin specialized in the medical field. In no way does he outrank me in rank or specialty. Now sit down."

…Tokubetsu jounin? No way… That's not possible!

"I refuse to—"

SLAM!

"Kazuhiko-kun!" shouted someone to his left as he struggled to push himself off his desk. What the
hell did she do to him?

"Kasa sensei," protested Iruka sensei, but even he wasn't spared as he found himself forced down on his seat. "What on earth?"

"Kazuhiko, is it?" drawled the girl as she continued to tap the attendance book against the podium in an impatient manner.

Gritting his teeth, the beaten teen forced his head to turn to face her.

"I don't care if you call me sensei. I don't care if you call me dead last, Kasa the Umbrella or any other inane name you think up. My job is to make sure you lot are capable of performing first aid," droned the girl as she looked straight into his eyes.

"Y-you," grunted Kazuhiko furiously as he continued to glare at her. She wasn't the least bit fazed.

"Once you could do that, then neither of us would have to see each other's face again, but until then you're stuck with me, got it?" said Kasa before the weight suddenly grew heavy once more. He could feel the air slowly getting crushed out of his lungs. As much as he hated to relent and submit to her, he found himself unable to do anything else.

"G-Got it," said Kazuhiko bitterly.

"Good boy," said the girl before the pressure disappeared and she resumed taking attendance.

Being an Academy student, news on active shinobi were limited. There was no way he could have known that Kasa was promoted to tokubetsu jounin in the span of five years. Most people can't even manage chunin in that time span. How was it possible a dead last like her become so powerful that she was nearly on point with the Uchiha's prodigal status?

…Unable to believe what was in front of him, he challenged her.

"What's the point in first aid if we have iryo-nins?" asked Kazuhiko smugly. "We could be using this time to learn better—"

SLAM!

"What's the point in learning better things if you're not alive long enough to use it?" retorted Kasa as she nonchalantly returned to her lesson as though he never interrupted. "Not every team has an iryo-nin and even if you do end up in a team with one, what happens when you get separated and end up bleeding to death because you don't know how to stop it?"

…And challenged her

"Iryo-nins are lame! They can't even fight, always in the back—"

SLAM!

"We'll be covering the medical protocols set down by one of Konoha's most profound iryo-nins, Tsunade-sama," continue Kasa without giving him a second glance. "Who, by the way, is an expert iryo-nin and formidable kunoichi in combat."

…And again.

SLAM!
"Kazuhiko, you should really stop," said one of his classmates worriedly after one of their lessons with Kasa.

But he didn't. Despite all he's done to irritate the tokubetsu jounin, she never sought to sabotage him or his grades. If he had a genuine question, she would answer fully and explain if he didn't understand. Even her so-called punishments didn't seem bad as it sounds when she used some sort of jutsu or seal to slam him into the desk or the ground. Nowadays it felt like no more than an idle shove. Either he built tolerance over the course of her punishing him or that she never intended to ever hurt him.

What surprised him further was the fact that she extended the invitation for him to take her advance iryo-ninjutsu class. The abuse hadn't lessened any… if anything it seemed like her inner sadist seem to expound even further as she proceeded to traumatize the fairly small class she held.

At least… it seemed like it in the beginning. As the months continued, her teaching methods were still as ruthless, but he slowly began to notice a solemn look cross her face whenever she thought no one was looking. Gradually, she seemed less terrifying and… a bit sad. He wasn't the only one that noticed either. Each and every one that accepted her invitation to her class came to the same conclusion as him.

However, they all continued to act as though the sadistic persona she put up scared them if only to see the faint glimmer of amusement in her eyes. Itachi was the only one to ever to rile her to showing anything else. Kazuhiko witnessed the countless one-sided argument Kasa shared with Itachi during their Academy days. It didn't surprise him when he spotted the Uchiha visiting during one of their class trips.

"...Just go get a checkup when you have a chance okay?" sighed the girl in a tone that Kazuhiko could only recognize as worry, even though she quickly tried to cover it up with a joke.

He had intended to slip away without a word, guilty that he stumbled onto a private moment between the two. However, he knew he could never do so without either of them noticing. If Kasa was a tokubetsu jounin, no doubt Itachi was equally ranked if not higher. In the ended he decided to pop out to apologize for eavesdropping.

"Kasa!" shouted Kazuhiko with an apology at the tip of his tongue, but paused when noticed a stranger he didn't recognize in their midst.

"Your students call you by your first name?" asked the stranger in puzzlement.

"Just this one," sighed Kasa.

...Maybe it wasn't so private after all? He wondered as the two proceeded to talk about him as if he wasn't there. Even Itachi voice out that he didn't remember Kazuhiko despite having shared classes with him prior to his graduation. Kasa's shoulders shook with mirth at the dismissal, it was the first time in a long while that he saw a real smile that reached her eyes.

...Then, without a word, she disappeared for a week. A number of iryo-ninjutsu senseis came and went. He soon realized that a good number of them were boggled down with work at the hospital or field missions. Iryo-nin were constantly in high-demand, especially with the ongoing war against Kumo and Kiri. It was strange that Kasa stayed as long as she had to teach them. Weren't tokubetsu
jounin-ranked iryo-nins indispensable? Why would they allocate her to teaching for so long?

Any attempts he made in researching about Kasa ended with a clearance wall. It made sense that the village would be protective over information regarding to their own shinobi. It was through chance that he stumbled across her information in an old bingo book.

"...The Crimson Terror?" read Kazuhiko in surprise when he found an old picture of Kasa in the bingo book.

As he perused through the contents of the page, he found his eyes widen with each additional detail. Despite being an iryo-nin, the auburn-haired girl ranked as an A-ranked shinobi with a kill-on-sight order by enemy villages. He nearly choked at the number of zeroes listed for her bounty.

Even with Kasa's abrasive teaching methods, he found it difficult to imagine her doing something that would rank her so infamously. His fellow classmates all asked about her sudden disappearance. Rin sensei didn't give much explanation beyond the fact that Kasa would be gone for an undetermined amount of time. If not for Naruto, they wouldn't have known Kasa was sick and bedridden in the hospital.

Kazuhiko suspected her condition might have been mission related, no one just gets hospitalized out of the blue. Was that why she was village-bound for so long? She was too sick to go out on the field? He tried to think back to all the times he seen her in class, but nothing stood out to him. There were no signs that she suffered an injury and in the months that she taught, she never got sick either. He speculated for days on what might've ailed her, but his mind came up with blank.

When she finally returned, he noticed the light in her eyes was gone. She kept a fake smile even as everyone showed their concern for her absence, but as usual, she brushed it off and resumed her lessons. Something wasn't right. The look on her face, the speech that she gave, it felt hauntingly like a goodbye. As if she was never going to come back again.

Maybe he was paranoid. No one else seemed to have notice, but he couldn't brush off the feeling he got from listening to Kasa. He didn't dare to approach her until class was over. He was certain that if his assumptions were true, she didn't want the rest of them to know.

"Hey, Kasa sensei, can I talk with you in private?" It was the first time he ever called her sensei and really meant it.

"In private?" said the girl in surprise with a raised brow. "Is something wrong?"

At first he stumbled over his words, unsure how to approach the auburn-haired girl about the conclusions he made. However, she waited patiently as he began to unravel his conclusions and his worry. He studied her as her face shuffled through a caution, bewilderment and surprise.

"... You think I'm suicidal," noted the girl without a pause.

"I don't think you're suicidal!" protested Kazuhiko, alarmed that she would voice it so openly. "Just that... you're probably just stressed and..."

"Pft..." A snicker escaped her before she tried to hide it behind a hand. He could only watch in confusion as her body shook, desperate to contain her laughter. For a moment he thought she was going to stop breathing from how hard she tried to keep herself from laughing.

"...You're going to be a wonderful iryo-nin in the future," said Kasa with a bright smile, one he was happy to note was real, but he turned a shade of red when he realized her compliment. "I look forward to the day it happens."
"T-that is… I…" spluttered Kazuhiko incoherently and the awkwardness resumed… at least until Sasuke Uchiha crashed in and spouted off some ridiculous claim that Kasa was his fiancée or some nonsense… Or at least he thought it was nonsense before the Uchiha Massacre happened and Kasa disappeared again.

For days, no one knew what had occurred. The senseis and other ranked shinobi in the village probably did, but the Academy students were left uninformed. He and the rest of Kasa's iryo-ninjutsu class were the only ones to have realized something was wrong. Along with Kasa, Sasuke and Naruto were missing from class as well.

While Naruto wasn't one of Kasa's official students, the blond regularly sat through most of the non-chakra related lessons. He and Sasuke were usually inseparable, so when the Uchiha failed to come to class, so did Naruto. By the time the two returned, rumors floated through the Academy about the Uchiha Massacre. Not many dared to approach Sasuke about the news. The few that dared to offer him consolation were immediately scared off by the Uchiha boy's foul temper and spiteful words.

"Ino wait!" shouted Naruto down the hall.

Out of curiosity, Kazuhiko glanced towards the source of the noise and spotted the Yamanaka girl crying as she fled from the blond boy that trailed behind her. Strange, didn't he normally stick to Sasuke? What was he doing chasing after Ino? At first he didn't think much of it, but then he came across Sasuke with a hand against his swollen cheek.

"…What happened to you?" asked Kazuhiko curiously as he looked down at the younger boy.

"None of your business," hissed Sasuke with a scowl.

"If you ask me, it looks like you had a falling out with Naruto and got your ass kicked," drawled Kazuhiko.

"I didn't get my ass kicked!" snapped Sasuke. "And no one asked you!"

"Then what do you call this?" said Kazuhiko as he casually took advantage of Sasuke's blind spot and curved his arm around to poke his swollen cheek.

"Don't touch me!" hissed Sasuke as he slapped his hand away.

"I could heal it for you if you don't want more people to know you got your ass kicked," grinned the older teen in amusement.

"I don't need your pity!" snarled Sasuke. "I could do it myself!"

"If you could do it yourself, you would've done it already," noted Kazuhiko dryly.

"And why would you help me?" glared Sasuke.

"Well, I don't know," drawled Kazuhiko sarcastically. "Can it be that you're hurt?"

Sasuke said nothing as he turned away from him again.

"Stop being a stubborn ass and let me see it," sighed Kazuhiko in exasperation as he reached out and pulled the hand covering Sasuke's swollen face. The younger boy hissed in pain at the slight jostle, but made no attempt to resist as Kazuhiko placed a glowing hand on his face.

If someone told him a year ago that he would willingly help a bratty stuck up Uchiha, he would've
called them crazy. Yet, here he was… helping a bratty Uchiha. He finally realized why he failed the secret genin exams the first time.

"Team Nine, Kazuhiko Nemoto, Keiko Sasaki and Nozomu Kusnoki," announced Iruka during his second team assignment.

"What?" gapped the teen in surprise at the names of his fellow iryo-ninjutsu classmates. This had to be a mistake! Why would they put three iryo-nins on the same team? However, he wasn't given a chance to protest as the door opened and a blue-haired man stepped in.

"Team Nine," said the man coolly as he glanced to the classroom of new graduates.

"Erm… I haven't finished giving out the team assignments and speech yet," inserted Iruka awkwardly,

"That's fine," said the man as his eyes focused on the three members of the newly formed Team Nine. "I'll personally fill them in regarding the particulars. I'm a bit pressed for time today."

"Oh… I see…" continued Iruka awkwardly before he gestured a hand to him. "Team Nine, this will be your jounin sensei, good luck and congratulations."

The three of them barely managed to push out a thanks before they found themselves hurrying after the blue-haired jounin. The man didn't seem intent on waiting for them as he sped through the halls and made their way out of the Academy in record time.

"Erm…sensei, where are we going?" asked Keiko quietly as they did their best to keep up with him.

"Your first mission, of course," said the man casually.

"First—what?" spluttered Kazuhiko in surprise. "What do you mean first mission? What about the secret genin exam?"

"That?" continued the man with nonchalance. "I don't see the point in giving you one. By the time I'm done with you lot, you'll either be capable shinobi or retired."

"What?" repeated Kazuhiko in disbelief. "But when I passed the exams the first time, the jounin sensei then—"

"I operate differently," inserted the man. "I don't see the point in sending you lot back to the Academy for another year when it's obvious none of you have any field experience to help your case. You'll either adapt or crash. It's faster and more effective."

"…Isn't that a bit… reckless and irresponsible for you to say that sensei?" asked Nozomu quietly as he stared up at the man in caution.

"Hmm," hummed the man in disinterest as he glanced at them. "Do you three want to be shinobi?"

"O-of course!" spluttered the three in disbelief. If they weren't interested in this career path, why would they have wasted all that effort at the Academy?

"Then you three pass," said the man bluntly as he propped a hand to his hip. "Can we get a move on now? We have quite a few places to get today if we want to finish before sundown."

Kazuhiko fell speechless, unable to comprehend the strange man before him. From the moment they met the man, he showed blatant disregard towards rules and regulations. He outright took them
before Iruka sensei could complete the usual procedure and order of events. He even went as far as
to toss out the very secret exam that had failed him just a year prior. It was insulting.

"But sensei," protested Keiko. "We don't even know your name. How could we go on a mission so
soon?"

"Yeah, and didn't you tell Iruka sensei that you were going to cover whatever it was he didn't
manage to tell us?" continued Nozomu.

"In the order of your questions," started the man as he listed his answers. "My name is Tesuri Mon.
You're going to have to go on missions sooner or later, might as well be sooner than later. You don't
need Iruka's pointless speech, I'll teach you whatever you need to survive. Any other questions?"

It took a moment for them to digest his answers before a look of surprise crossed their faces.

"…Mon?" asked Keiko with widened eyes. "Are you related to Kasa sensei?"

The man raised a brow in a very familiar manner, confirming their suspicions without a word. The
look on his face reminded them of Kasa sensei whenever she grew impatient with their
lollygagging… and if he was anything like their spastic sensei… they best not push their luck and
test how far the man's patience goes.

As they feared, Tesuri was as terrifying task master. For their first mission, the man took them into
the mountains to gather medicinal herbs. While their prior knowledge in iryo-ninjutsu class allowed
them to recognize the various herbs with ease, it didn't mean gathering said herbs was easy.

"…How are we supposed to get that?" sighed Nemoto as he squatted near the edge and peeked over
to the hazardous drop below.

"Easy, you go over the edge like so," said Tesuri as he pushed all three of them off the edge.

"YAH!" screamed the trio at the disappearance of the ground beneath them. Their hearts threatened
to rip out from their chests at their sudden plummet. However, before any of them managed to meet
the ground, a violent tug yanked at their waists and ceased their descent.

"With your current chakra level, you won't be able to scale back up the cliff after you've gathered all
the herbs if you went down on your own," reasoned Tesuri as he glanced down at them from the
cliff top. "I'll leave it to you three to figure out how to ration out you chakra. You have two hours. If
you don't manage to get back up here in that time with all the herbs, I'm leaving you there for
tonight."

It took a moment for his words to sink in, but when it did, they all shared the same look of disbelief.

"WHAT!?" screamed the three simultaneously.

"Hop to it," said Tesuri as she leisurely walked down the side of the cliff. "I'll be down below
gathering the ones you can't reach. If I finish before you. I'm leaving."

Like daughter, like father, Tesuri used fear to motivate them. They managed to complete their first
mission in a frenzy, but in their haste, they became a useless pile of chakra exhausted genins by the
time they returned to the village. At their lack of stamina and endurance, Tesuri decided to take on a
string of these grueling retrieval missions.

At first, they suspected that he was trying to exhaust them to the point of resigning. However, as
weeks grew into months, they slowly realized that wasn't the case. While the missions were strenuous, each mission built on top of the last and they found their miniscule chakra reserves slowly growing day by day. All the while, the man slipped in combat training when they weren't on missions.

"But we're medics…" murmured Nemoto in confusion. "Shouldn't we be training iryo-ninjutsu instead of combat?"

A sudden chakra scalpel pressed against his neck and he found himself not daring to breathe.

"All good and well, but you're not going to have the benefit of being in safe company," lectured Tesuri as he allowed the chakra scalpel to disperse. "I'm not saying you have to become a frontline fighter, but it won't do you any harm if you can stand on your own when the time calls for it."

Retrieval missions eventually turned into field support as the conflict against Kumo became strained and the need for iryo-nins grew. Konoha managed to push their forces back into the mountains; however, they refused to back down in their home front and fought even more viciously than they had at the border. None of the three were ready to become a full-fledged iryo-nins, they lacked the experience, but they were far from useless. They weren't qualified to do surgeries, but handling basic first aid and treating minor stab wounds and lacerations eased up more time for those who could.

Fortunately, Kiri temporarily halted their efforts while Konoha pushed into Lightning Country territory. The details were unclear, but it seemed that there was some sort of internal conflict that left Kiri licking its wounds. Things seemed like it was going smoothly, but then the unexpected happened and Kazuhiko stumbled into something he shouldn't have during one of their many missions away from the village.

"I told you, I will help you however I can. All I asked in return was to keep Kasa out of this!" said Tesuri icily, Kazuhiko could hear the seething rage bubbling beneath the carefully controlled words. "Why was Naki in Konoha? What was he doing that it involved my daughter?"

"Tesuri, we're so—" started a woman, but was promptly cut off.

"I don't want to hear your apologies!" grounded out the man. "There is no excuse in the world that could give me back my daughter!"

Kazuhiko's eyes widened in surprise at the mention of the auburn-haired girl's name. What did he mean by those words? Give back his daughter? Did something happen to Kasa? And what does this Naki person have to do with Konoha? More and more questions assaulted his mind, but he was in no position to ponder about them.

He had no clue who Tesuri was talking to and it didn't sound like they were allies to Konoha. Which meant he had to get out of here as soon as—

"Looks like we have an eavesdropper," droned a deep baritone voice before Kazuhiko found himself face to face with spiky orange-haired man in a black cloak with red clouds. "Why don't you join the conversation?"

Kazuhiko found himself speechless as the man dragged him out of hiding and towards a scowling Tesuri and a stoic blue-haired woman. Things did not look good.
"I-It's the Crimson Terror!" screamed the terrified Kumo-nin as a red mist and a terrifying cackle filled the air.

"Run, run, run!" sang a light-hearted voice as fear slowly seeped into the platoon of men. "Run as fast as you can or you'll be a dead man!"

Those closest were unable to escape as the mist overtook them. Their screams could be heard as the faint silhouettes were barraged by scattered streaks of light that resembled senbon. Those who were further away didn't meet a kinder fate as a violent glow and a song of a thousand birds chirped behind them.

"S-Sharingan Kakashi!" shouted another before a hand drove through three men, killing. The last thing the man in front saw was a glaring mismatch of eyes.

"He's open!" shouted another Kumo-nin in an attempt to take advantage of Kakashi's exposed state. However, before anyone could the small auburn-haired girl showed up and let out a stream of lightning release chakra to paralyze the hopeful Kumo-nins.

"Ah, ah, ah!" giggled at the girl with a waggle of her finger. "That's not playing fair."

"H-how is any of this fair?" stuttered out their paralyzed opponents.

"True," drawled the girl playfully as she squatted down to their eye-level. "How about I even up the stakes?"

"W-what?" said the other in disbelief.

"Kasa, quit fooling around," reprimanded Kakashi as he pulled his arm out of the chests of the three men.

"Oh, have a heart," whined the girl with a pout. Kakashi gave her a dully gaze before turning away.

"Do what you want," droned the silver-haired man as he walked off.

"Really? Yays!" cheered the girl as she waved to him. "Thank you Kakashi! I'll be done soon okay?"

Without a word, Kakashi left the remaining Kumo-nin to the girl and walked off on his own. He ignored the screams and continued on until there was silence. It wasn't until he pressed his back against one of the many surrounding rock formations that he allowed himself to let out an exhausted sigh. Tiredly, he pulled the hitai-ate down to cover his sharingan before tugging up the mic to his mask-covered face.

"Northeast 44 cleared," murmured Kakashi wearily as he slunk down to the ground.

"Kakashi? You okay?" came Obito's concerned voice over the shared frequency.

"I'll be fine in a bit," said Kakashi as he popped a handful of soldier pills into his mouth. "Rendezvous at——"

He didn't get to finish as radio cut out. Kakashi gave another sigh as he pinched the bridge of his nose to ward off an oncoming headache.
"Aren't you a pathetic sight," drawled Kasa's cheerful voice as she strolled by, drenched in blood.

"Why are you still here?" sighed Kakashi and glanced over at the corner of his eye.

"Aw, don't be like that. Don't you miss me?" chirped the girl cutely with a slight tilt to her head.

"...It's really creepy how well you can imitate her," came Tobi's serious tone through a distortion in the air before the former Uchiha materialized in front of him.

"Yo," greeted Kakashi lazily as he rested his head back against the rock formation.

"Heya, I'll leave him to you Obito!" cheered the Kasa clone before she gave a playful salute and disappeared with a poof.

Kakashi bit back a groan as the memories from the shadow clone that just dispersed flooded his mind.

"At this rate, I'm not sure which one of you need Inoichi more," droned Tobi as he crossed his arms. "You can't keep this up forever."

"Someone needs to maintain her reputation," murmured Kakashi as he pressed a hand against his head. "Otherwise it'll raise suspicion."

"If you continue like this, you're going to kill yourself," warned Tobi.

"I'm not abandoning her," rebuked the silver-haired jounin. "One day, she'll wake up and that reputation will be what keeps her alive on the field."

"Sensei's kid is going to graduate soon," continued Tobi as he decided to go on a different tangent. "Don't you think it's time for you to retire from anbu and start training him?"

"Hmph," scoffed Kakashi in amusement. "What makes you think he wants to be trained by the person who took his Sasa-nee away?"

"He's not going to have a choice if you do decide on becoming a jounin sensei," retorted Tobi dryly.

"I'm not exactly sensei material," chuckled Kakashi weakly. "He'd have a better chance with someone else."

"If not you, who else is there that would willingly take him?" scowled Tobi.

"Sorry," apologized Kakashi as he lowered his head. "I can't."

"Fine," sighed Tobi in annoyance before he relinquished his control to Obito.

"Kakashi!" shouted Obito in concern as he took over and hovered over the silver-haired jounin.

At the sight of his friend, Kakashi finally relaxed and dropped to unconsciousness due to chakra exhaustion. With one anbu mission after another, on top of impersonating Kasa while doing so had left a horrible drain on his chakra and his body.

In order to pull off the façade properly, he developed a number of jutsus to imitate the auburn-hair girl's attacks. Unlike her and her fellow iryo-nins, he couldn't use iryo-ninjutsu with the same caliber. He developed Chidori Current in place of her overcharged Defibrillation Jutsu and Chidori senbon for her chakra senbon and scalpels. Derivatives of Chidori were considerably easier to use and less chakra consuming compared to the iryo-ninjutsu variation.
Unfortunately, when used in conjunction with a Shadow Clone under a Transformation Jutsu, chakra exhaustion was a common outcome. He lost count how many times Obito or Tobi had to swoop in with the use of Kamui to get him to safety. This time was no different and he found himself dragged back to the village by the former Uchiha.

If given the chance, his friend and teammate would ship him off directly to the hospital and into Rin's care, but as anbu, they all need to report back to the hokage first. In short of a life threatening situation, no one was exempted from the rule. Even so, Obito was reluctant to leave Kakashi to retrieve Rin for the inevitable second collapse from chakra exhaustion.

"It'll take a bit to report everything," waved off Kakashi tiredly. "Just go."

"Are you sure?" asked Obito once more.

"Go," said Kakashi firmly before the other finally left.

In actuality, the report took no more than fifteen minutes to give and he was long gone before Obito manage to get back with Rin in tow. However, before he could escape to the safety of his own home a certain Nara waited pointedly for him at the end of the hall to the hokage's office with his arms crossed and his back leaned into the shadows of the wall.

"Shikaku-san," greeted Kakashi tiredly as he glanced towards the head jounin commander.

"It's exhausting to look at you," commented Shikaku pointedly.

"Hmph," scoffed Kakashi as he glanced away.

"Come over for dinner, you could use a home-cooked meal for a change," said Shikaku offhandedly as he pushed off without waiting for a response.

Kakashi kept his aloof exterior as he left in turn. It must be serious if the Nara wanted a private word with him. The only respite he had was that Obito and Rin were unlikely search the Nara residence for him. With any luck, he could escape back home without being found by either of them once his talk with Shikaku was finished.

What he didn't expect to see at the Nara household was Tsume Inuzuka.

"Shikaku, you really want to get one of Minato's brats involved?" scoffed the feral looking woman as she gave him a speculative glance.

"What is this about Shikaku-san?" droned Kakashi as he glanced to the older man.

"What do you know about the Hokage candidacy?" asked Shikaku with a tired exhalation.

"…Who was chosen?" asked Kakashi with furrowed brows as he jumped straight to the point. It was obvious that neither the Nara head nor the Inuzuka head were happy with the chosen candidate.

"Itachi Uchiha," replied Tsume bluntly.

"…Itachi?" repeated Kakashi in surprise and disbelief. "He didn't even want to lead his own clan, what makes Hokage-sama think the kid would be able to lead a village? Besides, isn't he too young?"

"Hmph," snorted Tsume, unamused by the obvious conclusion.

"Our current hokage assumed the position when he was about Itachi's age," droned Shikaku. "It was
likely he saw something in Itachi that reminded him of himself and after the Uchiha Massacre, this was a means to unite the remainder of the Uchihas."

"The man has gone senile," scowled Tsume with her arms crossed. "There's no way the Uchiha kid could handle the position. The current succession tradition needs to stop here."

"...What are you suggesting as an alternative?" asked Kakashi as caution and doubt started to seep into his mind. They couldn't possibly be suggesting what he thinks they're suggesting, could they?

"We're not staging a coup d'état," droned Shikaku with disinterest. "Konoha won't benefit from an internal conflict. The reason why we're doing so well right now is because of Kiri's inability to handle their inner politics."

"Then what exactly do you want to talk to me about?" asked Kakashi with a frown. It wasn't like he could change Hiruzen's decision if he decided on Itachi.

"Tsume suggested a vote among the serving jounins as the new succession process," continued Shikaku with another exasperated sigh. "This decision cannot be forced. Without Hokage-sama's approval, this is nothing in short of mutiny and at the moment, there's not enough support for us to persuade him for the change."

"And?" asked Kakashi, still uncertain to where this conversation was going.

"Among the active shinobi, you have garnered the respect of a large number of people," continued Shikaku. "I thought it's best to keep you updated and aware of the on goings in the village since you've been absent quite frequently as of late due to mission. You'll likely get involved sooner or later, but at least you'll be aware of the situation."

"...That's it?" said Kakashi, puzzled by the lack of involvement the Nara wanted him to partake in.

"I really don't see why you have to keep him informed," grumbled Tsume with a huff.

"The title of Hokage isn't the only position that needs to be filled," replied Shikaku offhandedly.

Tsume raised a brow at that comment and gave Kakashi another passing glance.

"If there's nothing else," said Kakashi as he casually moved to leave. "I have an irate iryo-nin to avoid."

Ironically, the best way to avoid Rin from finding him was to hide in the hospital and in turn Kakashi developed a nearly religious habit in visiting Kasa whenever he was in Konoha. With the auburn-haired girl still comatose, it was disheartening to see her.

"Hey," greeted Kakashi with a tired grin as he plopped down in the seat next to her bed. "Looks like I'm hanging out with you for a bit until Rin finds me."

As usual, the girl remain silent and seemingly asleep as he held his one-sided conversation. He lost count ages ago on how many times he done so, but it was a comforting routine. The quiet room, his unconscious subordinate, the sprig of blue flowers in a vase, the smell of antiseptic... He felt his eye grow heavy as it threatened to drift close, but before he could do so an irate voice called out from the door.

"Kakashi," sighed Rin in irritation when she finally made her way back to Kasa's room and spotted him in his usual seat.
"Yo," greeted Kakashi offhandedly with a light-hearted tone.

"Why do you have to make it such a hassle every time?" huffed Rin in annoyance as she grabbed him by the shoulder and began a diagnostic jutsu over him.

"You know I will end up here sooner or later," retorted Kakashi wryly. "So how exactly is that a hassle?"

"Don't give me that wise-ass," huffed Rin. "If I sat here and waited for you, you'll just decide to stay home and not come."

"Touché," agreed Kakashi as his eyes drifted back to Kasa once more. "Any improvements with Kasa?"

"…No," murmured Rin quietly as the steam from her previous bout with Kakashi dispersed. "There are no changes to her condition."

"I see," said Kakashi quietly before he turn his attention to the side-table next to the bed.

"Kasa's popular isn't she?" commented Rin when she noticed him picking up an armband from the modest pile.

"…Why is there a combat medic band here?" asked Kakashi with a frown as he fingered the cloth suspiciously. "That division only started last year. Kasa shouldn't have one."

"It's a tribute," noted Rin offhandedly.

"Tribute?" repeated Kakashi curiously as he glanced towards her.

"If she didn't teach at the Academy, the division wouldn't have existed," explained Rin. "The design on the band is from one of her students."

"Hmm?" hummed Kakashi as he studied the stitched design on the dark blue band. The word medic was stitched in red with a black background. Encircling the word were two protruding bunny ears, one stood straight up and the other hung lopsided. The characters for combat looked absurd beneath the almost adorable design. "…They have her sense of humor I suppose."

"Humor?" asked Rin in puzzlement.

"The Combat Medic Division is known for their ruthlessness," replied Kakashi as he flicked the armband back onto the side-table. "Nowhere close to Kasa's reputation, but enough to make enemies wary if they spotted them. I see why now."

"All done," said Rin as she clapped her hands on his shoulders, but the enthusiasm slipped away as gripped his shirt lightly. "You really can't keep doing this Kakashi. You're going to get yourself killed one of these days."

"You worry too much," said Kakashi with a light-hearted grin.

"…She'd want you to live for yourself, you know," said Rin.

"Rin, you're such a sap," said the silver-haired jounin as he gently peeled her fingers from his shoulders.

"Just… be careful okay? Stop being so reckless," sighed Rin as she backed off.
"Rin," started Kakashi, but he wasn't able to finish as the door opened and he spotted the familiar
anbu uniform and wolf mask. "Itachi."

"Captain," greeted the Uchiha in turn.

"Looks like my time here is over," said Kakashi in amusement as he clapped his hands on his knees
and pushed himself up. However, before he could move to leave, he noticed the furrowed brows and
suspicious expression on Itachi's face. "Something wrong?"

"Those flowers," noted Itachi, his eyes still set on the sprig of blue flowers on the side-table.

"Are you jealous?" asked Kakashi in good humor, but it didn't reach his eyes as he met with Itachi's
gaze. The former heir noticed something was amiss, but what?

"Kakashi, stop teasing him," laughed Rin as she slapped his arm playfully before she turned to the
younger boy with a grin. "Don't worry, Kakashi's not that considerate to do something like that.
Hana's the one that's been bringing flowers to Kasa."

"Hana Inuzuka?" asked Itachi without a single change in his expression.

"How many people do you think have access to visiting Kasa?" said Rin in amusement.

"How cruel of you to ruin my fun," said Kakashi in good humor, but his eye was focused on Itachi
who in turn focused on him. "I'll see you around."

"Likewise," agreed Itachi before the silver-haired jounin left.

Kakashi had every intention in sneaking back home and hide from the world the moment he left the
hospital. Unfortunately, it was as though the universe was against him and he found himself assault
by one confrontation after another. At the sight of Gai running towards him with his usual
enthusiasm, Kakashi quickly decided it was time he hid himself away and disappeared with a quick
body flicker.

"You can run my eternal rival! But you cannot hide!" shouted Gai as he gave chase to the silver-
haired jounin.

It took nearly a good portion of the day for him to finally escape the green-cladded jounin.
Unfortunately, when he finally managed to make his way back home, he found a small Root
operative sitting in wait by the window with a book in hand. He had to fight back an annoyed groan
as he closed the door behind him.

"I just want to sleep," grumbled Kakashi in exhaustion as he approached the other.

"Good evening Daddy," greeted the young Root operative.

"What?" said Kakashi with a confused frown.

"It's a term of endearment is it not?" asked the young man as he held up the book in his hand. "That's
what the woman called the man she is fond of even though he's not her fa—"

"No," said Kakashi as he snatched the book from his hand. "What are you doing here?"

"I only wish to have a positive first impression with Commander Itachi's senpai," explained the child
in a polite manner, contrasting the absurd greeting he gave just a moment ago. "He instructed me to
request an audience with you at your earliest convenience."
"For what reason?" asked Kakashi.

"He said he will disclose the details once you've meet with him," replied the other.

"Such a bold request," drawled Kakashi, unamused as he rested his hands on his open windows and towered over the boy. "Relay this message for me."

"Yes sir," replied the boy obediently without an ounce of trepidation in his voice.

"My earliest convenience is not for him to command," stated Kakashi with a cold glance.

"Is that all sir?" asked the boy with a tilt of his head. "Can I be of any further assistance?"

"Yes," replied Kakashi bluntly. "Get out."

"Have I done something displeasing?" stated the boy in puzzlement. "You're peeved with me."

"Don't you know it's rude to bother someone when they're exhausted and desperate for sleep?" droned Kakashi.

"Ah," said the boy in understanding as he shifted his weight backwards towards the open window. "My apologies, please have a restful sleep."

With that, the Root operative disappeared and Kakashi closed his window with much annoyance before finally crashing into his bed for his much needed sleep.

If given the choice, Kakashi would spend the remainder of his time in the village avoiding any more visitors. However, that was taken from him the moment Obito hunted him down after hiding for a week straight.

"Where the hell have you been? Do you know I've been looking all over the place for you?" groused Obito. "Because of you, he made me become a jounin sensei!"

"Him?" repeated Kakashi before he realized that his teammate meant Tobi. "Why would he do that?"

"Because if it's not you, no one else is trustworthy enough to do the job," grumbled Obito.

"And you are?" said Kakashi with a raised brow.

"Hey! What's that supposed to mean?" growled Obito.

"Those poor kids," mused Kakashi offhandedly.

"You colossal ass," grumbled Obito as he crossed his arms.

"Aside from Naruto, who else is going to be subjected to your torture?" asked Kakashi in good humor.

"Sasuke and that Sakura girl," noted Obito with obvious irritation at his teammate.

"How did you manage that?" asked Kakashi in surprise. "The Combat Medic Division likely have their eyes on them."

"Like hell I know," said Obito with a shrug. "He took over for the most part... though, I guess Itachi might've lent a hand in it too."
Kakashi raised a brow at that, but Obito could give no further explanation beyond another shrug.

"When are you meeting them?" asked Kakashi.


"What time?" continued Kakashi curiously.

"Uh… noon?" said Obito with uncertainty.

"Don't graduation orientation normally end around nine?" noted Kakashi.

"…" Obito fell silent for a moment before his eyes widened in panic. "SHIT! I'M LATE!"

With that, the former Uchiha disappeared in a swirl of leaves as he rushed back to the Academy. One would think Kakashi would get a moment of respite with him gone, but that was not the case.

"You can come out Itachi, I know you used Obito in order to find me," droned Kakashi as he turned around.

"Captain, I need your assistance," said Itachi without ceremony the moment he appeared.

"…You really don't waste time do you?" sighed Kakashi.

"I would not trouble you if I thought I could handle the matter on my own," admitted the Uchiha.

"Does it have anything to do with that rather rude request you made last week?" drawled Kakashi dully.

"If you were offended that I did not approach you personally, I apologize," said Itachi, dipping his head briefly before he glanced up at him. "However, this concerns the matter of village security."

"Security?" frowned Kakashi. "We're compromised? How badly?"

"At the moment, I'm not certain how far the breech is, but the hospital is definitely one of the locations," noted Itachi and immediately, Kakashi's mind darted back to a week ago when he last saw him.

"…Are they after Kasa?" asked Kakashi.

"Possibly," said Itachi.

"Any suspects?" pressed Kakashi with a frown.

"At the moment, Hana Inuzuka is high on the list," replied Itachi.

"All because she brought Kasa flowers?" asked Kakashi with a raised brow.

"Have you noticed what type of flower she's been getting?" asked Itachi.

"Ikebana is not my strong suit," noted Kakashi with a frown. "But the flower she brought in…"

"Forget-me-nots," stated Itachi. "It's unlikely her interest in ikebana is any higher than Kasa's. Both of them showed disinterest in the matter while we were in the Academy."

"Then what is so suspicious about the flower?" asked Kakashi.
"It's Shisui's flower," said Itachi.

"Shisui's… what?" said Kakashi in disbelief.

"He has these planted all over his house since we were children," explained Itachi.

"Any particular reason?" asked Kakashi with a frown.

"I suppose… he's afraid to be forgotten," theorized Itachi. "...There was an old practice in the Uchiha Clan. Children of similar ages were often paired up to encourage a close friendship. All Uchihas have the potential to develop something called the Magenkyo Sharingan that will allow them access to a higher level of genjutsus."

"And?" A sense of dread dropped into the pit of Kakashi's stomach.

"However, in order for that to happen… you would have to kill your best friend... Or so the clan scriptures says," noted Itachi almost mechanically. "Both Shisui and I developed the Magenkyo through witnessing Kasa's demise on two separate occasions. Safe to say it's not the act of killing, but the grief of loss that triggers the change, but I'm digressing."

"What?" said Kakashi as disbelief crossed his face.

"The point is," continued Itachi. "Shisui would never allow himself to be forgotten even if it concerns his own safety and in this village the people he's close to are rather limited."

"Rather prideful, wouldn't you say?" commented Kakashi.

"It's an Uchiha failing," agreed Itachi with a nod. "Which is why I would like your assistance. There aren't many at a level that could counter the Magenkyo."

"I see…" murmured Kakashi.

"Will you help me?" asked Itachi.

In the back of his mind, he could faintly recall the conversation he shared with Shikaku and Tsume regarding to Itachi's nomination and sudden rise through the ranks. Even so, he couldn't ignore the existence of the security breech. Be it Shisui or someone else, the safety of the village took priority. He assisted Itachi as the Uchiha requested and sent out Pakkun and his other summons as a means to track Hana's actions without her or her partners finding out.

His role was to provide assistance in the shadows without the girl's realization. They didn't find Shisui but the girl was arrested nonetheless for consorting and assisting a known missing-nin. Itachi and his Root operatives proceeded with the actual detainment, but Kakashi felt unease wash over him as the girl screamed in indignation that she wasn't a traitor. Even as she was dragged away in restraints she wouldn't stop throwing her accusations at Itachi.

"Don't give me that nonsense!" snapped Hana as she was dragged away. "As if you care about Konoha! You selfish emotionless psychopath!"

"It doesn't change the fact you've conspired with a known traitor," continued Itachi calmly.

"What?" hissed Hana. "After all he's done, after all he's sacrificed for you!"

"A traitor is a traitor, regardless what he merits he's done prior to it," finished Itachi as he motioned for his men to take her away.
"Shisui's a thousand times better than you!" snapped Hana. "Kasa deserves better!"

Itachi waited until she was long gone before he made his way towards Kakashi and delivered a formal bow.

"My thanks," said Itachi as he straightened his back to meet the man's eye, but the silver-haired jounin's attention was still focused on the direction where Hana was taken towards.

"She seems to favor Shisui quite a bit," commented Kakashi before he turned his attention to the Uchiha.

"She's under the impression that I'm doing this in order to get Kasa," noted Itachi.

"Are you not?" inquired Kakashi.

"This is the matter of village security. Personal vendettas have no place within our duties," replied Itachi smoothly.

"… Aren't you side-stepping the matter?" noted Kakashi with a frown. "Is Hokage-sama even aware of this operation?"

"He will be informed of as well as the Inuzuka Clan, no need to cause pandemonium within the village," answered Itachi.

Kakashi highly doubted this would be kept silent, but he didn't voice his thoughts. No doubt, Tsume would have a fit when she finds out her daughter's been incarcerated in such a manner…. Did he do the right thing in helping Itachi?

As he suspected, Tsume did not take the news well and started an uproar. Itachi’s actions did not sit well with the other clans as they joined the Inuzuka head in protest. Kakashi found himself uncertain of his own actions. What was right, what was wrong? What sort of future was he helping to bring about?

"Hey Kasa," whispered Kakashi as he found himself seeking her silent company once more. "How do you deal with knowing what's to come, when I'm already going mad being in the dark?"

As expected, the girl said nothing, but something different did happen for a change. Her hand… twitched.

"Kasa?" said Kakashi in alarm as he knelt forward hoping to see the girl open her eyes, but to his surprise and amusement he found her fingers slowly curl up one by one until only the middle finger stuck out. He couldn't help the laugh that escaped him as he shoulders shook with mirth. "If you're going to insult me, at least have the decency to do it out loud and awake."

The girl remained silent and the hand slowly uncurled and laid limp against the sheets once more. The smile slowly slipped from his face as he reached out and patted her face in attempts to wake her.

"Rayne?" called out Kakashi with concern.

No response. He patted her face again, but he received the same results. Something was wrong. It was unlike Kasa or Rayne to not follow up on such a crass gesture if it was a joke. Worried, he pulled his hitai-ate up to reveal his sharingan and lifted open one of Kasa's eyes. Rayne might lash out at him for the intrusion, but it hardly mattered against his growing concern. With a burst of chakra, he found himself in a nearly repaired hallway of Kasa's mind.
"…I should really charge you for using us as your verbal diary," rasped Rayne tiredly from behind.

"Rayne what—" He trailed off in horror when he caught sight of her current state.

"What's with that look?" mused Rayne half-heartedly, but the horror didn't fade from Kakashi's face as he rushed over and knelt before her.

"Your body…" whispered Kakashi as he gingered reached out to pull her up from the ground… What's left of her.

"What?" scoffed Rayne. "I always looked like this."

"Missing an arm, a leg and a good half of your face and body?" snapped Kakashi in fury.

"I had to use something to piece back together what's left of Kasa," murmured Rayne as she leaned into Kakashi's hold with a sigh. "Almost done though… not sure if she's going to be all there, but… there should be enough for you to work with."

"If you look like this now, what's going to happen when you're done?" demanded Kakashi.

"What do you think?" drawled Rayne sarcastically. "I'm going to shit rainbows and butterflies with sunshine and daisies."

"Rayne," said Kakashi seriously.

"I'll be gone and you'll have Kasa back and everyone else will be happy," droned Rayne.

"What about you?" asked Kakashi.

"Heh," snorted Rayne. "I exist to make sure Kasa lives… If my disappearance will assure her survival…"

"…This is your goodbye isn't it?" whispered Kakashi quietly.

"Well, it's common courtesy. You know, before you leave, you say good bye?" joked Rayne with a grin tugging at what remained of her lips. "That… and I want to thank you."

"Thank me?" repeated Kakashi in confusion. "For what?"

"For keeping us alive. For keeping her sane," murmured Rayne as her only eye drifted half close. "And… for acknowledging my existence."

"Rayne," protested Kakashi.

"She's might be a little off and a little different from what you remember, but she's still very much the same idiot," continued Rayne, not giving him a moment to cut in any further. "Can I trust you to make sure she stays safe when I'm gone?"

"…When have I not?" murmured Kakashi in reply.

"Hehe, you were always good at keeping your promises," whispered Rayne with a smile. "That's why I love you best."

"…Thanks for all your hard work," whispered Kakashi sullenly. "Rest well."

"See you in the next life," joked Rayne before her remaining eye finally drifted close and the remains
of her body disappeared from his arms.

The moment she disappeared the halls and the ground beneath him shifted and he found himself ejected from the girl's mind. He took a startling breath when his eyes snapped open to the physical world and nearly stumbled into the bed, if not for his quick recovery. As he regained balance, he noticed the small body he hovered over shift in movement and his eyes met with a familiar set of blues.

"Kasa…" breathed Kakashi in relief as the girl's eyes cleared and focused on him.

"…Kakashi?" croaked the girl uncertainly as she looked up at him.

"Welcome back," said Kakashi with barely contained joy as he reached out and brushed back the long red strands from her face. As promised, he'd protect Kasa no matter what.
Rehabilitation was a slow process. Physically, Kasa muscles hasn't atrophied in the last four years, it shouldn't take much training to bring her back to her peak. Mentally was a different story.

"Follow the light," said Rin as she flicked a flashlight over Kasa's blue eyes to check for pupil dilation and response speed.

Kasa did as commanded, but her expression remained lackluster and her movements lethargic. The only sign of her inaction was the slow stiffness of her movements. Rin suspected a side benefit of being a jinchuriki, but it was hardly a point to celebrate. She didn't come out of the coma completely unscathed.

"What's your name?" asked Rin as she went through the basic cognition questions.

...A blank look.

"Do you know where you are?" asked Rin.

...A tired blink.

"How about your age?"

...Nothing.

"What about your rank?"

...Silence.

As happy as Rin was to see Kasa finally awake, it was painful to know the girl was a shadow of her former self. Each question became more disheartening than the last. Beyond saying Kakashi's name when she first woke, she hadn't said a word since.

"How is she?" asked Kakashi once Rin finished her line of questioning.

"Physically, she's fine. Maybe a little stiff, but nothing a little physical conditioning won't fix," replied Rin quietly. Her gaze remained on Kasa worriedly as the girl stared blankly forward.

"And mentally?" questioned Kakashi.

"Since she's unresponsive, it's hard to get a clear evaluation of her mental state," murmured Rin. "However, if we take into consideration that it's only been a couple of hours since she woke up, she might just need some time to gather her thoughts."

"So, this is just temporary?" murmured Kakashi as he stepped in front of Kasa and knelt down to her eye-level.

"Maybe. Maybe not?" said Rin with an uncertain shake of her head. "I'll need a bit more time before —"

"Kasa?" whispered Kakashi in concern as he reached out to brush away the streaming tears down the girl's expressionless face. "What's the matter?"

Rin held back a grimace, fully expecting the girl to remain unresponsive. However, to her surprise,
she responded slowly with a voice hoarse from disuse.

"...Sad," whispered Kasa as she lifted her gaze to Kakashi.

"What are you sad about?" continued Kakashi gently.

"Something's..." rasped the girl with difficulty as she pressed a hand to her chest. Her brows furrowed in confusion as though she was trying to find something, but couldn't. "...Gone?"

To Rin or anyone else, the auburn-haired girl's words sounded like nonsense, but to Kakashi, as she noticed, it meant something more.

"Gone, but not forgotten," said Kakashi solemnly as he cupped her face rubbed away the last of her tears.

"...Promise?" murmured Kasa, confusion still marring her face with a deep frown.

"Always," agreed Kakashi as he tucked the loose strands of hair behind her ear. In the four years she slept, her hair had grown to her waist.

"...Strange," murmured Rin thoughtfully as she glanced between her silver-haired teammate and the auburn-haired girl.

"What's strange?" asked Kakashi with a glance back to her.

"Could you ask her the questions I gave a while ago?" asked Rin as she positioned herself next to Kakashi at the girl's eye-level.

"Why?" frowned Kakashi. "I thought you said—"

"It's just a hunch," replied Rin.

The silver-haired jounin was skeptical, but decided to humor her request.

"Kasa, do you know where you are?" asked Kakashi quietly.

"...Konoha...hospital." Her replied was slow, but clear.

"What's your rank?" continued Kakashi, surprise barely concealed on his face.

"...Toku...betsu...jounin..." answered the girl once more.

He continued asking one question after the next. Kasa's answers were slow and strained, but she still made the effort to answer. Rin attempted to question her halfway through, but the girl became unresponsive. Yet, when Kakashi resumed his questioning, she responded.

"You must be close," murmured Rin.

"What do you mean?" asked Kakashi.

"She responds to you," replied the iroyo-nin with a thoughtful look. "Not sure if you're the only one, but until everyone else return from their missions, we can't test out that theory."

"Right, everyone are on missions now," noted Kakashi.

After Naruto and Sasuke graduated, their mothers decided to return to active service. Obito had taken
the boys and Sakura on a mission and wouldn't be back for quiet some time. Tesuri on the other hand
was on the field training the new batch of Combat Medic Corp hopefuls.

"It's probably for the best," murmured Rin as she gazed at Kasa pitifully. "It would be painful for
them to see her like this…"

Knock-Knock

The two turned as the door opened to reveal Inoichi.

"Inoichi-san," greeted Rin politely as he entered.

"I came as soon as I heard," replied the man as he closed the door behind him. "How is she?"

"Unresponsive… except towards Kakashi," answered Rin with furrowed brows. "Would that be a
problem for her mental evaluation?"

"You say she responds to Kakashi?" said Inoichi in surprise as he glanced to the man in question.

"Kasa," said the silver-haired jounin in demonstration and Kasa turned her attention to him.

"Hmm," hummed Inoichi thoughtfully as he made his way to the auburn-haired girl.

Kakashi took a step back for him to get a closer look, but Kasa's gaze remained fixed on him even as
the blond jounin knelt down and lifted her chin to meet her eyes.

"Inoichi-san?" asked Rin.

"The last time I went into Kasa's mind, it was in shambles," explained the man. "Since it's unclear to
how much her mind's recovered, we might meet hostility if we attempt to go in."

"But with Kakashi…" continued Rin as realization slowly sunk in. "Even if her mind is hostile, it
might not attack because of him."

"In theory," agreed Inoichi.

"I'll have the seals and room set up for multiple entry, bring Kasa over in ten minutes," said Rin
before she ran off to grab inkwells and brushes to prep the examination room.

In the years she trained under Kushina, the woman taught her not only how to control and tame the
demonic chakra in her, but also seal work. While she was nowhere near the level of using it in
combat like Kasa or Naruto, Rin was still fully capable of using it for medical purposes. Between
Kushina and what Tesuri learned from his late wife, the two created a number of seals advancing the
medical field in Konoha.

If not for this advancement, the death toll from the war in the last four years would've been much
higher. A blessing at first, but then the Combat Medic Corp quickly found ways to weaponize the
seals. What was meant to heal ended up killing more than it helped. Of course, most of the kills were
the enemy's loss so there were hardly any complaints for such blatant disregard to the healer's code.

"Ready whenever you are," said Rin as she finished the last of the ink-work.

"Kakashi?" said Inoichi as he glanced to the man for confirmation.

The silver-haired jounin said nothing as he kept an arm around Kasa's slumped form and nodded.
Inoichi took a deep breath and shaped his hands into a viewfinder. The moment his chakra pulsed
through the seals, Rin found herself in an unfamiliar mindscape. She fought back a gasp when a barrage of vines with razor sharp ends came flailing towards them.

"Inoichi-san!" shouted Rin in alarm as raised her arms to materialize what chakra she could for defense. However, Kakashi pulled her firmly behind him before she could do so. "What are you—?"

"It's me…" started the silver-haired jounin softly, undeterred by the onslaught of vines coming their way.

"It's not stopping!" said Rin nervously as she and Kakashi dodge the onslaught.

"Kasa, we're not trying to hurt you," shouted Inoichi into the hall dominated by slithering greenery, but his words seemed to have no effect.

"Kasa-chan!" shouted Rin in hopes that maybe the girl would recognize her voice, but no use.

The vines bypassed Kakashi to ensnarl both her and Inoichi. She fought back a whimper as it squeezed the air out of her. Maybe it was a mistake for them to have gone in.

"… Let them go," said Kakashi with quiet determination. "I promised to keep Kasa safe, but I'm no medic. I can't heal her. You know Rin, and you know Inoichi, they won't hurt her."

Rin watched with bated breath as the slithering vines halted and hovered in place, almost as though it was speculative of his words. The silver-haired jounin waited patiently with an outreached hand to show he meant no harm. For a moment, Rin thought his pacifist stance worked, but then the vines whipped up in a frenzy and darted towards him with the sharp edge aimed towards his head.

"Kakashi!" screamed Rin in warning as she watched her teammate remain unmoving at the danger. She clenched her eyes shut, unable to watch him come to harm.

Crack

"Ow…" grumbled Kakashi.

Ow? Rin cautiously peeked her eye open and found her teammate rubbing the side of his face in annoyance. She could see a faint red mark on the skin not covered by the mask. The vines in front of him danced merrily as it curled away its sharp edge to nudge at him playfully.

"Ha-ha," drawled Kakashi dully as lowered his hand to push the vine away. "Can we pass now?"

Rin blinked in surprise as the vine… nuzzled against his open hand. A closer look at Kakashi's face, revealed a solemn expression before the aggressive greenery slowly retreated and cleared the hall.

"Looks like it was a good idea to have you along," sighed Inoichi in relief as he patted Kakashi's shoulder.

"…Yeah," murmured Kakashi as he trudged forward in the lead with Inoichi following suit.

As the vines retreated to the cracked walls, they were finally able to see the state of Kasa's mindscape. Broken ruins went as far as the eyes could see with large sections missing or beyond the state of disrepair. It amazed Rin that Kasa could respond at all with her mind in such a state.

Inoichi made a thorough check of the halls, placing his hand on each door, on each cracked walls as they passed. Rin listened quietly as she memorized as much of his diagnoses as she could. At the corner of her eye, she could see a stoically silent Kakashi as he looked towards the unmoving vines.
"Kakashi?" asked Rin with quiet concern. "Is something wrong?"

"...It's nothing," said Kakashi as he brushed it off. "How's the evaluation going?"

"Don't try to side-step the question," frowned the woman. "You always do this."

"Leave it, you can't help—Kasa?" said Kakashi in confusion.

Rin followed his gaze and spotted the auburn-haired girl sitting in the center of an open area with her arms wrapped around her knees. Her hair draped over her face in an eerie curtain. At the sound of her name, she twitched and slowly lifted her head. The same blank gaze appeared on her face here just as it did outside of her mindscape. However, unlike before, her attention focused on Rin rather than Kakashi.

"...Aren't you supposed to be dead?" asked the girl monotonically.

"Kasa-chan, you changed my fate, remember?" whispered Rin.

"...I did?" said the girl with furrowed brows. "Why would I do that?"

"Because you care," replied Kakashi. "She's not the only person you saved."

"Do I?" murmured Kasa in concentration. "I seem to recall killing a whole lot of people...while laughing..."

"It's an act," continued Kakashi. "You never enjoyed killing any of them."

"How do you know I didn't enjoy it?" asked the girl with a tilt of her head.

"Because that's not who you are," replied Kakashi.

"...You're the sentimental sort aren't you?" noted the girl.

"You are too," countered Kakashi.

"Am I?" mumbled the girl. "That's stupid."

Neither Rin nor Inoichi spoke as Kakashi continued his chilling conversation with Kasa. Each statement the girl made showed the uncaring detachment to her past memories. She remembered a good deal, but despite the memories, she showed no interest. For Rin, it was as though they were talking to someone wearing Kasa's skin. This wasn't the girl they've come to know.

"...Chances are, it's unlikely Kasa will ever be the same as before," said Inoichi grimly once they were out of Kasa's mind and the girl was peacefully sleeping in the next room over. "As of now, her mind is equivalent to a blank slate. While she can still function like any other person, any connections or loyalty she may have had previously is obsolete."

"In other words, she won't see anyone as a friend or foe... that's not necessarily bad is it?" asked Rin.

"It makes her a flight risk," frowned Inoichi. "With no attachments here, what's to keep her from leaving the village and possibly captured by the enemy?"

"She won't be a flight risk if we reestablish those bonds," interrupted Kakashi.

"True..." agreed Inoichi slowly. "But beyond you, she wouldn't react to anyone else."
"We don't know if that's true," reason Kakashi. "Up till now, she's only seen the three of us. It's quite possible she reacted to me because I've spent the most time with her as her anbu captain. I'm sure if she sees others she had more interactions with, she might respond to them too."

"Kakashi might be right," agreed Rin. "But who could we expose her to? Most of the likely candidates are all out of the village at the moment."

"Not all," interrupted Kakashi. "I could think of a few people that might have an effect."

"Who?" asked Rin with a confused frown.

"Her students, her teachers, her teammates," listed off Kakashi. "They might not have interacted with her for as long as I have, but it's worth a shot."

"Are you sure they're in the village?" asked Rin. "All of her students graduated from the Academy already. Her sensei might be on mission and as for her teammates… are you sure you want to trudge up such sensitive memories even with the detachment she feels right now?"

"Would you rather we leave her as she is?" asked Kakashi.

"...I guess it's better than nothing," murmured Rin. "Do you know where to find any of them? For all we know they could be on missions too."

"That could be easily confirmed at the mission's office," supplemented Inoichi.

"Should we bring them here to the hospital or should we take Kasa—" continued Rin, but a sharp raise of Kakashi's hand stopped her. "Something wrong?"

"...Did you hear that?" asked Kakashi with a concentrated frown.

"Hear what?" asked Rin.

"There was a noise from Kasa's room," replied the silver-haired jounin.

"Her room? But she's—" Rin yelped as she slapped a hand to her wrist. "The security seals on her window's disappeared."

Without another word, all three of them rushed over to Kasa's room. As they crashed into the room, the first thing they saw was the open window and the curtain swaying in the wind. Kakashi wasted no time as he lifted his hitai-ate to reveal the sharingan hidden beneath it and sped out through the window.

"Kakashi wait!" shouted Rin as she hurried after him.

He was long gone by the time she reached the window. Likely, he went up top for a better view with his sharingan. With how quick and brash her teammate acted, it was unlikely she could catch up to him if she attempt to follow. She gave a deep sigh in frustration, but paused when she spotted something unexpected below her.

"...Kasa-chan?" said the medic in surprise at the small figure walking down the side of the hospital wall.

She hopped over the windowsill and hastily made her way to the smaller girl. While it was amazing the girl managed to get down as far as she did, Rin couldn't let her continue since the girl hadn't used chakra in the last four years.
"Where are you going?" asked Rin once she caught up with Kasa, but the girl gave her no acknowledgment. Instead, she continued to aimlessly walk to the ground. Rin had to grab her before she decided to run off again. "Kasa-chan! You're in a hospital gown! You can't just leave like this!"

The girl stared blankly at her as she gave a weak attempt in tugging her arm free. It didn't take long before she gave up and left her arm limp in Rin's hold.

"Kasa-chan?" said Rin gently as she knelt down to the girl's eye level, hoping to get her to say something in response. What she got was an earful of a low grumbling growl from the girl's stomach. A small grin tugged at the corner of her lip as she clasped Kasa's hand in hers. "Did you leave because you were hungry?"

It was slow and barely noticeable, but she caught a slight dip of the auburn-haired girl's head in a nod. Rin gave a relieved sigh, at least she started to respond to her even if it was in slight body movements.

"Come on, let's get you change you out of that hospital gown and something to eat," said Rin as she gently guided Kasa along.

Kakashi was still nowhere to be seen, but she supposed he'll turn up when he decides to use Pakkun or one of his other tracker dogs. It wasn't hard to find clothes for Kasa, she still had a spare in her old locker. The staff unanimously decided to leave her locker untouched for Tesuri's sake as a silent hope that she would wake up one day.

"It probably smells like it's been in storage for a while… well, it has, but we can get you a fresh set later if you want. What do you feel like eating?" asked Rin casually as she tried to draw the girl into a conversation, but Kasa remained silent even as she lead her out of the hospital.

While she took the girl traversing through the village in hopes to help her recover through exposure, Inoichi went on Rin's behalf to explain the situation to her supervisor. Even with the sudden surge of iryo-nins graduating from the Academy, they were still short-handed more often than not.

"Does my eyes deceive me?" shouted a boisterous voice.

"Oh no," groaned Rin as she pressed a hand against her face when she spotted the green-clad jounin on his hands with an equally green clad student doing the same next to him. Why did they have to run into Gai of all people?

"Why it is Kasa! Kakashi's youthful compan—"

BAM!

Before any of them knew what happened, a small foot lashed out in a side mule-kick, straight into the man's unprotected nether regions. Gai's eyes bulged as he gave a wheezed squeak of pain. Startled, Rin covered her mouth as the auburn-haired girl in front of her slowly pulled her foot back in a controlled manner. If she didn't know any better, she wouldn't have thought Kasa was comatose for four years.

"Gai sensei!" screeched the green clad boy in horror as he abandoned his handstand and ran over to his mentor. The bowl-cut haired jounin somehow managed to retain his balance despite the devastating blow to his person.

"W-What brought on this un-youthful attack?" wheezed Gai, his voice still high from the pain.

"For condoning underage drinking, resulting in alcohol poisoning for a minor," droned the girl.
Rin blinked in surprise at the sound of her voice and abruptly turned her attention to the man in pain. Kasa reacted to Gai? Albeit violently and for a petty reason, but she reacted to him. Besides the one incident where she drank herself into the hospital, Rin couldn't recall Kasa ever seeing Gai. Rin's brows furrowed in thought.

Kakashi's theory might not be correct. If they measured the likeliness of Kasa responding so someone through the amount of interactions they shared, Gai shouldn't be on the list after meeting her only once.

"Kasa sensei! Mercy!" shouted the green clad boy as he darted protectively in front of his sensei with his arms wide open to block off Kasa from approaching Gai.

The girl glanced at him briefly before turning her heel and left. Rin frowned as she hurried after her. She responded to Kakashi, but not to her. Responded to Gai, but neither to Inoichi nor her former student Lee. Kakashi, as her anbu captain, had been with her through countless life or death missions. Gai, in his exuberance, lead to her hospitalization due to alcohol poisoning. As for her, Inoichi and Lee, none of them had anything of particular that stood out.

Could it be? The secret behind to getting her to react was to find someone who's left a deep impression on her? If that's the case…

Rin made sure to keep an eye on Kasa as she raised her hand to her lips and bit down on her thumb. In a practiced motion, she went through a number of hand seals before slamming it down to the ground.

"Summoning jutsu." She whispered before a puff of smoke appeared and a small gecko appeared in front of her.

"Hey Rin! Long time no see!" chirped the small lizard cheerfully.

"Sorry Yamori, I don't have much time, can you do me a favor," said Rin hurriedly as she glanced up to make sure Kasa hadn't gone off too far.

"Aw, all you ever call me for is to pass messages to the kid! Is it too much to ask to be summon for a chat once in a while?" harrumphed the gecko indignantly.

"Yamori," begged Rin before the small summon sighed in defeat.

"Fine, what do you want me to tell him?" huffed Yamori as he plopped down and curled his tail around his face sulkily.

"Can you find out if he's in the village?" asked Rin.

"That's it?" groused the lizard. "Come on!"

"If he's not in the village, it can't be helped," reasoned Rin.

"And if he is?" asked Yamori.

"I need to know where he is," answered Rin.

"Wouldn't it be easier to tell him to come find you?" asked the lizard with a tilt of his head.

"It's not likely he'll be able to move freely if he's in the village," said Rin as she glanced up and noticed Kasa was some distance away. "Please make it quick."
"Don't know what's goin' on, but I gotcha!" said Yamori dutifully before he disappeared in a poof.

"Kasa-chan," shouted Rin.

The moment her summon disappeared, she hastily caught up with the younger girl. In all honesty, if she left her alone, Kasa might've continued to aimlessly wander. She passed a number of restaurants despite of her hunger. Rin continued to ask what she wanted to eat, but again the girl remained silent. It grew worrisome. Did she need to have Kakashi around in order for the girl to actually eat?

Poof!

"Yo!" greeted Yamori cheerily as he reappeared on her shoulder, but paused when he noticed Kasa and fell into a staring contest with the girl. "What'd you do, pick up another stray?"

"She's not a stray and stop staring at her," sighed Rin.

"You tell her to stop starin' first," said Yamori as he fought back the urge to lick his eyes, but eventually gave in when the girl blew a sharp breath into his face. "Dang it! You cheatin' little—"

"Yamori!" chided Rin.

"Argh!" grounded the small lizard as he swiped his tongue over each eye. "He's in the village, but he's not alone."

"That's fine, do you know where he is?" asked Rin as Kasa continued to stare at her summon.

"Not really, but he was tending to a whole lot of flowers," groused Yamori as he turned to glare at the auburn-haired girl.

"Flowers?" asked Rin in surprise.

"Forget-me-nots," replied Yamori. "The house was surrounded by the stuff."

"…I see, thank you for your help," said Rin.

"If you ask me, I say return this brat where you found her," said Yamori as he stuck his tongue out at Kasa. The girl in turn flipped him off with a middle finger with a blank expression.

"Yamori," sighed Rin again.

"I got you, I got you! Later Rin!" said Yamori before he leaned forward to talk to Kasa once more. "And I hope I never see you again brat."

The girl blew another breath into his face before he disappeared in a cursing fit. Rin watched with interest as she picked up another detail to Kasa's condition. While she may not react to most people, she would react to antagonistic jibs. This made her want to test out her theory even more.

"Come on Kasa, there's someone I think you need to meet," said Rin as she gently took hold of the girl's hand and lead her on.

As before, the girl gave no resistance when she tugged her along. If anything, she seemed to take in the surroundings with interest. Maybe the area triggered some memories? Rin wouldn't be surprised if it did. After all, Kasa did spend a lot time here before her coma happened.

"Well, here we are," murmured Rin as she watched Kasa carefully in case it triggered a panic attack. The girl glanced to the flowers briefly, but otherwise seemed disinterested about the house.
"Rin-san, I thought I saw Yamori earlier what…Kasa-san?" said a soft voice in surprise as an ash-haired young man with spectacles appeared. "You're awake?"

"Awake, but not completely herself yet," supplied Rin. "Kabuto, I was hoping to help her recover through exposure to the familiar."

"Ah, so you're thinking of having her see…" trailed off the young man as he glanced to the house. "Not sure if that's the best idea though, considering what happened with the Uchihas."

"Yes, but... Kasa?" Rin snapped her attention to her side when the girl suddenly disappeared. "Where did she... huh?"

Confusion crossed her face when she found a plate of food in place where the girl stood just a moment ago.

"You probably don't have to worry, she swapped herself with one of the plates inside," explained Kabuto.

"What?" said Rin in utter confusion as she looked from the plate to Kabuto once more. "What do you mean she swapped... huh?"

"It's probably easier to show you," said Kabuto sheepishly as he motioned for her to follow.

Confused, Rin allowed herself to be lead into the house by the ash-haired young man. The moment she stepped in, she could smell an aromatic scent in the air. Someone was cooking and she could hear the clattering and sizzling coming from the kitchen. She looked to Kabuto in question, but the young man gave a helpless shrug in response.

"It's a thing he does... a lot," offered Kabuto.

With his answer clarifying nothing and Kasa nowhere in sight, Rin decided to enter the kitchen in search for answers. What she found was Kasa sitting at the table steadily clearing the countless plates around her and neatly stacking them into an impressive tower. At the stove, Itachi was silently cooking away not the least bit startled by the fact that Kasa was awake and eating all of his food.

...Well, she did say she was hungry. However, it hardly explained Itachi's actions. This was Shisui's house and despite what he done to the Uchiha Clan, Itachi didn't seemed bothered by that detail. Rin had expected a negative reaction when she brought Kasa to the house, but like Itachi, she wasn't bothered either.

Idly, Rin wondered if it was sentiment or something else. Either way... it didn't seem like Kasa reacted much to Itachi beyond his food... and here she thought, Itachi would have the best chance since he used to agitate her in the past.

"Is something the matter?" asked Itachi as he continued to cook.

"...You do know Kasa's awake and eating all your food." started Rin.

"So, she is," murmured Itachi. "But she's always done that even before her coma. This isn't surprising."

"And you don't find her awake, odd?" asked Rin with furrowed brows.

"I figured it was only a matter of time before she woke, she's always been stubborn about staying down," replied Itachi casually as he tossed the contents in his wok with a casual flick of his wrist.
Rin fell silent, at a loss for words with only the sound of Itachi's cooking and the clattering of each plate Kasa finished. She had no clue what to think anymore.
Ever since I woke up, I've been bombarded by a bunch of people who I'm fairly sure aren't real... One side of my mind suggested I was hallucinating and I should worry for my sanity. It also suggested I pretend none of them existed. As long as I didn't respond to the hallucinations, I should be fine... Except I've already responded to one and they know I can hear them... Fuck.

The other side, suggested these were real people and I probably shouldn't kick them in the balls even if they deserved it. It even supplemented its argument with what seemed like broken snippets of memories... or were they hallucinations too? Ugh, I wish I knew what was going on. My mind felt like a jumbled mess as though it was a computer with corrupted data.

Oh god, I'm not going get the blue screen of death am I?

...Well, at least the food's good... Even if my company consists of a dead person, a soon to be dead clan-killer and lastly, the king of identity-crisis. Speaking of which, who am I again? I know I told them my name was Kasa and a number of other things, but somehow it felt off... Like it's not completely me. Maybe it's an alias? Do kids get aliases?

I look like one... I think? Or maybe I'm just really short.

The clan-killer seemed pretty tall and there was a vague memory of not being interested in him because it would be... cradle robbing? Gods, how old am I? Better yet, how come the only things I could remember clearly were related to combat and potential threats?

...And why were there cows in my arsenal of tricks? I have to say the explosive was rather funny and embarrassing to face for an enemy, but still... cows? Why cows?

"Kasa, are you full?" asked Rin, her words pulled me out of my thoughts.

I blinked slowly as the multiple towers of plates in front of me came into focus. Holy shit, how much did I eat? Two, four... should I even attempt to count? And... didn't I just wake up from a coma? Shouldn't I be on a liquid diet or something to ease me back to solids? I don't feel any stomach pains... or was that going to come later? I am so not looking forward to worshipping the porcelain god later.

Poke.

"You're thinking too much again," said Itachi with his two fingers pushing my head back so our eyes would meet.

...What a rude condescending asshole. Who does he think he is to touch me as though we're friends? And for the record, what friend pokes someone's forehead like they're squashing an insect? Has no one taught this prick any manners? Or should I have expected this from a clan-killer?

Never mind, just ignore him. As long as I keep up the charades of ignoring their existence, the only one I potentially have to deal with was Kakashi. At least he treated me like a person.

"Speechless? How unlike you," commented Itachi as he pulled back.

I dropped my head back to its original position with hair draping over my face. Pointedly, I ignored...
him as I stared blankly ahead. I'll break his fucking fingers next time if he dares touch me again…
Right after I get rid of the urge to scratch my nose because of all this hair. How fucking long did I sleep for it to grow this damn long?

Annoyed, I grabbed a clean pair of chopsticks. Rin and Itachi's chatter stopped, their attention turned to me as a gathered the annoyingly long locks. In what seemed like forever and a half, I twisted the hair until it became a messy bun. By the time I stabbed the chopsticks to secure it in place, my arm felt tired from the effort.

"Kasa, chopsticks are for eating, not accessorizing," noted the Uchiha.

Well, screw you asshole! You have a hair-tie.

"I think her hair's bothering her," suggested Rin.

"Then cut it," continued Itachi.

I swear, if he comes near me with something sharp and pointy, it's going find a home in a place the sun never shines. Unnervingly, the Uchiha glanced to me with the corner of his lip twitching upwards. What the hell was he smiling about?

"You're leaking killing intent," drawled Itachi in amusement. "Glad to see you're the same as ever."

"What?" said Rin in surprise as she glanced between the two of us.

"She's doing her best to reign it in," said Itachi as he folded his arms on the table. "I'm surprised she managed to keep a straight face for this long."

Thwack!

I blinked in surprise when Kabuto suddenly smacked Itachi upside the head. The teen braced himself in what seemed like a practiced motion to keep himself from toppling over. He barely gave the assault a second thought as he corrected his posture and rubbed the back of his head where Kabuto smacked him.

"Stop antagonizing her," said the ash-grey haired medic as he towered over the Uchiha in annoyance. "Honestly, you have less tact than Sai sometimes!"

"Kabuto, what did I say about abusing your patient!" chided Rin.

"Normally, I would agree with you, but Itachi's an exception," replied Kabuto with a huff as he glared down at the nonchalant Uchiha. "He may be one of the most talented shinobi of his era, but he's still a petulant child when it comes to listening to medical advice."

…Pft, petulant? That's a new one, err… I think?

As amusing as it was to watch Itachi get slapped upside the head, the novelty quickly wore off. Hard to stay amused when people talk in front of your face as if you're not there.

"Can you think of anyone else she would possibly react to?" asked Rin as she glanced towards me worrily. "I thought for certain you would be able to draw out a reaction. Between her familiarity with you and how much you agitate her on a regular basis…"

"In other words, you expected her to attack me," retorted Itachi dryly. "What do you hope to get from her attacking me?"
"A confirmation," answered Rin with a grimace. "With how fragile her mind is now, she needs people she can turn to if Kakashi's not here."

"I don't believe fragile would be the correct word to use for her," droned Itachi in dryly before his tone turned curious. "And what is this about the captain?"

"At the moment, he's the only one she responds to positively," explained Rin. "Gai got a response too, but it wasn't exactly pleasant for him."

"I see why you're surprised when my presence incited nothing from her," said Itachi as a thoughtful expression crossed his face. "Hmm… someone who can incite a reaction…"

"Does anyone come to mind?" asked Rin.

"If she hadn't responded to me, I doubt Kotestu and Izumo could either," noted Itachi as he continued down his mental list. "She worked with Muta and Zaji for a while, but she was closer to Shisui while on that team. As for Hizashi sensei and Kurei sensei, I'm quite sure she's fallen out of contact with them since she joined anbu."

"Is there anyone else?" asked Rin hopefully.

"Among her students… maybe that Sakura girl could get a reaction, but she's on mission with Sasuke and Naruto and won't be back for a couple of weeks. As far as I know, Tesuri-san, Kushina-san and my mother are also out of the village," noted Itachi as he rummaged through his thoughts some more. "The only other people I could think that could possibly interest her… might be Tenzo, but he's on guard duty at the moment."

"He's guarding Hana Inuzuka, if I recall correctly," frowned Rin thoughtfully. "If she hadn't conspired with Shisui, she might've been a good candidate to help Kasa."

I blinked and glanced towards Rin in surprise. Hana's in jail? When did that happen? Why did it happen? She's part of the Inuzuka Clan, loyalty above all else was their clan motto, wasn't it? So why…

"She still might," commented Itachi before I noticed his attention on me.

"What do you mean?" asked Rin.

"Hana Inuzuka was her best friend long before she became friends with either me or Shisui," explained Itachi. "Wouldn't you be upset to find out your best friend betrayed you and the village with the very person who placed you in a coma?"

Wait, Hana's my best friend? And Shisui's a traitor that placed me in a coma? Shouldn't he be dead? That could explain why Itachi's here… but at the same time why would she be in cahoots with Shisui? What motive does either of them have to do this? None of this made sense. The thoughts continued to fester in my mind to the point I hadn't noticed the frown that crossed my face.

"Itachi, stop irritating Kasa," warned Kabuto. "You're not doing her any favors be inciting a negative response."

"I'm hardly at fault for her poor temper," commented Itachi offhandedly.

"…May I see Hana?" I rasped out politely, if only to spite the asshole. Though, the surprise on all their faces was more pleasant than I expected.
"Kasa?" said Rin in startle as she turned to me.

"…I would like to see Hana, please." I repeated this time more firmly as I slowly regained my voice.

Due to Hana being a political prisoner for one reason or another, the number of visitors that could actually see her was limited… Unless you were Itachi.

"No one would have protested if you brought Rin-san in as well," commented Kabuto as we followed Itachi down the dark corridor to where Hana was kept prisoner.

"I know," replied Itachi nonchalantly without a care.

"Why didn't you?" frowned Kabuto.

"She was annoying," said the Uchiha bluntly.

…Wasn't he pleasant? Not. Then again, I really shouldn't expect anything different from the guy who tortured his little brother all in the name of keeping him safe… Why do people like him again?

The conversation between Itachi and Kabuto was short-lived, but I didn't bother listening. I was far more interested in the layout and design of the prison. Who would've thought, the depths of the Forest of Death, there was a prison deep inside? I supposed, it would be a bitch to attempt prison break. One hellhole to another, literally.

"…What do you want Uchiha?" growled the young woman behind the seal-laced prison bars. "Here to gloat over your victory again?"

"Hardly, I have better things to do than to entertain a love-sick traitor," droned Itachi, ignoring the venom in her voice. "You have a visitor."

By the sound of their exchange, one doesn't need to be a genius to guess neither of them got along well. Though… he said something about her being a love-sick traitor?

"Visitor?" scowled the woman as she turned her attention to him, but the moment she caught sight of me, the expression all but disappeared as she pounced to her feet and grabbed onto the bars. "Kasa? Is that… you?"

I said nothing as I walked over to the bars and glanced up to her. She reached out a cupped a hand to my face as though she was uncertain if I was real. Her touch was gentle, but her hand was icy cold. I found myself pulled against the bars uncomfortably in a tight hug. Idly, I couldn't help but notice how much she towered over me. Damn… was everyone taller than me? This height thing really sucks.

"Thank god, you're finally awake," whispered Hana.

"She said she wanted to see you," continued Itachi offhandedly.

"Don't think this changes anything," retorted Hana as she pulled away enough to shoot him another glare.

"Of course not," agreed Itachi. "Kasa's awakening won't change your situation."

"Just like it won't change the fact you're a selfish arrogant prick!" snapped Hana.

"Reverting to name calling again?" droned Itachi dully. "How childish."
"At least a child knows how to be human," retorted the Inuzuka girl. "Were you ever one?"

Insults, barbs... How on earth did I get stuck between two squabbling... what are they? Teenagers? Young adults? I pressed a hand against my head as a dull ache pounded steadily through my skull. Between Hana's supposed conspiracy with a known traitor and Itachi's current non-clan killer status, I'm not sure what the hell was going on.

"Kasa, are you okay?" questioned Kabuto in concern before the other two fell silent.

"I've heard enough." I rasped out lowly as I pulled away from Hana's hold.

"Kasa?" called out the Inuzuka young woman carefully.

"Honestly, how old are you two to be bickering like children fighting over a toy?" I grumbled as I pushed my bangs back to glare at them with a scowl.

"...Kasa?" said Itachi, a frown marred his face as his brows furrowed.

"Not another word from you." I cut him off. "If I recall correctly, I asked to see Hana, not listen to the two of you argue!"

Itachi clicked his teeth shut and fell silent.

"Thank you." I huffed in annoyance before turning my heel to face Hana once more. "Now, how have you been Hana? Aside from the... imprisonment."

"Um... fine?" offered Hana awkwardly as she stared down at me. "And... you?"

"Good, if only everyone would stop treating me as though I'm a child or pet." I droned in distaste. "Contrary to what they believe, I'm not a vegetable. I can very well understand them while they're talking about me in front of my face."

"Then... why didn't you tell them?" asked Hana curiously.

"Because they're total utter asses." I replied bluntly.

"You...pft," snorted Hana as she covered her mouth with mirth clear on her face.

"What, am I wrong?" I frowned, but that only made her laugh even harder.

I can't say I contributed much in conversation, but Hana had no qualms in informing me of what happened while I was comatose. Out of everything she said, I probably understood less than half, but I nodded anyway. Despite her imprisonment situation, her company was far the most pleasant next to Kakashi.

While both of them smothered me in an almost suffocating manner, they at least did it out of concern. Everyone else either treated me as though I was brain-dead child or stupid pet. Itachi watched in silence as he kept a close eye on Hana as we spoke. I should probably find out what happened between them to cause such hostility.

"Sorry to interrupt, Kasa," started a bear-masked anbu operative as he slipped from the shadows. "But a matter's come up that requires Itachi's attention."

"Then by all means take him." I replied with a shrug. It's strange... regardless how flippant I acted or how openly I disregarded Itachi's authority, he never did anything about it. "I can do without his chaperoning."
"Kasa," said the anbu exasperatedly.

"She knows what you meant, Tenzo," quipped Itachi from his spot against the wall with his arms crossed. "She's just being difficult."

"Well, excuse me for interrupting your date because of my inconsiderate desire to talk to a friend after waking up from a coma for who knows how long." I drawled sarcastically in a breathy tone.

"I see your sense of sarcasm hasn't changed," commented Itachi as he unfolded his arms. "If you wish to visit Hana again, we can come back another time."

"I'd much rather have Hana visit me instead." I retorted. "Her bedside manner is far better than yours."

Itachi said nothing as he gave me a pointed stare. Hana grasped onto my hand and gave me a glance as though to tell me to stop being antagonistic. Even now, he still does nothing. Why wasn't he doing anything?

"Just go Kasa," said Hana quietly as she reluctantly released my hand. "I'll be fine here."

"I'll come visit, promise," I said with a grin and she in turn did the same, though with more reservation.

"I look forward to it," said Hana. She shot a brief glance at Itachi before she turned to walk back to her bedding in the cell.

"Since my visit's been cut short, shall we go?" I drawled with an open flourish of my arm as I turned my heel to face them.

"Always one with the dramatics," commented Itachi offhandedly as he pushed of the side of the wall and turned to lead me down the halls. "I supposed I should be thankful you hadn't taken your performance to the extreme."

"I'd say you're welcome, but I won't mean it." I replied casually in turn, but for some reason Itachi's even pace suddenly slowed to a stop. "What?"

"…To the extreme," repeated the Uchiha as he turned to face me.

"Yes, I heard you the first time." I frowned. "What about it?"

Itachi grew quiet for a moment as if uncertain of what to say next.

"What?" I asked again with a confused tilt of my head.

"It's nothing," said Itachi quietly. His stoic face remained blank as he continued ahead, but somehow I get the feeling my answer upset him… Strange, why would the clan-killer be sad over this?

"Am I missing something?" I asked Kabuto, but the ash-haired medic gave me a fake smile in return.

"I wonder," said Kabuto in a pleasant voice, not answering my question as he hurried after Itachi.

"Yo," I greeted Rin with a wave the next I saw her. The baffled expression that followed was priceless to say the least.

"Kasa?" said the woman in surprise as she glanced towards Itachi in question.
"I told you she was being difficult," noted the Uchiha with a careless wave of his hand.

She turned to me with a baffled expression and I returned it with a sheepish grin. After my visit with Hana, the mind fog abated somewhat and thinking became a little easier. I still couldn't remember everything, but Rin was Kakashi's teammate and as far as I knew, she seemed less likely to screw me over compared to the clan slayer. Even if he seemed sad when we last spoke, I felt more comfortable trusting her than him.

"Sorry." I apologized

"Are you okay now?" asked Rin quietly as she drew closer.

"I'm not sure what okay is." I replied with a shrug. "Memories are bit spotty. Things aren't matching up and honestly... I'm kind of tired."

"Oh," said Rin in surprise as she glanced to Itachi again in question.

"It's as she said, there are blanks in her memory," continued the Uchiha. "There was nothing spectacular to note in her conversation with Hana."

"I see," murmured Rin as she gently pulled me to her side and encouraged me to follow her lead. "It's been a long day, thank you for your assistance Itachi."

"It's no problem," said Itachi quietly. This time he hadn't bothered looking at me as he gave a polite bow to Rin before turning to leave. "If you'll excuse me I have some matters to attend to. I'll have someone escort the both of you."

"No need." The words left my mouth before I could catch myself. "I know the way out."

Itachi paused in mid-step with a sigh. "Kabuto, please see to getting two escorts for them."

"Pft," snorted Kabuto in amusement as he covered his mouth as the Uchiha resumed walking.

"...I definitely missed something." I grumbled under my breath as the ash-haired medic regained his composure.

"Don't worry about it," reassured Kabuto. "He's just upset he embarrassed himself for nothing."

"Embarrassed?" asked Rin curiously.

"What's embarrassing?" I frowned in confusion.

"It's something you'll have to remember for yourself," said Kabuto cheerily. "I rather enjoy seeing how things remain the same despite all the changes."

"What's that supposed to mean?" My frowned deepened, but he smiled and said nothing else in return.

Rin and I ended up with escorts out of the forest... To my surprise, they were rather small. Not small as in we were escorted by a small group. Small as in the two were fairly close to my height. How young did they indoctrinate people into anbu anyway? Well, I supposed pretty young if Itachi managed to become captain at age thirteen.

...Meh, who cares?
"Kasa? Kasa where are you?" shouted Rin frantically as she ran about the village in search for me.

I waited quietly until she long passed my hiding spot before I strolled towards the opposite direction. For a ninja, Rin was a surprisingly easy person to slip away. Who would have thought the classic I need to go to the bathroom excuse would work? But then again, I have the benefit of being underestimated since I'm technically a patient. Either way, I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Hospitals suck and I honestly didn't want to stay any longer than I already have. The psyche evaluations alone was boring enough to sit through. I'm not about to sit through however many physical exams they decide on next. Besides, there was a whole village to explore, people to talk to and houses to loot…

Hmm… maybe not loot. I probably shouldn't treat this like a game, but…

I glanced about the village and took in it low-tech surroundings. It was hard to take this place seriously. There wasn't a single car or noteworthy tech as far as the eye could see. There were what seemed like phone poles with various lines going from one house to another, but it didn't seem like there were landlines anywhere. If anything, those were more likely lines for electricity instead.

The lack of concrete and pavement made it seem unwise to have lines running beneath the ground. Not sure how advance their technology was, but I could imagine a nasty electrocution if they decided run lines without proper insulation materials. Aside from lights the only other thing out in the open I could see as anything remotely technological were the tub-fridges sitting outside of the convenience stores for ice cream.

"Kasa!" shouted Rin from a block over.

"She's persistent." I grumbled under my breath as I slipped into a nearby shop and waited for her to pass again.

"…Kasa sensei?" spoke a soft uncertain voice.

Sensei? When was this a thing?

"Where?" interrupted a brash voice in surprise.

"I believe the person hiding by the entrance might be…" trailed off another in a quiet mumble.

Shit, my cover's blown. Should I run or should I try to keep them silent instead? A quick glance outside told me Rin was nowhere in sight, but I could still hear her calling for me in the distance. If I ran out now, she would catch me. I don't know if I could convince my watchers to keep silent, but I rather not get hauled back to the hospital.

Decision made, I broke my attention away from the storefront and glanced back. To my surprise, I found myself staring into the clear white eyes of a dark-haired girl seated at a table with two other
boys about her age. I found myself startled when the white dog sitting on one of the boy's head barked happily at the sight of me.

"Holy shit Akamaru, it really is Kasa sensei," said the feral looking boy with red markings underneath his eyes.

Well, they know me, so it shouldn't be that hard to convince them, right? Only… what on earth should I say?

"…Yo!" I greeted them with sharp raise of my hand. The group tensed briefly at my action, but relaxed a moment later when they noticed I wasn't doing anything… Interesting, did I do something to them in the past?

"Kasa!" shouted Rin's voice from outside.

"Shit." I cursed under my breath as I glanced between them and the storefront. "Do me a favor, if she comes looking for me, say you didn't see me."

"Um… Sensei, why are you running from Rin sensei?" asked the Hyuga girl.

"Classified." I told them with a boldface lie before I turned to the wait staff. "Do you have a back door?"

"Yes, but—" started the other, but I didn't let her finish.

"Great! I'll be leaving that way." I said as I turned her about and urged her to lead the way. "I have some important matters to attend to with hokage-sama and I really don't have time for this. Thanks!"

Baffled and confused, no one protested against my words as I made my escape from the little shop. It wasn't likely I could play keep away with Rin inside the commercial and residential areas of the village. So, I decided to venture off towards the forest and training grounds. Strange, how I could remember the way around the village, but I could barely remember the people in it. I'm quite sure the kids at the shop were members of Team Eight unless something else has changed.

Either way, I wasn't sticking around to find out. I allowed my feet to take me wherever it went, but in the end, I found myself in front of what seemed like a memorial stone. Odd, I don't think I'm the sentimental sort, but I guess I could be wrong. Even so, this was the perfect time to check where the hell I was in this world's timeline. The Hokage monument showed only four faces, but it meant little with Rin alive and Itachi still in the village.

"Let's see…" I murmured to myself as I ran my fingers over the countless names etched onto the stone. It was a bit sickening to see so many names on it despite the village's short existence. Not even a hundred years old and it's gone through at least three major wars and countless pointless skirmishes.

…Humanity sucks regardless what world you're in.

"Don't know this name, don't recognize that name. Uchiha, Uchiha, Yamanaka, Akimichi, Nara, Hyuga, Hyuga…” I rambled off as I skimmed through each name, hoping to see something familiar. Eventually, I landed on one that I recognized. "Minato Namikaze…"

I frowned as I went back several lines and went down the list once more… Where was Obito's name? Better yet, where was Kushina's name? Shouldn't she have her name here since she died with Minato? Wait, back with Itachi… Didn't he mention something about Kushina and his mother out on missions? And he also mentioned someone with the name Tesuri… Who's Tesuri? That wasn't a
name I recognized, but he must have some importance for him to mention.

I continued down the list after Minato's name. There were maybe a hundred or so names following his. Surprisingly little compared to the numbers after Hashirama and Tobirama. It was a rough guesstimation—shut up, I'm making this a word—of how many people died per war. It's expected during the Second War the death count would have lowered due to Tsunade's firm influence in training increasing the number of iryo-nins deployed onto the field.

If my guesses were correct, Minato's death was after the Third War. A lower death count should be expected, but at the same time… I somehow got the feeling that it was lower. My hand continued to run over each name and paused over a number of Hyuga names.

"Hizashi's missing." I frowned, did he somehow survive?

As I went down the list, I tried to find more names from the major clans, just to make certain none of the key players were dead. The number I found, I didn't recognize most of them save for… two. Santa Yamanaka and Tokuma Hyuga. Not sure why they stood out to me, but for some reason, I felt my heart tightening at the sight of their names.

…I's probably nothing.

I sighed in irritation as I plopped down in front of stone with my legs crossed. Instead of answering my questions, the stone only served to raise a whole bunch more. What the hell do I do now? It's obvious my memories doesn't match the apparent reality I'm in, but at the same time, I don't have anyone I could as a bouncing board to hash out my thoughts.

What a pain in the ass! I let out another frustrated sigh as I raised a hand to scratch the back of my neck. I must've missed a couple of strands when I put my hair up with chopsticks. Halfway through the scratch, my sleeves fell to my elbow and I noticed the intricate designs on my arm. These must be seals, but they weren't the combatant sort.

Idly, I recall them being something relating to archiving knowledge, but it was rather dangerous to tap into carelessly. I stared at it for a moment, debating whether or not I should attempt accessing the information. There wasn't much else I could do on my own in short of telling everyone they're fictional characters. I don't think I could claim having foresight since everything seems to have gone different already.

"Hmm… What else do I have to lose?" I shrugged before placing my hand over the seals and pulsed chakra into them.

The sudden barrage of information forced the air out of my lungs through shock as I toppled to the ground. I could feel the convulsions wracking through my body as it slowly adjusted to the onslaught of information. At first, the torrent consisted mostly knowledge on seals and their functionality. Rather useful, if I ever get around to fixing that handwriting issue.

Why haven't I fixed it? Did I have time constraints? Or was I a lazy ass? Through the constant stream of information, a splatter of blood crossed my vision, followed by maniac laughter and screams. Oh…It's because I had an easier way to kill people.

…Interesting.

Messy as fuck, but interesting. A tiny girl like me, decimating the enemy forces like it was nothing. I couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of the thought. It was no wonder they're so concerned with trying to find me a keeper. I'm a living, breathing weapon.
"Hehe." I continued to laugh as I rolled onto my back. "Hahahahahaha!

The Uzumakis were a nasty clan. They've created so many ways to kill a person… So, many god damn ways and because of these seals, I know how to do every—single—one.

...How fun. I grinned in amusement as I came down from my laughing high. I could very well go rampaging through the village, killing every single person in sight and it would be at least an hour before I reach the end of the list. Hmm… I wonder how many people I could kill in that time before someone decided to stop the genocide.

I probably should worry over my lack of concern for human life, but I honestly don't feel the least bit mortified by the prospect of enacting genocide… or anything at all.

Now that I think of it. I don't have much of a desire to kill. Blood's a pain in the ass to wash out. Though, if someone tried to kill me, I'm not about to make it easy. I may not have much of a desire to live, but something inside me won't allow myself to roll over and die either. If I have to kill… well, I'm not going to cry about it. It was a means to an end. Besides, everyone dies, some sooner than others.

How droll… what else was in these seals?

Slowly, the seals and killing tactics receded and in its place were redheads… lots and lots of redheads. Ugh… am I in for a history lesson? Nooo, I hate history… Unfortunately, I had no clue how to dislodge myself from this godforsaken information dump. I'm likely going to be stuck in here either until my brain burns out or someone finds me… whichever comes first.

It felt like hours, enduring through the countless faces that was once the Uzumaki Clan. I couldn't bring myself to give a single fuck as my mind was filled with the phantoms of the past. By the time I've learned all I could of the people of Uzushio, I was happy they were all dead. Damn nightmare clan of tsunderes.

"When will this end?" I bemoaned as my body continued to convulse and I felt blood dripping from my nose.

"…Dear Kasa," whispered a soft woman's voice.

"What?" I said startled at the sound of my name. None of the other redheads in the surge addressed me directly and by name.

"By the time you get this message, I hope you've grown into a strong young woman." I blinked hazily as I tried to focus on the red-haired woman. "I'm not sure if you still remember me since you were so young, but I do hope you and your father are doing well."

Was she… my mother? I stared at her in fascination as she spoke. Of course, I heard maybe every third word she said as my hearing kept shorting out. Along with my nose, I could feel the blood dripping out from my eyes and ears as well. It was interesting how I was still alive.

"…SA!" A garbled voice broke through the snippets of deafness in a panicked shout.

A firm hand clasped around mine before it forcibly pried my fingers away. I hadn't even realized it tightened into a death-grip until now. The instant the connection was severed, I wheezed and choked on the back-drip from the nosebleed. My ears rung as I was hauled off the ground into a sitting position. The firm hand switched to rubbing my back as I coughed out the excess of blood.

"…hell… thinking!?" A furious voice broke through the silence in broken snippets. Even so, I could
still hear the concern laced under those few words.

I found myself laughing as I wiped the excess blood with my sleeve. Either I'm delirious from the blood loss or my brain's completely fried. I'm betting on the latter. A dumb giggle escaped me as I blinked blearily at the fuzzy figure. It wasn't until I felt the hands cupping onto my face that my vision slowly refocused onto the familiar mask and silver-hair.

"Yo! Sup 'Kashi?" I slurred with a stupid grin. "Can't hear a single word you're saying. I think I fried my auditory nerves"

He frowned at my words and tried to talk to me, but between the hearing loss and his mask, I couldn't tell what the hell he was saying.

"Still can't hear you!" I sang with a casual wave of my hand.

Kakashi gave an annoyed sighed as he pressed a hand to his head.

"I'm a pain in the ass, aren't I?" I grinned cheekily.

Even though I couldn't hear him, I'm quite sure he mumbled something under his breath by the slight movements under his mask. Before I knew what happened, he had me under his arm in a heat beat and sped through the village via rooftop back to the hospital.

The look of horror on Rin's face was priceless as she ran to us in a panic. Judging by the shape of her lips as she spoke, I'm quite sure she was demanding what happened and why was I covered in blood. Being the little ass I am, I couldn't help but worsen the situation for shits and giggles.

"Kakashi flashed me." I chirped cheerily. "And being the big perv I am, I couldn't help but spew blood from every orifice on my face."

The two froze and turned their attention to me in disbelief. Rin's mouth shaped a definite "what" and her expression turned darkly towards Kakashi. I glanced up with a grin as the silver-haired jounin glared down at me with his single eye.

"His pale ass was super tight and firm." I continued with a sly grin before I found a fist to my head. "Ow!"

"Quit trying to get me killed," grumbled Kakashi irritably.

"Hey." I blinked in surprise as I stuck a finger into my ear to clear out the dried specs of blood. "You fixed my hearing."

"What happened?" demanded Rin firmly, I could almost see the chakra radiating off her.

"She overexerted herself with her seals," explained Kakashi as he clamped a hand over my mouth to keep me from spouting random nonsense. "When I found her, she was already delirious and deaf."

"Who are you calling delerus?" I slurred.

"Delirious," corrected Kakashi.

"You're a poopy head." I mumbled childishly and hung limp under his arm like a rag doll.

"Kakashi," grounded out Rin furiously.

"You might not believe me, but ironically, this isn't far from Kasa's usual behavior," commented
Kakashi dryly as he shifted his hold on my limp form so my head would rest on his shoulder instead of dangling off the side.

"...You're not the first to say that," frowned Rin. "But... compared to Itachi, she hasn't reacted negatively towards you at all."

"That's because Kakashi's not a total dick." I grumbled and yawned. My eyes drifted close, too heavy to stay open. "I'mma gonna take a nap..."

"Kasa...?" said Kakashi, his voice rumbled against my ear where I lay on his chest. Within seconds, I was out like a light, possibly snoring.

The next time I woke, I was back in the hospital. My bloody clothes were discarded and I was in a hospital gown once more. The only difference from before was the distinct lack of Kakashi, but in his place was a blue-haired man sleeping with his head cushioned over his arms. His hand was gripped firmly in mine. Vaguely, I recognized him as one of the many faces I saw through the seal. No red hair, not an Uzumaki, but he was with the woman I assumed my mother. So...

"...Dad?" I called out quietly, not to startle him awake, but it didn't help.

"Kasa?" said the man in a groggy panic as he jolted up at the sound of my voice.

"Sorry." I said apologetically when he finally gathered himself from the rough awakening.

"You're awake," cried the man in relief as he held my hand to his face. "I could hardly believe it when Yamori brought news to me."

It was strange watching this man cry in front of me. I didn't know his name. I didn't know who he was beyond what little I saw of him in the visions. Heck... I don't even remember my own mother's name. From this life... or the last... I suddenly felt like a horrible person... Maybe I'll ask Kakashi later. He should know right?

"Sorry." I apologized again, but he shook his head with happy tears streaming down his face as he brushed back my long strands.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," said the man reassuringly. "As long as you're back and you're well, nothing matters."

I guess to a parent, at least a good one, nothing else really matters compared to the health and safety of their children. The thought warmed my heart and I found myself smiling despite the stiffness from my face muscles.

"Thanks dad." I said quietly as I squeezed his hand comfortingly.

Besides his oddly colored hair, the other thing I noticed about him was the strange band on his arm. Combat Medic Division? Since when were medics part of the frontlines? Didn't Tsunade make a number of rules that went against this?

"Something wrong?" asked dad as he tried to follow my gaze. "Oh, this."

"...I thought medics weren't supposed to be in the frontlines." I said quietly.

"Didn't stop them from putting you in it," said the man darkly.

"Um..." I blinked at the sudden venom in his voice. "So... I'm not part of the Combat Medic
Division?

"It didn't exist when you were still on active duty," explained dad with a grimace.

"Oh… then why does it exist? Didn't Tsunade-sama make a ruling about putting medics in the frontlines?" I asked in confusion.

"This division exists because of you," continued dad quietly as he brushed a thumb over the back of my hand.

"Me?" I repeated in surprise.

"I decided, if they would put medics like you on the frontlines, I might as well train them to survive it," explained dad.

Briefly, I recalled a different symbol etched onto his hitai-ate. Something about it told me dad wasn't originally a Konoha ninja. Yet, he seemed to be genuinely concerned over Konoha's budding new medics.

"…Why?" I asked in confusion.

"Why what?" asked dad.

"If… Konoha did this to me, why are you helping them?" I asked.

"Because no one should have to face the pain of losing their child for any reason," answered the man determinedly. "I may not agree with how things are run in Konoha. I may not have the power to abolish what I think are stupid rules and regulations, but I will be damned if I stand by and watch another child lost to the senselessness of battle."

I said nothing as I listened to his speech. Dad seemed… kind of cool. A bit preachy at some points, but it was the thought that counted. It didn't take long for me to decide he was a good person. Maybe not everyone was a dick here.
Age 19: Kabuto, Shisui

Age 22: Zaji, Muta, Kotetsu, Izumo

Age 23: Tenzo, Anko, Iruka, Mizuki

Age 25: Kakashi, Obito, Rin, Gai, Zabuza

Age 26: Asuma, Ibiki, Kurenai, Shizune, Ebisu

Age 36-41: Kushina, Mikoto, Tesuri, Tsume, Choza, Shikaku, Inochi, Kurei, Ensui, Shirakumo, Hizashi, Hiashi, Fugaku

Age 49: Jiraiya, Tsunade, Orochimaru

Age 67+: Hiruzen Sarutobi
"...Kakashi, I demand you to kidnap me this instant." I grumbled irritably in the restrictive chakra draining rope normally reserved for rowdy shinobi patients. I don't get why I was in them! I've only tried to escape the hospital twice since I woke up!

"If you behaved, this wouldn't have happened," said Kakashi dryly.

"How do you expect me to sit still here when it's so boring?" I protested as I wiggled in vain to get free. However, instead of freeing myself, I slipped off the edge and toppled towards the ground. "OH SHI—oomph."

Inches before my face acquainted with the floor, Kakashi managed to grab a handful of the rope binding. Suddenly, I felt like I was being treated like a rowdy puppy being hauled up by the scruff of its neck. Kakashi sighed in exasperation, but I could see the hint of amusement in his eye as he gave that fake, over enthusiastic smile.

"I know you enjoy giving yourself a concussion through your recklessness, but please do try not to knock yourself out in the process. You've only just woken up from a coma after all," said Kakashi casually.

"Geez." I grumbled under my breath. "Passive aggressive much?"

"Kasa," warned Kakashi.

"Fine, fine." I grumbled and hung limply in his hold once more... I seem to be doing that a lot lately.

Knock, knock

"Don't come in!" I perked up with an evil grin. "We're inde—mmph!"

"Come in!" grounded out Kakashi as he clamped a hand over my mouth.

"My, my, it's good to see you so lively, Kasa-kun," chuckled an old man as he slid the door open and entered.

"Hokage-sama," greeted Kakashi before he turned to me with a glare. Out of spite, I bit down on his gloved-hand. Realizing what I was doing, he pulled back only enough for me to only catch the fabric. "As you can see, she's not completely well in the head."

"Hey, just because you refused to kidnap me doesn't mean I'm unwell." I retorted haughty as I spat out the bit of glove I managed to catch.

"Normal people don't ask to be kidnapped," retorted Kakashi dryly.

"Normal's overrated." I stuck out my tongue at him. He sighed in exasperation as he plopped me back on the bed once more.

"Do try to act your age," droned Kakashi. "Hokage-sama took time out of his busy schedule to see you."

"Easy for you to say." I grumbled. "I don't even know how old I am."
"You're 17," replied Kakashi bluntly.

"Am I? I thought I was older." I frowned and glanced down to the ropes binding my small form. "But then again… this body doesn't seem right either… am I supposed to be this small?"

"Poor diet," droned Kakashi in a lazed manner.

"Now, I know that's a lie." I retorted with a huff.

"And why is that?" asked Hiruzen in good humor.

"Simple, gluttony before all." I scoffed. "I would never turn away any food as long as it's cooked deliciously. Which reminds me, hospital food sucks! Kakashi! I want takoyaki!"

"…How is it, you think you're older and yet you continue to act like a child?" sighed Kakashi.

"Age has nothing on maturity." I replied cheekily before I turned to Hiruzen with a pointed glance. "So, what brings you here Hokage-sama? I'm a bit surprised you're still alive… actually, I'm surprised that a lot of people are still alive."

"What do you mean?" frowned Hiruzen.

"That's what I like to know." I grumbled. "With so many people alive, it's hard to tell what point in time I'm in. Maybe you could help clear up some things. Tell me, has Naruto gone through the chunin exams yet?"

"You remember Naruto?" said Kakashi in surprise.

"Obnoxiously loud blond with a fugly-ass orange jumpsuit?" I asked.

"Not exactly the words I would use to describe him, but yes," confirmed Kakashi.

"Hmm, I guess some things never change." I shrugged again. "So, did we get invaded yet?"

"…How did it go from Naruto taking the chunin exams to Konoha getting invaded?" snapped Kakashi.

"You didn't answer my first question, so I asked another." I chirped brightly. "But it's a good thing that we haven't been invaded yet right?"

"Kasa-kun, this is no laughing matter," said Hiruzen seriously.

"I'm not laughing." I retorted. "Not knowing when death approaches is far from funny. I have no interest in dying so soon after waking up."

"Then will you tell us what's coming?" asked Hiruzen.

"Sure." I shrugged.

"…Sure?" repeated the man in surprise. "You're willing to divulge information on the future?"

"After you answer why you seem to believe everything that comes out of my mouth. For all you know I could be sprouting random nonsense and yanking your chain." I frowned before returning my attention back to the binding. "Speaking of chains, could I please get out of these ropes? I know Kakashi's into bondage and all, but—mmph!"
"I'll untie you if you stop saying this nonsense!" growled the silver-haired man. "Nod, if you agree, but if you start spouting nonsense again, you're getting gagged on top of this."

I grinned against his hand at his poorly worded threat, but made no move to agree. It was kind of fun to tick him off. Not the wisest action on my part, but definitely the most amusing one… Hmm… I wonder, do I have a death wish?

"Kasa-kun," started Hiruzen as he drew my attention to him. "The reason why we believe you and the reason why your memories seem like a mess right now, is because you're an oracle. You have seen both the future and past."

I'm… an oracle? Me? I raised a brow at his words. What sort of bullshit did I feed them before this? Screw the death wish, I'm a freaking rabid fangirl stalking death. What the hell was I thinking?

True, with enough foreknowledge, it was possible to pull off pretending to be an oracle. However, from what I could remember, the benefits hardly outweighed the risk. There must be a reason for me to do this, some sort of gain to put myself in such a position. I took a deep breath and leaned into Kakashi's hand, body hunched over in thought.

"Kasa?" questioned Kakashi worriedly as he pulled his hand back and brushed away the bangs that curtained around my face. "Are you okay?"

In the absence of his hand, I clamped my own over my mouth and sank deeper into my ponderings. His words of concern were otherwise ignored. For the life of me, I couldn't think of a beneficial reason. There was no reason for me to tell them I was an oracle unless… I fucked up somewhere and told the lie to save my own ass.

"…When did you find out I was an oracle?" I asked as I glanced up to them with a speculative look. "I wouldn't announce—well, I would, but I wouldn't do it in a way that you'd take it seriously. So how…?"

"It's due to your reckless selflessness," answered Hiruzen evenly.

"My what?" I repeated with a confused frown.

"You were never one to stand by and watch when you knew things turned for the worst," grinned the man wryly. "Jiraiya informed me of your oracle abilities shortly after what happened with Rin-kun and the three-tail's attack."

"Hokage-sama, you knew?" said Kakashi in surprise as he turned to the man.

"Jiraiya is my student and my shinobi, do you think he would not inform me of this detail?" asked Hiruzen with a raised brow.

"No sir," answered Kakashi with a shake of his head. "But if you knew then why did you…"

"Have her do all the things she's done?" supplied Hiruzen.

The silver-haired jounin fell silent and I found the aged leader focused on me again.

"At the time neither Jiraiya nor I knew the extent of your oracle abilities. While you've acted favorably towards Konoha with your foresight, it was impossible to tell whether or not we would remain in your favor. Hence, why you were left mostly unrestricted to bond and grow attached to those around you," explained Hiruzen.
"There's a 'but' following this." I noted with a frown.

"It was a risky gamble as you were a rather volatile child and Jiraiya had sealed half the three-tailed demon in you," supplied the man.

"Wait!" I held up a hand to stop him. "You know what, never mind, this sounds like something long, boring and I probably wouldn't remember it anyway. So, in short, I screwed up because I was too nice and you found out that way. Got it."

"…I wouldn't say being too nice as screwing up," coughed Hiruzen at my abrupt interruption.

"Doesn't matter to me either way, it just means I have to be more careful this time around." I shrugged. "So, what should I expect since we've cleared that bit up?"

"What should you expect?" repeated Kakashi with a frown.

"It's obvious that you're not going to leave me alone." I commented with a casual wave of my hand. "Besides, wouldn't you agree it's faster to tell me what you guys want rather than wait for me to snail crawl my way to remembering?"

"You…" Kakashi looked as though he wanted to protest, but relented in exasperation as Hiruzen let out a soft chuckle.

"At the moment, I'm not really sure what to do with you," admitted Hiruzen. "I don't expect you to take up missions anytime soon, but if you do, you'll likely be placed under Kakashi's command until you've fully recovered."

"I see…" I murmured thoughtfully.

"However, I do have some concerns regarding to the invasion you mentioned earlier," continued Hiruzen with a smooth transition. What a sly old coot. "What can you tell me about it?"

"Who knows, with so many thing different, it might not even happen anymore… Unless you're planning to invite some unknown village or Konoha's former enemies." I murmured with a frown before I spotted a twitch on Hiruzen's face. "…You weren't planning that were you?"

"...We're in the midst of hashing a peace treaty with Kumo for quite some time," explained Hiruzen. "Quite possibly inviting them to the next chunin exams as a show of faith."

"Kumo, huh?" I hummed thoughtfully before shrugging. "Probably not too big of a problem."

"…You have no problem with them?" asked Kakashi in surprise.

"Should I?" I asked with a tilt of my head. "It's not like they killed my friends or family right?"

"In any case," interrupted Hiruzen, though it felt intentional for some reason. "I'll keep your words in mind for the days to come. Do try to get well as soon as you can, Kasa-kun."

"Will do!" I chirped with a jaunty wave as the man left with a smile.

"…Kasa," started Kakashi again, his voice soft and solemn.

"I suffered a devastating loss to Kumo didn't I?" I commented and the silver-haired jounin tensed next to me.

"You remember?" asked Kakashi.
"Not a thing." I chirped brightly with a grin. "But I could tell from the look on your face."

"And it doesn't bother you?" frowned the other. "Not remembering?"

"Well… it probably should, but…" I gave a shrug. "The past is in the past. Whoever it was that I forgot is already dead. I know it's heartless to say this, but right now, it's just emotional baggage I don't need. On the off chance I see them again in the afterlife, I'll say sorry."

"…Heh," snorted Kakashi as a soft broken laugh escaped him. "You're simply amazing, do you know that?"

"Of course, I am." I grinned cheekily. "So, are you going to take me out to dinner or what? I'm not joking about the hospital food sucking."

I didn't manage to sucker Kakashi to sneak me out of the hospital before Rin and dad gave the okay. Instead I found myself with a particularly questionable jailer when it came time for Kakashi to leave. As much as I preferred his company over everyone else's, he was only human. I rather not have him stink because I refuse to tolerate another person's presence.

"Sensei, for the last time! You can't keep escaping your room like this!" shouted the young iryo-nin as he caught up to me five minutes after I've slipped out of my room.

"Why do people keep calling me sensei?" I asked with a frown as I tilted my head back to glance up at him. It's obvious he knew me, I couldn't say that I knew him. Dad didn't seem like the type to trust easily, but I could always be wrong. "Who the hell are you anyway?"

"I'm Kazuhiko," sighed the young man in exasperation. "I know you probably don't remember me but—"

"Sh." I raised a finger to my lips with a sharp hush and halted in the middle of the hall.

"Err… Something wrong?" asked Kazuhiko with a puzzled expression as glanced down at me.

"Your voice makes me want to smash you into the ground… Repeatedly." I frowned at his flinch and glanced up to his nervous grin.

"A-ah, I guess you remember me after all… or at least what you used to do to me out of annoyance," said Kazuhiko sheepishly.

"I sound abusive." I commented thoughtfully as I took in the entirety of the young man in front of me. While he was wary of me, it seemed out of habit rather than fear. "Yet, you're here willing as my jailer despite what I've done to you… are you a masochist?"

"What? No!" shouted Kazuhiko in protest.

I fought back a giggle at his flustered expression, but became distracted when I noticed the strange band on his arm. The Combat Medic band. There was one on the side table next to my bed and I saw one on dad's arm. Strange, I thought medics were supposed to stay out of the conflict. Why was there a combat division? And why…

"Why a rabbit?" I tilted my head with a frown as I focused on the single floppy ear. "And why this particular design? It's not exactly intimidating."

"It wasn't at first," agreed Kazuhiko. "We were underestimated more times than not, but we've come
a long way since then."

"How so?" I asked curiously.

"If you want to know more," started Kazuhiko slyly. "You're going to have to return to your room."

"Hmm… nah, I'm not that interested." I shrugged and walked off.

"Sensei!" protested the taller teen as he continued to trail after me.

As fun as it was to mess with—a former student? I didn't leave the hospital. Instead, I lead him on a wild goose chase. He in turned tried to bribe me to stay with information on the Combat Medic Division. From what it sounded like, it was a covert medic team specializing in guerilla warfare tactics. Interesting, considering traditional medics were usually kept away from the frontlines and stayed in the background to heal and upkeep the morale of their fellow ninjas.

Instead of waiting on the sidelines and watching their allies fall one by one, the combat medics ambush their enemies with a precision that makes it near impossible to retaliate. As Kazuhiko noted, they were underestimated at first. Now, they were almost as feared as anbu and hunter-nins. It's both hilarious and embarrassing to imagine the enemies fleeing in terror at the sight of the cute bunny design. I wonder who had the sense of humor to use such an innocent creature as their mascot of death.

Sadistic little pricks… I approve. Not sure why, but the thought made me feel proud. Though, not proud enough to keep away the boredom.

"Sensei, if you're going to lay on your bed, could you please stay on it and not hang halfway off the side?" sighed Kazuhiko as he hovered over me.

"Make me." I grumbled, my fingers barely touching the ground as I dangled my head and arms off the edge of the bed. "How much longer are you guys going to keep me here? It's been days, I'm bored."

"Kasa, stop acting like a child," drawled Kakashi as he strolled into the room.

"You can't prove I'm not!" I sang with a raised finger, but I didn't bother pulling myself up from my haphazard position. "I'm short enough to pass as one!"

"If you rather stay here instead, I'm more than willing to oblige you," continued the silver-haired jounin before I sat up in a hurry.

"You're going to kidnap me?" I asked brightly.

"No, for the last time, I'm not going to kidnap you," droned Kakashi.

"You'll change your mind one day." I commented cheekily.

"See what I mean?" commented Kakashi as he glanced behind.

"Who are you talking to?" I asked in puzzlement.

"Let me see her," replied a soft woman's voice.

A solemn expression crossed the silver-haired jounin's face before he stepped in and moved aside for his companion. Before I knew what happened, a rush of air entered the room and I suddenly found myself embraced in the arms of a woman with… red hair?
"…Mom?" I said in confusion. The woman tensed at my words. Strange she would act like that, but then realization struck and I recalled the broken message I stumbled across.

"Sorry Kasa, I'm not your mother," apologized the woman gently as she pulled back with a saddened expression on her face. "I'm Kushina, remember?"

…Naruto's mother, another person who was supposed to be dead, but not. Her red hair must've thrown me off. Ugh, on top of my memory loss, it's going to take some time to get used to the inconsistencies.

"Right." I mumbled with a sheepish laugh. "I forgot my mom's dead."

By the time I realized my poor choice in wording, the room fell dead silent. I'm not sure should I be annoyed that everyone felt the need to walk on eggshells around me or annoyed at my own lacking in social tact.

"Kasa-chan," said gentle voice before I noticed a dark-haired woman standing by Kakashi. "It's okay if you can't remember any of us. You don't have to force yourself."

As much as I wanted to thank the woman for breaking the tension, I couldn't. My body tensed and my vision shifted. I fought back a shaking breath as a wave of anxiety overcame me. Vaguely, I recalled the sensation of blood-drenched hands, panicked desperation and pain. The woman before me flashed through my mind in series snippets much like a broken projector screen.

"Kasa-chan, you're staying with us," said the woman firmly as she hauled me off my feet, uneven hair peeked into my vision a couple of times, hinting a hair disaster of some sort.

Flash

"Come visit me when you get a chance." She smiled with a small baby in her arms as someone else carried me off elsewhere.

Flash

"Are you getting sick again?" asked the woman worriedly as she knelt down at pressed a hand to my forehead.

Flash

"I made your favorite," smiled the woman as she ushered me along with a number of other children with hitai-ates.

Flash

"…Just know that you'll always be welcome here, okay?"

Flash

"…It's not your fault."

I pressed a hand to my head as I tried to shake off the onslaught of flashes, but it wouldn't stop. After the fifth image, I got the point. The woman was someone akin to a second mother to me. Even so, the flashes continued.

"Kasa-chan? What's wrong?" called out Kushina, her voice faint and distant. There were other voices too, but they were quickly drowned out.
Compared to the information surge from the seals, this was nothing, but like the seals the images were unrelenting. I clutched my head even tighter as the torrent of images began to turn unbearable. Why wouldn't it stop? This didn't happen with anyone else. What's so special about…?

"Were you avoiding me…Oracle-san?" whispered the man with a fox mask in amusement.

Oh… that's why. It wasn't just the matter of my closeness to Mikoto, rather it was a failsafe to make certain I remembered him. The man who tried to wipe my memory. I'm not sure how I managed to do this, but compared to everything else, the memories regarding to Naki were near complete. I must be one petty son of a bitch. One thing was for certain, no one fucks with me and gets away with it.

"Kasa?" The endless barrage suddenly stopped the moment I heard Kakashi's voice.

I blinked rapidly as the images subsided before I found Kazuhiko kneeling in front of me with his glowing green hands pressed against the sides of my head. Kakashi hovered worried behind him as he and Mikoto kept a firm hold on Kushina. They must've removed her so Kazuhiko could cut in to treat me.

"Back with us?" asked Kazuhiko as he studied my eyes with a frown.

"Never left." I replied offhandedly as I moved to pull his hands away.

"You looked like you were in pain," said Kushina worriedly.

"Did I?" I feigned innocence. "Must've been cramps."

"For your head?" retorted Kakashi dryly.

"Haven't you heard of menstrual migraines?" I countered.

"Kasa-chan!" chided Mikoto.

"What? It's a thing!" I protested half-heartedly before I felt a heavy hand on my head. "Quit it Kakashi!"

"As you can see, Kasa's not quite herself," droned Kakashi as he pressed even more weight into his hand. I ended up face planting into the mattress after I gave up resisting the pressure. "She can be aloof one moment and abrasive in another. Tesuri mentioned that she shouldn't be too overly stimulated. It's probably best to let her rest."

"I suppose," said Kushina disheartened by his words.

"Tesuri probably knows what you could do to help her," noted Kakashi as he turned his attention to her. "Kazuhiko, you know where he is, why don't you lead them to him? I'll keep an eye out of Kasa until you come back."

"Um… sure," said Kazuhiko, though his voice sounded uncertain by the suggestion.

"Kasa-chan, we'll visit again," said Mikoto gently as I felt her slender hand at my shoulder. "Rest well."

They vacated the room and I was left alone with Kakashi. He removed his hand from my head once the door closed and took a step back.

"How's your head?" frowned Kakashi in concern.
"A bit late to ask, don't you think?" I retorted dryly as I sat up rubbing the side of my head.

"Would've asked earlier, but you were deflecting their questions," replied Kakashi. "Was there something you remembered that you didn't want them to know?"

"...Something like that." I sighed and dropped my hands to my lap. "...Kakashi can I ask you a favor?"

"Always," replied Kakashi without hesitation. "What do you need?"

"I haven't even told you what it is yet." I noted with a raised brow.

"Would you rather I say no?" commented the other.

"Touché." I acknowledged before letting out another loud sigh. "This might sound a bit alarming, but there's a shit storm coming."

"...Shit storm?" repeated Kakashi with a raised brow.

"Shit storm." I confirmed slowly in an almost a condescending manner. "Shit's going to hit the fan soon and I have no interest in getting fucked over again."

"I see..." murmured Kakashi as he focused his attention on me. "What do you have in mind?"

"Training." I answered simply. "I need you to train me back up to speed."
"Fuck, fuck, FUUUUUCK!" I screamed at the top of my lungs as I dodged one attack after another from Kakashi. I don't know how this was possible—well, I do—but the fucker's throwing cows at me! COWS! As in my cows! This is why I hate sharingan users!

"Come on Kasa, didn't you say you were going to show me something?" drawled Kakashi in amusement with a dark chuckle that sounded almost like a giggle. It felt oddly out of character, but at the same time, eerily familiar.

"You no good cheat! Those are my cows! MINE!" I screamed another flying bovine boulder came at me. I barely managed a backwards bridge to dodge it in time before falling onto my back and rolling away from Kakashi's dropkick.

"We're ninjas, there's no such thing as fairness," retorted Kakashi as I rolled onto my knees and swung myself to my feet.

"Then you won't mind me doing this!" I snapped as I twirled and spun into a rapid dance to whip up a whirlwind.

In the brief glimpses I managed to catch in each spin, Kakashi grounded himself in order to resist the raging currents. The bovine boulders he sent at me earlier were torn from the ground and pulled into the cyclone around us. Chakra threads sprouted from my fingers and attached themselves onto the boulders. On their own, they weren't strong enough to lift the boulders. However, with the cyclone doing most of the heavy lifting, the threads were meant to be more like guides.

The instant I halted in my dance, I yanked at the threads in full force and sent them flying at Kakashi. It was near impossible to aim, but that many cows, it'd be hard pressed to dodge... if Kakashi was a normal person. I slipped into the next dance without waiting to see whether or not the cows struck its target. Within seconds, a fiery dragon came to life and snaked towards where the cows impacted into the ground.

"Please say I got him." I breathed heavily as I lifted my sleeve to wipe away the sweat dripping down my face. My eyes darted warily around me as I did my best to guard my back while trying to locate Kakashi.

"Good try," came Kakashi's muffled voice before a pair of hands shot out from the ground.

"SHIT!" I shouted in a wheeze as I scramble backwards with a jump, unfortunately, it was too late.

"Chidori Nagashi!" announced Kakashi.

"FUUUUUCK!" I screamed before what felt like a thousand currents rushed through my body. My muscles contracted, my vision went white and the next thing I knew, I was twitching on the ground feeling thoroughly singed.

"You improved," said Kakashi cheerily as he crouched over me with a grin. "You were never able to last this long against me before."

"Is that supposed to make me happy, you sadist!" I forced out with a raw croak, barely able to glare at him as he watched me trying to stop the spasms and painstakingly crawled to my knees.
"This hurts me more than you know," replied the silver-haired sadist without an ounce of remorse as he grinned.

It's been nearly two grueling weeks since Kakashi began my retraining. Fortunately, due to the demonic chakra in my system, my body didn't suffer muscle atrophy and deterioration through my long coma. Rin and dad made certain of it before they gave Kakashi the okay to start training me.

Initial stiffness aside, my body could be considered at its peak prior to the coma. Everything felt as it should and despite my lack of memories, my body still remembered how to fight. At first, I thought it was godsend that I didn't have to relearn everything to survive. However, I was proven wrong after one training session with the silver-haired sadist.

"Kakashi-san! I told you stop being so rough with her! Must you electrocute her to this condition even in training?" chided Kazuhiko as he hastily placed his hands over me and began healing the damage I suffered.

"Think of this as motivation," replied Kakashi casually. "She's less likely to fall for my attacks if she knows how much it hurts."

"Motivating my ass." I grumbled under my breath.

With Kakashi, brute strength and fancy attacks meant nothing if you didn't have the mind for strategy and tactics. He was born and bred to be a combat prodigy. On top of which, he had years of experience under his belt, not to mention a fucking plot armor. In short of becoming god, it was nigh impossible to touch him much less beat him.

I've been pummeled, drowned, burned and electrocuted more times than I could count in the last two weeks. The man was a merciless taskmaster. If he agrees to train you. He agrees to train you.

"Stop sulking, I wasn't lying when I said you improved," said Kakashi gently. "You've pretty much picked up from where you left off.

"Doesn't feel that way." I grumbled.

"That's only because you've remained stagnant the last four years due to your coma," replied Kakashi.

"Are you rubbing it in my face that you've improved?" I noted in a deadpan.

"Now, why would I do that?" said Kakashi pleasantly.

"I take back every nice thing I ever said about you." I grumbled under my breath.

"Hate me?" asked Kakashi in good humor, though there was an odd look in his eyes while doing so.

"As if I'll give you the pleasure of receiving my hate." I scoffed. "Just to spite you, I'll like you more."

"Er… sensei… I don't think that makes sense," inserted Kazuhiko.

"Oh, shush, the adults are talking." I waved him off as I pushed myself off the ground.

"…We're the same age," offered the teen weakly.

"I outrank you." I said snippily and clapped what dust I could off my clothes.
"You're pulling rank?" drawled Kakashi in amusement.

"Yep!" I chirped and turned to him with hands behind my back in a faux cute stance. "And since you outrank both of us, dinner's your treat."

"Buy your own dinner," retorted the silver-hair jounin dryly.

"I've been in a coma for four years. I have no money." I countered with a cheeky grin. "Besides, you owe me for stealing my moves."

"I don't know what you mean," droned Kakashi, a hint of a grin showed through the crinkle in his mask.

"Don't play dumb." I huffed and stepped into his personal space to poke him in the chest. "You may hide the dancing pretty damn well, but those are my cows! How many times have you used them in a fight huh? I demand royalties for using my moves!"

"Are you now?" drawled Kakashi in amusement.

"Be glad I'm not asking for an arm and a leg… just unlimited dinners at my whim." I grinned.

"…Unlimited dinners huh?" sighed Kakashi in exasperation.

"That or I tell dad and Kushina-san you're starving—"

"I get it, I get it," said Kakashi with a raised hand. "Unlimited dinners."

"And you have to treat Kazu this time too!" I inserted.

"Fine," agreed the silver-haired jounin.

"W00T! Free meal!" I cheered before zipping behind him and pushed him along. "Let go! I'm starving!"

We ended up going to Ichiraku ramen. Why? Because Kakashi's a stingy ass.

"I wanted barbeque." I grumbled with my chin on the counter.

"You never specify you're the one to pick," mocked Kakashi, his chin rested against his palm while he stared down at me.

"Bite me." I scoffed and laid my face flat against the counter to stare up at him.

"Erm… I'm not really hungry, can I go?" asked Kazuhiko uncomfortably.

"No," said both Kakashi and I in unison. "No."

"But—"

"No." We repeated once more. He sulked in his seat.

"You're as lively as ever," chortled Teuchi as he set a bowl of ramen in front of me and Kazuhiko.

"Ha! My ramen came first!" I mocked Kakashi happily as I sat up and grabbed a pair of chopsticks from the container.
"I thought you wanted barbeque," commented Kakashi offhandedly.

"True, but it doesn't mean I can't enjoy the simple pleasures in life." I said before digging in with gusto.

"Like insignificant pettiness?" drawled Kakashi dully.

"Exactly." I said through a mouthful while slurping the stray strands of noodles.

"Your table etiquette needs some work," noted Kakashi as Teuchi placed his bowl of ramen in front of him next.

I ignored him in favor of the hot broth's savory bliss. Apparently, he took advantage of the moment and hastily slurped up his share of ramen. By the time I glanced over, he was finished and setting his chopsticks down.

"You must give one heck of a blow job huh?" I commented. Kazuhiko choked on his noodles next to me while Kakashi gave me an unamused glare.

"I kid, I kid!" I laughed while raising my hands up in surrender.

"One of these days that mouth of yours is going to get you in trouble," warned Kakashi.

"Yada, yada, yada." I snapped my hand open and close in mockery of his warning and finished the rest of my ramen with the same efficiency. "Teuchi-san! Seconds please!"

"If you eat yourself sick just to put a dent in my pocket, I'm upping your reps tomorrow," cautioned Kakashi.

"You know how many calories I burn from your torture sessions? As if a couple of bowls would make me sick." I waved him off. "If anything, you're the one that needs to eat more."

"I will," grinned Kakashi. "I'm just waiting for you to get full before I go for barbeque."

"What? No fair!" I growled. "You cheating—"

"KAKASHI YOU ASSHOLE! COME OUT WHEREEVER THE HELL YOU ARE!" roared a furious voice in the distance.

"Oh no," groaned the silver-haired jounin as he pressed a hand to his face.

"Who's that?" I glanced behind us curiously.

"Two very annoying and protective little brothers," grumbled Kakashi as he placed down a wad of cash and got up from his seat.

"Where are you going?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Away before—"

"YO! KAKASHI'S IN HERE!" I bellowed loudly in a fake baritone. "HE'S TRYING TO—"

As per the norm, he clamped a hand over my mouth and hauled me out of my chair. Damn, I didn't even get to finish my ramen. However, before I could forlorn over the loss of my meal, a pair of familiar boys came rushing into Ichiraku with a vengeance.
"Sasa-nee!" breathed the blond boy. He looked torn between elation and anger, but the latter won out when his gaze drifted up to Kakashi. "Let go of Sasa-nee right now you kidnapper!"

"For the last time Naruto, stop calling me a kidnapper," groused the silver-haired jounin.

"Says the person with Kasa-nee in a hostage hold," frowned the Uchiha boy next to Naruto. My guess, this was Sasuke, but I'm not too certain with that combat medic band on his arm. Since when did the angsty little traitor decided he wanted to be a healer?

"Obito, I can hear you snickering," grounded Kakashi as he look over the heads of the two boys in front of him. "Come in here and restrain your students."

"Pft, can't handle a couple of boys Kakashi?" snorted a dark haired man in amusement as he brushed the hanging drapes aside and strolled in.

"I rather not deal with their mothers when they go home in bruises," retorted Kakashi.

"Of course," chirped Obito. I can't help but notice the eye-patch over where his right eye should be. "Glad to see you're finally awake Kasa. How's the nap?"

"Could've done without the memory loss." I answered once I managed to pry Kakashi's hand from my mouth. "But more importantly, what the hell are you wearing Naruto?"

"Sasa-nee?" said the boy in surprise, his anger against Kakashi forgotten as he stared at me in confusion.

"Black tee-shirt, orange vest and dark green khaki shorts? Honestly, a full orange jumpsuit is less of an eyesore compared to this!" I glanced up to Kakashi with a scowl. "Was this what you meant by not exactly?"

"More or less," agreed Kakashi.

"What's even worse!" I glanced over the blond with a scowl. "He's taller than me! Is everyone taller than me?"

"Well, it has been a while since you've seen them," repeated Kakashi, clearly amused by my rising irritation.

"Not helping!" I grumbled under my breath.

"Sensei, maybe it's best to move this conversation elsewhere," suggested Kazuhiko as he stood up from his seat. "I'm sure you have plenty to catch up on with Naruto, right?"

The oddness in his tone of voice made me turn my attention to him. It took a moment for me to decipher the solemn expression on his face before I realized he wanted me to switch to a less public area to explain my lack of memory to the newcomers.

"Sure." I nodded before glancing to Kakashi with a grin. "So, are you going to put me down or carry me home?"

"Walk on your own," said Kakashi dryly before he promptly dropped my ass on the ground.

"Oomph!" I grunted as I plopped down on the ground and glared up at him. "A little warning would've been nice!"

"I'm not nice, remember?" grinned Kakashi mockingly.
The reunion and explanation to follow took place back in Kushina's apartment. Since my knowledge of what's happened was half-ass at most, the explanation was left predominately to Kakashi and Kazuhiko. I on the other hand, sipped away on a cup of hot tea while seated across the table from Naruto and Sasuke. The two listened with rapt attention while Obito gained a contemplative frown through each detail.

"You really don't remember who we are?" asked Naruto quietly. His soulful blue eyes were wide and filled with hurt. "At all?"

"Well… not in the way that you think I know you at least." I answered truthfully and regretted it almost immediately at the kicked puppy expression on his face. "Look, just because I can't remember anything from before doesn't mean I can't remember anything forever. If anything, there's always new memories to look forward to. So… Shit, why are you crying?!"

"Sasa-nee!" wailed the boy as he vaulted of the coffee table and plowed into me in a crushing hug.

"N-Naru, can't breathe!" I wheezed against his hold.

"I just…" sobbed Naruto as he clung onto me tighter. "I thought you never wake up!"

My attempts to soothe Naruto prove to be pointless as his body continued to shake with sobs. Seeing I wasn't going anywhere soon, I sighed and reached around to pat his back comfortingly. While doing so, I noticed Sasuke watching quietly in his seat from across the table. His hands gripped tightly in his lap as though he was trying to restrain himself.

"…I'm going to regret this." I muttered under my breath before I raised a hand to wave him over. "Come on, you look like you need a hug too. Let's get it over with."

The Uchiha boy looked hesitant at first, but he didn't need a second invitation as he circled around the table and joined in Naruto in the hug.

"Kasa-nee, I'm glad you're back," murmured the boy quietly as his arm overlapped Naruto's and held onto me tightly.

"Yeah, yeah." I sighed and craned my head back. "Who else wants hug? Since it seems like I'm already in a dog pile."

No one else joined, but I could see the faint smiles on Kakashi and Obito's faces as the two boys got their fill on hugs and the supposedly heartfelt reunion. I'm not certain how I should feel about this. The whole situation was instigated by Naruto when he tackled me with a hug, but… everything else after that felt almost… habitual if I could call it that.

As corny as this may sound, even though I can't remember anything about them beyond what I know from the show, it seems like my body did.

…That or I'm just a sucker for cute things.

"And then this guy with no eyebrows show up with this big ass sword!" recounted Naruto animatedly as he spread his arms out to establish the size of the weapon. "He did the whole creepy monologue thing with the killing intent too."

"Nowhere as scary as yours though," added Sasuke.

I raised a brow, me scarier than Zabuza? Was that even possible?
"Obito sensei would've kicked his ass if it wasn't for Haku," sniggered the blond.

"His name's not Haku," corrected Sasuke.

"I have to call him something!" retorted Naruto with a huff. "He's a freaking compulsive liar, how do I know he won't change his name again the next time I see him?"

Wait what? Haku a compulsive liar? Since when?

"He told us his name in the end," sighed Sasuke.

"Sure," drawled Naruto dryly. "Like what he did with his gender?"

Silence.

"...He didn't lie about that," muttered Sasuke.

"Then..." started Naruto before realization set in and his snorted with laughter. "Pft, you thought he was a girl?"

"What? He was wearing a woman's kimono!" argued Sasuke, his face flushed pink.

And then nothing made sense. In some ways it seemed like Sasuke and Naruto's roles seemed reversed and in others it seemed like nothing changed at all with only minor differences in players and events. All in all, the Wave mission still happened. Through it, Sasuke and Naruto grew closer, though it seemed like they were close to begin with. I wasn't sure what to make of it.

At least until I received a summons the next day to show up at Hiruzen's office. After spending nearly two weeks attached to Kakashi's hip, metaphorically, it was strange to go somewhere without —Never mind, I spotted him in the admin building. Whelp, that lasted for all of ten minutes.

"Yo!" I greeted him with a wave.

"What are you doing here?" said Kakashi in surprise.

"What does anyone do around here when they get summoned by the hokage?" I retorted dryly.

"Summoned?" frowned Kakashi. "For what?"

Before I could voice out my thoughts, a masked boy suddenly appeared. His attired screamed anbu, but he looked rather young for the role.

"What is it?" stated Kakashi as he kept a cautious gaze on the boy.

"Good morning daddy," greeted the boy pleasantly.

"...Daddy?" I repeated with a raised brow towards the silver-haired jounin. "Something you want to share?"

"I thought I told you to stop calling me that," glowered Kakashi darkly.

"Have you?" The boy tilted his head in confusion.

"What do you want?" demanded Kakashi.

"Hokage-sama is awaiting for the both of you in his office. There's a mission request that requires
"Your attention," replied the boy easily.

"Mission? Said Kakashi in disbelief. "She woke up barely two weeks ago! He can't expect her to go on mission this soon!"

"I wasn't privy to the details, you will need to speak with Hokage-sama to confirm the mission parameters," noted the boy.

"This is ridiculous," growled Kakashi.

"Don't shoot the messenger." I interrupted as I slipped in front of Kakashi.

"Kasa—" started Kakashi.

"Please let Hokage-sama know we'll be there momentarily." I said politely as I brushed my silver-haired protector off.

"Very well," replied the boy. Despite the mask he wore, I could almost see the fake smile by the sound of his voice. "I'll inform Hokage-sama."

With that, the masked boy disappeared and I was left with my irritable silver-haired protector.

"What do you think you're doing?" demanded Kakashi as he towered over me.

"I dunno." I shrugged. "But I'm tired of you kicking my ass. Who knows, the mission might be a good change of pace. It'll give me a chance to test out my skills against someone who doesn't find every chance they get to electrocute me."

"Instead, they will try to kill you," countered Kakashi with a glare. "You have a kill-on-sight tag on your name. You're in no position to carelessly go out on missions."

"Hokage-sama thinks otherwise." I sang.

"Since when did you trust his judgment?" asked Kakashi.

"Wooh, someone sounds bitter." I chirped.

"Kasa," sighed Kakashi in frustration as he tried to make me see reason.

"You can't protect me forever, you know." I pointed out. "Sooner or later, I'll be placed on a mission. At least with this one you'll have my back… unless you're going to have poor little ole me venture into the cruel dark world…alone."

Kakashi glared at me.

"…All by myself." I continued with a sad pout.

He didn't buy my act. His glare didn't lessen in the least.

"With no one to help me." I faked a snuffle, but glanced up to the silver-haired jounin with a cheeky grin.

He did his best to keep his glare on me, but eventually relented with an annoyed sigh.

"You need more work on your acting skills," grumbled Kakashi.
"But none in my manipulating skills." I chirped.

Kakashi was far from happy when we entered Hiruzen's office. Itachi was present along with two other individuals. Their clothes distinctly resembled the style worn in the Water Country. However, what was most noticeable was the ginormous sword on the back of a heavily bandaged man. Next to him was an effeminate young man slightly shorter than Itachi.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the Crimson Terror herself," drawled a rough voice wryly as the bandaged man glanced over to me in amusement.

"Let's skip the pleasantries, Zabuza," cut in Itachi smoothly, his voice cold and distant. If I didn't know any better, I would think he didn't like him very much.

"Is that really how you Konoha-nins treat your clients?" droned Zabuza with a scoff. "I'm surprised tree-huggers lasted as long as you have."

"Zabuza senpai, you weren't very kind or professional to our clients either," chided the effeminate teen softly. "Please try to be civil, we need their assistance to save Ane-sensei."

"Clients? Senpai? I studied the duo curiously. I assumed they were dead since the Wave mission came and passed. Then again, Kakashi wasn't there to drive a chidori into one of their chests. So maybe that lead to another change? But... if was that the case, why were they here requesting a mission of all things?

"Seika, we're paying them," retorted Zabuza, his voice drew me out of my musings.

"Please excuse him," sighed the teen named Seika in exasperation as he decided the older man a lost cause and turned to appeal to us instead. "I understand we had a conflict in Wave. What we're asking is a bit unprecedented, but we're are fully capable and willing to pay for the S-Ranked mission in question."

"An S-ranked mission?" repeated Kakashi with furrowed brows as he glanced to Hiruzen questionably.

"It will consist of shinobis with specialties in combat and infiltration," explained Hiruzen. "The objective is a rescue mission in Kiri."

"Kiri?" I blurted out in surprise. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but are we not currently at war with them? What makes you think they won't see us coming?"

"Correct, which is why there will be two teams. One will serve as a distraction while the other will infiltrate and secure the target," continued Hiruzen. "Both teams will need to work in tandem for the mission's success."

"By your summation, Kasa would be deployed," frowned Kakashi. "You are aware she is on a medical leave. Why is she included on this mission?"

"Kasa-san has an impressive reputation," explained the dark-haired young man. "Her presence alone will greatly benefit the combat front. She's capable of drawing large numbers to herself."

For a moment I was lost for words. Everything he said sounded like a compliment. However, they were nothing more than empty flattery.

"...In other words, I'm bait." I drawled.

"Bait is such a harsh word. I like to think of you as a mascot," replied the teen cheerily.
"Thanks, but no thanks." I replied curtly. "I am no one's mascot."

"True, but it's been so long since your last debacle," said the teen with a knowing grin. "I'm sure you're probably bored and dying for a challenge, no?"

…Shit, what do I say to that? Between him and Zabuza, it sounded like I had one bad ass rep to live up to. How am I going to do that when I have no memory of it? Better yet, how did that reputation manage to survive? I've been in a coma for the last four years.

The longer I thought on it, the blanker my mind became. Their belief of my supposed badass reputation was the only thing I was certain. Since I couldn't think of anything else to do, I decided to try my hand at bluffing.

"Are you enticing me?" I drawled sultrily, a sly grin at my lips as I tilted my head back in a mocking gesture.

"Only if you wish to be," replied Seika cheerily.

"Is that so?" I hummed thoughtfully and pressed a splayed hand against my lips to stifle the sadistic giggle that followed. The sound that came out surprised even me. I didn't know I could pull off something so creepy.

"Kasa, this is not the time to indulge in your games," interrupted Itachi, his gaze cold and stoic.

"If not now, then when?" I grinned slyly.

"Stop being such a buzzkill Uchiha," snorted Zabuza. "Are you forgetting we're your clients?"

"You're also our enemy," inserted Itachi.

"I never took you one for grudge holding," smirked Zabuza.

"Itachi-san, you do not have to trust us as you wish. However, this rescue mission is utmost important to us. We're willing to pay in any manner to rescue her," stated Seika firmly.

"And how exactly are you paying?" I asked and glanced towards Kakashi and Itachi. "The last I heard, you and Zabuza were fugitives from Kiri. An S-ranked mission seems quite out of your pay range."

"Both Zabuza and Seika-kun came across a sum of money. While the sum is not nearly enough to cover the costs of an S-ranked mission. Seika-kun agreed to take up residence in Konoha."

"Residence?" I asked with a raised brow. How was that an ample exchange?

"You're paying with your bloodline limit," realized Itachi.

"For Ane-sensei, it's a reasonable price," smiled Seika pleasantly. "Wouldn't you pay whatever you have to save someone you care for, Itachi-san?"

Itachi fell silent and gave no further resistance.

"And who exactly is Ane-sensei?" I asked.

"Ameyuri Ringo," replied Seika easily.

"…One of the Seven Swordsman of Kiri," murmured Kakashi with a frown. "I thought she was
dead."

"Dying," corrected Seika. "Sensei is extremely sick and with her imprisonment, I don't know how long she will be able to last. So please, I beg of you. Please help us."

Despite Naruto and Sasuke's claim of him being a compulsive liar, the teen seemed earnest when he gave a deep bow in his request. Hiruzen, Itachi and Kakashi all gave me expectant gazes, each with a different message. Even so, I found myself defeated when I gave my answer.

"If you put it that way, how could I say no?" I replied unable to fight back the sudden surge of soft-heartedness. God damn it, I'm such a sap.
"Why did you agree so easily?" asked Kakashi with a frown after we were long gone from the briefing room.

"Why not?" I countered easily as we continued the casual stroll through the streets. "It's not like I have anything better to do anyway."

"This isn't a D or C-ranked mission Kasa. You can die," grounded Kakashi.

"So I can." I agreed.

"You don't care?" asked Kakashi in disbelief.

"Apparently not." I huffed lightly and trained my attention elsewhere. "With how you and everyone act around me, it seems like I don't know anything at all."

"That's not what I meant," argued Kakashi.

"No?" I glanced back up to him with a grin. "My memory's spotty, my plans and goals for the future are nonexistent and I agree almost readily despite the threat of death. It's almost like I'm a stupid little puppet."

"Kasa," started Kakashi.

"Since I have no clue what's going on, tell me what I should care about Kakashi." I continued.

"I'm trying to protect you," glowered Kakashi.

"I know." I chirped. "Not sure why you care enough to do so."

"What do you mean?" frowned Kakashi.

"You're not wrong." I added. "I honestly can't find myself caring about anything."

"You cared about Naruto and Sasuke enough to comfort them," inserted Kakashi.

"Only because it didn't take much effort." I deflected.

"That's a lie and you know it," countered Kakashi.

"I thought you wanted to keep me alive." I brushed his rebuttal off and turned to him with another grin. "Instead of lecturing me on what to care about, why don't you take me shopping for some fun toys to take to the battlefield? I've been eying this senbon shooter since the last time we went to restock."

"Don't try to change the subject," groused the silver-haired jounin.

"But Kakashiiii." I dragged out in an annoying bratty girl whine and clung onto his arm.

I didn't need to look up to see him seething. He was giving off waves of irritation. However, before he could voice it out, a sultry giggle caught my ear and I felt Kakashi tense up ever so slightly next to
"My, my Kakashi, I thought you'd be bored of her by now, but I guess I was wrong," drawled a woman in amusement. "You really are interested in little girls aren't you?"

"Mitarashi," greeted Kakashi evenly as we turned to face the purple-haired kunoichi.

It took a moment for my brain to register the woman as Anko. Her scantily clad outfit and spiky ponytail should've tipped me off, but I was distracted by the striking pink-haired girl standing next to her with a combat medic band on her arm. First Sasuke, now Sakura, I can't say I'm surprised to see Sakura as a combat medic, but I really have to ask. Who isn't in the combat medic division?

"Kasa sensei! You're awake!" said the girl in surprise as she glanced between me and Kakashi. "Erm… are you on a date with Kakashi-san?"

"…Pft." I couldn't help but snort in amusement as I turned away from Kakashi's scowling face.

"Not funny," grounded out Kakashi while I was hunched over next to him, doing my best not to laugh my ass off at the question.

"I-I can't breathe…" I wheezed out through my silent laughing.

"At least one of you retained a sense of humor," commented Anko in amusement. "How was the coma, sleepy?"

"Anko sensei!" said Sakura in astonishment.

"Could've used more hot guys." I replied cheekily.

"Oh?" grinned Anko as she waggled her eyebrows towards Kakashi. "So you woke up for prince charming eh?"

"Prince charming my ass." I huffed with a pout. "I didn't even get a kiss."

"Eh?" gasped Sakura in shock as she continued to look between us. "Then you two really are—"

"I'm quite sure the two of you have thoroughly smeared my reputation," interrupted Kakashi irritably.

"Always the party-pooper aren't you Hatake," droned Anko as she tilted her head back in a condescending manner.

"What do you want Mitarashi?" scowled Kakashi.

"Who said I wanted anything?" chirped Anko with a hand propped at her hip. "I was strolling along with my cute little student to get some dangos when I spotted you two lovebirds on your lovey-dovey date. It's only polite for us to say hello."

The look on Kakashi's face was priceless. I have to say, Anko is by far my most favorite person to come across since waking up. Unfortunately, what she did was short-lived as Kakashi easily regained his composure as though nothing happened.

"Since when was Haruno under your tutelage?" frowned Kakashi as he glanced to the pink-haired girl. Sakura ducked down her head in embarrassment at his attention. "I thought she was Obito's student."
"Well, as you may know Hatake, Sakura-chan here is considered a combat medic," started Anko as she hooked an arm around Sakura's shoulders. "However, compared to Itachi's snooty little brother, she's a bit lacking in the combat area. How could I stand by idly and watch such potential waste away?"

"Does Obito know you're kidnapping his student?" retorted Kakashi dryly.

"Kidnapping is such a foul word," drawled Anko as she draped herself over Sakura's shoulders and the girl turned as pink as her hair. "I like to think it as character building, but I digress. Sakura-chan has plenty of character already. We just need to work on her self-restraint issues."

"Self-restraint?" I repeated with interest while Kakashi seemed doubtful.

"She has a bit of a problem with letting loose on the battlefield," chirped Anko as she slapped Sakura's behind lightly. "The poor thing's much too shy about leaving corpses for people to find."

"Anko sensei!" hissed Sakura as she covered her behind from further assault.

"Haruno, if you value your virtue, you might want to change mentors," suggested Kakashi.

"You're one to talk," scoffed Anko.

At some point, both Sakura and I were sidelined as Anko and Kakashi fell into an insult-fest. Amusing at first, but boring after the third round.

"Erm… it looks like they're not going to be finished anytime soon," started the girl awkwardly as she shuffled her feet.

"Seems so." I sighed.

"Um… sensei," continued Sakura shyly. "I know you've been in a coma for a long while, but I didn't slack off in the least in your absence. I did everything like you asked!"

"…You did?" I said in confusion, completely at a loss at what she could possibly refer to.

"Yes," nodded the girl enthusiastically. "I made Sasuke cry."

"…What?" I repeated in disbelief. "How?"

"With the exception of taijutsu and stamina, I've beaten him in every possible subject like you told me to when I was reinstated into the Academy," explained Sakura.

"And…that made him cry?" I asked in confusion.

"Ah, maybe cry isn't the right word," said Sakura sheepishly. "More like frustrated to the point of tears? He was really upset when I was announced as the rookie of the year."

"You got rookie of the…" I trailed off in surprise. "Really?"

"Yes!" said the girl brightly.

"…Interesting." I murmured thoughtfully.

"And we recently went on a mission that went from a C-rank to an A-rank mission," continued Sakura excitedly.
Somehow, I found myself the audience for yet another rendition of what happened in the Wave mission. Compared to Sasuke and Naruto's recount, Sakura's was by far more comprehensible. However, I'll spare the lot of you the misery of listening to it through the voice of a timid fangirl.

In short, some people lived, some people died and some people shouldn't have appeared at all. Prime examples would be Zabuza and not-Haku surviving, Tazuna dying, but Inari's father Kaiza's alive. However, none of those could compare to Suigetsu somehow ending up in the company of Zabuza and Seika.

I'm quite sure water-boy doesn't show up until well into the time skip. Orochimaru had him locked up in some test tube until Sasuke went about slaughtering the snake sannin and taking over his operations. The more I tried to make sense of the changes, the bigger the headache became. Any foreknowledge I had before was obsolete.

If I tried to find every single difference, I'd be stuck here until doomsday. Yet, I couldn't help but try to find the cause and effect for everything.

"Kakashi…What did I do?" I asked with furrowed brows once Sakura and Anko were gone.

"I'm not sure I understand your question," answered Kakashi as he glanced at me.

"Why do they care?" I reworded the question, a frown marring my face. "Naruto, Sasuke, Sakura and even Itachi to some extent… What did I do to make them care?"

"You're their sister, their friend and in Sakura's case you're her teacher and the very person who made it possible for her to continue as a kunoichi," supplied Kakashi. "Why shouldn't they care?"

"Doesn't really answer my question." I muttered under my breath before I turned to face him fully. "What about you then? Why do you care? I've been nothing but a pain in your ass since I woke up and from what it sounds like, I was even more of a pain in the ass before I went into a coma. Why are you sticking around and helping me?"

"Why are you trusting me to help you?" countered Kakashi.

"Hey, you're not allowed to answer a question with another question!" I huffed.

"Why not?" grinned Kakashi and I realized he was parodying what I did earlier.

"…Touché Kakashi, touché." I returned and snorted at the obvious slight.

"I'm not one to give corny sentimental speeches," commented Kakashi in amusement. "Those are more in Obito's alley."

"Of course." I retorted dryly and waved my hand in an offhanded motion. "How dare we mortals ever associate the Great Kakashi as corny and sentimental."

"It goes without saying, you care more than you let on," supplied Kakashi in turn as he caught my wrist to stop my flippant gestures. "But if you insist on denying the truth, I won't stop you."

"Then why are you holding onto my arm like I'm a convict?" I scoffed. "I'm starting to see why Naruto thinks you're a kidnapper."

"As amusing as it is for you to continue to sully my name, didn't you say you wanted to restock on your equipment? We'll never get anything done if I don't drag you along," noted Kakashi.
"Hmm… I have a short attention span, don't I?" I commented. The silver-haired jounin rolled his eyes and dragged me along before I could distract myself further. I guess at least one of us has to be the responsible one.

"Kasa-chan?" said a short-haired woman in surprise when Kakashi and I entered the weapon shop.

With how often people say my name, I'm starting to wonder if they think I've forgotten it. However, the way she said it sounded different. Compared to other people who were shocked by my awakening, this woman took my appearance as a pleasant surprise. Almost as though she had no clue I was in a coma.

A quick glance over the woman, I noticed several bruises peeking through the mesh shirt under her black, white-trimmed kimono and a slight bulge under the sleeve of her right arm.

"...Do I know you?" I frowned as I tried to logic out the stranger's identity.

"You probably don't remember me," said the woman sheepishly. "You were rather young when we first met."

My brain drew up a blank as I kept staring at her. When I was younger? Does that make her a canon character or someone random? I pressed a hand to my head to ward off the oncoming headache.

"Please excuse her, Shizune-san. Kasa's not feeling well," interrupted Kakashi as he placed a hand on my shoulder.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Shizune with concern as she glanced towards me.

I did everything I could to keep myself from gapping like a dumbfounded fish as I stared up at her. What the heck was she doing here? More importantly…

"Where's your pig?" I asked.

"Oh… um… Tonton's…" murmured the woman morosely as her gaze turned solemn.

Good god, did I do something that killed Tonton?

"Is Tsunade-sama back in the village?" asked Kakashi in an attempt to change the subject, but the woman's expression seemed to darken further.

Shit, Kakashi's just as bad as me when it comes to socializing.

"Shizune-san, are you done? I got your—" a white haired man trailed off as he walked into the shop with full paper bag in arm. His eyes widened as he caught glimpse of me. "Kasa sensei, I'm glad to see you awake and well. Naruto was quite excited when he told me the news. Will you be returning to the Academy soon?"

Annoyance simmered as I glanced at another person I don't recognize. Someone needs to get me a fucking guidebook with everyone's name and face. I'm getting sick and tired of playing guess who.

"It will be some time before Kasa will be able to do so Mizuki," noted Kakashi, inadvertently supplying me with the man's name.

Mizuki? Before I realized what happened, a painful pulse shot through my head. Another trigger. With gritted teeth, I pressed a hand to my head as scattered images of names and faces crossed through my mind. Guess I got my wish. Gods, I wished it didn't hurt so much each time it happened.
The majority of the images connected to the Academy either as a teacher, a student or a barely recognizable classmate. Out of those, there was a boy, his face blurred out and without a name.

"You're not going to be able to remember much if you keep letting your mind wander off," said the boy in amusement.

I frowned and pressed my hand harder in an attempt to abate the pain to focus on the memory. He seemed familiar, but for some reason I can't recall who he was.

"Hey, don't go hogging Kasa-chan all to yourself," teased the boy and… Itachi was there?

"...you can have...her," droll the Uchiha with a rolled of his eyes, his words broken and incomplete much like the rest of the memory.

It really shouldn't be surprise that he was an asshole even as a child. However, before I could attempt to delve deeper into the broken memory, Shizune's concerned voice drew me out and brought me back to the present.

"Kasa-chan, are you okay?" asked the woman.

"I'm fine." I mumbled and rubbed at my temple to will the headache away.

"Are you sure?" She asked again.

"Positive." I replied.

Compared to Mikoto's trigger, this one wasn't as bad. However, I have to wonder why Mizuki of all people was chosen to be a trigger. The likelihood of me running into him was slim and there was a higher chance that he would've been imprisoned for revealing Naruto's jinchuriki status to him… Speaking of which… does Naruto even know he's the Kyubi's host? I'll have to ask Kakashi later.

"If you're certain," said Shizune worriedly.

"Don't trouble yourself over me." I brushed her off. "You're here for equipment right? What were you planning to get?"

"Oh, I'm just here to get my senbon launchers serviced," replied Shizune.

"Senbon launcher?" I said with interest.

"I just throw mine," inserted Kakashi.

"I didn't ask you." I huffed.

"I'm not getting you senbon launchers," retorted the silver-haired jounin.

"Why not?" I grumbled.

"For one, you've never trained with them before much less use it for battle," explained Kakashi.

"I could always learn you know." I countered.

"You missed me at point blank range," added Kakashi. "Clearly, you need something that covers a bit more area."

I opened my mouth to protest.
"No explosives," continued the man.

"Spoiled sport." I blew out a breath of air grumpily before the appearance of the shop owner reminded me of Shizune's presence.

"You're enthusiastic as ever," commented Shizune with a light-hearted giggle as she turned to pay for her weapon.

"Come on Kakashi, you can train me up to use it." I grumbled.

"No," said the silver-haired jounin bluntly.

"Cheapskate!" I huffed.

"Kasa-chan, you're a medic, you shouldn't be on the frontlines," chided Shizune gently.

"On the contrary," interrupted Kakashi. "Kasa is rather talented in dealing with crowd control."

"...I am?" I turned to him with puzzlement.

"That is, with the right team and equipment of course," added Kakashi.

"No one in their right mind would do that," argued Shizune.

"I know a few people that says otherwise," countered Kakashi.

"She's going to get killed," frowned Shizune.

"She won't," replied the silver-haired jounin.

"How are you so sure?" asked Shizune.

"Because unlike you, I know what she's capable of," answered Kakashi.

My eyes darted towards each of them as they continued their volley of words. On the one hand it sounds like each of them were trying to defend me in their own way, but on the other... it felt like I was a toy being torn between two children. I'm not sure should I be flattered or disturbed that two grown adults acted like this.

"Easy, easy," interrupted Mizuki as he slipped between the two of them before they got into each other's faces. "I'm sure everyone has their own opinions on what a medic should be, but this isn't the time nor place for such discussions."

"Ever the teacher," drawled Kakashi. "We're not one of your students."

"Old habits die hard," replied Mizuki pleasantly. "Maybe if you took on some students of your own, you could understand Shizune-san's views."

"This is fun and all." I interrupted hastily before Kakashi could slip in another retort. While the silver-haired jounin wasn't the type to devolve into a mindless fist fight over an argument, I rather not risk the off chance that Shizune picked up more than just medical jutsus from Tsunade. "But I'm afraid we will have to take our leave in preparations for our next mission."

"What about your equipment?" asked Shizune in concern.

"It's probably not the best time for me to be experimenting with new tools anyway. I'll just leave my
order and pick it up a later time." I said as I snatched up an order form and hastily scribbled out a random amount of miscellaneous things before signing and slapping it on the counter. "See you around Shizune-san!"

Before the woman could say another word, I grabbed onto Kakashi's arm and dragged him out of the shop. To my surprise, the silver-haired jounin didn't protest as I dragged him several blocks away. If anything, he seemed more concerned than annoyed by the encounter.

"What is it now" I huffed in annoyance.

"You remembered something in the shop," supplied Kakashi.

"...I can't hide anything from you can I?" I sighed.

"You reacted similarly in the hospital when Sasuke's mother showed up," explained Kakashi.

"It wasn't as bad." I brushed it off.

"How often are these bouts?" asked Kakashi in concern. "Will you be okay if it happens in the middle of a battle?"

"No clue." I shook my head. "Hopefully, it doesn't happen during battle."

"Are you sure you want to take on this mission?" asked Kakashi once more.

"Do you still have my back?" I countered wryly.

"You know the answer to that already," rumbled Kakashi.

"Then I don't have anything to worry about." I returned with a grin.

Defeated, Kakashi sighed in exasperation and didn't press any further. Idly, I wondered what I did to earn such devotion from him.
The mission briefing was surprisingly short and the number of people placed on the mission seemed abysmally small. Kakashi, Zabuza, Tenzo and I were part of the distraction team, while the retrieval team comprised of Itachi, Kabuto and Seika. If I cared, I might have wondered why Itachi didn't seem happy at the arrangement. However, since I did not, my attention turned elsewhere.

For example, why the hell am I on the distraction team with only three other people? Seriously, we're goading the enemy. To attack us. *On their home turf.* Maybe I should've listened to Kakashi and stayed home. With my luck, I'll get myself killed before someone manages to.

"Something wrong, Kasa?" asked Tenzo as we trailed after Zabuza and Seika through the misty forest.

"Who came up with the name Crimson Terror? It sounds like a bad fever that may or may not kill you." I said offhandedly in an attempt to shift my thoughts elsewhere, but instead it brought up countless other questions. "I mean there must've been other options. It's not like crimson was chosen purely by the color of my hair."

"True, but you are known for striking terror into your targets," pointed out Tenzo and I shot him a raised brow.

"Let's be honest here, the only reason they're scared of me is because I drugged them senseless. Otherwise I'm more likely end up with a name like the Crimson Fairy or something equally inane." I scoffed. "With my battle tactics, it makes more sense to call me the Crimson Roofie or the Crimson Fucker."

"You're not changing your name to the Crimson Fucker," retorted Kakashi dryly.

"You can't even stop her from wearing those shoes for the mission Hatake, what makes you think you can stop her from changing her name?" snorted Zabuza as he eyed the okobos on my feet.

"You're one to talk, Mr. Bandage fetish." I retorted haughtily. "At least I can fight better with these shoes, what's your excuse? The bandages doubles as a shirt?"

Now, I know I'm being an extremely antagonistic ass and more likely than not, I'm going to end up killed for my shitty behavior. If I was sensible I would observe in silence and act when necessary. However, since I know how well I deal with silence— which, by the way, is poorly—it's safer to irritate people to the point I could tell whether or not they will out right kill me given the chance I'm alone in a dark alleyway with no witnesses.

… So much for not being suicidal. At this rate, I am *inviting* people to kill me.

Speaking of which, it fits perfectly with our mission parameters of goading Kiri to attack us while Itachi and Seika went about with the POW breakout. Again… why the hell did I accept this mission? I could've totally walked away. Kakashi would've let me, but noooo I have to be the biggest idiot and challenge Murphy's Law! You'd think after getting comatose I would learn to be smarter about testing my luck.

*Poke*
"Pay attention," said Itachi as he pulled his hand back. "We'll be in Kiri territory soon and while your job is to draw their attention, try not to get yourself killed."

"Poke me again and I'll die just to spite—"

POKE! POKE! POKE!

"Quit it, Itachi!" I swung my arm to swat away his attacks, but failed to do so. Instead, I found his hand latched onto my wrist and his dark eyes glaring into mine.

"You may do whatever you wish as long as you fulfill the mission. However," started Itachi, his glare sharpened dangerously. "Under no circumstance are you allowed to die."

"Or else what?" I countered, but before it could escalate, a hand grabbed the back of my shirt and hauled me off the ground.

"Behave," warned Kakashi as he held me up like a naughty puppy.

"He started it." I pouted childishly while Itachi reluctantly released my wrist. Why do I say reluctantly? Because the asshole's death grip nearly pulled my arm out of its socket when I was hauled off the ground.

"I don't care who started it," droned the silver-haired man with a disinterested glance. "Both of you stop squabbling like children and move on."

"Hmph," snorted Zabuza in amusement; however, before he could insert his opinion on the matter, Seika stepped in and clapped his hands lightly to catch our attention.

"All right, all right, I know everyone is extremely agitated, but please can we get on with the mission?" asked Seika softly while shooting Zabuza a glance. "Ane-sensei might not be able to hold on for much longer."

"…Tch, fine," grumbled Zabuza, no doubt holding himself back from a wisecrack before he glanced towards us. "Oi, Hatake, Crimson brat, we're branching off here. Seika'll take the Uchiha and the other one."

"C-Crimson brat?" I repeated with incredulity.

"With what I've seen, you're more annoying than terrifying," commented Zabuza dryly.

I opened my mouth to retort, but found myself without a good come back. He had a point. With what little memories I possess, I doubt I could scare anyone in the same manner as my previous self. Don't get me wrong, I could still put up a decent fight, but as for the homicidal theatrics… I mean, I know the Crimson Terror's ruthless reputation and horrific kill record, but I'm not sure I could pull it off.

Sure, my body remembers how to fight, but muscle memory could only go so far. Without a strategic mind, muscle and brawn were useless. My charred ass post one of Kakashi's many training sessions proved charging head first with your arms swinging was not a sensible option.

So… How should I do this?

"Kasa-san, please do not take offense to Zabuza-san's tactlessness." Seika's polite words drew me out of my thoughts and I was met with a warm smile. "I'm sure with your expertise, the mission will be a success."
... Says the person who hired an amnesiac. I supposed he can't be faulted completely. It wasn't like my condition was publicized... Wow, Hiruzen's a dick for hiring out shinobi under false pretenses. I wonder if the clients ever ask for a refund? Then again, if the shinobi weren't up to par, the clients would likely end up dead. No complaints there I supposed, but it's probably not good for business either.

"Enough dallying," interrupted Itachi as he focused his attention to Kakashi. "Captain, I trust that you'll keep the idiot from getting herself killed."

My eyes narrow as I shot a glare at the Uchiha, but kept silent as Kakashi has yet to put me back down on the ground.

"The Crimson Terror will be able to handle herself," replied the silver-haired jounin.

Itachi fell silent for a moment as though contemplating his words. "...Very well."

Somehow, I got the feeling they shared an unspoken conversation not privy to my ears. Why would Kakashi refer to me as the Crimson Terror rather than my name? It was possible he did it for the sake of appearances in front of Seika and Zabuza, but at the same time it didn't feel quite right. Itachi's lack of insults towards me seemed a bit off, but I wasn't given the luxury of delving into the matter.

The distraction and retrieve teams both parted ways and eventually with Zabuza's guidance we ended up a safe distance away from the shadowy structures hidden behind a thick veil of mist. Now that we're here... I have to ask... how am I doing this again?

"Hatake, are you sure the Crimson Brat's ready for this?" scoffed Zabuza as he gave me a skeptic glance.

Before I could retort a soft poof signaled the creation of a clone and I found myself facing a smirking replica of... me? Did I make a clone? I don't remember making one, but if I didn't make one then who...

"Sit back and enjoy the show Zabuza," drawled my auburn-haired copy as she pressed her hands on my shoulders. "I'll leave this clone here to guard you lot in case anyone gets past me."

Say what now? I blinked as she shoved me towards Kakashi and he caught me by the shoulder with ease. I glanced up to him in confusion, but his eye was focused on my duplicate and Zabuza instead.

"Hmph, let's see how well you do, brat," sneered Zabuza as he crossed his arms.

My duplicate gave a flourished bow before disappearing with a body flicker. I wanted to ask Kakashi what the hell was going on, but before I could, I heard my voice bellowing loud and clear in front of the gates of Kirigakure.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" started my copy with wide open arms and a restrained sadistic giggle in her voice. Despite her back facing us, I could practically envision the deranged expression that was probably on her face... was I that crazy before the memory loss? "I'm pleased to announce the beginning of a hostile invasion! Feel free to surrender prematurely or prepare to face your fiery deaths."

"...Is she serious?" said Zabuza in disbelief. "That idiot is going to get herself killed!"

From where we stood, I could see a hail of shurikens flying at my reckless copy. However, before any of them could hit, she had already gone through a series of hand seals and drew up a wall of earth... wait, I don't know that earth release—oh... that's not me... I glanced to Kakashi again and
he snuck a secretive smirk as he pretended nothing out of the ordinary happened.

"I see you lot prefer to do this the fun way. Very well!" giggled my imposter and I found myself highly disturbed as she crumbled the wall before her and casually strolled towards the gates, unperturbed by the obvious threat in front of her.

Panic filled the air as orders were screamed from Kiri's gates. I watched with morbid fascination as she plowed through the advancing forces as a one-woman army, either maiming or electrocuting those who came near. I was unsure whether to be disturbed or impressed. I knew Kakashi was a cow-stealing ass, but I hadn't expected him to go as far as stealing my image to traumatize-slash-murder our enemies.

"As I've said before," droned Kakashi as a glimmer of approval appeared on Zabuza's face. "The Crimson Terror can handle herself."

So, this was what he meant when we parted ways with Itachi. I must say, Konoha has a knack for breeding child-soldiers and con-men. Except…I know it also has a knack for creating self-less idiots that sacrifice themselves for those they care about.

My eyes narrowed when I noticed my so-called copy took a hit to the shoulder and hadn't immediately dispersed. Don't shadow clones normally disappear after one hit? Were they supposed to be that dura—A chill crawled up my spine and I suddenly found my body moving on its own. I had no clue why, but for some reason I felt the urge to help and…protect? Or was this some strange bit of narcissism?

I faintly heard Tenzo call out my name, but I already left the safety the trees and mist provided.

Muscle memory took over and immediately I went through the steps to bring forth a fiery dragon to drive off the hordes surrounding Kakashi under disguise. The smarter lot of the horde dispersed and distanced themselves from the dragon. Kakashi, who was still wearing my face, looked at me with restrained shock before hastily zapping a nearby Kiri-nin who hoped to catch him unaware. Why I said restrained? Because he looked like he was torn between wanting to kill me or yell at me.

Fortunately, before he could do either, Tenzo stepped in with a barrage of tree branches and impaling tree roots from the ground. Zabuza on the other hand charged in with his sword a swinging. Even Kakashi's own clone joined the fray with his own brand of badassery. No point in yelling at me when the people that I'm supposed to stay behind with joined in the fray.

"Hey boss." I chirped brightly as I pressed a hand with healing chakra to his shoulder. He didn't look pleased, but said nothing to give away the fact I wasn't a clone.

The next moments to follow were a flurry of battle cries and chaos. Kakashi, with the guise of my face, took charge of the intimidating factor with the cackling and permanent maiming. I on the other hand played to the image of insanity by launching cow boulders at the enemy with my umbrella as though it was a bazooka.

…Yes, you heard me. I have a cow bazooka.

Kakashi may not have allowed me to get the senbon launcher, but an umbrella with a rapid card dispensing mechanism to shoot out seal cards was decent consolation prize. Seriously, how many people could boast they could make the sky rain cows? It sounds ridiculous as hell, but it's absolutely a glorious sight to behold.

"Wait, is that—Oh fuck!" screamed a stray Kiri-nin before he was plowed to the ground by one of
my many cows. The sickening crunch and squelch of a body getting crushed nearly made me gag and shudder.

"It's raining cows! Hallelujah!" I sang at the top of my lungs, if only to drown out the screams and the other sickening sounds that associated with the rain of bovine shaped boulders. "IT'S RAINING COWS! AH! AH!"

It's okay. I can do this. This is what the Crimson Terror does right? So what if I can't remember. It doesn't bother me. The bodies, the screams, the corpses. I can handle this.

"Heh... hehehe." A slow sadistic giggle escaped my lips as I tried to keep my body from shaking. What the hell am I doing here? Why am I doing this? I have no obligations to do any of this. Kakashi gave me a chance to back out! So, why am I here? This story, these people don't concern me! I— Are those bubbles?

BOOM!

I barely pulled up my umbrella and the Barrier Wing seal before the bubbles exploded. The aftershock nearly knocked me off my feet if not for the two. All panicked thoughts were abandoned as my eyes darted about the battlefield for the source of the explosive bubbles. Who the hell interrupted me? Can't they tell I'm in the middle of a forced mental breakdown? How am I supposed to retain any sense of humanity if they won't even let me—

"So, we meet again," drawled a low baritone voice before I caught sight of a pretty young man dressed in Kiri's combat kimono. "It has been years since our last encounter, but I supposed it's fate that we face one another in battle again."

Um... I stared blankly at him, uncertain how to respond. Who is this guy? From his words, it sounded like we had an epic battle or something of the sort.

"Fortune was on your side when you survived our last encounter. Unfortunately, it will not favor you today," continued the young man as he shifted his stance in preparation for a fight. "If you have any last words, speak them now."

My brows furrowed as I wracked my brain trying to put a name to his face. However, no names came to mind as I continued to stare at him.

"No words, I see," said the young man with a frown. "Fare—"

"Sorry." I pressed a hand against one of my eyes with a deep sigh as I cocked my head aside in confusion. "But, who are you again?"

An indescribable look skepticism crossed his face as though he wasn't certain whether I was joking or being serious. Eventually, the skepticism turned into cold indifference as he directed a firm glare at me.

"You and your mind games," accused the other. "Have you forgotten? It didn't work on me when we faced one another during the chunin exams, it's not going to work now."

"Chunin exams, huh?" I hummed thoughtfully, but still there was nothing. "Must've been rather forgettable. Refresh my memory, what happened last time?"

"Oh, I see," scoffed the Kiri-nin. "You're embarrassed by your previous defeat against me."

"Embarrassed? Nah." I chirped brightly despite the obvious conflict and chaos around us. "I get my
ass beaten to the ground nearly daily by Kakashi. You must've not left an impact."

"I nearly killed you!" snapped the Kiri-nin, finally losing his temper.

"From what I've been told, that happens nearly every other week, you have to be more specific." Despite the lack of memory I have for this young man, something about him made me really want to piss him off. "What's your name again? Because I'm getting rather tired of referring you as *that* guy in my head."

"Enough! I will not take this insult!" snapped the young man before he twirled a smoke pipe into his hand. The next thing I knew, a barrage of explosive bubbles came at me.

"…Pft." I snorted as I refrained myself from laughing. As dangerous as they were, it still didn't make the image any less ridiculous.

With a snap of my wrist, I twirled open my umbrella to take the brunt of the explosion. Like before, the aftershock nearly knocked me off my feet. I was forced to dance backwards to keep myself from toppling over. Times like these made me abhor my lack of height and weight. While I could use chakra to stick to the ground, I rather not risk the spare few seconds it took to attach and detach from the ground.

As I danced backwards to avoid the worst of the aftershock, I hastily reloaded the card launcher with more seal cards. Mr. Pretty Boy seemed adamant to blow my head off with one of his bubbles, but I rather not see that go.

"You can't hit me." I sang childishly as I swung the umbrella to my shoulder to launch cows at him in retaliation.

Strange, how a short few moments ago I was ready for a mental meltdown and now I'm singing while shooting cows at people like an ass … Am I the only one that finds this absurd or does no one care enough to point out this utter bullshit?

"You are by far the most annoying person I have ever encountered!" growled the other as a cloak of red chakra began to envelope him.

Wait—red? My eyes widened briefly as one tail after another formed behind him. This guy's a jinchuriki? A sharp pain shot through the side of my head. Why am I getting a memory surge in the middle of a god damn battle? I gritted my teeth and pressed a hand to my head to abate the pain. It was hard to keep even a single eye open.

…I am so fucked.

"Your feinting tactics won't work on me," snarled the jinchuriki.

"Eh?" I dragged out with a forced grin to hide my grimace. What else could I do at this point than to play into the misconstrued bluff? This memory surge better end soon, otherwise I'd be nothing more than a memory. "Am I that obvious?"

"I understand now what you've done," hissed the young man, chakra tails flitted agitatedly behind him. "Us jinchurikis aren't that easy to kill. I should've known what you did in the exam was nothing more than a farce! You weren't hurt! You were just biding time, forcing me to exhaust myself before I faced the Uchiha to ensure Konoha's victory!"

"If that's what you believe." I replied, despite the different picture the memories painted of the exchange. Either my previous self was one hell of an actress or someone's been playing an extreme
game of telephone regarding to my prowess in battle.

"Enough talk, I won't let you stall for time as you had before!" snapped Utakata as he charged.

Utakata? I frowned as the name and face pieced together from the memories. The six-tailed, Saiken's host. Doesn't he die at some point? Or did I do something that ensured his survival too?

"DIE KASA M—" declared Utakata, but never finished as an enormous blade cleaved through him. As quickly as the chakra cloak formed, it dispersed in mere seconds.

In that same moment, I found a rain of blood splattered against my face and body. Everything went by so quickly, I wasn't sure what happened. It wasn't until I noticed Zabuza's looming figure standing over Utakata's writhing form that I realized what happened.

Stay calm… It's only blood clinging to my face… and my body… and everything I'm wearing. It could be washed off. It's no big deal. It doesn't bother me. It won't bother me. Idly, I raised my sleeve to dab away the worst from my eyes before I focused them on Zabuza.

"Stop fucking around and get a move on," groused the man as he heaved his blade over his shoulder. "You've wasted enough time with him already."

I took a deep breath and stared straight at Zabuza, unamused.

"…You got me dirty." I grumbled as the memory surge finally came to an end.

"Suck it up, it's not like it's never happened to you before," snorted Zabuza. True, but normally it was my own blood and not someone else's.

"You're really abandoning your village, huh?" I continued, anything to avoid thinking about the blood and what a pain in the ass it would be to wash off later.

"Shut up and do what we paid you for," snapped Zabuza.

"So pushy." I muttered under my breath before a familiar tremor from the ground caught my attention. "Move!"

Both Zabuza and I hastily vacated our position moments before the ground opened up and swallowed Utakata whole. Never thought I'd say this, but I'm glad Kakashi was a sadistic ass when it came to his tough love lessons.

"Always the reckless one that Utakata," said a woman's voice, followed by an exasperated sigh.

"Hmph, you're one to talk Mei," retorted Zabuza with a scoff as he turned towards the source of the voice before the woman revealed herself to us. "Still having trouble trying to find someone who will marry you before you turn old and saggy?"

"Oh, do fuck off, not everyone could find a young boy toy like you. Speaking of which, where is the little shit?" chirped Mei with false cheer as she stepped out from the mist.

What immediately caught my attention was not her outlandishly revealing outfit. Rather, it was the noticeable scar stretched across her once flawless face. Despite her jovial tone, she showed no amusement. To say the woman was pissed would be a grievous understatement.

If I was a normal sensible person, under normal circumstances, this would be a good time to make a shitty excuse and scram. However, since I'm neither sensible nor in a normal situation…
"You two have a lot of unresolved sexual tension don't you?" I commented offhandedly before the two focused their attention on me. I must really have a death wish.

"Don't you have some enemies to blow up brat?" droned Zabuza.

"Ah, you would like sometime alone I see. How rude of me." I returned with a theatric bow. "Shall I take my leave?"

"Get out of here!" snapped Zabuza.

"She's not going anywhere!" countered Mei in turn before spitting a mouthful of molten lava at us. From the proximity, dodging the attack wouldn't have been an issue. There were plenty of space and safe heights to take advantage. However, before I could think to do either a red cloak of chakra formed a shield in front of me and took the hit. I blinked at the look of surprise and anger in Mei's eyes.

"You!" roared the woman in fury as she directed her glare, not at me, but through me.

"I do believe it's about time we wrap things up," came Itachi's soft drone from behind.

"What are you doing here Uchiha?" frowned Zabuza as he narrowed his eyes at the dark-haired young man.

"Ending a war," replied Itachi casually as he strolled towards us with a skeletal figure made of chakra surrounding him. The battlefield grew terrified as more and more people took noticed of the large chakra figure that loomed over all of them.

"I-It's Itachi the Titan!" screamed someone in the distance.

"Pft, the Titan?" I snorted at the title. Who comes up with these names? Though, I have to say, he does know how to make an entrance. Susano does look pretty badass in the midst of chaos.

"Where's Seika? What happened to Ameyuri?" demanded Zabuza furiously.

"No need to concern yourself over their livelihood, they're fine," noted Itachi. "You can see to them when we're done with Kiri."

"Done with Kiri?" frowned Zabuza before sudden explosions and screams filled the air. Traps unleashed from the trees, hands shot out from the ground and dragged unexpected Kiri-nins into the earth. Masked figures and a number of Medic Corp iryo-nins bearing Konoha's symbol joined from the shadows and added to the onslaught of chaos. The supposed faux diversion invasion suddenly turned into a full-on assault. It was then I realized the so-called retrieval mission was nothing more than an excuse to enter Kiri with a knowledgeable guide.

The prison break was the true distraction. It diverted Kiri's forces in two fronts and weakened their guard. It's no wonder they wanted me on the mission. They wanted my reputation to draw out the big guns and reinforcements before the ambush team enacted slaughter. Despite feeling thoroughly used, I must applaud them for their backhanded schemes.

Mei gritted her teeth for at seeing herself outnumbered and outmatch. Despite the situation, defiance continued to burn in her eyes as she raised two fingers to her lips and let out a quick staccato whistle. At the sound the Kiri-nins all darted away from their opponents and sped through identical hand seals.
"Hidden Mist Jutsu?" I said in surprise as a wave of mist swept through the battlefield.

"They're regrouping under the cover of the mist," explained Zabuza as he chased after Mei who slipped into the growing field of mist.

"Konoha shinobi take caution!" bellowed Itachi before he strengthened Susano and charged forward. The heat from Susano dispersed any mist that came in contact with the skeletal figure. Any stragglers that failed to escape his path was slaughtered on the spot. Compared to what I've done, Itachi's kills were quicker and arguably less gruesome.

I resisted a grimace and shook off the thought. This was not the time to fret over sensibility and morals. Not when I'm not even sure whether I'm actually feel bad for the people I've killed or if I'm a psychopath pretending to be remorseful. Either way, those thoughts will have to wait until this mess was done and over with.

"Come and get it!" I shouted with a maniac cackle as I slipped into the fire dragon dance to disperse as much of the shrouding mist as possible.
Reacclimatize

I had no clue how long I fought or how many I killed, but the battlefield was a smoldering mess by the time the signal flare declaring the end of the assault was fired. A shaking breath of exhaustion escaped my lips before my legs gave way and I dropped onto my behind with a delirious giggle. From where I sat, I could see members of the Combat Medic Corps make their rounds to treat the surviving Konoha forces.

My hand gripped tightly to my umbrella as I drew it forward to block the sight of dismembered bodies and wanton destruction. I lost sight of Itachi some time ago, but I'm sure he's probably fine. Not many things could get through Susano after all.

But… that's not the problem… or at least not my problem.

I let out another shaking breath as I drew up my legs and rested my forehead on my knees. My shoulders shook as I fought and failed to hold back another wave of hysterical laughter. Who am I kidding? I'm not the Crimson Terror! Hell, I'm barely even Kasa!

What am I even doing here?

"Oi, Crimson Brat, have you lost your mind?" called out Zabuza.

"Don't you have something better to do?" I drawled with a sadistic giggle despite how much I wanted to do nothing more than to curl up and cry.

"As if I want to play messenger," scoffed Zabuza distastefully. "You're needed, the Uchiha wants to see you."

"See me?" I frowned. "Why?"

"Hell if I know," huffed Zabuza as he turned to lead the way. "Get your ass moving, I have better things to do."

"Of course you do." I muttered under my breath as I reached into my pouch for a handful of soldier pills and popped them into my mouth. At the bitter taste, I fought back a grimace as I snapped my umbrella shut and used it as a crutch to get off the ground.

My steps were wobbly at first, but steadied once the soldier pills kicked in. I probably shouldn't be using soldier pills as frivolously as I have, but I'm honestly too exhausted to care. As I trailed after Zabuza, I couldn't help but notice the destruction we wrought. While there were too many bodies to count on the field, it would've been more if Mei had not used the mist shroud to cover their retreat.

**SNAP**

My eyes darted to the sound, but regretted when I realized it was from the anbu-operatives snapping the necks of the unfortunate survivors who didn't manage to die immediately. So much for Konoha being the nicest village around. When it comes to war, there was no such thing as kindness. I averted my gaze and focused on Zabuza's back as I followed him to a makeshift tent.

"I got her," grounded out Zabuza as he pulled open the tent. "Now, where are Seika and Ameyuri?"

"Tenzo, if you will," came Itachi's quiet reply before Zabuza backed up and the wood-user came out.
"Please follow me," said Tenzo before he glanced to me with a forced grin. "I'll leave Itachi to you then."

"Hm?" I raised a brow at him before he ushered me in and Zabuza released the flap, closing the tent once more and left me uncomfortably alone with Itachi. "What do you want?"

"Kasa," whispered out Itachi as he walked towards me.

"What?" I frowned as he drew closer.

"I need you..." rasped out the Uchiha as he staggered to a stop in front of me.

"Me? I repeated before the sense of wrongness overcame me. "Itachi? Are you—"

Before I realized what happened, I found my arms hastily wrapped around Itachi's torso and doing my best to ease him to the ground.

"Itachi! Itachi!" I shouted as I rolled him onto his back and slapped his cheeks trying to get him to respond. His skin was cold and clammy to the touch. His breathing was labored and is that blood gushing from his mouth?! "Oh you son of a—"

I pressed my hands to chest and forced a surge of healing chakra to clear the blood drowning his lungs. What the hell was he thinking going to battle with his lungs in such a state? Was he stupid or suicidal? I gritted my teeth and healed what I could to the best of my abilities, but it wasn't enough. The deterioration was far worse than what I've worked with before.

"K-Kasa," rasped out Itachi, his brows furrowed as he let out a pained groan.

"Shut up." I ordered. It was hard enough to focus on repairing the various broken capillaries in his lungs and stopping the inflammation from starting up due to the trauma.

"Kasa," repeated Itachi in his delirious state of mind.

"I told you to shut up! I already told you I'm not her! I'm not the damn Kasa you know!" I snapped. "Why the hell does everyone care so much about her? She's not even a good person! I'm not a good person! So why—"

Green chakra turned red and I found my breath hitched as another memory surge assaulted my mind. Startled, I stumbled back, wide-eyed and stunned as blown off limbs and blood filled my vision. I nearly gagged at the phantom memory of blood against my tongue. I tried to shake off the red chakra triggering the memory surge, but it didn't go away, it kept glowing an angry red.

"STOP it! I SAID STOP!" screamed a blond-haired young man with a Yamanaka-styled ponytail as he took control of the blonde woman stomping on my head.

"S-Santa?" I choked as memories forced itself into my mind.

"Kasa move!" shouted a panicked Hyuga. He shoved me to the ground in an attempt to protect me, but only to die in my place instead.

"Stop..." I whispered with a broken whimper as I dropped my head to the ground desperately clutching at my head as memories of Tokuma invaded my mind next. "Please make it stop! I don't want to see this! I don't..."

The more I begged, the more agitated the red chakra became. It drew a draft through the tent and sent
the loose flaps fluttering in a demonic breeze.

"K-Kasa," croaked out Itachi

I looked to Itachi, his face contorted with pain, but I can't touch him as I am now. I can't help him. I —

"Kasa!" shouted Kakashi as he tore the tent open with Kabuto by his heel.

The two took a single glance of the situation and hastily acted. Kakashi made his way towards me while Kabuto rushed to tend to Itachi.

"K-Kakashi." I stared up to the silver-haired jounin with agonizing tears in my eyes. "I can't make it stop. I can't—"

"Calm down," ordered Kakashi steadily as he took caution not to get too close to the red chakra as he knelt down to my level.

"I can't." I cried.

"You can," reassured Kakashi. "It's only a memory surge, you've handled it before. I saw you do so in the midst of battle. This is nothing."

"But…" I protested weakly before he reached out and rested a hand on my head.

"The more you're agitated the worse it will become," continued Kakashi soothingly. "Just calm down and everything will be fine."

I let out a choking whimper, hands gripped at my head as I wished for the chakra and memories to stop. Despite Kakashi's reassurance, it still felt like an eternity before the agonizing surge subsided. By the time it was over, I laid limp and motionless on the ground barely able to keep my breaths from shaking. With how exhausted I was, even keeping my eyes open felt like a chore.

These surges will be the death of me one day. I fought back a groan as I tried to process the memories and organize my thoughts. Santa and Tokuma… they were like family to Kasa, maybe even brothers to some extent. Compared to the other memory surges, these memories… hurt. Maybe, this Kasa wasn't as much of a monster as I imagined her.

I curled into myself, hands pressed against my chest where the pain felt the strongest. How did Kasa lived with this? How could she live with knowing they died because she couldn't protect herself, because they cared more about her life than their own? I barely even knew them and yet it hurts. It hurts so much that I…

"How are you feeling?" asked Kakashi gently as he drew me from the depressing thoughts.

"Is there anything worse than shit?" I muttered with a weak laugh, still raw from the memories. I was terrified that I would start crying if I didn't force myself to laugh.

"There's always dead or dying like Itachi," inserted Kabuto helpfully from the other side of the tent. Right, I almost forgotten about him.

"How is he?" I murmured distractedly as I rolled my face against the ground to get a better look at the ash-haired medic and the fallen Uchiha.

"As good as someone with his condition I suppose," replied Kabuto offhandedly, but I could hear
the mild irritation in his voice. "I warned him what would happen if he exerted himself. Normally, he takes heed of my warnings quite well, but this time I have no clue what's gotten into him. He didn't even need Susano to win that battle! He could've gone through without using a single jutsu. I swear he's…"

Whatever he said next faded into white noise as I stared at Itachi's prone body. What was it about Kasa that made these people throw away their lives so easily for her? I don't understand… I just… don't…

Unable to keep my eyes open any longer, I gave up and welcomed unconsciousness.

Whatever I expected when I woke up, definitely didn't involve being tied up chakra restrictive ropes and finger-cuffs. A quick glance around the tent, I found Itachi in a similar predicament, except his eyes were also bounded with bandages made from the same material.

"Awake?" asked Itachi quietly as he turned his head towards me. He probably heard me moving.

"No, I'm sleep talking." I replied in a deadpan.

"Good to see you're back to your old self," continued Itachi in turn.

"That's debatable." I replied as I dropped my head back down with a sigh. "I have to say, I somewhat get why I'm tied up like roast ham. Not sure why you're also tied up. Did we get kidnapped? Or does Kabuto have a bondage fetish like Kakashi?"

"Hn, getting kidnapped would be a luxury," snorted Itachi with a restrained chuckle. "If I remember Kabuto's words correctly, he said we're both suicidal idiots that can't be trusted with chakra usage without supervision."

"Really?" I scoffed. "And you're just going to laid there and listen like a good little boy?"

"Apart from my chakra being restricted, wasteful chakra usage would do more harm than good in my case," answered Itachi.

"…Right." I fell silent at the reminder of his sickness and what he did during the battle.

"Something wrong?" asked the Uchiha before the silence became uncomfortable. Even though he was the quiet sort, somehow he always made sure it was never silent when I was around. Strange.

"Back in the forest…" I started after a moment. "I could've handled it myself. You didn't need to protect me, you know."

"I do," confirmed Itachi with a nod.

"Then why did you do it? If you knew I could handle myself and you knew you would only worsen your health, why did you do it?"

"My body moved on its own," replied Itachi, but didn't extrapolate further.

…Moved on its own? I bit back a laugh and shook my head. Both he and Sasuke used the same excuse, but I guess I can't fault him completely.

"Itachi, I'm not the same Kasa as before. I'm not even sure I could be her. None of her memories feels like my own and I'm not even sure why Santa and Tokuma…" I trailed off with a frown, not sure where I was trying to go with this anymore.
"You remember Santa and Tokuma," said Itachi in surprise.

"Not so much remembering as watching their livelihood and deaths play out like a bad movie." I muttered under my breath before I shook my head. "Never mind. Forget I said anything. Just... stop treating me as if I'm the Kasa you know because I'm not her. And honestly, after seeing what she went through, I don't want to be her."

"Kasa," started Itachi, but I didn't let him finish.

"For all intents and purposes, the Kasa you know is dead and I'm... just a stranger wearing her face and using her name. I know this is unfair, but..." I chewed my lower lip trying to find the right words to make this less cruel. "This is my life now. So... erm... What I'm trying to say is..."

"I understand," said Itachi quietly and somehow that made me feel like the scum of the earth.

"...Look." I sighed and shifted uncomfortably against the bindings. "Erm... We started off on the wrong foot. So, how about we just start everything over?"

Itachi was silent for a long while. For a moment, I thought he would be like everyone else and try to convince me otherwise, but he didn't. Instead he took a deep breath and turned his head back towards the ceiling, despite not being able to see through the blindfold.

"I supposed that would be the best option," murmured Itachi.

"Really?" I blinked in surprise. "No protest whatsoever?"

"A hokage needs to know which battles to fight and which to retreat," explained Itachi in an almost text-book fashion. "Had I argued, you would've gotten angry and that would be counterproductive."

"Oh... I guess." I mumbled before his words sank in. "Hey, wait a sec, did you say a hokage needs to—wait, wait, wait! You're going to become hokage? When the hell did this happen?"

"While you were comatose obviously," replied Itachi dryly.

"No shit, Mr. Obvious." I huffed before a thought clicked. "Holy shit... If I killed you, I could've gotten the title of Kage Slayer! How awesome is that?"

"I'm not a kage yet," retorted Itachi.

"Yeah, but Kage-Candidate Slayer doesn't sound as cool." I countered. "But I suppose Titan Slayer doesn't sound too bad."

"You do know you could be charge for treason for even humoring the idea of killing a potential kage," commented Itachi dryly.

"Meh, worst case scenario I get tortured to death or executed. Best case scenario, you pretend my words are bullshit and we become besties." I shrugged.

"...You're an idiot," said Itachi in a deadpan.

"Says the idiot next to me tied up like a bondage victim." I retorted snippily.

"It's always a losing battle with you isn't it?" sighed Itachi in exasperation.

"Yep." I replied cheekily. "So, back to the topic on hand. Are we going to start anew or should I expect my ass kicked and throw into jail for treason when you're out of those ropes?"
"Hn," hummed Itachi with a wry grin before a soft laugh escaped his lips. "I just can't win against you can I?"

"Well, I'm quite sure you can kick my ass quite easily, but in a battle of who is more annoying, I will win." I replied.

"Even if you're claim you're not Kasa, you're more similar to her than you think," inserted Itachi.

"Maybe you don't know Kasa as well as you think… Oh, why do I bother?" I snapped back in exasperation and turned my attention away from him. "You know what? Let's agree to disagree."

"Kasa—"

"Nope, end of conversation." I cut him off with a huff and stared up at the cloth roof.

"Stop being—"

"O-V-E-R!" I enunciated.

The tent fell into an uncomfortable silence and I found myself sorely hoping for either Kabuto or Kakashi to poke their heads in.

"Kasa," started Itachi once more and I found myself groaning in irritation.

"I thought I said—"

"Pleasure to meet you. I'm Itachi Uchiha," said Itachi quietly.

Momentarily, I was at a loss for words. He was so stubborn about treating me like the old Kasa, I didn't expect him to actually oblige my request after I ended the previous conversation.

"You're quiet, was that not to your liking?" asked Itachi.

"…Pft." I snorted, unable to refrain from snickering.

"What?" asked Itachi in confusion at my sudden laughter.

"You are so awkward." My body shook with mirth despite the tightness of the ropes. At the corner of my eye I could see Itachi's confused frown tug up into a faint smile.

"Idiot," murmured Itachi with a hint of fondness in his voice. I supposed I could forgive him for indiscretion… just once.

As far as the campaign against Kiri went, Konoha emerged the victor. Beyond a name drop to scare off the more timid opponents, I played no larger role in the conflict. The planning, the resolution, I had no part in any of it. I was more of a foot soldier than anything else.

Half-way through the campaign, Itachi switched me from the frontlines to the ranks of the combat medic division. Surprisingly, a large number of those in the division was familiar with the old Kasa, either as peers that once worked with her and Tesuri at the hospital or they were students like Kazuhiko. I naturally, don't remember most of them despite of their fond familiarity towards me. Even more so, they don't seem to be terrified of my reputation at all… Why is that?

"Hey, Keiko." I called out to one of my former students, she was among the names and faces in the memory surge triggered by Mizuki.
"What can I do for you Kasa-sensei?" chirped the young woman brightly, a stark contrast to the timid girl from my memory.

"Do you have a moment?" I asked.

"Uh… Sure. Why?" asked Keiko with a confused tilt of her head.

"Just some questions, it won't take more than a moment." I assured her. She nodded in agreement and we ended up taking the conversation to a secluded area a short distance away from the main camp. While I couldn't who listened in onto our conversation, I couldn't risk damaging the Crimson Terror reputation so carelessly.

"What did you want to talk about sensei?" asked the young woman when we finally stopped.

"I'm not sure if you're aware of my circumstances in the last four years but—"

"Sensei," interrupted Keiko gently. "Everyone in the division is aware."

"What?" I glanced up at her in surprise. "What do you mean everyone is aware?"

"Not everyone, just the combat medic division," explained Keiko with an awkward grimace.

"I don't… understand." I frowned in confusion.

"No one knows the full story of what happened, but the whole reason the combat division formed was because of you," continued Keiko as she twiddled with her hands uncomfortably. "Tesuri sensei didn't want a repeat of what happened to you to anyone else. So, he took me, Kazuhiko and Nozomu to form the first combat medic team. Sort of like a trial run to convince Hokage-sama to allow him to start the beginnings of the division."

"Trial run?" I repeated curiously.

"You probably know of the decree Tsunade left behind regarding to iryo-nins," continued Keiko. "We're not supposed to be frontline fighters or in any combat field beyond healing our comrades. Tesuri sensei had to prove that we would be able to handle ourselves."

"How…?" I trailed off, unable to imagine what dad, it's still a bit strange to call him that, had to go through.

"…Most of the combat medic division has some level of anbu training," noted Keiko.

"Anbu." I repeated in surprise. "Is that why none of you are terrified of my reputation?"

"Well," chuckled Keiko sheepishly as a faint blush tinted her cheeks.

"What?" I asked with a frown.

"Don't be mad sensei, but most of us were borrowing your reputation… and maybe made it worse until the division was fully formed a year ago," said Keiko.

"Say what now?" I said in bafflement.

"Your Healing Wind technique," continued Keiko. "While you never really taught us how to fully use it, a number of us had been… experimenting while on the field. Tesuri sensei told us the basis on how it worked and we sort of… used the enemies as practice and it kind of started the division's gruesome reputation and we kind of took advantage that people got scared of us for that."
"Oh…my…god" I pressed a hand against my eyes and started laughing. The entire Combat Medic Division was like me! They were all working off a fake reputation! The world was scared of a bunch of fakers. I couldn't help but kneel over laughing.

"Sensei?" asked Keiko worriedly as she hovered over me with concern.

"You made my day." I restrained my laughter and looked up to her with a bright grin. Fake it till you make it; at least that was one mystery solved.

"Um… did I answer everything you needed?" asked Keiko with uncertainty.

"Yep! Keep up the great work." I patted her arm in approval and gestured to make our way back to camp.

On the way there, I broke out in hysterical laughter several times more before it was finally out of my system. It probably added to the rumors of my insanity, but honestly, I'm too amused to care what people think of me since the Combat Medic Division probably faced similar issues. It's nice to have someone to relate for once.

"It's good to be alive." I breathed in delight after my last round of laughter and smiled up to the cloudy sky.
The campaign against Kiri ended with the death of their Mizukage Yagura by the hands of Mei Terumi, Kiri's newest Mizukage. Over the course of the war it seemed Yagura had finally lost his mind. Whether his bout of insanity was due Naki's involvement or from the stress in trying to maintain civility in his village in the height of war, nothing could excuse his destructive policies.

If Mei and her band of rebels hadn't enacted a coup, so many more would've died under Yagura's tyrannical rule... Why does it always have to be the cute ones that turns out to be the psychopathic serial killers?

Anyway, under Mei's new rule, the war finally came to an end with a conditional surrender from Kiri. What sort of condition, I have no clue. I wasn't part of the negotiations team and... whelp, I honestly couldn't care less. Call me pathetic, call me shallow, but I'm sick and tired of field rations, drafty tents and the lack of hot showers. Though... if I had known what we would return to I wouldn't have minded camping a bit longer.

"They're back!" cheered the legion of waiting villagers as the returning squadron walked through Konoha's gates with Itachi in the lead.

"A hero's welcome." I sighed with distaste. Normally, I have nothing against the masses wanting to cheer for the return of their champion, but...

"Kya! It's Itachi-sama!"

"He's so cool!"

"He's so dreamy!"

"Over here! Itachi-sama!"

...Fucking fan-girls. Why did it have to be fucking fan-girls?

"ITACHI-SAMA!" roared a boisterous young man as he charged out from the crowd excitedly.

I stand correct it, fan-girls AND fan-boys. I closed my eyes and took a breath. My hand immediately reached up and pressed two fingers to my forehead in an attempt to abate the growing irritation. I can't remember how this action came to be or even why it helped, but I'm not going to complain if it keeps me from killing every annoying fan-person in sight.

Before he managed even two steps, one of Itachi's Root operatives stepped out and ushered him gently back into the crowd. This one was dressed no differently from the rest of the returning forces. After all, it wouldn't do for anbu or root to show their presence out in the open when they're supposed to be shadow operatives.

"Is something wrong, Kasa sensei?" asked Keiko when she noticed I wasn't paying attention to the adoring crowds.

"Just a headache, it's nothing." I muttered under my breath.

"Oh? And Here I thought you'd be more excited to be back home," drawled Kakashi in a low
amused drone.

"K-Kakashi-san!" squeaked Keiko in surprise as she jumped next to me.

"What do you want?" I sighed and cracked a single eye open to glance up at him through the space between my fingers.

"Thought, I keep you company since you looked a bit irritated," commented Kakashi offhandedly as he stared down at me. "Wouldn't want the Crimson Terror to off on a rampage again, right?"

"Ha-ha." I retorted in a deadpan.

Funny story, I never went on a psychotic rampage. What actually happened was people's imagination going wild after hearing news that Itachi was severely injured. Since no one knew of Itachi's underlying health issues, people immediately assumed I was the culprit because of the demonic wind flapping at the tent. As news of Itachi's poor health would be detrimental to his reputation, no one bothered correcting their assumptions.

Instead, they decided to add more to my list of fake accomplishments. As if I don't already have a shit ton of things to live up already, they have to tag on kicking Itachi's ass too.

"I don't need a babysitter Kakashi." I sighed when the silver-haired jounin made no move to leave. "But if you insist on making me feel better. I wouldn't mind a big bowl of shaved ice with condensed milk and strawberries."

"Oddly specific," noted Kakashi in amusement. "But expected."

"Kakashi, I swear if you continue to coddle me I will fuck you so hard—" I paused midway and amended my words with a waggle of my brow. "Well, not that way… Unless you're into that."

"Sensei!" whispered Keiko harshly, her face flushed red in embarrassment.

"What? You're a medic, you've seen and heard worse." I grinned at her mortification.

"I—you—" spluttered the girl, face utterly red before she stomped her foot down in indignation. "Sensei!"

"Pft." I hid my sniggering behind my hand as the taller kunoichi buried her face in hers and complained about my crassness.

Out of the corner of my eyes, I noticed Kakashi staying oddly silent with a pensive frown. However, when I turned to ask him what's wrong, the expression disappeared and he grinned faintly in response. Strange…but I supposed if it got him to leave me alone, it shouldn't be too bad. Even so, something felt off about his reaction. Eh, maybe it's just my imagination.

To complete the pomp and circumstances of the hero's welcome, we were obligated to bear through what I assumed to be a heartfelt speech by Hiruzen. Something about trials and tribulation or… something along those lines. Can't say I paid much attention to it. Despite joining the war efforts, I still didn't feel any attachment or particular loyalty towards Konoha as a whole.

I might've gained some fondness for my fellow Combat Medics and tolerance towards Itachi's astounding awkwardness, but it was hardly enough to make me give my undying loyalty to Konoha. Only a selfless idiot would do something like that so readily. I have better things to do than to throw away my life….
"What are you thinking now?" asked Kakashi, his soft exasperated voice broke through my thoughts before I realized the processions were coming to an end.

"How hard do you think it would be to steal Itachi's underwear?" I spew the most random thing I could think of on a whim. While I don't intend to betray Konoha, it would do me no good for them to know where my loyalties lie.

"Why…" sighed Kakashi in exasperation as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "Do you want to steal Itachi's underwear?"

"Just look at the amount of fan people he has." I gave a vague wave towards the people still cheering for the Uchiha. "Think of how much money we could get from auctioning it off to these people."

"Sensei…" whispered Keiko with a loud hush, but I paid her no mind as I forgot the original intent of the story and proceeded to make the idea as outlandish and absurd as possible.

"The issue would be to prove it is Itachi's underwear, but stealing it wouldn't be too much trouble between the three of us." I chirped.

"Sensei!" hissed Keiko as she tugged on my arm as Kakashi looked over my head in amusement.

"…He's behind me isn't he?" I muttered under my breath.

"Naturally," replied Kakashi with a grin.

"Do I want to know why there is a discussion about underwear theivery? Specifically mine?" droned Itachi as he walked around me and into my line of sight.

"Not really," answered Kakashi in good nature. "Though, a good sealing scroll wouldn't hurt to have in your possession."

"We could have split the profit." I continued with an exaggerated sigh.

"Absurdity aside, Hokage-sama requested your presence," continued Itachi. "He wants a private word with you."

"Only her?" frowned Kakashi in his inquiry.

"Yes," confirmed Itachi with a curt nod.

"Why?" I questioned in confusion.

For the life of me, I couldn't think of why he would want to speak with me. It's not like I played a big role in bringing the war with Kiri to an end. If anything, the only accomplishment I've done during this whole ordeal was embellishing my crappy reputation further with the rumors about my attempt on Itachi's life. I sorely doubt Hiruzen believed any of this nonsense.

"He extrapolated that you would understand his request," continued Itachi.

"How on earth am I supposed to know what the hell does he want? It's not like I'm a psych—oh…" I trailed off dumbly and sighed. Right, oracle status, forgot about that. "…God damn it."

Much to my displeasure and heavy resistance, both Kakashi and Itachi hauled me off to see Hizuzen. Gods, I feel like a child being dragged to the principal's office. Even so, I forced myself to keep the
irritation off my face. Acting like a petulant child wouldn't make this end any faster regardless how much I want to stomp my feet and throw a tantrum.

"Hokage-sama." I greeted evenly alongside Itachi and Kakashi.

"Welcome back and thank you for your efforts. I understand it was a strenuous campaign," returned the man pleasantly in turn before directing his attention to both Kakashi and Itachi. "If you may, I would like to speak with Kasa-kun privately."

"Sir," started Kakashi, but the aged-leader raised a hand to interrupt him.

"Your concern for Kasa-kun is admirable Kakashi, but this will take only a moment," continued Hiruzen calmly. "Itachi, if you will."

"Of course, Hokage-sama," replied Itachi with terse bow before he turned his heel and glanced to Kakashi expectantly. "Captain?"

The silver-haired jounin glanced to me with reluctance.

"Like Hokage-sama said, it won't take long." I reassured him with a grin. "Can you let Kushina-san and dad know I'm going to be a bit late for dinner?"

Without a word, Kakashi gave Hiruzen a curt bow before following Itachi out of the room. The door closed with a resounding click and I was finally alone with Hiruzen.

"Kakashi is rather protective of you," commented the man off-handedly.

"A bit too over-protective." I muttered in agreement.

"So much that he wouldn't even listen to me," continued Hiruzen. His even voice sent alarms through my mind as I focused my full attention on him.

"Hokage-sama—" I started, but his stern gaze silence any words that wanted to escape my lips.

Any irritation I had moment ago disappeared. The man exuded an oppressive aura. Compared to the killing intents I've felt throughout the Kiri campaign, this was far more threatening. My lungs constricted and I found the need to force myself to breathe. As much as I thought of Hiruzen as a senile old fool, there was a reason the man was revered as the God of Shinobi.

And at this current moment, he was pissed. Something must've happened.

"Kasa-kun, I've received some alarming news regarding to you as of late," continued Hiruzen, stone-faced and stern voice.

"Sir." I started slowly, but he wouldn't allow me to continue.

"While I understand you can do little about what others spread of your reputation, do try to be aware that every action you make reflects on Konoha as a whole," chastised Hiruzen. "Especially when it brings your loyalty to Konoha into question."

"Yes… sir." I murmured quietly, unable to do anything else but agree.

"As for the incident with Itachi," continued the man coolly. "I'm sure you're aware of his current health issues?"

"How could I not?" I muttered under my breath, but flinched when he gave me a pointed stare. "My
apologies."

"Answer me this Kasa, what is your opinion of Itachi?" asked Hiruzen.

"What do I think of him?" I repeated his question in confusion. "Um… I'm not exactly sure I understand your question."

"Would you entrust your life to him?" rephrased Hiruzen.

"…Hokage-sama, why are you asking this?" I trailed off uncomfortably, not liking the turn in conversation.

"Answer the question Kasa-kun," said Hiruzen patiently.

"Erm… as a person? From what I've seen with my own eyes, I guess he's okay… a bit awkward and weird, but he tries." I mumbled.

"You mentioned with your own eyes, does that mean you've seen him in your visions as well?" inquired Hiruzen.

"Hokage-sama, the Itachi in my visions and the Itachi that stands before you now are two very different people." I started. "It wouldn't be fair to—"

"Kasa-kun, please tell me what did you see in your visions," pressed Hiruzen.

"...He's loyal to a fault." I said quietly and shook my head. "At your orders, he killed his entire clan… He was labeled the Clan Slayer, an S-ranked missing-nin… As you're already aware, Itachi isn't in his best health. Because of one order, he lost his family, his home and his village while slowly dying of a sickness that has no cure…"

Hiruzen's aged-face grew grim and sullen. I had no clue what sort of answer he expected, but judging by his expression, this wasn't it. With how he went about with Kakashi earlier, was he having doubts about Itachi's loyalty to Konoha also? Or does this have something to do with Itachi's poor health? It couldn't be right? Would Hiruzen be that cruel to discard Itachi now?

"Is that enough, Hokage-sama?" I asked quietly, caution at the forefront of my mind. If he decides to get rid of Itachi, Sasuke might grow to be an issue instead. "Or would do you want to know how he finally died?"

"...No, that's enough," replied Hiruzen quietly as he carefully wiped away any expression he may have shown in our short conversation. The ease he had in doing so made it hard to tell whether he showed it to me freely or if he was truly an actor.

"Hokage-sama." I continued, voice soft not to disrupt the stillness in the room as I tested the waters. "Do you think there's something wrong with Itachi?"

"No, nothing of the sort," sighed Hiruzen with a shake of his head. "I had meant for our conversation to finalize a decision, but instead I learned of a horrible mistake I could have made."

"Sir?" I frowned in confusion.

"Perhaps I've been Hokage for far too long," mused Hiruzen wryly, his age finally showing through on his face. "Maybe it's time for me to finally pass the hat on to someone younger and more capable."
"…Itachi is not a poor choice as a successor if that is what you're concerned about." I added, unsure if he was testing me or if he genuinely wanted to confirm Itachi's legitimacy.

"Hmm," hummed Hiruzen, a tired grin tugging at the corner of his lips. "Tell me, who would have succeeded me had I subjected Itachi to the fate you've seen?"

"It might not happen anymore." I informed him, still somewhat cautious with his line of questioning. "Are you sure you still want to know?"

"…Please don't tell me Jiraiya succeeded me," murmured the man in displeasure.

"Actually, Jiraiya-sama went to get Tsunade-sama to take the position." I supplied as the information didn't seem too dangerous to give out.

"Tsunade?" said Hiruzen in alarm.

"It probably won't be possible anymore." I amended as the memory of Shizune flashed through my mind. "The circumstances that lead to her inauguration probably won't happen now."

"I see…" noted Hiruzen with a sigh. "Thank you for your time that's all I needed."

…That's it? Confusion washed over me as I stared at him. I somewhat expected the questioning to continue for much longer. This barely took any time at all. Was this all he wanted to ask?

"…By your leave then, Hokage-sama." I bowed politely and turned to leave. There was nothing else I could have said or done since he dismissed me.

Filled with uncertainty, I stepped out of the office. The meeting with Hiruzen unnerved me more than I thought. I had every intention to head back home, take a hot shower and attempt to find something to distract me from this conversation. However, my plans were cut short when I found Itachi waiting for me at the end of the hall.

"Maybe I'm just over thinking this." I gave a defeated sigh as I plastered a fake grin on my face. It was bad enough to have Kakashi worry over me. I don't need to have an overprotective Uchiha on me too. "To what do I owe the pleasure of having yet another meeting, Future Hokage-sama?"

"You might want to be careful with your words. My candidacy doesn't mean anything," said Itachi as he poked my forehead.

"Says you." I swatted his hand away and rubbed at my head. "The job's pretty much yours. Everything else is just formality."

"…What did you do?" sighed Itachi in exasperation.

"What makes you think I did something?" I huffed indignantly.

"Because I know you," retorted Itachi dryly.

"Whatever, I'm going home!" I puffed up my cheeks in irritation and stomped pass him. Except when I tried, he caught me by the arm. "What now?"

"My mother invited you over for dinner," replied Itachi.

"…Itachi, we barely just got back. How the hell would you know whether or not your mother invited me for dinner?" I asked.
"I have my ways," replied Itachi with a faint twitch at the corner of his lips. "Your father, Kushina-san along with Naruto and a few others were also invited. The captain is off to inform them as we speak."

"You certainly work fast." I muttered under my breath before giving out an exhausted sigh. "Fair warning, I'm stealing your bathroom and your bed when we get to your place. I'm fucking exhausted and I'm dying for a hot bath."

"...Fair enough," nodded Itachi, but paused when a thought came to mind. "Do you have a change of clothes?"

"We've been on the field for weeks, what do you think?" I retorted dryly before giving a careless shrug. "Besides, I could just steal yours or something."

"I rather you not," noted Itachi and my brows furrowed in question. "Unlike the captain who tolerates your continual attempts on his life through the hands of your father, I have enough people wishing for my demise."

"Pft, the great Itachi-sama, future hokage of Konoha, dreaded Titan to our enemies." I rambled with a playful flourish as I listed off each of his reputable titles.

"Do you have a point to this?" drone Itachi stoic and unamused.

"Even with all those badass titles, you're scared of my dad?" I grinned.

"Have you forgotten your father is the founder of Konoha's Combat Medic Corps?" retorted Itachi dryly. "You underestimate how much influence he has the founder."

"As if they're stupid enough to attack you." I scoffed. "You could probably take them down on your lonesome."

"Individually, they're manageable. As a whole is another story," pointed out Itachi.

"You think my dad's going to pull a coup because of his overprotective daddy tendencies?" I retorted dryly.

"Hardly," replied Itachi with a shake of his head. "In the end, members of the Combat Medic Corps are still Konoha shinobi. They wouldn't go as far as staging a coup at the whim of your father's request... However, it doesn't stop them from making any medical related incident unpleasant."

"Example?" I pressed on for more information.

"I'm due for an annual physical soon," replied Itachi.

"...I'm afraid to ask why that would suffice as a good answer." I muttered in response and shook my head. "How about I head home, clean up before I crash at your place?"

"Are you sure you won't drown yourself by falling asleep in the tub?" asked Itachi.

"I swear if I find one of your Root lackeys spying on me in the bath, they're getting hospitalized." I warned. "Have a little faith in me will ya?"

At first, it seemed like Itachi refused to budge on the matter. We shared a one-sided glaring match with me glaring and him staring back in apathy. However, he eventually relented and released my arm with an exasperated sigh.
"…An hour," offered Itachi. "If you're not out in an hour, I'll have the female Root operatives go in to get you."

"There are female operatives in Root?" I said in bafflement. "And here I thought Danzo was like Orochimaru who kidnapped only male children from prominent families."

"Male children from—" Itachi paused with his brows furrowed and his lips tugged into a frown.

I tilted my head curiously, wondering what he suddenly stopped talking. However, before I could voice out my question, he shook his head again and turned his heel back towards the hall where we came from.

"Itachi?" I called out.

"There's something I need to discuss with Hokage-sama. I'll meet you back home later," replied Itachi over his shoulder as he walked forward.

"Mine or yours?" I asked jokingly.

"I'll see you soon," answered Itachi as he continued on.

If I cared more, I would be more concern over Itachi's strange behavior. However, since I don't, I went home without a second thought and basked in the glory of indoor plumbing and hot water. I hadn't realized how much everything ached until I sunk into the steaming bath. The world disappeared and I was at peace… for all of ten minutes.

"SASA-NEE! ARE YOU HOME?" shouted Naruto as his excitable footsteps stomp about the house outside the bathroom door.

…Fate, why do you hate me? All I asked for was one uninterrupted bath. Just one.

"Naruto, she's probably not home yet," came Sasuke's voice.

"But her shoes are here," countered Naruto.

"Maybe she's in the bath?" supplied Sakura.

"Oh yeah! I should go check—Yeow!" yelped Naruto.

"Naruto, even if Kasa sensei is your sister, you can't just barge into the bathroom like that!" snapped Sakura.

"I wasn't going to!" retorted Naruto with a huff.

"Sakura, there's something call knocking," inserted Sasuke snidely.

"Oh shut up Sasuke, as if you wouldn't do it if you had a chance. Everyone in class knew you have a crush on Kasa sensei," countered Sakura.

"W-what!? I do not have a crush on Kasa-nee!" snapped Sasuke.

"Says the person who claimed sensei was his fiancé," said Sakura dryly.

With an exasperated sigh, I sunk deeper into the tub until my head submerged completely under water. Part of me did so to drown out their conversation. The other part secretly wanted to drown myself so I wouldn't have to deal with the squabbling of pubescent teenagers.
...If only I was so lucky. I'm quite sure if I tried, Itachi's hidden Root operative would probably step in and haul my naked ass out of the tub. Stupid Itachi and his overprotective big brother tendencies. He's not even hokage yet and he's already abusing his boss privileges. It's going to suck for whoever he decides to get together with in the future.

"Hiding again?" asked Kakashi when he found me outside on the veranda later that night instead of mingling with the other guests in the Uchiha household.

"I'm not hiding, I'm getting some air." I countered, but made no move to leave from my spot at the edge.

"Something happened during your conversation with Hokage-sama," noted the silver-haired man. I opened my mouth to deny it, but a sharp glance from him stopped any lie from escaping my lips.

"You can say that." I muttered under my breath and stare up at the clear night sky.

"Want to talk about it?" asked Kakashi as he sat down next to me.

"...Not really." I murmured. "There's honestly not much to talk about. Hokage-sama asked some questions and I gave some answers."

"About the future?" asked Kakashi.

"I don't think that future is a possibility anymore." I shrugged.

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" asked Kakashi.

"You tell me." I murmured as I drew my legs to my chest and rested my chin on my knees. "Everything's so different. Everyone is different. Not knowing what's going to happen... It's... kind of scary."

"Scarier than the Crimson Terror on a murderous rampage?" commented Kakashi in an offhanded joke.

"Ha-ha." I retorted dryly.

"Maybe not knowing what's going to happen would be good for a change," continued Kakashi.

"How is that a good thing? People could die because of me." I scowled at him.

"People are dying because of you," replied Kakashi.

"Well, that's—" I paused and lowered my gaze. "Technically, not wrong, I guess."

"People die, it's normal in our profession," continued Kakashi. "Even if you know, there's only so much you could do to save them."

"Yeah, but—" I protested.

"You've already done what you could once and that left you in a four-year coma," interrupted Kakashi. "I know you barely remember anything from before, but I do. I remember your tears for Minato sensei, for Princess Yukie, for Shisui and the entire Uchiha Clan. I remember how those visions destroyed you, each and every time."

I fell silent at his words.
"You said before you found it difficult to care, but I know it's a lie," continued Kakashi softly. "You do care and you care deeply. Otherwise you wouldn't be bother by the loss of your foresight."

"Kakashi…" I sighed.

"Since you no longer have your visions, why don't you let someone else worry about the future for a change?" suggested Kakashi.

"…You know." A faint chuckle escaped me as I glanced up to him with a grin. "You make it really hard not to love you."

"After my life again?" grinned Kakashi wryly.

"Always." I chirped brightly.

"Itachi-ni!" shouted Naruto from inside.

"Looks like our future boss is back." I joked. "It's going to be weird to call him Hokage-sama someday."

"Quite," agreed Kakashi as he pushed himself from the ground and turned to me with an outreached hand. "Think about what I said, would you?"

"Fine, fine." I sighed as I grabbed onto his hand and pulled myself from the ground and clapped the back of my clothes clean. "Shall we?"

Kakashi nodded and we returned to the boisterous party. As we stepped in, I spotted Itachi fending off the excitable Naruto and Sasuke duo. A faint grin tugged at his lips as the two vied for his attention. I supposed Itachi wouldn't be a poor choice for a boss. Maybe Kakashi's right and I should let someone else worry for a change.

"Sasamee! Guess what! Guess what!" shouted Naruto when he spotted me.

"What?" I indulged his question with a grin.

"We're going to be in the next chunin exams! Isn't that great?" said the blond as he bounced over to my side.

"Chunin exams…" The grin on my face faltered for a split second before I forced it wider with a weak chuckle. "Yeah, that's great…just great…"

Neither Kakashi nor Itachi missed my slipup. Their relaxed demeanor disappeared, replaced by quiet caution. To anyone one else, they looked no different from their usual selves. I supposed it had to do with how much time we spent with one another on the field. Just as they could tell something was wrong with me, I could do the same for them… I guess I can't stop worrying yet.
"So…" I started awkwardly once we were in the kitchen and away from the rest of the party. Itachi waited patiently as I tried to piece together what I wanted to say. "You might want to take Sasuke out of the chunin exams."

"Why?" frowned Itachi as he questioned me calmly. "What did you see?"

"Well," I continued uncertainly as I crossed my arms in thought. "Since everything's changed so much, I'm not sure if it would still happen… Scratch that. How many Uchihas would you say will be participating in the exam?"

"Kasa, what exactly is—"

"Wait, wait, actually how many of them have active sharingans?" I pressed a knuckle against my lips with a frown. "Sasuke might not be the only one in danger. It's probably better if—"

"Kasa focus!" snapped Itachi as he grabbed onto my shoulders to stop my rambling.

"Uh… right." I murmured sheepishly.

"I know you're concern, but you can't let yourself get lost in your visions," chided Itachi, a concern glare furrowed his brows as he stared down at me.

"If you want to get technical, it's more of a memory than a vision. I don't think getting lost in it is a possibility." I noted offhandedly with a shrug. "Either way, I still think it's a good precaution to take Sasuke out of this exam."

"You still haven't told me what exactly the threat is," sighed Itachi.

"Orochimaru." I replied, pressing my knuckles against my lip as I gave more thought to his motives. "He wants the sharingan—no, more like he wants the body of someone with the sharingan. Having the eyes alone puts too much strain on a non-Uchiha."

"Why is he after Sasuke specifically?" frowned Itachi.

"Sasuke is the last…" I paused.

No, that's not true anymore. Sasuke was no longer the last Uchiha. How did the old Kasa manage to save so many of them? She must've use her bogus oracle abilities as an excuse to get help, but who would she have gone to? From what I've gathered, there were only a small handful of people who was aware of the so-called foresight, but it didn't seem like she told all of them about it. Why though?

"Kasa?" whispered Itachi gently in an attempt to draw me out of my thoughts.

I paid him no mind, something wasn't right. If she asked for help, why was the success rate so low? What did Kasa do resulted in Shisui taking Itachi's place as the clan-killer? More importantly, if Shisui really was the one to do all this, why would Hana help him? And why was she so angry at Itachi if he was the victim?

Then there was also the factor with Naki. The man was the new Tobi of this world, but how does he play into all this? What reason would Shisui have in—

"The Uchihas are a threat. They need to be eliminated."
"Not now," I hissed as I pressed a hand to my head and kneeled over. Itachi caught the crook of my arm and eased me down as I gritted through the onslaught of memories.

"I'm sorry."

"Forgive me."

"I… killed them… it's my fault."

"My fault!"

Fugaku… the Uchiha elders… Naori-san… My stomach heaved and emptied its contents as I watched the senseless massacre play through my mind. Cold realization hit me as everything began to make sense. The reason why there were so many survivors was because Shisui didn't kill the Uchihas… I did.

I vaguely felt Itachi shift out of the way to avoid the mess and drew my hair back away from the growing puddle of sick. Did he know? Did he know I was the one that killed his family? At the warm hand rubbing small gentle circles on my back to ease the nausea, I guess not. Why doesn't he know? What could have happened that cause the blame to be shifted to Shi—

"They're the reason I can't have you!"

Oh… I coughed, heaving the last of my dinner from my stomach as the memory surge slowly faded away. My body slumped in exhaustion before Itachi caught my shoulders and pulled me away from the puddle of vomit on the floor.

"You okay?" asked Itachi with concern as he leaned me against the cabinets.

"I…She… Everything's screwed up!" I buried my face in my hands in desperation to organize my thoughts.

How do I break this to him without triggering the infamous Uchiha avenger mode? Sasuke would blow a gasket in a heartbeat with his hair-trigger temper. Itachi... he may have killed his family in another lifetime, but that was his choice. Here, Kasa took that choice from him. She not only killed his family, but was also the cause for his best friend's betrayal to the village. Where do I even start?

"...Don't blame yourself. It's not your fault," started Itachi quietly.

"W-what?" I drew my hands away from my face and looked up to him in surprise.

"You remembered the massacre," continued Itachi.

"How did you—"

"There aren't many things that could elicit this sort of response from you," explained Itachi. "Seeing you've already endured through the memories of Santa and Tokuma's deaths in Kiri, this was the only logical conclusion I could come to."

"But I—Kasa killed…" I stopped when he raised a hand to stop me.

"It was out of your control," reasoned Itachi as the expression on his face softened. "I had hoped… out of everything you've forgotten, it would be one of things you would never remember."

"You're not… angry?" I said in confusion.
"It would have been inevitable," murmured Itachi with a shake of his head. "But this is not the time nor place for such talks. You mentioned Orochimaru might be after Sasuke, but that was when Sasuke was the only Uchiha remaining correct?"

"Yes," I nodded in agreement. "But since there are so many other Uchihas now, the threat might be towards the Uchiha as a whole. Or at least the active Uchiha shinobi."

"I see," murmured Itachi pensively. "I'll inform Naori of the situation and have her put the clan on high alert for the duration of the exams. As for Sasuke…"

"Will you take him out of the exams?" I asked, hopeful of his answer.

"No," replied Itachi bluntly. "This will be the first joint exam the villages shared since the beginning of our peace talks with Kumo. As they've attempted to kidnap Sasuke in the past, to have him participate will display our level of trust and hopefully improve the chances of success in amending relations between the two villages."

"You'd risk Sasuke for political gain?" I snapped in disbelief. "And what the hell do you mean they tried to kidnap him before? So you're not only risking him against Orochimaru, but you're risking him against his former kidnappers as well? What is wrong with you?"

"It's not risk if there are precautions set ahead of time," countered Itachi.

"And what kind of precaution could deter that?" I growled.

"The Crimson Terror," replied Itachi bluntly. "I've already spoken with Hokage-sama to put you in as one of the overseeing proctors."

"Me?" I said in disbelief. "You do know my reputation is bullshit right? It may work in the chaos of the field when everyone's too busy to notice, but what the hell am I supposed to do in an exam? Just stand there?"

"Exactly," confirmed Itachi.

"…You're kidding right?" I grumbled darkly. "I don't know the first thing about how a chunin exam is supposed to be run! How the hell am I going to be a proctor?"

"With your reputation, you don't need to do anything," explained Itachi. "Being there is a deterrence in itself."

"…And if there are ballsy enemy ninja crazy enough to start shit?" I countered.

"Hn," grinned Itachi as he stretched out two fingers to tap my forehead. "Then there won't be a problem for you to blow them up like you do on the field."

"…I'm not sure if I should I be reassured or disturbed by your confidence in my murdering abilities." I groused and place a hand over the spot where he poked.

"Take it however you see fit," continued Itachi light-heartedly as he pushed his hands against his knees and stood up. "I'll clean up the mess and get you some tea while you think over it."

"Trying to bribe me with tea now?" I noted wryly.

"If I recall correctly, it is your one true love is it not?" replied Itachi as he filled up a pot with water and set it on the stove. "You claim you would elope with a pot of tea."
"Yeah… I'd… do it." I laughed at the absurdity of the claim as I slumped boneless against the cabinets, eyes heavy and nearly impossible to keep open.

"Kasa?" called out Itachi

"I think the Crimson Terror may need a name change soon." I mused quietly as I slowly lost grasp of consciousness. "To the… Terrible… Narco…lep…tic…zzz…"

Blackouts were quickly becoming an issue. While the memory surges provided a good deal of information, it left me dead tired and utterly useless. Fortunately, aside from that one incident during the Kiri campaign, the majority of my surges were in relatively safe locations.

I have no clue what transpired while I was out, but I assumed everything was fine since no one was missing limbs or horribly traumatized when I returned to the waking world. In fact, it was oddly peaceful the days that followed after, to the point it was almost enough to make me believe everything would be okay for a change… Keyword: almost.

"Good morning Kasa-san," greeted Sai with insincere pleasantness at the living room window sill before he paused with a confused tilt of his head. "Why are you wrapped up like a spring roll?"

"Because it's nice and warm." I retorted haughtily from the couch, bundled in a throw with only my head visible. "Do people not know how to use the door anymore?"

"Aren't you concerned that you leave yourself vulnerable to an ambush?" asked Sai curiously.

"I'm willing to take the risk," I sighed and snuggled deeper in my bundle. "What does the boss man want this time?"

"I… see?" murmured Sai before he replied. "There's a briefing for all Chunin exam proctors at the Academy auditorium."

"…Do I have to go?" I grumbled. "I didn't even agree to be a proctor for the exam."

"I'm afraid so. Itachi-sama insisted," replied Sai.

For some reason, Sai seemed to be Itachi's preferred Root operative for sending messages. Why? My guess is either he has some weird fondness for the kid or he reminds him of Sasuke… Either way, Itachi has a weird brother complex.

"Fine… where and when?" I sighed.

"Academy, room 302 in an hour," answered Sai brightly.

"Is Itachi going too?" I wormed my way to the edge of the couch, but overestimated the distance and crashed into the ground instead. "Oomph!"

"He has some duties to attend to with Hokage-sama…" paused Sai with another tilt of his head. "Will you require some assistance?"

"Nope." I answered voice muffled with my face down on the ground. "I got this."

"Very well. Have a nice day Kasa-san," said Sai before he disappeared from the window sill.

Long after he was gone, I sighed dejectedly and rolled until I was free from my self-imposed blanket prison. No point in procrastinating, no hiding from the shit storm, but… I didn't really feel like gearing up for a briefing. Unfortunately, there wasn't much to Kasa's closet aside from kimonos and
travel gear. Apparently, fighting in traditional wear has become a staple for the Crimson Terror's reputation.

Muscle memory-wise, it's fine. Comfort-wise, I much rather wear shorts with an extra loose hoodie. I seriously need a shopping trip for some comfortable clothes.

I shook my head at the silly thought and made my way to change into a summer yukata. I didn't bother grabbing my umbrella or seal cards, but I did make an effort to grab my hitai-ate. While the Crimson Terror is a staple name out on the field and a number of bingo books, it was barely a whisper among the civilians and children. Sure, they've heard of the name and reputation, but few paid enough attention to connect the name to me.

If not for the hitai-ate, my vertically challenged-self was often mistaken for an Academy student playing hooky when I'm not around other shinobi. A blessing I suppose if ever I need to blend in, but a nuisance when all I want to do it get lunch on my day off.

"Hey, hey! It's Kasa!" greeted a spiky-haired shinobi with a bandage across the center of his face the moment I stepped through the doors of the designated classroom.

I glanced to him with furrowed brows, wondering who he was. It's obvious he knows who I am, by the greeting, but I can't recall a name to his face.

"What? No greeting?" huffed the man, feigning disappointment.

"Kotetsu, it's obviously because she hung out with Itachi for too long," drawled a bandana wearing shinobi with hair covering one-side of his face.

"Too right Izumo," grinned Kotetsu as he glanced back to the other with a knowing grin as though he was teasing me. However, when I didn't rise or even respond to his playful jibes, the smile faded from his lips and confusion crossed his face instead. "Something wrong Kasa?"

I stared at the two for a good minute, waiting for a memory trigger, but it seems the memory surges occurs only during inconvenient times. With no recollection, I gave a shrug and responded as I would to anyone who wasn't aware of my memory loss.

"Sorry, I forgot who you were for a moment." I teased light-heartedly.

"What?" said Kotetsu aghast in mock hurt before he turned to his partner. "Did you hear that Izumo? She implied we're forgettable."

"That's cold even by Itachi's standard," agreed the other chūnin, but a slight grin was at his lips as he took my words as a joke.

"Well, someone has to best Itachi somewhere." I grinned. It didn't take more than a moment before the two started laughing and clapped a friendly hand on my shoulder.

"Welcome back Kasa, it's been a while," laughed Kotetsu.

"Has it now? I don't remember a single thing." I continued pleasantly as he and Izumo drew me into their conversation of what they know of the chūnin exams thus far.

After the incident with Utakata on the battlefield, I found it was easier to pretend I knew people when they greeted me to avoid the whole awkward backlash of butt-hurt about my lack of memory. It took a bit of trial an error since I still had the whole Crimson Terror reputation to maintain. It wouldn't do for the supposed psychotic killer to seem harmless and friendly. However, it was also a
good way to check on how well these people knew Kasa.

Those who knew her at a personal level or at least interact with her long enough would dismiss the whole psychopath act as nothing. Those not in the know would disappear halfway through a short exchange, terrifed as they flee from my presence.

"If it isn't the Uchihas' little girlfriend," chirped a sultry voice before I found an arm resting on my head. A scanty mesh-clad kunoichi with a spiky purple ponytail grinned down at me as I glanced up at her. "Finally gracing us with your company after so long?"

"Hello." I greeted evenly as I digested her words.

Between what she said and I recalled from the last memory surge, I hazard a guess Kasa either had a complicated relationship with the Uchiha boys or this was a lot of one-sided bullshit. If Shisui's words were of any indication, he seem to have an unhealthy infatuation with old Kasa. As for Itachi... he must have some fondness for old Kasa if he's willing to forgive her for murdering his whole family... She must have felt something for the two as well if she went as far as getting herself in such a mess. Though, to what extent... I'm not sure.

"Hmm? What's that look for?" asked the purple-haired woman teasingly. "Trouble in paradise?"

"Paradise is overrated. Hell is cozier." I replied smoothly, dismissing the fact I was lost in thought at the moment.

"Ha! I knew I liked you for a reason," chuckled the woman as she slipped her arm down to my shoulders and drew me in a headlock. "I'm definitely having you as part of my unit for the exams."

"Your part?" I repeated, as she manhandled me in her arms. At my peripheral, I could see curious eyes watching with trepidation, but no one dared to utter a word. Were they scared of me or her?

"Anko, stop manhandling the Crimson Terror, you're scaring everyone in the room," rumbled a deep voice.

"Come now Ibiki, afraid she might murder everyone in cold blood?" huffed Anko as she turned to face the speaker.

"It's not murdered I'm concerned with," retorted the scar-faced man with a scoff.

"Ah, you're talking about the maiming," hummed Anko gleefully as released ahold of me. The others in the room flinched at the casual mention. "Right, right, we can't risk being short-handed."

"Okay, enough chitchat, all of you quit fucking around and sit down," sighed a lethargic man as he strolled casually into the room with a senbon peeking out from his lips and a thick binder tucked under his arm. With the exception of Anko and Ibiki, the rest in the room skittered to find a seat.

"That goes for you too red."

I raised a brow at the nickname but said nothing as I found my way to the furthest seat in the room. After being feared for so long and by so many, it was an odd feeling to be dismissed so casually. Even stranger when everyone else in the room was terrified. I bit back a sigh as I sunk unwillingly into my seat. The chunin exams suck.
"…You are probably the only person who would break into a jail cell to eat lunch with someone," commented Hana dryly as she cut up the okonomiyaki in the box on her lap.

"Yeah?" I replied, puffing through a mouthful of steaming hot food. "If Itachi would stop being an ass and let you out, I wouldn't have to do this now would I?"

"Kasa, you really shouldn't be here," sighed Tenzo as he hovered by the jail cell's door.

"What's Itachi going to do if he finds me in here? Throw me into a cell?" I snorted. "Besides, I got one for you too didn't I? Eat up."

Tenzo gave an exasperated sigh as he started picking at his food.

"How did Itachi piss you off this time?" sighed Hana as she took a bite of her food.

"Aside from being an ass?" I drawled. "Oh, I don't know… ignoring my warnings, forcing me to do what I don't want to do i.e overlooking EVERY section of the chunin exams! You know… the usual."

"Hmph," snorted Hana. "You two sound like a married couple."

"If we're married, I want a divorce." I growled under my breath. "Tenzo here is probably the only person that could stand being married to his ass."

"W-What?" coughed Tenzo, he choked on his food at the comment.

"You are." I waved off his incredulity before pausing. "Speaking of which… Hana, why did you decide to help Shisui knowing what he did?"

"Kasa—"

"What made you help him?" I interrupted. "I know you… or at least I like to say I know you. It doesn't make sense for you to help him. Even if Itachi is an ass, I can't see you betraying Konoha to help a traitor. So why?"

Melancholy fell over her face as Hana's gaze fell to Tenzo. Realizing her hesitation, I rolled onto my feet from her bed roll and promptly delivered a kick to Tenzo's ass.

"Woah!" yelped Tenzo as he stumbled forward to avoid spilling his food and turned to face me.

"What was that for Kasa?"

"Move, I wanna talk shit about Itachi with Hana and she's not going to talk if you're here." I answered bluntly.

"Come on Kasa, I'm already breaking the rules by letting you come in here already. I can't—"

"I'll take all the blame if you get in trouble." I quipped.

"That's not the point!" protested Tenzo.
"Just do it already! It's not like you're the only Root operative here! Hana's not going to get far even if she tries to break out! She's not stupid! This place is in the middle of the Forest of Death for god sake!" I grunted as I started pushing him away from the cell.

"I'm going to have to tell Itachi about this, you know that right?" sighed Tenzo as he reluctantly allowed me to push him forward.

"You can tell Hokage-sama and the T&I division for all I care. Now scram!" I huffed as I propped my hands on my hip.

"Fine, fine," sighed Tenzo in exasperation as he glanced back. "Don't take too long okay?"

"I got it!" I waved him off as I made my way back to Hana's cell. "So, ready to talk?"

"...You have way too much power," commented Hana.

"The power to be an ass?" I grinned.

"The power to get away with being an ass," corrected Hana.

"Fat lot that does me." I muttered. "I can't change anything with it. Hell, I can't even get out of stuff I don't want to do."

"...You don't get it do you?" sighed Hana.

"Get what?" I frowned in confusion.

"You were always a bit slow when it came to these things," said Hana in exasperation as she placed her food down and moved to walk closer to me. Her hands cupped over my chin so I would look straight into her eyes. "You don't understand how much power you have over people. How they're willing to kill for you. Die for you."

"Um... H-Hana?" I gulped awkwardly, but too nervous to back away from her.

"Though you just woke up from a coma, you're not a kid anymore Kasa," continued Hana as her soft gaze turned sharp. "You need to be aware of the affect you have on people. Memory-less or not."

"...I'm not sure if you're trying to seduce me or tell me the world is in love with me." I joked light-heartedly despite the discomfort I felt.

"I supposed to you there is no difference," sighed Hana as she dropped her hands from my face and crossed her arms.

"Uh... sure?" I shrugged, not wanting to continue on that line of conversation and steered it back to my original question. "You still haven't answered my question to why you helped Shisui yet. Do you love him or something? It seems a bit odd for you to help him."

"It's complicated," murmured Hana as she tried to side-step the question.

"I have all the time in the world to listen... Well, until Tenzo comes back with Itachi and kick me out anyway." I grinned. "Come on, you can tell me."

"Oh Kasa," A faint grin tugged at the older girl's lips as she stared down at me with somber fondness. "There's so much you don't understand..."

"Then tell me." I pressed on in curiosity. "You can't expect me to learn if you keep me in the dark."
"…It's better you not know," replied Hana quietly.

"Why?" I frowned, wondering what could have drove the Inuzuka Clan head's daughter to doing something like this and not give reason to it.

"Visiting hours are over, Kasa-san," greeted a familiar voice before I broke my attention from Hana and turned to the source.

"Kabuto." I said in surprise.

"Hana-san, best you return to your cell," suggested the ash-haired shinobi as he gave us a deceptively disarming smile.

"What, his majesty Itachi can't take time to come here himself?" challenged Hana with a raised brow as the bespectacled young man chuckled.

"We both know what would happen if Itachi-sama comes here," commented Kabuto casually as he out his hand in a flourish bow. "If you would, Hana-san."

"What does he mean?" I turned to Hana in confusion, but the girl didn't answer as she huffed and turned her heel to return to her cell. "Hana?"

"Think over my words Kasa," said Hana cryptically as she closed the jail-cell door behind her and plopped down on her bed roll with her back facing us.

"Kasa-san," continued Kabuto in a pleasant tone as he opened his arm towards the exit.

Reluctantly, I tore my gaze from the cell as I clenched my fists at my sides.

"I'll be back again Hana." I called out to her before I made way out with Kabuto trailing from behind.

Tenzo was nowhere in sight as we left. I assumed he took another path to avoid me on the off chance I talked his ear off or harassed him about calling Kabuto. Wise move, can't blame him for covering his own ass. Though, it didn't help alleviate the concerns brought up by Hana's words. From how our conversation went, I have a sinking feeling old Kasa checked off more and more in the Mary-Sue status.

Let's see… She has a relation to the main character, albeit distant. A terrifying reputation that brought either adoration or fear… and apparently everyone is in love with her… Gods, I hope not. As convenient as it would be to have everything resolved because the world loves me for some random bullshit is—

"Kasa-san?" said Kabuto as he interrupted the silence.

"Yeah?" I broke out of my thoughts and glanced to him.

"You're free now, am I correct?" He continued with his usual smile.

"…Why?" I asked cautiously.

"Let's have lunch," chirped Kabuto.

"I'm not hungry." I answered.

"I know," replied Kabuto. "Let's have lunch."
"…Why would I go to lunch if I'm not hungry?" I frowned.

"You burned off my face and suggested we go on a lunch date," replied Kabuto cheerily. "We never got a chance to do so."

"What?" I halted in my steps to stare at him in disbelief.

"Something wrong?" asked Kabuto as he stopped to turn back to face me.

"Why the hell would anyone suggest a lunch date after burning off someone else's face?" I threw up my hands in disbelief. "More importantly, why the hell would you want to go out with the person that burned your face off? Are you crazy?"

"Because it would be amusing," replied Kabuto with a grin.

"Amusing how?" I frowned.

"Hana-san was right, you really don't know," chuckled Kabuto as he continued walking. "Let's have lunch, it'll be fun."

"I don't see how any of this is fun!" I shouted as I hurried after him.

"…Why am I here?" I pinched the bridge of my nose with a frustrated sigh as Kabuto merrily skimmed over the menu.

"What do you feel like having?" asked Kabuto as he ignored my question.

"I'm not hungry." I grumbled.

"Neither am I," continued Kabuto.

"You're aggravating." I hissed.

"You're aggravated," agreed the bespectacled asshole as he placed down his menu and laced his fingers underneath his chin with amusement. "I could see why Itachi-sama and so many others are fond of you."

"Please tell me this is not a love confession." I dropped my head to the table in a loud thud.

"I have no intention of shortening my life any more than I already have," chuckled Kabuto.

"Then, why are we here?" I sighed, not lifting my head from the table as I tilted it to glance up at him.

"You have questions and I have answers," noted Kabuto. "That's why you went to Hana Inuzuka, was it not?"

"… You know why Hana helped Shisui?" I lifted my head from the table.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" commented Kabuto.

"According to you and everyone else, not to me." I grumbled.

"Well, you can tell me what you've come up with and I can tell you how wrong you are," offered Kabuto.
"Gee, thanks." I muttered as he waved down the waitress to order.

I watched as he gave the waitress a list of skewers from the menu and other small things that could be easily eaten without being too filling. While Hana's convinced the world was in love with Kasa to the point of Mary-sueism, Kabuto's seemed to mock the very thought. So the question here... who's right?

"What's on your mind?" asked Kabuto at my silence.

"You don't love me." I watched his expressions closely as I tested the waters.

"What makes you say that?" grinned Kabuto, not giving away any of his thoughts on the matter.

"Ah-ah!" I sat up and interrupted him with a pointed finger. "You're not allowed to answer a question with a question. You said you will tell me how wrong I am with my guesses."

"I also said it has to be something you've concluded," agreed Kabuto as he pushed up his glasses with a sly grin. "So, unless you can give a reason, I won't answer your blind guesses."

"You play dirty." I grumbled.

"Well?" continued Kabuto pleasantly. "What's your reason behind it?"

"Amusement, this is all it is for you." I crossed my arms. "If you loved me or were even the least bit interested you wouldn't go out of your way to piss me off."

"Itachi-sama, pisses you off on a regular basis," chirped the bespectacled teen.

"But we're not talking about Itachi now are we?" I countered. "You also mentioned you didn't want to shorten your life more than you already have. Love is a high stupid factor, if you truly are in love, you wouldn't care about something like survival."

"Rather cynical, don't you think?" questioned Kabuto as he casually took a sip of his tea.

"I could say the same since you're mocking the very idea of it." I continued.

"Touché," agreed Kabuto, but it felt more like a loss than a victory.

Everything about this conversation was in his control. He wanted me to come to the wrong conclusion about something, but what? Thinking back on our conversation, he's been evasive with every reasoning I brought up. The only thing constant was his mockery of the idea love. So... either he wants me to think I'm not loved or... I glanced to him again, trying to gage his reaction with my next words.

"Someone is in love with me." I cautioned, his eyes seemed to light up at my words.

His grin widened and I huffed in annoyance. I wanted to know why Hana helped Shisui, not this whole nonsense of about someone who's in love with me. How the hell did the conversation end up here of all places anyway?

"This is stupid." I grumbled.

"You're not wrong," agreed Kabuto.

Okay, the consensus was love is stupid. If love is a stupid factor, then people who are in love ends up doing stupid things. Such as... betraying the village over a girl. My thoughts immediately drifted
to Shisui and the blood memories of the massacre. However, if this was the case, there was no need for Kabuto to go in such a roundabout way for me to conclude this or come to a misunderstanding since it's supposedly the obvious answer. There's something more to this, but what?

Logically, Hana would fall under the same category for helping Shisui if she loved him... If? Why if? I frowned at the thought. If she's not doing this out of love for Shisui, then who was she doing it for? Inuzukas were loyal to a fault they wouldn't betray anyone unless...

My eyes widened. I was going about this the wrong way. I was so wrapped up in the possibility of romantic love, I completely forgot about the other equally motivating factors of love. Familial love between family, platonic love between friends and the most dangerous one apart from romantic love was patriotic love for your home.

The young woman imprisoned wasn't love-struck. She didn't pine and obsess over a one-sided love. All those times Kasa saw her bicker with Itachi, she was outspoken and critical over political matters. The times she praised Shisui was used as an insult. He was the lesser evil in her eyes despite a traitor to Konoha, which meant... the threat was in Konoha.

A chill went up my spine at the conclusion. What was the threat? Who was the threat?

"Who's in love with you?" asked Kabuto as he interrupted my train of thought.

"Huh?" I glanced up to him in surprise.

"You said, someone is in love with you," repeated the ash grey-haired teen.

...Someone in love with me? My thoughts went back to Hana's words from before. Something about how I affected people. How they're willing to kill and die for me and how much power...

"Oh..." I whispered, quiet realization dawning me at last.

Hana's stand, Kabuto's distaste for love... it was all about power. The person in love with me had a dangerous amount of power in Konoha, be it literal, political or in this case... both and Hana saw it as a threat to the village.

"Seems like you've come to a conclusion," said Kabuto pleasantly.

"...I'm not sure what you find amusing about this." I pinched the bridge of my nose with another sigh. "The fact Itachi is in love with me or the fact Hana thinks Itachi's a threat to Konoha because of it."

"What do you think?" asked Kabuto.

"I think everyone in this village needs to improve on their communication skills or is in serious need of a therapist." I muttered in a deadpan.

"You're not surprised Itachi is in love with you?" noted Kabuto with interest.

"I'm more surprised by the amount of people who is." I scoffed and dragged my hand down my face. "No one is worth this much trouble."

"Even you?" continued Kabuto curiously.

"Especially me." I lowered my hand and drummed my fingers against the table in agitation. "This is so stupid. Of all the things it could've been, you're telling me this is nothing more than teenage love drama? Give me a break!"
"…You're angry," said Kabuto in surprise.

"Of course I'm angry!" I snapped, slamming my hand down. "I'm pissed off that every single one of you played off being all wise and mysterious over something as stupid as this!"

"You care more about that?" a frowned crossed Kabuto's face with his question.

"I shouldn't have to care about this shit in the first place." I threw my hands up in frustration. "Why the fuck do you care? It's not like you love me, you made that clear enough. So what? You're in love with Itachi or something? Are you pulling a 'hurt him and you'll regret it' routine? The fuck do you want from me?"

We fell into a silent one-sided glaring contest with me glaring daggers at Kabuto and him staring back at me in cool speculation. I had no clue what ran through his mind, but after a moment the corner of his lips tugged upwards and he broke the silence with a hearty laugh.

"You don't change much do you?" chuckled Kabuto as he stifled the last of his laughter.

"Quit the vague dialogue shtick and get to the point before I decide to go home." I grounded. "I've already sat through one stupid conversation today, I don't need another."

"Blunt and straight to the point as always," chirped Kabuto, though his tone had changed significantly from the one he used earlier. "But even so, I'm glad you're okay."

"Okay?" I frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Yes, what were you talking about?" interrupted Itachi's voice before I snapped my attention towards the source of his voice.

"Hello Itachi," said Kabuto smoothly as he shot him a grin. "Looks like we're going to have to cut our lunch date short, Kasa."

"What are you doing here?" Itachi's eyes narrowed, I could see the defining lines on his face as his jaw tensed.

"Just telling Kasa here how much you love her," continued Kabuto as though trying to antagonize the Uchiha. "Since you never seem to want to tell her yourself Itachi."

…Itachi, not Itachi-sama, Kasa, not Kasa-san.

A frown crossed my face as I noticed the subtle differences. Something wasn't right. From our campaign in Kiri, I know Kabuto has a tendency to act out when he thinks Itachi's being too reckless with his own health. He tended to keep others in the dark if only to laugh at them.

…That's not Kabuto.

At the realization, my fingers twitched to reach for my seal cards, but then I realized I didn't carry any on me… Shit.

"Well, it's obvious I've over stayed my welcome," continued the fake Kabuto as he pushed himself up from his seat. Both Itachi and I tensed at the ready, but instead of an attack, the fake gave a three finger salute. A familiar draft of leaves surrounded his the body before he flickered away. "See you around."

"…Who was that?" I asked quietly, still on high alert despite the fake disappearing.
"Someone I'll deal with. You don't have to concern over it," replied Itachi with a short release of his breath. His body was still taut with tension as he made his way out the restaurant.

"Oh, I think I definitely should be concerned about this." I countered as I grabbed onto his arm.

"Look, we'll talk later," evaded Itachi as he pulled my hand off. "You're underequipped and he's still in the village. I need to catch him before he gets away."

"Itachi!" I snapped.

"Later!" He shouted in returned before slipping away with a replacement jutsu and disappearing in another flurry of leaves.

"Fuck you! You're not making me sit here and wait!" I snapped as I tried to chase after him, but paused when I realized I didn't know how to body flicker. Even if I chased after him, I wouldn't be able to track him for long, what with my lack of equipment.

"Um…" started the waitress that was serving me and the fake Kabuto.

"What?" I snapped.

"N-not to be a bother, but could you pay for the meal before you leave?" asked the woman meekly.

"…Fuck a duck! Son of a—" I bit down on my lip to keep from shouting a string of curses as I pressed two fingers to my forehead to calm down.

As if being left behind like a useless damsel in distress wasn't bad enough, the fuckers left me with the bill. The bill! I took a deep breath before reached into my obi for my wallet and slapped down the payment for the mostly untouched meal. I swear, when I get my hands on either of them, I'm going to kill them. I'm going to kill them good!
Idiots

Armed to the teeth, I took to the roof in hopes to spot Itachi or the fake Kabuto in conflict. Probably a pointless endeavor by this point, but I was too angry to care.

"What was I thinking going around the village with barely any equipment on hand? Am I stupid?" I grumbled to myself as I skipped over another roof in hopes of spotting my targets.

To think it was safe to go about the village with no weapons, I must have grown lax. Just because it was no longer the frontlines didn't mean the threats were gone. If the massacres and multiple attempted kidnappings were any indication, Konoha wasn't the most secure of villages.

Security issues aside, I have the wide arsenal skills in killing, healing and acting like a psychopathic murderer. All which were utterly useless when I have no tracking skills whatsoever to find the people I want to use it on. Hell, a memory surge would be appreciated right about now. It may leave me in shit condition, but at least I'd get somewhere.

"Come on, give me something! Any—oomph!" I tumbled as something heavy pounced on my back and knocked me to the ground. "What on earth—bleh! S-Stop! Stop!"

I raised my arms in an attempt to ward off the slobbering tongue against my face, only to find another two come at me at different directions. What the hell is going on!? I tried to push myself off the ground, but the weight on my back kept me pinned in an angle with no leverage. How was I so careless? Why didn't I sense them at all?

"Kasa sensei!?" shouted a familiar voice in alarm before he started shouting at my attackers. "What are you guys doing? Haimaru get off her! Off!"

"Haimaru?" I frowned as I lowered my arms to see three happy dogs hovering over me with their wet noses sniffing me excitedly.

No, not any dogs, Hana's dogs. A grin crossed my lips grin as I pushed off from the ground and held out a hand for them to sniff.

"Hello, deus ex machina." I whispered when the three became excited once more, their tails wagged as they circled me in a wild pounce. They smelled Hana from my brief visit. "If you guys find Itachi for me, I can take you to Hana."

The three barked and nuzzled my hand.

"All right there Kasa sensei?" said the voice one more time before I spotted Kiba on the side with Akamaru in his arms.

"Yeah, just fine." I replied as I got to my feet.

"Not sure what got into them," started the feral boy as he tried to grab a hold of them, but the three dogs sidestepped from his hand and circled around back to me once more.

"Sorry to cut this short Kiba, but I'm going to borrow the Haimaru Brothers for a bit." I said as I took off down the street.
"Wait, borrow?" shouted Kiba in surprise. "For what?"

"Duck hunting!" I answered back with a laugh as we took to the roofs.

Not sure why I said duck hunting since Itachi hardly resembled the creature, but who cares! Exhilaration bubbled from my chest as the Haimaru Brothers passed me on the roof and took point in hunting down Itachi.

"Soon Uchiha! Soon!" I bellowed with a maniacal cackle, no doubt disturbing the peace for the villagers down below.

I wasn't sure where the Haimaru brothers would lead me, but to my surprise it was to a house I've been to once before when I first woke up.

"Here?" I said, my elation melted into confusion as I looked to the three of them. They gave a soft bark in confirmation as to not alert those inside the house. "Why here?"

The trio took another sniff before they gave an excited bark, this time louder as they charged into the house.

"Wait!" I shouted as I scrambled to chase after the dogs. Hana's dogs were better train than this. What could have caused them to bolt? As I made my way in a loud crash went through the room before a body came crashing into me.

"Kasa!" shouted Itachi. His voice too far to be the one who crashed into me, which meant…

"Got you!" I snarled, arms latched onto the scrambling body that attempted to escape. My hands pressed against his lower back where his kidneys would be with chakra at the ready. "Move and peeing blood would be the last thing you worry about."

"…Ruthless as ever," sighed a faintly familiar voice as a chuckle shook his body.

"Don't think I won't." I hissed, pressing my hands harder into his back, forcing his body to still at the threat.

"She's got me," agreed my captive, though his words was not directed to me. "What will you do now, Itachi?"

"What are you waiting for? My hands are full, knock him out, tie him up or something!" I snapped. However, when my words were met with silence, I grew uncertain and called out again. "Itachi?"

"…Kasa, let him go," said Itachi quietly.

"Let him—what?" I snapped. "What's gotten into you Itachi? You can't just—"

"Well, if you rather," commented my captive as his arms suddenly wrapped around my body in a tight hug, his hold locked my arms in a position my hands couldn't touch him. "You could always come with me."

"Yeah… no," I grunted and charged up a defibrillation jutsu through my body. Unfortunately, it had no effect.

"Kasa, Kasa, don't you think I know you better by now?" chirped my captor. "Your jutsus don't work on me."

"Wipe that smug grin off your face before I do it for you." I growled.
"Is that a promise?" He lowered his face to a bare inch away from mine. His breath brushed against my lips as he spoke.

At this distance, I could only stare straight into his single ebony eye and the dark eye-patch over his right. Judging by the state of his skin, he looked as though he lacked nutrition and proper rest. Strange… don't bad guys usually take better care of themselves?

THUNK! The distinct sound of kunai hitting the wall behind us.

"Enough," said Itachi quietly.

"Ah, looks like I made Itachi angry," grinned my captive turned captor.

"You made your point Shisui, release her," ordered Itachi.

"Have I really?" retorted the older Uchiha, good-humor disappeared from his tone as he glanced up to Itachi with a serious expression over his face.

I struggled for a moment, annoyed that the two were carrying on with a conversation I'm not privy to. As if it wasn't bad enough they left me with a bill, they also damsel-ed me while having a cryptic monologue session. Whelp, since nothing I do matters… Fuck it.

"Kasa?" said Shisui in alarm when the tension slipped away from my muscles and my body fell limp against his hold.

"Oh, don't mind me, you guys carry on with your verbal dick measuring contest." I retorted dryly as I stared up to the ceiling aimlessly. "I'm just gonna lounge until you're done, 'kay?"

"Kasa, you're in a hostage situation right now," grounded out Itachi.

"Meh." I shrugged. "With how you guys talk, it's going to be a while before anything happens. Since Shisui's so kindly offered to hold me until it's over, I might as well take advantage of it. I'm feeling lazy."

"…Are you serious?" said Shisui in disbelief.

"Yeeeeeep." I popped the p as I swung my dangling legs lazily. "Go on, don't mind me. I might even decide to take a nap."

"Stop being childish!" snapped Itachi. "This is not the time—"

"Weeeell," I dragged out with a mocking tone. "Since I'm being treated like a child, why not act like one? I mean, it's not like I need to know anything right?"

"Kasa!" snapped Itachi.

"So, which one of you are going to declare your undying love for me and then fight to the death?" I drawled in a deadpan. "Because if you're going to do that, at least let me get some popcorn to watch."

Not a sound was made between the three of us. The room fell silent. Itachi sent a pointed glare at me. I in turn flipped him the bird while my in awkward damsel-ed limp ragdoll state and Shisui looked baffled by the whole ordeal.

"…Why do I bother?" sighed Itachi, unable to handle my nonsense as he pinched his nose.
"Well, it's your fault for loving me. No one told you to do something stupid like that." I retorted.

"If you're aiming to change my mind, you're doing a wonderful job," replied Itachi dryly.

"Good to know you're easily swayed." I scoffed. "And I wondered why Hana hated your guts."

"…Pft," snorted Shisui as he broke out into laughter. "Only you… hahaha!"

"Hmm?" I craned my neck to get a better glance at Shisui who had tears in his eyes. "What's so funny?"

"Only you would dismiss being a hostage and then egg Itachi into a bickering match," laughed Shisui.

"I know what I am, but what does that make you?" I retorted.

"Schoolyard insults? Really?" said Shisui dryly.

"Better than what the two of you are trying to do." I countered.

"What?" said Shisui in surprise.

"If memory serves me right, which would be rather ironic at this point. I'm the one who was responsible for the massacre, no? You confirmed it yourself Itachi. So, why is Shisui taking the blame? Did he actually kill any Uchihas at all?" I continued as I tilted my head back to talk to Itachi.

"Kasa," said Itachi in warning.

"All this secrecy is a bit strange, but it didn't hit me why until now." I ignored his warning.

"And why is that?" asked Shisui.

"You Uchihas are a real pain in the ass," I explained with an irritated grunt. "I'm not sure which type's worse. The world ending assholes or the self-sacrificing idiots like you two, martyring yourself for one reason or another."

The two Uchihas said nothing, but I could tell I've hit the mark.

"So, wanna fill me in what you're both trying to save, slash, protect, and, or destroy? Or should I go back to lounging while you two try to convince me Shisui's evil?" I huffed.

Itachi glanced to the older Uchiha before he relented. "…Fine."

"Really?" asked Shisui with a raised brow. "You're the one who suggested to leave her out of this."

"That was when she was in the dark and unaware," amended Itachi. "You and I both know, if we try to leave her out now, she would do something outrageous just to spite us."

"True," agreed Shisui. "Kasa was always the petty type."

"Hello, still standing here." I reminded them as I planted my hands on my hips.

"But we still love you," chirped Shisui.

"Somehow the word sounds cheaper and cheaper each time I hear it." I drawled.

"Only because you haven't heard it from the right person yet," quipped Shisui before he glanced to
his wrist to check the time. "I'm cutting it a bit close. Itachi, think you can cover everything on your own?"

"Go," ordered Itachi.

"Well, I'm off," said Shisui with a quick playful salute. "Try to be a bit nicer to Hana."

"You said that as though she wouldn't find that suspicious," commented Itachi.

"Try anyway," continued Shisui before he leant down and gave each of the Haimaru brothers a pat on the head. Once done, he turned to me with a quick peck to my forehead. "See you around Kasa."

With that, disappeared with a body flicker in a swirl of leaves. I pressed a hand against my forehead where his lips touch and rubbed it out of agitation. All this talk about love, I'm starting to think Shisui's a troll. I glanced to Itachi who waited patiently with crossed arms.

"So, ready to tell me everything?" I asked.
"So… what happened to giving me answers?" I commented offhandedly as the dark-haired Uchiha finish preparing ingredients for yet another dish before going back to the wok once more. "Or do you Uchihas enjoy talking over food when the other person isn't hungry?"

"As you and Shisui so fondly like to remind me, I have a habit of stress cooking," replied Itachi alongside the hiss of metal and food.

"Uh-huh." I sighed as I glanced down to the Haimaru brothers devouring plate after plate of his cooking. "Hana's going to kill you if she finds out you're feeding her dogs."

"What she doesn't know won't harm anyone," retorted Itachi.

"Except her apparently, since she's stuck in prison while you two numb nuts are running around playing villain and victim." I scoffed. "And if you say this is for the greater good, I'm going to kick you in the balls."

"Of course your answer to all problems would be kick them in the balls," snorted Itachi as he turned off the stove and plated his most recent dish. "Glad to see your priorities haven't changed in that regard even with memory loss."

"Hey!" I warned.

"Stop comparing you to old Kasa, right?" noted Itachi dully as he moved on to cleaning the pots and pans he used.

"An easy thing to promise, but you hardly put it to practice," I retorted.

"You make it difficult," countered Itachi evenly.

"I'm guessing that's why you and Shisui decided to keep me in the dark with whatever the two of you have planned." I huffed.

"How much of the night of the massacre do you remember?" asked Itachi.

My flippant attitude disappeared at the sudden question before I thought back to the gory memory. It was still an unpleasant image despite the detachment and time distance.

"The deaths… your mother being skewered, Shisui's absurd declaration of love, which I'm quite sure at this point is a ruse, and… the man named Naki." I muttered with a frown. "The memories itself are incomplete so I'm not sure on the details on how he's involved or why Kasa would help him—"

"She was under Danzo's influence," explained Itachi.

"Danzo?" I repeated before I recalled Shisui's face moments earlier. "Ah… that explains the eye patch—wait a sec, what happened to Danzo? Root is his baby isn't it? How come you have it?"

"…You can't remember who most of us are, but you remember Danzo?" noted Itachi.

"Take that up with old Kasa, I'm not the petty ass that decided what memories to save." I retorted in defense. Itachi raised a brow. "…Okay, fine, I'm equally petty, but you can't fault me for what she
"Hn," scoffed Itachi as he dismissed my defense and continued. "Danzo went missing shortly after the massacre. No message, no struggle, nothing."

"Nothing?" I frowned. "That doesn't sound like the old fart at all."

"Elder and councilman of our village and you call him an old fart?" noted Itachi with a raised brow.

"Hey, he brainwashed me into…well…" I grumbled under my breath. "He's not very nice, don't see why I should call him anything else."

"Fair enough," grinned Itachi as he took a seat across from me and continued his story. "We were in the midst conflict with Kiri and Kumo and sorely needed more numbers in our ranks. Hokage-sama decided it best to reassign them to me to lead them to battle… I supposed it also served as a test in part of his decision for my candidacy as well."

"Yes, rub it in my face you'll be my boss once the Third decides to retire." I commented dryly.

"I thought you wanted to hear the full story," retorted Itachi.

"Sorry, I have a short attention span." I said non-apologetically.

"I know you want to know the details about Shisui, but there's a point to everything I've brought up thus far," explained Itachi. "So, if you could not interrupt, it would be greatly appreciated."

"…Why do I get the feeling this is going to be a long winded story?" I grumbled.

"Kasa," warned Itachi.

"Fine! Fine!" I made the motion to zip my lip and locked it with a key.

Itachi gave me a pointed stare before I rolled my eyes and reached out to grab his hand. I made an exaggerated show to deposit the metaphorical key into it. I clapsed his hand closed with both of mine before I gave him a look that said are you happy now? His gaze lowered to his trapped hand, but he made no move to pull away from me.

"Tenzo and I were on an espionage mission in Kumo when the massacre occurred," continued Itachi quietly as he resumed his story. "When Naori sent message for my withdrawal, I had no clue what had happened. By the time I returned, news of the massacre spread through the village and everyone was convinced Shisui was a traitor. Sasuke in particular was most adamant as he witnessed your—Kasa's last moments against Shisui and the stranger Naki."

True to my word, I kept silent and watched as the micro-expressions sped across Itachi's face. It was strange to see the normally stoic Uchiha to be so expressive, even if it was for a fleeting split second. His brows pinched briefly at the unpleasantness of the conversation and his eyes turned glassy in recollection. He seemed so… vulnerable and exposed. It felt almost wrong to watch him.

"With my father and the Uchiha council dead, the entirety of the clan suddenly became my responsibility. My mother was hospitalized, Sasuke was a mess, Shisui was gone and you…" trailed Itachi softly in a mumble. "I… was a mess."

I opened my mouth to make a wisecrack, but snapped it shut at the grin that tugged at the corner of his lips daring me to break my promise. I huffed in annoyance and maintained my silence. Note to self, never make promises that's a pain in the ass to keep.
"At first, I struggled with the responsibilities as the new clan head. I hadn't realized how bad relations became between the Uchihas and the rest of the village," noted Itachi with a shake of his head. "Just trying to return order to the Police force was a nightmare in itself… In the end, I decided to relinquish the position to Naori—She's my ex-fiancée if you don't remember."

Ex-fiancée? My brows shot up in surprise.

"That's a different story," interrupted Itachi quickly before I could ask and I huffed in annoyance. "I'll tell you that one another time okay? We'll be here forever if I go into that one too."

Reluctantly, I nodded in agreement and motioned for him to continue.

"The reason why I passed leadership of the Uchiha Clan to Naori was because she knew in part what happened during the night of the massacre," picked up Itachi from where he left off. "What she provided was hardly enough to paint the whole picture of that night, but what I did garner from her left jarring discrepancies that lead me to believe Shisui wasn't a traitor. I had no way to confirm Shisui's innocence, not with how everything else looked.

Not long after I passed on the position to Naori, Danzo disappeared. As I've said before, there was nothing to be found of the man. Neither a message nor a struggle… but he's definitely dead. Hokage-sama's not aware of this, but Danzo had silencing seals on all his Root operatives. If they try to speak or reveal information about their splinter cell, they're met with gruesome paralysis.

Kabuto revealed this detail to me months after I assumed command. From him, I learned what happened to Shisui. He…" His enclosed hand tensed under mines as he clenched it into a fist. His eyes lit with a cold fury while he steeled his nerves to continue. "According to Kabuto, Danzo had been in contact with the man named Naki long before even he himself joined Root. He's uncertain to what arrangement the two had, but one thing was certain, that man wanted you."

"Me?" I said in surprise, curiosity got the better of me as I broke the silence. "Why me?"

"You're an oracle," replied Itachi simply as he lowered his head. "…Shisui found out, but before he could do anything, Naki was already on him and stole one of his eyes. Kabuto ended up being the one to complete the eye transplant to Danzo, who later used it on you. He and Naki had an agreement that the man would take you the moment the deed was completed. Shisui tried to warn you, but with the silencing seal… he couldn't say anything."

"Then the whole possessive jealous act…" My face paled as realization sunk in.

"It was the only thing he could think up at the time to gain Naki's trust," confirmed Itachi with a grimace. "He had to make a show, for Naki to believe him."

"Then the attack on Mikoto-san?" I asked.

"He managed to avoid any major organs," noted Itachi. "He would've knocked out Sasuke too, but things went south and you ended up in a four-year coma."

"What a mess." I mumbled quietly and shook my head. "That still doesn't explain what happened with Hana."

"I'm getting to that," answered Itachi. "Recall Shisui had the silencing seal on him?"

"Yeah? But you said Danzo died not too long after. He should be able to talk, shouldn't he?" I frowned.
"The issue, is who would believe him," explained Itachi. "Everyone in the village is convinced he's a traitor. Even if he could talk, no one would listen long enough for him to explain.

"No one… except Hana." I frowned. "From what I've gathered in my conversation with Shisui, it sounds like she thinks you'll do something utterly stupid that would put the village at risk because you love me, but that can't be it right? You had to do something for her to hate you so much."

"That's Shisui's fault," replied Itachi.

"How?" I blinked.

"He needed a way back into Konoha, Hana was simply the most convenient one for him to approach since they had regular contact prior to the incident," explained Itachi.

"Most convenient?" I said in disbelief. "You do know Hana is an Inuzuka right? They're the most loyal and stubborn—oh…he used his other eye didn't he?"

"It was the only way he could send messages to me undetected," answered Itachi.

"Hana is rotting in a jail cell because she thought you were a threat to Konoha." I whispered.

"Shisui is currently our only informant with Naki," reasoned Itachi. "I had to do what I must in order to maintain his cover."

"So you guys turned her into a scapegoat?" I glared at him.

"Tenzo makes certain she's not mistreated while there," assured Itachi.

"This doesn't make it okay!" I shouted.

"Kasa, it's not forever," reasoned Itachi.

"Then how many years do you intend to keep her locked up?" I growled. "How long has she been there?"

"For as long as it takes to keep you and Shisui safe!" snapped Itachi. "I've already lost the two of you once to Naki! I'm not going to lose either of you again! Not when I could prevent it!"

I paused, giving Itachi a double take at his outburst. Of all the things I expected going into this, Itachi snapping and losing his temper was not one of them.

"Do you know how frustrating it is to watch you recklessly throw yourself into danger?" shouted Itachi as he stood and slammed his hands down on the table. The dish rattled against the force. The Haimaru brothers paused in their feast at the commotion. "Do you know how hard is it to know Shisui's innocent and I can't do anything about it?"

"Then tell me." I retorted. "Don't expect me to be a mind reader because you and everyone else think I'm a god damn oracle! How the hell would I know why the hell you're angry?"

"You want to know why? Fine! I'll tell you!" growled Itachi. "I'm angry that neither of you came to me when you were in trouble! I'm angry because you're both idiots who recklessly disregard their own lives! I'm angry about how the two of you could sacrifice everything for my sake! I'm angry because you both left me!"

"…Itachi." I murmured softly as I digested his words.
The dark-haired Uchiha breathed a slow breath through his nose to calm himself. He gave a defeated sigh as he sat back down in his seat, a bit carelessly compared to his usual self.

"You'd think I've come to terms with it by now," scoffed Itachi with a shake of his head. "Be it in the Academy, the chunin exams or even when we were in anbu, you and Shisui were always…"

My fingers glided over his hand before I grasped onto his exposed wrist. He fell silent as his gaze rose from his wrist to meet my eyes. I tilted my head curiously as I gazed back into his. We must've stared at one another for a good minute before my brows furrowed in confusion.

"I don't get it… It's obvious you have some level of fondness for me to not flinch or pull away when I touch you," I muttered with a frown. "But your pupils haven't dilated and your pulsed slowed to a steady beat despite your earlier agitation."

"Your point?" noted Itachi.

"So, either you've loved me at one point and moved on or you don't love me in the manner most people believe you do." I continued thoughtfully. "With how you speak about Shisui and myself, I'm more inclined to think of the latter, making your brother complex even worse than I initially thought. However… you never seem to deny the implications suggested by everyone else… why is that?"

"What does this have to do with our conversation?" frowned Itachi.

"Don't try to change the topic." I gripped onto his wrist tightly to keep him from fleeing from the conversation. "You said you'll answer my questions and I intend to make you answer every little thing, regardless how pointless or stupid you may think they are."

"Why are you suddenly curious about this?" asked Itachi.

"Why are you so reluctant to answer?" I countered. "It can't be because you love me. Regardless how badass as you are, even you can't perfectly control micro-reactions your body gives out unconsciously."

“But I did love—" Itachi halted his words before letting out a frustrated grunt.

"Did?" I repeated curiously at the past tense.

"Trust you to make this difficult," muttered Itachi as he glanced away, not meeting my eyes.

"Difficult?" I scoffed. "No, I think the term you're looking for is awkwardly embarrassing. Though, I have no clue why you find this awkward or embarrassing since you and old Kasa were never a couple to begin with."

"I rather not talk about my love life if possible," murmured Itachi, his face flushed pink despite his stoic demeanor.

"Now you got me curious." I grinned.

"We're not talking about this," huffed Itachi.

"But you owe me!" I whined. "You have a lover you're using me as a cover to keep it a secret from everyone! Why else wouldn't they bother you about the failed engagement between you and Naori?"

"No," replied Itachi bluntly.

"Stingy," I grumbled, releasing his arm so I could cross my arms indignantly. "At least satisfy my
curiosity of when you decided to move on."

"When did you become such a gossip?" glared Itachi.

"When you and Shisui decided to convince the world everyone is in love with me," I retorted. "I
swear, I'm going to have relationship commitment issues because of you guys. Now fess up!"

"...It was while we were in anbu with Tenzo under Captain Kakashi," answered Itachi grudgingly
when he realized I wouldn't relent on my pestering until I got an answer.

"In anbu?" I blinked in surprise. "What happened?"

"You... were different," replied Itachi softly. "I wouldn't say you changed since I could still
recognize you under the whole Crimson Terror façade, kept trying to convince me you're someone
named Rayne, but it was probably a coping mechanism. You never did like the gorier side of shinobi
life."

"Rayne?" I noted curiously.

"You called yourself Rayne the downpour," scoffed Itachi. "A pun off your own name I supposed."

"Makes sense I guess?" I frowned. "So... did Kasa's existential crisis turn you off or something?"

"Don't be an idiot," said Itachi as his gazed focused on me solely.

"Oh excuse me, nothing can deter the mighty Titan of Konoha." I drawled mockingly.

"Except the captain apparently," inserted Itachi dryly.

"Kakashi?" I questioned. "How?"

"Haven't you ever wondered why you trusted him so implicitly despite having no memories at all of
being Kasa?" asked Itachi.

"You do know there is a possibility I might've just imprinted on him like a newborn since I have no
memory whatsoever at the time." I suggested.

"Deny all you want," said Itachi as he ignored my nonsense. "Back then, when you thought no one
was watching, you would look to the captain with this longing gaze."

"...Longing gaze?" I blanched at the description. "That doesn't sound like Kasa at all from what I've
gathered."

"You have a tendency to lie to even to yourself," commented Itachi.

"Uh...huh, not buying it." I shook my head.

"There was also that one... hypothetical conversation we had shortly after chunin exams," murmured
Itachi reluctantly.

"What sort hypothetical conversation are we talking about here?" I asked suspiciously.

"...You and Shisui had a running joke that I should elope with him," explained Itachi. I snorted in
return. "The conversation was about finding someone to surrogate a child between the two of us."

"...That, I could believe coming out from Kasa." I noted. "So... what did she say to make you give
“You said you wanted to give birth to, and I quote 'A badass silver-haired soldier with mommy issues' prefaced and followed by a spiel about scientists, aliens and decapitation,” finished Itachi.

"O…kay…” I started slowly. "I could see why you decided to abandon your interest in her now… though, I'm more concern why you didn't do it earlier. Are you a masochist?"

"Nonsense is part of the norm when dealing with you, memories intact or not," scoffed Itachi. "The point I'm trying to raise is the fact you specified silver hair."

"I still say it's not like Kasa to make lovey-dovey eyes behind Kakashi's back… it just sounds… weird.” I frowned, but ultimately shrugged and dismissed the whole thing. It's not like I share the same exact views as old Kasa anyway. "Eh, what's passed has passed… It's not like I'm looking for a relationship with the shit storm coming our way anyway. Which reminds me, what exactly do you and Shisui have planned for the chunin exams? I'll keep silent about his position, but I rather not go into this blind."

"Orochimaru might not be the only threat coming to the village,” explained Itachi. "While I haven't gotten any intel regarding to the sannin, Shisui's been keeping me updated on Naki's movements…"

"And?" I frowned.

"He's gathering forces, we might need to contend with an invasion while hosting the chunin exams," explained Itachi.

"What?” My eyes widened. "Why are we hosting the exams if we know he's going to attack?"

"The exam was meant to be a sign of good will and a means to finally end the conflict between the villages. It's too late to retract the invitations now," stated Itachi. "The best we could do is to set up precautions and prepare for the worse."

"And your reason for sticking me in the exams as a proctor?” I asked.

"I didn't lie when I said your presence alone is a good deterrence, but it's also for your safety. You're less likely to get ambushed or kidnapped if you're constantly surrounded by people," reasoned Itachi. "I know you hate this, I'll keep you updated when I can, but… please, for once, trust me on this."

I fell silent, thinking over his words. His brows furrowed in worry and his eyes betrayed his stoic expression with a full hearted plead. I wondered how different this conversation would have been if I was still Kasa with all her memories. I personally felt no romantic attachment to the Uchiha, but I wonder if old Kasa shared my sentiment. Either way, I can't deny sense of comradery I shared with Itachi.

"…Fine, since you've decided to go protective brother on me, there's not much else I could do.” I relented with a sigh before a grin crept onto my lips. "But don't think for a moment, I'm going to give up trying to find out who managed to catch your attention."

"I truly question your sense of priority,” said Itachi a shake of his head.
You don't have to do anything, he said. You just have to sit there and people will be scared of you, he said. Well, Itachi's sorely overestimated the common genin's political knowledge of Konoha and the effectiveness of the Crimson Terror's reputation. I did my best to dismiss the thoughts as I reached for the teapot to pour myself another cup.

Using my drink as cover, my gaze swept over the room. I'm not sure what I was searching for in the sea of genin. Since Kabuto was both Itachi's personal medic and his right-hand regarding to Root, it would be difficult for the ash-haired medic to find time to work as a double agent. From what I've seen of him so far, he seemed more concerned, if not exasperated with Itachi's recklessness with his health.

It's not an impossibility for him to be a traitor, he could very well be doing his best to heal Itachi so Orochimaru could have a functioning Uchiha body with one of the highest level of sharingan at his disposal. Though, if that was the case, who would he have in the chunin exams to act as a spy? With Danzo out of the picture, who else did he have in the village as a contact?

Aside from Root there weren't any other group with easily exploitable children that would fit his motive. Who could he possibly—

"About time you losers got here! I thought I was about to be bored to death waiting for you!" snapped an aggressive voice.

"Suigetsu? What are you doing here?" came Sasuke's voice in return.

My gaze drifted towards the back of the room where Team Seven entered. A light blue-haired teen with his arms behind his head gave a toothy grin with his shark-like teeth. Every bit of his features screamed Kiri-nin, but to my surprise he wore a Konoha hitai-ate. Even more alarming were the two Root operatives by his side. One, I recognized as Sai and the other, an older teen with dull blue, chin-length hair. I haven't seen him personally, but if I hazard a guess he might be Sai’s brother Shin.

With Itachi at the helm of Root operations, I wouldn't be surprised if the older teen survived due to better conditions. Even so… why the hell were they here with Suigetsu? Did Itachi put them in as plants for the exam? If they were, why would Suigetsu be in the mix? Wasn't he on probation since he along with Zabuza and Seika were new recruits?

"Oi, what do you think you're doing?" grunted the looming shadow over me.

"Hmm?" I drew my attention away from the group in the back and let out a bored hum as I took note of the Iwa hitai-ate. As far as my memory goes, Iwa could be considered harmless. They stayed out the majority of the Third War and practically had to be forced to join the Fourth. "I'm quite sure we're all waiting for the exam to start."

"No, I'm talking about that," huffed the boy as he pointed to the steaming cup in my hand and the teapot resting on the bench where I sat. "This is the chunin exams, who do you think you are to treat it like it's a joke?"

"There's no rule against tea drinking." I commented offhandedly as I raised the steaming cup. "If you want some, I don't mind sharing."

"I don't want your tea!" snapped the genin as he moved to slap the cup away.
However, before either he or I could do anything, a white sword hilt cut in and pushed the genin away from me. I blinked slowly at the fair-skinned blond who suddenly interrupted our conversation. My eyes drifted to his hitai-ate. Three clouds, Kumogakure. A potential ally for Konoha in the future, if peace talks went well after the chunin exams. Judging by his height and the faint reminiscence of baby fat on his cheeks, he was likely in his late teens if he hasn't already stepped into adulthood. His blue eyes stayed fixed on me with a glare. Somehow, my existence seemed to piss off everyone today.

"You don't want to mess with her," warned the blond as he lowered his hilt away from the other genin.

"And why is that?" huffed the Iwa-genin in annoyance.

"Because she's no genin," answered the Kumo-genin icily. "Isn't that right? Konoha's Crimson Terror."

At his words, the room broke out in a mix of whispers. Some in shock, some in disbelief and a couple in confusion. Most looked like they heard the name and possibly the rumors linked to the name, but was unaware of my appearance… So much for not having to do anything. I supposed I have to defend my title now… how tedious.

"Interesting." I drawled, hoping whatever I say next would sounded like Crimson Terror would say. "And here I was beginning to worry about the genin of this generation's political awareness."

"You killed my sister," growled the genin.

"I've also killed brothers, mothers, fathers and any extended family you can think of. Your point?" I commented.

Fury crossed his face as his hand gripped onto the hilt of his sword. He took an aggressive step forward, but before he could draw his blade two sets of hands latched onto his arms and pulled him back.

"Atsui!" hissed the dark-skinned teen. "Do you want to die?! You can't take on the Crimson Terror!"

"So what?!" snapped the blond furiously as he fought against the hold of his two teammates. "She dismissed my sister's death! As if she was nothing!"

"Omoi, it's pointless to reason with him, just drag him away!" hissed the dark-skinned girl on the other side of the Kumo-nin named Atsui.

"It's not over Crimson Terror! I'll kill you one of these days! I PROMISE YOU—" roared the teen, but he didn't get the chance to finish as a loud smoke bomb drowned out his voice and Ibiki appeared with his legion of proctors behind him. The room fell silent at his intimidating presence… but of course I had to ruin it for the sake of the Crimson Terror's reputation.

"Yo!" I greeted the man pleasantly as he gave me an unforgiving stare.

"If you're going to sit-in and observe, do it quietly," droned the man.

"My apologies, please don't mind me and carry on." I chirped.

He shot me a pointed stare before sending a low level wave of killing intent through the room. The lesser experienced student crumbled in varying levels of terror, but most tried their best to stay composed. Those who stood unaffected was somehow expected and unexpected at the same time.
The Kumo-trio that confronted me and the Suna-trio, who I'm quite sure are Gaara and his siblings judging by clothes and coloring, their disinterest and lack of response to the killing intent was expected.

Itachi's Root operatives and Suigetsu aside, there were a large number of Konoha genin unfazed by the killing intent. Those who I immediately recognized were Naruto and his fellows. The rest were genin in their early teens fairly close to the Konoha Twelve's age. Among them, a scant few wore the Combat Medic band much like Sasuke and Sakura. Though, I have noticed Neji, Tenten, Ino and Hinata also sporting the seemingly harmless bunny insignia on their armband.

…I get the feeling those unaffected were likely in Kasa's class at one point or another. Scary how the actions of one person could influence the growth of such a scary generation.

Seat placements were given, examinees were seated and the test proceeded. Everything went according to plan, but I found myself bored. Aside from standing in as a living gargoyle, my presence overall was unnecessary.

Having nothing else to do, I poured myself another cup of tea and sat back to watch the exam unfold. Regardless how some of these kids could be considered weapons of mass destruction, it was still funny to watch them stress over something as absurd as a paper exam. Got to appreciate Ibiki's talent in trolling and hazing potential new chunins. And they said people in the T&I department had no sense of humor.

Even so, it wasn't enough to keep me interested to stay awake as I found out at the sudden spike of killing intent. I barely stopped myself from launching a cow at the culprit before I realized I wasn't out on the field. Groggily, I opened my eyes to a pair of netted boobs hovering over my face with Anko grinning above me. At my peripherals, I could spot my seal cards floating threateningly around us. Well, I'll be damned. I thought muscle memory was scary, chakra memory was even more so.

"Had a nice nap?" chirped Anko sultrily as I flicked my wrist to retrieve my cards and pushed her boobs out of my face with the backside of my hand in the same motion.

"Would be better without your attempts in suffocating me." I replied as I sat up properly.

At the silence, I thought maybe I slept through the exam and the examinees had all moved on to the next part. However, when I finally glanced at the silent and stunned room, I can't help but wondered what exactly I missed while I was asleep.

"Ibiki, is the exam still going?" I asked with a raised brow as I glanced to the scar-faced man.

"These are the passing candidates for the first exam," replied Ibiki easily with crossed arms. "You slept through Anko's premature entrance."

"Have I?" I blinked, glancing behind me to see a broken window and a large black cloth with violent calligraphy congratulating the examinees for making it to part two of the exams. "Oh, I have. My apologies, should we move onto the next exam area then?"

The room remained in awkward silence as Anko broke out in a hearty laugh and sent a stinging slap into my back. Despite the throbbing sting on my back, I oddly couldn't bring myself to give much of a response. Strange… why do I feel so groggy and tired? I had more sleep than when I was on the field, so it can't… I paused at the thought and glanced to my teapot.

Oh, son of a—

"Why don't you wake up a bit more first?" suggested Anko cheerily, subtly hinting she was aware I
was drugged.

"And miss the next portion of the exams?" I replied with false cheer while my chakra bubbled angrily to burn away the toxins in my body. I thought this body was immune to most poisons! I swear, when I find the sinner who dare drug my beloved drink, death will seem like a mercy.

If the examinees weren't wary of me before, they're definitely cautious now. Unlike normal people, my body no longer produced chakra of its own. Instead, it runs off filtered demonic chakra. At a base emotional level, it feels no different from any other chakra. However, in anger and agitation, even non-sensors could tell something was horribly wrong.

It was the main reason why intimidation tactics worked so well with the Crimson Terror persona. Kakashi explained it to me once during the retraining after I woke up, but I never thought much of it until now. Unlike the veterans on the frontline, most of these genins wore their thoughts openly on their faces. Not to say the shinobi on the field did any better when faced with the likes of Itachi, but—Oh… OH!

"Anko-san, isn't it about time you lead them to their dea—I mean, the location for the second examination?" I said, purposely inserting the slipup.

"Ah, of course. Will you do the honors of leading the stragglers?" grinned Anko as she added fuel to my intimidation tactics.

Between the two of us, not many dared to lose sight of her as we moved onto the next area. Once there, I kept myself at a visible distance while Anko handed out the consent forms. If I wasn't so annoyed with the tea drugging, I might've found it amusing. The forms would make sense if the village had the luxury of peaceful living for years, but since we've only recently finished our conflict in Kiri and started peace talks with Kumo, no one in any of the villages was unfamiliar with occupational hazards.

"You look bored," commented Kabuto as he came up from behind.

"And you look annoying." I retorted with a side glance, wondering if it was really Kabuto or Shisui in disguise.

"My, my, someone must have crossed Kasa-san badly. Do you need me to teach them a lesson?" joked Kabuto. As if reading my mind, he materialized a perfect chakra scalpel to prove his identity.

Shisui, while talented and have ample amount of skills in chakra control, was not a medic. He may be able to pull off forming a chakra scalpel, but it was unlikely he could do it at the speed Kabuto does with such ease.

"If you can severely maiming Itachi the next time you see him, it would be greatly appreciated." I commented dryly as I returned my attention back to the processions.

"You're such a kidder Kasa-san," chuckled Kabuto as he pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "I may be Itachi-sama's personal physician, but even I am not exempted from punishment."

"Then you're useless to me." I snorted flippantly. "So, what does his majesty want now?"

"Nothing much, just that you don't forget yourself," replied Kabuto easily.

"Great, as if drugging my tea wasn't enough of a precaution already. He needs to send someone to give me a reminder." I grumbled. "Why bother even putting me in this exam if he's going to do all that?"
"Kasa-san, your chakra's fluctuating again," laughed Kabuto before I realized I fell for Itachi's machinations again.

"…God damn it." I sighed dejectedly as I settled my temper. No doubt the sudden anger surge sent another wave of anxiety towards the test takers. "It's scary how well Itachi can predict and manipulate people. How do you deal with him Kabuto?"

"Hmm? Shouldn't you know the answer to that, Kasa-san?" replied Kabuto in his usual false pleasantry.

"…Why do I even bother talking to you?" I rolled my eyes.

For a moment, we stood in silence as the examinees handed in their signed consent forms and retrieved their individual scrolls and gate placement for the start of the next exam. I caught sight of Naruto and a number of others shooting me a subtle wave before they sped off towards their starting point. I grinned in return, not repeating the gesture to avoid drawing too much attention to them. They have enough to deal with in the forest already. They don't need my reputation to add to it.

"Out of curiosity, Kasa-san," continued Kabuto once the majority of the examinees were out of sight. "This chunin exam is no small matter. Aside from Itachi-sama's slight with your tea, you seem otherwise indifferent. Why is that?"

"You'd be the same as me if you were in my shoes." I replied with a nonchalant shrug.

"What do you mean?" asked Kabuto with a confused frown.

"How much would you care when every decision you make and everything you do is controlled by the machinations of others?" I asked dryly.

"Isn't that what we're doing already by being a shinobi?" replied the ash-haired young man with a cheeky grin.

"Maybe for you." I muttered under my breath.

"How so?" asked Kabuto.

"The shinobi life was old Kasa's choice." I replied, since he was among the few who are aware of my amnesiac situation. "But that's her story, not mine."

"I see," hummed Kabuto thoughtfully as he clasped the tip of his chin against the curl of his thumb and index finger. "Then what would you say is your story then?"

"Hmm… I wonder." I murmured solemnly.

"Seems like you're not so sure yourself," chuckled Kabuto.

"Shut up," I grumbled.

"When you do figure it out, let me know. I'd love to hear about it," said Kabuto with what almost sounded like genuine interest.

"… Why?" I narrowed my eyes suspiciously at him. "Did the asswipes put you up to saying that? I'm onto them you know! The world doesn't love me like they claim!"

"Let's just call it curiosity," replied Kabuto easily. "Your situation is a unique case after all."
"Somehow that doesn't sound reassuring in the least." I grumbled.

"How hurtful," sighed Kabuto dismissively. "In any case, Itachi-sama has already sent operatives into the forest for the week. However, he did request for your presence at the tower to review the security footage of the participating teams throughout the week and at the end of the second exam."

"Damn slave driver." I groused.

"Would you like to have dinner with me before you go?" asked Kabuto cheekily.

"This time, I know you're fucking with me." I pointed an accusing finger at him. "You troll!"

"What would ever make you say that?" continued Kabuto without missing a beat.

"Just get out of here." I waved him off in agitation.

"Shall I send Itachi-sama your regards?" asked Kabuto.

"You can tell him to go fuck himself." I scoffed.

"Very well," agreed Kabuto amicably. "See you in a week, Kasa-san."

"What has my life come to?" I said in exasperation. "Leave already!"

"Leaving," sang Kabuto before he disappeared in a flurry of leaves.

I was half tempted to scream in frustration once he was gone, but I found myself unable to stay angry. Not when he brought up a good point about my uncertainty. If this life is Kasa's story, what's mine?
Observation duty was… interesting. As ordered, I followed Anko's entourage towards the tower with full expectation of being bored out of my mind for the duration of the week. However, within the first 18 hours, two teams managed to complete the second part of the exam. Gaara's team was expected as it was part of the original timeline. The second team on the other hand… was not.

"…How the hell?" I muttered under my breath in disbelief.

It was hard not to recognize the second party. What with the amount of orange and the two deceptively cute bunny insignias. Team Seven not only managed to beat the original timeline's record by a full week, but they somehow befriended Gaara. If Naruto's affectionate hugs towards the redhead was anything to go by, the lack of blood and violence definitely indicated a positive sign.

"Impressive, right?" commented a familiar voice from behind.

"Obito?" I said in surprise as I spun around in my chair to meet him.

"Yo! Long time no see!" greeted the Uchiha as he strolled over and plopped in the empty seat next to mine. "Funny to see you here all alone. I thought there would be more people watching over the cameras."

"It's four in the morning." I replied.

"There's a thing call shifts," commented Obito.

"They were annoying, so I told them to go to bed." I replied.

"You have the authority to do that?" asked Obito with a raised brow.

"…I may have abused the Crimson Terror's reputation and scared them to submission." I admitted absently as I turned my attention back to the screen. Obito laughed at my confession. "What are you doing here anyway? Jounin senseis aren't allowed to sit through the second portion of the exams."

"I'm not here to observe my team. They're more than capable of handling themselves," replied the Uchiha as he hugged the back of his seat and rocked forward. "I'm just wondering how you're holding up."

"…Holding up what?" I frowned and glanced to him in confusion.

"Stress," answered Obito easily.

"What makes you think I'm stressed?" I asked.

"To quote what you just said, it's four in the morning," countered Obito. "You could have gone to bed, but instead you sent everyone else to sleep and stayed up alone."

"Maybe I just prefer the quietness of the night." I replied with a dismissive wave.

"Uh-huh," hummed Obito without an ounce of agreement in his voice. "So the fact that no one would gives up on trying to convince you you're the same old Kasa is not stressful or annoying at all."

My mouth open at the ready to refute another one of his claims, but clicked shut in surprise when I
heard what he actually said.

"I've gotten used to it." I shrugged dismissively.

"By lashing out and aggravating every possible person you interact with," scoffed Obito. "That mouth of yours is going to get you killed one of these days. Compared to Kasa's coping mechanisms, yours is far more self-destructive."

"…Coping mechanism?" I blanched. "You think I'm lashing out to cope? I'm just an asshole."

"Pft," snorted Obito before he broke out into laughter. "I see your level of denial is about the same as hers though."

"Say what you want. What is this visit about anyway? I doubt you're here because of my well-being." I sighed.

"You're half right," agreed Obito as he gathered himself from the laughing fit and rested his chin on his arms on the chair's back. "While I am a worried about how you're doing, I'm more concern about what you would do when the stress finally gets to you."

"What can I do?" I frowned. "I don't have any real power. You of all people should know the Crimson Terror is just a farce."

"The Crimson Terror is a farce, but Kasa the oracle is not." Obito's voice dropped to a deeper timbre. His single eye focused on me so intensely, I half expected to see a red sharingan glaring back. "It's alarming when you show no loyalty to the village."

"…Not that I'm really going to fight you if you're here to arrest or kill me for treason, but just to let you know, it would've been a much easier for you when Itachi had me drugged this morning." I added dryly and returned my attention back to the screens. Team Seven and the team from Sand parted ways and made their way into the tower each with a pair of the required scrolls to pass.

"Do you have no sense of self-preservation?" asked Obito in a low drone.

"Eh…" I gave another careless shrug. "I've learned today that Itachi has the freaky ability to predict and manipulate my every action and reaction to the T and it's pointless to bother. Until he's grown sick of my bullshit, self-preservation's not particularly high on my to-do list. It's not like I have much of a choice in anything anyway."

"Pessimism?" noted Obito with a raised brow. "How unlike you."

"You're one to talk," I scoffed and waved my hand. "How about we skip the pleasantries and you tell me what the hell you want Mr. Not-Obito."

"Hmm… are you concluding this from your broken memories or are you touching on your oracle abilities?" hummed the imposter Obito.

"Neither." I retorted haughtily. "It's common sense when you're so jarringly different from Obito."

"And how are you sure this isn't how I really am?" countered the man.

"Please, if Obito knew I held no loyalty to Konoha, he wouldn't take the fact as calmly as you," I replied easily.

"Not incorrect," agreed the man.
"So, are you here to recruit me for some diabolical scheme to take down Konoha? Or are you here to convince me to help you kidnap whatever bloodline that caught your fancy?" I drawled.

"…What if I am?" admitted the man openly. "Are willing to assist?"

"Pft, are you seriously asking me that?" I snorted in amusement.

"We've already established you held no loyalty to Konoha. What would be the problem?" asked Not-Obito.

"Yeah, but it's also established that Itachi's uncanny ability to predict and dictate my every action thus far." I dismissed him again. "Even if I hold no love for Konoha, betraying it won't benefit me in any manner. It's as good as suicide."

"Then why humor my offer rather than outright declining?" asked the man.

"I'm just stalling." I stretched my arms over my head with a tired grunt.

"Stalling?" asked Not-Obito with a raised brow. "Everyone's asleep. Who can possibly come to your aid by stalling? You're the only one awake."

"I know." I let out a long yawn as dropped my arms and hunched over miserably in my chair. "But I'm kind of obligated to at least attempt to detain you for T&I. You know how that is."

Before not-Obito could voice out a response, I took the preemptive and drew up a dome of seals around us. He had the gall to look amuse as I twitched my fingers and launched a number of gravity and knockout seals at his person. It wasn't until a moment later, I realized the reason for his arrogance. The seals flew through him harmlessly while he remained seated and undeterred by my actions.

"…Kamui." I murmured in surprise when I recognized the phasing ability. "But that's…"

"Obito's magenkyo sharingan's special ability," supplied the man.

"You're not Obito!" I ground out. "Rin is alive! The events that leads him to manifest the eye didn't happen!"

"Rin died in my timeline," supplied the man evenly. "You likely know me better as Tobi."

"Timelines? Tobi?" I repeated in quiet disbelief. "How—"

"I sacrificed the rinnengan to come back with izanagi," explained the self-proclaimed Tobi. "Since you seem to know what I'm talking about, I won't go into details about how it happened, but rather why I'm here."

"…Why are you here?" I frowned, unsure how to proceed further with the presence of a time traveler.

From what I could recall, it wasn't like time travel was an impossibility. It did happen, albeit in one of the movies, but it happened. Not to mention, the existence of izanagi was somewhat of a cheap reset ability. I can't say I'm completely surprised by the notion of a time traveler. I mean, why not? There's already an amnesiac Mary-sue in the mix, what's a time traveler or two? Except… I'm not exactly sure if this time traveler was a friend or foe.

While I did manage to retain a whole lot of information regarding to the timeline, none of it held the
ending to Naruto's story. Old Kasa's memories of the plotline went as far as Tobi teaming up with the newly revived Madara before she got fed up with the endless fillers and outright laziness in trying to follow the manga. Though, with Naruto's uncanny ability to convert enemies to allies, I can't dismiss the possibility that Tobi wasn't as bad as I assumed.

"I'm not here to continue the plan for an Infinite Tsukuyomi if that's what you fear," assured Tobi as though he was reading my mind. "To reiterate what Obito said earlier, we're here out of concern for you."

"Concern for me?" I repeated dumbly before registering the rest of his words. "And what do you mean we?"

"There were complications when I came back," replied Tobi. "This body isn't mine, it's Obito's. He's listening in on our conversation as we speak. I'm merely borrowing his body for the moment."

"… I don't even know what to say to that." I admitted after a moment. "Still, it doesn't explain the whole bit of you being concern about me. Unless you're hoping my oracle abilities can somehow help you snatch a body of your own or assist in some diabolical plan or… something."

"I have no interest in taking after Orochimaru," scoffed Tobi. "I wasn't lying when I said I was concerned about your mental state."

"That's rich, coming from the person who tried to destroy the world to make it anew because your crush died." I scoffed. "You of all people have no right to judge the mental stability of others."

"It's because of those faults that I'm aware of yours," countered Tobi.

"We barely ever spoke! I can count all the times I've seen you since I woke up in one hand." I scowled. "Don't presume you know me."

"…Because you're not Kasa?" supplied Tobi, his words startled me to a stop as his single eye focused on me. "That's it, isn't it? Your dismissive attitude and the cause for your antagonistic behavior is because you don't want other people to see you as—"

"Shut up!" I snapped, finally fed up by his words. "You know nothing about me! Not you, not Kakashi and definitely not Itachi! It's always Kasa used to do this or Kasa used to do that! You all expect me to act like her, but I'm not her! I'll say it a thousand times if I have to! You know why? Because I get assholes like Itachi who can't get it through their heads that Kasa is gone! G-O-N-E, GONE! Sure he says we can start over, but you know what I hear every time I talk to him? Do you?"

Tobi said nothing, his face unreadable, but I didn't care. It was as if a dam of pent up rage and frustration finally broken, I couldn't stop myself from ranting.

"It's either 'how typical of you Kasa' or if I do something un-Kasa-like, he looks at me like I committed a crime! Nothing I do or say is considered my own!" I threw up my arms in fury. "Nothing belongs to me! Not my name, not my friends, not my family and not even my damn enemies! Hell, I bet if they knew I'm not Kasa, they'd join the 'You're Not Kasa' club and give me grief too! So don't give that bullshit about caring about me when I know damn well it's Kasa you're all worried about!"

"Feel better?" asked Tobi when I breathed heavily through my nose out of anger.

"Fuck you!" I kicked my chair at him out of frustration. "What do you want from me? It's not like I'm going to betray the village even if I don't give a damn about it!"
"Like I said before, I'm concerned," repeated Tobi calmly as he dismissed my tantrum.

"What the fuck is there to be concerned about!?!" I growled and raised my hands out at the ready to launch more seal cards at him. However, I stopped myself short since I knew that nothing I do would matter while he had kamui at his disposal. I took a slow deep breath to calm myself. "You know what? I'm not going to bother. Say or do whatever you want. I don't care. Just leave me alone. The door is that way."

"You misunderstand me," commented Tobi. "I personally don't care much for the village either."

"...You don't?" I frowned at his confession.

"I'd be a hypocrite if I judge you for your lack of loyalty," commented Tobi with an idle wave of his hand. "You of all people should know full well what I think about Konoha and its inhabitants."

"It's filled with shitty people that's full of shit?" I hazard a guess.

"Hn," hummed Tobi with a twitch at the corner of his lips before he continued with his line of thought. "As is every other hidden village in existence, but it hardly matters with the threat of Madara's return looming over all our heads. If his new lackey manages to bring him back it doesn't matter which side you're on. We're all doomed."

"Okay, but then what concern do you have about me?" I frowned. "It's not like I can do anything about it."

"On the contrary, your reputation and oracle title holds more power and sway than you think," countered Tobi.

"Sure," I drawled sarcastically and waved a hand towards the monitors behind me. "That's why I'm sitting here doing monitor duty."

"It is," confirmed Tobi seriousness in his eyes as he focused on me.

"...You're joking," I deadpanned.

"How else would anyone contain and control someone like you?" reasoned the time-traveling parasite. "In a society of shinobi, a single word from an oracle like you could end lives."

"...At this point, my so-called foresight is of one future, probably the one you're from, but the hell would I know!" I groused. "Youfuckers—Kasa included—changed so much shit, nothing I know could be reliably applied to the current situation! Anyone stupid enough to take my word for it is going to find out in a heartbeat that I'm obsolete!"

"It doesn't matter because this isn't about power or abilities anymore," added Tobi. "They will listen to you because of who they think you are. They will come up with their own reasoning to make sense of things even if it doesn't work out."

"How is this my life?" I growled under my breath and pinched the bridge of my nose and breathed deeply to calm myself. "Either I deal with this sudden surge of bullshit responsibility I'm highly not qualified for or Madara wins and we all lose. Damned if I do and damned if I don't. What the hell I'm even supposed to do?"

"You can start by helping Naruto," suggested Tobi. "He may seem like he's handling things fine on his own, but he will need all the help he could get."
"And how exactly can I help him, genius?" I scoffed.

"Just be his sister," answered Tobi.

"...His sister?" I frowned. "I mean, sentiments aside, I don't see how me acting as—"

"I didn't say act," interrupted Tobi. "I want you to genuinely be his sister."

"You know I'm not—" I started, but he cut me off before I could finish.

"The bitterness you have against being Kasa needs to stop," stated Tobi firmly. "When I said Obito and I were concerned earlier about you, this is the very reason why. You are Kasa and nothing will change this. Memoryless or not, it will not help you or anyone else if you continue to push everyone away claiming you're not Kasa."

"But I don't want to be fucking Kasa!" I snapped, nearly screaming. "Do you know what the hell she's been through? Do you know how it feels every time I get one of her memories? Nothing ever goes right in her life! I don't want to feel the pain and agony she felt! I don't want to care about what she cared! I can't... I can't handle having people I care about dying on me!"

"You think shoving everyone away and keeping them at an arm's length is easier?" asked Tobi.

"Easy? How is any of this easy?" My voice quavered as I let out a bitter laugh. "No matter what sort of bullshit I tried to pull, they won't even try to stop me! Hell, they tolerate it as if it's some stupid quirk and just goes with it! Seriously! I broke into a god damn high security prison to have lunch with Hana and they let me! Are they idiots? How could they love her that much? How could any of you love her that much!?"

"...You're jealous," said Tobi quietly realization as he stood from his seat.

"I'm not jealous!" I screamed, tossing another seal at him. It went through him harmlessly like the others as he made his way towards me. "I don't want to be Kasa! I can't be Kasa! I—"

A gentle hand rested on my head. I felt my throat tighten and my eyes burn at the expression on Tobi's face.

"Don't..." I choked back a growl as I sniffed back the snot that threatened to drip from my nose. "...Look at me like that. I don't need your pity!"

"It's not pity, never pity," continued Tobi as he lowered his hand and moved to right the chair I knocked askew earlier. "Whether you can understand or not, people care for you. However, if you feel like you're undeserving of that sentiment, it's not too late to reciprocate instead of antagonizing every person you come across."

"I'm not..." I couldn't finish my words, not when it sounded broken and uncertain to my own ears.

"Take some time to think about it," said Tobi. He patted my shoulder in passing before the air distorted and he left through Kamui.

Regathering my thoughts after he left was difficult. With my body still shaking, I grudgingly reached for a handkerchief in my obi and blew my nose to clear the annoying stuffiness in my nose. It didn't lessen the tightness in my throat or the burning redness in my eyes, but it was a start. I took a shuddering breath and sat back down in front of the monitors.

Aside from Naruto and Gaara's teams going through the congratulatory completion speech, nothing
else happened while I was distracted. Try as I might, I couldn't keep my thoughts from the conversation with Tobi. I don't want to be Kasa… but at the same time…
"Congratulation to the nine teams that passed the second portion of the chunin exams," started Hiruzen on the last day of the second exam.

My attention wasn't on the elderly hokage, but instead on the passing teams. Out of the nine, only five teams remained the same as before. Team Seven, Team Eight, Team Ten, Team Gai and the Sand Siblings. The remaining four were recognizable, but somewhat unexpected.

The first of which was the team with the two Root operatives and Suigetsu. The three were more than qualified for a field promotion if necessary, but it's more likely Itachi planted them into the exam to overlook the other teams. Sai and Shin were capable of jounin level espionage and assassinations. Out of the three, Suigetsu was likely the least experienced in a leadership position. Unlike Zabuza and Seika, he wasn't part of the roster to end the conflict in Kiri.

The second team, I recognized as the Kumo group from the first exam. The blond named Atsui seems to have some sort of grudge against old Kasa for killing his sister or something along the lines. I get the feeling, I might have to deal with an avenger in the near future… how tedious.

The third team, the one from Ame. Not a group I expected to see at all. Particularly with the vague recollection of a group wearing the same breather masks getting their asses kicked by Naruto and his team. With my spotty memory, I can't tell whether they were the same team, but it was still strange to say the least.

As for the fourth and final team from Kusa… They were the last village I expected to see a team in the preliminaries and their genin even less. Why I say this? Because the genin standing in front looked eerily like the genin Orochimaru killed and used as a disguise in order to sneak into the exams and bite Sasuke.

While I'd like to be hopeful and say Orochimaru decided not to kill the unfortunate soul, the two other genin on the team made me think otherwise. One was a red-haired girl with red-eyes and glasses and the other was a spiky orange-haired young man. Karin I might be able to excuse as a Kusa-genin since she was one in the original, but Jugo…

"You look like hell," Kakashi's familiar and comforting voice broke me out of my thoughts before I noticed the silver-haired jounin trailing behind me after Hiruzen's obligatory exam speech. Naturally, like all other political speeches, I didn't pay much attention to it as it was nothing more than nonsensical lip-flapping anyway.

"Really? I haven't noticed." I drawled sarcastically, but in good humor. It was nice to see him after the week I've had. "So many to traumatize, so little time."

"Of course," agreed Kakashi dryly, but the concern was still clear on his face.

"Tobi spoke with you, didn't he?" I noted with a slight hint of exasperation.

"He said nothing about what was discussed, but…"

"You were concerned." I finished with a sigh and glanced up to him with a speculative tilt of my head. "Hmm… I guess I could see why Itachi came to his conclusion the way he did."

"What conclusion?" asked Kakashi with furrowed brows.
"Nothing you have to worry about." I cracked a grin.

"You're diverting," continued the silver-haired jounin.

"Really, it's just something I have to come to..." I trailed off when my eyes caught sight of the first line-up announcement for the preliminaries.

Gaara from Sunagakure

Vs.

Suigetsu from Konohagakure

"Oh... you've got to be kidding me." I muttered under my breath as Suigetsu shouted his words of challenge towards Gaara. The red-head remained stoic and unresponsive as the crowd of chunin-hopefuls dispersed to the viewing platform above.

"Kasa?" frowned Kakashi as he followed my gaze to the board. "What did you see?"

"If we're lucky, only one death." I muttered under my breath as I glanced to the smug Suigetsu sneering at Gaara.

"And if we're not?" asked Kakashi.

"How are you with seals?" I asked.

"Nowhere near Kushina's level," replied the silver-haired jounin.

"... Let's hope we don't need a seal master today then." I muttered.

"Match ends when one of you gives up or is unable to continue," explained Hayate the proctor once the two genins were the only two that remained on the floor. "Begin!"

Suigetsu was the first to move with a quick draw of his katana. Gaara responded not long after with thick tendrils of sand lashing out at the water-user. Blade clashed against sand. The metal sung as the small granules grazed violently against its surface. The resistance lasted for no more than a second before Suigetsu pushed back and darted away from the chasing tendrils.

The sand whipped around attempting to catch him from behind, but the blue-haired genin was quick to deflect the sand whenever it was close to grabbing him. All in all, it looked like a one-sided match as Gaara stood stoically on one side of the room while Suigetsu darted about in defense.

"He's not going to last is he?" noted Kakashi offhandedly.

I grimaced when the sand finally knocked the blade out of the blue-haired teen's hand and hastily latched onto his person. Suigetsu cursed loudly as he reached behind him for something, but by then it was too late. The sand encapsulated him completely. Gaara looked disinterested as his hand reached out and slowly curled into a claw.

"Suigetsu!" shouted Sasuke in alarm as the sand collapsed into itself and crushed its victim.

If I faced this scene a month ago after just waking up, I might've been tempted to turn away and spare myself from the blood and gore. Now, after maintaining the Crimson Terror's reputation, I'm too desensitized to care. Suigetsu wasn't important or vital to the plot anyway. So what if he—

An explosion of water burst out from the enclosed sand, interrupting whatever thought I had in mind.
Surprise crossed Gaara's face before the unexpected deluge swept him off his feet. The water continued to rise until it's completely filled the arena below, up to the edge of the viewing platform. Even more unexpected was Suigetsu's cackling echoing throughout the room as he reformed in what is possible a small lake's worth of water in the room.

"Suck it sand boy! I got my storage seal off before your stupid sand could crush me!" cackled the blue-haired genin as part of his body reformed above the large body of water.

The redhead was at the bottom, hopelessly trying to use his sand to propel him to the surface. With the amount of water around him, his sand was far too heavy to move with the same dexterity as before. Suigetsu saw it as an opportunity to attack and gave no leeway. With a quick set of handseals, a water dragon rose up to the rafters before violently plunging into the depths to keep Gaara at bay.

A look of panic and fear crossed the redhead's face as the last bit of air was knocked out of him and floated away in a bundle of bubbles. The sand became frantic at this point trying its best to shove its user to the surface for air, but it was futile against the diving water dragon.

"Gaara!" screamed Naruto as he tried to jump over the railing, but Sasuke and Sakura stopped him before he managed.

As the redheaded jinchuriki's struggle slowly ceased, he lost consciousness and floated aimlessly in the water. A chill went down my spine as demonic chakra pulsed and rippled through the room. Shit, Shukaku was starting to take over.

Horror crossed the faces of the remaining two Suna-genin as neither of them anticipated their brother to lose. Hell, I don't think anyone expected this outcome. Suigetsu wasn't supposed to be here, much less beat Gaara by means of drowning. What the hell happened to the supposedly untouchable genin?

I fought off the urge to gnaw at my lower lip as I racked my brain to figure out the mess. My foreknowledge is useless in this situation! What should I do? What can I do?

"Kasa," called out Kakashi and snapped me out of my panicked thoughts.

The certainty of his firm gaze reminded me the trust and confidence he had in me. I took in a quick breath and calmed myself. Tobi was right, it didn't matter if my information is right or wrong anymore. All I could do now was act. Everything else could wait. With a nod to Kakashi and turned my attention to the demonic chakra below.

"You take care of Suigetsu. I'll handle the water and Gaara." I said as I flicked an empty storage seal card into my hand from my obi. "If I fail, get Kushina-san. I'll hold him off for as long as I can."

Without a word, Kakashi jumped over the railing with a spark of lightning release in his hand. A quick touch to the body of water sent Suigetsu screaming and detaching himself from the large mass. The silver-haired jounin managed to snatch him up and speed over to the viewing platform in one swift move before I slapped down the storage seal to rid the arena of the flood.

Red chakra bubbled and started to encapsulate Gaara by the time I reached him. The demonic chakra slowly converted itself into sand as Shukaku's high-pitched giggle echoed the room. I don't need to see Hiruzen's face to know the alarm that followed. Instead, I flicked my wrist to get a hold of the five sealing rings to the appropriate fingers before digging them straight into Gaara's stomach.

"Sorry buddy, can't have you going on a murdering spree today." I muttered under my breath as I
tried to keep Gaara's body from thrashing about.

If the situation wasn't so dire, I would be annoyed that these genins were all taller than me, but this wasn't the time or place to rant about my shortness. Shukaku's giggle turned into a screech as the chakra gave up trying to sand-capsule Gaara and attempted to lash out at me. However, with the five-point seal in place, it petered out inches away from my face before it could land a substantial hit.

The whole ordeal took less than a minute, but it felt like I've held my breath for an eternity. Gaara was dead asleep on the ground, his breathing even and slow, completely unaware of what's to come. Hesitantly, I pulled my hand away from his stomach and brushed aside the damp locked clinging to his face. Dark bags under his eyes aside, Gaara looked ridiculously young... I'm really getting sick of this world and its penchant for child-soldiers.

"Proctor Kasa," coughed Hayate as he brought my attention back to the rest of the arena.

"This one will not be continuing in the exam." I spoke evenly as I draped Gaara's arms over my shoulders and hauled him onto my back. "You can decide whether or not Suigetsu needs to do a rematch since I interrupted, but this one will go no further."

"Wait a minute! You can't just—" protested Kankuro, but I flared up a killing intent to cut off any further complaints.

Without another word, I made my way out of the arena with Gaara on my back and towards the infirmary. There's no doubt this will cause an international incident, but I couldn't care less. Shukaku will not be part of the chunin exams invasion. There was no point in trying to retain the old timeline.

"You know... I never thought you would go as far as to kidnap the Kazekage's son to stop a demon outbreak," drawled a voice I've only heard in Kasa's memories.

Leaning against one of the many infirmary beds was a fox-masked man in anbu gear. For Tobi's replacement, it's rather strange not to see Akatsuki's cloak, but then again it would be stupid and difficult to waltz through enemy territory with such a flashy uniform.

"Hello Naki." I greeted evenly.

"I'm flattered! You remember me!" said the masked man in delight as he clapped with mock excitement. "And here I thought you wouldn't since you've forgotten everyone else."

"Cut to the chase." I interrupted him. "You're here for Gaara's biju right?"

"Oh, Kasa, Kasa, Kasa," sighed Naki with a shake of his head. "You of all people should know there are things far more valuable than jinchurikis and bijus."

"...Are you... trying to kidnap me?" I said in disbelief as I stared at him.

"Kidnap is such an ugly word," waved Naki. "Think of it as... recruitment."

"...You know, you're the second person this week that's tried to get me to defect." I grumbled. "The last one is trying to save the world from destruction, what's your deal? You want to create a false utopia by trapping everyone in an illusion?"

"Heh," chuckled Naki in good humor. "Nothing so contrite. The world's not worth the effort."

"Then are you out to destroy it?" I asked with a raised brow, confused since it sounds like he has no intention of carrying out the Infinite Tsukiyomi plan.
"Yes and no," replied the other easily. "The world as a whole is not worth saving. However, a selective few is definitely worth the time and effort."

"Uh-huh… and you see me as one of them." I droned, still trying to figure out how he was going to go about his plans if he's willing to forgo jinchurikis and bijus.

"Of course," chirped Naki. "Contrary to what that old fool Madara thinks, you as the oracle, is far more valuable than any of these jinchurikis. You have the power and foresight to lead these stupid sheep to the right path."

"…Wait, what?" I said in disbelief at the mention of Madara's name.

"Bijus and jinchurikis are nothing more than unstable weapons ready to blow without a moment's notice. Even if I managed to collect them all, what use are they if they won't listen?" continued Naki. "You've seen the future and you know what's to come. Madara's plan is time consuming and worthless."

"…If it's time consuming, then why are you working with him?" I hazarded a question.

"Working with him?" scoffed Naki with a laugh. "Who said anything about working with Madara? I killed the old bastard ages ago along with his stupid little plant thing."

"…You did what?" I said in disbelief as I stared at him as he tilted his head in confusion.

"Oh right, I forgot you can't see into the past or future of the dead," murmured Naki thoughtfully. "No matter. I'm sure you can still see what's to come soon and hopefully you'll change your mind then and join me."

"Wait, what do you mean—"

"Love to stay and chat, but that annoying Uchiha's going to show up soon and I rather not deal with anymore of spawns from that man's clan," sniffed Naki haughtily before he gave a two finger salute and disappeared in a flurry of leaves.

I stood there, dumbfounded and at a loss. Everything I thought I knew about the replacement Tobi was ultimately thrown out the window. Naki claimed that Madara had no part in any of his plans. Hell, he even went as far as to kill the Uchiha and what I can only assume was Zetsu. None of Kasa's memories ever had him wearing the Akatsuki cloak. Her memory has only shown him with that mask and that anbu outfit.

Does he have no affiliation to Nagato and his band of super-powered missing-nins? No Akatsuki meant no jinchuriki kidnapping and no biju extraction. The Ame orphans would have no reason to go after these jinchurikis, but if that was the case… then what exactly am I trying to prevent? What am I trying to protect?
Lies and Revelations

I sat blankly next to Gaara's bed, my hands mechanically shuffled through my deck of seal cards as I tried to process what happened. Contrary to Naki's claim, no Uchiha showed up after he left. Either because there weren't any coming in the first place or they immediately went after him the moment he left. It didn't matter which because my brain still couldn't wrap around what I just heard.

Naki wasn't working with Madara. The old Uchiha was not only dead, but Zetsu or some form of Zetsu was quite possibly dead as well. Infinite Tsukuyomi's no longer on the table, but it's unclear whether or not other factors are still an issue. Akatsuki might not be after the jinchurikis and bijus; however, it doesn't rule out the possibility of the fourth shinobi war. Only this time it won't be the people vs OP Madara and it'll just be an old fashion people slaughtering people type of war.

Tale as old as time…maybe the cliché villain motive of destroying the world had some merit. Regardless how many times someone saves the world, someone out there will take it as a personal challenge to fuck it up with either greed or sheer stupidity.

"I… can't hear mother…" rasped a quiet voice.

For a second, I thought Orochimaru finally made an appearance, but when my eyes drifted to its owner, I found Gaara staring back at me with a solemn gaze. The seal I used earlier to empty the arena of water should have drawn out any that was in his lungs too, but it might've done it quite harshly for his voice to sound like that.

"Well, I wouldn't call Shukaku your mother, but good morning sunshine, did you have a nice nap?" I chirped with the Crimson Terror's brand of cheery condescension.

At this point it was out of habit from using it on the field. It took more effort to turn off that voice than to speak normally. A benefit if the Crimson Terror image was considered an asset, except it's not. Compared to the oracle, it was a paltry thing. No one cared how the oracle acted as long as she acted in their benefit.

All that time…wasted.

"…Naruto said the same thing in the forest." Gaara murmured as he gaze turned to his hand instead.

It seemed like he was trying to call for his sand, but with the seals I've placed on him, it's unlikely he would be able to do so until it's removed. I don't really plan on removing it, at least until Kushina has a chance to take a look at his base seal. Not sure what political whiplash I've created by taking him during the middle of the exam, but I'm sure Hiruzen and Kakashi's on top of handling the issue.

"He did?" I was surprised by the mention of Naruto.

…How does Naruto know Shukaku's name? The faux smile on my face turned into a pensive frown. There weren't many ways he could have gotten that information, unless… Tobi told him? I fought back the urge to scoff and shake my head. Of course Tobi told him. Who else could have done that? He said for me to help Naruto, but he's already got the position of help covered. There was no point for me to be here, my existence-

"You're…his sister," continued Gaara, his voice drew me out of my thoughts as I turned my attention to him again.

"What makes you say that?" I asked. It didn't feel right to claim myself as Naruto's sister, when I've
"He bragged about you," murmured Gaara quietly. "Second only to the Uchiha and the pink-haired girl."

"...Is that so?" I raised a brow at the claim.

"The two of them were close to waxing poetic about your accomplishments," noted the redhead. "To them, you're practically a saint."

"A ridiculous notion I can assure you," I scoffed. The memory of my dismissal of Suigetsu's worth was still clear in my mind. No saint would abandon someone for death because they're unimportant.

"...Why did you defend me against that man earlier?" asked Gaara quietly.

"You were awake then?" I said in surprise before dismissing the thought. The red-head wasn't known for sleep even when Shukaku was taken from him. "Not that it mattered, he wasn't after you in the first place."

"Even though you didn't have to, you stayed even after he left," noted the redhead, his gazed remained unfaltering on me. "Why?"

"...Why does anyone do anything?" I shrugged.

"I want to know," demanded Gaara as he forced himself to sit up, but a quick flick of my wrist and I had a gravity seal card pinning him back down on the bed. "Your actions differed from him even though you share the same look in your eyes!"

"Him?" I frowned. "Naruto?"

"No!" snapped Gaara, but his resistance grew hesitant as he turned his gaze away. "...Naruto's eyes have a strange brightness in them, his shines in comparison to yours."

I blinked, not expecting his awkward fondness for the blond. Though, considering it was Naruto, I really shouldn't be startled by how he's going about befriending everyone. Even so, there weren't many people Gaara cared about early on. Who could he possibly be comparing me to? The only people he's around on a regular basis before the chunin exams were his siblings and sensei. There aren't many people in his—

"That look on your face again," muttered Gaara irritably. "Why do you have the same look as him?"

"...I have the same look?" I frowned.

"He said he hated me before he tried to kill me," snarled Gaara. "But you! You saved me from the exam and you protected me from that man! Why do the two of you share the same look but act so differently?"

Understanding dawned on me as I slowly recalled bits and pieces of Gaara's childhood with Yashamaru. How the man was the only person who cared and stayed with him until he was ordered by the Kazekage to drive Gaara to the edge.

Yashamaru, from what I can recall and understand, loved Gaara. If not for the Kazeakage's order, he would not have made an attempt on his nephew's life, much less lie to him about how no one loved him. Not a good defense or exactly the best way to show his affection to someone he cared for, but it still didn't change the fact he cared.
"…Because he lied." I muttered quietly.

"What?" said Gaara weakly, the previous aggression melted into lost expression.

Being ostracized his whole childhood, Gaara's socially inept when it comes to social appropriateness. A weapon doesn't need to care or take into consideration of those around him after all. His understanding of people came down to a scant few categories. Those with fear, with caution and only recently, kindness from Naruto. The only other thing he's witness first hand prior to that was Yashamaru's brand of caring.

"He… lied?" repeated Gaara in a soft and confused voice. "Why… would he lie?"

Caring… was not a word I expected to be associated with. If anything, I was antagonistic and cruel. I kept everyone at a distance and lashed out at those who dared to come near. Nothing about me presented an aura of caring. Yet, inexperience as Gaara was, he managed to see through the lies even I couldn't see through myself.

"…To make it easier I suppose." I continued. "It's harder to kill someone you care about."

"But Yashamaru said… no one…" Gaara shook his head in disbelief as he stared at me with wide eyes. "It makes no sense! You make no sense! Why would you care? You don't even know me! Why does Naruto care? Why does anyone care?"

"Oh… the irony." I breathed and gave up all pretense of maintaining myself as a broken laugh escaped my lips.

"What's so funny?" growled Gaara, his body still pinned by the gravity seal as he fought against its pressure.

My body shook as I fought for each breath. For months, I screamed those very words over and over again. Why anyone care when one saw who I really am, when no one understood me. Yet, hearing Gaara throw those words back at me now, made me realize how much of an idiot I really am. Tobi's right, I've allowed my jealousy against Kasa blind me.

"Sorry." I apologized, reigning in the last of my laughter as I leaned back in my seat with a tired grin. "You just made me realized something."

"What?" growled Gaara, thoroughly unamused by my behavior.

"Why people care." I replied.

"And why do they care?" asked Gaara, his eyes narrowed and full of suspicion.

"Because we're human. Stupid and awfully sentimental, regardless how hard we try to lie to ourselves and to others." I murmured in amusement as I took in Gaara's doubtful eyes. "You don't believe me."

Gaara said nothing.

"Considering my track record consists of lying to myself and others, I don't blame you," I commented lightheartedly as I lowered my gaze to my hands as I folded them on my lap. "I can't claim I protected you because I cared because like you said, I hardly know you."

"Then why?" asked Gaara.
"Because you're important." I answered easily enough. "Because protecting you will keep those I do
care about safe."

"…And who are you trying to keep safe?" frowned Gaara.

"Still trying to figure that part out," I sighed dejectedly. "But at least we both know it's not that guy
from before…. So that's something."

"…You make no sense," said Gaara crossly.

"Irritating isn't it?" I grinned back. "Just sit tight for a bit, once Kushina—that's Naruto's mother—
gives you a look over, you can go back to pretending you care even less than I do and traumatizing
everyone to your heart's content. That is if Naruto doesn't get a hold of you first. He seemed rather
fond of you."

At that, Gaara fell completely silent and decidedly ignored me for the rest of his stay at the infirmary.
Kushina eventually came along with dad and his entourage of combat medics. I stepped aside and
allowed them to take the matter out of my hands as I left the infirmary. I found Kakashi waiting for
me unexpectedly outside of the room as my mind still circled around the revelations Gaara
unknowingly given me.

"You okay?" asked the silver-haired jounin, concern clear on his masked face as he placed a hand on
my shoulder.

"I'm fine," I answered softly.

"You sure?" asked Kakashi again, his eye stern and apprehensive.

It's strange… Unlike before, I didn't feel angry or bitter that he cared. Now that I've accepted
resentment I had for Kasa, it felt as though a weight has lifted. I hadn't realized how stifling it was
until now.

"…Naki showed up before Kushina-san and dad came." I admitted. "He… tried to recruit me."

"What?" Kakashi's eyes widened, his grip tightened on my shoulder at the news. "Did he do
anything? Where is he now?"

"He didn't do much aside from saying I should join him." I murmured. "He left not long after, said
something about running away from an Uchiha… I'm guessing Tobi's on his tail now."

"Right," breathed Kakashi, his grip loosening as he continued. "Obito left not long after you did…
but you're sure you're fine?"

"Yeah," I replied and to my surprise, meant it.

"That's good," Kakashi sighed in relief.

"So," I decided to change topic. "Once Kushina-san looked over Gaara and do something about that
seal of his, he shouldn't be an issue any more. How's the exam since we left. Anything notable?"

As eye opening as the revelation was, have someone care so much still felt strange. It will take some
getting used to, now that I'm not actively fighting against it. Even so, I have no clue who or what
exactly I'm fighting to protect, but… compared to before, I felt a little less incline to let them all crash
and burn. I supposed, it's the least I could do after everything.
If I was a sensible person, Gaara and Suigetsu's matchup in the preliminaries should have prepared me for final's lineup. Of course, if anyone knew me they'd laugh at the idiot who thought to call me sensible in the first place.

Suigetsu (Konoha) vs Karin (Kusa)

Temari (Suna) vs Shikamaru (Konoha)

Hinata (Konoha) vs Karui (Kumo)

Kagari (Ame) vs Lee (Konoha)

Naruto (Konoha) vs Shiore (Kusa)

Sasuke (Konoha) vs Sakura (Konoha)

Omoi (Kumo) vs Mubi (Ame)

"What… the actual flying fuck?" I muttered under my breath as I stared at the tournament bracket for the finals.

I hadn't believed Kakashi when he told me the results at the infirmary. Out of the seven listed, only Shikamaru's match remained the same. The rest was unfathomable. Kumo, Ame and Kusa weren't even in the running last time. Hell, I'm quite sure Naruto's team was the reason why the Ame team didn't make it.

Even though Gaara's no longer part of the finals and the threat of Shukaku being release is mitigated, with so many villages participating for this chunin exam it was a cause for alarm.

Currently Konoha and Kumo are in the midst of peace talks. If things go south, Kumo could possibly take advantage of the invasion and cripple the village. For Konoha's sake, I hope Hiruzen manages to come to an agreement with the northern village. With the oncoming invasion and Naki's ease in traipsing through the village, it's in sore need of protectors and allies.

Kakashi had gone off in search of Shikaku after taking my account at the infirmary, no doubt to assist in fixing whatever issues I might have caused in taking Gaara out of the exams. I had half expected Itachi or one of his Root operatives show up to shadow me when I left without the silver-haired jounin by my side, but surprisingly, I found myself without a keeper for a change. It was rather strange to have such freedom after being monitored for so long.

Not entirely clear what I was supposed to do with that bit of freedom. It's only been a scant two hours since the preliminary tournament at noon. Hiruzen hadn't given me any further assignments and if I were to be honest, I don't have any real duties to attend to as a proctor for the exams either. I ended up wandering the village after I made my way back to the village proper.

"Hey ho, it's the Crimson Terror yo!" rapped an unfamiliar voice from behind.
At the mention of my moniker, I turned towards the owner of the voice and found the dark skinned Kumo-nin Killer B. Beside him was the scowling blonde who threatened to kill me during the first exam and behind them were the two other Kumo genin that made it through the preliminary tournament. In hindsight, maybe I should have gone straight home. I am not equipped to thwart a political fiasco. Whelp… too late now.

"Good afternoon." I greeted evenly, ignoring Atsui’s heated glare while directing my attention to Killer B and the two other genin. "Congratulations on making it to the finals."

Atsui jolted from where he stood in an attempt to lash out at me. However, before he could make more than a step, Killer B slapped him in the chest with a heavy hand to hold him back.

"Hey, hey cool your jets, no need to do something you'll regret," warned Killer B.

"She's mocking me!" snapped Atsui. "She does this, knowing she killed my sister!"

This again. At first, I fought back the urge to sigh in exasperation and I kept my composure as I always do… but then I remembered I don't need to maintain the Crimson Terror's image anymore. With a loud sigh, I let my shoulders drop and shook my arms loose from the stiff posture I kept. The four stilled and turned a cautious gaze towards me. I propped a hand to my hip and the other to my head as I tried to rid whatever psychotic dialogue defaulted for the Crimson Terror.

"Look." I huffed and turned a firm gaze towards Atsui, the teen flinched. "I'm sorry I killed your sister. I'm sorry I can't even remember, but please do keep in mind that's what happen during war and conflict. People kill and get killed. Do not think you are the only person who suffered loss!"

"And you think that makes it okay?" snapped Atsui, regaining his confidence and rage once he realized I wasn't going to attack them.

"No." I replied bluntly. "But it hardly matters when none of us have a choice in what mission we take or who we fight. We fight for our villages, we kill for our villages and what happens? We gain grudges for our villages. Do you know how many enemies I've gotten because of my village?"

The group remained silent.

"Don't know? Me neither!" I threw up my hands with a laugh. "What I do know, is that when someone finally kills me it won't change anything. They'll be happy for the moment, but someone else would be upset at my death and then go after the killer and when the killer dies those they care about would get upset and then they'll come back and extract vengeance and so on and so forth. The cycle of hate and vengeance will be alive and well, going round and round."

"So what, are you telling me to be the bigger person?" growled Atsui. "Because I will not—"

"It doesn't matter who is the bigger person." I cut him off. "In the end we're still the ones losing. What I am telling you is that you're stupid for declaring your intentions to kill me. What you should do is kill me without anyone knowing so no one will come after you. Honestly, what is with this generation?"

"...Are you..." started Atsui in confusion before his eyes widened in disbelief. "Teaching me how to kill you?"

"Oi!" I shot a look towards Killer B. "What kind of sensei are you? Didn't you teach them how to stay alive?"

"You don't have any..." Karui trailed off as realization set in. "You do! But how were you able to
hide that? We have so many—"

"It's a farce," cut in Omoi as he thrust out an arm to keep Karui from stepping forward and no doubt spilling more information about spies. "Remember what she did to Yugito in her file. She made her doubt herself, she made Gashira doubt her."

"For the love of!" I threw up my hands in exasperation. Just how well knit were these lies for the Crimson Terror? Was there anything I could do to make them stop thinking I'm this badass? "Screw this, I'm done with the Crimson Terror's image!"

The group tensed as I directed my full attention to Killer B instead. My face heated up in embarrassment as I cleared my throat to steel my nerves. With a deep breath, I belted out my words at the Kumo-nin.

"What's done is done, being the Crimson Terror is no fun. The blood, the gore is nothing I adore. These allegations and accusations feels like a duration of castrations! I'm endlessly associated with this degradation from the village's decoration and designation! You lot are nothing more than a generation of knuckle-headed retardation. So fuck y'all and your shitty patriotism!" I ended with a solid middle finger at the group.

Any anger from the genin had was replaced with silent shock. They stared at me as though I grew a second head. With a huff, I dropped my hand to my side in a lazy swing before I turned my heel to leave. However, before I made more than two steps a loud clap and a bellowing laugh came from Killer B.

"I see, I see, you're a rapper like me!" chuckled Killer B. "A wordsmith that's created the great myth. The notorious Crimson Terror who scares with fervor."

"Correction, the Crimson Terror is not off her kilter." I turned my heel to continue the next verse. "Though to be honest, she probably fairs only slightly better than the average... fetter."

"Ha! I see your slight bungling, but you're not yet struggling. This might be you hustling," mused Killer B.

"How exasperating!" I growled. "No more of this word juggling! I am done, this is over. Good day, goodbye and no more re—"

To my surprise, Killer B held out a fist. I stared at it for a moment before glancing up to him in question. A half-smirk plastered across his face. One… that…

"Fist bump on it!" said Naruto brightly as he held out his fist.

The memory came and went so quickly, I barely felt any of its usual effects. My hand curled up mechanically and reached out for his before it even registered in my mind. What came next was alarming and unexpected. Memories not my own invaded my mind. Details of Kumo's position in the peace treaty, details of Killer B's conversation with Yugito and his encounter with Itachi.

To see me by Itachi's side was confusing, but at the mention of Tsukiyomi, I figured he included the Crimson Terror into his illusionary attacks. However, that wasn't important. What was important was the next set of memories of Killer B going through Kumo's bingo book regarding to the Crimson Terror and his conversations with Yugito Ni.

The moment those memories ended, a memory surge began. I raised my other hand to my head as the barrage started.
"Why do I have a cat strapped to me?" cried a much younger Kasa, knees shaking and close to tears as she clung clumsily to her deck of seal cards.

"If you don't give up, I'll not only kill you, I'll—" Kasa fought back a grimace as Yugito's claws punctured through her chest. She had to maintain the farce, she can't seem weak!

"Die," said Kasa with unblinking eyes as the kumonin's skull bubbled and warped into a violent explosion. Panic ran through her mind with thoughts of Tenzo hurt and dying. "No time... no time..."

"Did you know the best way to lie, is to tell the truth? Thank you for contributing to the eventual freedom of my kind," smiled Kasa sweetly with the very lie she was the biju not the jinchuriki.

"This is Kame," announced Kakashi to a room filled with anbu.

"...I'm cold," whimpered a dark-haired child on Kasa's back.

"Princess! Wake up!" screamed Kasa desperately.

My fist slipped from Killer B's as I stumbled towards the ground. Except, I never touch the ground as Killer B shifted his arm to catch me instead. I gagged on my own blood as it dripped from my nose and also down the back of my throat. It's been long since I had a memory surge as bad as this one, but at the same time it told so much. The birth and rise of the Crimson Terror.

Vaguely, I could hear Atsui screaming for my death. However, it was drowned out by the number of missions and kills done during the Crimson Terror's rise... except not all of them were done by Kasa. Most of it seemed hazy, but I managed to pick out that Kasa wasn't exactly alone in her term as the Crimson Terror. There was someone else. Someone in her head... but that's not important. Not right now.

"You knew." I wheezed, coughing up blood as my vision cleared. "If you knew then how many others—?"

"Your validation confirms my supposition, though not many share my theorization," replied Killer B with a chuckle as he helped me back to my feet. "They see it as postulation with no substantiation."
"Then why… this?" I gestured vaguely with a frown on my face.

"There's more to you than notoriety, an anxiety that takes over propriety and your random bouts of charity for Suna's jinchuriki and this silly Atsui. It is contrary to your unpopularity," chuckled Killer B.

"…Meaning?" I asked, frown deepening into further confusion.

"Animosity between Konoha and Kumo is coming to an end. What say you, we be friends?" grinned Killer B. "Not as Konoha's Crimson Terror or Kumo's awesome rapper, but from one jinchuriki to another."

The Kumo genins fell silent as did I. This was… unexpected, but compared to what else I've come across the past few hours…

"Sure, why not?" I shrugged.

Making friends with Killer B was not on my agenda today, but neither was the sudden memory surge. While I no longer hold hostility towards being Kasa, the memories itself hinted something more. I am Kasa, but not quite in the way most think and I intend to find out why.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: Attempted Hamilton-styled rapping… but I think I ended up with Dr. Seuss instead. Thank you to everyone who left kind and supportive words in the last reviews. It's very heartwarming and I appreciate it very much. Since the holidays are coming, I tried to finish this chapter before it passed. Hopefully, the Killer B encounter was able to make you all smile a bit even if it's a bit silly. Happy holidays!
"Tell me, what is it that constantly draws bijus, jinchurikis and chunin exams to you?" sighed Shikaku in exasperation behind a sake cup.

"It's not like I go out of my way to look for them." I muttered irritably.

"Even with your faulty memory, you somehow managed to outdo your younger self in not only facing another jinchuriki during the skirmish in Kiri, but befriending two other during this chunin exam," murmured Shikaku. "I'd say luck, but with your track record, this is bordering on a curse."

"Trust me, if I can control this, I'd totally turn and walk the other direction." I huffed and snatched the sake bottle from the table.

"No," said Kakashi, plucking the bottle from my hand before it touched my lips.

"Seriously? After the day I had, you deny me a god damn drink?" I scowled. "I'm of age!"

"I've seen you drunk before and if you went home with even a hint of alcohol, I'll have three parents trying to castrate me," retorted Kakashi.

"Castration?" I grinned with interest. "What's the story behind that one?"

"You drank Gai under the table during your moment of grief and got your stomach pumped for alcohol poisoning," answered the silver-haired jounin bluntly.

"…Put that way, not very interesting." I huffed and grabbed the cup of tea instead and sipped it.

"In light of… what happened during the preliminaries," muttered Shikaku. "We managed to talk down any anger that arose from your interruption. The finals will go as scheduled in a month's time."

"Then why am I here?" I asked, lowering my cup and glancing up at his half-lidded eyes.

"I know it's probably too much to ask, but is it possible for you to not rouse up any more inter-village incidences until the threat of invasion is over?" asked Shikaku.

"Says the person without the ridiculous reputation and countless death threats on their head." I grumbled. "I didn't even kill anyone this time and I'm still in trouble."

"You have Itachi to thank for that, he's been spreading his Root operatives thin to keep trouble from finding you… not that it kept you from finding it," continued Shikaku.

"Ah, that explains the drugging." I muttered.
"You're immune so long as you're not involved in anything that could harm the village," warned Shikaku. "Even Itachi has his limits, kage candidate or not."

"You could have told Kakashi passed on whatever message you had," I frowned. "Why go through the trouble of seeing me in person if it's simply to give me a warning? You've never bothered before, what changed?"

"Kasa—" started Kakashi, but Shikaku raised a hand to stop him.

"Contrary to what some may think, words can be far more dangerous than any weapon or jutsu," stated the Nara as he lowered his hand. "They've rallied men, incited wars and revolutions alike."

"And because I'm an oracle, the danger of my words are even more so." I muttered.

"I understand you're still coping with your memory loss, but you must remember every action you take will have consequences," cautioned Shikaku.

"...I'm not even sure if any of this is really my choice anymore." I muttered in response.

"What do you mean?" frowned Shikaku.

"If this is about your continue denial about being Kasa—" cut in Kakashi immediately, almost as if he was afraid.

"I am Kasa." I interrupted him with certainty.

"Oh?" noted Shikaku with interest. "What brought upon this sudden certainty?"

"The same reason that caused it I supposed." I muttered with a frown.

"What reason?" asked Kakashi.

"It took some time for me to notice something strange since the memory surges were random and rather far apart from one another." My brows furrowed in thought. "It probably didn't help that I had to deal with the whole Crimson Terror bit, but no point in crying over spilt milk I guess."

"And? What did you find?" asked Shikaku.

"With how close and intimate these memories were it was easy to believe they were mine..." I placed a hand against my head. "Except they're not."

"They're not?" repeated Shikaku in alarm. "Explain."

"Simply put, these memories were of Kasa," I elaborated. "Every single one of them were like a spectator viewing in rather than experiencing it first-hand. It's also the reason why I had such a hard time accepting the fact that I am Kasa when all the memories seem to invoke a sense of jealousy and envy."

"The memories belong to someone else?" repeated Shikaku warily. "Whose?"

"I don't know." I muttered and ran a hand through my hair. "But whoever it is, had little fondness for Konoha. Can't say it's entirely to blame for my antagonism, but it certainly didn't help."

"I see, this may be a problem..." murmured Shikaku pensively.

"Yep, security risk and all." I chirped.
"You know, telling us that means we're obligated to detain you for being a risk, right?" sighed Shikaku. "How can you sound so cheerful about this?"

"It's either tell you the truth or put myself through another round of denying who I am." I shrugged. "Honestly, I'm kind of tired of pretending so... I'll leave the decision of what to do with me up to you guys."

"...You don't make this easy do you?" grumbled Shikaku in annoyance.

"Sorry." I chirped unapologetically.

"How troublesome," muttered Shikaku as he took another idle sip of his sake. "I'd like to give you the clear since you've been so honest. Unfortunately, unless we find out whose memories you have, we can't risk letting you run about as you are."

"Understandable." I nodded. "Would you like me to disarm myself before you have me taken into custody? Or would you prefer someone else to do a more thorough—"

"That's not necessary," interrupted Kakashi.

"Kakashi?" frowned Shikaku as he turned his attention to the younger man.

"She's not a threat, I know whose memories she has," noted Kakashi.

"You do?" I said in bafflement. "How could you possibly know—"

"Rayne," stated Kakashi firmly.

I paused, recognizing the name from a previous conversation with Itachi. He mentioned it was an alias Kasa went by in her tenure as the Crimson Terror, but from the sound of Kakashi, Rayne wasn't just a name. She seemed like... another person all together. Wait, didn't Itachi say something about...

"The second personality?" asked Shikaku with interest. "I was not aware she was still in existence after the incident with the Uchiha Massacre."

"After the massacre, she spent the last four years fixing the damage to Kasa's mind. From the looks of it, she used her own memories to supplement the missing pieces she couldn't recover," murmured Kakashi solemnly. "She ceased to exist shortly before Kasa woke up."

"And you're certain she's not a threat to Konoha?" asked Shikaku.

"Despite Rayne's temper and foul disposition, she never actively sought to do harm... if anything, her drive fell more in line to protect," said Kakashi. "Albeit, not in the most gentle manner."

"Hmm," frowned Shikaku in a low hum. "Vouching for her in this manner, you do know the risk you'll be placing yourself in, do you not Kakashi?"

"Detaining Kasa and putting her away won't benefit Konoha," reasoned Kakashi. "She's never been a danger to the village before and it's unlikely she'll become one now or in the future."

"Bold words," droned Shikaku as he finished the last of his sake. "Is that your resolve? To protect this girl at the risk of the village?"

"She is a part of this village," said Kakashi firmly.

"Hmph," a faint smile touched Shikaku's lips as he lowered his cup. "If only Minato could see you
now. He would be so proud of the man you've become."

"What?" said Kakashi in surprise.

"Still not quite ready to replace me just yet," muttered Shikaku irritably as he snatched the bottle from Kakashi's hand and refilled his cup once more. "But you'll get there."

"Then..." frowned Kakashi.

"Just keep her out of trouble," sighed Shikaku.

"Seriously?" I blinked in surprise. "You're just going to let me off like—hey!"

"Shut up already, are you trying to get yourself locked up?" grunted Kakashi as he pressed my head down with a firm hand.

"It's not like it makes a difference whether I'm in or out of it anyway!" I retorted with a vain attempt to swat his hand away. "Quit it!"

"Hmm... then maybe we should give you a reason to stay out," noted Shikaku.

"A reason?" I glanced to the man curiously as he reached into a nearby drawer and pulled out a small rectangular-shaped box.

"When you were younger, before you were even a shinobi, you came here once on your own searching for something," noted Shikaku. "Imagine my surprise when I realized what you were after was something you've seen only once before, but still somehow managed to pinpoint it was here in my home."

"Huh?" confusion clear on my face as I stared at the box in his hand.

"I told you to come back when you became a chunin, but it seemed like you've forgotten about it in the midst of your circumstances," murmured Shikaku. "It's unlikely you'll be able to reproduce it with your lack of seal-making capabilities, but with the invasion coming, it might be more beneficial to have you traversing through the village with ease to utilize your healing capabilities to its fullest."

"...Healing?" I gapped. "Am I hearing you correctly? You want to use the Crimson Terror, whose very reputation is to cause mass death... to be a healer?"

"We can't afford to have someone follow you during the course of the attack," reasoned Shikaku. "On an attack of this scale, having more of us survive the ordeal outweighs the slaughter capability of single person."

"The fact you trust me to do this is fine and all, but what makes you think I'll be able to do that with what's in the box?" I asked with a raised brow.

Without another word, Shikaku opened the box. My eyes widened at the sight of a familiar three-pronged kunai.

"I'm sure this answers your question," commented Shikaku as he set the box on the table between us.

"... I thought you didn't trust me, why would you give me this?" I asked cautiously.

"Have I ever said I didn't trust you?" countered Shikaku with a raised brow.

"Then what was the whole thing with Kakashi just now?" I waved vaguely at Kakashi's direction.
"Merely a test on his resolve and his trust in you," replied Shikaku nonchalantly. "If I truly saw you as a threat, you wouldn't be sitting here."

"That's…" I found myself temporarily at a loss for words before a wide grin tugged at my lips. "Probably the most badass thing I've heard anyone say to me."

"Kasa…" groaned Kakashi in exasperation as a light chuckle escaped Shikaku's lips.

"But, I do have my curiosities," continued the Nara. "I know your loyalty is not with Konoha. It's never been with Konoha even when you had your memories."

Surprise crossed my face at his declaration. There was no anger or accusation, merely a statement of fact.

"At the time you gave Minato as your answer," continued Shikaku. "You probably don't have the same attachment to him now with your memory loss, but I am curious where loyalty lies now."

"Truthfully?" I paused and pondered for a moment before thumbing backwards towards Kakashi. "Probably this guy."

"Your reason?" asked Shikaku.

"Pure bias!" I chirped brightly. "Compared to everyone else, he's the least annoying and… I think Rayne might have had a thing for him."

"What?" spluttered Kakashi in disbelief.

"Oh, before you freak out, Rayne's attraction to you is according to Itachi. I personally see you as an over protective mentor of sorts..." I paused briefly before another thought came to mind. "Or maybe even a father figure."

"…Fine," sighed Kakashi. "But just do me a favor."

"What?" I asked.

"Don't ever call me daddy in front of your father," grounded the silver-haired man. "I know that thought cross your mind when you said father-figure."

"…Hehe, you caught me." I cackled before turning my attention back to Shikaku again. "Is that answer acceptable?"

"…I regret asking," drawled the man as he pushed the box forward for me to collect. "Just take the box and make yourself useful."

"Yes sir!" I chirped brightly as I plucked the kunai from the box. "I'm going to need to get a holster for…"

I paused as I felt the seal half-activate under my touch, revealing a multitude of locations that housed one of Minato's kunais. I could see why Shikaku wanted to use this as a means for me to get around to the different areas to treat the wounded during the invasion. I'm surprised no one bothered to remove all these kunais... but then again, aside from Minato, who else could even use...

Among the countless sceneries, one stood out with an anbu figure wearing a fox mask. Alarmed, I dropped the kunai and scrambled away from it.

"Kasa? What's wrong?" asked Kakashi as caught me from falling flat on my face.
"Naki! I saw Naki!" I shouted before remembering the first memory surge back in the hospital. "He could use seals. He's been using Minato's kunais to get around Konoha undetected!"

"What?" whispered Shikaku lowly, eyes wide and alarmed. "Does he know you've seen him?"

"I-I don't know. I dropped the kunai when I saw him, maybe not?" I gnawed at my lower lip.

"How many kunais are there?" demanded Shikaku. "We need to know where he's been going."

"There were so many." I ran a hand through my hair as I tried to recall what I saw. "The majority of them seemed like training grounds. There's one for the hospital, one for the stadium, the Hokage Monument, the Academy? And… I think I saw Kushina-san's apartment and… there was one on Kakashi too."

"Not good," muttered Shikaku. "Can you hear anything when you touched the seal?"

"No, no sounds," I shook my head. "Just a glimpse of what's around the kunai."

"Without touching the kunai again, do you think you can find all of the other kunais and remove them?" asked Kakashi.

"I don't think so, not with just the glimpse." I eyed the kunai warily.

"Even if we could remove it, we don't know if Naki could recreate Minato's seals either," muttered Shikaku.

"What then?" I asked. "We just leave the kunais where they are and let Naki come and go as he pleases?"

"We might have to," frowned Shikaku. "If he can recreate the seals, getting rid of these kunais will only limit your ability in getting around the village as we originally planned. If he can't then these kunais are good indication of where he would go if he were to flee during a fight."

"So… are we going to set up an ambush?" I asked.

"Yes and no," said Shikaku. "You won't be part of the planning."

"What? Why not?" I scowled.

"You're far more usefull as a distraction," reasoned Shikaku. "We can't set up an ambush if he can see it coming."

"What do you expect me to do? Seduce him?" I spat sarcastically.

"I'll leave how to distract him to your discretion," drawled Shikaku. "But something must be done about these kunais. Naki could potentially sneak enemies into the village for the invasion during the chunin exams."

"It's too dangerous," argued Kakashi. "What's to say Naki wouldn't outright kidnap her?"

"He had plenty of opportunities to take her in the past," noted Shikaku. "And from her most recent encounter, wouldn't you say he has a savior complex? He prefers people following him willingly."

"Even so…" grimaced Kakashi.

"I won't force her to do this, but ultimately, it's Kasa's choice whether she wants to or not," said
"...I get to choose?" I blinked in surprise.

"Your loyalty is not to Konoha, forcing you to act against your will for it, is counterintuitive," reasoned Shikaku.

"Ah, makes sense." I muttered before glancing to Kakashi. "You don't want me to do this."

"No," agreed Kakashi. "But knowing you, you'd do it just to spite me."

"Only out of love." I grinned in response to his flinch at the word love.

"...You did that on purpose," growled Kakashi.

"Not sure how I'm going to distract Naki, but I'll do my best." I chirped, blatantly ignoring the irritation I've caused Kakashi.

"Best of luck," said Shikaku.

"I wouldn't count too much on that," groused Kakashi. "Do us all a favor and don't get hurt."

"Hmm? Hurt? And here I expected a 'don't get killed' type of response." I joked.

"You're harder to kill than a cockroach," said Kakashi dryly.

"Totally feeling the love here." I scoffed as I crawled over to the kunai to pick it back up.

"Just be careful," surrendered Kakashi with a long exasperated sigh.

"No promises." I waved the kunai dismissively. Somehow, things seem to get more and more complicated.
"How oh how should I be a distraction?" I muttered under my breath as I flipped the three-pronged kunai absently into the air and caught it by the ring as it came back down, spinning it on my finger as I strolled about.

Shikaku said he'll leave it up to me on how to distract Naki while they planned out an ambush, but how am I supposed to distract essentially an undead with seemingly no weakness? Not that him being alive would make it any easier, but at least I could try to kill him if anything. This feels like it's out of my capabilities.

Lost in my thoughts, I almost didn't notice the hand snatching the kunai out of the air on my fifth toss. Startled, I turned my heel, chakra threads at the ready to draw out my seal cards for an attack, but stopped abruptly at the sight of a white-haired man with a wart on his nose.

"…Jiraiya?" I said in surprise.

"What happened to calling me Jiraiya-sama?" said the man with mock hurt. "But I supposed you remembering who I am at all is not too bad considering your circumstances."

"… We met before?" I tilted my head curiously.

"Now you're just hurting my feelings little lady," sighed Jiraiya as he glanced to the kunai in hand. "You really shouldn't be tossing this around like a toy. How did you even get a hold of this?"

"Shikaku-san gave it to me." I offered the explanation. "I'm supposed to use it to—"

"Shh," hushed Jiraiya with a finger to his lips before I noticed a string of seals snaking around the kunai and binding over the hiraishin seal. "Best not be so loose-lipped about his plans."

"Oh…" I said in realization, Shikaku must have realized how in over my head I was and asked Jiraiya to assist me. "…Wait, shouldn't you be training Naruto?"

"Done and over," replied Jiraiya cheekily as he handed the kunai back. "The kid's quick."

"What do you mean?" I frowned as I took the weapon.

"Picked up the rasengan like fish to water. I've never seen someone do it on their first try," noted Jiraiya.

"First try?" I said in surprise.

"Is he not supposed to get it so quickly?" frowned Jiraiya.

"It's not bad… I'm just… surprised," I muttered.

"Why is it surprising that things are going well?" asked the sannin in confusion.

"Just on the err side of caution, that's all." I shrugged as I pocketed the kunai. "Since it's not convenient to talk here, why don't we move the conversation elsewhere?"

"I usually prefer the ladies asking me that question to be a bit older and bustier, but I'll make an
exception for you," said Jiraiya with a click of his tongue and a wink.

"...Whatever," I shrugged.

"I've never gotten that reaction before," said Jiraiya with a raised brow.

"With what I've been through the last several weeks, I'm not surprised if another person decides to profess their undying love for me or something along those lines." I said nonchalantly as I took the initiative to start walking. "Let's have tea, because I'm honestly tired of having lunch and dinner."

"Of course," laughed Jiraiya heartily with a wry grin tugging at his lips as he followed.

We ended up at a quaint teahouse some ways from bathhouse. Far enough from the town center to be overheard by the ninja populace, but not so far into the civilian districts. While not many may recognize who I am on sight, I'm quite sure they would be able to recognize Jiraiya. Neither of us needed the attention if we were to talk.

"So... where should we start?" I asked after the waitress dropped off our drinks.

"How about with what you remember from our last encounter?" said a familiar voice from behind.

"Naki!" I shouted in alarm and turned in surprise, but before I could flee and relocate myself to a better position, I found two strong hands clasped at my wrists and pinned to the table. "What? Jiraiya?"

"...Sorry," murmured the white-haired sannin regretfully before I felt the unraveling of a genjutsu. Gone were the whites in the man's eyes and in its place was inky darkness against his once ebony eyes. His skin pale and cracked.

"Edo tensei?" I whispered in horror as surprise as I darted my eyes between the man and Naki.

"Hello again," chuckled Naki as he circled around my chair and plopped down in the seat Jiraiya vacated.

"How the fuck did you even manage to kill him?" I demanded with a glare.

"You make it sound like it's hard," grinned Naki as he picked up my cup of tea and started sipping.

"How?" I growled.

"Sentiment is a funny thing," noted Naki as he flipped the emptied cup upside down and set it on the table. "It can be a motivator, but at the same time it could be debilitating."

"What could you have possibly done to trigger that response?" I glanced to the apologetic-looking sannin holding me down.

"You want to tell her?" drawled the golden-eyed corpse as he grinned to Jiraiya. "I'll even give you permission to talk freely."

"I don't even know what you are anymore," scowled Jiraiya.

"Oh get off your high horse," scoffed Naki.

"You killed them!" growled Jiraiya. "How could you!? They were your—"

"Blah, blah, blah," sighed Naki as he flapped his hand to mock Jiraiya's words. "Orochimaru sensei
had it coming. He's the one who made me into this! And sis? I gave her a choice. Not my fault she couldn't see my vision."

"And what vision is that?" spat Jiraiya. "All you've been doing is going around collecting orphans and inciting conflicts!"

"Correction, I'm cleansing the world of our kind." noted Naki airily as he waved his hand about. "We shinobi bring nothing but hate and violence wherever we go. Hell, we profit off it. I'm just doing the world a favor by taking us off the board."

"You're kidding right? Killing off all the shinobi in the world won't solve anything! People will just find other ways to kill each other! What you're doing is utterly pointless!" I snapped.

"Oh don't worry, I'll get to the rest of the world in time," grinned Naki. "Well, after the orphans grow up a bit and I add them to my undead army anyway."

"…What the hell are you on?" I said in disbelief as I stared at him.

"Well, it's probably more practical to get someone powerful like my grandfather and the other big names from the other villages, but as you could see here with Jiraiya, they won't share my vision. I could silence them with a seal, but I rather not have glaring disapproval follow me around," reasoned Naki. "Not to mention, I don't want to risk the chance of someone knowing how to unravel this neat little jutsu keeping me here."

"Then why do you have Jiraiya under your thumb now?" I asked.

"I need to give the kiddies time to reach their prime before I add them to my army," explained Naki nonchalantly. "Jiraiya, Orochimaru sensei and my sister are great babysitters, being the sannin and all."

"…Tsunade is your sister?" I looked at him in disbelief. "Then you're…"

"Nawaki Senju," answered Naki with a tilt to his head. "But do keep to calling me Naki. I rather not be identified with Konoha."

"Why? What drove you to…this?" I frowned.

"Interesting how my being dead completely negates your ability to read neither my past nor future," chuckled Naki."Long story short, I've been lied to, kidnapped, drugged, experimented on, killed and revived by someone I thought I could trust."

"And that drove you to genocide." I raised a brow.

"Not quite," said Naki pointedly. "Honestly, I was angry and at a lost until I found Madara."

"Wait, I thought you said you're not working with him!" I argued.

"I'm not," dismissed Naki with a wave. "I told you I killed him, didn't I?"

"Then what do you mean?" I asked.

"The whole utopia idea," explained the dead Senju as he tapped a finger on the upturned cup. "He wanted to bring it to the world with some weird genjutsu… thing. Of course, it's utter nonsense. As the old saying goes, never trust an Uchiha, but then I thought… Utopia doesn't sound too bad. Except not everyone should be given such a gift. Not everyone is deserving."
"Hence your selective orphans." I muttered before eying him again.

"They didn't ask for any of this, they are victims and the most deserving to receive utopia," reasoned Naki. "As are you."

"...Sure, let's go with that." I brushed the thought aside before continuing. "Why are you so insistent on having me join you? I can't see your future or your past, you have no use for me. Killing me would probably be a better option to keep anyone else from using my oracle abilities."

"Well..." grimaced Naki as he sucked air through his teeth. "You're kind of hard to kill. Not for the lack of trying, mind you."

"What?" I blinked.

"Lord knows how many favors I had to do to convince Danzo to make that deal with Hanzo after the mess with the three-tails," scoffed Naki. "Since the plan failed in Konoha, I was hoping I could get it to work in Ame, but your daddy had to go and roundup Akatsuki to get you out. You have no idea how infuriating it was when they contacted me to assist your retrieval. If I didn't need them to continue the conflict in Ame, I wouldn't have even bothered!"

"...You were working with Danzo and Akatsuki?" I said in disbelief.

"Worked," corrected Naki in annoyance. "Danzo became unbearable when he found out you were an oracle and Akatsuki practically cut ties with me after the bitch fit your dad had with them after your coma. Can't say I was upset when the Uchina up and kidnapped Danzo and did who knows what to him, but getting cut off from Akatsuki pissed me off a bit. How is it possible you managed to get so many relevant people to keep you alive?"

"As Kakashi puts it, I'm a loveable cockroach." I said flippantly.

"So I've heard," muttered Naki before he leaned into the table and grinned. "Which got me thinking. With such a wide influence, it's high time you join my payroll."

"What makes this time different from all the other times I've de—" I started, but he grabbed me by the chin, fingers digging into my cheeks as he yanked me forward. My eyes widened at the sight of a single glowing red sharingan.

"Oh, you're not given a choice on the matter," grinned Naki as he harshly tugged my head back and forth in a mock playful manner. "Those precious guard dogs of yours really shouldn't have given you that kunai. Now, you're all alone at my mercy."

"...What are you—" I grounded out through his unforgiving grip. "Going to do to me?"

"Why, string you up like a good little puppet of course," whispered Naki in amusement against my ear. "But don't worry, I'll make sure to let you have front row seat. You can watch as each—and—every—one of your guard dogs perish. Starting with those two Uchiha boys of yours, what do you say?"

"I'd say you're more predictable than we expected," came a familiar monotonic drone.

"Shikaku," growled Naki as he and Jiraiya struggled to release their hold on me and reluctantly took several steps back.

Once freed, I stumbled away from the two before I spotted a number of shadows latched onto the shadows beneath Jiraiya and Naki. Several Naras could be seen positioned in the shadows of the
shop as Shikaku idly strolled towards them, his shadow among the many attached to the two.

"You haven't changed much from our Academy days, Nawaki," continued Shikaku as he came to a stop. "Always the impatient one."

"And you," grunted the undead Senju in agreement as he eyed the Nara. "Using the Oracle as bait? A ballsy gamble, don't you think?

"Lured you out, didn't I?" countered Shikaku with a shrug.

"You think your little shadow puppetry can hold me?" laughed Naki before letting out a snarl. "I own the most powerful ninjas from this shitty village!"

The wall behind him imploded as a pale fist drove through, sending a shockwave strong enough to collapse the whole establishment. Something wrapped around my waist, yanking me off my feet as the walls came crashing down. I yelped as it dragged me out of the carnage and into the grip of yet another person. When I took in who it was, my eyes widened and my jaw dropped at the duo before me.

"No… way." I whispered.

Like Jiraiya, the two shared signs of edo tensei. The first was a long-haired man with skin as white as a ghost. Purple outlined the blacken whites of his eyes, but what stood out the most was the snake-like yellow slit eyes. There was no doubt he was Orochimaru. The second was a blonde, big-busted woman with a diamond-shaped seal on her forehead, Tsunade.

"If you'll excuse me," huffed Naki in annoyance as he gave a dismissive glance towards the Naras on the ground and brushed off the debris on his person. "I'll be leaving with the oracle."

"Not with my daughter, you're not!" snapped Tesuri before a transparent pink barrier went up around the area. Kushina and members of the Combat Medic Corps could be seen in position for the barrier seal.

"Come now Tesuri, you know you can't beat me," sighed Naki. "Besides, I have dear old sis and her teammates to—"

The air warped and suddenly I found myself along with the sannin sucked into a swirl of darkness. When my vision cleared, we were in a bizarre world of elevated geometric blocks. None of us had the chance to take in our surroundings for more than a second before a familiar ginormous fiery blade sliced through Orochimaru.

"Kasa move!" shouted Itachi before I darted away from the reassembling carnage that was Orochimaru. Orange flames from his Susano overtook the spot where I stood, burning and devouring the scattered remains of the snake sannin.

I barely managed to regain my footing when Jiraiya appeared in front of me. However, before he could grab me, a wall of green flames came between us. As I scrambled backwards, I realized it wasn't a wall of flames, it was an armor, another Susano armor to be exact.

"Shisui?" I said in surprise as I glanced around for the other Uchiha, but my efforts were short lived as Tsunade appeared next and I barely managed to duck and roll out of the way before the older woman could grab me.

"Tobi! Get Kasa back to the other side!" snapped Shisui.
"And leave you two here?" I shouted in disbelief, but my protests were ignored as I found a firm hand on my shoulder and I was dragged out of the dark world of Kamui without a second opinion.

"Kasa, Tobi!" said Kakashi in relief when he spotted us.

"What on earth is going on?" I demanded as Tobi released me.

"Love to stay and chat, but I need to go back and help the boys. Later!" said Tobi before he disappeared back into the Kamui spiral.

"Wait a sec—" I protested, but he was gone.

"Come on Kasa, we need to get you somewhere safe," said Kakashi as he grabbed onto my arm and dragged me along.

"No!" I snapped and pulled away, "You're going to tell me what the hell is going on! I've been dragged from one place to another without rhyme or reason for the last ten minutes!"

"We went for a preemptive strike," replied Kakashi bluntly. "The Naras, Kushina, your father and the Combat Medic Corps are attempting to capture Naki. Itachi, Shisui and Tobi are in charge of containing Jiraiya, Tsunade and Orochimaru."

"What? Are you guys crazy?" I said in disbelief.

"Better to try now than to deal with it when there are delegates and other non-Konoha shinobi in the village," reasoned Kakashi before he reached for me again. "Now come on! We need to get you somewhere safe in case—"

"There are you are," sighed Naki in frustration as he hooked an arm around my neck and yanked me back.

"Kasa!" shouted Kakashi.

"Really shouldn't have given her that kunai!" mocked Naki before the world shifted again and we were whisked away from Kakashi. "Now, where were we?"

"For the love of!" I growled, struggling and kicking against his hold.

"Now, now," grunted Naki as he struggled to pin my arms and legs into something more controllable. "Don't make this harder than it already is. You lost me three valuable chess pieces!"

"Well boo-fucking-who to you!" I snarled. "You asshats been yanking me back and forth like a rag doll all day! Excuse me if I don't give a flying fuck!

"Don't make me kill you," threatened Naki.

"I'm a fucking cockroach, good luck with that!" I spat.

"Enough!" growled Naki as he pinned me to the ground and yanked my head up so my eyes met with his single sharingan. "You will obey me!"

The eye glowed red, the tomoes spun. I tried to shut my eyes and turn my head away, but his grip tightened on my hair. His thumb dug into the corner of my eye to lift up an eyelid. I thought for sure it was all over and that I was his to control… but then the undead Senju was suddenly ripped away into the air by a dark mass.
The air felt heavy, too dense to breathe. I watched in breathless amazement as the darkness gripped onto Naki, crushing his smug corpse body as he screamed and struggled to free himself. It was like watching a black hole eviscerating whatever that came its way. Within seconds, Naki was gone.

I gapped in disbelief as I turned to my savior. After being the flag in this psychotic capture the flag game between Naki and Konoha, I never expected someone to actually kill Naki. In short of the original summoner canceling the jutsu or the edo tensai corpse deciding to move onto the next life, I didn't think there was another way to kill the undead.

"It's over," said the deep voice of my savior.

I half expected the speaker to be a man, but who I saw instead was a woman with long flowing red hair, rinnegan eyes and the black cloak with red clouds of Akatsuki. I know her. I've seen her before in my memory surge. She's…

"…Mom?" I whispered in confusion.
"…Mom?" I stared up at the woman for a brief moment before the ringed purple eyes clicked in my mind. "You know, it's kind of fucked up that you picked my mom of all people to be one of your Pains, Nagato."

"My condolences," said the man using my mother's face. "But I do not have the knowhow or adeptness in seal-work. This vessel is the only one I have available that's capable of accessing the seal network Naki's using."

"…Great, another person who can use the major security breech." I muttered darkly under my breath. "So, what's your deal?"

"My… deal?" repeated the man with a confused tilt to his head. "What do you mean?"

"I've been kidnapped and tossed around from one person to the next for the better part of the day either being bait or whatever." I grumbled. "What's your reason?"

"We, the Akatsuki, are in contract with Konoha," explained Nagato. "In exchange for Konoha's medical services, we offer our assistance."

"Wait… contract? Akatsuki is a mercenary group?" I repeated in disbelief as I looked at him. "Since when?"

"Since the fall of Ame," replied Nagato quietly.

"…What?" I gapped, completely at a loss for words. What did I do this time to cause that change? "Wait, but there were participants from Ame that made it to the finals! How could it be gone?"

"Naki was rather upset when we decided to cut ties with him," explained Nagato, but he sounded like he wanted to avoid explaining the whole ordeal. "The ones participating are the few remnants that managed to survive and will have a chance to be adopted into the other villages depending on their performance."

I suppose that sort of makes sense… Naki didn't sound like he took the rejection well when he talked about it earlier. Can't say I'm surprised that he somehow razed Ame to the ground. Albeit, I am curious how he managed to do so. He may be an immortal corpse, but it's still one versus an entire village and Hanzo. Even if he somehow managed to do it on his lonesome, why didn't he do it to the other villages?

"If there's nothing else," interrupted Nagato while I was lost in my thoughts. "Will you be able to make it back on your own? Your father… he's not fond of me using Somoku as a vessel. Unfortunately, she was the only vessel that could reach you in time."

"Uh…” I mumbled before reaching into my pouch to pull out the kunai Naki tampered with. I could still access the other kunais within the village, but the call on the tampered kunai felt louder than the rest.

"For your safety, you may wish to destroy that kunai," suggested Nagato. "There's a low chance of someone else learning how to utilize these seals, but it's probably best not to tempt fate."

"Well… Fate hates me," I muttered darkly. "If I keep it, at least I'll see it coming."
"…If you wish," agreed Nagato amicably.

"So… what do I tell Hiruzen on the debriefing?" I asked. "Or are you going to show up in a different vessel to talk to him instead?"

"Yahiko will be the representative for the debriefing," explained Nagato. "Everything we talked about has been relayed to him. Generally, he handles talking with clients since he's… more amicable to deal with."

"I see…" I murmured before we fell into an uncomfortable silence.

"…Are you sure you'll be fine on your own?" asked Nagato once more.

"I'll be fine, but…" I gnawed on my lower lip before giving an exhausted sigh. "Can I get a hug?"

"…A hug?" said Nagato in confusion.

"It's been a horrible day and even though you're not my mom, I'll take what I can get," I said pathetically.

Nagato seemed frozen and reluctant at first, but eventually he made his way to me and drew me into my mother's arms.

Mentally and physically exhausted, I sank into the hug and clung tightly to what was once my mother's body. Despite all that's happened today, it's not even noon yet. With Naki gone, the possibility of an invasion during the chunin exams practically disappeared. Sure there were still his orphans, but without him around they'll likely stay with whatever villages they've snuck into or quietly disappear from shinobi life. It's unlikely they would continue without his direction.

Of the two wars Konoha fought the last several years, Kiri's been resolved for weeks and Kumo was well on its way to reconciling with Konoha. Suna could potentially be a threat, but with Gaara this docile and practically a puppy trailing Naruto, it's unlikely Suna could coerce him into a full-scale attack. The undead Senju didn't seem to follow Orochimaru's methodology, so there was a chance that invasion talks were never completed.

Akatsuki potentially could have been the final threat against Konoha, but since they were nothing more than a mercenary group now, they seem rather harmless. All in all… everything sound… resolved. Would you look at that? I'm not sure should I be relieved or worried.

"…Are you okay now?" asked Nagato awkwardly.

"No," I muttered and reluctantly took a step back. "But, I'll manage somehow."

"…Yahiko would like to relay a message to you from my other vessel," said Nagato after giving me a long look.

"A message from Yahiko?" I repeated in surprise.

"He said you probably don't remember him, but the offer to join Akatsuki still stands if you'd like a change of scenery," relayed Nagato.

"…That's very generous, but I don't think…" I tried to decline, not expecting the offer.

"He also mentioned, you don't need to necessarily join Akatsuki," interrupted Nagato. "If you want to leave the shinobi life altogether, we can help you as well."
"But… why?" I frowned, confusion clear on my face as Nagato turned his gaze to Somoku's hand.

"We owe it to Somoku and your father," said the man quietly. "It's far too late to make amends for what's happened. After Ame's gone we've tried to make amends with your father, but he would have none of it. The least we could do is to offer the same to you. Whether or not you take it, it's to your discretion."

"I'll… keep that in mind," I murmured. "Thank you."

"Do take care Kasa, if you ever decide otherwise…" said Nagato as he discreetly reached into his cloak to revealed one of Minato's kunai in his possession. "You know how to reach us."

With a brief incline of his head, the man disappeared in a red flash, no doubt using the kunai as a means to leave the village. Once alone, I let out a frustrated sigh and dragged a hand over my face in an attempt to gather my thoughts.

"…Damn it." I murmured as covered my hand over my mouth and evened out my breathing. Just when I thought I finally figured out who I am and I what I wanted, he had to come in and throw a wrench in it all.

For months, I tested the patience of anyone and everyone around me. If not for the absurd level of fondness people had for me or my oracle status, no doubt I'd be punished or outright executed for being a public menace and flagrantly disrespecting my peers and superiors. They are saints for turning a blind eye to all my nonsense.

It's strange. Before today, Naki had offered several times in the past to help me leave Konoha, to get away from it all. I never thought about accepting before, maybe because he was a megalomaniac or more likely, I've never really given a really choice in the matter. Between him and Konoha, it was either help him or help them. There was never a true option to leave.

It's clear to me now, as long as I am the oracle I will never be able to leave the village on my freewill. I will never be able to escape the shinobi life. And the most messed up part...I didn't realize I even wanted to leave in the first place.

Nevertheless, I still needed to report in, otherwise I might face a search team. With the kunai still at hand, I charged the necessary chakra to select which kunai to warp to. After finding the one closest to the administrative building, I breathed out and allowed it to drag me towards the other kunai before making my way to report in.

Of those involved in the whole exchange, a few reported to Hiruzen by now. Though, I doubt the man was ever completely unaware. Judging by the lack of anbu interception, he probably watch through his crystal ball when Nagato disintegrate Naki. Which brings the question on whether or not he heard Nagato's offer. While Shikaku may seem dismissive of my lack of loyalty towards Konoha, Hiruzen might not see it in the same light. To him this might very well be treason.

"Hokage-sama." I greeted the man evenly as the door closed behind me.

"Kasa-kun," returned the man in greeting, his hands folded solemnly over his face as smoke drifted from his pipe lazily. "Today must have been a harrowing experience for you."

"...Sir," I replied, too weary to maintain any level of a façade. "With all due respect, may I speak plainly with you?"

"About?" noted Hiruzen with a raised brow.

"This thing you and everyone else is doing." I gestured with a tired flap of my hand.
"I'm afraid I don't follow," replied Hiruzen.

"Leaving me in the dark, using me as bait." I listed a few examples to start. "While I understand it was necessary and possibly the only way to catch Naki unaware of the assault, I…"

"Yes?" Hiruzen asked for clarification when I trailed off.

"What use is an oracle that cannot see the future?" I forced out, struggling to find the right words. "Even if I try to maintain the farce, people will eventually realize the truth. My usefulness to Konoha is on a time limit."

"Kasa-kun," said Hiruzen firmly as he lowered his pipe. "What are you saying?"

"There's no easy way for me to say this, but for the village's sake I think it's best for me to leave before I become a liability." I said evenly.

"Unfortunately, leaving Konoha would make you a bigger liability than what you already are," replied Hiruzen bluntly. "For you it's not an option."

"…I suppose not." I murmured.

"As much as it pains me to say this," rumbled Hiruzen quietly. "I do hope you will not attempt to abandon the village because of this."

"Hokage-sama." I snapped my attention back to the man in alarm.

"As long as you remain with Konoha, no harm will come to you," continued the man, the warm slowly slipping from his voice. "But if you do decide to abandon the village, please know that your absence will not be taken lightly."

"I'll be branded a missing-nin and the bounty on my head's will get worse, right?" I murmured.

"I'm glad we're clear on the matter," said Hiruzen evenly.

"Expected as much." I sighed before turning the conversation back to the mockery of a debriefing. "As I did not take part for much of today's operation. There's not much to report. However, I will note that Naki, aka Nawaki Senju has been obliterated by Nagato of Akatsuki. If there is nothing else sir, I would like to take my leave.""Very well," nodded Hiruzen at my lackluster report. "I look forward to your years of service to come. You may be dismissed."

With a respectful bow, I left Hiruzen's without another word and ended up taking the hiraishin back home before skulking for the rest of the day. No need for them to get suspicious of me after what happened at the office. The undisguised threat was far more disheartening than I expected. I knew Hiruzen would never accept my resignation, but to threaten me at the suggestion…

"Sasa-nee, are you okay?" asked Naruto worriedly when he came home that day.

"I'm fine." I lied with a bright smile. "How's training for the finals going?"

"Awesome!" cheered Naruto happily as he went on talking about his day. "Itacih-ni got Kabuto to train with me and man oh man! He's crazy good!"

"Is that so?" I hummed and nodded in the appropriate places as he continued to ramble on about his training.
While it's nice to see everything resolved and Naruto living a much happier life, I can't help but feel a sense of aimlessness. Konoha's safe as is everyone else and I'm… not needed anymore. Maybe… I should rethink Yahiko's offer after all…
Nearly a month's passed since the conflict with Naki. Aside from those directly involve, the village proceeded on as though nothing happened. Shisui was reinstated as a Konoha shinobi and in turn, Hana was released from her imprisonment for supposedly conspiring with a traitor. I thought for certain the Uchiha Clan would put up a fuss for Shisui's return as he supposedly slaughtered the clan, but the current clan head—Naori Uchiha—didn't seem bothered at all.

If anything, she seemed to welcome him back into the clan with a kindness I never thought possible from an Uchiha. Just one of the many changes I've yet to get used to I supposed. The only thing that kept the whole ordeal from being swept under the rug and forgotten was the Inuzuka Clan. They had valid reason to interject due to Hana's wrongful imprisonment, but even then the conflict was far more tamed and quiet than I expected from the known hot-blooded clan.

The Chunin Exams was on the last of its leg with an influx of nobles and visitors coming to the village to spectate. Under normal circumstances, I should be tightly wound and nervous at a possible invasion. However, with Madara and Orochimaru killed by Naki and the undead Senju subsequently obliterated from existence, most of the major threats were gone. In short of worrying for Naruto and the other participants' well-being, there was nothing else to concern over.

…Not that it mattered. If anything, the results of the exam was far more distracting than a potential invasion. A last minute change was done to the lineup as the genins under Naki's thumb were pulled out of the tournament. Furthermore, neither Naruto nor Sasuke made it to the last match. The two were beat out of the running by Hinata and Sakura respectively with the Hyuga heiress as the ultimate victor in the last match.

"You seem unimpressed," commented Anko next to me as we stood attention to the closing ceremony. "I thought you'd be happier with so many of your brats in the finals."

"Hmm." I gave a non-committal hum as I listened half-heartedly to Hiruzen's speech.

"It honors me greatly to see so many talented genin participate in this year's Chunin Exams," announced Hiruzen. "All of you fought valiantly and I'm certain you have done your village proud by your efforts. I cannot ask for a better tournament to host on my last days in office is Konoha's Third Hokage."

Shocked whispers broke out in the audience. Most were surprised by the announcement, save for the daimyos sitting in the VIP section. Hiruzen needed their approval for his successor before he could officially retire. It won't do to piss of the village's main clientele by picking a leader they disapprove.

"While my last retirement was short lived due to the heroic sacrifice of my last successor, I am proud to have found a new successor to take on the mantle as the Fifth Hokage of Konoha," announced Hiruzen as he stepped back and held out his hand to Itachi who stood behind him. "Ladies, gentlemen and daimyos of the Elemental Nations, I present to you Itachi Uchiha."

Itachi stepped up into the spotlight, back straight and intimidating to all those who knew him only by reputation. The applause he received at the end was polite at best, with the exception his fangirls and boys legion, scattered amongst the rest of the audience. I can't say I know the extent of Konoha's political climate, but compared to the hero's welcome we received after defeating Kiri, the reaction to
Itachi becoming the Fifth Hokage felt muted and lackluster. It didn't bode well for his future.

A fact I thought I would take pleasure in, since he was such a manipulative little shit. However, at the sight of Naruto and Sasuke's smiling and excited faces, I found myself unable to do so. If they knew how much political bullshit and stress the elder Uchiha was going to endure in his run as the Hokage, they wouldn't be this happy.

So, despite my annoyance against Itachi, I decided to offer him some support as the applause slowly died out. I flicked several seal cards into the air and triggered them to explode, one after another in succession, much like fireworks with the last card being the Crimson Terror's signature red mist fear toxin. At the alarming display, all shinobi stood in attention and turned their eyes to me.

"Congratulations!" I smiled sweetly to the audience and gave a theatrical bow in response. "I look forward to seeing the leadership of our esteem Fifth Hokage."

To outsiders, this was meant to be the Crimson Terror's approval of the new hokage. To those in Konoha, this was the approval of the Oracle. While I wasn't certain how many people was aware of my so-called oracle status, I assumed it's enough from how Hiruzen acted regarding my request for leaving Konoha. I may not have the freedom to do much, but it doesn't mean I couldn't try to change things anyway.

"...And I look forward to continue serving Konoha as I have," replied Itachi evenly in response as he gazed down at me.

Stoic and distant as his usual self, Itachi seemed unfazed by my actions as Hiruzen finished up the rest of the closing ceremony. Compared to the tepid atmosphere from the previous announcement, the stadium felt tense and cautious. Konoha was nowhere near Kiri's reputation of ruthlessness, but with the Crimson Terror's backing, people will have to think twice before they decide to start something. A total abuse of the Crimson Terror's reputation, but the only avenue I still had to making a difference.

"Reckless as always, aren't you Kasa-chan?" said a woman's voice as I made my way out of the stadium.

"...Naori-san?" I frowned as I glanced to the purple-haired woman, one eye white with blindness, standing in the shadows with her arms crossed. Apart from the horrid memory of the Uchiha Massacre, I haven't seen her since I woke up. "What are you doing here?"

"The Uchiha Police Force is providing extra security until the exams are over," replied Naori easily as she pushed off from the wall and made her way towards me.

"O...okay?" I noted as she stopped several steps short before towering over me. Not that it was difficult with how short I am.

"Itachi informed me of your condition," commented Naori with a soft, yet sad smile. "It's unfortunate, we haven't a chance to speak with one another since that day... How are you?"

"Fine, um..." I paused. If Itachi told her what happened, then I'm not surprised that Shisui was forgiven so easily. However, why was she talking to me so nicely? Kasa killed a good portion of the Uchiha Clan. Shouldn't she want my blood or something?

"It wasn't your fault," continued Naori as if reading my mind. "What happened that day was out of your hands."

"...Then why are you here?" I couldn't help but blurt out. "Even if I'm forgiven, I doubt the Uchiha
wants anything else to do with me."

"On the contrary, there is still one last business the Uchiha Clan has with you Kasa-chan," corrected Naori as she held up a hand for emphasis.

"What business?" I frowned.

"You probably don't remember, but you have a marriage contract with the Uchiha Clan," explained the Clan Head.

"A…marriage contract?" I repeated in disbelief before replaced with indignation. "What then? Are you here to collect?"

"The opposite actually," replied Naori evenly, much to my surprise. "I'm here to annul it."

"Oh…okay?" I murmured awkwardly. "Not that I'm complaining, but… can I ask why?"

"The official reason, adding the Crimson Terror to the Uchiha Clan is far more a liability than an asset," answered Naori with a wry grin. "With how small the clan is nowadays, we can't afford to have as many enemies as the Crimson Terror."

"Fair enough," I nodded in agreement, not expecting such an answer. "And unofficially?"

"The Uchiha Clan is moving forward with its marriage practices. Contracted and arranged marriages are rather archaic," chuckled Naori. "Though, with Itachi and Shisui around, I doubt anyone could force you into a marriage you don't want. Not that you're the sort to given in so easily to the will of others."

"Heh, guess not," I grinned in response.

"I wish we could have shared this conversation in a more leisured manner, but duties call. Yours and mine," said Naori.

"It was nice to talk to you." I continued, uncertain what else to say in this situation. "And um… sorry again for… what happened."

"It's unlikely we'll cross paths again anytime soon," noted Naori. "But do take care Kasa-chan. You have people who care dearly for you."

"A bit too much, I might add." I muttered under my breath and drew out a hearty chuckle from Naori.

The conversation with Naori, unexpected and awkward as it was, felt oddly liberating. Unlike the conversation with Hiruzen that ended with a not so subtle death threat, Naori practically freed me from any obligations I owed the Uchiha. I didn't think it was possible to feel this light and free. If not for the fact I was village-bound and banned from any missions that required leaving the village, I might have felt happy. For as big as Konoha was, knowing I wasn't allowed to leave felt like a prisoner.

I can't help but think back to Yahiko's offer again, to leave Konoha. There's nothing left for me here after all. I've already done what I could to help the village. Hiruzen had already made it clear, if I left the village, I was nothing more than a missing-nin and a bounty would be place on my head. I would live the rest of my life constantly fleeing and looking over my shoulder.

"Ah, Naruto's sister!" called out a soft-spoken voice. I snapped out of my thoughts to realize I've
made my way back home and the person who called out of me was Naruto's calligraphy sensei who lived next door.

"Seishuu-sensei," I greeted the man with a nod.

"You seem a little out of it, are you okay?" asked the man with concern.

"It's nothing, just thinking about something." I waved it off.

"Well, I can't blame what with the Chunin Exams and all. Maybe you should take a break and go somewhere," suggested the man.

"Like where?" I retorted dryly, but humoring the man nonetheless. "I doubt I could go anywhere in the Elemental Nations without getting harassed."

"Why not go out of the Elemental Nations for a vacation then?" reasoned Seishuu. "Your Western Common sounds flawless, I'm sure you can handle a trip to the Western Continent."

"…Western Continent?" I repeated quietly.

"Did you forget there are more places beyond the Elemental Nations?" scoffed Seishuu. "I know it's been quite some years since we last spoke about it, but surely you couldn't have forgotten."

Of the memories I received since waking up, I've gotten none about the neighbor calligrapher, Seishuu sensei. The reintroduction to the man at the time was rather awkward, but overall this peculiar neighbor while odd, was amiable. I had forgotten that English was considered Western Common in this world. The Crimson Terror was known only to those within the Elemental Nations since the outer world spoke Western Common. If I left to a place that didn't speak Eastern Common, then the chances of someone recognizing me as the Crimson Terror was slim to none.

"Sorry, Seishuu-sensei." I apologized earnestly. "I completely forgot about it. If you don't mind, could you tell me more?"

The man looked exasperated for a moment, but his inner teacher must have gave in as he invited me into his apartment. Seishuu recounted his knowledge of the Western Continent as he rummaged about for a map. I don't think I've ever seen one that went beyond the Elemental Nations. Not that there was a need for most shinobi or even civilians to travel that far.

"Pergrande is the immediate country after crossing the Suna boarder, but it's easier to take a ship from the port towns in the Land of Tea and go to Enca and Sin if you're interested in going there," explained Seishuu as he pointed out each location.

"Mind if I borrow the map sensei?" I asked by the end of lecture, with no intention of giving it back. I could very well buy a map of my own once I get to the port town, but I rather not have Seishuu give my pursuers the same lecture with visual aid. Not that I intended to go to the countries he pointed out. Those were still fairly close to Suna. If I were to leave, I'd pick the furthest country. Between the distance and language barrier, it would make it difficult for any of them to efficiently pursue me.

"Sure, you can have Naruto bring it back to me when you're done with it," waved Seishuu dismissively for me to take the map.

"Thanks," I said gratefully before leaving his apartment and back to Kushina's.
Map secured, I went about making a mental inventory of what I need to pack and seal away. I won't be able to do any shopping without rousing suspicion while in Konoha. Anything I'm still missing will have to be purchased at the port town and hopefully there's still some money left over to exchange for currency in the Western Continent.

It was reckless to leave Konoha with such abrupt planning, but at the same time, this was the best time to leave. The Chunin Exams were over, visitors who came from all over to partake on the tournament were slowly trickling out of the village and back towards their hometowns. Konoha have enough on its hands to keep track so no one slips through and enter the village. Besides, the more spontaneous I act, the less likely Itachi would be able to predict my actions ahead of time.

As I went through my things, I noticed the kunai Nagato left me before we parted ways a month ago. He and Yahiko offered Akatsuki's assistance if I ever decided I wanted to leave the shinobi life. It may cause strife between Akatsuki and Konoha if they were found assisting me in leaving the village. However, my chance of success would be much higher if I had their help. If I could find a way to get out of Konoha before contacting them, there's less chance of them being blamed for involvement in my departure.

Which meant the limited window of opportunity from the Chunin exams just became even smaller. If I want to succeed, I need to leave today before the abundance of visitors became negligible. Determined, I made quick work in raiding Kushina and dad's supply cache, taking only what I need and making sure nothing else was out of place. Tools, herbs and supplies were neatly sealed away in a hefty stack of cards, kept in a leg pouch hidden beneath my kimono.

Packing done, I needed to find a way to occupy everyone who would notice my absence immediately. Brows furrowing, I wracked my brain for something that could give me a head start.

"Sasa-nee?" called out Naruto as he knocked the door to my room.

"N-Naruto!" I spluttered in surprise as I jolted and turned my attention to him. Fortunately, any incriminating evidence of my departure was safely sealed away on my person. "Erm, what are you doing here?"

"I wanted to wash up and get changed before heading over to Sasuke's for the party," answered Naruto with a tilt of his head, his clothes were ripped and dirtied from his matches at the stadium. " Aren't you heading over too? Why are you still home?"

"Oh… right, party. " I murmured, completely forgetting about the party in the midst of my planning. Everyone will gathered in one place… that might be to my advantage. Morbidly, I noted it was the same place where Kasa nearly killed Mikoto and a good portion of the Uchiha Clan. Whatever distraction I ultimately decide on, I hope it won't leave any more negative memories on it.

"Are you okay?" asked Naruto worriedly as he look to my face.

"Everything's fine," I reassured him with a smile and a pat to the shoulder. "Why don't you go wash up? We can head over together."

"Sure! You got to tell me about that prank you decided to do at the end of the old man's speech about Itachi-ni being the new hokage!" said Naruto excitedly. "Did you know that he was going to be the next hokage? Huh? Huh?"

"Get in the shower," I said with a roll of my eyes as I pushed him towards the bathroom.

For a second, guilt tugged at my chest as he happily went off to do as he was told. I shook my head
and steeled my resolve. I've done enough. Screw Tobi and his words, Naruto will be fine. Unlike the original timeline, there were more people Naruto could rely on. He doesn't need me.

The walk from the apartment to the Uchiha compound, felt like an eternity, but Naruto's chattering helped calm my nerves. In talking with him, I felt less like a fugitive and more like I actually had a choice.

"Let's get this party started! Naruto Uzumaki is here!" announced Naruto boisterously as he gave himself a loud entrance into the dining area.

"You're late!" shouted Sasuke and Sakura as they pointed accusingly at their blond teammate, berating him for his tardiness and emulation of their Uchiha sensei.

With a fond shake of my head, I made my way to the spot next to Tesuri and Kushina. The party was larger than I expected. A quick sweep of the room and I spotted a good number of the Konoha Twelve and their senseis. It made more sense if they held it at a public venue due to the size. However, with how private Itachi was, I could see why Mikoto decided to host it at home rather than going out.

The thought of drugging everyone crossed my mind briefly, but it would be impossible to do so without being noticed. While everyone were among friends, we shinobi were the cautious type. Even more so for those in the combat medic corp. They would be able to smell or taste the drug before it even touched their lips with proper training.

Trying to neutralize everyone without causing harm would be difficult, but—

"Naruto-kun! I challenge you to a handstand-eating contest! If I can't beat you, then I'll do a hundred squats around the Uchiha Compound!" declared Lee with fervor.

"You tell him Lee!" cheered Gai with equal boisterousness as he drank down his cup of sake.

I paused thoughtfully as I studied the student-teacher duo. It's impossible for me to keep from harming people if I attempted a distraction, but it's another story if I had someone else do so. Sure, the property damage and destruction would be absurd if my memory's correct. However, compared to the Crimson Terror going on rampage, a drunk genin would raise less of an alarm.

"Don't even think about it," murmured Itachi, nearly giving me a heart attack as I turned my attention to him.

"Think about what?" I said innocently, despite terrified by the thought that he could read my mind.

"Don't act innocent," scoffed Itachi. "You want to join in with their insanity. I know that look on your face."

"Why I never," I retorted with mock indignation, but in actuality I was filled with relief. As terrifyingly capable Itachi was, he wasn't omniscient.

His eyes narrowed at me with a distrusting glint. I grinned back with my usual snark as I poured myself a cup of tea. His attention didn't stay on me for long as Naruto and Lee somehow managed to convince the Uchiha matriarch to allow them their silly competition. The two then made way to the veranda and flipped themselves into a one-handed handstand as Kiba and Choji readily brought over plates of gyozas for the two to devour in turn.

While most of the room was captivated by the childish competition, I needed to use a sleight of hand to get a hold of a glass of sake. Due to the alcohol poisoning incident with old Kasa, it was
impossible for me to even touch alcohol without stringent reprimanding. I have no clue whether or not Gai was aware of his favorite student's reaction to alcohol, but it's best for the blame to not come back to me if he was.

Once I got hold of a glass without notice, it was only the matter of finding the right moment before handing it to Lee. Not that it took long. Eating competitions always ran the risk of someone choking from eating too quickly. Lee was on his sixth plate of gyozas when it happened and I made a show of scrambling before handing him the glass. It took him seconds to down the glass and he went from rambunctious to silent.

"Lee? You okay?" asked Tenten cautiously when she noticed the uncharacteristic silence from her teammate.

"Ooooof course Imma okay!" slurred Lee with a drunken hiccup. "Hic, whaa makes you think Imma not?"

"Dude, are you drunk?" laughed Kiba as he tried to pat the older boy on the shoulder, but Lee swayed out of his grasp and abruptly uppercut the Inuzuka boy into the ceiling.

"Dun mock me ya jerk!" snapped Lee, red-faced and bleary-eyed.

What followed next was utter chaos. Between the jounins and genins in the room, attempting to reign in and pin down Lee without harming him was a near impossibility. Naturally, I made a poor attempt in helping to not seem suspicious, but ultimately, I took advantage the moment of chaos to slip away unaware.

Switching to civilian-wear with a hooded traveling cloak, to hide my hair and shroud my face, I made my way towards the village gates. All seemed like it was going well, as long as I made my way out of the village, I could activate the kunai Nagato left me and request his assistance without jeopardizing Akatsuki's agreement with Konoha.

It took some patience as I waited for the guards to be busy with inspection for a small caravan before I slipped pass with a group of casual travelers. Between steady breaths and even steps, it took everything I had to calm my heart as I walked out through Konoha's main gates.

One mile, two… I just needed to go as far as the next town and freedom was in my grasp.

"And where do you think you're going?" Kakashi's low baritone all but ripped the hopes from my chest as I felt his firm hand on my shoulder.

A lump caught at my throat as I attempt to swallow back a sob. My body shook as a fought off the tears welding in my eyes.

"…Kakashi, I—" I started with a thousand excuses at the tip of my tongue, but before I could say any of it, his hand slipped away from my shoulder and gently rested on top of my head, over the hood. Confusion crossed my face as I glanced up to him.

"I thought I'd at least get a goodbye," murmured Kakashi quietly with a sad wry grin hidden behind his mask.

It took a second for his words to sink in, but when it did, I found the tears pouring out of my eyes as I tackled him into a tight hug. He wasn't here to take me back. He was going to let me go.

"I'll try to keep them off your trail for as long as I can," said Kakashi gently as he patted my back comfortingly.
"Thank you," I whispered gratefully as I took a step back and wiped away the stray tears. "You're the best!"

"Just promise me you'll take care of yourself," said Kakashi.

"Promise," I grinned brightly at him. "I won't forget this."

"Get going," said the silver-haired jounin as he gave my head one last ruffle.

With that, I pulled out Nagato's kunai and warped to the corresponding kunai. What waited for me on the other side was the expectant Pain version of my mother. She gave me a brief nod before leading me to Yahiko and the rest of Akatsuki.

"So, have you decided?" asked the orange-haired man.

"Yes, I no longer want to be a shinobi." I answered, embracing the lightness in my heart with confidence.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: I have no clue what to say here. I'm kind of torn between joy and relief. This story had taken so much of my misery and kept me alive for 5 years. I'm going to look into going into therapy again, so for those who are worried, please don't be. I'm going to try to get help again and thank you for so much for sticking out for this long.

The original draft for Kasa's departure had more conflicts and exchanges between her, Itachi and Shisui. With them physically keeping her in the village and leading to a violent fight. However, I didn't want Kasa to leave Konoha like Sasuke did in the Sound Four Retrieval arc and honestly, it made no sense for her to attempt to fight Itachi and Shisui. Her strength is in creative adaptability and for her to win, in my opinion, is to not have to fight at all.

There's still an Epilogue to follow this chapter. I'm actually looking forward to writing it. I'm a bit late, but happy Winter Solstice and every holiday out there. I'll see you guys next time in the final chapter.
Kakashi knew something was off the moment she stepped room after Naruto's grand entrance. How could he not? He's watched over her since the moment she woke from her coma. Trained her to the point she managed to handle herself after thrown into yet another warzone. Watched her struggle in figuring out who she was and what she wanted despite of the heavy expectations surrounding her.

Similar to Kasa, she can't handle being upset, but compared his former subordinate, she coped more like Rayne. The way she lashed out, alienating and pushing away those around her. The way she carried herself in a defiant, yet aloof manner. She was neither Kasa nor Rayne, but rather an unhealthy amalgamation of the two.

Her abrasive persona made her look vastly independent, but in actuality she was vulnerable and terrified. He could see the cold emptiness in her eyes every time someone attempt to assert who she was or who she was supposed to be. It didn't matter if those assertions were of unconditional love and respect. As someone who lost both her identity and memories, choice and consent was the only semblance of control and security she had.

It made her seem childish and irrational at times, but he could understand why. Kasa and Rayne were never given a choice even when they were still around. It was the very reason for the Crimson Terror's existence. A series of events where none of their wishes mattered. They were forced to accept their position and play their role.

She was too, he supposed, but unlike her predecessors, she fought back.

Apart from her, everything at the party appeared normal. Even the impromptu hand-stand gyoza competition didn't feel out of place. Maybe it was from watching her for as long as he had, but the moment Lee started to choke from overeating, he noticed she was the first to react and gave him something to drink to wash down the large quantities of gyoza.

It was done seamlessly to the point that had he not been watching her, he would've been taken by surprise just as the rest of the party. She was an oracle. For her to find and use an unusual quirk or weakness of someone was not unusual. Why she felt the need to do so was far more concerning. He said nothing through the beginning of Lee's drunk violent fit as he waited to see what she would do after inciting the chaos.

At first, she acted as if she was surprised and even attempted to help with cajoling Lee. However, as the genin became rowdier and more destructive, she took advantage of the chaos and slipped away. He followed at a safe distance as she slipped away to change into civilian gear and a traveling cloak. Kakashi frowned when he concluded that she was attempting to leave Konoha.

Why? He had no clue, but as he continued to follow in secret wondering why she emanated stress and panic. Pit against an Inuzuka's nose, his sense cannot compare. Even so, he could faintly smell the faint scent of stress hormones coming off her in waves. What grounded her to take such extreme action to leave to village? Was there another threat?

The thought worried him for a moment, but as the distance between them and Konoha continue to grow, he couldn't risk going any further and decided to confront her instead.
"And where do you think you're going?" he asked quietly as he gripped onto her shoulder and pulled her to a stop.

He half-expected her to lash out and flee, but what he got instead was far more heartbreaking as he realized the actual intent behind her actions.

"...Kakashi, I—" She started, her voice quivered and her body shook like a leaf in the wind.

The silver-haired jounin didn't need to see her face to know tears were welding in her eyes. He knew Kasa well enough to recognize the signs for what they were. Guilty and defeated, he pulled his hand away from her shoulder and rested it gently on her head, much like what he did for Kasa during her early Anbu days. The girl looked up to him in confusion, jostling the unshed tears from her eyes down her face as she did so.

What could he say in this situation? Protocol demanded him to take her back to Konoha for judgment, but... after looking down at the confused and terrified expression on her face, he found he didn't have to the heart to do it. More so when a memory came to the forefront of his mind.

*Can I trust you to make sure she stays safe when I'm gone?*

"I thought I'd at least get a goodbye," murmured Kakashi with a sad smile as he made up his mind.

The array of emotions flitted across her face in that one moment was more than enough to make his decision worth everything as the small girl tackled him into a grateful hug. He didn't feel a dampness where she buried her face into his stomach, but from the sniffling of her nose, he could tell she was crying. The last time he saw Kasa cry was right before the Uchiha Massacre when he caught Shisui. She must've been terrified for her to cry with such relief.

"I'll try to keep them off your trail for as long as I can," reassured Kakashi as he patted her back.

"Thank you," she whispered gratefully as she rubbed her tears away like a child. "You're the best!"

*That's why I love you best."

"Just promise me you'll take care of yourself," said Kakashi fondly as he noticed the last resemblances she shared with Rayne and Kasa.

"Promise," she grinned brightly with renewed hope. "I won't forget this!"

"Get going," said Kakashi solemnly as he gave her head one last ruffle before she pulled out a kunai and disappeared.

A hiraishin kunai, he noted, but it's obvious she's not using it to return to Konoha. He stood for a moment longer, wishing and hoping she will find a happier life with this new freedom. Mental farewells given, he made his way back, cleaning away any tracks that may be used to follow the smaller girl at a later date. Mindful of the time he spent, he hastily returned to Konoha before both his and Kasa's absence was noticed. Fortunately, by the time he made it back, the group had barely manage to contain Lee and his destruction.

For the rest of the evening, no one was the wiser of her disappearance. By time anyone noticed and brought it to Hiruzen's attention, it was well into the late afternoon on the next day. Naturally, as he was both her former commander and among those who last saw her the night before, he was summoned for questioning.

"Kasa's missing?" Kakashi gave a convincing show of surprise as Hiruzen debriefed him on the
situation. "Since when? She was at the Uchiha's last night for the post-tournament party."

"Apparently, she never made it home last night," noted Hiruzen as he gave Kakashi a scrutinizing gaze. Kakashi could tell the man suspected him in assisting her escape.

"Could she possibly been abducted?" frowned the silver-haired jounin, undeterred by his superior's arbitrating gaze. "We have to send out a search team!"

"Not to worry. A team is already in the process of preparing to leave," continued Hiruzen evenly as he puffed his smoking pipe.

Ever since he protested against Kasa's placement in the last war, the elderly leader took note of his protectiveness over the younger girl and questioned any and every opinion he had when it came to her. The fact the man sent a pursuit team before their interview session meant he didn't trust the jounin not to sabotage the effort. A wise precaution on the hokage's part, but far too late as Kakashi had already destroyed any tracks the pursuit team may use to track Kasa.

"Then my presence?" questioned Kakashi cautiously as he kept his attention on his leader.

"Kakashi," exhaled Hiruzen, the smoke escaping from his lips as he spoke. "As you are aware, my retirement as Third will be coming to a close and Itachi will be succeeding me soon."

"Sir?" queried Kakashi with a frown, unsure of the man's direction in the conversation.

"Given his past relationship with Kasa, I would rather not have this matter carry over to his interim as hokage," explained Hiruzen solemnly. "As such, I must question the extent of your loyalty."

"I am loyal to Konoha, sir," said Kakashi with no hesitation.

"Yes, but does it rank higher than your loyalty to the Oracle?" asked Hiruzen.

The Oracle, not Kasa. Their hokage—no, only his sensei held that title to Kasa. Prior to her memory loss, she did admit her loyalty was to Minato and not the village. Not that he could blame her, the Third won't even refer to her by name anymore. As such, he shouldn't refer her by name either if he doesn't want to incite the man's wrath.

"Hokage-sama, my loyalty will forever be first and foremost to the village. I would rather kill myself before ever betraying Konoha," reassured Kakashi. "Conversely, for the sake of the village, trying to contain and control the Oracle is not in our best interest."

"Your reasoning?" demanded Hiruzen with a cold, firm gaze.

"We kept the Oracle contained in Konoha was because we feared our enemies using her foresight against us. However," paused Kakashi briefly to assess how well Hiruzen would accept his explanation. He was walking a fine line in defending Kasa and outright admitting to assisting her escape. He could very well be tried and punished as her accomplice. "Keeping an uncontrollable Oracle in our midst could potentially be detrimental."

"Continue," noted the man much to the silver-haired jounin's surprise. At least the man was open to listening to his defense.

"In short of killing her, there's no definite way of controlling her if her actions in the stadium the day before is anything to go by. She potentially could have caused an incident with the Daimyo's present," reasoned Kakashi as he continued onto his next defense. "Not to mention, prior to her memory loss, she's admass a large number of support in nearly every level of our ranks. Even if we
have her under constant guard, who's to say she couldn't approach any of them and plant seeds of discord?"

Hiruzen fell silent, his face stoic and unreadable as he continued to scrutinize the silver-haired jounin before him.

"Konoha may not have her loyalty, but neither do our enemies, sir," pressed Kakashi. "If they attempt coerce or force her, it might very well lead to their villages' destruction."

"Are you suggesting letting her go is to our benefit?" challenged Hiruzen.

"The decision is ultimately left to you Hokage-sama," replied Kakashi. "This is merely my observation on the matter."

"I see…" murmured Hiruzen as he took another puff of his pipe and putting the room into another uncomfortable moment of silence. "…What do you think of this Shikaku?"

Shikaku? Kakashi barely restrained his surprise as he watched the nonchalant Nara meld out from the shadows with his hands in his pockets.

"He's not wrong," drawled Shikaku as he turned his dark eyes to the younger man. "With Itachi's coronation coming up, it's best to ignore the matter for now and hope for the best. Konoha cannot appear to be in conflict with itself during the transitioning of power."

"…Sir?" frowned Kakashi as he glanced between the two men in the room.

"How did he do?" asked Hiruzen as he glanced to the Nara. "Will you be comfortable with retiring from your position as Head Jounin Commander after my retirement?"

"I think Itachi will do fine to have his consult as Head Jounin Commander," noted Shikaku with none of his usual dry humor. "I'm sure if the Oracle ever returns to Konoha, Kakashi will be able to objectively handle the matter despite Itachi's bias with her."

"… Very well then," decided Hiruzen as he blew out a breath of smoke and tapped his pipe on an ashtray. "The matter with the Oracle will be revisited at a later date if she returns to Konoha. Let the pursuit team know they needn't go after her."

"At your command," Shikaku turned to give Hiruzen a slight bow.

"Kakashi," continued Hiruzen as he folded his hands in front of his face. "Let me be clear, this time, Konoha is allowing the Oracle to leave. If she ever returns, there will be no leniency next time. Understood?"

"…Yes sir," said Kakashi dutifully as he stood tall and firm.

"You may be dismissed," said the man as he lowered his hands.

"At your command," replied Kakashi with a formal bow before he followed Shikaku out of the office.

The stoic Nara said nothing for blocks as Kakashi followed him. He was still digesting the information on what just happened in the hokage's office. It was obvious that Shikaku was the one to figure out Kakashi allowed Kasa to escape. From how Hiruzen acted, the man was not okay with Kasa's impromptu departure. What she did was practically treasonous. There was no reason for the Third to dismiss the matter entirely.
Shikaku must have given quite a convincing argument for the verdict to end as such, where no one was punished and Kasa was virtually free from Konoha. It wasn't until halfway into the Nara forest that the older man let out an exasperated sigh.

"What a pain, between you and Kasa, I'm quite sure the two of you have shortened my life by at least a decade," droned the exhausted Nara as he shot Kakashi a glare. "Had I not taught you anything in the last four years?"

"…Hmm?" frowned Kakashi as he turned his attention to the Nara.

"If you managed to convince her to be more patient and come back, we could have gotten Itachi to let her leave!" grumbled Shikaku. "Instead you nearly gotten both of you listed as traitors! You're lucky your value to Konoha is as high as it is, otherwise it would have been much more difficult to convince the hokage to let the matter drop."

"…You were going to help her leave?" Kakashi was taken aback that Shikaku already had a plan in mind. He didn't think anyone besides him saw what was happening to Kasa.

"Like I said before, your assessment wasn't wrong. With the amount of stress the brat was going through, it was only a matter of time before she snapped. We're lucky she decided to leave instead of doing something else," reasoned Shikaku before he gave Kakashi an evaluating gaze. "Even so, what made you let her go instead of going with her? You could protect her better if you were by her side."

"No," said Kakashi solemnly. "I'll only be a constant reminder of the very place she's trying to escape. You once said her oracle abilities could very well lead to her death or the start of another war. It's best she left with no reminders of the past."

"Hmm…" hummed Shikaku pensively before he resumed his slow saunter through the forest towards his house. "I suppose you've learned something after all."

Kakashi blinked, surprised by the compliment.

"Come on," drawled Shikaku, followed by a yawn. "I need a drink and you're having one too. The things I do for you damn brats. I don't know how Minato put up with the lot of you."

"Indeed how," murmured Kakashi, a fond grin tugging at his lips as he glanced to the orange hues of twilight blanketing the sky. He wondered briefly how far Kasa must have gone before he pocketed his hands and decidedly followed Shikaku. Konoha will be different without her around.

With each step he took, the drink sounded more and more inviting. It's really a pity he couldn't have given her a proper send off.

________________________________________

Author's Notes: There's a bonus bit with Kasa after this note, but I like to comment on the epilogue before getting to that. I've seen a lot of reviews commenting that they didn't understand Kasa's actions or her desire to leave Konoha despite having so many family and friends who care for her. The thing is, Kasa's relationship with Konoha as a whole is an abusive one. Sure there are nice bits here and there, but overall it's toxic, where no one cares about her actual needs.

Yes, there are people who love and care for her, I'm not saying there aren't. But sometimes the people who love you the most can also be the most controlling and least understanding whether intentionally or not. I chose Kakashi and Shikaku for this finale because anyone else would have saw her departure as betrayal and completely ignore the actual reason for why she left.
There are so few people in the world who can see pass what they want to see and actually see the struggle and difficulties of the people around them. I want to capture that reality.

As I'm writing this now, I'm struggling to find the right words to describe what I felt these past years. The dreadful feeling of loneliness despite having so many people who love me, but not understand me. The tightness in my throat and the suffocating guilt in my chest whenever they try to help me, but instead they're unintentionally making it worse. I lost count how many times I lashed out in anger and frustration trying to explain it in a way for those around me to possibly understand. I'm lucky to have one friend who understands, but unfortunately, it's not always enough.

I'm happy that most of my family can't understand because it means they don't ever have to feel this way, but at the same time I'm jealous that they're free from this deep hole of dark misery. That they don't feel the constant cold and nauseous feeling that makes you want to die just to not feel it anymore.

Umm... sorry for the dark turn, I actually want to end this story on a happy note, especially for everyone who stuck around for this long. You guys are amazing to have gone through over a hundred chapters and 20-40 page long interludes. So, without further ado, I'll let this last bit take you to the end. Hopefully on a happier note.

---

**To Sea and a New Adventure**

Since she woke up, Kasa faced many things. Memory loss, finding her sense of self because of said memory loss, maintaining a façade of a fake reputation she had no hand in building, war and who can forget stupid politics she really have no interest in! Hell, she even managed the ballsiest move she's done to date, escape Konoha without being dragged back and treated like a traitor.

The bit where she asked Akatsuki for help in leaving the Elemental Countries was surprisingly anti-climactic. She asked and they agreed, totally not worth mentioning in hindsight. All in all, in the short amount of time since she woke up, her life's been a badass rollercoaster.

Yet... that's nothing compared to what she facing with her new found freedom.

"Someone please kill me—bleagh!" moaned Kasa miserably with each jostling wave.

Barely three days at sea and the small ex-shinobi was done in by seasickness, hurling every chunky bit of her lunch into a bucket. Had she known her body was prone to seasickness, she would've taken the long way through Sand. Unfortunately, she was too far out at sea at this point to even think about water-walking back to land and taking the alternative route out of the Elemental Countries. The only solace she had was the cool salty breeze pushing the sails along.

"Still haven't gotten your sea legs yet, girly?" chuckled one of the ship-hand in passing as he did his chores.

"Fuck off Steve!" retorted Kasa before resuming upchucking her guts into her personal bucket.

The man laughed as he went on, a welcome response compared to the first day where everyone treated her like she was going to break down crying for her parents. Despite being physically seventeen, her short stature of 4'10 made her appear much younger and the captain was reluctant to take her on as a passenger thinking she needed a guardian to travel with her. If not for Yahiko vouching for her, she would need to sneak aboard and suffer the seasickness without the breeze.

By now, the majority of the crew was used to her crass responses. It helped that she was fluent in
Western Common (English) compared to the other travelers from the Elemental Countries. The merchants spoke marginally better due to their trading, but even they didn't hold a light to her. She has broken memories of another lifetime to lean on. Even so, she hadn't thought of what to do once the ship docked at the other side of the sea. The notion hadn't bothered her, not with the lingering seasickness torturing her every waking moment.

"You know, it's less rocky in the lower middle cabins," suggested a fellow traveler in fluent Western Common. "I can help you down there if you need help."

At his large shadow towering over her, she risked a glance up from her bucket and spotted a gruff muscular man in a well-worn traveler's cloak. His face was covered in week-old stubble and his grungy orange-hair was slicked back in a style that contrasted against his outfit.

"Thanks but no thanks, you look mighty shady right now mister," retorted Kasa.

"Ha! I like your spunk kid!" laughed the man boisterously as he slapped his knee in good humor.

Kasa blinked in surprise at the reaction. Like the crew, the man wasn't offended by her crass response or the subtle implication that he may be a pedophile. Instead, he made it sound like she said the funniest thing in the world.

"…You're weird," commented Kasa, unable to think of any other response to his compliment.

"Eh, everyone's a little weird," shrugged the man before he plopped down with his legs crossed a comfortable distance away from her. "So, what's a kid like you doing, traveling alone?"

"Still giving off that shady vibe," deflected Kasa with a glare. "Why do you keep talking to me?"

"Just killing time," dismissed the man with a wave. "I'm waiting for something."

"…Waiting?" frowned the small girl, her interest peaked by the vague phrasing. "What are you waiting for?"

The man looked around cautiously to see if there were any eavesdroppers before cupping over his mouth conspiratorially with the biggest grin she's ever seen.

"Don't tell anyone, but there were kraken sightings on this ship's sea route," whispered the stranger, his eyes alit with childish glee.

"… A kraken," repeated Kasa dryly. Another bout of nausea hit her, now that she's realized the stranger was nothing more than a man-child with a taste for absurd adventure.

"I know!" whispered the man in glee. "Isn't it exciting? I've been on this ten-year quest for about a month so far. Haven't seen a single tentacle the whole time, but the sea is a huge, maybe it's just in a different part of the path right now."

Kasa frowned, the man made no sense. How was it possible he was a month in on a ten-year quest? Shouldn't he be ten years and a month into the quest? Not that she was given the chance to correct him as the ship suddenly gave a violent jerk and Kasa found herself air-bound and flung across the deck.

"Kid!" shouted the man as he tried to grab her, but too late she was already over the railing and plunging towards the sea.

Internally cursing her luck, Kasa chucked her bucket aside and braced for impact. However, she
never touched water as a tentacle appendage broke through the water's surface and latched around her waist.

"Are you fucking serious?" cursed the girl loudly as she stared at the creature emerging from the sea.

"Ha! What did I say! Kraken!" laughed the man.

"Oh my god! Girly, you okay?" shouted Steve when he and his fellow crew members came to check on the commotion, but screamed when more tentacles emerged and wrapped around the ship.

"Hold onto your pants, I'll get the kid back onto the ship safe and sound," said the stranger in good humor.

Annoyance flooded Kasa at the man's self-satisfied grin. She was sick and tired of being fate's favorite chew toy. The whole reason she left Konoha was to regain some semblance of control in her life. She had no intention of becoming a random damsel in someone else's story.

"I can save myself!" snapped Kasa as she charged up cancerous chakra into her hands and slapped it onto the tentacle around her waist.

The offending appendage exploded into a gory mess and drove the kraken into screeching in agony. Kasa, now free from its hold, plummeted towards the monster's bulbous body. With a flick of her wrist several cards with explosive seals made their way to the kraken and latched themselves onto the creature's limbs with the help of chakra threads. As though sensing the small redhead's intent to do it further harm, the creature untangled its tentacles in hopes of reaching for her instead.

Unfortunately for the kraken, what followed next was a fiery explosion. Charred and raw pieces of its tentacles scattered every which way. The air smelt of raw and burnt octopus. Kasa, being in the direct range of the blast was covered in the uncooked slimy guts of the creature. Despite having been covered in human blood and gore in the past, it didn't make this any less disgusting.

Not that it was enough to distract her from taking advantage of the explosion's knock-back to propel herself back to the ship's hull. Hands and feet covered in chakra, she made her way back up to the deck, face to face with an audience of awed and horrified crewmen.

"Well…damn," muttered Kasa under her breath as she scratched the side of her cheek that's still covered in kraken guts. "I don't supposed you guys could keep this quiet?"

"Holy shit girly! That was amazing!" shouted Steve.

There goes her hopes of keeping a low profile until she reached the Western Continent. Maybe she should have sucked it up and played damsel in distress after all. Anyone who came searching around the port towns in the Elemental Countries for her now, no doubt will hear about a small red-headed girl exploding a sea creature with a touch of her hand.

"Hey kid, what's your name?" asked the scruffy adventurer, a serious expression replaced his previous light-hearted joking demeanor.

Double crap, Kasa internally groaned. The man's probably pissed at her now. She just kill-stole the creature the adventurer was searching for last ten years. It was one thing to be a foul-mouth asshole when people think she's a harmless looking little girl, but another thing to be an asshole when people know she was capable fighter.

"Okay, if it's about the kraken, I'm sorry," mumbled the redhead apologetically. "Maybe we could tell the crew to say you killed it instead? You'll still get bragging rights and all. I really don't want
"Forget the credit for killing the kraken," dismissed the man as he took several large strides towards her. "Who taught you how to do that?"

"Uh…myself?" replied Kasa unconvincingly. She wasn't lying completely, since technically the previous Kasa did teach herself how to perform the explosive touch.

"You learned all that by yourself?" said the man in surprise.

"Well… maybe I had a teacher here and there," muttered Kasa, realizing how preposterous it must sound for someone her age to reach such a level, but she really needed to change the conversation before she has to explain any further. "Look, I know you've been looking for the kraken for over ten years, but—"

"Ten years?" repeated the man with a confused blink. "Who said I looked for the thing for ten years? I've only been on this quest for a month."

"But you said it's your ten-year quest!" protested Kasa.

"Oh that!" laughed the man, humor returning to his eyes. "That just means the quest been incomplete for over ten years. I just won't get the bounty since you killed it, but that's not a big deal, there are other ten-year quests around. I have to say, you're pretty amazing for your age. Are you part of any guild?"

"…Guild?" repeated Kasa with a confused frown.

"You know, a wizarding guild?" said the man with a vague hand gesture.

"I'm not—" started the girl before a thought came to mind. If she claimed she was a wizard that meant any news about this kraken fiasco would be credited as wizard magic and not ninja skills. Not that she was aware that magic and wizards were even a thing in this world. How much more was there outside of the Elemental Countries? "—part of any guild at the moment."

"Is that so?" said the man thoughtfully as he rested his chin in the crook between his thumb and forefinger in a check pose. "Well, if you like, you can join my guild and get the bounty for killing the kraken. I mean, it's not like anyone else could take credit for it now, you might as well do it."

"Not that I'm ungrateful for the offer, but you're still super shady," muttered Kasa. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Eh, there's a bunch of other kids like you back at the guild. Most of them orphans, but all of them are spunky little spitfires like you," grinned the man. "You don't have to accept my offer, there are tons of other guilds out there that would probably take you in a heartbeat with that kraken bounty under your belt. Just saying you might have more fun with kids closer to your age. What do you say?"

"…You know, we just met and you haven't even told me who you are and what guild you're a part of," countered Kasa.

"Well, you haven't introduce yourself either kid," retorted the man with a grin before he shrugged open his cloak to show a bird-like symbol on his exposed left pectoral. "But I supposed it's only polite if I did so first. The name's Gildarts Clive. I'm from the Fairytail Guild and you, little lady?"

"Fairytail huh?" started the redhead thoughtfully. The name sounded awfully familiar, but for the life
of her she couldn't remember why. Instead, she took advantage of the pause to come up with a fake name. She can't continue to call herself Kasa Mon if she wants to hide. In the end, the best she could come up with was a butchered version of her old name. "Ella Gates."

"So Ella, what do you think about joining Fairytail?" asked Gildarts.

"Hmm… Sure, what do I have to lose?" said the newly named Ella with a shrug.

At least, now she knows what she's going do after she gets off the ship. This was no longer the story of the iryo-nin Kasa from Konoha. Here on out, this was her story. The story of Ella Gates and her new life as a wizard of the Fairytail Guild.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: And goodbye Kasa. I'm not likely going to write Ella's story, but I hope you enjoyed the light-hearted twist at the end. It's been a crazy ride and I hope you all have a happy 2019. Thanks for reading.

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