**Things Better Left Unsaid**

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## Things Better Left Unsaid

by *Itachis_Husband*

### Summary

When Itachi entered college, his only goal was to maintain a 4.0 GPA. Easy, right? Now throw in a flashy roommate, your typical failing athlete, and a laid-back cousin who swears that he's got everything under control. (Pairings listed above are subject to change - some are fleeting, some take longer to develop, etc., etc.)

### Notes

WARNING: This story will contain homosexual relationships in the near future. If you do not like, do not read.

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See the end of the work for more notes.
Move-In Day

BASED ON ITACHI'S OBSERVATIONS, there were three types of parents who attended, or in one case, didn't attend their child's college move-in day. The first type was the overly involved parents who helped their child transport their belongings to the campus, helped them unpack everything and insisted that they stay for the duration of day's activities. If granted the opportunity, they would probably stay the night to make sure that everything went smoothly. For most of these parents, it was their first-born child they were relinquishing. The second type were the parents who helped transport their child's belongings, helped them to shift the furniture around and hook up their computer and TV before leaving. For these parents, they'd most likely been through this process before. The third type was more challenging to place. These parents weren't present for their child's move-in day. Perhaps, Itachi reasoned, that the bond between the child and parents in this situation was not the greatest which would account for the parents' absence. Or perhaps, in some cases, the parents were not in the picture at all, for whatever reason. Maybe, he concluded, these were the children whose parents had attended the process many times before and assigned an older sibling to help out instead.

And then there were Itachi's parents.

"There. I've got your computer up and running and the internet's working, so you should be good." Fugaku said.

"Thanks." Itachi responded. He knew as well as his father did that he could've figured out how to hook up his laptop and troubleshoot any problems that arose. However…

"Are you sure you like everything the way it is?" His mother asked. To any stranger, she seemed to be excited and proud of her oldest son for making it to college. But past her pleasant smile, her composer was quickly crumbling. "Your roommates not here yet, so it wouldn't be a big deal if you moved some things around a bit."

"He said he's fine." Fugaku said, putting a hand on his wife's shoulder.

"But there's still so much to unpack." She argued weakly. He'd only brought a suitcase full of clothes, some toiletries, his laptop, his messenger bag, some school supplies, the textbooks he had pre-ordered almost a week ago, and some snack food. Things he was more than capable of accomplishing on his own. "It's his first time being away from home for so long and there are kids whose parents aren't even here to help them unpack."

"He's not like those other kids whose parents couldn't care less because we're here and he's already unpacked." Fugaku said, glancing at Itachi. "Honey, he's fine. We should go before we hit traffic."

"Honey, he's fine; we should go before we hit traffic."

As weak as her arguments were, Mikoto wasn't going to back down without a fight. "Sasuke," she said, turning to her youngest son, "don't you want to spend more time with Itachi before we leave?" She asked.

It had been a clever move, appealing to Sasuke when it was clear that Fugaku's mind had already been set. Sasuke however, had only tagged along to miss his own first day of school, citing that "they never do anything worth showing up for" and was lounging on the bed beside Itachi surfing the internet on his phone. "Not really." He said indifferently.
Mikoto's smile fell as her shoulders slumped. Once again, Fugaku put a hand on his wife's shoulder, turning her around to face him. "He's fine, dear. And so is Sasuke. There's no reason for us to stay any longer." He said, his voice a gentle whisper.

Even if he didn't outwardly show it, it pained Itachi to see his mother so defeated when he was so used to seeing her happy. When the rest of the family was in a foul mood, she was the one to pick them up and brighten their days. To see her like this was a rarity and something Itachi hoped he wouldn't have to see again until Sasuke started college, although a deep part of him hoped that she would have more control over her emotions by then.

"What about his roommate?" She asked.

Fugaku drew his hands back. "His what? What about his roommate?"

"We haven't met his roommate yet! We can't leave without meeting him first." She said triumphantly.

Beside him, Sasuke was rolling his eyes at his mother's absurdity and in front of him, Fugaku was dumbstruck. "Mikoto, listen to yourself! I don't think it's necessary that we meet whoever our son is living with. Think about it for a minute, most parents show up to these things to help their kids move in and then leave. Some don't even do that, and you should be happy that Sasuke even came along."

At the mention of his name, Sasuke raised his eyebrows, but other than that, his facial expression did not change.

"How many parents do you hear telling their co-workers how they want to meet their kid's college roommate?"

"Fugaku honey," Mikoto coed, caressing the back of her husband's neck with her hand, "you'll be happy we stayed when your co-workers want to know what your son's roommate is like. You'll thank me, I guarantee it."

"We don't even know when he's going to show up...if he's going to show up."

And as if on cue, the door tumblers jiggled, attracting their undivided attention. With some difficulty, the door swung open with such force, Mikoto's hair shifted blew in the draft to reveal the bottoms of her ears before settling into place.

Standing before them was a young man with a mane of blonde hair, half pulled into a ponytail with the rest of it loose around his shoulders. But his most defining quality by far were the bright blue skinny jeans he wore.

"Oh! Uh...hi. My name's—" He attempted to say by way of introduction, only to be cut short by his large, red suitcase catching on the door frame. "Deidara." He finished, extending his hand to Itachi's father.

The air in the room had suddenly changed the moment Deidara walked through the door. As if his bright blue pants weren't a red flag, the feminine lilt in his voice was a major one. Even Sasuke was staring in distaste.

When Fugaku didn't reach out to shake Deidara's hand, Mikoto did. "Hello, Deidara, nice to meet you." She said warmly, widening Deidara's smile.

"My name is Mikoto, I'm Itachi's mother, and this is Fugaku, Itachi's father, and Sasuke, Itachi's
younger brother."

Deidara waved. "Hi. It's a pleasure to meet all of you." He said.

Having not been introduced by his mother, Itachi stood up from the bed and moved to shake Deidara's hand. "Itachi." He greeted him.

"Deidara." His new roommate parroted, pursing his lips together at the awkward interaction.

"Well, it was a pleasure meeting you Deidara, but—" Fugaku started, only to be interrupted by his wife.

"Are your parents here?" Mikoto asked.

Itachi and Sasuke exchanged knowing glances. On the outside, their mother appeared to be quite the socialite, but in reality, she preferred to stay indoors with her family. The brothers knew full-well that this was all a ploy to spend more time with Itachi before they went back home.

"They're tied up with work right now so they couldn't be here." He breezily replied and wheeled his large red suitcase to the foot of his bed.

"Do you need any help moving in your things?" She quickly asked, completely aware of Fugaku's obvious look of displeasure beside her.

Deidara looked at her, and then at his suitcase. "Um…sure, yeah, if you want to." He said, placing his duffle bag on top of the other bed.

"Sasuke, come help Deidara carry in his things, please." Mikoto beckoned and followed Deidara out the door. The murderous glare etched into Sasuke's features was almost a perfect replica of their father's, Itachi noted in amusement.

Itachi had had two suitcases, a messenger bag, a narrow, stackable storage container, and a few groceries neatly packed into the recycled tote bags his mother used. The same could not be said for Deidara, however.

Leading the march, Deidara carried a large cardboard box filled to the brim with art supplies. When Itachi asked what was in the duffle bag he'd thought to have art supplies in it as well, Deidara's simple explanation was "Do you know how much art supplies I need to get me through the year? I have a lot more at home, but that'll have to wait until another time." And as if a duffle bag and a cardboard box wasn't enough, he had brought with him a large portfolio that was slung over his shoulder as well.

Beside him, Itachi carried yet another duffle bag, this one designated for toiletries, and a blue crate overflowing with pens and pencils, both old and new. Itachi'd seen these particular crates advertised with the college merchandise at one of the megastores he'd visited within the past month. He didn't see the appeal of using a crate with large circular holes adorning the surface that pens and pencils could easily fall through – the very reason he hadn't bought it. Deidara, it seemed, hadn't thought of this fact, Itachi surmised as various pens and pencils threatened to puncture the veins and arteries in his forearms, leaving him shifting uncomfortably throughout the majority of their trek.

Trailing behind them, Sasuke carried another cardboard box filled with groceries bundled up in the plastic bags he'd left the store with. In addition to the groceries, Sasuke had stuffed the various posters tossed on top of the backseat clutter under his arm, much to Deidara's distress.

"You're gonna bend them, yeah!" He cried.
"How else are we supposed to carry them, dimwit?" Sasuke argued and was quickly scolded by their mother for calling him a dimwit. "Don't worry, blondie, I won't bend your precious little posters."

Bringing up the rear, Mikoto and Fugaku walked side by side, Mikoto carrying a crate similar to the one Itachi was carrying, only this time, her crate was overflowing with shoes instead of school supplies. Fugaku, meanwhile, carried Deidara's bed spread hastily stuffed into its original packing, several deflated pillows, and an oversized book bag which Deidara claimed to be filled with "other necessities" though Itachi strongly believed that it was filled with more art supplies and he was too embarrassed to admit it.

"Well son, it's time we headed out." Fugaku said once all of Deidara's things were accounted for, save for his phone charger which he accidently left in his car.

Itachi looked between his father and mother in confusion. There was still a welcome dinner in the quad where students' families were welcome to attend. Personally, Itachi'd spent enough time around his family for one day, in fact, he'd spent more time with him today than he had all summer.

His mother, on the other hand, was a different story altogether. Twenty minutes ago, she'd been frantically searching for any excuse to spend more time with her eldest son. He figured she'd be jumping up and down with excitement at the prospect of being able to spend more time with him.

A few feet away, Deidara was busy unpacking the duffle bag and cardboard box full of art supplies and piling them high onto his desk. It occurred to Itachi that this would probably be the last time Itachi saw the surface of Deidara's desk until the last day of the semester when they moved out.

"Call us anytime." Mikoto said, reaching down to embrace him in a hug which lasted long enough to suggest that she wasn't ready to let go.

Still caught in her embrace, Itachi caught a glimpse of his younger brother taking a picture of either his new roommate, clad in his cyan colored pants, the horde of art supplies which, combined, were probably worth more than five hundred dollars, or both.

As if his younger brother wasn't bad enough, when Mikoto pulled away from the hug, she couldn't help but glance at Deidara's collection of shoes. It was a lot more than Itachi owned, and there was a particular shoe on the top of the crate they were still contained in, a bright red one, that he swore was a women's shoe instead of a men's.

He stood up when his father approached him and moved in for a quick embrace. "Remember your upbringing, son." Fugaku whispered in his ear. Patting his son's shoulder, he motioned for Sasuke to follow them out. "Say goodbye to your brother, Sasuke."

Still unabashedly staring at Deidara, Sasuke grinned as he wrapped an arm around Itachi's neck. "Have fun." He said with a snicker and blew Itachi a kiss before exiting behind his mother.

"He's cute." Deidara commented once the door closed behind them.

"Excuse me?" Itachi asked, attempting to keep his tone even.

Deidara turned to glance at him from over his shoulder. "Your brother. I think it's cute how he blows you kisses, but don't you think he's a little old for that, yeah?"

Itachi exhaled, relieved that he wouldn't be starting a fight with his roommate on the first day. "Yeah." He stated.
"But all in all, your folks seem nice." Deidara said, staring at Itachi with eyes almost as blue as his pants. He bent over to pick up the packaging stuffed to the brim with his comforter and worked to unzip it.

"Thanks?"

Deidara smiled. "It's kinda interesting, yeah. They're like your typical family." He said, finally managing to unzip the plastic. "You've got the hard working father who doesn't show his emotions in order to look like the strong protector of the family, the caring mother who cooks dinner every night, and the brooding emo teenager who's always angry at the world. Or at least, they seem like it, yeah. I wouldn't really know."

Itachi was surprised at the accuracy in which Deidara described his family. He'd never really thought about it before, but he had a point. His family was pretty stereotypical. But where did that leave him, then? He wondered, but didn't want to ask.

He looked up to find Deidara sitting on top of his mattress, pinning the sheets to the surface using his hands and knees. "Do you need help with that?" Itachi asked.

"Nope!" Deidara grinned and instantly flattened himself against the flat surface. As Itachi expected, the parts of the sheets that were pinned beneath his knees had flung out from underneath of him, defeating the intended purpose of keeping them in place.

Itachi watched him struggle for a few minutes, hopping off the bed to barely secure two corners of the sheet before moving to the other end, only for one of the opposite corners to come undone in the process.

"Let me help." Itachi said, taking a fistful of fabric in his hands and stretching it over one of the opposite corners.

"Thanks." Deidara chuckled. "How many college students does it take to cover one mattress, yeah?" He joked while Itachi struggled to pull the sheet over the last corner of the bed; the corner that Deidara himself was originally responsible for. "Let me help you with that, yeah."

Itachi tensed as Deidara's fingertips grazed his own as he snaked his hands underneath the sheets to grip it from underneath. Itachi wasn't one of those people who believed that homosexuality could be spread from contact like a disease, but innocent touches quickly turned into intentional ones until it progressed into something more; a path Itachi did not want to walk.

"You think it shouldn't have been that difficult, yeah?" Deidara said once they managed to accomplish their mission.

"It wouldn't have been if you'd bought the correct sheets." He murmured, absent-mindedly rubbing his hands together.

"Why spend money on new sheets when I can just as easily use the ones I already own? It just takes a little bit more effort." He stated, haphazardly throwing his pillows and comforter on top of the bed, narrowly missing Itachi in the process. "So," he said, throwing himself onto the bed, "what's your major, yeah?"

"I'm double majoring in business administration and accounting with an English minor." He replied, taking a seat in his desk chair.

Deidara's eyes widened in surprise. "Wow…you're in for quite the semester than, aren't you?"
"I guess." Itachi shrugged and reversed the topic of conversation to Deidara. "What are you majoring in?"

Deidara inhaled in such a way that Itachi expected him to answer that he was undecided. "I'm majoring in chemistry with a secondary teaching certification with a studio art minor meaning I want to teach high school chemistry and do art in my spare time, yeah."

He didn't expect the real answer to leave him speechless like it did. When asked that question, Itachi assumed most people responded with one word answers like "math" or "philosophy" or "English" let alone already know what subject they want to minor in. A small population of the campus probably hadn't even decided on a major yet. Itachi liked to believe that he was an abnormality wanting to double major and also know what it was he wanted to minor in, but sitting on the bed opposite to him, idling swinging his feet back and forth over the edge sat somebody else who knew exactly what they wanted to do with their life. He just didn't expect that somebody to be Deidara.

"Really?" He answered, glancing at Deidara's cluttered desk. "I expected you to be—"

"An art major?" Deidara asked. Itachi nodded. "I get that question a lot, yeah, especially when people see all my art supplies. However, art's not a very stable profession and I need something to pay off all these college loans I'm taking out!" He laughed.

Itachi chuckled along with him, understanding the importance of a stable career, especially when one finishes up with college. "I don't know many artists, but the ones I have met seem to be hell-bent on either pursuing a career that gets them nowhere or one that's highly competitive. For all the work that you'd need to put in, I don't think it's worth it."

"Well, I've never been one to fit the mold." He said, smiling wistfully. "I mean, just because I'm gay doesn't mean that I'm going to violate you or crawl on top of you when you're sleeping, that's just creepy. But everybody thinks that there's some gay agenda to convert everyone to the 'other side' or something yeah, but it's not. In fact, there is no gay agenda, yeah. I'm the same as everybody else except for the fact that I'm a man who likes men."

Itachi knew that Deidara was homosexual from the moment he walked through the door but hadn't wanted to say anything about it. That "lifestyle," as his parents always referred to it, wasn't for him. It wasn't something he particularly wanted to witness, hear about, and definitely wasn't something that he wanted to participate in. However, during his time in high school, he'd witnessed a kid being bullied for his sexuality and was mercilessly teased until he committed suicide and nobody, no matter their "lifestyle" or "life choices" or "preferences" or whatever you wanted to call it, deserved to be treated in such a manner.

He was pretty keen at distinguishing who was homosexual and who was heterosexual, but wasn't comfortable attaching such labels until it was confirmed. He expected Deidara to mention it at one point or another, but this, this was different.

Looking up from the backs of his hands, his knuckles white from clenching the sheets underneath them, Deidara noticed Itachi's overwhelmed expression and immediately colored. "I'm so sorry for going off on you like that, I really am, trust me." He said and smacked himself in the forehead with the heel of his palm. "God, why am I such an idiot!?"

"Deidara,"

"My cousin said that this would happen. She said that when we were all settled and everything, I should gently explain that I was gay and ask if you were okay with that but why should I have to
apologize for something I can't change, yeah? Why should the first thing I say to you be 'Hi, my name's Deidara, and I'm gay and I'm sorry if my sexual orientation offends you. Let's be friends, okay?' but I just can't do that, yeah. My name's Deidara and I'm here to become a high school chem. teacher and hone my skills in art. Oh, and I just so happen to be gay, a tiny aspect that in no way defines who I am."

By the time he was done, he had his face and his hands and was visibly shaking. Although Itachi was hesitant at first to make any physical contact with him, he was not above reaching out to place a hand on his roommate's shoulder to comfort him. "Deidara, it's okay." He whispered.

"No it's not." Deidara whined. "I blew it. You probably think that I'm a gay psychopath now, don't you?"

He shook his head. "Not in the least. I agree that you shouldn't have to apologize for who you are; in fact, I think that you're brave for standing up for yourself." He said, squeezing his roommate's shoulder before letting his hand fall back to his side. "A word of advice though, don't go off like that with everyone you meet for the first time. That, people might be offended by." He grinned and glanced at his watch. "The welcome dinner started ten minutes ago. Care to join me?"

Deidara nodded and dabbed at the corners of his eyes with the back of his hand. "Yeah." He said, hopping off his bed.

"Itachi?" He sheepishly asked him as they were walking down the hallway together. "Thanks, yeah."

"No problem." Itachi answered and faced forward once more.

"Do you remember what you said about not going off on people when I first meet them?" Itachi nodded. "Yeah, my cousin said the same thing to me this morning before I left."

"Is that so?"

He nodded. "I wasn't planning to get so angry like that, but I was just worried, you know?"

Itachi shook his head. No, he didn't know.

"I mean, my sexual orientation isn't something I try to hide, but I was worried about how you would look at me since we'll be sharing a room for almost a year, yeah."

At that moment, Itachi realized the truth in Deidara's words. They would be sharing a room for nearly a year. And even though Itachi had made it apparent that he didn't mind one way or another what Deidara's sexual orientation was, sharing a room with him was almost the same as sharing a bed, a thought that left him warily considering how the rest of the year would turn out.
SINCE MOVING IN, DEIDARA had made it his personal mission to cover up every square inch of his side of the room. Itachi thought it was first, impossible. He would've needed an entire photo album's worth of pictures and multiple cases of double sided tape to accomplish such a feat. Either that, or a year's supply of ink cartridges if he planned to print them out. At which point, he thought it was ludicrous. In the end, he was quite successful in his endeavor, hanging a few canvases he'd painted in high school, a mess of pages ripped directly from sketchbooks of all shapes and sizes, detailing birds and other small creatures and colored using different mediums, and photographs he'd taken himself and printed out before hand as he neglected to bring a printer with him.

While his roommate used his free time before the official start of the semester to decorate, Itachi chose take advantage of it by reading through his class syllabi and getting a head start on a few of the week's assignments which Deidara later chided him for.

"Still doing homework, Itachi?" Deidara asked him the following Monday, throwing his plate onto the table with more force intended, making Itachi jump in surprise. "It's the first day of classes, you can't possibly have that much homework, yeah!"

Itachi, still taken aback that somebody had willingly sat down to eat with him, even though he had long since finished his meal, changed the topic of conversation. "What are you doing here?" He asked him instead.

"What am I doing here?" Deidara scoffed, throwing his hair over his shoulder as he sat in the chair opposite Itachi. "I'm eating with my roommate, yeah. Roommates gotta stick together, you know."

Itachi didn't know that there was an invisible contract that bound roommates together for their freshmen year of college. Across from him, Deidara was attempting to shove half of a sandwich into his mouth like a squirrel stores acorns in it's cheeks and attempted to smile at him. If people know that Deidara's homosexual, will they think of me that way too? He wondered to himself and shook the thought off. Most people weren't raised in closed-minded households such as he was and judging by the mobs of laughing college students around them who were too busy to pay attention to two freshmen, he decided that it wasn't relevant. Besides, having a lunch companion couldn't hurt, could it?

"Seriously though." Deidara started again, swallowing the food in his mouth. "You've been doing homework all weekend. You've probably completed every assignment up to midterms by now, yeah."

"I'm a double major. I need to work twice as hard to stay ahead of schedule because I can't afford to fall behind."

Deidara raised a questioning brow. "Please. I'm a chem. major. It's practically the same thing as double majoring."

I hardly think so. Itachi thought but didn't argue with him. It wouldn't be long before Deidara started pulling all-nighters studying at the last minute when he could've taken the same initiative as Itachi had. And when that happened, Itachi would simply carry on with his own studies, content with the thought that he was already ahead of the game.
"So what're you studying right now?" Deidara asked. "Darwin's theory of evolution? The Big Bang Theory? Quantum physics?"

"Logical fallacies." Itachi replied. "It's for my philosophy class." He elaborated in response to his roommate's obvious confusion.

"Studying already, Itachi? It's the first day of school!" A familiar voice boomed, pulling a chair up to the table.

"Shisui," Itachi greeted warmly. "How have you been?"

"Good, good." Shisui replied, leaning back in his chair to stretch his legs underneath the table. "Spent most of the summer working and interning." He exhaled. "Just the life of your average twenty, almost twenty-one year old, you know?"

"That's right, you'll be turning twenty-one soon, won't you?" Itachi asked evenly. He hadn't forgotten when Shisui's birthday was, and he hadn't forgotten how old he'd be turning when that day came, or what he'd most likely spend this birthday doing.

Shisui offered a smug nod. "Yup. In one month and 18 days, I'll be legal."

He was even counting down. Out of the corner of his eye, Deidara's head was bowed as he continued to eat his lunch in silence, overpowered, outnumbered, and forgotten by the very roommate he was sticking together with. "Shisui, this is Deidara, my roommate."

Shisui raised his eyebrows as if he hadn't even noticed that another student was sitting with them before a wide smile spread across his face. "Yo! Nice to meet you man, I'm Shisui!"

"Deidara, yeah. Itachi's roommate." Deidara said with a bright smile. "But I guess you kinda already knew that since he just said it, didn't you?"

Shisui cracked a small grin. "You're adorable."

It took all of Itachi's restraint not to roll his eyes or shake his head at his cousin's innocent comment. Surely, Shisui wasn't dumb enough to think that Deidara was heterosexual and would know that he was joking, right? He prayed that Deidara would forget about it by the time he returned back to their room.

"You guys get along?" Shisui asked, looking between them both.

"Of course yeah!" Deidara responded.

"We have our differences." Itachi muttered and attempted to continue reading the text lying in front of him.

"It's hard to have a roommate lunch when all your roommate wants to do is study all day. I mean, who does that?" Shisui asked him.

Deidara vigorously nodded, a tiny shard of lettuce protruding from between his lips from the last bite he had taken from his sub. He immediately sucked it in swallowed what he was chewing before agreeing "I know, right?! He was reading all weekend too, yeah!"

Itachi could feel Shisui's accusing stare on him. "Seriously, Itachi? Seriously? Your first week of college and you're already studying? What the heck? Seriously, who does that? I'm a junior and I don't even study that hard!"
"Right?" Deidara quickly agreed.

"What's your major?" Shisui asked Deidara.

"Me? I'm a chem. major with secondary certification and a minor in art, yeah." Deidara informed him.

Itachi actively attempted to ignore the two. If he couldn't hear them, he couldn't be bothered by them, he reasoned.

"So you're like a double major too – chemistry and education, plus an art minor! Let me tell you, art courses are not easy and to add to that, each one is like four hours long." He said and turned to Itachi. "Deidara's not studying that hard, so why are you?"

At this point, reading further was futile, Itachi closed his book and offered Shisui a knowing stare. "I can't afford to fall behind. If he wants to decorate the room with pretty pictures and wait until the last minute, be my guest. But I want to stay ahead of the game while I still can."

Deidara glanced to the side, seemingly hurt at Itachi's jab concerning what he spent his free-time over the weekend doing. "Itachi, Itachi, Itachi." Shisui sighed and put a hand on Itachi's shoulder. "Your father's not here, so what are you worried about?"

"I think I made my point perfectly clear, Shisui—"

"Eh-eh-eh-eh-eh! I'm not done talking yet. Didn't your mother teach you not to interrupt your elders?" Shisui chided. "You're going to go gray way before you're fifty if you keep this up, Itachi, believe me."

"Like you'd know. You're only twenty."

"And soon to be twenty one. And when I turn twenty one, I'll try to sneak you a drink or two to loosen you up, okay?" Shisui said, patting his shoulder as he rose to take his leave. "Well, I best be going; my class is starting soon." He sighed. "It's tough being a junior, you know? Nice talking to you again, Itachi and take it easy, okay?"

Itachi raised his eyebrows apathetically.

Shisui raised a hand at Deidara. "Nice meeting you, Deidara."

"Nice meeting you too, Shisui!" Deidara called over his shoulder.

"See ya, guys. And Itachi, I mean it; take it easy."

"Will do." Itachi muttered, opening his book to the page he'd left off at.

"Cute." Deidara sighed.

"Hn." Itachi hummed, ignoring the comment. If Deidara wanted to venture into uncharted territory with Shisui, he was in for a rude awakening. And Itachi wasn't going to stop him.
I wasn't going to post this chapter until Monday or Tuesday - a week after posting chapter one. However, I just completed chapter 18 and thought "why not post a new chapter while I'm at it?" I'll probably post chapter three either Monday or Tuesday. No promises!

Until next time,
Itachi’s Husband
IT WAS SATURDAY MORNING, and Deidara was busy taking a shower down the hall in the communal bathroom, giving Itachi much appreciated time to himself without being distracted by his roommate's various antics.

"So what's it like where you came from, yeah?" Deidara would ask, or "what was your high school like? Did you take any AP classes, yeah? Wait, you probably only took AP classes, didn't you?" And when Itachi didn't answer, Deidara would talk about his own life. "It's really boring where I came from, yeah. There's not much to do back home, but this is this gas station where my friends and I would all hang out late at night!" He'd laugh. "Those were the days, yeah." And then he'd turn to Itachi with sparking eyes and say "You should come and visit me back home sometime, yeah! And I could bring you to the gas station where me and my friends always hang out! It'll be a blast!"

"No offense, but I'm not sure I want to drive three hours—"

"It's only 2 hours from here, yeah." Deidara corrected him.

Itachi bit back the unkind words he could've said in response to Deidara's comment, and instead, reiterated his statement as if he hadn't said anything. "I'm not sure I want to drive three hours from my house to visit you at a gas station."

"Oh." He mumbled and lowered his head, causing his long blonde locks to hide his facial expression. In less than ten seconds, however, his head snapped up, his hair wildly spreading around his face and said "there's other fun things to do, yeah! We don't have to hang out at the gas station if you don't want to!"

Itachi's only peace could be found at three times: whenever Deidara was in class, taking a shower, or sleeping. That was it. One would assume that he'd find peace whenever the blonde was studying, but even then Deidara was either listening to music loud enough for Itachi to hear it through Deidara's earbuds or he was talking himself through his homework problems.

Even when he was reading, he wasn't silent. He'd be silent for only a few paragraphs before gaining Itachi's attention to tell him about something funny he and his friends did back home or about something interesting he saw on campus that day.

Itachi glanced at the clock on his phone. Deidara had been gone for only five minutes, and it usually took him fifteen or twenty to finish his showers. Why it took so long, Itachi didn't care to know. All he knew was that he had ten to fifteen minutes of solitude to burn, and he was going to spend it reading as much of his required reading for Tuesday as he possibly could.

A notion which was shattered the moment his phone rang. He picked it up and sighed when he saw who was calling him.

"Hello, mom." He said, closing his marketing essentials text.

"Hi sweetheart! How's your first week of school been going so far?" She asked him.

He glanced forlornly at his abandoned textbook and responded. "Good, I suppose. I haven't done
much of anything besides homework all week."

"You have this much homework already?! It's the first week of school!" She whined.

"Mom, I'm in not in high school anymore, I'm in college. I've gotten a homework assignment the first day of each of my classes, and a syllabus detailing the homework I'll have for the rest of the semester that I could be working on." He explained to her, although he really shouldn't have have had to explain anything at all in the first place. Mikoto went to college. This wasn't anything new to her.

"I know, but still. It's the first week of your freshmen year, you should be enjoying yourself." She said. "Have you made any friends yet?"

Itachi knew that this question would come up during the course of this conversation. He just didn't know when. "No, I haven't yet. But I have lunch and dinner with Deidara on occasion, and I've ran into Shisui a couple of times."

"You haven't made any friends yet, honey?"

"I heard my name, yeah?" Deidara asked when he came in, absently running a hand through his hair.

Itachi glanced at the phone in his hand to indicate for Deidara to be quiet. Taking the hint, he nodded and mouthed "okay" before putting his toiletries away. "No, not yet, but I haven't had the time so far—" Itachi continued, only to be cut off by his concerned mother.

"Itachi, I know that you don't like making friends,"

Not true, Itachi thought.

"but maybe you can reach out to your classmates so that when midterms and finals come around, you have someone to study with. " Mikoto suggested.

"Mom, I'll be fine. Besides, I prefer to study alone anyways." He said, rubbing his eyes.

"Join a club! Maybe you'll meet some new friends there!" She insisted. "Don't they have a club fair sometime soon?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Itachi watched Deidara sprint across the room and hurriedly shift through a stack of orientation papers that were laying on his desk. Itachi ignored him (as best as can be expected when Deidara almost knocks his lamp off the desk) and focused on the conversation he was having with his mother. "Maybe. I don't know when though—"

"There's one today, yeah!" Deidara exclaimed, holding a piece of paper in the air as if it were the Holy Grail. He ran over to where Itachi was sitting on his bed and held the paper an inch away from his face.

"Hold on, mom." Itachi said, and held the phone away from his mouth. "What's today?" He asked.

"The club fair! It's today!" Of course he was eavesdropping on Itachi's conversation. "I wanted to go, but I forgot and now I remembered!" More like, you forgot until my mother mentioned it. "Wanna come with?"

"There you go, Itachi! Go to the club fair with Deidara and make some new friends!" Mikoto said before Itachi could decline.
"It starts at eleven, so we need to hurry up so that we make it there on time!"

"Well, Itachi, I'm going to get off the phone so that you and Deidara can go to the club fair. Be sure to let me know if you meet any new friends there, okay?" Mikoto asked.

"Sure." Itachi said, wondering how on earth he had gone from having fifteen minutes of solitude to being dragged on some sort of roommate bonding outing with Deidara.

The club fair was being held in the main room of the student community center where various clubs and organizations had set up tables and winged poster boards to advertise their clubs which ranged from language clubs, to nature clubs, clubs specific to majors like Teachers of Tomorrow for the education majors, to even sports.

"Join the swim team!" The swim team table was yelling from behind their table. The spokesman, a guy whom Itachi recognized as being from his philosophy class was wearing a track suit, much like the rest of the members of his team. "Like to swim? Join the swim team! Don't like to swim? Join us anyways! We'll teach you how!" He boomed.

"I thought that this was a club fair, not a recruitment fair." Itachi said to Deidara as they passed by the swim team table.

It took Deidara a moment to answer as he was undoubtedly checking out the guys on the swim team when he responded "I mean, isn't that what all these clubs are doing, yeah? Recruiting members?"

Itachi shrugged. "I suppose." He said, glancing back at the swim team members who were chatting up two girls wearing short shorts and tank tops that exposed their belly buttons. "But that's different. Being a part of a club doesn't take any special talent. Those guys on the swim team were advertising swimming lessons back there."

"I might just sign up in that case." Deidara murmured huskily.

Itachi ignored the comment and glanced around at the various tables and cringed when they passed by a table with a jar full of condoms and condom shaped bumper stickers. "Condom?" A short girl with frizzy hair and thick rimmed glasses asked him.

"No thanks." He politely declined and continued walking. It was a few seconds later that he realized that Deidara wasn't by his side anymore. "Deidara?" He asked, turning around.

At that moment, Deidara came bounding through the crowd of people, ducking and dodging to get to where Itachi was standing. "Sorry, yeah. I wanted to pick something up." He said.

"That's okay." Itachi said and turned around to continue walking.

"Condom?" Deidara asked.

Itachi blinked at the sight of a little square package that advertised a strawberry flavored condom for "an enhanced sexual experience." "No!" He said. His eyes widened when he noticed the bulge in Deidara's hoodie pocket and the colorful square packets protruding from inside. "How many did you grab?!" He asked.

Deidara looked confused. "What? You never know when you're gonna need 'em! Besides, there was so many to choose from, yeah! Besides, you'll be thanking me when the time comes and you wanna get it on with your—"
Itachi held his hands up to keep him from saying anymore. "Stop. Just, stop." He said and glanced at Deidara's overstuffed pocket. "Do something about that, people are going to think that we're lascivious."

"I don't know what that means, and I don't think a majority of the people here know what that means, so they probably won't of us that way, yeah."

"They'll think we're indecent." Itachi elaborated.

Deidara outstretched his hand and rested it upon Itachi's shoulder, giving him a knowing look. "Itachi, I'm gay, people already think that of me so I've got nothing to lose." He said, retracting his hand and stuffing it in his already overstuff pocket.

Except the rest of your dignity. Itachi thought in disgust. "Why did you even want to come to this thing so badly?"

"For that." Deidara said, nodding his head in the direction of what seemed to be some sort of art club.

"An art club?"

"Partially." Deidara answered. "Look closer, yeah."

Itachi did look closer and didn't see anything of interest. "A crash course in Photoshop?" He asked.

Deidara let out a sigh of frustration and ripped his hands from his pockets, spilling about three condom packets onto the floor. Itachi was about to reprimand him when Deidara put his hands on his face and turned his line of focus to a rather bored looking male with dyed red hair. "Do you see it now?"

"Him?" Itachi asked. Deidara nodded excitedly. "I don't get it, what's the big deal?"

"What's the big deal, yeah?" He nearly shouted and then lowered his voice. "Don't you see? He's hot as hell!"

Itachi spared a second glance at him. Tall, lean, couldn't-care-less punk style. Even though he knew that Deidara was referring to, he didn't see what Deidara saw in him. "And how did you know he would be here?"

"He's an upperclassmen in one of my art classes. He's an engineering major, but he recently declared a minor in art!" He squealed.

"Go talk to him, then." Itachi suggested.

Deidara didn't need to be told twice. Within thirty seconds, he had pushed his way through the crowd and was making conversation with the members of the club, talking about everything from computer design software to paper weights to bands of markers.

Itachi smiled, happy to see Deidara find a group of people who shared the same interests as he did. Hopefully that'll occupy him enough to give me a moment of peace and quiet. Itachi thought to himself and headed in the direction of the Accounting Association table. He may not have made any friends on his little excursion, but he certainly wouldn't without picking up a flyer or two.
Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
Out of the Blue

Chapter Notes

Just a note concerning some time gaps in the plot:
Chapter one took place at the end of August, Chapter two took place a few days after chapter one, chapter three took place a week after that, and this chapter takes place during the first half of the month of October.

A MONTH INTO THE SEMESTER, Itachi's hard work was starting to pay off. His first weekend spent reading and completing assignments that weren't due for another two weeks had kept him ahead of the game, and relatively stress-free. He couldn't say that he was completely free of stress, as double-majoring within itself was stressful, but through long hours spent at the library – before class, between class, and long after his classes for the day were finished – he had the ability to put off assignments in favor of studying for an exam the next day, as well as the ability to call it a night if the work-load became too much.

Despite his mother's constant phone calls and text messages asking if he was adjusting alright, Itachi felt as though that the transition from high school to college was seamless. Of course this lifestyle yielded very few friends, but Itachi was fine with that. Putting up with his roommate was all the social interaction he needed, even if, at times, it wasn't wanted.

Deidara, on the other hand, was wishing that he'd worked on his assignments sooner as he found himself swamped with assignment after assignment after assignment every night. Though he was obviously struggling with his studies, the blonde managed to have enough time every now and again to work on a massive art project non-related to any of his art classes. Itachi knew this only because upon returning to their room after a long evening doing homework in the library, he'd find scraps of paper littering the floor, or a can of spray fixative sitting on his desk because Deidara's own desk was polluted with whatever art project he was working on at the moment, or Deidara, along with his desk would be covered in paint or ink of some sort, despite Itachi's warnings to keep the room tidy.

"I'll clean it up, yeah, don't worry!" He'd beam each time.

In the end, it would be weeks before Deidara would see it through. And even though it bothered Itachi, the last thing he wanted to do was be on bad terms with a guy he'd be sharing a room with for the next six months or so, even if he spent most of his time in the library.

And yet, through it all, Deidara even managed to juggle a bit of a social life, bringing random classmates into the room, and each time, it was someone from a different major visiting for a different reason. His chemistry classmates were easy to pick out; they'd arrive at their door with thick texts and binders that rivalled in size and would either sit on Deidara's bed, the floor, or borrow Itachi's chair without his permission and quickly apologize when he returned later on that evening. Then came the art minors, who were probably Deidara's closest friends. They stood out the most as they gazed in awe at Deidara's hyper-decorated side of the room and cringed at Itachi's barren half. Deidara's education classmates rarely visited the room, preferring instead to work in one of the various study lounges in each dorm, the student commons building, or in the library.
But none of these friends compared to Sasori, the "hot as hell" upperclassmen who shared one of Deidara's art classes.

"What are you so happy about?" Itachi asked him one day when he entered the room with a dreamy smile plastered across his face.

"You know," he'd say before collapsing onto the bed and staring up at the ceiling with lustful eyes, "that hot upperclassmen in my fundamentals of design class, yeah?"

"Sasori?" Itachi asked with a raised brow.

"Hm-hm…God he's so sexy, yeah." Deidara'd say and retreat into his own little world, leaving Itachi to go back to his work.

He honestly didn't care to hear the details of Deidara's love life, but Itachi knew that if Deidara wanted to share the details of each (usually brief) encounter with him, then what choice did Itachi have other than to engage in the conversation too?

But as much as Deidara talked about the guy, he didn't seem to know much about the guy.

"Is he even homosexual?" Itachi'd once asked him.

Deidara shrugged. "I dunno. I wish!" He'd laugh.

Itachi didn't understand. Why would one become infatuated with someone without knowing if they ever stood a chance of being together with them? He knew that teenage girls across the country fell for young male singers every day knowing that they didn't stand a chance, but still claimed to love them unconditionally anyways. But Deidara's case was different. "Wouldn't that be important to know?"

Deidara crinkled his nose and waved his hand to dismiss Itachi's statement. "Nah. I'll figure it out when the time is right, yeah."

I don't know if I like where this is going. He thought in response to Deidara's antics. However, his roommate's social life was not the place for him to pry, so he left it be.

One person's social life he could not let be without prying into, was that of his cousin, Shisui's.

"Dining alone today, Itachi?" Shisui asked, unceremoniously dumping his book bag next to the table.

Itachi briefly glanced up from his accounting homework to see who decided to grace him with their presence (even though he already knew who it was) and answered "Yeah."

"Bummer." He frowned before immediately perking back up again. "Hey, hold that thought while I go get something to eat, okay? Do you have time?"

Well, I was planning to do my homework in solitude, but now that you're here… "Yeah. I have time." He answered. He'd already completed the assignment a few weeks in advance and was reading over it again before class again on Wednesday morning.

"Cool. Be back in a sec!" He said and jogged in the direction of the lunch line. It felt like only seconds had passed by when he returned to the table with a lunch tray in hand. "So where's your roommate?" He asked, shoving a fistful of fries into his mouth.
Attempting to spy on Sasori in the library. "Studying in the library I believe."

Shisui nearly choked on his French fries at the admission. "Whoa, really? Wow! Even blondie's cracking down on the books!"

_Not really._ Itachi thought, but decided he didn't want to inform Shisui of his roommate's sexuality, which, he found out on the first day, was a bit of a touchy subject with strangers. "I guess."

"Hm. You must've influenced him." Shisui mused.

"So what about you? How're your studies going so far?" Itachi asked him.

"Oh, they're kicking me in the ass." Shisui explained nonchalantly. "But that's okay, it's only October."

"You do realize that midterms are only in a few weeks, don't you?" Itachi asked him.

Shisui smiled and placed a hand on Itachi's shoulder. "Key words, Itachi: _in a few weeks_. I've still got time!"

How was it, Itachi wondered, that someone who's been in college for two years could care so little about their grades? Maybe it was easier during one's senior year, but Shisui was a junior. If anything, his top priorities should be looking for an internship or finding a part-time job or something along those lines.

"I suppose you'll be studying the day of your birthday instead of celebrating then since you have so much time?" He asked him.

Again, Shisui waved his hand dismissively as he took a bite of his apple and swallowed before answering. "Fuck no! I'll be drinking myself to oblivion!"

"But your birthday's a Monday. How are you going to—"

"Simple. I'm going to skip the next day and if anyone asks, I had the stomach flu. I hear a lot of people have been coming down with that lately." Shisui said.

Although Itachi had personally never lost anyone to drunk driving, he'd seen enough public service announcements to vow never to "drink himself into oblivion" much less drink at all. He once shared these concerns with Shisui, who, at the time, was a high school senior and told him "Ah, that's just to scare you into not drinking and driving. We're smart kids; we'll call a cab or better yet; we'll have a designated driver!"

Hearing Shisui rant and rave about the wonders of turning twenty-one and listening to his various drinking plans made Itachi's stomach knot. He wanted to think that Shisui would drink responsibly and not get behind the wheel while intoxicated, but peer pressure worked in mysterious ways, and the influence of alcohol, if consumed in great quantities worked in even more mysterious ways.

"I know what you're thinking." Shisui said, snapping him out of his thoughts. "You think I'm going to drink and drive. Itachi, I've heard so many of those God damned PSA's in my lifetime to know better!" He said and smiled the same way he always had in their youth when he was allaying Itachi's fears. "So don't worry about it. I'll be fine."

And as per usual, Shisui's words were enough to soothe Itachi's conscience and bring a small smile to his face.
"But seriously though! I cannot freakin' wait until I turn twenty-one!" He continued.

And just like that, Itachi’s smile disappeared, unbeknownst to Shisui.

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, Itachi had Philosophy 101, one of many Gen. Ed. courses required for graduation. On those days, he would arrive to class fifteen minutes early, way ahead of everyone else who preferred to arrive with either three minutes to spare, or five minutes late.

The professor himself was one of the latter types.

At 3 o’clock p.m. Tuesday afternoon, Itachi patiently awaited the arrival of the professor by checking his phone to see if he had received a text message from Shisui.

He'd made sure to text him the day before, cautioning him to remain aware of his surroundings and not to overdo it that night, to which he received the same phrase Shisui always told him when Itachi worried about his well-being. Don't worry about it.

Knowing that Shisui would be too hung-over to attend any of his classes the following day (that, and he told Itachi himself that he was planning to do so), Itachi waited until noon when he sobered up to text him asking if he was still alive.

It was meant to be taken as a light-hearted joke, but Itachi seriously wondered if Shisui had kept his promise to take it easy.

"Hi."

Itachi glanced in the direction of the voice addressing him to his left. It was the guy from the swim team that he and Deidara had seen recruiting members at the club fair. Itachi didn't know his name or anything about him other than the fact that he was on the swim team, periodically skipped class, surfed the internet during class, and was always late arriving to class.

Your typical jock…Itachi thought with distaste. He never understood athletic types who received full scholarships to go to college and who's only motivation to succeed academically was being able to continue playing and earning money for the school whereas people like Itachi worked hard earning scholarships writing essays and taking out student loans to afford an education to eventually find a stable, well-paying, salaried job that would support them in the future.

It was types like this swimmer who only thought in the present whereas people like Itachi thought long into the future. And that was what annoyed him the most.

"Yes?" Itachi asked with a raised brow. This deadbeat had never spoken to him in class before, so why did he feel the need to start now?

Was it to make friends, he wondered. He certainly hoped that he wasn't trying to recruit him for the swim team. If that was the case, he was in for a rude awakening.

"I realize that midterms are coming up in a few weeks…" He started slowly, averting his gaze to the floor as he spoke.

"The midterm exam for this class is next Thursday."

Immediately Kisame's head snapped as he locked eyes with Itachi. "Next Thursday?! As in, next week? Next Thursday?!"

Itachi nodded.
"Shit." He swore under his breath. "Okay, so apparently, midterms start next week." He reiterated and muttered "even though I thought they were after homecoming."

"They are after homecoming." Itachi stated matter-of-factly. "This week is homecoming."

"Really? Damn." He swore again.

Itachi was really starting to wonder when this guy would get to his point. Before the professor arrives, maybe?

"Anyways, I'm not doing so well in this class,"

And that's my problem because…?

"And this midterm'll probably be the death of me,"

Is this really going in the direction I think it is? Itachi thought with an increasing amount of dread.

"So I was wondering if you would help me study."

Itachi frowned. "So you basically want me to tutor you."

Kisame shrugged. "More or less, yeah."

Just then, their professor turned the corner and strode into class, checking the time on his wristwatch. "Sorry I'm late." He apologized, which went unheard by the class who let out a collective groan. They were hoping to leave class early had he not shown up. "Any who, let's get started with Immanuel Kant, shall we?" A statement which earned him another collective groan which he easily dismissed.

Itachi turned his attention to the front of the room, and from the corner of his eye, watched the athlete do the same.

By the time the end of the period came around, Itachi attempted to pack up his things as quickly as possible to avoid engaging in another mindless conversation again, only to be ensnared moments after their professor dismissed them.

"So will you help me?" The athlete asked him.

"I'm not a tutor." Itachi stated. "I don't even know you."

The comment took his classmate aback who nervously chuckled "Yeah you do; I've sat next to you since the first day of class!"

Itachi rolled his eyes and rose from his seat. "I don't even know your name."

The athlete moved to block his path and grabbed Itachi's hand in an awkward and forceful handshake. "Kisame Hoshigaki, at your service. So will you tutor me or not?" He asked again.

Itachi stared at the older student, briefly marveling at the man's persistence and sidestepped him to exit the classroom. "I already told you, I'm not a tutor. Have an actual tutor help you."

"But—!" Kisame attempted to argue, hot on Itachi's heels.

Itachi spun around to face him, his patience quickly dwindling. "Listen, it's free to go, and that's what they're paid to do." He said, speaking of the students paid to be tutors for their peers. Itachi
had never actually been to the tutoring center himself, but he's heard people mention it before. With that said, he hoped that the man would leave him be as he set off to the library.

"Wait," Kisame said, grabbing his shoulder and spinning Itachi around to face him once more. "I can't go to the tutoring center."

"And why is that?" Itachi asked, annoyed that Kisame had the audacity to lay a hand on him like that.

Kisame froze, averting his gaze anywhere except for Itachi. Itachi shifted his leg slightly, debating whether or not hearing this guy out was worth his time or not when Kisame finally spoke. "If my teammates see me go to the tutoring center, they'll know I'm failing and tell the coach and I can't have that." He sighed.

"So why should I help you?" Itachi asked. He could think of a thousand reasons why he shouldn't have to waste his time tutoring this moron: he wasn't a tutor, nobody was paying him, he had his own studies to worry about and his own midterms to study for. Why did he have to care about something as frivolous as what Kisame's teammates thought of him?

"Because you're smart." Kisame answered.

"The philosophy tutors have already taken and passed the class. They're more than qualified to help you with this; I'm not." I have my own life to worry about.

"But I don't know them! I know you!"

So? "Again, you and I haven't talked to one another until today." Itachi retorted.

Quickly running out of convincing reasons, Kisame's shoulders slumped as he beared his heart to Itachi. "Listen, I admit it, I don't know you that well. But I do know that you're smart – smart enough to ace every test and paper the professor assigns to us." He said. Before Itachi could question how Kisame knew this, he elaborated "I know that because I glance at your grades when we get things handed back. I know you're smart and I know you could help me. And if you want money, I'll pay you, just, hear me out, I really need this, I—"

As much as Itachi liked to see people grovel at his feet and beg for his time, he put a hand up to silence the other student. "You do know that midterms are next week, right?"

"Yes."

"And you understand that I'm extremely busy this week as I have my own midterms to study for, right?"

"Right."

Then why are you...? "If I tutored you, you'd have to agree to meet with me when it's convenient for me, and I don't have time to play games, is that clear?"

"Are you saying yes?" Kisame asked him.

Itachi sighed. "I'm not responsible for whatever grade you receive on the midterm."

"Got it!"

Itachi looked him up and down once more. Was he really considering what he thought he was
considering? "Fine. I'll tutor you."

"Yes! Thanks bro, you have no idea how much this means to me!" Kisame celebrated.

Itachi turned on his heal and beckoned for Kisame to follow. "Meet me in the library then?"

As quickly as it appeared, Kisame's smile faded. "Wait…right now?" Itachi nodded. "I've got swim practice tonight from five 'til nine, can we do it later?" He asked him.

"I suppose." He said and as soon as the words left his lips, he mentally kicked himself for agreeing to this plan in the first place. Why did he think that someone who showed up to class fifty percent of the time would care enough to show up at a decent time when people were still awake and motivated to study during daylight hours? And why did he think it would be easy to tutor an athlete? What with Kisame's swim practice schedule, Itachi'd be lucky if they met up more than once within the next week. He wasn't even a tutor so why was he going to such lengths?

"Awesome! Thanks a lot!" Kisame cheered and turned on his heel to walk in the opposite direction. He made it less than two feet before turning around and calling Itachi again. "Oh, by the way, I don't have your number! Might need that."

Itachi sighed and pulled out his phone and asked for Kisame's number instead. Once Kisame recited his own number, Itachi texted it with his contact information and checked his own messages for a text from Shisui.

"im alive (barely) thx" Shisui's message read.

Itachi interpreted that to mean that Shisui was simply suffering from a really bad hangover and left it be at that, making a mental note to look for him at the cafeteria the next day to verify whether or not that was the case.

"Itachi?" Kisame, asked, gaining his attention. "Is that how you pronounce it?"

Itachi nodded. "Yes."

"Okay. See you tonight at ten? Does ten sound good to you?" He asked, slipping his phone into the pocket of his track pants.

It wasn't how he planned to spend his evening, but the deal was done, and it was too late for Itachi to back out now. "Sure." He agreed half-heartedly.

"Cool. See you then, Itachi!"

Itachi raised a hand in goodbye and quickly exited the building in case one of their other classmates overheard them and tried to solicit his services.

"You're back!" Deidara merrily greeted him upon his return. "How was your day, yeah?" He asked excitedly.

Itachi suspected that Deidara wasn't excited to know about the details of Itachi's day, but more excited to share the details of his own day. Regardless, Itachi answered anyways. "It was fine, I guess."

"That's cool, yeah." Deidara replied.

Itachi noted the expectant look on Deidara's face and waited a moment before asking "How was
"Guess what? I asked Sasori to be my date for the homecoming dance this Saturday!" He beamed excitedly.

"You did?" Itachi asked as he gently set his laptop bag down by his desk. "Did he say yes?"
Deidara nodded enthusiastically. "I didn't think he was homosexual…"

"All that matters is he said yes and I'm going to homecoming with the hottest guy on campus!" Deidara chirped like an adolescent teenage girl. What with his long blonde hair, he could probably pass for one too… "I'm meeting him for dinner after his fluid dynamics class tonight, yeah!"

Itachi forced a smile, despite the abrupt nature of Deidara's good news. For being a homosexual himself, Deidara never mentioned to Itachi that Sasori was homosexual and even interested in him for that matter. Something inside his head told him that something wasn't quite right, but he left it be. Who was he to ruin Deidara's good day just because his was less than stellar?

Only time would tell...

Chapter End Notes

And so the plot unfolds...

What do you think of the main cast now that they've all been introduced? Also, I looked up Shisui's birthday which actually falls on October 19th. This works out perfectly because it aligns with midterms and homecoming!

Until next time,
Itachi’s Husband

The next chapter is set to center around the night of the homecoming dance~
The Homecoming Dance pt. 1

IF SHISUI WAS COGNIZANT enough to reply back to Itachi's text in his hung-over state, then it stood to reason that he didn't die of alcohol poisoning. It didn't stop Itachi from searching for him in the cafeteria on Thursday, however.

He waited for almost ten minutes when he spotted a familiar head of black curly hair peeking out between the mass of students.

"Well if it isn't my second mother!" Shisui joked.

Itachi sighed. "I was just concerned for you is all." He answered, unwrapping the turkey sandwich he purchased earlier. He was too preoccupied scouting for Shisui to eat it until now.

"Over nothing!" He laughed. "It was fun though; you should've been there."

"I'm sure it was." Itachi answered apathetically, taking a small bite of his sandwich.

"You bet it was! The hangover was worth it!"

"Was skipping all of your Tuesday classes worth it?" Itachi asked him. "Especially with midterms being next week?"

Shisui waved the comment off dismissively like he always did and leaned back in his chair. "You only turn twenty-one once, Itachi. You only turn twenty-one once."

"You'll still be twenty-one after midterms are over and you'll still be able to legally purchase alcoholic beverages then. Your midterm grade, however—" He was saying when Shisui put a hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"Let me tell you a little secret, okay?" He said, leaning in close and placing his hand up to his mouth to prevent nearby students from overhearing them. "When I was a freshmen, I thought a lot like you did, all worried about midterms and studying and getting good grades and whatnot. And when I became a sophomore, I still worried about stuff like that, but I still got good grades. Now that I'm a junior, I'm taking it easy. If I don't do well on midterms, there's always finals week. And don't discredit the assignments in between midterms and finals." He said, raising a dark brow.

Itachi wasn't a junior, so he couldn't refute Shisui's claim. However, he still believed that it wasn't as easy as Shisui made it sound. College was harder than high school, that much was for certain. Even though his high school classes were easy, Itachi still studied to ensure that he understood the material. In college, however, it was essential that he studied everything because every professor was different, and it was uncertain what material, and how much material they'd covered in class would present itself on the test.

In high school, Shisui was an excellent student; in fact, Itachi heard nothing but praise from his aunt and uncle when they visited the house for the holidays.

"He's such a hard worker." His aunt told Mikoto.

"The kid's going to go places, Fugaku, the kid's going to go places." His uncle said.
And all the while, Mikoto would smile and laugh while Fugaku nodded in agreement. It was only after the pair took their leave for the night that Fugaku would sit down with a cup of tea, shaking his head. "If he puts his mind to it, he will go places." He spoke of Shisui. "But the boy's too overconfident, and that's going to get him in trouble one of these days."

Although Mikoto wouldn't agree or disagree, the way she pursed her lips spoke volumes. She wanted to disagree, but deep down inside, she knew that her husband's words held some truth to them.

At the time, Itachi didn't understand what his parents were saying. He knew that they were talking about Shisui, as they always did after Fugaku's older brother and wife left their house, but he never understood what they meant.

Across from him, Shisui was smirking, his hand still outstretched and resting on Itachi's shoulder. It wasn't until today that he saw what he failed to understand so many years before.

"When you're a junior, you'll understand." Shisui said in response to his cousin's sudden silence and retracted his hand.

*I highly doubt I will.* He thought forlornly and changed the subject. "Are you planning to attend the homecoming dance this weekend?" He asked.

Shisui nodded excitedly. "You bet I am! Are you?"

He had a feeling Shisui would ask him that. He shook his head.

"Why not?" Shisui asked him. "Itachi, it's your first homecoming! C'mon!"

"I'm not against homecoming week." Itachi explained. "I think it's fun and all how everyone is running around showing off their school spirit, but why does there have to be a dance at the end of it?"

"To celebrate!"

Itachi sighed. "Celebrate what? Our football team? The players have a big enough ego as it is, they don't need a dance to boost it any more than that. Besides," he continued, "what if the football team doesn't even win? What're we celebrating then?"

Shisui shrugged. "Our school spirit?"

This was turning out to be a dead-end argument. Itachi remembered the days when he and Shisui would argue about who's rock skipped the furthest when they would play at the river bank. It was a pointless argument, but back then, it was an important one. And at the end of each day, they'd forget about it (most of the time. Itachi could always skip rocks better than Shisui could.)

Here they were now, discussing the relevance of a *homecoming dance* for God's sake. Could they not have a normal conversation anymore? Had they grown so far apart that they couldn't even agree on anything, be it skipping classes due to a massive hangover or the purpose of a homecoming dance?

"I'm not going." Itachi finally said. "I think it's a huge waste of time, and I'd rather not bear witness to the miniscule pieces of fabric women have come to call 'dresses' and moves once reserved for strip clubs that people our age are passing off as 'dancing.'"
At this, Shisui's eyes grew wide in surprise as well as his smile. "And you chided me for acting older than I really was!" He laughed and raised a hand to his mouth to try to stifle his laughter. "Spam, Itachi! What're you, fifty years old?!"

"Fine. Why are you going then?" Itachi asked, ignoring Shisui's previous comment.

Using the heel of his palm, he wiped away the tears that had collected in the corners of his eyes from laughing so hard. "Lets see," he said, crossing his arms in thought, "I'm going to the homecoming dance to look at girls in 'miniscule pieces of fabric' and participate in 'moves once reserved for strip clubs' of course!" He said and immediately broke into another fit of uncontrollable laugher, attracting the stares of some of the students sitting at the table behind him.

Itachi raised a quizzical brow. And Shisui was the older of the two…

"You're a trip, Itachi." Shisui said as he recollected his composure. "But yeah, homecoming is a chance to have fun and get drunk afterwards. It's a great way to relax and take a break from studying before midterm week comes."

"You're going drinking again this weekend?" Itachi asked incredulously. "After you just went out on Monday and skipped all of your Tuesday classes?"

Shisui shrunk backwards in his chair in the face of his cousin's accusatory tone. "Yeah…? Why? Do you want me to sneak you a drink?"

"What? No!" He exclaimed and lowered his voice when he noticed that his outburst had attracted the attention of a nearby custodian worker moping the floor. "And what are you taking a break from? You just lectured me on how juniors don't have to worry about something as trivial as midterm exams or grades and that doing well on the finals is all that really matters!"

"Okay," Shisui leaned forward, assuming a more serious air, "let me set the record straight; I'm not saying I'm not going to try to get a good grade on my exams next week and that I'm not going to make an effort to study because I am studying, Itachi."

At this point, Itachi couldn't decipher whether Shisui was being serious or not. "But you just said that you didn't—"

"Midterms are different for everyone. Some midterms are easy 10 question multiple choice tests whereas others are ten, twenty page research papers. A film major's mid-term is going to be extremely different from a math major's midterm. While I care about getting good grades, I'm not going to spend every minute of every day in the library with my nose in a textbook. I'm a junior, and this is my second to last homecoming and I want to savor it as much as possible. I'm going to homecoming to have a good time and forget the stress of midterms next week for a few hours. And like I said, if I do badly on the midterm, there are several other opportunities for me to bring my grade back up."

"Like the final exam?" Itachi asked. Shisui nodded matter-of-factly. "Shisui, what happens if you decide that you 'need a break' from the finals? Then what? Are you going to go drinking then?"

"I already told you, Itachi," Shisui growled in annoyance, "it's homecoming. It's a party; a celebration. I'm going to get drunk whether you like it or not." He said and pulled out his phone to check his messages. "I'm not even going that far from campus in case you were worried I might drive off the road and into a tree or something."

The screeching of Itachi's chair caught Shisui's attention as Itachi hastily grabbed his bag and
unfinished sandwich. "Goodbye, Shisui." He said, and stalked off in the direction of the exit. He
normally prided himself as being someone who was not quick to anger or easy to upset, but
something in Shisui's words caused something to snap inside of Itachi. Something Shisui knew
better than to bring up under any circumstances, especially during an argument.

"What do you mean you're not going to homecoming, yeah!?" Deidara asked the night of the dance
when he realized that Itachi had no intentions on attending.

"I have midterms to study for." Itachi answered simply as he scanned the notes contained in his
binder.

"So?" Deidara said, walking over to where Itachi sat at his desk. "I have a quiz Monday morning at
eight a.m. and I'm still going, yeah!" He argued, bending down to meet Itachi's gaze.

Does anyone care that midterms start Monday? Itachi thought to himself but bit his tongue. He
already lost his temper with Shisui in the cafeteria yesterday and nearly snapped at Kisame in the
library earlier for asking him the same thing. The last person he wanted to go off on was the
person he was forced to share a room with for the rest of the school year. "I'm not going. Dances
aren't my cup of tea." He said evenly. "Enjoy yourself tonight. For the both of us."

Deidara seemed saddened by the fact that his roommate was being left out of the climax of the
homecoming week festivities, but offered him a small smile regardless. "I will." He said and
opened his arms wide. "Well? How do I look?"

Itachi cracked a tiny smile. For a second he thought he'd said something deep and awe-inspiring
that warranted a hug. "You look good." He answered honestly.

Deidara wore a crimson red dress shirt, black slacks, a black vest and a black bow-tie to match.
Itachi couldn't have done any better himself if he had to choose, though he would've opted to wear
a tie rather than a bow-tie, but the bow-tie suited Deidara. In addition to that, he wore his hair in a
low ponytail and left his long bangs hang over the left side of his face like he usually did.

"Really?" Deidara asked him.

Itachi actually thought he looked better that way compared to the high half ponytail he donned
every day and nodded.

"Thanks, yeah!"

A swift knocking on the door halted both of their movements as Deidara's face lit up. "That must
be Sasori!" He said and darted to answer it.

Standing on the other side of the doorframe was the man Itachi remembered from the club fair. His
hair was messy as though he'd just gotten out of bed, but intentionally styled that way. Like
Deidara, he too wore a red dress shirt that matched his crimson hair dye, making Itachi wonder
which of the two chose to wear red in the first place.

"Ready?" Sasori asked, gesturing to the hallway.

"Yeah!" Deidara nodded excitedly while he fiddled with his phone. "Just a second, yeah!" He said
and handed it to Itachi. "Can you take a picture, yeah?"

"Sure." Itachi said, rising up from his chair.

Deidara led them out to the hallway where another couple was taking a selfie of themselves and
their homecoming date.

Itachi waited as Deidara wrapped his arm around Sasori's waist, leaving Sasori to follow suit after. "Ready?" Itachi asked. When Deidara nodded, he pressed the camera icon and snapped a photo. "I'll take one more just in case." He said.

"Take as many as you need to, yeah!"

Itachi smiled. Although he still wasn't completely comfortable with Deidara's...sexual preferences, he found it amusing how Deidara's verbal tic increased when he was excited or nervous. *No wonder he stresses out so much about his public speaking class.*

When Itachi finished taking the couple's pictures, he returned Deidara's phone back to it's rightful owner who was excited to see the results. "Thanks again, yeah! And are you sure you don't wanna come?"

Itachi nodded. "I'm sure." He said and gestured to his clothes. "I'm even dressed for the occasion, nor do I have anything to wear to such an outing." He explained. While he wasn't wearing his nightclothes just yet, he doubted that his school clothes, as professional as they were, would blend into a sea of women in dresses and men in tuxedos. That, and the thought of showing up to a formal dance with Deidara and his date, both of whom were men, unsettled Itachi. What would people think of him then? He didn't want to know and thus didn't exercise the thought any further. "Have fun, okay?"

Deidara smiled. "We will, yeah! And, Itachi, yeah? Don't spend too much time studying, okay? You better be in bed by the time I get back, yeah!"

"Which will be...when?"

"Late, yeah!"

Itachi nodded. "Will do." He said and gestured for Deidara to take his leave. "Now go on, you're going to be late!" Itachi called after him.

Deidara waved to him one last time and jogged to catch up with Sasori who was idly scrolling through his phone.

Itachi lingered in the door a little longer than he meant to, wondering what it was that Sasori saw in Deidara. Not that there was anything wrong with Deidara, Itachi just found it odd that Sasori just so happened to be homosexual, and on top of that, just so happened to be attracted to Deidara. As if Itachi wasn't suspicious enough already, Sasori made no physical contact with Deidara the entire length of the hallway.

Even though Itachi himself wasn't homosexual, if he were taking his date to homecoming, he would've at least wrapped his arm around his date's neck, holding her close, loosely around her back or around her waist. If anything, he would've attempted to hold her hand for the duration of the journey to the gymnasium where the dance was being held.

*Then again, I'm not sure that they're officially dating.* Itachi thought to himself as he closed the door to their room. From what he heard, Sasori had asked him to be his date to homecoming out of the blue; Deidara didn't know whether or not the upperclassmen was homosexual before then, so it made sense that they'd be apprehensive to dive right into physical contact.

Sitting down at his desk, Itachi briefly glanced at the work spread before him and leaned back in his chair.
His mother knew he'd be spending the night studying for midterms, having called him the day before to ask if he'd changed his mind about attending the dance (to which, Itachi wearily confirmed that he would be studying instead, much to her disappointment). Kisame himself was attending the dance and made it clear that he was not studying for their philosophy midterm. Deidara was attending the dance with Sasori, and Shisui implied that he was briefly attending the dance before retreating to a friend's apartment to "relax and get drunk."

Although Shisui's after party plans concerned him, Itachi reminded himself that Shisui was twenty-one and could make his own decisions. If he became so drunk that he couldn't walk the next morning, then it was on him for making the wrong decision the night before. If he was still hungover by midterms Monday morning, so be it. After all, it wasn't like Shisui was his brother or anything. What did it matter to him if his cousin got himself into trouble? He couldn't say that Itachi didn't warn him.

With that in mind, Itachi set to work on his various assignments for the week, starting with his English paper which was due Monday afternoon. His accounting midterm was scheduled to take place earlier that morning, but he was on top of his accounting assignments and knew that the test would be relatively simple. Regardless, he would still review the material Sunday night just to make sure, but the paper would take longer. After his paper was done, he'd study for his marketing midterm, which was to take place on Tuesday morning. Given that the material to be covered was going to be taken straight from the text, he needed to take time each night before then to study it so that he didn't miss anything.

Which left his philosophy midterm on Thursday afternoon. Thanks to Kisame, whom Itachi had been tutoring for the past four days, Itachi himself had brushed up on his knowledge of the material and felt that he would do just fine on the midterm for it and still had another five days to prepare if need be.

He glanced at the time on his phone. 9:08 p.m. it read. The dance started at nine and was scheduled to be over by 11 p.m. which gave Itachi approximately three hours to finish his English paper, and submit it electronically to his professor, and get a head start on the content for his marketing midterm. If he worked diligently enough, he'd have finished reviewing at least two and a half chapters of his marketing essentials text.

If he paced himself correctly, he'd be finished with two and a half chapters by the time Deidara arrived back because by then, the blonde would no doubt spend the rest of the night recounting every detail of the event, from the songs that were played to the color of the drinks that were served and wouldn't go to sleep until Itachi heard every word of it.

If he arrives back. Itachi thought with a small smile. Though he didn't want to consider what Deidara and his date might decide to do after the dance, he liked the idea of having an extra hour or two to study before retreating to bed.

When he heard the tumblers of their lock turning earlier than expected, he quickly checked his phone which read 10:03 p.m. It's over already? That was fast. Itachi thought and glanced at his unfinished English paper. He had only the conclusion and works cited page to type yet. What's more, he still had to reread it for content and grammar before he could even consider e-mailing it to his professor. "That was fast."

He cited out loud.

"Yeah." Deidara responded apathetically.

"Did Sasori realize that midterms are next week and go home to study?" He asked when he noticed
that Deidara had entered without his date, attempting to make a light joke out of it.

"No." He answered, untying his bowtie.

"Then why are you back so early?" Itachi asked, turning back to his computer to finish his conclusion paragraph. He knew that something was up, but he’d be damned if he didn't at least finish this paper by the end of the evening. "Did something happen?" He questioned in response to Deidara's uncharacteristic silence.

Leaning against his bed, the blonde numbly unbuttoned the cuffs of his shirt, eyes averted to the ground. "Sasori wasn't really into me, yeah."

Itachi sighed. Why did I have a feeling it would turn out like this? He thought, feeling guilty for not bringing up his suspicions about the redhead sooner. "How do you know that?" He asked, playing dumb for the time being.

"His girlfriend showed up."

This, Itachi wasn't expecting and blinked his eyes in confusion.

"Yeah; that's what I thought." Deidara answered.

Itachi shook his head, the conclusion paragraph of his paper long forgotten as he turned around in his chair to face his roommate. "His girlfriend showed up? I didn't he even had a girlfriend."

Deidara's mouth turned into a twisted smile. "Neither did I, yeah." He chuckled darkly.

"So wait, start from the beginning and tell me how all of this happened."

Deidara sighed and pushed himself up onto his bed. "Everything was going great when we got there, yeah." He began to explain, livening up as he told the story. "He kept staring into my eyes and everything was perfect yeah. It's like he and I were the only people on the dance floor, like nothing else mattered."

Itachi nodded along, trying to discern when within the last hour this had happened, but remained silent.

"He kept looking around, every so often, and I asked him what he was looking for, and he'd look into my eyes, smile, and say "nothing" in that sweet, seductive voice and give me one of those warm smiles that made me fall for him in the first place, yeah."

Again, Itachi nodded along, trying to pretend that Deidara was a girl so that the fact that both of them were men didn't bother him so much. After today, he never wanted to hear a man describe another man's voice as being sweet and seductive.

"And then he'd grab my hand and pull me onto the dance floor, and everything would be perfect again." Deidara told him. "And then all of a sudden, I hear someone screaming 'Sasori! Sasori!' and I turn around to see this pink haired girl in a tight red dress and matching two inch heels walking towards us, yeah. She was so mad that if looks could kill, Sasori would've been dead in an instant."

*Only someone with an artistic mind would use this many metaphors when recounting an event.* Itachi mused, though he expected as much upon Deidara's return. The only detail that eluded him was the one concerning the girl's hair color. *Red haired guy plus pink haired girl...interesting.*

"I looked at Sasori, who didn't even bat and eyelid, even as the girl got up in his face and starting
yelling 'I can't believe you, Sasori! Going as far as bringing some butch as your date just to make me jealous!' and Sasori pulled me by his side and told her 'my date is actually a man, babe; and I've been meaning to tell you this for a long time but, I'm gay' yeah, and she kept growling and saying 'I cannot believe you, I just..I cannot believe you!' yeah." Deidara said. "And then she was like 'I told you, he and I were working on a group project together and there wasn't any enough space in the library to do it!' and then Sasori went 'it didn't look like it when I came in!' but she just kept yelling 'I can't believe you, bringing a man as your date and even color coordinating with my red dress – how long did you have this planned? I said that I was sorry, God dammit! Was it really so bad that you had to pretend to be gay just to make me jealous? Huh? Was it?!' and then she grabbed his shirt and dragged him off to the side, yeah. And when he smiled at me and said 'brb' she started yelling 'Oh no! He's not your date, I'm your date, Sasori! Me! I'm the one whose dress you color coordinated with! Me! Not him; me!' and I just kinda waited by the punch bowl like an orphan waiting for their parents to come back, yeah. And like, ten minutes later, I look over to see them both sucking face and he's got his hand on her ass like she wasn't just about to punch him in the face when she saw us!" He cried, his face red with anger and embarrassment.

Itachi was speechless. He knew that something was off about Sasori, but he didn't say anything regarding the matter because he didn't know the facts. In his mind, he imagined Deidara saying something to Sasori about needing a date for the homecoming dance, and Sasori, feeling sorry for him like an empathic human being, agreed to go with him. Knowing Deidara, however, Itachi figured that Deidara interpreted Sasori's \textit{accompaniment} as being a \textit{date} and that the two had entered a romantic relationship with one another.

At least, that's what he thought until Deidara told him what happened at the dance with Sasori's \textit{girlfriend}. It was one thing to agree go to the dance with Deidara as his date, it was another thing to pretend to be homosexual in order to play Deidara's feelings. It was something else \textit{entirely} to pretend to be homosexual and agree to be Deidara's date in order to make his girlfriend jealous.

But then again, how trustworthy were people who dyed their hair blood red?

Across from him, Deidara sat shaking on the bed, rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands. "Deidara," Itachi soothed, rising from his chair to offer a comforting hand, "I'm sorry that happened to you." He said, attempting to rub circles into Deidara's back until his fingers got tangled up in the blonde's pony tail. "I really am."

"I knew it was too good to be true, yeah. I knew it." He sniffled.

Itachi instinctively moved to grab a tissue so that Deidara wouldn't rub his nose on the sleeve of his dress shirt or onto his black slacks. "These things happen sometimes." Itachi said, trying to meet Deidara's eye. "You're bound to come into contact with dishonest people at some point in life or another. It's just unfortunate that that person turned out to be your homecoming date."

Deidara nodded. "You can add manipulative heart breakers to your list too, yeah."

Although it seemed a little too specific for Itachi's overall statement, he found a way to work it in. "Yeah. You'll come into contact with those people at some point too." He said. "The first person you fall in love with isn't always the right person, nor will they end up being the one you spend the rest of your life with."

Deidara nodded and pulled a tissue from the tissue box Itachi had offered him, blowing his nose.

"Just don't beat yourself up over this experience, Deidara. If anything, let it be a lesson learned to never fully trust what others say, especially if you don't know them that well first." Itachi said and added "and don't go blindly rushing into love next time either. Wait until you're sure that it's
definitely the right moment. *And* the right person. Alright?"

Rubbing his eyes, Deidara nodded once more and said "I will."

"Good." Itachi replied when he heard his cell phone vibrating on the surface of his desk. He stole one final glance at Deidara, making sure that he'd be okay while he answered his phone. It was probably his mother calling to ask if he'd decided to go to homecoming at the last minute or to ask how studying for his midterms was coming along. *No, I didn't go, and it's coming along fine.* He'd say, which would hopefully end the conversation quickly.

"Itachi?" Deidara asked.

It wasn't his mother.

"Thanks, yeah."

"No problem." Itachi mumbled, too distracted by the name displayed on the caller I.D.

"Who is it?" Deidara asked him.

It was Shisui.

Chapter End Notes

    Until next time,
    Itachi's Husband
The Homecoming Dance pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Lately I've only been posting one chapter at a time but one chapter eluded to the much anticipated homecoming dance, and I couldn't just post part one of the homecoming dance without posting part two, now could I?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"HELLO?" ITACHI ANSWERED CAUTIOUSLY, unsure what to expect from his cousin's mouth this time.

"Itachi?" Shisui hazily replied.

He was drunk.

Itachi held the phone away from his hear and glanced at the time. 9:48 pm. Itachi really hoped that it wouldn't come to this – Shisui becoming completely wasted tonight – but never would he have guessed that Shisui would get wasted so quickly. "Shisui, I thought you were at the dance." Itachi questioned. A foot away, Deidara sat on his bed, quietly watching for any clues that would let him know what was going on on the other end of the line.

"Itachi?" Shisui asked.

"Yes?" God, he hoped that Shisui wasn't in trouble.

"I just wanted to tell you that I love you."

"Shisui? Where are you?" He demanded.

"I love you soooooo muchhhhhhh." He slurred.

"Shisui." Itachi said forcefully, trying to get the other man's attention. "Where. Are. You?" He enunciated slowly, hoping that his cousin was at least sober enough to understand those three words and more importantly, give Itachi a clue to his whereabouts.

"Good question…um…"

"Are you hurt?" Itachi asked instead, his patience growing thin.

"I think I'm…"

"You're hurt?" Itachi repeated.

Shisui was silent on the other end of the line, but hadn't hung up, if the pulsating bass in the background was anything to go by. Itachi prayed that Shisui didn't pass out or walk away from his phone, which would explain his silence.

"Shisui?"

"Yes, my love?" Shisui asked him.
Itachi brought a hand to his forehead and smoothed back his bangs which quickly, albeit messily, fell back into place seconds later. "Shisui. Where. Are. You?" He asked him again.

"Torune and Fu's apartmentttttt...." He finally answered.

Although an answer was good, Itachi had no idea where Torune and Fu's apartment was. He knew that Shisui's answer was a legitimate one, as he'd heard his cousin mention those names here and there, but he didn't know exactly where they lived. "Are you on campus?" He wanted to ask, which would make finding his cousin a lot easier given the limited number of upperclassmen apartment units on campus. However, thinking back to his conversation with Shisui the other day, he knew that wasn't the case. Fu and Torune lived off-campus "not far from campus," Shisui explained, before adding "not far enough to drive into a tree."

Had he not said those last few words, Itachi might have stayed longer and convinced his cousin to tell him the address of the place. But instead, Itachi let his emotions get the better of him and stormed off before he could say anymore on the matter.

"Where is that?" Itachi pressed.

"Uh..." Shisui faltered and called out to someone in the background. "Guys, what's the address of this place?"

To say that Itachi was surprised that Shisui was sober enough to ask for an address, much less offer a sentence longer than four words, was an understatement. If anything, Itachi was relieved to be getting somewhere and opened the desk drawer where he kept his car keys.

"Where're you going, yeah?" Deidara asked.

Itachi held up a finger to silence him while he listened for an address amidst the din in the background on the other end. This could be his one and only chance to get a coherent answer from his cousin, and he wasn't going to waste it.

"545 North Walnut Street." Someone answered.

"545 North Walnut Street." Itachi quietly repeated to himself and quickly jotted the address down on his long forgotten rubric for his English paper.

"545 North Walnut..." Shisui answered almost thirty seconds later.

"I'm coming to get you." Itachi responded, quickly throwing on a pair of shoes before stalking over to the closet to grab a jacket.

"Where are you going?" Deidara asked, hoping off his bed.

"To pick up Shisui." Itachi answered.

"Why?" Shisui whined on the other end. "Don't worry about it Itachi...I'll be fiiineeeeee."

"Why, what's wrong with Shisui?" Deidara asked.

Itachi sighed in frustration from having so many people talking to him at once. "Shisui, you're not fine. It's not even 10 pm. and you're hopelessly drunk." He said, thus answering both Shisui and Deidara's questions simultaneously.

"Itachi, I'm twenty-onnee and I'm not drinking..." Shisui argued, slurring his words together.
"You are drinking, and I don't care. I'm coming to pick you up and bring you back to campus, got it?" He said and hung up before Shisui could protest any longer. Considering how drunk Shisui was, Itachi wouldn't be surprised if Shisui was still attempting to prove his sobriety into a receiver with no one listening on the other end of the line.

Checking to make sure he had his wallet, jacket and school I.D., he turned to Deidara. "I'll be back later on, I—what're you doing?" He asked.

Before him, Deidara had thrown on a sweatshirt on top of his dress shirt as well as a pair of sneakers. "Can I come too, yeah?"

Itachi considered this for a moment before reminding himself that Shisui was completely wasted and that he need to be there ASAP. "Hurry up." He told Deidara, who smiled in delight and jogged after his determined roommate.

According to the GPS on his phone, 545 North Walnut Street was only a five minute drive away from campus, which Itachi was grateful for.

The short drive there was spent in complete silence, save for the feminine voice giving Itachi directions on where to go to reach their destination. Itachi wouldn't deny the fact that he was tense thinking about his cousin's wellbeing. As much as he wanted to trust that Shisui had everything under control, it was obvious that he didn't. For God's sake, he just turned twenty-one less than a week ago and already he was going overboard. It was one thing to skip all of one's classes the day after one's twenty-first birthday because they had spent the night drinking, but it was another to become as drunk as Shisui was in less than an hour's time.

Unless Shisui didn't attend the dance at all and was drinking before then.

Itachi blinked to chase the thought from his mind. He wasn't going to think about what Shisui was doing before the dance started and he wasn't going to think about what Shisui was doing now. All that mattered was that he returned Shisui home safely before he got himself into serious trouble.

"You okay, yeah?" Deidara said just above a whisper from the passenger side beside him.

"Yeah." Itachi tersely answered. As much as he wanted to convince himself that he didn't care about what Shisui did in his free time, he did care. Next to Sasuke, Shisui had been an older brother to him when they were growing up.

What's more, Shisui was his best friend. And Itachi knew better than most that drinking more than one can handle can lead to deadly consequences and he didn't want that to happen to Shisui.

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"I can tell you're worried about him, yeah." Deidara continued. "But you're doing the right thing, picking him up without being asked."

That's right. Shisui didn't explain the nature of his call. Itachi just assumed from the slurring of his words that he was drunk and in desperate need of a ride home. Never once did he consider what Shisui had actually called him for. "I suppose." Itachi answered vaguely. He honestly couldn't remember the nature of Deidara's question, if Deidara had even asked a question in the first place.

"I'd like to have a friend like you." Deidara said.

Itachi glanced at his roommate, whose facial features were being illuminated by the orange glow of the passing street lamps.

"Like, if I'd called you as drunk as Shisui seemed, I'd like someone like you to stop everything and
pick me up just to make sure that I'm safe, yeah."

Something in Deidara's words brought a tiny smile to Itachi's face. It didn't distract him from the matter at hand, but it conveyed to him that he was doing the right thing. "Thanks."

"No problem, yeah."

When they turned onto Walnut Street, it was obviously which apartment they were looking for, if the ten or so cars parked on the edge of the street were anything to go by.

"Guess we're here." Deidara lightly commented.

Itachi chose to park on the opposite side of the road at least twenty feet from where everyone else had parked their cars. Craning his neck, he checked if there were any signs prohibiting the parking of those who weren't residents before putting the car in park.

"Are we allowed to park here?" Deidara asked him.

"There's nothing that says that we can't." Itachi answered, unbuttoning his seat belt and stepping out of the car.

"Do you want your sweatshirt, yeah?" Deidara asked, holding up the garment from outside the passenger seat.

Itachi shook his head. "No thank you."

"Are you sure?"

Itachi nodded. "I'm sure it'll be hot inside. I'll be fine, thanks." He said, checking both sides of the road for oncoming traffic before jogging over to the lively apartment building across the street.

Just as they had little difficulty finding the correct apartment, they were able to find the right unit in very little time.

"The door's open, yeah!" Deidara beamed, pointing towards the ray of light shining from within.

*Are any of them worried about being caught by the police tonight?* Itachi wondered, opening the door slightly.

Inside, there were at least twenty people dancing to the same pulsating rhythm Itachi heard over the phone when Shisui called, but couldn't place where it was coming from. All around him, women were tossing their hair back and forth, gyrating their hips against their male counterparts, most of whom held beer bottles in their hands. The exact sight Itachi wanted to avoid in the first place.

"Do you see him anywhere?" Deidara yelled over the beat of the music.

Itachi shook his head. "Not yet." He shouted, venturing into the crowd to search for his cousin, Deidara following close behind.

Suddenly, a drunken partygoer bumped into Itachi, causing him to bump into a girl who spilled half of her drink on the floor. "My shoes!" She gasped.

"Sorry." Itachi apologized and turned to face the man who bumped into him.

"Who're you guyssss?" He asked, slurring his words as much as Shisui had. Whatever they put in
the punch bowl here had to have been quite the mixture to induce such a drunken state within so little time. Looking around, however, almost everyone in the room seemed to be suffering from the same state of intoxication, leading Itachi to believe that the party hadn't just started.

"We're friends with Shisui Uchiha." Itachi answered.

The man blinked in confusion a few times behind the little slots of the black masquerade mask he wore over his face before lazily turning on his heel and retreating down a hallway. "Fu!" He called out.

"What?" A reply shouted from nearby.

"Do you know where…," the man paused, trying to remember the name of the person he was asking about, "…Shisui is?" He asked.

From out of the crowd, a hand poked it's way through, followed by an arm and a leg and the rest of the a body, revealing a man with shoulder length ginger colored hair tied into a half-pony tail. "Shisui?" He asked.

The other man, whom Itachi guessed was Fu's roommate, Torune, nodded slowly.

"He's in the kitchen, man." Fu answered and squeezed Torune's shoulder. "Why? Who wants to know?"

Torune pointed to Itachi and Deidara. "His friends, here."

Fu offered them a wide, slightly inebriated smile and raised his hand for a high-five. "What's up, dudes? Want a beer?"

Itachi shook his head and grabbed Deidara's hand. "We'll pass." He said, leading his roommate up the hallway where the opening to the kitchen was.

"Watch your step, there's a bottle on the floor." Itachi instructed, carefully sidestepping the obstacle. Deidara followed suit, and stayed close to Itachi while they searched the crowd for a familiar patch of black curls.

"I'm majoring in criminology and physiology, you know." A familiar voice purred.

Itachi tuned in to where the voice was coming from and headed straight to it, much to Deidara's confusion.

"Really?" A short brunette holding a beer bottle asked him.

Shisui gave her a crooked smile. "Yeah. Hopefully I never have to arrest you one of these days." He whispered into her ear.

"I'm sure you'll go easy on me." She answered.

Shisui chuckled again, about to take another swig of his drink when it was suddenly swiped from his grasp. "Hey! 'the heck was that for?" He demanded.

"We're leaving," Itachi said, grabbing his cousin by his shirt sleeve.

"But the party just started!" He whined, attempting to free himself from Itachi's iron grasp but failing miserably in the process.
"From the looks of it, it's been going on for quite some time, and there's no doubt that you've had more than enough to drink tonight." Itachi admonished as they maneuvered their way through the crowd.

"What time is it?" Shisui asked.

"Time to go." Itachi answered, pushing through the open front door and stepping out into the hallway. With Deidara following behind, Itachi grabbed Shisui's wrist and led them down the hallway.

"Itachi," Shisui whined, "why are you walking so fast? Slow down some!"

Itachi and Deidara looked at one another and exchanged equally confused glances before Itachi spoke, "Shisui, I'm not walking fast."

"You are!" He moaned, holding onto the wall for support. "Give me a break, I'm really drunk, okay?"

"Now you admit it." Itachi said, wrapping an arm around Shisui's waist to help support him so they could get out of there before the neighbors called the cops. The absolute *last* thing Itachi wanted to do was have a run-in with the law. And he knew, had Shisui been sober enough – scratch that – had Shisui been *smart* enough to think of the consequences ahead of time, he would've known that having a record wouldn't bode well for him, given his dream of pursuing a career in the police force. "I'll try to walk slower." Itachi compromised.

Ahead of them, Deidara poked his head out from the open elevator carriage, holding out an arm to keep the doors from closing. Even though they'd originally taken the stairs to find Fu and Torune's apartment, it was clear that they weren't going to be able to support 140 lbs. down four flights of stairs.

"Itachi?" Shisui asked once they were in the elevator.

"Yes?"

"I love you." He slurred.

Itachi rolled his eyes. "So you've said."

In retrospect, it was probably a better idea to take the stairs instead of the elevator because as soon as the elevator jolted to life and started to descend, Shisui groaned "Don't feel so hotttt...," clutched Itachi's side and vomited all over the elevator floor.

"*Sweet baby Jesus!*" Deidara shouted, jumping out of the way.

Itachi cringed and focused on the lit ceiling tiles of the carriage instead of his wet feet. *Why do I have a feeling that it's gonna be a long night?*

"Itachi," Shisui groaned in the backseat of Itachi's car.

Immediately Itachi positioned his fingers on his turn signal level, ready to pull over if Shisui felt the urge to vomit again. "Do you need me to pull over?" He asked.

"I'm sorry." He moaned, lying on his side and clutching his stomach.

Itachi relaxed, re-positioning his hand on the steering wheel once more. Shisui had been
apologizing ever since they exited the elevator and while they rubbed their shoes on the grass outside of the apartment building. And repeatedly, Itachi sighed, telling him "it's nothing" but due to his current state, Shisui apparently felt the need to say it again and again.

"I know you are." Itachi said, turning onto the road that led to the university. "Deidara, is it okay if I drop you off in front our building? I'm going to drive Shisui back to his room."

"Sure, yeah." Deidara agreed. "Will you need help getting him up there?"

"I should be fine, thanks." Itachi smiled slightly and focused on the road before him. He briefly considered bringing Shisui back to their room, but that would undeniably result in Shisui falling asleep in Itachi's bed and Itachi having to sleep on the floor, which he was not okay with. He wasn't the one who went out to party and get drunk, so why should he have to sleep on the floor?

On the other hand, he didn't have the nerve to force Shisui to sleep on the floor either. (And especially after what happened in the elevator, Itachi was concerned for the safety of their carpeting.) With this in mind, he decided that he would take care of him in Shisui's room where his cousin could fall asleep in the safety of his own bed. If he wanted to vomit on the carpeting in his own room, Itachi was perfectly fine with that.

"Here we are." He said to Deidara and unlocked the car doors.

"Thanks, yeah." Deidara said with a wave. "Got your keys?"

Itachi patted his jean pocket. "Yeah. I don't know when I'm going to be back, so you don't need to wait, okay?"

Deidara nodded. "Okay, yeah." And shut the door behind him.

"Itachi?" Shisui asked from the back seat, raising his head slightly.

"Yes?" Itachi asked with a raised brow.

"I love you."

Itachi closed his eyes and sighed. "I love you too, Shisui." He responded back.

Shisui flashed him a drunken smile before vomiting into the sweater Itachi had brought along just in case it was cold outside. Sighing, he offered Deidara a tense smile before pulling away from the sidewalk and in the direction of Shisui's building.

Chapter End Notes

I know, a little anticlimactic, but at least Shisui's not dying! That's something to be happy about!

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
IF A STUDENT DIES, HOW long would it take for the school to announce it publically? Itachi wondered. It had been three days since Itachi sent Shisui a text asking if he was alright after his drunken partying the night of the homecoming dance. He had yet to receive a response back.

The text was sent at 2:18pm on Sunday his messaging app informed him, so he indeed sent it. What's more, he'd sent it with four bars of signal strength; there was no reason for it not to reach him and the campus wasn't a dead zone for cell phone reception either which meant one of two things: that Shisui's phone had been turned off all weekend or he had already received the message and chose not to reply back to it.

Unless Shisui had dropped his cell somewhere – on the floor, in a punch bowl, in a toilet, or all three – Itachi was willing to bet that it he'd seen the message and simply opted not to reply back to it. But why? If anything, he expected to run into Shisui at the cafeteria for lunch on Monday like he usually did, but saw no signs of the older man. Don't tell me he's still suffering from a hangover. Itachi thought while he waited. Shisui also failed to make an appearance on Tuesday which was unusual given the fact that he and Shisui always ate lunch together on Tuesdays and Thursdays after Shisui's Zombie Lit class ended and before Itachi's Intro to Philosophy class began.

Is it so wrong to worry about someone you care for? Itachi wondered as he patiently waited for Shisui to make an appearance at the cafeteria Wednesday afternoon. He had long finished his sandwich and would've preferred to spend the extra time he had before his next class reviewing his marketing text in the library instead of worrying about his cousin's wellbeing. But here he was, anxiously scanning the flood of students chatting with one another as they carried their lunch trays to a vacant table.

When ten minutes passed with no sign of Shisui's messy head of hair, Itachi pulled his bag onto his shoulder and cleared the small table of trash and any crumbs that may have been left over for his lunch. With only fifteen minutes to spare before his English class, he decided to forfeit going to the library, which was a five minute trek from the cafeteria, and headed straight for his next class instead. Arriving fifteen minutes early to lecture was normal for him.

On his way out of the cafeteria, he spotted a girl walking in his direction and held the door open for her in an act of chivalry. "Thank you!" She smiled brightly.

"You're welcome." Itachi replied back, squinting against the harsh afternoon sunlight. Once the girl was inside, he let the door close behind him and turned to head down the stairs when he collided with another body. "Sorry." He apologized and blinked in confusion.

"It's fine." Shisui muttered and continued to walk past.

"Wait, where are you going?" Itachi asked and followed his cousin inside. "I haven't talked to you since Saturday; did you get my message? How are you feeling?"

"I got your message, and there's a reason I didn't answer." Shisui said from over his shoulder. "You're not my mother, Itachi. I'm not oblicated to tell you where I'm at and what I'm doing at all times because it's none of your God damned business!"
"Come again?" Itachi asked. "Shisui, I don't know if you remember this or not, you're the one who called me completely inebriated at ten o'clock Saturday night! What was I supposed to do?!"

Shisui whirled around to face him. "I'm not some damsel in distress who needs saving, Itachi; I don't need to be locked in a away in a tower where I can do no wrong and wait until my knight in shining armor comes

"I didn't need you to come rescue me from Fu and Torune's party Saturday night, Itachi. I'm not some damsel in distress who can't take care of herself and needs to be locked away in a tower. I'm twenty-one fucking years old! I can take care of myself!"

"I wasn't suffering from alcohol poisoning or anything like that if that's what you were thinking!"

With every accusation that left Shisui's mouth, Itachi could feel his own temper boiling, making it harder and harder to bite back the unkind words that threatened to spill out. "You may not have a problem now, but judging by the way you've been drinking, you're not far from it. Watch, you'll be an alcoholic by the time you're twenty-two if you keep this up Shisui."

"Who fucking died and made you the fucking president, Itachi? God! You're only seventeen fucking years old! What do you know about alcohol!? Huh? Nothing! Nada! Zip!"

"I know that alcohol can cause you to make foolish decisions that you'll regret later!" Itachi yelled. "I also know that reckless drinking can quickly escalate into reckless driving and get you or somebody else seriously injured or killed, Shisui!"

"Oh, give me a fucking break, Itachi! Your mother didn't die! She only broke her collar bone for fuck's sake! And that was like, twenty years ago! Let it go already!" Shisui snapped.

That was it. With Shisui's last comment, the floodgates of Itachi's patience opened, releasing what little control he had left over his temper. "And how do you think that happened, Shisui? Do you think that she got so drunk that she drove herself into a tree? No! She didn't! My father was the one who had too much to drink, my mother warned him that it would impair his senses and tried to convince him to let her drive home, even though she was seven months pregnant, but he wouldn't let her and convinced her that he could get them home safely! And what happened? His vision started to blur and he drove them both into a tree!" Itachi yelled, pointing a finger at Shisui. "And yeah, she broke her collar bone, but she also went into labor and gave birth to Sasuke prematurely! How did you think I felt when your mom woke us up in the middle of the night to tell me that my mom was in the hospital because she had been involved in a car accident? How do you think I felt when I saw nurse after nurse rushing in and out of her room and not knowing what was going on because your mom didn't know anything and my father was sitting on a bench sobering up?! How do you think I felt when I was told that my brother was born too early and needed to be kept in an incubator to be monitored for trauma or any birth defects because of the impact?!"

"And how do you think I'd feel if I'd been told that my cousin, my best friend, and the only person who's been like an older brother to me growing up, died in a car accident due to driving under the influence, Shisui?" He cried and with shaking hands, pulled his cell phone to check the time. He had two minutes to get to his class. Without bothering to hear Shisui's response, Itachi wordlessly turned on his heel to exit the building.

"Do we really have to study last week's material?" Kisame asked again.

Itachi shot him a glare and proceeded to flip through the thick philosophy text for the chapter covering last week's lecture. He was still smarting from his heated exchange with Shisui in the cafeteria earlier and didn't care to put up with any more crap for the rest of the day.
"And do you actually read that worthless thing?" Kisame asked. "Nobody reads the textbook. I doubt that the professor even reads it!" He laughed.

"We're on page one-hundred and twenty-four." Itachi instructed.

Kisame didn't even move to touch it. "But seriously though. Do we have to study last week's material? It's fresh in my head!"

Itachi sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. "Then tell me what we covered last Tuesday and Thursday." He challenged.

The way Kisame's eyes widened in response to Itachi's serious question. "Last week was so long ago! Do you seriously expect me to remember what we talked about in class?" Itachi didn't flinch. "Come on! Give me a break!"

Itachi redirected his gaze to the page numbers at the bottom of the text. "Turn to page one-hundred and twenty-four so we can cover…"

"It had something to do with war theories or something." Kisame quickly answered. "Right?"

Itachi raised an eyebrow. "Partially."

"Yes!" Kisame silently cheered to himself.

"What about it?" Itachi asked. "And I guarantee you won't get any points for referring to them as 'war theories.'"

Kisame bit the inside of his cheek and looked around the room, as if the millions of books around him would simultaneously lend him their combined wisdom and give him the answer he was looking for. "Give me a hint. How many of them are there?"

"Six."

"Six!?" Kisame cried and slammed his palms on the table, an action which immediately earned him scornful glares from every occupant in the room. "There are six of them?" He whispered.

Itachi nodded.

"I give up," Kisame huffed. "What are they?"

Despite the powerful urge to have Kisame open the book and educate himself, he decided to read them to him. "They, meaning the 'just war theories,' are: just cause, right intention, proper authority and public declaration, last resort, probability of success and proportionality." He read. "Can you remember what any of them are or do we have to go through them one by one?"

Kisame seemed to consider this. "Aren't they self-explanatory?"

"Then explain them." Itachi said and closed his text.

Kisame grimaced and slowly proceeded. "Let's see…"

"Just cause." Itachi offered.

"Just cause means that you can only go to war with someone for the right reasons." Kisame explained.
Itachi nodded. "How is that different from having the right intentions?"

"Is that the second one?" He asked.

Itachi closed his eyes and nodded slowly. "Hm-hm."

"Shit." He swore. "Is this really going to be on the test tomorrow?"

Itachi shrugged. "I can say with utmost certainty that it will be presented in the form of an essay question."

"Shit." He swore again. "But what if it's not?"

"Then you will have been given a reprieve." He answered and thumbed through the text for the page he needed. "Just cause is the most important rule that sets the face for rights to be followed." Itachi read. "A state may launch war only for the right reasons. The right reasons include: self-defen—"

"I think I'll be fine just knowing the names of them, don't you think?" Kisame asked.

Itachi sent him an impatient glare and set down the text. "Tell me something: how are you doing so far in this class?"

Kisame shrugged. "I dunno. The professor hasn't posted any grades yet."

"How do you think you're doing?" Itachi asked, rephrasing the question.

Kisame released a short laugh. "Badly! I'm pretty sure I flunked all of the assignments and quizzes so far! I think the professor has it out for me—"

"Then if I were you, I'd make sure to know all of the just war theories by name, and be able to differentiate them from one another in order to have any hope of getting a good grade on tomorrow's midterm, do you understand?"

Kisame furrowed his eyebrows. "Who pissed in your cereal this morning?"

In a feeble attempt to retain his composure, Itachi took a deep breath and slowly released it. "You're the one who begged me to tutor you, so it's reasonable to say that I expect a certain amount of cooperation on your end, am I right?"

Kisame nodded. "Yeah, I guess so."

"And during the two occasions that I have studied with you, I've worked around your schedule, and adjusted the pace to accommodate your needs when you're the one who asked me to be your tutor. I didn't volunteer for this job and I'm not being paid to sit around and debate what material will appear on tomorrow's test. Now I'm going to give you two choices: we can skip studying altogether and I'll go back to my room and study the just war theories by myself, or you can open your text book to page one-twenty-four. Your choice."

Kisame sighed in resignation. "I left my textbook in my room, can I borrow yours?"

"Thank God that's over." Itachi whispered under his breath once the door to his room was shut behind him. On his left, he noticed that Deidara was lying on his stomach, fast asleep on top of his bed before a large open sketchbook, bereft of any designs.

"Rough day, yeah?" Deidara asked as Itachi walked by, startling him. "You thought I was asleep,
"Then what were you doing?" Itachi asked, maintaining eye contact while he set his bag at his desk.

Deidara raised his shoulders slightly, blinked and lifted his eyebrows. The laziest shrug Itachi had ever seen in his life. "Not much, yeah."

So far today, Itachi confronted Shisui, which quickly escalated into a screaming match in the middle of the cafeteria, and nearly walked out on Kisame at the library. Dealing with his roommate's problems was the last thing on his list of priorities, but faced with a sight as pitiful as the one before him, Itachi knew that he was going to have to ask "How was your day?"

Turning onto his side, Deidara first shifted his legs so that they hung over the edge of the bed and pulled his body up to a sitting position like the undead rising from their graves. "I talked to Sasori today, yeah." He said.

And so it began. In preparation for what Itachi knew would be a long, drawn out story with meaningless details, he placed his bag on the floor and sat in his desk chair. "How'd that go?" He asked.

"Well," Deidara began, "I didn't want to talk to him after what happened at the homecoming dance, yeah. But after seeing those smoldering eyes and the wicked grin, I couldn't help but wonder if it was all just a really bad dream, yeah."

"Smoldering eyes and wicked grin? Itachi almost said something regarding Deidara's word choice but left it alone. As quirky as the artists' words were, he was certain that the big picture would become clearer as the story continued. Or at least, he hoped so.

"It's like, how can somebody like that lead me on like he did, you know, yeah?"

_I could list at least ten different indiciations._ "I don't know, Deidara."

"He just seemed so real and so perfect, yeah. I thought that he actually liked me. At the very least, I thought he was bi! Not trying to make his girlfriend jealous." He steamed.

"He could very well be bisexual. You don't know that for sure, do you?" Itachi asked.

Deidara fixed him with a hard stare. "I asked if he was actually gay, yeah."

Itachi leaned back in surprise. He didn't expect such a bold move from Deidara. "And what'd he say?"

Deidara bowed his head and kicked his legs back and forth over the edge of his mattress. "He just shook his head and said 'To be honest, I thought you were a girl at first.' Then he said 'by the time I asked you out to homecoming, I realized that you weren't and said 'to hell with it.'"

Itachi shook his head in disgust. From the time Deidara pointed Sasori out at the club fair, he knew that there was something off about him just by observing the way that he dressed. Of course, Itachi wasn't so shallow as to judge a book by its cover so he didn't say anything about it at the time. Perhaps Sasori's personality was softer than his appearances. Maybe he was the real deal. But as time went by and Deidara announced that the upperclassmen had asked him to be his date for the homecoming dance, a red flag signaled in Itachi's head. Up until then, Deidara hadn't mentioned anything regarding a mutual attraction between him and Sasori. While it was obvious that Deidara was attracted to Sasori, it was unclear what Sasori's feelings for Deidara were. Hell, Deidara didn't..."
even know what Sasori's sexual orientation was, and based on Itachi's observations, homosexual men were pretty observant on the topic of sexual orientation. So of course it struck Itachi as odd that Deidara was ignorant to such an important detail about his date, blindly hanging on Sasori's every word as being the truth.

What's more, Sasori's behavior the night of the dance wasn't normal either. In fact, there was no affection in his eyes and seemingly no desire to make physical contact with Deidara as they retreated down the hallway, Sasori checking his phone the whole way instead of wrapping his arm around him or even reaching out to hold his date's hand.

Had Sasori's asked Deidara out to homecoming as a friend, that'd be fine. But in a malicious attempt to make his girlfriend jealous – that was low.

"I'm sorry, Deidara." Itachi finally spoke.

Deidara lifted his head and pulled his hair back over his shoulder. "Thanks, yeah." He smiled. "Hey."

Itachi glanced up to meet Deidara's gaze. "Hm?"

"Did you ever get a hold of Shisui?"

"Yeah. I ran into him at the cafeteria today." Literally ran into him.

"How's he doing?"

"He's mad at me for ruining his fun." Itachi calmly stated.

Deidara cocked his head in confusion. "He's mad at you? For what? Why? He was completely wasted and it wasn't even close to midnight! How could he be mad at you for something like that, yeah?"

Itachi shook his head. "He's upset with me for attempting to convince him that he's not invincible now that he's able to drink and that he, just like every other infallible human being, is prone to make stupid decisions that could yield potentially dangerous consequences down the road." He explained.

Deidara cast his gaze down towards the floor below his bare feet. "I hate to see the day when he figures out you're right, yeah. Is that why you were in a bad mood earlier?"

"Mostly. I'm tutoring one of my classmates in preparation for our midterm tomorrow and he's not putting in the effort needed to pass."

"That sucks." Deidara said.

Itachi shrugged. "Oh well. It's his grade. If he doesn't want to put forth the effort then so be it. It doesn't affect me one way or another."

"Yeah." Deidara agreed and pulled out his phone. "It's six o'clock, yeah. Wanna go grab dinner with me?"

Itachi briefly glanced at his computer before deciding that he could use a break from studying and enjoy a nice, laid back dinner with his roommate. "Sure."

"Great!" Deidara beamed and hopped off his perch on the bed. In a matter of seconds, he was
below the mattress frame searching for a pair of shoes to wear out.

Itachi, still dressed from his tutoring session with Kisame, waited by the door with his hand on the handle until Deidara finished forcing his left foot into his black Toms. "Ready?" Itachi asked him.

Deidara nodded excitedly.

"Let's go then." He said and held open the door.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi’s Husband
SINCE THE WEEK OF HOMECOMING, Itachi and Deidara had fallen into a comfortable routine wherein the two roommates shared lunch every Monday and Wednesday, and dinner every Friday, Saturday and Sunday due to the differences in their class schedules.

"They actually pay people to construct their work, yeah!" Deidara was saying through a mouthful of potato chips Wednesday afternoon.

"That's interesting; I didn't know that." Itachi remarked. According to his artistic roommate, several modern-day artists paid people to construct their work in a fashion similar to that of a factory assembly line.

"Like," Deidara attempted to continue before choking briefly on a stray potato chip shard lodged in his esophagus. Itachi moved to clap him on the back when Deidara put up a finger and took a long drink of soda before exhaling in relief. "Anyways, there was this one guy who's credited for constructing a sculpture of a dog balloon animal, but he didn't actually build any of it himself, yeah!" He said as if nothing had ever happened.

Cautiously, Itachi lowered himself into his chair and made certain to keep a watchful gaze over the blonde should he choke again. He didn't, much to Itachi's relief, and happily rambled on about an artist whose recent collection utilized glitter.

Even though Itachi didn't care to discuss modern-day artists, artistic mediums, or art in general, Deidara was the happiest Itachi had seen him all year. With the incident involving Sasori behind him, he appeared to be enjoying the company of his roommate as he educated him about giant balloon sculptures and glitter aesthetics.

Conversely, it had been exactly two weeks since Itachi's argument in the cafeteria with Shisui, and although he preferred to discuss the nature of found objects as they applied to art any day of the week, part of him still worried about his cousin's welfare since their fight.

He glanced down at the table where he laid his phone and pressed the home button to reveal the time when a familiar voice sounded nearby.

"Excuse me."

Itachi looked up in time to see Shisui's fleeting back meld into the crowd.

"I mean, why didn't I think of that when I was a kid, yeah?" Deidara was saying. "I could've been a millionaire by now—"

Itachi held up a finger to interrupt him. "Excuse me for a second." He rose from his seat and weaved his way through the endless sea of students converging for the purpose of nourishment between classes. He could see a sliver of Shisui's black jacket from within the crowd when somebody grabbed his wrist from behind.

"Who the—?" Itachi muttered when he was met by golden irises and a gleaming white smile.

"Hey! Guess what?" Kisame asked.
"What?" Itachi asked and looked over his shoulder to see if he could still find Shisui. Luckily for him, his cousin was chatting with a girl advertising an upcoming event for the psychology club.

"I checked my midterm grade for philo101 online." Kisame beamed.

Itachi raised his eyebrows in surprise. It appeared that this knuckleheaded athlete cared about his studies after all. "You did?"

Kisame furrowed his brow. "Yeah…don't you?"

Itachi resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "I just expected you to wait until they were given back in-class."

"The professor told us our grades would be up by this morning at the latest so of course I was going to check to see what I got!"

"So what'd you get?" Itachi asked him.

"A C+!" He proudly exclaimed. "I didn't completely fail!"

Itachi's shoulders dropped. "But a C+ is hardly worth getting excited about."

"But you don't understand!" Kisame said, grabbing both of Itachi's shoulders in his broad palms. "I've failed almost every assignment we've been given. A C+ is one letter grade away from a B- which is good, right?"

Itachi nodded slowly. "Right…" He agreed, wondering where Kisame was going with this line of reasoning.

"So all I gotta do is ace the final, and it'll be smooth sailing, baby!" He cheered.

"There's still a written assignment due between now and Thanksgiving break." Itachi warned him. "If you do well on that, and study for the final a few weeks in advance, you might leave this class with a B."

"That's what I'm talking about!" He roared, raising his hand in the air for a high-five. Itachi tentatively returned the gesture and cradled his hand after the harsh impact of their palms. "I know I'm not the best student, but would you be willing to help me study for the final exam?" Kisame asked. "I'll pay you double."

It wasn't a question of money, so much as it was the time he was willing to devote to Kisame's cause. Final exams was the week wherein he'd have either an assignment or written test in all of his classes to prepare for, and the few weeks between Thanksgiving break and then wasn't much time. "I'll tutor you on two conditions." He said. "In order for me to have enough time to study for my own exams, I'll need you to meet me on time; no excuses."

"Done."

"And if you don't understand a concept, we will review it. Understood?"

"Got it."

Satisfied with Kisame's resolve, Itachi crossed his arms. "Good. We start immediately after the conclusion of Thanksgiving break. Deal?" He extended his hand to shake on it.

"Deal." Kisame said, returning the gesture and walking in the opposite direction. "See you
tomorrow in class, Itachi!" He called over his shoulder.

Itachi nodded and turned to see if Shisui was still conversing with the psychology club student only to find that, in the span of his conversation with Kisame, Shisui had disappeared from the scene.

"Who was that, yeah?" Deidara asked when he returned.

"A classmate of mine." Itachi answered and wrapped up the other half of his sandwich. "I have to go. My class is starting soon."

"Okay! See you later, yeah!" Deidara said. "Have fun in class!"

Itachi sent a small smile his way. "Thanks."

-8-8-8-

The week of Thanksgiving break, Itachi outlined a strict schedule for himself consisting of homework assignments, a group project in marketing, an individual project in statistics, the planning of the topic for his end-of-term paper in English and all around studying for his final exams in each of his classes. While some finals, given previous methods of testing, would be easier than others, the only one Itachi could put off until later was his philosophy final wherein he would do all of his studying (and then some) in Kisame's company.

"Did you guys kiss yet?" Sasuke asked him.

Itachi whirled around in his desk chair to face his sibling. "Did we do what?"

"Did you and your roommate kiss yet?" Sasuke asked as if it were the most natural question in the world.

Itachi's face scrunched up in disgust as he pictured what it would be like to kiss Deidara, golden tresses gliding between his fingers, warm lips encapsulating his own as a deep moan escaped the other's throat, reminding him that he was kissing another man.

The thought sent chills down his spine, and not in a good way either. "No!" Itachi cried. "Just because my roommate is homosexual does not mean that I am too!" He said and spun around to return to his work.

Sasuke rolled over onto his side and propped his head up with his palm. "You haven't considered it? Not even once?"

"No." Itachi answered, hoping that if he focused on next week's chapter for his marketing class that he'd be able to tune Sasuke out.

"Haven't gotten so drunk that it just hap—"

Unable to ignore him any longer, Itachi, held up a hand to silence his younger sibling. "Stop. We haven't kissed and we never will. Deidara knows better than to act on such impulses anyways."

"Which means he's thought about it before." Sasuke concluded. Itachi glared at him. "What? You said he knew better than to act on such impulses, which means that he's had impulses before, right?"

Itachi groaned. "That's not at all what I'm trying to say. I'm not homosexual. Deidara knows that." But as soon as the words left his mouth, he realized the invalidity of his statement. Does Deidara
"know better? Itachi questioned as his mind drifted to the night of the homecoming dance.

"Sasori wasn't really into me, yeah."

Sasuke raised a speculative brow. "Are you sure about that? Because you seem pretty asexual to me, Itachi. Think about it. You've never been on a date with anyone before or showed any interest in women in general."

"Speak for yourself." Itachi retorted. "You act like you have some expertise in this area, but unless something happened while I was away at school, you've never gone on a date with anyone before either and you've showed very little interest in girls ever since you were in kindergarten."

"That's because I'm waiting for the right one to come around. All the girls in my school are annoying."

Sure, now you decide to be noble. Itachi thought. "Are you sure you aren't homosexual, Sasuke?"

"We're not talking about me, Itachi, we're talking about you." Sasuke said. "And if you must know, if I ever settle down, I intend to spend the rest of my life with a woman, not a man."

"Spoken like a mature adult." Itachi murmured sarcastically.

"So let me get this straight; blondie hasn't made any moves on you yet?" Sasuke continued, ignoring Itachi's admission. "He's never once let on that he finds you attractive or anything like that?"

"No."

"You've never had dinner together or anything like that?" Sasuke pressed.

Itachi rolled his eyes in amazement. "Can't I have lunch or dinner with my roommate every so often?"

"Correction:" Sasuke said, "your gay roommate."

"Just because he's homosexual doesn't mean that anything's happening or going to happen between us." Itachi said.

"I wouldn't be so sure, Itachi." Sasuke said, idly scrolling through one of his various social networking apps. "You've never been attracted to anyone before, and throughout your entire high school career, you've never 'shared a meal' with anyone either." He air-quoted.

Itachi narrowed his eyes in confusion. "What are you getting at?"

Just then, Sasuke swung his legs over the side of the bed and tucked his phone in the back pocket of his jeans. "If I were you, and I didn't want anything to come from my little dinner dates, I'd be watching my back." He said, pausing at the doorway. "But who knows? You might be surprised by what comes of it."

And on that note, Sasuke disappeared down the hall, leaving Itachi with a mess of papers and a million unanswered questions.

-8-8-8-

"How's the semester going so far, honey?" Mikoto asked him the next day as they prepared a traditional thanksgiving feast.
Itachi had just placed the stuffing in the oven to cook and closed the lid. "Fine." He answered, pulling off his oven mitts and lying them on the granite countertop.

"Are your classes going well?" She asked and fetched a container of disinfectant wipes to clean the countertop with.

Itachi reached out to take the container from her. "Yeah."

"Are they harder than the college credits you took during high school?" She asked.

"Not at all." Itachi answered. "If anything, they're a lot easier."

Mikoto arched her eyebrows. "That's surprising; the fact that community college courses are more difficult than those of a prestigious university. Interesting." She mused and opened her palm to collect Itachi's dirtied disinfectant rags from him to throw away.

Itachi shrugged. "I suppose. There's definitely a lot more coursework to juggle than there was in high school. Fortunately for me, I've made it a point to complete all of my assignments a week in advance to stay on the safe side."

Mikoto smiled in a way that only an adoring mother would in the face of her child's success. "That's good. You've never given me any reason to worry. Now if only your brother was the same way. This 'I can do everything without even trying' attitude is going to catch up with him one of these days. He acts just like your cousin." She laughed. "By the way, how's Shisui doing? I hear he's making plans with some friends of his this weekend."

Ever since Itachi could remember, his and Shisui's families always visited each other for the holidays. Most years, Itachi's family would visit Shisui's for Thanksgiving, and Shisui's family would stop by for Christmas. This year, however, Mikoto had volunteered to house Thanksgiving at their house as Shisui's mother was suffering from recent carpal tunnel surgery and couldn't prepare the turkey herself.

"He's doing fine." He said, carefully choosing his words. "He's been busy with his studies so I haven't seen him very much lately."

Mikoto nodded in approval and moved to uncover the dough she'd set aside for the cherry pie. "I'm surprised. Shisui's finally getting serious about his studies. I'm glad."

Itachi breathed a sigh of relief. He didn't expect the conversation to go that smoothly.

"For a minute I was worried that he'd go crazy on his twenty-first birthday and start partying every weekend. Guess I was wrong." She admitted sheepishly.

You couldn't be any closer to the truth. Itachi wanted to say but let it be. His mother had been through enough when it came to alcoholics. Her father was an alcoholic, and for a while, her husband had been one too until that fateful night thirteen years ago. He watched as she delicately lifted the ball of dough from its plastic confines and dropped it onto the newly cleansed countertop. She didn't need another reason to be unhappy, he decided.

"Are you getting along with your roommate?" She asked. "What's his name again?"

"Deidara." Itachi supplied.

"Deidara, that's it!" She smiled. "Have the two of you been getting along?"
Itachi considered this for a moment. It was an innocent question, but after his talk with Sasuke yesterday, he felt he needed to keep some facts to himself. "I guess so. He's messy and talkative but most of the time he restricts his clutter to his side of the room and knows better than to bother me when I'm working." He said.

"That's good. Can you pass me the pizza slicer, sweetie?" She asked. Itachi did as he was asked and fetched the utensil from a nearby drawer. "Thanks."

"You're welcome."

"Does Deidara have a girlfriend?" She asked.

Itachi knitted his brow in confusion. "No mom, Deidara's...homosexual..." He said with uncertainty. He could have sworn that his mother was aware of that fact.

"Really?" She asked. "Does he have a boyfriend?"

"No. Not that I know of, at least." Itachi answered. He tried to read her expression, looking for anything that would suggest that she was tactfully prying for information about his roommate's love life, or possibly, Itachi's own love life, but her expression was inscrutable. Perhaps she genuinely forgot about Deidara's sexuality.

She pulled him in for a quick hug. "I'm glad that the two of you are getting along." She gushed and turned her head to the kitchen doorway. "Sasuke! Come help with the cranberry sauce!"

"You didn't think that we would?" Itachi pried.

Mikoto arched her eyebrows and turned away. "To be honest, I had my doubts..." She confessed.

"Why?"

"It's just that, well," she stuttered, "you've never been very...social...around strangers. I was worried that by being so far from home and surrounded by so many new faces, you'd feel out of place."

*Out of place?* Itachi thought and sighed. "Mom, I'm not a little kid anymore. I don't need to be surrounded by friends all the time, you know."

Mikoto smiled. "I know, but you're always gonna be my little boy in my eyes." Just then, Sasuke appeared in the doorway. "And no matter how old Sasuke gets, he's always going to be my baby boy!" She said and pulled him in for a hug.

"Mom!" Sasuke whined. "What's wrong with you?"

Mikoto, like all mothers Itachi had seen in his lifetime, always knew how to walk the fine line separating innocence and reconnaissance when it came to Itachi's personal life. Whether she was trying to ascertain the details of Itachi's relationship with Deidara, or was genuinely concerned about his well-being, he did not know. Perhaps it was a little bit of both.

-8-8-8-

Given his brother and mother's behavior as of late, Itachi wasn't surprised when his father invited him to watch the football game that evening shortly after they had finished eating dinner.

"You're gonna watch with us this year, Itachi?" Shisui's father asked. "And here I thought you
didn't like sports!"

"I don't." Itachi muttered and took a seat on the sectional, perpendicular to where Fugaku and Kagami sat.

Kagami's face held a puzzled look until his eye caught a glimpse of an exceptional play on the television screen. "TOUCHDOWN!" He cried, raising his fists in the air.

"Tell me, son," Fugaku said, "how's everything going at school?"

"Good." Itachi answered.

"How did midterms go?"

"Good. I received straight A's in all my classes so far." He said, omitting the part where he stayed up until one in the morning the night before taking care of his hung-over cousin.

Fugaku nodded and turned his attention to the screen. "Just what I'd expect from you." He said. "How's that roommate of yours?"

"Deidara?" Itachi asked, even though he knew who Fugaku meant. "He's doing fine."

"Do you two get along?"

Itachi was really starting to get sick of this game. "Yeah. He usually keeps to himself." He lied, telling his father only the details he wanted to hear.

"That's surprising. I pegged him as being a distractive type. You're able to get your work done when he's present?"

"I get a lot of my work done between classes in the library most of the time." Itachi answered truthfully. "But once my classes are done for the day, I retreat to my room and study there. Deidara knows to leave me alone when I'm working."

"Deidara," Kagami said to himself, "is that your roommate?" He asked Itachi.

Itachi nodded, unsure why Kagami found the need to enter their conversation. "Yeah, why?"

"Shisui's told me about you guys. He says you two have created a really close bond over the semester." Kagami said. "He's always telling me how he sees you two eating lunch together in the cafeteria together or walking to class together. He wished that he and his roommate freshmen year were as close as you guys were; Shisui despised his roommate!"

"Is that so?" Fugaku asked.

Itachi inhaled, mentally preparing a way to downplay Kagami's words when Mikoto's voice rang from the kitchen. "Sasuke! Be careful; that's glass!" She scolded him. "Itachi, sweetheart! Can you give me a hand in the kitchen please?"

"Coming!" He called back and rose from the couch. Thank God… he thought to himself as he made his way to the kitchen.

"Sorry to interrupt your time with your father, honey, but Sasuke's trying to destroy all of my glassware." Mikoto explained.

"It's alright." Itachi smiled.
"Since Itachi's here, can I go watch the game with dad and uncle Kagami?" Sasuke asked.

Mikoto sighed. "If it keeps you from breaking any more dishes, then yes, you may."

"I didn't break it!" Sasuke called over his shoulder.

"It was only a matter of time, honey!" Mikoto called back with a chuckle.

"What do you want me to do?" Itachi rolled up his sleeves and took a position next to his mother at the sink.

"I'll hand you the dishes, and you can put them in the dishwasher for me, okay?" She asked. "And when the dishwasher's full, we'll hand-wash the rest."

"Okay."

Like clockwork, Mikoto and Itachi worked together in a synchronized fashion. Mikoto would grab a dish from the stack on the countertop, quickly rinse it and hand it to Itachi who would carefully place it in the dishwasher. And whenever she got to a dish with food scraps still stuck to the surface, she'd work to scrape it off while Itachi continued to rinse less difficult dishes and place them in the dishwasher.

"What made you want to watch football with your father and Kagami this year, honey? I thought you didn't like football." She said when the dishwasher was full.

"I don't." Itachi answered.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: The bit about artists paying people to do their work for them is true(The thing about the giant balloon dog sculpture is true as well) If you're curious about it, you can look up "Jeff Koons balloon animal sculpture).

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
This chapter is approximately 600 words less than what you've come to expect from each chapter of this story and for that, I apologize. I think the last three or four chapters have been shorter due to the fact that the time between homecoming and Thanksgiving break and Thanksgiving break and Christmas/winter break is so short that I don't have a lot of room to push any more details than I already do. Also, there is a lot of dialogue in this chapter (dunno how it happened, it just did), so enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

ITACHI WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED when he returned to a vacant room Sunday afternoon. The halls were to open at noon, giving all students the chance to return half a day in advance before classes started again and Itachi seized the opportunity. For him, the decision was simple: sleep in a little and make the trip before most church services concluded or stay at home another day and wake up several hours in advance to beat the morning rush-hour traffic and drive two hours to make it in time for his first class.

Though Itachi loved his family, he could only handle so much prodding concerning his social life or lack thereof. Especially after his uncle's comment about how he and Deidara were so close, walking to class and eating lunch together. The man made it sound like they did those sorts of things all the time when in reality, Itachi only ate lunch with his roommate twice a week, and dinner three times a week. And of all the times Itachi could think of where he and Deidara had walked to class together, it was because the biochemistry major saw him walking and jogged to catch up with him.

Was it so wrong to share lunch with one's roommates or walk to class together? Okay, Itachi admitted that walking to class together was a little much but Deidara was…clingy…that way. Although he had friends of his own, Itachi seemed to be his closest, and after the incident at homecoming with Sasori, Itachi accidentally put himself in the position of Deidara's guardian, the one whom Deidara could come to with all of his problems and consult with if he ever found himself in need of advice.

Was that so wrong? Everyone needs a friend they can confide in every now and again, right?

Itachi rolled his suitcase to the edge of the bed, ready to haul it onto the mattress to unpack its contents before deciding to sit down and lay back instead.

While Itachi was fine being his roommate's confident, the only problem was the closeness it brought with it.

-8-8-8-

"So," Deidara said as he munched on a cheese quesadilla slice, "how was your Thanksgiving break, yeah?"

Itachi shrugged. "It was fine. What about yours?"
According to his understanding, Deidara had woke up at six thirty in the morning and made the two hour drive to arrive to his 8am class that morning, albeit fifteen minutes late due to traffic. "It was great, yeah!" Deidara chimed through a mouthful of cheese. "My cousin tried to follow a Thanksgiving turkey prep episode on a cooking channel, but it was going too fast for her and she didn't have all the ingredients ready!" Deidara laughed. "She had to keep pausing it and eventually she had it paused for so long that the episode started to resume and—"

There were a lot of people walking by, Itachi noted and glanced at his watch. 12:45pm. That was a reasonable lunch hour, since most classes let out after noon. While Deidara chattered on about his cousin's antics over the break, Itachi watched the people passing them by. Most of them were busy laughing and carrying on with their friends while others looked down at their phones while they walked and the rest looked straight ahead, concerned only with the destination before them. I wonder how many of them pass by at this exact time every day, Itachi wondered. Nobody struck him as familiar as the crowds passed them by, but never before had Itachi cared to study the flocks of students on their way to and from the cafeteria lunch line or cutting through the cafeteria to reach their classes more quickly. I wonder if any of them care that I'm sitting with another man who looks like a woman. What if they know Deidara? Do they know that he's homosexual? If so, do they think that I'm homosexual too, or think that we're lovers? He continued to watch the hundreds of students pass by their table and decided that most of them didn't them any mind, and if they did, they probably didn't care.

"But yeah, not sure what I think of Kurotsuchi's new boyfriend. I mean, who dates a guy whose name sounds almost exactly like hers, anyway?"

Itachi realized with a start that he'd completely zoned out from the conversation and hadn't heard a word of Deidara's anecdote and immediately felt guilty for it.

"I dunno." Deidara said before Itachi could even utter an apology. "I just think it's weird, yeah, but I guess names don't matter when you're in love, right?" He chuckled.

He didn't even notice. Or if he did, he didn't care. A trend that seemed to be the norm for Itachi's generation.

-8-8-8-

Remarkably, Itachi was able to reach out to Kisame upon returning to campus yesterday to schedule a tutoring session in the library. And as per their agreement after midterm grades were posted online, Kisame not only agreed to meet with him the next day, but arrived on time as well. In Itachi's mind, this was progress.

"Let's start by reviewing the material we've learned since midterms and once we finish with that, we'll review the material covered before midterms. Sound good?"

"Wait," Kisame interjected.

"We won't be able to cover everything in one day;" Itachi continued, "we'll cover it over the span of the next two weeks; maybe four lessons each time?" He asked, looking up to meet Kisame's eyes.

Kisame shook his head. "Why do we need to study the stuff we learned before the midterm exams? All of that stuff is still fresh in my mind; shouldn't we focus on the new stuff instead of the old?"

"Not all of the material we learned before the midterm exams appeared on the exam itself." Itachi
calmly explained.

"Yeah, but—"

"Plus, the final exam is cumulative and if I recall correctly, you didn't do very well on the midterm."

"Yeah, but," Kisame attempted to argue and sighed in defeat, "I still remember all of the stuff that we covered."

Itachi regarded him doubtful stare.

"I just…forgot most of it when the exam was in front of me." He answered in a small voice.

Itachi sighed.

"I have test-taking anxiety, okay! Give me a break, will ya!?" Kisame loudly explained, and earned a look of displeasure from the librarian who was putting away some texts nearby. "It's not my fault." He muttered.

Itachi set his thick philosophy book on its spine and pried open the middle of it using his thumb nails. "Then we'll just have to study so much that it becomes second-nature to you." He said, idling flipping through the pages of the text.

Across from him, Kisame sighed and mimicked Itachi's movements, roughly flipping through his own text to match the page number Itachi was at.

-8-8-8-

"I need a break." Kisame announced not even twenty minutes later.

Itachi glanced at his watch. "We've only been at this for twenty minutes so far—"

"I need a break."

Itachi regarded his classmate with a look of annoyance. "If you want to do well on the final, then we need to—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I get it, and if it means staying here an extra ten, twenty, minutes then so be it, but if you want me to retain any of this, I need to take a break."

Itachi sighed and went back to reviewing the text. "Fine."

"How long do I have?"

Itachi glanced upwards. "How long do you need? Three minutes?" He asked. When Kisame's brow wrinkled, he asked "Five minutes?"

"I was thinking like, ten minutes, actually." He bargained.

"Seven."

"Ten."

Itachi sighed and sat back in his chair. "Look, I have things that I need to get done for tomorrow, so you can either take a seven minute break or we can continue. Your choice."
"Seven minutes isn't even enough time to grab a candy bar from the vending machine!" He cried in a hushed tone.

"I would be if you weren't so preoccupied negotiating with me." Itachi responded coolly, flipping a page of the text.

"And if I'm not back in seven minutes?" He asked, watching Itachi skim the paragraphs printed on the next page.

Itachi didn't even look up. "Then I will not be here," he said, checking his watch, "and you only have six minutes now, so if you want a candy bar, then I suggest that you—"

"Running in the library is prohibited, young man, do you hear me!?!" The library shouted from behind him, causing Itachi to jump in look to the direction of her wrath.

"Sorry, ma'am!" Kisame called over his shoulder as he raced around the corner to find a vending machine, leaving behind a bewildered Itachi.

-8-8-8-

After a solid hour of studying, Itachi declared that they could stop for the day and would meet again at the same time on Wednesday afternoon and possibly on Saturday once Kisame checked his swim team schedule.

"Alright; sounds good." Itachi said as he eased his tablet into his messenger bag.

"So." Kisame said.

Itachi looked up. "What is it? Do you have a question about something?"

"How was your Thanksgiving break?" He asked.

This took Itachi by surprise. He and Kisame weren't friends. They were classmates who only talked before and after class and during the few tutoring sessions they shared together. Itachi didn't know Kisame and Kisame didn't know him, so why was he asking him about his break. "Fine. And yours?" He shrugged. I guess it's just a conversational device, Itachi thought to himself.

"Lemme guess; you spent the whole time studying, didn't you?" Kisame asked, completely ignoring Itachi's question.

"Not entirely." Itachi supplied, securing the straps on his bag before hoisting it onto his shoulder. "I do have a life outside of school you know."

Kisame, who had only brought his philosophy text with him, plucked it from the table they were sitting at and held it by his side. "Really?" Kisame arched his eyebrows in surprise, which took Itachi aback a little bit. "And here I thought that you lived underneath the library or something, only emerging when you have class or when you want to torture me!" He laughed.

Itachi narrowed his eyes in contempt. How did this man ever make it as far as college, much less graduate from preschool?

"So aside from studying, what did you do over break?"

Itachi shrugged and pushed open the double doors of the entrance. "I did what everybody else does during Thanksgiving. I spent time with relatives."
"I bet your folks are fun people!" Kisame mused with a grin.

Itachi forced a grin in return, hoping that Kisame would take the hint and end the conversation already. "Not really." He answered when it became apparent Kisame wouldn't leave without one.

"Really? I would've never guessed!" He laughed.

So much for that. Itachi thought. "So I'll see you in class tomorrow?" Itachi turned and took a step in the direction of his dormitory.

Kisame nodded. "Yup. I'll walk with you; I'm headin' in that direction too, actually." He said. "So what do you all do when you get together? Practice your Hebrew or something?"

"I'm not Jewish." Itachi offered tersely. What did it take for this man to take the hint?

"Do they make you copy Latin poems?"

"No." Itachi answered, deciding that maybe if he answers were short and directly, Kisame would get the idea and stop talking altogether.

"Then what does your family do when you all get together?" He asked. Didn't I already give you an answer to that question? Itachi wondered. "We talk."

Kisame made a circular motion with his hand, urging him to continue. "Do you have any siblings?"

"One.

"Older or younger?"

"Younger."

"Brother or sister?"

"Brother." What was this, twenty questions? Kisame had used the word "torture" today to describe their tutoring sessions, so was this some sort of payback? Payback for what? Itachi's intent was to help Kisame, not torture him, so why was it that this man was trying to befriend him all of a sudden?

"So you have a younger brother." He stated.

Itachi nodded and caught Kisame smiling at him from out of the corner of his eye.

"Is he as boring as you are?"

At this, Itachi glared at him, but gave in and answered his question regardless. "Like any teenager, he spends a lot of time on his phone texting his friends."

"You guys get along?"

"Yeah."

"What d'ya talk about?" He asked. "You said your family talks when you're home, so...what d'ya you and your brother talk about? The news, politics, world peace?"

Although Itachi did attempt to engage Sasuke in all of those subjects at one time or another, he had
a feeling that admitting so to Kisame would only prompt a lengthy discussion about political views – views he had no doubt Kisame would be opposed to. "I ask him about school and what his friends are up to and he gives me indeterminate answers."

"Indeterminate?"

"Vague." Itachi supplied.

Kisame chuckled. "I can see how you two are related. Does the rest of your family act like that?"

They were only a few yards away from Itachi's dormitory and wherever Kisame was heading in this area so Itachi decided to wrap it up as quickly as possible. "More or less." He answered, hoping that Kisame wouldn't follow him all the way to his room. That was not on his agenda for the day.

"Sounds like fun." Kisame said.

Once they reached the entrance of the building, Itachi turned around to face his stalker. "Where are you going?"

Kisame frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You said you were heading in this direction." Itachi said. "Do you live here?"

And just as quickly as it faded, Kisame's smile returned. "No, I live over there." He gestured to a set of buildings on the far end of campus.

Itachi furrowed his brow. "If you live all the way over there, then why did you come all the way over here?"

"Because this is the first time I've gotten any indication that you're human like the rest of us and not the study-obsessive drone you make yourself out to be." He said and turned on his heel in the direction of his dorm. "Well, see you in Philo tomorrow!" He waved.

Itachi stood motionless at the door, watching Kisame's retreating back as his brain worked to comprehend what just transpired between them.

"Because this is the first time I've gotten any indication that you're human like the rest of us and not the study-obsessive drone you make yourself out to be."

Kisame's words still echoed in his head, long after they had parted, earning him an expression of confusion from his roommate.

"Is everything alright, yeah?" Deidara asked. "You look like you just saw a ghost or something!"

Itachi blinked a few times in order to register what had been said to him and responded "I'm fine. I've just had a long day. That's all." He placed his messenger bag by the side of his desk.

Deidara nodded, though his look of concern had immediately morphed into that of worry. "Are you sure? You seemed kind of spacey during lunch today too, yeah."

"So he did notice. "I'm just adjusting to being back at school, that's all."

Deidara smiled and glanced back at his open text book before meeting eyes with Itachi once again. "Oh yeah, that reminds me; how was your break? I know you said that it was fine, but you didn't really tell me what you did while you were at home, yeah."
Why is everybody so interested in what I do when I'm at home? Itachi wondered. Does everyone seriously believe that I spend every minute of every day studying? "Family stuff." He shrugged. "I did a little bit of homework here and there, but I spent some time with my family too."

Deidara smiled and kept his gaze level with Itachi as if he was expecting him to say more and nodded. "Sounds like fun, yeah."

Not quite the enthusiasm Itachi was expecting from the artist, but he didn't dwell on it. "Not really. They wouldn't stop asking me about how I'm doing and if I'm getting along with my roommate."

Deidara flipped his hair over his shoulder only for his bangs to cascade over the left side of his face again. "We haven't had any major fights so far this year!" He chimed. "You're the oldest in your family, right? You're the first born?"

"Yeah."

"I'm sure your folks are just curious to see if you're making the 'smooth transition from high school to college' that our advisors keep yapping about. I know your mom worries about you a lot judging by the way you talk to her on the phone. 'Mom, I'm not going to any end-of-the-year parties, I have finals to worry about; yes, I have friends; no, I will not grow up to be a lonely bachelor who collects stamps—"

"She never said I would grow up to be a lonely bachelor who collects stamps!" Itachi protested.

"My point is," Deidara continued, sliding off the side of his bed, "family can be overwhelming sometimes, and, no offense, but your parents seem kinda intense, yeah."

Itachi averted his gaze to the floor beneath their feet as the corners of his lips quirked upwards. "None taken."

Deidara placed a hand on his roommate's shoulder, making him snap his head up in surprise. "Well, if you ever need an escape, you're always welcome at my place." He winked.

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

"I mean it! I'm not telling you to run away and join the circus or anything, I'm just saying, if you ever need to get out of the house for a few hours, give me a call and I'll give you directions!" Deidara said. "Maybe over winter break or something? I dunno! But if your family gets to be too much, you're always welcome at my place; trust me, I know the struggle." He smiled.

"Thanks. I'll think about it." Itachi said. He had no intention of going out of his way to spend more time with his roommate than he already did in school, much less drive forty-five minutes to hang out with him outside of school. But if telling Deidara that he'd consider it made him happy, then a little white lie wouldn't hurt.

Deidara grinned and slid his hand off Itachi's shoulder and hopped back onto his bed, causing his pens and sticky notes to bounce a foot into the air. "Shit!" He cursed, reaching over the side to pick up the fallen highlighters that were just inches from his reach.

"Thanks, yeah." He said, flipping himself back onto the bed, his blonde hair wild like a cockatoo's mane and his face reddened from the blood rush. "And remember, Itachi, if you ever need me, I'm
just a phone call away!" He breathed, apparently winded from his little acrobatic stunt.

"Yeah." Itachi smiled.

Chapter End Notes

I don't even know where to begin with regard to Itachi. He seems to view every social interaction as either a twisted game, doesn't he? But the person I feel has it the worst this time around is Kisame. Poor guy.

And no Shisui this time! Don't worry! I have plans for him to make a guest appearance next chapter, and things are bound to get heated...

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
WITH FINALS WEEK, CAME mixed emotions for Itachi. For the majority of the semester, Itachi wished for silence and order, and patiently waited for the rare moments when it arrived. Sometimes, however, it never did.

"I thought you had class." Itachi stated when he discovered Deidara in the room on a Wednesday night in early October.

There were paper airplanes everywhere – on the artist's bed, on the floor, on Itachi's bed and under the bed, on the window sill, on his desk, and in the closet, but Deidara didn't seem to mind in the slightest as he shook his head. "Not tonight, yeah. The professor cancelled." And with that, he went back to his craft, which consisted of folding down the wings of a tiny blue airplane.

"Fine, but can you please contain the mess to your side?" Itachi sighed in exasperation and set down his bag by his desk.

"Mess? What mess, yeah?" He asked.

Itachi didn't respond, and instead made a point by plucking a red paper plane from the socket of his desk lamp.

"Oh." Deidara said, extending his hand to retrieve the paper model. "Sorry, yeah. But you have to admit, it's hard to control where paper airplanes fly off to!"

"Then wait until you're outside to fly them." Itachi replied.

"But then I have to grab my keys and my I.D. and what if I hit someone with one of them?"

_The better question is, what if you hit me with one of them?_ "You can fly them in here." Itachi surrendered.

"Really, yeah!? Are you sure? You don't mind?" Deidara asked.

Itachi pulled a thick text book from his bag and pulled it open to a random page in the middle. "But if you hit me with one of them, you're done, do you understand?"

Deidara nodded. "I understand! Thanks, yeah!"

"No problem." Itachi muttered and immersed himself in his studies. He had a lot of reading to catch up on from when Deidara had made him sick, and tonight was the night he was planning to get it all done before the weekend until _this_ happened. He glanced over at Deidara who was hunched over his desk, intently studying the diagrams on the page before him as he crafted little planes out of colored paper. _I suppose no harm could come from making paper airplanes._ Itachi decided, and let it be.

Or at least he _thought_ it was harmless until he kept hearing the soft crinkling of airplane noses colliding the walls and window every five minutes. In the end, he endured twenty minutes of this when a stray plane nicked him in the left temple of his head.
"Sorry!" Deidara squeaked when Itachi whirled around to face him.

"I think that's enough for now, don't you think?" Itachi asked and that was the end of it.

By the end of the night, Deidara's half of the ceiling had been decorated with various air craft hanging from fishing line taped to the ceiling. *At least he's recycling, I suppose.*

And then there were times where Itachi was in a foul mood, be it from completing a difficult assignment weeks before it was even discussed in class only to find that it had been cut from the curriculum completely, or arguing with his cousin, or just wasting his time dealing with immature classmates who had no business pursuing a higher form of education based on their actions.

And through it all, Deidara would return back to their room late at night with a cheerful smile on his face and ask him how his day had been. And most of the time, all he received in response was a half-hearted shrug. And he seemed to be okay with that. "I understand if you don't want to talk about it, yeah. I think everyone has days like that at some point or another. But if you ever wanna talk about it, I'll listen." He once told him.

Itachi even found himself missing his tutoring sessions with Kisame when their philosophy final came around.

"What's this?" Itachi asked him that morning.

"Fifty dollars." Kisame answered. "Well, two twenty dollar bills and a ten dollar bill."

"For what?"

Kisame shrugged and smiled. "I know I'm not the best student, and you probably won't believe me when I say this, but I'm certainly not the worst student either. I may not get straight A's like you do, but somehow I've managed to stay afloat this far into the game."

Itachi nodded and wondered where exactly Kisame was planning to go with this.

"But this class," he said with a chuckle, "this class was going to be the death of me, and if it weren't for you, I would've failed and sent my GPA down the toilet, and my time on the swim team would've been done for."

*Of course, because that's what's most important here. Itachi thought sarcastically.*

"And when I first asked you to tutor me, I promised I'd pay you. Now, I don't think we ever established how much tutoring an idiot like me costs, but I hope that fifty is enough." He explained.

Itachi handed the money back to him. "Keep it."

"But I told you I would pay you for—"

"Thanks, but I don't need your money. Studying with you forced me to review concepts I didn't think I needed to review and cement them in my head when the time came to be tested on them." He answered and said in response to Kisame's blank stare "In short, you helped me to become a better student, and that, to me, is worth more than any amount of money."

At that, Kisame laughed and lightly punched Itachi in the shoulder, which hurt more than he was expecting it to. "Your devotion to your studies never ceases to amaze me." He mused.
"Alright, class, it is now twelve o'clock, which means it is time to pass out your Introduction to Philosophy final." The professor announced.

"Hey." Kisame whispered to Itachi, who raised a questioning brow. "You probably won't need it, but good luck anyways."

"Thanks. The same goes to you, Kisame."

"And keep in touch next semester! I might need your help with my statistics class!"

Itachi took a deep breath and shook his head. What was he thinking, admitting that he liked studying with this man? Of course it was bound to lead him to a similar predicament down the road. "Perhaps." He said under his breath. At least he had a little over a month to contrive of ways to weasel himself out of this predicament.

He only wished he could say the same about his dilemma concerning Shisui. In the thirteen days between his last final exam and Christmas day, Itachi had spent his time racking his brain for things he would say to Shisui when his family visited his cousin's for Christmas.

"Why are you ignoring me?" Maybe? That was certainly a good place to start, but was much too confrontational for his liking. If those were the first words out of his mouth, he could say good-bye to his speaking relationship with Shisui for good. But it wasn't Itachi's fault that Shisui was ignoring him! Hell, he didn't even remember why his cousin was ignoring him! Was it because of what happened on homecoming? If so, Itachi drove out of his way to save Shisui's drunken self from humiliation, acts of stupidity that would lead to serving time in jail, alcohol poisoning, drunk driving, and possibly death. How did driving him home safely warrant nearly two months of silence, Itachi wanted to know.

He also needed to take into account the possibility that Shisui would play dumb and act as if nothing was wrong between them. "I'm not ignoring you, I've just been busy." He'd say, even though he was obviously still upset with his cousin for keeping him out of harm's way.

And then it occurred to Itachi that Shisui might not even be present for their family's Christmas dinner just as he hadn't been during Thanksgiving. "Shisui a no-show again?" Sasuke would snicker in the presence of Shisui's parents.

"Oh, he made plans with friends again this weekend." His mother would sigh and hug her sister-in-law. "But he's twenty-one now and old enough to make his own decisions, so who are we to stop him?"

And through it all, Itachi would quietly steam over his aunt and uncle's ignorance, wondering how they could possibly allow their child to miss out on an important family tradition they've had since before they were born in favor of drinking to excess with their equally, if not more intoxicated peers?

"Good afternoon, Uncle Fugaku," Shisui greeted them at the door on Christmas Day, "Aunt Mikoto, and may I say that you look stunning this evening?"

"Oh Shisui!" She giggled. "Always the charmer, aren't you?"

"That's what people say." Shisui sighed and stepped back to allow them inside. "Sasuke." He nodded.

"I'm surprised you didn't ditch like you did on Thanksgiving." Sasuke muttered.
Shisui shrugged. "Nope, not this time! Mom said I had to participate for the most important family get together of the year." He said and diverted his attention to his older cousin. "Hey."

Itachi pursed his lips. "Hey."

"Listen, can I talk to you about something later?" Shisui asked him, leaning in close to his ear so nobody else could hear him. "After dinner."

After two months of silence, now he wanted to talk about things? "Sure." Itachi agreed. This was bound to be interesting.

"Shisui!" His mother, Megumi, called from the kitchen.

"Yeah, ma?" Shisui called back and headed in the direction of his mother's voice.

"Can you set the table? Dinner's almost ready!"

"Sure thing, ma!"

-8-8-8-

Throughout dinner, Itachi's mind worked overtime to consider all the things that Shisui could possibly want to say to him. Even as his mother and aunt enthused about the placemats and dinner set up, and his father and uncle discussed work, and Shisui sympathized with Sasuke's complaints of a two-week winter break in comparison to Shisui's month long break, Itachi ruminated over Shisui's proposal to chat. Shisui's demeanor seemed fine. He appeared to act like the Shisui Itachi knew before college started – easy going, charming, considerate, sympathetic to the underdog (or in this particular case, high school students with two week holiday breaks), and all around jovial instead of the cocky, invincible, pre-alcoholic, know-it-all party goer Itachi came to know this past fall.

"Is everything okay, Itachi?" Mikoto asked him. "You haven't said much all afternoon; is everything okay, sweetheart?"

Itachi nodded and tersely answered "Yeah. Everything's fine."

But Mikoto wasn't buying it. "I would have at least thought that you and Shisui would be talking about school or something since you guys haven't seen each other in a while."

"Nonsense!" Kagami disagreed. "Final exams are done and over with; there's no need to talk about them!" He joked light-heartedly. "Besides, they're not even in the same classes in school so there's nothing to talk about."

Mikoto sat silently for a few moments and spared a glance at her eldest son before relenting "I suppose you're right." She laughed and scooped up a spoonful of mashed potatoes from her plate. "It's been so long since I was at college that I guess I forgot how everything works, huh?"

"Ah, the joys of getting old, right, Mikoto?" Megumi, laughed.

Itachi had since stopped listening to the general conversation occurring all around him and tried to work out why Shisui wanted to talk with him now of all days. His pleasant demeanor was expected around their family. Of the two of them, Shisui was always the better liar, creating realistic stories and situations all the while masking his true feelings beneath the surface. If he was mad at Itachi, he wouldn't have a problem showing it. But in the face of his family, things were different. For all Itachi knew, Shisui could be scheming ways to cut ties with his cousin and let him know that he
never wanted to be bothered by him again.

And over what? A stupid, drunken phone call Itachi took seriously almost two months ago?

"Phone call?" Shisui asked when Itachi confronted him about it after dinner like they agreed upon. "What phone call?"

They were currently in Shisui’s room upstairs – Shisui claimed to have some old text books Itachi might find use in, giving them a scapegoat to retreat from the family festivities for a little bit while they talked.

"You called me, drunk, on the night of homecoming." Itachi seethed. "Or don't you remember that?"

Shisui scratched the back of his head. "That night was a little hazy for me, I can't remember much of it to be hon—"

"You called me to tell me how much you loved me."

"I was drunk!" Shisui cried.

"And when I asked what was wrong, you didn't give me an answer!"

"Because nothing was wrong!" Shisui explained, throwing his hands up in the air.

"Then why did you call me if nothing was wrong?" Itachi demanded.

"I admit it, Itachi: I. Was. Drunk."

"Which raised an immediately red flag in my mind because it was barely ten o'clock in the evening, Shisui, who gets as drunk as you were that quickly at night?!"

Shisui held up his hands in surrender. "I admit it, that wasn't my finest hour and I apologize. I was drunk, really drunk, and I must have accidentally dialed your number. I didn't mean it, and I'm sorry to worry you."

"And it took you until now to reach that conclusion? Shisui, you acted like I didn't exist for two months! You avoided me at the cafeteria, you wouldn't answer my calls or texts asking if you were alright – for all I knew, you could've died from alcohol poisoning!" Itachi fumed.

At this, Shisui bowed his head. "I know, and I'm sorry."

It was a little too late for apologies now, as Itachi's patience with him had finally reached its limit. "For some reason, I don't believe that you are, Shisui. If you were truly sorry, you would've have given me the silent treatment for two months when I did nothing wrong. The last time I checked, you were supposed to be grateful when someone, someone sober, drops everything they're doing to pick you up and take you home safely! Do you know how much work I wanted to get done that night? It was two days before midterms and I had tests to study for and papers to write and things to review, and then I had to deal with Deidara—"

"Wait, what happened with Deidara? You didn't tell me that story."

"Maybe I would have if you had wanted to talk to me, Shisui, but that wasn't an option because you were mad at me for acting like your mother and for treating you like an alcoholic!" Itachi yelled.

understand that you're mad, and you should be because I've been acting like a complete dick this whole time and shouldn't have ignored you for as long as I did."

"So talk." Itachi said.

From his backward position on the swivel chair, Shisui glanced up at his cousin and sighed. "Okay. I wasn't mad at you for the past month, to be honest with you."

"Then why didn't you talk to me, Shisui? Why did you—?"

"I wasn't talking to you because I was ashamed." He said. "Ashamed of my actions, and ashamed of myself."

Immediately, Itachi's anger melted away with his cousin's confession. He opened his mouth to urge him to continue when Shisui elaborated.

"I went to a party a week before Thanksgiving break and, well," Shisui explained, "I got really drunk."

"Really?" Itachi asked sarcastically.

"Yeah." Shisui sighed. "So drunk that I made a lot of bad decisions that day."

As Shisui described everything he could remember from the party he attended, Itachi found himself feeling around for Shisui's plush comforter and took a seat on the bed, never once tearing his gaze away from Shisui as he recounted several embarrassing acts Itachi was certain Shisui would never in his life partake in had he been sober. "And you were able to gather all of this from the pictures on your phone?" Itachi asked incredulously.

"That, and the scene I woke up to the next morning." Shisui shrugged. "So yeah. I was mad at you after homecoming, and contrary to what you may think, I didn't skip out on Thanksgiving at your parents' house because I was mad with you. I skipped out because I was so ashamed of myself."

"So let me get this straight, you skipped Thanksgiving dinner with my family in favor of getting completely trashed only a week later?" Itachi asked. "I don't understand. How can you be ashamed of what happened when you got drunk at a party a week prior, only to do the same at another party in order to avoid me?"

"That's the thing." Shisui said. "I didn't go to a party on Thanksgiving."

"But your parents said—"

"That's because I lied to them." He admitted. "I told them I was going to a party with friends because I knew that you would demand an explanation for why I was ignoring you, and at the time, I wasn't ready to give it because I was still licking my wounds."

"Then what were you doing if you weren't partying with your friends?"

"I went to a diner for dinner and drove around town until the mall opened for Black Friday and hung out there for a little bit, watching the masses fight over flat screen TVs and shit." He chuckled. "It was actually quite entertaining; you should've seen it. I managed to buy a pretty sick leather jacket for next to nothing as well!"

"You should've told me, Shisui."

Itachi shook his head. "About the party. Despite my feelings regarding what happened on homecoming, I would've been there to help you."

Shisui shrugged. "But you would've been angry with me too, just like how you were angry with me all day today before now."

Itachi gave a half shrug before responding "Perhaps. But I would've pushed everything before that aside after hearing what happened to you."

"What did I ever do to deserve such a good cousin like you, Itachi?" Shisui asked with a small smile.

"You're like a brother to me, Shisui, you should know that. We may fight with one another, but at the end of the day, you and I are still family, and family sticks together through thick and thin." Itachi stated.

"So you aren't mad at me anymore? Even though I treated you like trash?"

"Why should I be mad at you when you learned a valuable lesson? I just hope you'll be more careful going forward. Deal?"

Shisui chuckled nervously. "About that. There's actually a party I was planning to attend on New Year's Eve."

"Shisui," Itachi protested, "haven't you learned your lesson already?"

"Boys!" Megumi called up the stairs. "Are you almost done up there? There's presents under the Christmas tree for both of you, remember!"

"Coming, ma!" Shisui called and rose from his chair. "That was a month ago, Itachi! And I did learn my lesson! I promise!"

"I wouldn't be so sure." Itachi rose to a stand and followed Shisui out the door. "I'm not sure if you're noticed this, but every party you attend entails mindless drinking, which you always seem to succumb to with very little persuasion."

"And I told you that I've learned my lesson, Itachi!" Shisui whispered as they descended down the stairs to reunite with the rest of the family. "While there will be alcohol present, I promise you that I've learned my lesson from last time and will drink with moderation."

"I don't know, Shisui…"

Shisui brought a gentle hand to rest on his cousin's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Itachi; it'll be fine! I promise!"

Itachi opened his mouth to further dissuade them, but by then, they had reached the living room where everyone had gathered around the Christmas Tree, sorting out which presents were for whom.

"There you are, boys!" Kagami greeted them. "Just in time! Sit down, so we can get started!"

Mikoto leaned in close to Megumi and whispered "I think Kagami's more excited than the kids are, wouldn't you agree?"
Megumi shook her head and smiled fondly. "My husband's always had the heart of a child."

"What are you two talking about?" Kagami asked before turning his head back to the sea of presents lying before them. "You know what, never mind, let's just get on with it – youngest goes first?" He asked.

As per tradition, the family would take turns unwrapping one present at a time, starting with the youngest – Sasuke, followed by Itachi, Shisui, and so on until it was again, Sasuke's turn to unwrap another present. The cycle continued until everyone unwrapped all of their presents; at which point, they would pose for a family picture, and then spend the rest of the night sitting around chatting or indulging in their gifts.

Itachi watched as Sasuke quickly stripped a large box of its shiny blue gift wrap to reveal the expensive headphones he had been drooling and obsessing over the past several months. "But everybody at school has them!" He would always whine to seemingly deaf ears.

"Yes! Finally!" Sasuke cheered and went to work breaking them free of their confines so that he could try them out.

"Sasuke, Sasuke dear, why don't you wait to open them until everyone has opened their other presents?" Mikoto reminded him, ignoring the scowl she received in return. "It's your turn, now Itachi."

Unlike Sasuke, who immediately went for the biggest present of them all, Itachi opted to open whichever present was closest to him, which, in this case, was a small rectangular present wrapped in bright red wrapping paper and adorned with a simple black bow on the top. "To: My not-so-little-cousin Itachi, From: Your always-awesome-cousin Shisui" The sticker tag read.

"I see you didn't waste any time opening the best one here, huh Itachi?" Shisui commented.

Itachi smiled slightly and carefully peeled away the wrapping paper by the taped seams to reveal a framed picture of Shisui and himself when they were younger. In the picture stood a soaked four year old Itachi with puffy red eyes, swollen from crying, and choppy bangs sticking to his face while a seven year old Shisui, wearing a dry shirt and soaked shorts that stuck to his legs, attempted to force down his laughter.

Although Itachi remembered that day as if it were yesterday, he didn't remember his aunt taking his picture afterwards.

"Shisui, I'm scared." Itachi remembered telling his cousin as they stood at the foot of a creek in the woods behind Shisui's house.

"It's just water, Itachi, it's not like you're gonna drown or anything." Shisui said.

Itachi shook his head. "It's not that…what if I slip on one of the rocks?"

"You won't slip! It's easy! Look!" Shisui said and hopped from one rock to another until he had safely made it to the other side. "Look, I'll do it again!" He said and hopped from rock to rock until he had made it back to Itachi's side. "See? It's easy!"

"I don't think I can…"

Shisui put his hands on his hips and heaved a heavy sigh. "You're the one who wanted to explore the woods you know, and there's lots more to explore beyond this creek; you just have to cross it."
"I don't know…" Itachi mumbled.

Shisui knelt down on one knee and took Itachi's tiny hands into his own. "Don't worry about it, Itachi! It'll be fine! Trust me! You can do it!"

And with those few words of encouragement, Itachi found it within himself to trust his cousin and hop on the first rock. It was only when he heard Shisui cheering from behind him that he opened his eyes to find that he was still dry as he stood atop of the rock. "I did it, Shisui! I did it! Did you see me?"

"You bet I did! You only have a few more to go and you'll be over on the other side!" He encouraged him.

And with two more hops, Itachi found himself in the middle of the creak, halfway to the other side with Shisui continuing to cheer from behind. When he hopped onto the fifth rock however, he landed too close to the edge and lost his footing. Within seconds he had fallen backwards into the creek while the stream passed over him and Shisui's loud cheering morphed into muffled cries.

"Don't worry about it, Itachi! It'll be fine! Trust me! You can do it!" Shisui had said to him back then, and Itachi had trusted him only to find himself at least a foot under water at the bottom of a murky creek bed full of sharp rocks and mud.

"Well? Do you like it?" Shisui asked him. "I had to look through dozens of photo albums of us from when we were kids to find that picture, you know!"

The left corner of Itachi's mouth quirked upwards. "Yeah." He said. "Thank you."

Less than twenty minutes ago, Shisui had said the same thing to him; "Don't worry about it, Itachi; it'll be fine! I promise!" with regards to the party he was planning to attend next week.

"Shisui, it's your turn." Megumi prompted, but Shisui was way ahead of her and had already reached for a large rectangular box wrapped in "T.A.R.D.I.S. blue" wrapping paper as he referred to it.

Back when they were kids, Shisui's words always melted Itachi's worries away, even if whatever they were doing didn't go quite as expected, Itachi always felt a wave of comfort overcome him when Shisui promised that things would turn out okay.

"The Doctor Who series 1-7 boxed set?! Holy shi—zzballs that had to have cost you guys a fortune!" Shisui cried.

But no matter how Itachi looked at it, he couldn't bring himself to believe that everything would be as Shisui promised this time.

-8-8-8-

At 11:47pm on December 31st, Itachi was not ashamed to admit that he had spent the past two and a half hours reading his new Stephen King novel his parents gave him for Christmas in an effort to preoccupy himself from Shisui's party-going habits.

He wanted to believe that Shisui wouldn't make the same mistakes he claimed to have made before Thanksgiving break and even before then during homecoming, but a part of him couldn't force himself to believe that in a room surrounded by other drunken twenty-something year olds, Shisui would restrain himself and be sober enough to drive home safely, especially on a night such as New Year's Eve, which particularly worried Itachi.
"If you need me, don't hesitate to call." Itachi whispered to him as they embraced before his family returned home.

"Don't worry about it." Shisui whispered when they broke apart. "I'm telling you, I'll be fine."

"Itachi?" Mikoto said, appearing at Itachi's doorway.

Itachi jumped as he had gotten to a particularly suspenseful part of the story and was engrossed in his thoughts to hear her coming. "It's not midnight yet, is it?" He asked, bookmarking his page with his finger as he leaned over to check the time on his phone.

When he found that he still had ten minutes left before the start of the New Year, he glanced up at his mother for an explanation only to be confronted with tears streaming down her face.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?" He asked, laying his book on the nightstand, his bookmarked page immediately forgotten.

"Honey," she choked out, "that was Kagami. Shisui is dead."

Chapter End Notes

I spent an ungodly amount of time planning what these people were going to get each other for Christmas. Not even kidding, I made a CHART for this.

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
"Honey," she choked out, "that was Kagami. Shisui is dead."

-8-8-8-

MIKOTO'S VOICE WAS LIKE A SCALE, and every syllable that dropped from her tongue was a weight, and every word a package of weights. Of the words Itachi's brain processed, "honey" was the lightest weight; "Kagami" heavier than that. Some scales, however, can only handle so much weight. It would be illogical to weigh an elephant using a kitchen scale, as it would be crushed under the pressure.

Just like Itachi's heart when his mother uttered one of the heaviest words in the English language, "dead."

"What?" Itachi asked. Shock cours ed through his veins like a bloodhound hot on the trail of a rabbit. Shisui is dead.

Tears spilled over from the rims of his mother's eyes. She nodded, the only response she could muster to his question.

Shisui is dead. "No. He...he can't be." Itachi whispered. He was drunk.

"Kagami just called from the hospital after he and Megumi ID'd Shisui's body." She sniffled. "He's gone, honey."

Itachi shook his head. "No, he can't be." He told me not to worry. He promised that everything would be fine.

Mikoto forced a small smile and leaned against the doorframe to his bedroom.

Shisui is dead. He was definitely drunk. "How."

"I'm sorry?"

"How?" He reiterated. Alcohol poisoning. Fatal bar fight. Vehicular manslaughter. Driving under the influence. The list was endless and Itachi wanted to know which one was responsible for the death of his cousin.

Mikoto blinked a few times before realizing what Itachi meant by that. "He was killed in a car accident, sweetheart."

"Was he drunk?"

"I don't think so. " Mikoto shook her head and wiped the tears from her eyes with the heel of her palm. "What makes you think that?"

His eyes burned with the promise of tears, and his throat constricted with the threat of suffocation. "He said that he was going to a party." He spoke and took a deep breath to steady his breathing. "Tonight. He said that there would be alcohol and that he would be drinking."
"What's this about drinking?" Fugaku asked, suddenly appearing in the doorway of the bedroom.

Mikoto turned to face her husband. "Did Kagami say anything else?" She asked.

Fugaku averted his gaze and pursed his lips, a gesture that indicated that he was uncomfortable discussing the topic at hand. "He was involved in a two car collision on the highway and was pronounced dead at the scene." He said. "And what's this nonsense about drinking?"

This time, Mikoto averted her gaze. "Oh. Itachi had asked if Shisui was drinking. Apparently he was planning to go to some sort of party, I—"

"Party? What party?"

This time it was Itachi's turn to speak. "The other day he mentioned that he was planning to attend a party tonight where there would be alcoholic beverages."

Fugaku grunted. "Well if that's the case, he didn't make it very far."

"What do you mean?" Mikoto asked.

"When the first responders found Shisui's car, he was heading northbound and was killed by a car that veered off into the median and into the other lane, colliding head on with Shisui and killing him instantly. In other words, Shisui wasn't drunk at the time of his death."

-8-8-8-

In the time since the start of winter break, Deidara had probably started and finished at least a hundred art projects by now; twenty since the start of the new year. Itachi could only begin to imagine the sorts of crazy ideas the artist had embarked on in that span of time – drawings, paintings, sketches, miniature sculptures, ornaments carved with detailed pictures illuminated by tiny lights inside. The possibilities were endless, infinite.

Kisame was maybe swimming perhaps? But in the dead of winter? Seeing as he was an athlete, he probably found an indoor facility with an Olympic sized swimming pool where he practiced his form.

And that guy that Deidara had a thing for last year had probably posted at least a dozen pictures of himself making out with other men by now for his jealous girlfriend to see.

Meanwhile, Itachi had quarantined himself to the comfort of his bedroom, effectively exiling himself from the rest of his family.

Just then, a knock at the door came, rousing him from his thoughts.

"Sweetheart?" His mother's sweet voice asked from behind the door. "Are you in there?"

Scratch that—ineffectively exiling himself from the rest of his family. After a moment of internal debate, Itachi decided not to answer and pretend that he wasn't present, hoping that that would send his mother away and leave him alone with his thoughts.

Apparently, that method only worked with Sasuke when he was younger as Mikoto allowed herself to come in anyways. "Oh!" She exclaimed. "You are in here! Didn't you hear me ask if you were or not?"

Itachi didn't move. Perhaps if he stayed completely still, she would get the message then.
"You didn't come down for breakfast." She said, taking a seat on the edge of his bed. "I made zucchini frittatas. I made Sasuke leave some for you in case you wanted any later." She took a strand of her son's long hair and pushed it behind his ear and proceeded to stroke his long, soot colored locks.

Normally, Itachi found the gesture comforting, but at this very moment, he found it to be very annoying and lifted his hand to dislodge her fingers from his hair. "I'm not hungry."

He could practically hear his mother frowning. "At least come downstairs, honey. I know these past few weeks have been hard on you, but you're not alone. Your father and brother are downstairs if you need them, and if you want, I'll always be willing to lend you a listening ear." She said. When Itachi didn't grace her with a response, she continued. "Will you please come downstairs? Spring semester starts in a couple of weeks, and we've barely seen you since Christmas."

"Fine." Itachi murmured and pushed himself up and out of his bed using first his forearms, and then his hands. If it'll keep you from pestering me about this any longer...

"That's the spirit!" Mikoto praised and engulfed him in a tight embrace.

Fugaku Uchiha commonly sat in the kitchen when he wasn't working and was present when Itachi appeared in the doorway in search of his mother's leftover frittata. "I was wondering when you would come down." He said, taking a sip of his coffee. "Your mother saved you some breakfast from this morning."

"I know." Itachi answered. There was no sign of frittata on the countertop which meant that his mother had placed it in the fridge for later.

Fugaku closed his eyes and nodded. "Right. She probably told you that when she was upstairs." He muttered to himself.

As he thought, the dish sat on the top shelf and was covered in saran wrap. Itachi carefully pulled it out and closed the refrigerator door with his elbow.

"School's starting back up soon." Fugaku said. "Are you prepared for the second semester?"

"I've already cleaned out all of my folders, ordered my books, and downloaded a copy of my class schedule." He replied.

"Good." He imagined his father nodding in approval as he skimmed over the morning paper. "You've always been physically well-prepared for things like this, but my concern is if you're emotionally prepared for the challenges of returning back to school."

Itachi froze and pursed his lips. He remained silent for a few moments before pressing the "START" button on the microwave and sighed. "Yes, dad. I'm prepared."

"You know they sent out an e-mail, right?"

*How long did it take for a university to publically announce the death of a student?* Itachi remembered wondering a few days after the evening of the homecoming dance. It took a couple of weeks, Itachi learned. The school would publically announce the death of a student with the consent of the family, which could take anywhere from a few days to a month, or never if the family wanted. In Shisui's case, it took a little over a week for him to receive an e-mail message over his phone one afternoon stating the university's remorse following the death of a fellow student, Shisui Uchiha, who died in a car accident late on New Year's Eve. "I saw it."
"Will you be able to handle the entire school knowing about it and potentially asking you questions about what happened to him?"

"By then, it will have been over a month since Shisui's passing. I'm sure they'll forget by then. Most people probably don't even know that we're related."

"Your professors might. Or that roommate of yours."

"Then I'll tell them the truth."

"The truth being…?" Fugaku prodded, glancing at him from over the edge of his reading glasses.

Itachi pushed the button to open the microwave and grabbed his breakfast. "That he died in a car accident." He answered breezily.

Just then, Sasuke appeared at the doorway and took a step back when he saw Itachi standing by the counter. "I see you decided to rejoin the realm of the living."

Slamming the drawer that contained the silverware in it, Itachi stalked past his father and brother, his frittata long forgotten.

"Is everything okay, sweetheart?" Mikoto asked him on the stairs. She was holding a basket of laundry in her hands.

"I'm going out." Itachi muttered through gritted teeth.

"Where?" She asked, turning around as he passed her. "Did something happen?"

But Itachi didn't answer her and kept walking, intent on getting in his car and driving away from here. Away from his family, away from his problems, and away from everything.

'I'm sorry!' Sasuke's text message read. Itachi sighed and put it away when he heard the door before him being unlocked from inside to reveal a familiar face.

-8-8-8-

"I can't believe that you actually showed up, yeah!" Deidara grinned when he opened the door. "I didn't think you were going to even consider it! Come in!" He said, gesturing for his roommate to follow him inside.

"Are you sure your cousin's alright with inviting me over? I know it's short notice and I don't want to intrude." Itachi mumbled, burrowing his hands in the pockets of his jacket in an effort to warm them up.

Deidara dismissed his comment with a wave of his hand and replied "Nah, Kurotsuchi loves it when I bring friends over. It lets her know that I lead a healthy social life."

Itachi smiled.

"Plus, she'll probably be too busy with Akatsuchi the whole time."

"Who's Akatsuchi?" Itachi asked.

"Her boyfriend."

If Itachi didn't feel intrusive on the drive here, he certainly felt intrusive now. "Deidara, if I'm
intruding, don't hesitate to ask me to leave." Itachi said.

"You're?" A feminine voice asked from a doorway down the hall. "But you just got here!"

*So this is the cousin Deidara speaks so fondly of.* Itachi thought. Kurotsuchi was tall and slim with large brown eyes and short black hair that cupped her jaw. Behind her, appeared the man Itachi assumed to be Akatsuchi, who was at least three times Kurotsuchi's size and could act as one of those oversized beanbags if he wanted to. Everything was huge from his thighs to his feet, to his forearms to his hands. The only feature that wasn't proportioned to the rest of his body were his eyes, which were accented by his large nose.

"Akatsuchi, this is Dei's roommate..." Kurotsuchi started and snapped her fingers in an effort to remember his name.

"Itachi."

"Yes!" She exclaimed, pointing her finger in the air in a genuine eureka moment. "This is Dei's roommate, Itachi."

Akatsuki raised his hand. "Hi." He said.

"Nice to meet the both of you." Itachi said, returning the gesture with a small wave of his own.

"It must be hard living with Dei, isn't it? It's sort of become my second full-time job if you know what I mean!"

"Oh shut up Kurotsuchi!" Deidara playfully snapped. "You're embarrassing me!"

Kurotsuchi offered Deidara a slanted smile. "Whatever, DeiDei."

Deidara groaned and gestured to the staircase behind him. "Wanna go somewhere more private?"

He asked.

More private? To do what? "Sure. If that's okay."

"Did you hear that, Akatsuchi? He asked if it was okay to go upstairs! He is such a gentlemen! Deidara, you are lucky to have this young man as a roommate!" Kurotsuchi gushed, holding onto Akatsuchi's thick bicep. "Our home is your home! Don't hesitate to make yourself comfy and don't do anything I wouldn't do up there, you hear me?"

By then, Deidara was already halfway up the stairs. "Loud and clear, cuz." Deidara answered back. "Cousins are just as embarrassing as parents are sometimes!" He laughed.

Itachi only just realized that he had only once heard Deidara mention anything about his parents, and that was on the day they moved in to their shared dorm room. Every other time, it was his cousin he mentioned. "Deidara?"

"Yeah?"

"If you don't mind me asking, do you live here or with your parents?"

Deidara paused at the top of the stairs, leading Itachi to think he had said something wrong and nodded in the direction of the door on his right. "I don't mind at all, but it's kinda a long story, yeah. I'll tell you inside."

"If it's something that you're uncomfortable with, you don't have to tell me." Itachi said once
Deidara shook his head and opened the door. "It's fine."

The first thing Itachi registered about Deidara's room was that there was little to no visible carpet under the blanket of clothing. Upon closer examination, there were pens, notebooks, sketchbooks, and books of all shapes, sizes and genres scattered among the discarded clothing.

"Sorry about the mess, yeah. I didn't really have time to clean up before you got here." Deidara said.

"How do you even manage to move around without stepping on something?" He asked, looking for some sort of foothold.

"Tread carefully." Deidara said and skillfully tiptoed from the door to the bed where he sat down with such force that his legs flew upwards from the impact. "Don't be shy, yeah. If you step on something, you step on something. No big deal."

When they were young, Sasuke's favorite game was one where he and Itachi would hop from pillow to pillow scattered around the living room, the goal being not to fall into the "lava" beneath them and brought a small smile to Itachi's face as he engaged in a more intricate form of the game almost a decade later.

"The reason I don't live with my parents is because they kicked me out last year when I came out that I was gay, yeah." Deidara said in response to Itachi's earlier question.

Itachi, who had just made it to where Deidara was sitting on the bed, looked at him with wide eyes, unsure of what to say or do in the face of such a heavy admission. In the end, "Why?" was the only question he could think to ask as he felt around for the top of the bed, unable to take his eyes away from Deidara.

"Why did they kick me out? Or why did I tell them?" Deidara asked. When Itachi faltered for an answer, he smiled and bowed his head. "That's okay they kinda go hand in hand, yeah." He said. "Well, long short, I was tired of the fact that I was hiding who I really was from them and didn't want to live like that any longer. I knew my parents were sorta homophobic, and for that reason, I kept it a secret once I realized that I was gay but after a while I thought 'They're my parents; they'll still love me whether I'm straight, gay, bi, trans, right, yeah?" He sighed. "Yeah, well, they freaked out. My mom started crying and my dad started yelling 'this is not how we raised you!' and told me that I had a day to pack my bags and leave, yeah." He said with a bitter smile.

That was probably how his own parents would react if Itachi told them something like that but to kick out their underage child on that basis seemed completely irrational and unnecessary.

Deidara took a deep breath and continued. "I was furious with them, but also upset at the same time and locked myself away in my room for the rest of the night thinking that tomorrow morning, things would be back to the way they used to be and we'd all pretend that nothing ever happened, yeah."

His verbal tic was more pronounced, Itachi noticed, a sign that Deidara was uncomfortable talking about the matter but Itachi didn't say anything and simply listened to him continue.

"But they were adamant like, 'This is not the way we raised you so if you want to pursue a sexually deviant lifestyle, do it under somebody else's roof, not mine!' he yelled, and I told him 'fine! I'll leave!' and he was like 'good luck finding somebody who will take you in!' and I was like I'm going to move in with Kurotsuchi!" yeah. Kurotsuchi was the only person I could think to call because she knew that I was gay and she was okay with it, yeah. She had just landed her dream job and wasn't
very thrilled when I called to tell her that I wanted to move in with her because her house was small and she wasn't making very much money yet, but when she heard the reason why I wanted to move in, she welcomed me with open arms, yeah."

"Deidara, I'm so sorry you had to go through all of that." Itachi said, suddenly feeling ashamed that he had fled from his parent's house not too long ago because they were trying his patience and pushing an issue that he wasn't ready, nor willing, to talk about just yet. His problems were petty in comparison to the things that Deidara had been through. "I didn't know that you've had to endure so much."

"Don't be, yeah. I'm much happier living with her than I was when I was living under my parent's roof and I'm finally free to be able to express who I am now." He smiled, but Itachi could tell that the subject still pained Deidara to think about as a shadow came over his features.

"Are you ready for the upcoming semester?" Itachi asked, quickly changing the subject to save them from several minutes of awkward silence.

Deidara nodded. "I think so, yeah. Have any of the professors posted what books we need for our classes yet?"

"Deidara," Itachi said, "that information has been posted for almost a month now."

"Really?!" Deidara shrieked and reached underneath his bed for where his Mac was plugged in. "Shit!"

Suddenly, Itachi was very grateful for how had Deidara worked to keep their dorm room as clean as it was. Granted, Deidara's side was messy and often cluttered with books and art supplies, but after seeing his bedroom, Itachi vowed to never complain aloud about his mess ever again after today.

"Did you look at your books already?" Deidara asked, frantically searching for the school store tab on the university website.

Itachi pointed it out to him in the upper right hand corner. "Yeah. I ordered them a couple of weeks ago."

"Shit! Why didn't you text me, yeah?"

*Because I was busy attending my cousin's funeral maybe?* "I thought you would've checked." Itachi answered.

Deidara groaned. "I forget how to even do it, how do I know which books I need?"

Itachi sighed and leaned over so that he could instruct Deidara on what to do. "First, you need to know what classes you're taking; it's best to pull up your class schedule so you know what the name of the class is and what section you're scheduled to take."

Deidara complied and navigated to the page where one found their class schedule for the upcoming semester. "It says that I need to confirm my attendance before I can view/print my schedule, yeah."

"You didn't do that yet?" Itachi asked him, stunned by how unprepared Deidara was when the spring semester started in a little over a week. "You should've been sent an e-mail telling you to do so."

"Really? How can they expect us to check our school e-mail when school isn't even in session,
yeah!" He protested.

Because mature adults are expected to check e-mails, even over holiday breaks. "Never mind, just click the drop-down arrow under 'courses.' There should be a link that says 'confirm attendance.'" He instructed, but Deidara wasn't paying attention and was instead thumbing through the various e-mails he had neglected to check since the start of the holiday break.

"When did they send that, yeah?"

"The e-mail is just a reminder; you actually confirm your attendance online." Itachi pointed out.

"'Sad News?'" Deidara read. "What the heck do they mean by that? Did the university burn to the ground or something over Christmas break, yeah? If so, the e-mail should say 'hallelujah' instead!"

Itachi drew back from the blonde, painfully aware of the content in the e-mail that Deidara was about to read.

"'We are deeply saddened to inform you that one of our very own students, Shisui Uchiha, a junior criminal justice student, has been killed in a tragic car accident on the night of December 31st? Plans regarding a memorial service are currently being discussed with Shisui's family and we will be sure to notify you of the date. The university encourages all of you to send your prayers and condolences to the Uchiha family during this painful time as we reflect upon the life he lived and the accomplishments he left behind during his time in this world'..." Deidara gasped and looked at Itachi who had hung his head in an attempt to block the piercing words that came from Deidara's mouth. "Oh my God, Itachi," he breathed, "I'm so sorry, yeah!" He said and quickly pulled Itachi in for a tight hug.

As if the lump in the back of Itachi's throat wasn't already making it difficult for him to breathe, Deidara's crushing hug was worsening it as Itachi pried his roommate off of him. "It's fine." He said, plucking strands of Deidara's hair from his shoulder and bangs.

Deidara violently shook his head, sending his golden tresses in all different directions by doing so. "No, it's not yeah, you and Shisui were together all the time almost!" He cried and pulled Itachi into yet another tight hug. "I'm so sorry, yeah. Are you okay?"

Itachi pulled away from the hug and averted his eyes to the mess of clothes on the floor beneath his feet. "It's been hard, no doubt, and to be honest with you, all I want to do is forget about the whole thing and move on with my life as if nothing happened for the moment." Itachi sighed. "Unfortunately, my parents seem to think that I'm hurting myself by bottling up my feelings and won't leave me alone."

Deidara nodded. "Is that why you wanted to come over today?" He asked.

Itachi sighed. "I'd be lying if I said that it wasn't. I'm sorry." He said, and rose to a stand.

"Wait, where are you going, yeah?"

Itachi shrugged. "It was a mistake to come here to run away from my problems. I'm sorry."

He managed to tip toe halfway to the door when Deidara grabbed his wrist. "Don't be. Remember how I told you after Thanksgiving break that if you ever needed an escape from your home-life that you were more than welcome to come visit me? I meant what I said, yeah. I really did. And if you don't want to talk about Shisui's death, then we won't talk about it."

A small smile played at the corner of Itachi's lips in response to Deidara's words. "Thank you." He
"Any time, yeah." Deidara smiled. "And I mean it, Itachi, if you ever need an escape from your family, give me a call and we'll work something out, okay?"

Itachi nodded, too overwhelmed with so many emotions that he couldn't count them all on ten fingers to properly respond.

"Hey, I got an idea!" Deidara chirped. "Let's go watch a movie together, yeah!

This took Itachi aback a bit. "You want to go watch a movie?"

Deidara nodded enthusiastically. "You said you didn't want to talk about... 'stuff'... so I thought that watching a movie would take your mind off of things for a while, yeah!"

Itachi hardly ever watched movies unless it was with the company of his brother, he found himself slowly coming around to the idea and checked the time on his phone. "What time is it?" He asked, justifying his delayed response to Deidara's question. On the lock screen, he noticed that he had received two missed calls from home, and a text from his brother and mother. "Hold on a second." Itachi said and held up a finger so he could check his messages in case it was anything important. The last thing he wanted was to be informed that another family member died.

"im sorry! i didn't mean it i swear!" Sasuke's text read.

"Did you get your brother's text saying that he was sorry for what he said to you this morning?"
His mother's text read. "Be safe out there and let me know if you'll be home in time for dinner this evening. Love, mom xoxo."

"Is everything alright, yeah?" Deidara asked.

"Yeah." Itachi nodded and quickly stuffed his phone back into the pocket of his jeans. "So, are there any good movies playing?"

Deidara offered him a playful smile. "I'll guess we'll find out, won't we?" He asked and in a matter of minutes, the pair was out the door and traveling to the local movie theatre in Deidara's electric blue car, school books forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
Don't Kiss, Don't Tell

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

WHY WAS IT THAT PROFESSORS waited so late to post the required texts and course syllabus, Itachi often wondered to himself. The past thirty or so days should've given them enough time to revise the course syllabus so that it matched the dates of the new semester and accommodated for spring holidays and closings such as Easter and spring break. How hard was that? The students should be the ones procrastinating, not the professors and because of that, Itachi found himself "hitting the books" as Shisui would say harder than he did during the previous semester.

He was currently absorbed in next week's management 204 course text when a soft spoken voice reached his ears. "Are you by chance related to Shisui Uchiha?"

Itachi glanced up at the person addressing him and frowned. "Yes." He answered and went back to reading his text.

"Brother?" The red haired engineering major asked him.

"Cousin." Itachi supplied.

Sasori nodded. "I see. Sorry to hear about what happened. What a tragedy."

Itachi nodded but did not provide a verbal response. He knew that his behavior could be construed as being rude, but he honestly didn't care for what Sasori had to say. He hurt Deidara in ways that were uncouth and on those grounds, Itachi had no desire to associate with him.

Sasori continued to stand by the edge of the table that Itachi was occupying and took a sip of the coffee he held in his hands before speaking again "You and Deidara still roommates?"


"How's he doing?"

"Fine." Itachi answered, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

Sasori moved to sit down in the chair across from him. "That's good to know." He said and sat his coffee cup on the table. "Listen, about homecoming. I don't know what Deidara told you, but it wasn't like that, I—"

Itachi held a hand up to silence him. "I'm sorry, but I don't care what actually happened at homecoming. All I know is that you led Deidara on just to make your girlfriend jealous—"

"That's not true! Sakura and I broke up like a month before that! We weren't together! We—"

"Save it." Itachi said and rose to a stand. "What happened happened and cannot be undone. And I don't know why you're trying to explain this to me three months after the fact. If this was something you knew you would regret, then maybe you should've thought that before you agreed to be Deidara's date." He said and stalked off in the direction of the exit. His class didn't start for another twenty eight minutes but at least he could study in the solitude of an empty classroom rather than a crowded cafeteria where he was liable to run into people he'd rather not talk to.
"How was class this morning?" He asked Deidara at lunch.

Deidara released a heavy sigh and threw his hair back over his shoulders as he sat down at their usual table. "BOR-ING!" He groaned. "I want to learn chemistry, yeah! I want to blow things up!"

Itachi smiled slightly and pushed around the lettuce in his salad bowl to mix it all up. "I'm sure you'll be able to take it eventually—"

"But I wanna take it now, yeah!" Deidara whined. "How was your class?"

"Boring." Itachi answered.

Deidara laughed. "I'd rather take general botany than an accounting class any day, yeah!"

"It's not that bad." Itachi explained. "It's just a bunch of numbers and figures. That's all. If you know what you're doing, it's really quite easy—"

"I don't want to hear it!" Deidara said and clamped his hands over his ears.

"It's really not that bad—"

"Don't wanna hear it!"

"Fine!" Itachi said in surrender and pierced a couple of lettuce leaves with his plastic fork. "I won't talk about it anymore."

"Good." Deidara said and lowered his hands from his ears, all while suspiciously eyeing his lunch companion should he decide to continue. When he deemed that Itachi had dropped the subject, he picked up his slice of cheese pizza and took a bite out of it. "By da way," he said with a mouth full of cheese, "I shaw Shashori shish morning on my way to" he swallowed "biology yeah."

"Really?" Itachi asked without making eye contact. Deidara nodded and took another bite of his pizza. "Did he say anything to you?"

Deidara shook his head. "No." He said and swallowed. "Why?"

"I saw him this morning too." Itachi said with a shrug.

Deidara's eyes lit up a little. "Really? Did he say anything to you?" He asked.

"He said that he was sorry to hear what happened to Shisui."

"Does he know Shisui?"

Unlike his ill-mannered roommate, Itachi took a moment to finish chewing what was in his mouth before responding to Deidara's question. "You said he's a junior didn't you?" Deidara nodded. "That's what I thought. They were in the same grade level then. I don't know if they've ever interacted with each other before."

"Maybe they had a class together?" Deidara suggested.

"Maybe."

Deidara nodded and plucked a napkin from the dispenser situated in the middle of the table to wipe
off his greasy hands. "Did he say anything besides that, yeah?"

Itachi hoped that Deidara wouldn't ask him that and although he could easily lie and say that Sasori hadn't, he thought it better to be upfront with Deidara instead and tell him the truth. "He tried to apologize for what happened at homecoming."

"He did?" Deidara asked. "What'd he say, yeah?"

"I don't know."

And just like that, the excitement that was previously giving color to Deidara's cheeks and illuminating his sky blue irises, it began to drain. "What do you mean you don't know, yeah? I thought you said—"

"I didn't want to hear it because the damage has already been done. There's nothing he can say or do to remedy the fact that he led you on in order to make his girlfriend jealous, Deidara."

"But if he apologized—"

Itachi sighed. "Don't be too naïve, Deidara. For all you know, he might have an ulterior motive like he did the last time."

"But—"

"I'm saying this because I don't want to see you get hurt again. What if he's only apologizing so that he can lead you on again to make his girlfriend or some other girl jealous? Then what?"

A dark cloud overtook Deidara's usually sunny disposition as he lowered his head. "I guess you're right, yeah."

Itachi extended his arm to let his hand rest on Deidara's shoulder. It wasn't his intention to upset the blonde, but he felt that he deserved to hear it nonetheless. "You'll find somebody better than him. You just have to wait for the right person to come along." He smiled.

Deidara lifted his head to reveal a small smile of his own. "Thanks, yeah."

"Am I interrupting something?" Kisame asked, suddenly appearing a few feet away from their table.

Itachi quickly retracted his hand from his roommate's shoulder and coolly responded "No, not at all."

"Mind if I sit?" He asked.

"I don't mind." Itachi replied.

Kisame glanced around the crowded room, most likely in search of an empty seat. "Where's an empty seat...?" He said to himself.

"You can have my seat." Deidara offered. He tossed his used napkins onto his empty paper plate and folded it in on itself so that it could be thrown away before rising to his feet.

"Where will you sit?" Kisame asked. "I can find another one, it's no big deal—"

Deidara shook his head. "I was just leaving."
"Why so soon? The party's just getting started!"

Itachi shook his head. He hardly considered a conversation about tutoring to be equivalent to the fun of party, especially the type of parties that an upperclassmen like Kisame likely attended.

"I forgot that I needed to print something out for my English class this afternoon, yeah!" Deidara hurriedly explained whilst slinging his back pack over his shoulder. "See you later, Itachi!"

Itachi raised a hand. "See you later."

"Does he have a class soon?" Kisame asked as he took a seat at the table.

"I don't think so." Itachi responded. "I think his class doesn't' start for a few more hours at least."

"How long does it take that kid to print something out?"

"Not long. He said he likes to give himself extra time because he knows he'll get distracted on art websites and social media." Itachi shrugged.

"He's something else." Kisame mused before taking on a more serious air. "Hey, I heard what happened to your boyfriend and I just wanted to let you know that I'm really sorry."

Itachi blinked. "Excuse me, my what?"

"Your boyfriend. Shisui." Kisame elaborated. "The one that just died in a car accident over winter break. I meant to say something to you sooner, but it kept slipping my mind…" He said, his voice trailing off.

"You mean my cousin?"

"What?"

"My cousin." Itachi said. "Shisui's my cousin, not my boyfriend."

Kisame slumped back into his chair and chuckled nervously. "Wow, that's awkward. I thought he was your boyfriend. That would explain why you two look alike and share the same last name, I guess."

"Why would you think that Shisui's my boyfriend?" Itachi asked. It should've been clear as day to anyone who passed them by when they ate lunch together or ran into each other on campus that they looked alike. And if they read the e-mail, which, Kisame would've had to have done in order to know what something happened to Shisui, should've noted that in addition to their matching appearances, they also shared the same last name.

Kisame shrugged and folded into himself in such a way that he appeared to have an extra set of chins. "I don't know! I always see you guys together and just kinda though that you were together! I never thought that you two were related!" He cried. "Man that sucks."

"It's fine." Itachi dismissed.

"Well how are you holding up?" Kisame asked, leaning forward. "I know it's been a month, but you guys seemed really close." He chuckled again now that he knew the two were close not because they shared a romantic bond, but a familial one. "Sorry." He said by way of apology for his inappropriate laughter.

"It's fine." Itachi sighed. "It's been hard, no doubt, especially not seeing him around campus as
often as I used to, but I'm trying to convince myself that he's just busy."

"You're in denial." Kisame said matter-of-factly.

"Perhaps." He said. "Right now, I'm just trying to concentrate on my studies instead of looking into it too much."

"Makes sense." Kisame agreed. "I wouldn't have expected anything less from a robot like you." He joked, referring back to a conversation they had the previous semester concerning Itachi's work ethic. "Well, I'm sorry to hear about your cousin, Itachi." Kisame winked and rose to his feet. "I just came over here to offer my condolences. A couple of buddies from the team are waiting for me over there and probably wondering where I got lost to, so I should get back to them before they leave!"

"Okay."

"Keep your head up, okay? You may not be able to see it now, but there's always a silver lining!" Kisame called from over his shoulder.

Itachi smiled at his retreating back and whispered a quiet "thanks."

-8-8-8-

The beginning of the semester was always the best time to find a quiet spot in the library to study as none of the professors (or at least, none of the professors that Itachi knew of) were assigning much work this early in the term. His chances of being immersed in complete silence were even greater as it was Valentine's Day and most students were more concerned with taking their dates out to dinner and a movie rather than spending the day studying in the library.

Even the student librarian looked as though she wanted to be somewhere other than there, he noticed.

"I can't believe I have to spend the day in the library when I should be spending it with my girlfriend, man!" Itachi heard someone saying as he was getting ready to leave. "I mean, who gives fucking homework over Valentine's Day weekend?"

"I don't know dude." Another student was saying.

*Maybe you should've completed your assignments ahead of time instead of waiting until the last minute.* Itachi thought bitterly.

From around the corner, two muscular students, athletes maybe, appeared. One of them had a square jaw, golden irises and short ginger hair pulled back into a pony tail with bangs that framed his face whereas the other had short dark brown hair and was wearing hipster glasses.

Itachi attempted to ignore them and walk past when the orange haired one side-stepped in front of him to block his path.

"Excuse me." Itachi muttered.

"Hey, don't I know you from somewhere?" He asked.

Itachi shook his head. He vaguely remembered seeing these two men before, but didn't care to remember where. He probably met them at one of the many campus events that Deidara talked him into attending last semester. "But I don't wanna go by myself, yeah!" Deidara would whine and
Itachi would push his homework to the side only if it meant shutting him up.

"Oh yeah, that party!" The brunette answered.

The ginger haired man blinked a few times before his eyes lit up in realization. "Yeah, yeah, yeah! The homecoming party! You were with a blonde chick! Remember? You came to pick up Shisui?"

That's right. Itachi remembered now. He'd met these party-obsessed drunken wanabees on the night of the homecoming dance when he went to pick up Shisui. He sighed as that was not an experience he wanted to relieve. Especially now.

"Man, I am so sorry to hear about what happened to Shisui." The ginger said. What was his name again?

"Yeah, me too, man, me too." The brunette added, nodding his head.

"How did you guys know each other? Are you related?" The ginger asked.

"He's my cousin."

The ginger nodded at the brunette with an obnoxious smirk adorning his features. "See man, I told you so!"

"Shut up Fu!" The brunette said and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Fuck! That fucking hurt, Torune! God, man!"

Fu and Torune, that's what their names were. Itachi remembered now.

"But yeah, that's terrible man, we're really sorry." Fu reiterated. "What happened to him? Did he die in a car accident?"

"Yeah." Itachi answered.

"Was he drunk?" Torune asked. "Shisui was never really good at holding down his liquor." He mused.

Itachi clenched his hands in annoyance. "He wasn't drunk." He growled.

"Wait, he wasn't? Then how'd he get into a car accident? He was going to a party, wasn't he? It was like, New Year's Eve or something, wasn't it? Wasn't it, Torune?" Fu asked his comrade.

"Not all car accidents are related to driving under the influence." Itachi said in a low voice and walked in the direction of the exit. Behind him, Fu and Torune were beckoning him to come back and explained what exactly happened to Shisui, but he didn't so much as spare a second glance. The night of homecoming was in the past and so was Shisui's car accident. And Itachi preferred to leave them that way.

At least when he returned back to his dorm room, he could collapse on the bed and read a book or something to help clear his mind of the events that had transpired over the past few weeks. "Will you be able to handle the entire school knowing about it and potentially asking you questions about what happened to him?" He remembered his father asking him a few weeks before the start of the second semester.

"By then, it will have been over a month since Shisui's passing. I'm sure they'll forget by then. Most people probably don't even know that we're related." Was his response.
Deidara was the first of his peers to notice when Itachi instructed him to check his e-mail for a confirmation code from the university book store and happened upon it by coincidence. Itachi knew that his own roommate would learn of the news of Shisui's death fairly quickly. Sure, he was taken aback when he found out that Deidara hardly ever checked his school e-mail account, but nonetheless, Deidara was the first to outwardly say anything about it to him.

The second was Kisame, who mistakenly thought that Shisui was Itachi's boyfriend but offered his condolences the first week of school.

It had been a month and a half since Shisui's death and by then Itachi was starting to believe he was right when he told his father that nobody would know that they were related and that most people would forget by then. He didn't count on running into Shisui's old "friends" and for reasons he couldn't quite explain, their ignorant comments were eating away at him.

"Keep your head up, okay?" He remembered Kisame saying to him the first week of the spring semester when he reached his dorm room and pushed the key into the lock. And Kisame was right. Fu and Torune's comments wouldn't matter to him twenty or thirty years down the road. And for the time being, he just needed to take out some time for himself and relax, even if that meant spending the rest of the afternoon in bed reading a book until it was time to eat dinner.

It did not include walking into a dim lit room littered with scattered rose petals, though.

"What is this?" Itachi asked.

Deidara, who had been drawing on top of his bed, looked up in surprise before glancing around the room. "Shit!" He swore and quickly scrambled to his feet.

"Are you expecting somebody? Because if so, I can leave." Itachi said, gesturing to the hallway behind him.

"No, no, no! It's not what you think, yeah! I swear! It's not what you think!"

If it wasn't for the fact that Fu and Torune were probably studying in the library right now, Itachi would've taken two steps backwards and headed back to the normalcy that was the school library. But because he didn't feel like explaining the specifics behind his cousin's death to a pair of morons like Fu and Torune, he closed the door behind him and set down his bag by the desk.

"You've got thirty seconds to explain." Itachi said.

"Okay!" Deidara said and took a breath. "So for the people in the world who have a boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever, it's Valentine's Day, but for people like you and me who don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend to spend the day with, it's Single's Day!" He explained with a wide, albeit nervous smile.

Itachi wasn't buying it. "I don't understand…"

"It's Single's Day, yeah! It's the one day of the year that people without significant others celebrate not being tied down in a relationship and being free to do whatever they want so instead of spending all this money spoiling my non-existent boyfriend—"

"You spent all this money to spoil me instead?" Itachi asked. "I'm sorry, but I'm still confused, I'm not—"

"No, no, no, no! It's not like that! All of this is for me, yeah! I'm spoiling myself! I bought the rose petals for me and because they're artistic and I might use them for an art project later this month, and I even bought a box of chocolates to eat by myself but if you wanted some, I would
share them with you too because as far as I know, you're single too, and I wanted you to feel included, but I didn't mean to freak you out, yeah! I swear! And I'm sorry, yeah! I'm sorry!"

Itachi held up his hands and advanced towards his frantic roommate to calm him down. "It's okay, Deidara! I get it now. I think! It's fine!"

"Really, yeah?"

"Yes. Really. It's fine."

Deidara nodded slowly and reached behind him to produce a box of chocolates. "Do you like chocolates, yeah?"

Itachi thought about this for a moment before answering "What kind do you have?"

"Well as Forrest Gump once said 'Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get!'" Deidara quoted and patted the spot beside him on the high bed.

Although Itachi was content to grab a chocolate and retreat to his own bed, he had a feeling that he would be coming back for more and more chocolates after consuming the first one and a few moments later, found himself cautiously mounting his roommate's bed.

"What kind is your favorite, yeah?" Deidara asked, handing him the box.

"I actually like the ones with the cherry filling inside them." Itachi answered.

Deidara's face cringed in disgust. "Oh God, those are nasty, yeah!" He said and stuck his tongue out.

"Which ones are your favorites?" Itachi asked, and plucked a round, unsuspecting chocolate he assumed to contain cherry filling in it and bit halfway in.

"I like the ones with coconut in them yeah."

Itachi considered this for a moment and shrugged. "Coconut's not bad. Not my favorite, but not my least favorite."

"Really? Deidara asked in astonishment. "You're one of the first people I've met who actually like coconut flavored chocolates, yeah!"

"I don't know why everyone hates them so much. I think the crunchiness of the coconut mixes well with the smooth chocolatey exterior."

"Right? Spoken like a true chocolatier!"

For the next ten minutes or so, the two sat on Deidara's bed discussing which chocolates they liked, which ones they didn't and on a few occasions, lifted the box in an attempt to decipher which pictures pertained to which box and what "amaretto's" meant.

"According to my internet dictionary, 'amaretto is a type of sweet, almond-flavored liqueur.' Itachi said and put down his phone.

"Really? I would've never guessed, yeah!" Deidara said and offered him the half-finished box of chocolates.

Itachi shook his head. "No thanks. I've eaten way too many already. I'll be lucky to leave the
dentist with *only* one cavity after my next appointment!" He joked.

"Right!" Deidara laughed and placed the box of chocolates on his pillow. "Hey, you seemed kinda upset earlier when you walked in earlier. Was it because of the mess? If it was, I promise to have it picked up by the end of the night, I swear!"

"No, it's not that. I ran into some of Shisui's 'friends'" Itachi said, using air quotes, "at the library today."

"Which ones? Do I know them?"

"The ones we met at the party on homecoming." Itachi explained.

Deidara exhaled in realization and nodded in understanding. "I remember, yeah." He said.

Itachi pursed his lips and nodded. "Yeah, well, I ran into them earlier and they said some really ignorant things."

"Like what, yeah?"

"Like 'Shisui could never hold down his liquor' and whatnot as if Shisui was drunk when he got into the accident. They don't know the whole story. He *wasn't* drunk. What irritates me the most is that they don't seem to care that their 'friend' is dead. They think it's a joke. Like Shisui was less of a man for not being able to drink as much as the rest of them could without feeling the effects of the alcohol." He said and released a shaky sigh.

"They sound like total douchebags." Deidara commented. "A true friend wouldn't have acted like that. Did they at least say that they were sorry that it happened, yeah?"

"They did, but they didn't seem to mean it which upsets me the most." Itachi and glanced up at the ceiling. "My father warned me that this would happen. He asked if I was 'emotionally prepared' to deal with people asking me questions about Shisui's death and it's been a month and a half since it's happened. I thought that I'd be fine by now. I thought that nobody would remember it anymore."

Deidara extended his arm and wrapped it around his roommate's shoulder and brought him close in an act of comfort. "It's okay, yeah. They're just ignorant pricks who were never really Shisui's friends to begin with. It's sad, but the only thing that matters now is that he had a friend like you when he was still alive, yeah."

Itachi exhaled and turned to face Deidara with soft eyes. For the past month and a half since his cousin's passing, he'd been struggling with his loss and looking for a certain kind of comfort; comfort that he couldn't seem to find. While his mother constantly showered him with love and affection in the time since Shisui's death, Itachi found himself suffocating under all of the attention rather than being comforted by it. On the opposite end of the spectrum, his father acted as if nothing had happened and expected Itachi to feel the same way and move on with his life. And Sasuke, well, he wasn't sure how Sasuke was approaching Shisui's death, but his manner of comfort was slightly unorthodox to say the least.

But here in front of him, Deidara managed to unintentionally take his mind off of the things that were bothering him when he entered the room and brought it up once Itachi was feeling well enough to talk about what happened.

That was the kind of comfort he had been longing for and it touched him so deeply that he had to exert all of his willpower not to lose his composure completely and cry in front of Deidara like this.
He opened his mouth to say "thank you" but no sound escaped. Out of embarrassment, he pulled away and tried to compose himself before trying again when a set of lips pressed against his own in a delicate kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
ALTHOUGH ITACHI WASN'T VERY fond of romantic literature, he wasn't as ignorant to romantic terminology like melting into a kiss. But there was a difference between knowing it and feeling it and it wasn't until today what knew what melting in a kiss felt like.

The overhead lights in the room were still turned off as Itachi hadn't asked Deidara to turn them on when he returned to their room. On the edges of his vision there were tiny red blurs scattered all around but neither of those things were important. In a matter of seconds, warm lips had attached to his own dry ones and tasted of caramel – soft and sweet.

As delectable as caramel tastes, however, some ill-prepared caramels can leave behind a bitter aftertaste in one's mouth.

"I'm sorry that you lost such a great friend, yeah." Deidara whispered when he pulled away and glanced up to meet Itachi's perplexed look. "Too soon, yeah? I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, not when you were in such a vulnerable state yeah."

Though the kiss went no further than his lips, they reeked of chocolate and as a result, Itachi only tasted chocolate. The very same chocolate the coated the inside of his mouth like sludge clings to a sink drain. "I'm not…” Itachi started. "I'm not homosexual, Deidara."

Deidara's eyes widened. "You're not?"

Itachi shook his head.

"But I was so sure that you were yeah!"

"Yeah, you were certain that Sasori was too." The words escaped Itachi's mouth faster than he could bite them back and by the time they had left, there was no taking them back.

"I admit it, I didn't really know Sasori very well, but—"

"Well it seems that you didn't know me very well either.” Itachi said, quickly hopping off the bed before Deidara could make any other unwanted advances towards him and went to collect his things. Fu and Torune may be aggravating, but at least they wouldn't try to kiss him when he expressed his innermost thoughts and feelings – things he wasn't necessarily comfortable sharing with his own family. "What made you think that I was homosexual?" He asked before picking up his messenger bag.

By now, Deidara's face had flushed with embarrassment and his ears were quickly turning a furious shade of red. "I just—I don't know! You had a boyfriend, didn't you? Wasn't Shisui your boyfriend, yeah?"

This again? "No! Why does everybody think that Shisui was my boyfriend?" Itachi demanded and ran a frustrated hand through his hair.

"Really, yeah? But you guys always used to have lunch together, yeah! And I saw the way that you two would look at each other—I saw the way your eyes lit up whenever you saw him!" Deidara protested. "Can you blame me? He told you that he loved you the night of the homecoming dance
and you said that you loved him back, yeah! Remember? I mean, yeah you guys broke up a few weeks later, but how can you honestly tell me that you weren't dating?"

At this, Itachi stood up from putting his shoes back on and replied. "For starters, Shisui was drunk when he said those things. Since when do you believe anything that an intoxicated person says?!"

"Some drunks are super honest, yeah!"

"And yes, I remember telling him that I loved him back. You know why? Because Shisui is my cousin, Deidara! You of all people should've known that!" Itachi seethed.

"You never told me that he was your cousin, yeah! How was I supposed to know?!" He cried, hopping off the bed as well.

"I'm sure I told you sometime within the past four months that I've been living with you and if you've ever seen Shisui and I together, you should've made the connection that we look alike." He let out a short chuckle. "You read the e-mail that was sent out, I know you did, because I was with you when you read it! 'Shisui Uchiha, a junior criminology student, has been killed in a tragic car accident on the night of December 31st.' If I was homosexual, don't you think it'd be a little odd that I'd be dating somebody who shares the same last name as I do?"

Deidara shrugged helplessly. "I didn't know, okay! I'm sorry, Itachi! I really am! I'm sorry! I didn't know, yeah! I mean it!"

But Itachi wasn't listening anymore. In one fluid movement, he swung his book bag over his shoulder, grabbed his keys, cell phone, and wallet from his desk and exited the room without another word, ignoring Deidara's pleas all the while.

-8-8-8-

It wasn't until 10:33pm that Itachi returned back to his room that night. He'd spent a record setting five hours in the library, leaving only once to find something to eat at a nearby restaurant. Upon making sure to sit in the most remote area he could find in order to elude Fu, Torune, Deidara, and any other person who felt the need to mess with his life even more if that was humanly possible. In that time, he completed every homework assignment he possibly could in all of his classes for the next three weeks and finished a paper that wasn't due for another month. His professor hadn't even explained the grading criteria for it yet or how to effectively utilize the necessary library resources to write it but he didn't care. He'd gladly redo it if it meant having something to do that would get him out of his room and away from his roommate.

But he couldn't keep this up for long. Eventually, he'd run out of assignments to complete and books to read and even he became bored with repetition which was bound to happen if he continued to complete assignments that hadn't even been discussed in class yet. Sure, he could get a part-time job, but that was taking things to the extremes. He needed something short-term that could distract him from the day's events and distance him from Deidara. If given the appropriate amount of time, he could come up with a solution that would do just that.

Never again would he be so foolish as to befriend someone of Deidara's sexual orientation.

Never again.

-8-8-8-

"Did you see the note I left on your desk, yeah?" Deidara asked late Monday night.
"Yeah." Itachi answered simply and gathered up his night clothes for bed.

There was a brief pause before Deidara's small voice permeated the silence. "What did you think of it?"

"I didn't read it."

"Why not?"

Itachi turned to face him. "Because there is nothing that you can say or do to change what happened yesterday, Deidara. You completely misunderstood the situation and made unwanted advances toward me that will be hard to put in the past."

"I'm sorry, yeah! I'm really, really, sorry, Itachi!" Deidara whined. "Can you just hear me out, yeah? Please?" He said, purposefully standing in Itachi's way.

Itachi set his clothes down on the bed with a sigh. "Fine."

Deidara interlocked his fingers together and took a deep breath before he spoke. "I've always had feelings for you, yeah. Ever since the first week of school."

And Itachi agreed to hear him out because?

"I mean, who could blame me? You're smart, studious, handsome, I mean, look at you!" He said and gestured to Itachi's current outfit which consisted of a blue V-neck sweater and casual khaki-colored slacks. It wasn't the smartest outfit he owned, but it was far from careless. "Who wouldn't fall in love with someone like you! You dress nicely and your hair is always so neat and tidy! I can barely drag myself up out of bed most mornings, much less take a shower before class but you do it every day! Even on the weekends you're up at the crack of dawn!" He said and quickly got back to his point when he noticed the overwhelmed look on Itachi's face. "Anyways, I've always had feelings for you, but I didn't want you to feel uncomfortable around me, yeah."

Too late for that.

"So I pushed my feelings aside. And after Sasori dumped me on homecoming, you were the one who comforted me, yeah. You told me not to blindly rush into love and wait until the time is right and at that moment, I fell for you. Hard, yeah. I wanted to kiss you so badly that day, yeah. And my feelings only intensified when I saw the way you dropped everything you were working on to pick up Shisui that night when he called you. And you were so calm the whole time! You were calm when I was a wreck, when Shisui called! Even at the party you were calm! And you kept it together when Shisui puked all over your shoes while I was screaming loud enough to wake up the whole building, yeah!"

Itachi remembered those shoes. They were one of his favorite pairs too and they were not cheap.

"And you were just so calm like you always are, yeah! Even when the shit hits the fan, you stay calm and that's what I love about you! When you said you were going to drop me off at our dorm before you drove Shisui back to his, I wanted to stay with you the entire night so that you wouldn't be alone, yeah but I wanted to give you guys some space. And after Thanksgiving break, when you told me that you family was getting on your nerves all weekend, I asked if you wanted to visit me over winter break because I wanted to see you be happy, yeah! I wanted to show you a good time, and not like that! Not like that! Like, I wanted to show you where I come from and see you smile for once! You hardly ever smile anymore, and I know that's partially my fault, but ever since your fight with Shisui after homecoming, I hardly ever saw you smile, Itachi! And believe me, after I
said that, I wanted to kick myself for being a dumbass like 'Idiot! What did you say that for!? Now he's definitely going to think that you're a freak!' like I wasn't thinking that day, yeah! But when you called me on winter break, I wanted to go outside and run laps around my house I was that happy, yeah!' Deidara enthused and sighed contentedly. "I saw you smiling at the movie theatre yeah. You were smiling at the screen as if you didn't have a care in the world, yeah. As if all of your problems had just melted away, like magic or something. And I smiled because you were smiling and because I was the one who brought the smile to your face. Sure, the movie was funny at times, but if it wasn't for me, you wouldn't have gone out to the movies in the first place and had such a good time. I don't even remember what the damn movie was about; I was too busy thinking about how I just wanted to hold your hand, yeah."

Itachi wasn't sure how he felt about all of this. When he first met Deidara, he instantly knew that Deidara was homosexual but didn't say anything about it for two reasons – one, he didn't believe in making snap-judgments about people based on their appearances, and two, what did it matter that his roommate was sexually attracted to men instead of women? Yeah, it would be awkward sharing a room with someone who would potentially find him attractive and make a move on him, but Deidara, like Itachi and everybody else in the world was a human being and deserved to be treated like such instead of being like whatever label other people gave him?

Despite this standpoint, Itachi had his concerns. Not a day went by that he didn't overanalyze Deidara's words and actions, trying to decipher if the blonde was insinuating something more or just being overly friendly. He had been so careful to keep his distance, but what was he supposed to do when Deidara was visibly upset? Just sit there and watch? That wasn't who Itachi Uchiha was or who Itachi wanted to be. He didn't care about their close proximity on Deidara's bed. The only thing he cared about was being a good roommate and supportive friend.

But it was clear to Itachi that he had slipped sometime after that night. He let his emotions get the better of him and agreed to things that he normally wouldn't have like going over to the blonde's house over winter break when his family wouldn't leave him alone about Shisui's death. And just yesterday when he sat on his bed on Valentine's Day for crying out loud! How stupid could he be? Sharing chocolates – chocolate, a known aphrodisiac – on his homosexual roommate's bed on Valentine's Day? In dim lighting and with rose petals scattered all around the room?

He'd grown complacent. Plain and simple. Itachi had grown complacent.

And he was experiencing the consequences of his actions.

"And yesterday – scratch that – ever since Shisui's death, you haven't been yourself. You've been withdrawn and I can't stand seeing you that way, yeah! And yesterday, you just seemed so broken…I wanted to do something. I wanted to take your mind off of everything. And when you opened up to me about how you felt, I – something happened, yeah, I don't really know how to explain it. I felt a spark go off between us, or at least, I thought I did, yeah, and I don't really know how to describe what happened next – my body moved on its own and it just happened, yeah, I swear!"

Itachi turned his head away and picked up his night clothes once more. "It didn't seem like an accident; it seemed intentional."

Behind him, Deidara was stuttering, searching for the right words to say in his defense. "I just – I didn't – I just – I don't know, yeah! I'm sorry! I misread the entire situation! I misread you, yeah! I thought that you were gay! It was an honest mistake!"

"How can you honestly say that kissing someone of the same gender without knowing that they definitely share the same beliefs as you do, Deidara? How? Explain that to me!" Itachi demanded.
"You say it was a mistake but given your track record, I have a hard time believing it."

"What do you mean 'based on my track record' yeah?" Deidara asked. "I asked Sasori out to homecoming and he said yes! He agreed to be my homecoming date and then dumped me for somebody else yeah!" Deidara said with watery eyes.

"I admit it, that was insensitive of him, but you're not free of blame, either Deidara. You asked out somebody you barely knew apart from one class to be your homecoming date! How can you place the blame entirely on Sasori when this whole thing wouldn't have happened if you had some common sense!"

"But—"

"And the same goes for my relationship with Shisui. If you would think before you act or speak instead of doing whatever feels good at the time, maybe you would've known that Shisui and I were related! Maybe instead of putting all of your energy into trying to make me feel better, you could've asked me what my relationship with Shisui was! Is that so hard, Deidara? All you had to do was ask! You could've asked me if I was seeing someone, you could have asked me how I knew Shisui, you could've asked me why Shisui and I were fighting, and you could've asked me if I was attracted to men or not!"

Deidara was crying at this point as he went to reply to Itachi's remarks. "First of all, I didn't ask you what your relationship with Shisui was after he died because you were still upset after his death, yeah! And I didn't ask about your love life because I didn't want you to freak you out, yeah!"

"Oh, and kissing me was the safer bet?"

"No! But I already told you that I wasn't thinking, yeah! And I don't ask you any personal questions because it's clear that you don't want to talk about your personal life yeah! You wouldn't have wanted to tell me if you were seeing somebody or not, you wouldn't have wanted to tell me why you and Shisui were fighting because you told me that you didn't want to talk about it yeah!"

"You're right." Itachi conceded. "If you had asked me if I was seeing someone, I probably would have been reluctant to tell you because I would've felt uncomfortable. And you're right. I didn't want to tell you why Shisui and I were fighting because you knew why we were fighting! You knew that I tried to reach out to him on several occasions and he didn't reciprocate! It was clear as day, Deidara but you were probably too busy daydreaming like you always do!" Itachi spat. "Oh, and if you had asked me if I was homosexual or not, I would've been uncomfortable, but I would've told you the truth in order to avoid something like this occurring!"

Deidara's face were as pink as his puffy eyes as he frowned in the face of Itachi's objections. With a heavy sigh, he clenched his hands into tight fists and said evenly. "I may have been wrong about Sasori, yeah. But I know I'm not wrong about you, yeah. You told me not to rush into love, and I didn't. I waited until I was certain that you were gay. Yeah, I was wrong about you and Shisui, but in all my time as your roommate, I've been looking for signs, yeah. You never pay any attention to girls, yeah. Never."

Itachi threw his hands up into the air and glared at the blonde. "Unlike you, Deidara, I didn't come here to make long-lasting relationships. I came here to further my education and get a degree so that I can get a well-paying job."

"That may be, but even the most studious of men's eyes stray when they see a pretty girl walk by. You don't even flinch; you just keep reading."
Itachi shook his head and grabbed his night clothes. Forget sleeping in his own bed. He would sleep in the lounge on one of the couches if it meant being away from Deidara and his ridiculous ideas of his.

"And I see the way you look into space when you talk about Kisame."

"What?" Itachi asked and whipped around so fast that his pony-tail fell over his left shoulder and over his chest. "What does Kisame have to do with anything?"

"You never look me in the eye when you talk about him, yeah. You always look at the ground, or at the table, or off into the distance but never at me, yeah. You don't know it, but there's a twinkle in your eye when you talk about how annoying he is or how he tried your patience when you were tutoring him and I don't blame you. He's hot as hell, what with those sculpted muscles and tanned skin and that white smile that could be used on a billboard advertising toothpaste, yeah. I get it, you like athletic types and I'm not an athlete. I understand, yeah."

"I don't know what gave you the idea that I was remotely interested in Kisame besides helping him get a good grade in our shared introduction to philosophy class last semester but you couldn't be more wrong! Kisame is just a guy I used to tutor. He's nothing more, and nothing less."

"Then why does he always wave to you at lunch, yeah?" Deidara asked and folded his arms.

"Because I helped him pass philosophy!" Itachi cried. "You are reading into this too much, you know that?"

"You know something? You put up this homophobic front and act like you're okay with gay people and anybody who's not straight like you think you are, but you said it yourself: gay people make you uncomfortable."

"I did not say that!"

"I know how to read between the lines, yeah. Contrary to what you think of me, I'm not an idiot, yeah."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" Itachi demanded, quickly losing the remaining strands of his patience.

"Kisame's gay and you're not threatened by him."

"What?! Kisame is not gay! Who told you that?!"

Deidara shrugged. "Nobody. I can just tell yeah."

Itachi's mind was going a million miles a minute as he tried to process everything leaving the blonde's disproportionately large mouth. "Really? You can tell?" He asked sarcastically.

His roommate nodded.

"Do you even know Kisame apart from what he looks like? Have you even sat down and had a conversation with him because when he sat down at the lunch table with us a few weeks ago, you got up pretty quickly because admit it; you were jealous that you weren't the center of my attention anymore."

Deidara's lip quivered as if he were about to cry some more, but he took a deep breath to stave it off. "You're right. I was jealous because since your fight with Shisui before Thanksgiving break, I
thought you were single and was planning to ask you out sometime, but wanted to wait until the right moment like you said, yeah. And then the star of the school swim team swoops in and all of a sudden, you're spending all of your time hanging out with him instead of me, so yeah, I was jealous! Especially knowing that he's gay and that he's hella attractive yeah!"

"I was spending all my time tutoring him! Tu-tor-ing him!" Itachi enunciated to make his point and sighed out of frustration. "You're wrong about Kisame. In fact, you're wrong about everything because you are too busy living in some sort of deluded fantasy to see the big picture, Deidara and I'm sick of it! I'm done!" Itachi yelled and angrily stalked to the door with his night clothes, cell phone, keys and wallet.

"Think what you want, Itachi, but I know I'm right about this. I'm right about Kisame, and I'm right about you, yeah. Just you wait."

He'd sleep in his car, he decided, and turned around to grab his blanket from the bed.

"Where are you going?"

"Somewhere other than here." Itachi answered and with his comforter in hand, forcefully slamming the door to leave Deidara, the part of him that had lost sight of his values, the evening of the homecoming dance, the last semester, and his friendship with Deidara behind him as he carved a new path for himself. One that had an undefined ending. And he hoped that things would be better moving forward.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
IN THE DAYS SINCE THE ARGUMENT, Itachi shared very little interactions with his roommate, Deidara. When Itachi awoke in the mornings, Deidara was still asleep, and most often, when Itachi arrived back to the room, Deidara was nowhere to be found. And Itachi was okay with that. A small part of him kept nagging him to apologize for the words he had said to Deidara but he couldn't bring himself to do so. "You're right." Itachi conceded. "If you had asked me if I was seeing someone, I probably would have been reluctant to tell you because I would've felt uncomfortable. And you're right. I didn't want to tell you why Shisui and I were fighting because you knew why we were fighting! You knew that I tried to reach out to him on several occasions and he didn't reciprocate! It was clear as day, Deidara but you were probably too busy daydreaming like you always do!" Itachi spat. "Oh, and if you had asked me if I was homosexual or not, I would've been uncomfortable, but I would've told you the truth in order to avoid something like this occurring!" Sure, they weren't the nicest words to ever pass from his lips out into the open but nonetheless there was some truth in them. And how would he go about apologizing for that? I'm sorry for the tone I used the other night but my words still stand? If Deidara didn't already think of him as an emotionless ass, he definitely would after hearing that so Itachi decided to let it be.

When he lay awake at night trying to fall asleep, he could picture Deidara kissing him as if he were a silent observer, watching from his own bed. He could see himself glancing at the wall beside him as he tried to utter a simple "thank you" in response to Deidara's words of comfort. He could then picture Deidara's lopsided smile and eyes glazed over with what Itachi thought was comfort but in reality, had been lust and wanting, before leaning in to press his lips against Itachi's own. It would only be seconds as Deidara's long, blonde fringe would expose Itachi's face of pure horror while Deidara purred an apology.

What mindless idiot purrs an apology? Deidara, that's who. The blonde thought that Itachi was undeniably homosexual and had feelings for Deidara but just wasn't ready to make it official and thus apologized for his actions. What did he think would happen next? That Itachi would fiercely pull him back in a tenderer, deeper kiss that would inevitably lead to having sex on Deidara's bed? The mere thought repulsed Itachi so much that he vowed to stop letting his mind wander back to the events of that night. But the few times that Itachi did see Deidara in the room, he couldn't help but wonder if that's how the blond really imagined the night would end. It most definitely explained the low-lighting and the rose petals even if Deidara swore that they were for himself and for him alone.

"I just – I didn't – I just – I don't know, yeah! I'm sorry! I misread the entire situation! I misread you, yeah! I thought that you were gay! It was an honest mistake!" He remembered Deidara pleading with him. And as much as Itachi wanted to believe that it was an innocent mistake, he couldn't. It wasn't an innocent brushing of their hands, no. It was a calculated and very intentional kiss on the lips. And that was something that Itachi could not – would not – accept. While Deidara had apologized profusely in the days immediately following the incident, he had said some other troubling things as well that raised red flags in Itachi's mind.

"I've always had feelings for you, yeah. Ever since the first week of school."

What if, based on that statement alone, such a thing were to happen again? If Deidara had had feelings for him since the beginning of the school year and had the audacity to kiss him without
first knowing if Itachi was homosexual or not, it stood to reason that those feelings wouldn't go away overnight.

"I may have been wrong about Sasori, yeah. But I know I'm not wrong about you, yeah. You told me not to rush into love, and I didn't. I waited until I was certain that you were gay. Yeah, I was wrong about you and Shisui, but in all my time as your roommate, I've been looking for signs, yeah. You never pay any attention to girls, yeah. Never."

It was these words that kept Itachi up late at night

I know I'm not wrong about you, yeah.

And it was those words that made Itachi's heart race and made his mind wonder during class. Why should Itachi apologize if Deidara was adamant about being in a relationship with Itachi, whether he was homosexual or not? (And most certainly was not!) But those very words still troubled Itachi. What if Deidara made advances towards him in the middle of the night when he was sleeping? What if Deidara spied on him while he was taking a shower or getting dressed in the public bathrooms down the hall of their dormitory? To anyone else, his fears were far-fetched. You're just being paranoid, cuz'! He could hear Shisui saying. The kiss was only the beginning, however, and Itachi wanted to put an end to all this so that he could focus on his studies like he came here to do instead of worrying about his homosexual roommate's motives.

"Hi, can I help you?" The man behind the campus residence life desk asked Itachi.

"I know it's past the deadline to switch rooms this semester, but my roommate and I haven't been seeing eye to eye recently and it's making it hard for me to focus on my studies," Itachi said without missing a beat. He'd been rehearsing what he would say all morning so that he wouldn't stumble over his words.

The man pursed his lips together and leaned forward in his chair. "Did you try to work things out with your roommate?"

I waited until I was certain that you were gay. Yeah, I was wrong about you and Shisui, but in all my time as your roommate, I've been looking for signs, yeah. "Yes." He lied.

"And you weren't able to resolve it with him?"

Itachi shook his head. "No sir, I wasn't."

"Did you talk to your RA about it?"

Itachi shook his head. "No sir, I didn't."

The man nodded and leaned back in his chair. "Talk to your RA about it. They're there to help resolve problems between roommates and help them to reach a mutual agreement without taking things to extremes." He said. "What year are you?"

"Freshman." Itachi answered.

The man nodded. "If you're having problems studying, there are all kinds of on-campus resources for you to use. Every dormitory has a lounge on each floor where you can study if your roommate is being too loud for you to concentrate. You could also go to the library or, if there aren't any events being held, study in the community center. Lots of students find quiet places to study there!" He smiled.
"Noise isn't the issue. Itachi wanted to say. My roommate thinks that I am homosexual and is waiting to jump me if I should allow him to do so and it's affecting my studying. Itachi wasn't stupid. He may not have been here for long, but he knew that there were places for him to study if he needed peace and quiet. There weren't, however, places to sleep if you were worried about your roommate making sexual advances towards you in the middle of the night.

"Does that help?" The man asked.

Itachi nodded.

The man smiled. "Glad to hear it! Talk to your resident advisor if things don't clear up between you and your roommate or you resident director. If you have any problems reaching out to either of the two, my name is Yamato." He said and extended a hand for a hand shake.

Itachi reached out to clasp the man's hand to reciprocate the greeting. "Thanks. Have a nice day." Itachi muttered and turned on his heel to leave.

"Take care!" Yamato called behind him.

That was pointless, Itachi thought on his way back to his room. But what was he expecting to come out of it when he didn't divulge the details of his dilemma? If he had, the man probably would've made a call to security for sexual harassment which would probably remain on Deidara's record all throughout his college career and maybe even bleed into his post college career. And when you were an aspiring high school teacher, the words sexual harassment did not bode well for you at all.

And as much as Itachi wanted to escape living with Deidara, he didn't want to ruin the blond's life. And as the days went on, Itachi wondered why he had even thought about switching rooms. Deidara was harmless. He may have mistakenly assumed that Itachi was homosexual and set out to prove it, but since the day of their argument, Deidara kept his distance from Itachi. He didn't say much of anything except for the occasional "excuse me" when passing Itachi by to get from one part of the room the other and was seeming to avoid having any physical contact with Itachi altogether. If anything, Deidara seemed to return to his usual, bubbly, absent-minded self in a week's time, making Itachi question if he'd been able to move on that quickly or had simply forgotten all of the things that Itachi had said to him the other week.

And Itachi was okay with that.

-8-8-8-

Itachi had always loved libraries – quiet sanctuaries where would could escape the noises of the world around them – or in Itachi's case, the raucous chatter permeating his bedroom from a bevy of students passing by, laughing and carrying on as if they didn't have a care in the world. But in the library, things were different. Groups converged to work on projects at small tables, talking quietly amongst themselves as to who had what information and who would take responsibility of what part, as students' fingers clicked away at their laptop keyboards and printers whirred to life every thirty seconds in the background.

This, Itachi thought, is what college should sound like. To him, there was no greater sight than seeing his peers working diligently on assignments that would earn them a degree and hopefully catapult them into the job market after graduation. But as peaceful as the library was, he couldn't spend the night there. He could, but he didn't dislike being in his room so much that he had to resort to sleeping at a desk in the library. So when he finished revising an essay he had written way ahead of his due date only to find out that he had done it incorrectly when the professor explained the assignment in class earlier that day, he headed back to his room.
He had only made it ten feet past the library entrance when he heard somebody call out to him.
"Hey! Itachi! Wait up! Is that you?"

Itachi turned in the direction of the familiar voice speaking to him from behind. "Kisame?"

Kisame smiled and raised his right hand by way of greeting. "I hoped that was you or else I'd look like a complete dumbass!" He laughed. "How's it going? I feel like I never see you anymore these days!"

Itachi shrugged. "Fine."

"Hitting the books like usual?" Kisame asked.

_Wasn't that the point of college,_ Itachi wanted to say but nodded nonetheless.

"I'd expect nothing less!" Kisame said. "Where are you going?"

Itachi tilted his head in the direction of the freshman quad. "Back to my room. Why?"

"Because I was going to get something to eat and wanted to know if you wanted to tag along." He shrugged.

Itachi shook his head. "No thank you. I just ate not too long ago."

Kisame frowned. "Do you wanna tag along anyways? I'm not used to not seeing you every other day for tutoring."

Itachi had two options: go back to his room to skim chapter five of his communications text and chapter thirteen of his accounting text or accompany this man to eat a second dinner.

"You don't have to get anything to eat. We can just sit and talk."

Itachi didn't particularly enjoy just sitting and talking though. He preferred to simply sit in his room alone with his text books with no outside noises to bother him. But since Kisame _insisted_ on catching up on the times, Itachi agreed to accompany him for dinner, albeit reluctantly.

During the short walk to the burger place where Kisame chose to eat, Itachi noted that he was wearing a track suit and carried a large duffle bag slung over one shoulder. "Are you just coming back from swim practice?"

Kisame nodded. "Hm-hm! I have class until 4:20pm and swim practice from 5 – 7pm before getting dinner and then heading back to my apartment to study."

As soon as the words left Kisame's mouth, Itachi wondered why he would opt to eat dinner so late instead of picking up something quick after his last class. Then it dawned on him that you had to wait several minutes after eating before going swimming, much less swimming for sport. "You live in an apartment?" He asked. In the time that he'd known Kisame, the upperclassmen had yet to say where he lived apart from a very vague hand gesture in the distance.

Kisame nodded. "On campus, but yeah I live in an apartment."

Itachi nodded and opened the door to the burger establishment so that Kisame could easily squeeze himself and his duffle bag through. "Do you like living in an apartment?"

"Thanks," Kisame said, passing through the door with ease, "and yeah! It's great! I love having a living room to play video games in with the guys on occasion, and I love having a room to myself.
I mean, don't get me wrong, I like having other people around but sometimes I just need a space that's entirely my own, you know?

Itachi nodded and followed behind as Kisame made his way up to the counter. After being accepted to the university his senior year of high school, Itachi dabbled around the school website soaking in all of the things his future college had to offer. And although he, as a freshman wouldn't get the chance to live in an apartment until he was an upperclassman of some sort, that didn't stop him from looking. And with everything that was going on in his life lately, he could use a space all his own.

"How're things going with you?" Kisame suddenly asked.

Itachi blinked a few times, snapping out of his daydream. Kisame had a burger in hand and had picked a tall table with equally tall bar stools to sit at. How had he been so absorbed in his thoughts that he didn't remember Kisame ordering anything, much less picking out a table to sit at? "Good."

Kisame smiled. "How're things going with that firecracker roommate of yours? Have you snapped yet?"

*How did he know? He couldn't know. That's impossible. There is no way that Kisame would know what's been going on between Deidara and myself. Unless Deidara told him.*

"You two just seem like polar opposites to me," Kisame continued, "you're quiet and reserved whereas he strikes me as being the loud and obnoxious type."

*He doesn't seem to know anything.* Itachi concluded and exhaled to calm his racing heart. "Yeah. I'm not sure how I ended up with a roommate like him."

Kisame shrugged and took a bite of his sandwich. "He is your roommate still, right?" He asked, covering his mouth with his hand as he spoke. "Because I never see you guys together anymore. Like, I used to see you two eat lunch together all the time last semester. Did something happen?"

Itachi shook his head. "Our schedules don't really coincide this semester."

"Hm." Kisame hummed in understanding. "I was wondering because I see you all the time, but you're always either too far away, in a hurry, or studying and I never get the chance to catch up with you. And then I see blondie, what's his name again?"

"Deidara."

"Yes! I see blondie occasionally too but with his new friend of his—"

*New friend?* Itachi wondered.

He didn't realize he had uttered his thoughts aloud until Kisame nodded and said "Yeah, well I mean, I guess he's his friend. I always see them together." He said.

Deidara did seem to be happier lately, something Itachi had originally attributed to moving past their argument and continuing on with his life. "Do you know who it is?" He asked. In all the time they lived together, Itachi had met various people who either shared a class with Deidara, or a random stranger he had started a conversation with in the quad and befriended the same day. But Itachi didn't know of anybody that Deidara had recently befriended.

Kisame nodded. "It's this arrogant red-headed bastard who lives down the hall from me."
"Is his hair naturally red or dyed red?" Itachi asked, hoping that it was a type of naturally occurring type of red hair.

Kisame nodded. "Oh he dyes it blood-red. You've probably seen him around campus before, he's hard to miss. Tall, skinny, looks bored as hell all the time, used to date this girl with pink hair… what was his name? Satsujin…Satosu…Sasoi…"

"Sasori?" Itachi supplied.

Immediately Kisame's eyes lit up. "Yeah! That's it! Sasori!" He grinned. "Have you seen him before?"

"A few times, yes." He answered, gingerly stepping down from his stool. "I should get back to my room. I some things I need to do for tomorrow."

"Like reread your text book for the third time this semester?" Kisame joked but didn't push the issue any further. "I'm just kidding! Do what you need to do! But before you go—"

"Yes?" He asked and slung his messenger bag over his shoulder.

"I was wondering if you could help me out with my statistics homework? I know it's early in the semester, but today's lecture completely flew over my head and I want to get a handle on it before my grade plummets, you know?"

"When is it due?" Itachi sighed. Knowing Kisame, it was probably due the next day by class time.

"Don't worry; it's not due for another week yet." Kisame must have noticed the shock on Itachi's face and elaborated. "I made a New Year's Resolution to budget my time more effectively this semester so that I don't feel overwhelmed like last semester."

"Good." Itachi nodded and he truly meant what he said.

"When do you want to meet up to help me work on it? I mean, if you're too busy, I'm sure there are a thousand statistics tutors who would be able to help me it's just that you helped me pass Philo101 last semester and I didn't want to break the awesome dynamic that you and I had together."

At that, Deidara's words floated into Itachi's head. "Kisame's gay and you're not threatened by him."

And for a split second, Itachi allowed his eyes to search for signs that Kisame could be homosexual. His hair, usually neatly styled to a fine point was messier than usual, but that might have been due to the fact that Kisame had just spent the last couple of hours wearing a swim cap on his head. His eyes were a shade of chestnut so warm, compared with that friendly smile always donning his face that it was hard to deny him. And although he was wearing a full body track suit, Itachi had seen how thick his forearms and calves were from vigorous exercise. **Homosexuals didn't work out like that, did they?** Itachi found himself wondering.

Why was he thinking of those things? Why did he care? "…I didn't want to break the awesome dynamic that you and I had." Why did he assume that those words implied that Kisame liked him? For all Itachi knew, that was Kisame's usual way of speaking. What's more, his voice didn't contain that feminine lilt that Deidara's had – a telltale marker, in Itachi's mind, for determining a male's sexual orientation. "You said its' not due for a week?"

Kisame nodded. "Yeah, it's not due until next Tuesday."
"Can I get back to you on that then? I promise I won't keep you waiting until the last minute."

"This weekend maybe?"

"Maybe." Itachi answered and pushed open the doors to the establishment. While he originally wanted to skim over his text books in preparation for tomorrow and Thursday's classes, there was something that he needed to discuss with Deidara first.

-8-8-8-

When Itachi returned back to the room, Deidara wasn't there. While Itachi may have been purposefully avoiding his roommate for the past week and a half, he knew that Deidara's latest class let out no later than five o'clock.

It was a quarter to eight when Itachi returned to the room.

After placing his messenger bag by the side of his desk, Itachi sat down in his chair and opened up his accounting text book until Deidara returned. But after three hours of rereading material he'd already covered either by himself or in class, Itachi gave up waiting for Deidara to return and didn't panic about it. Deidara usually stayed up late and given the circumstances of late, most likely stayed out even later to avoid being in the same room with Itachi.

*There's always tomorrow,* Itachi reasoned and gathered up his tooth brush and night clothes for the evening.

As fate would have it, Itachi didn't get the chance to talk to Deidara three days later on Friday afternoon.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" Itachi asked when Deidara returned back to the room at 1:45pm.

Deidara flinched slightly and set his bag down on the bed. Without turning to face him, he replied "Sure, yeah, but I don't have much time. I have somewhere I need to be in a few minutes."

In that case, Itachi wouldn't waste any time beating around the bush. "Kisame told me that you've been spending more and more time with Sasori lately."

Deidara, who was busy replacing textbooks with art books, note books with sketch books and mechanical pencils with charcoal sticks, halted in his movements briefly before continuing what he was doing. "Yeah?"

"Yeah?" *Just 'yeah'?* "Do you share any classes with him?"

Deidara shook his head. "Not this semester, yeah. We started hanging out about a week ago after art club, yeah. We don't have a lot in common, but you know what they say, opposites attract."

Itachi didn't understand. How could he talk about the man who broke his heart and manipulated his feelings for his own personal gain so breezily as if nothing had happened between them? "You're not..." how did he want to say this?

"No, yeah." Deidara answered before he could even formulate the question. "We're not dating."

"So you're just friends?" Itachi asked.

Deidara nodded.

"I'm sorry, but how can you be friends with someone who *purposefully* manipulated you so that he
could make his girlfriend jealous?"

"He and Sakura broke up." He answered nonchalantly and bent over to dig around in his cluttered desk for something.

"That doesn't excuse the way he treated you last semester during homecoming."

"That's the thing. He broke up with Sakura before I asked him to be my date to the homecoming dance, but she didn't think that he meant it which is why she was furious to see him and me together at the dance, yeah."

"And do you honestly believe that?"

Again, Deidara nodded. "I do. Yeah he got back together with her that night but he dumped her during Christmas break because she complained too much and was too needy." Deidara explained. "He realized, after they had broken up that he felt something for me the night of the dance but tried to ignore it because of how adamant Sakura was about getting back together, yeah. And after they broke up, he finally acknowledged the spark he felt when we were dancing that night, apologized to me a few weeks ago and asked if I'd like to give him – give us – a second chance, yeah."

It took all of the willpower that Itachi had not to roll his eyes during Deidara's little anecdote regarding Sasori. He remembered Sasori approaching him in the beginning of the semester, seemingly trying to repair the bond between Deidara and himself but Itachi wouldn't listen. He only remembered Sasori emphasizing the words "Sakura and I broke up!" but Itachi held up a hand before he could say anymore. He wasn't dumb enough to fall for a lame excuse like that but he feared that Deidara would fall for something like that. Or worse, he'd fall for Sasori again. "Deidara, do you remember how you felt the night of the homecoming dance? You were crying." Itachi said. When Deidara didn't say anything in response, he continued. "Do you honestly want to go through something like that again?"

"I don't care, yeah. He already apologized."

"Just because he apologized doesn't mean that he's changed since October, Deidara! For all you know, he could be manipulating you again to satisfy some other ulterior motive of his, he could be —"

"Listen, yeah." Deidara said, turning to face Itachi head on. "A month ago, you told me that the tried to apologize for what happened at homecoming. A few weeks ago, he came to me himself and apologized and he swore that he and Sakura broke up for good this time, yeah."

Itachi exhaled in frustration, unable to bite his tongue on the matter any longer. "I guarantee that Sasori is just toying with you, Deidara! How can you be so blind not to see beneath the surface? And don't tell me it's because he apologized. A person's actions are what define them, not their words."

Deidara's eyes narrowed as he picked up his bag. "Some apologies can be genuine, yeah. And I'd hate myself for not giving him another chance after he sincerely apologized to me, yeah."

"Sincerely? Deidara, how can you be so sure that he doesn't have some kind of underlying ulterior motive behind his apology?!" Itachi cried.

Deidara shrugged and turned the handle to open the door. "I don't. But unlike you, Itachi, I know how to give people a second chance."
Fun Fact: I carefully selected the names Kisame supplied when trying to remember Sasori's name. Using a Japanese dictionary, I looked for Japanese words that could be used to describe Sasori's character (well, for 2 out of 3 of them at least!) and came up with the following:

1. Satsujin = A murderer (this one was for laughs, I swear!)

2. Satosu = To warn/advisse (as when Itachi warns Deidara that Sasori may have ulterior motives up his sleeve~)

3. Sasoi = Invitation/Enticement (as when Sasori invited Deidara to the homecoming dance)

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
Deidara shrugged and turned the handle to open the door. "I don't. But unlike you, Itachi, I know how to give people a second chance."

Itachi screwed his eyes shut and forced himself to concentrate on the words of his accounting text. "If the exchange rate for the merchant was B1 = $0.28 on May 31, 2001, Sunagakure had a foreign currency transaction loss of $10,200 \[B1,020,000 \times ($0.28 - $0.27) = $10,200\] during the year ended May 31, 2001, on the loan payable to the Konohagakure bank."

Sasori's just toying with him. He's manipulating him just like he did last October and Deidara's too naïve to realize it.

And just like that, Itachi couldn't recall the information he'd just read less than a minute ago. "If the exchange rate for the merchant was B1 = $0.28 on May 31, 2001, Sunagakure had a foreign currency transaction loss of $10,200 \[B1,020,000 \times ($0.28 - $0.27)\]…"

Out of the 10,000 or so students attending this university, he had to choose Sasori. Surely there are other people in that art club who would treat him better than that.

"…If the exchange rate for the merchant was B1 = $0.28 on May 31, 2001, Sunagakure had a foreign currency transaction loss of $10,200 \[B1,020,000 \times 0.30 = B1,020,000\] is equal to the carrying amount, in Konoha currency, of Konoha's investment on May 31, 2000 \[(B500,000 + B600,000 + B2,300,000) \times 0.30 = B1,020,000\]…"

"That's not right…” Itachi whispered as he realized that he skipped to the first part of the paragraph and read the last part of the sentence twice. Closing his eyes, he leaned back in his chair and released a heavy sigh. What did it matter if Deidara hung out with Sasori again? Sasori would toy with his feelings, lead Deidara on and within a few weeks, Deidara would be curled up in his bed cursing himself for falling for Sasori's act a second time. Itachi tried to warn him and Deidara didn't want to listen. Therefore, Itachi couldn't be held responsible for whatever came of this new friendship between them.

But if he didn't have a problem with it, why couldn't he just let it go and move on with his life? He had plenty of things to do that would benefit him in the long run. And worrying about his roommate's social life wasn't one of them.

"But unlike you, Itachi, I know how to give people a second chance." Deidara had said before he left the room.

That, Itachi decided is where he had the issue. Not only was Deidara repeating actions from the past that left him heartbroken, but he had also made a personal jab about Itachi’s reaction to the events following Valentine's Day. Where does he get off blaming me for something that he did? He's the one who kissed me without making sure that I felt the same way about him or even shared the same sexual orientation for that matter! It should be up to me to decide whether or not to give him a second chance, not the other way around. If he wants to martyr himself then so be it.

Leaning forward once more, he pushed the right side of his bangs behind his ear and began to read again. "...If the exchange rate for the merchant was B1 = $0.28 on May 31, 2001, Sunagakure had
a foreign currency transaction loss of $10,200 [B1,020,000 X ($0.28 - $0.27) = $10,200] during the year ended May 31, 2001, on the loan payable ($0.28 - $0.27) = $10,200] during the year ended May 31, 2001...."

Something wasn't right. Didn't I just read that sentence? Knitting his brow, he continued to read on and found that he had in fact reread the same line over again. "This is pointless." He sighed.

Just then, his phone vibrated behind him to alert him to a new text message from Kisame. 'can you help me with my stats hw? You said that you would on tuesday and im kinda busy this weekend and wanted to know if we could get it out of the way before then.'

Itachi frowned and opened up his messages to reply back. I'm sorry, Kisame, but I'm busy at the moment.' He began to type when he glanced at his open textbook. As much as he wanted to read that chapter today, it was obvious that he wasn't going to get very far. 'When are you free to work on it?'

'nows a good time for me if its a good time for you'

'Now works for me. Meet you in the library in 10 minutes or so.' Itachi responded back and moved to grab wallet and room key. Once he had both items, he picked up his phone and noticed a new text message from Kisame that was longer than the simple "okay" that he was expecting.

' can we do this in my room? i cant concentrate very well the library.'

First Deidara insisted that Sasori had changed for the better and now Kisame insisted on studying in a rowdy apartment where his roommates were most likely playing video games in the room next door or blaring loud music in another room less than five feet away. 'I'd rather do this in the library where it's quiet, if that's alright with you.'

'my roommates arent home right now. its quiet here.'

Itachi pursed his lips. 'Fine. What building do you live in?' He asked. Although he felt like Kisame's apartment would be more distracting than the library would (and why Kisame felt he couldn't concentrate in the library, Itachi didn't know and didn't care to ask either) but gave in to his ridiculous request as he was tired of arguing with people his own age.

'university hall'

Itachi nodded and pushed his phone into the back pocket of his jeans. Although he wasn't familiar with the building itself, he was familiar with the general area where the on-campus apartments were located. And with that, he put on his black fleece jacket and made his way to the other end of the campus.

About a quarter of the way into his journey, he realized that he wouldn't be able to enter another dormitory without residing in said building and texted Kisame to ask if he would let him in.

'sure thing'

And true to his word, Kisame was standing by the glass double doors when Itachi arrived. "Cold?" He chuckled.

Itachi nodded. "Yes, so I would appreciate it if you stepped to the side and allowed me to come in."

"Somebody woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning..." Kisame grumbled yet his smile
did not falter. "Thanks for coming over on such short notice. You see, I've got a million things to do this weekend and thought it'd be a good idea to get this assignment out of the way before I forgot about it, you know?"

Itachi wrung his hands together in an effort to warm them up now that he was inside. "I do know."

Kisame was quiet for a few seconds before saying "That's right, I'm talking to the kid who actually reads the text book. And more than once!" He laughed.

Itachi wordlessly followed him up the stairs.

"A lot of people like taking the elevator but the stairs aren't bad. It's an easy way to exercise without really even trying."

_Must you narrate everything you do? You're an athlete. I figured you'd rather take the stairs. I don't need you to give me a play-by-play._

"Is everything alright? You seem kinda quiet today. Not that you're usually really talkative, but you seem...well...less talkative today for some reason. Is everything alright?"

"Everything's fine."

"If you were in the middle of something, you could have told me. I could've Googled how to figure this shit out."

_Then why didn't you? Why do you insist on pulling me away from my studies just because you're too busy daydreaming during class to properly pay attention to what the teacher is demonstrating on the board? It's math for God's sake, you are given examples for a reason._ Itachi thought bitterly. But then again, if Kisame's math notes were as bad as the ones he took in Philosophy, Itachi could see why he would need extra help understanding the material. "It's fine. I'm here now so there's no sense in going back to my building."

"Okay." He shrugged.

It did not escape Itachi's notice that Kisame occasionally glanced at him from over his shoulder but did not say anything until they reached his room. _It's about time he got the hint._

"Here it is! Home sweet home!" Kisame announced, gesturing for Itachi to walk right in.

Upon first class, Kisame's apartment didn't look much different from Itachi's dorm room. Same carpets. Same walls. The furniture in the living room was different which was a given seeing as he and Deidara only had two beds, desks, night tables, bookshelves and dressers in their room.

Kisame brushed past him and padded over to the coffee table which was littered with papers. "Feel free to make yourself at home but don't eat anything in the fridge without asking first. Zabuza gets pissed if anyone touches his shit. And believe me, you do not want to go there!"

"I'm fine." He said and removed his jacket.

"You can throw that on one of the chairs if you want." Kisame said, gesturing to one of the four chairs surrounding the dining table. If Itachi had a choice, he would've preferred to help Kisame at the dining table where he could sit in a chair as opposed to sitting on the floor at the coffee table. But if sitting on the floor helped Kisame to focus better, Itachi wouldn't utter a word otherwise. Especially if it meant returning to his room sooner.
But did he really want that?

Kisame leaned back against the sofa with a chuckle. "Man, you should've seen it, one time, Kushimaru took one of his soda's and Zabuza—"

"What you working on?" Itachi asked, taking a seat next to Kisame on the floor.

Kisame blinked a few times. "Statistics…? Isn't that what you said you were going to help me with?"

"I mean what are you currently studying in statistics." He sighed and plucked a typed assignment sheet out from underneath Kisame's statistics text.

"Um…linear regressions, scatter plots, correlations and coefficients and stuff like that."

"And this is your assignment sheet?"

Kisame nodded. "Yeah."

"How far have you gotten on it so far?"

Kisame inhaled and glanced down at the chicken scratch adoring his notebook paper. "Uh…I did the first part, but I'm not sure if I plotted the regression line correctly or not…"

"Okay."

"And that kinda messed me up on the other questions…" He sheepishly admitted.

Itachi nodded to show Kisame that he was listening and quickly skimmed the assignment sheet. It appeared that Kisame was only required to complete two problems with four to five questions each. Easy. But if you couldn't even plot a linear regression line correctly, it would in fact skew the data needed to complete the follow-up questions. "This isn't hard, Kisame. In fact, you can complete all of this on your graphing calculator."

"I know that but I'm not really sure which buttons to press…"

_The calculator does everything for you and you're not even sure how to use it?_ Itachi thought bitterly.

"Are you okay? You seem a little off today."

"I'm fine." Itachi quickly uttered before Kisame could ask him anything else that would extend this tutoring session for any longer than it needed to be. "Let's start with problem number five."

"Question five? I didn't get that far yet."

"Question five in your book."

"But I don't need to do question five. It's a suggested problem." Kisame pointed out.

Itachi screwed his eyes shut and forced himself to reign in his patience. "I know that. I'm intend to work through as many suggested problems as it takes until you can grasp the concept needed to complete the required problems because I will not be accused of plagiarism."

Kisame held his hands up in surrender. "Okay, okay. Calm down. I get it. But how would you be accused of plagiarism? You're not even in my class."
"I'm not taking any chances."

"But you helped me out in philo101 so how is this any different?"

_Breathe in. Breathe out._ That was different because in introduction to philosophy, I forced you to read and comprehend the content in the text book on your own so that you could apply it to the quizzes, tests, and midterm paper. I also encouraged you to take better notes in class so that you could use that information to better your grade. If I helped you work out a required homework problem, you're showing me that you know how to follow instructions. You're not thinking for yourself. And if the professor sees that you're acing your homework yet failing your tests she or he might become suspicious and question how you were able to do well on your homework yet perform so miserably on your tests."

As Itachi spoke, Kisame's eyebrows drew closer together, the warmth exuded from his eyes vanished and his smile gradually diminished, leaving him looking confused and hurt.

_Maybe I was too harsh just now._ Itachi briefly thought to himself. But it was the truth and if he didn't inform Kisame in the beginning, how would Kisame ever see it for himself?

"Question number five?" He asked.

Itachi nodded. "Yeah."

Kisame unceremoniously flipped through the chapter until he reached the practice problems in question. "Found it. So you want me to work through this problem first?"

"Hm-hm. Let me know when you're not sure what to do next and I'll help you through it."

"Kay."

When Kisame told him that he didn't grasp the lecture on Tuesday, Itachi took that to mean that he didn't even know where to begin. But Kisame knew what he was doing. He knew how to create a scatter plot (though to be perfectly honest, most third graders knew how to do that much), he knew which buttons to press if Itachi pushed him hard enough and by the time they had finished the suggested problem, Kisame felt ready to return back to the required problem.

"Oh, so I just plot a and b on the graph and that's my correlation? Or…am I not supposed to ask you that?"

"That's correct. And I'll only tell if you what you're doing is correct or incorrect. I won't walk you through this one." Itachi answered.

"Okay…"

Itachi watched Kisame work through the rest of the first problem and stopped him if he made any mathematical errors that were differed from what Itachi himself got as he worked the problem alongside him.

"So…" Kisame spoke as he drew the scatter plot for the second problem, "wanna tell me why you were so mad when you came in earlier? If you didn't want to help me, you didn't have to. I just thought that, you know, since you helped me out with philo, you wouldn't mind helping me out in stats. Or if you were busy, we could've met up some other time, you know?"

His golden irises glanced up to meet Itachi's, causing him to turn away. "It's nothing."
"It didn't feel like nothing. You were pissed off when you got here."

"It doesn't have anything to do with you." Itachi quietly admitted, ashamed by his lack of emotional control as of late. *Grief?* No. He wouldn't think about Shisui now. That would only make things worse.

"I may have been misdirecting my frustration towards you. I'm sorry."

"Fight with your roommate?"

*How could be possibly…?!*

Apparently the look of mortification was enough for Kisame to continue his train of thought. "I haven't seen you guys together much lately. I usually see the two of you having lunch or dinner together or just walking around campus you know?"

"I told you that Deidara and I have different schedules this semester." Itachi grit out.

"So what were you so angry about when you got here if doesn't have anything to do with me or Deidara?"

Itachi replaced the lid on his calculator and slid it into the messenger bag he'd brought along with him. "Nothing. I've just been stressed out lately is all."

"I can believe it what with all the homework you do all the time!" He laughed.

Itachi forced a half smile. "Well it looks like you've finally gotten a grasp on the subject matter so I think I'll take my leave."

"But you just got here! At least stay for a few minutes and hang out or something! Can't your homework wait until Sunday night or something?"

Itachi shook his head. His homework could technically wait until twenty minutes before class since he completed the readings way ahead of time. The little interaction he had shared with Kisame over the past half an hour was strained. What could he possibly gain from spending more time with someone whom he couldn't even hold a decent conversation with?

Without another word, he turned on his heel to leave when something grabbed his wrist. "Hold on," Kisame said as he gradually rose to a stand, "there's something you're not telling me because I can see it in your eyes. Something's bothering you and I have a feeling it has to do with Deidara's new red-headed friend."

"It's nothing, Kisame. I'm just stressed out." He wasn't lying. If Deidara wanted to get himself caught up with Sasori again, Itachi wouldn't stop him.

At least, that's what he tried to convince himself of.

"The Itachi Uchiha I know doesn't stress out over homework assignments he did three months in advance." Kisame stated and released his hold on Itachi's wrist. "Is this about Shisui?"

"What?"

Kisame averted his gaze to the floor and scratched the back of his head. "I worded that badly um...I dunno...you're different...this semester...I—"

"I'm different?!"
"Well no, I didn't mean it like that I—" Kisame stuttered.

"If your cousin—your best friend—died a week after you finally made up after a semester of animosity towards each other in a car accident, wouldn't you be different too, Kisame?"

"Itachi, I didn't mean it like that!"

"And if...when you got back to school, everybody you've ever met on campus approaches you to tell you how 'sorry they are' or how 'he could never hold down his drink' like they know what happened. Like they know Shisui like I do!" Itachi said and clenched his hands into fists to keep them from shaking.

"Itachi, calm down, I didn't mean it like that! I'm sorry! Just please, calm down, I won't bring it up again, I swear—"

"First it was my family. Is it so much to ask for a little bit of space? All I want to do is move on and act like nothing happened but my mother kept tiptoeing around me like I'd fall to pieces at any moment, my father kept shoving the reality of it all back in my face and my brother thought it was a joke!"

"I didn't know, Itachi, I swear—"

"Then it was Sasori who had the audacity to approach me to offer his condolences like I even cared for his pity after what he did and then to ask about Deidara? Unbelievable."

"Wait, what does Sasori have to do with all of this?"

"And just when I thought everyone was done feeling sorry for me, I run into Shisui's so called friends who wrote off his death as a matter of him not being able to 'hold down his liquor'!" Itachi seethed. His voice had since started to shake as he tried to blink back the hot tears that threatened to spill over. "If they were really Shisui's friends, they would've known better. They would've attended the funeral. They would've taken this more seriously. But they didn't."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Itachi, I really am." Kisame whispered.

"And then Deidara," Itachi hissed, "I admit that my encounter with Shisui's friends rattled me a bit and I was relieved to have Deidara take my mind off things for a bit until I was ready to talk about it but to kiss me as if that would make things better!?"

And just like that, the dam started to crumble. All of those emotions Itachi had worked so hard to repress over the past two months started to spill over along with his resolve. And just as quickly as it was happening, Kisame was working to collect the pieces by gently taking his hand and leading him into the bedroom before he could protest or flee back to his own dormitory.

Once inside, Kisame sat on his bed and pulled Itachi down to sit beside him.

"I'm sorry." Itachi sniffled and wiped his nose on his sleeve. He didn't care that he'd had to wash his shirt later. He didn't care that Kisame was bearing witness to his collapse. As soon as Kisame uttered Shisui's name, everything he had been working so hard to keep hidden from the word just started tumbling out.

"Don't be. I'm the idiot who brought this up. I should be the one apologizing." He said with a heavy sigh. "Last semester, I thought we were starting to become friends, you know? Then this semester it was as if we'd just met for the first time, like we were total strangers. And I'm not very good at expressing how I feel without sounding like a complete asshole but I was genuinely concerned
about you, Itachi. I really was. That's why every time I saw you around campus, I asked if you wanted to hang out because I wanted to see what you were like when you weren't trying to shove the just war theories down my throat in that stuffy old library you seem to call home."

At this, the right corner of Itachi's mouth quirked in what could be construed as a smile.

"But like I said, you were different—I mean...more distant this semester. And I admit, I thought that maybe you and Deidara were arguing about him wanting to keep the lights on when you wanted to go to sleep or some stupid shit like that, you know? I didn't think that it was all of this...why didn't you tell someone?"

"Who would I tell, Kisame? Answer me that. Who would I tell?"

"You could've told me. I would've listened to you as carefully as I'm doing right now."

The rims of Itachi's eyes burned with tears and his stomach was coiling tighter than a boa constrictor suffocating its prey. The way he saw it, he had two options: take his bag and run back to the safety of his dorm room and try to forget what just happened in the last five minutes, or try to recover what was left of his dignity. After all, the damage had already been done. Kisame had seen him unravel so there was no point is trying to forget what just happened. All he could do now was attempt to smooth things over.

"Before you go on, I have a few questions." Kisame said as Itachi opened his mouth to speak.

After a moment of careful consideration, Itachi obliged "Go on."

"God where do I even start?" He murmured. "Okay. What exactly happened with Deidara? Was he your boyfriend or something?"

Tactless. "No, he was not."

"Then why did he kiss you? What did you say? And when did this happen?"

_There's still time to back-out. You don't have to do this. He doesn't need to know._ Itachi thought to himself. But Kisame had seen him break down completely and didn't look like he was going to let Itachi leave without providing an explanation. "Valentine's Day. It happened on Valentine's Day."

Itachi began and explained his run-in with Fu and Torune, what they had said, what Itachi saw when he returned back to the room, how he and Deidara had shared chocolate on Deidara's bed before Deidara asked him why he was so upset earlier, the kiss, and how he and his roommate were barely talking to each other now.

"Wow." Kisame breathed when Itachi finished. "And all this time I thought you read textbooks in the library all day and all night. I never thought that you of all people would be wrapped up in so much drama but then again, my freshman year of college was full of drama too..." He mused.

"It's not like I wanted for any of this to happen." Itachi muttered.

"I'm sure you didn't but that's what happens when you get to college. It's unavoidable."

Itachi shook his head. "No. It _could've_ been avoided if I didn't lower my guard around him. If I didn't tell him about what Fu and Torune said that day. All of this _could've_ been avoided if I would've been thinking straight."

"Maybe, but you have to remember that you're still grieving over your cousin. Grief has a way of making people do weird things, you know?"
"I wish Deidara had the sense to know that." He muttered.

Kisame glanced at the ceiling. "I don't know the kid that well to be honest with you, but from what I've seen, he's a little bit 'out there,' you know what I'm saying? He strikes me as the type to act first and think later but based on what you've told me about, his heart was in the right place."

"How could you say that? Kisame, he took advantage of me in a vulnerable state and you're telling me that his heart was in the 'right place'?"

"Before you go off on me again, hear me out please," Kisame said, "he took your mind off of those douchebags didn't he?"

Itachi nodded but refused to meet Kisame's eyes.

"And he made you feel better afterwards right?"

He nodded again.

"Sure, he kissed you, but maybe he got the wrong message…"

"The wrong message? Are you trying to say that I led him on or something? Because the last time I checked being an unbiased human being couldn't be construed as leading somebody on, Kisame."

"That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that maybe Deidara thought that you were interested in him or something. I mean, the kid thought that Shisui and you were dating…"

"Shisui was my cousin!"

"So you've said, but I also thought that the two of you were dating too so I can kinda see where Deidara's coming from."

"But he never once asked me if I was homosexual or not. In fact, he seems to have appointed himself as the local authority concerning homosexuality."

"What makes you think that?"

"He told me that he thinks that I'm homosexual and swears that he's right." When Kisame didn't say anything, Itachi continued with a curt chuckle. "He actually thinks that you're homosexual and since I have no problem spending so much time around you that I must be homosexual too!"

Although Itachi thought that Deidara's logic was ludicrous, he didn't find it to be as hilarious as Kisame seemed to. Across from him, the upperclassman was holding an arm over his stomach and guffawing so loudly that Itachi wouldn't be surprised if the residents across the hall came knocking at his door to complain about the noise.

"That kid's something else, I tell you…" Kisame finally spoke a few minutes later and wiped the corners of his eyes. "But I gotta give the kid some credit, he's sharper than most people I know."

Itachi blinked a few times. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well it's just…" Kisame started to say before chuckling some more, "a lot of people around here see two hundred and sixty-eight pounds of testosterone when they see me. You wouldn't believe how many girls attend our swim meets just to stare and get all giddy when I look their way. Or how many chicks ask me to be their date to homecoming and prom. That's all anybody ever thinks of when they see me. The muscle-y athlete who should have girls wrapped around his finger at all
"What are you saying?"

"I'm not gay if that's what you're thinking."

Itachi breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm bi."

Chapter End Notes

A few notes:

1. I actually researched some accounting jargon so that stuff is kinda legit.

2. I also dug up my old statistics notes and tried to re-familiarize myself with it for the purpose of this chapter. So that's pretty legit too...(I even took the lesson from the exact date which Kisame's last class was...which explains the simplicity of the material. But we can't expect Kisame to get to the super hard stuff until a bit later in the semester now can we?

Until next time,

Itachi's Husband
"THAT KID'S SOMETHING ELSE, I tell you…” Kisame finally spoke a few minutes later and wiped the corners of his eyes. "But I gotta give the kid some credit, he's sharper than most people I know."

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"What are you saying?"

"I'm not gay if that's what you're thinking."

Itachi breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm bi." Kisame said with a shake of his head. "I know it's hard to believe that the guy who's six foot seven and can do the breaststroke in record time would be interested in his own gender. People don't usually think that about me. But I don't care if you have a dick or a clit. It doesn't matter to me. So long as your heart's in the right place…that's all that matters really. Life's too short, you know?"

Itachi's eyes burned from the few tears he let spill over as he squinted at the athlete sitting on the bed across from him. I'm not tired. So why can't I open my eyes any further?

"Your heart's in the right place, Itachi. It really is."

Itachi raised his eyebrows but still he couldn't fully open his eyes. Why won't they open? Even with his contact lenses in, Kisame was a blur in the center of his vision. I stopped crying. Did I take my contacts out? No…I would've remembered doing that. So why can't I open my eyes?

"You may not think so," Kisame continued, "but like I said before – grief makes us do weird things sometimes. But deep down, I know that your heart's in the right place." And with that, he quickly closed the gap between them as he brought their lips together in a chaste kiss.

A dry kiss that tasted like fabric.

Itachi opened his eyes to find himself lying face down against his pillow and blearily glanced up to check the time on his phone. 1:58 AM.

Great. No wonder I had such a hard time opening my eyes. He thought to himself and rolled over to lie on his back when a stark realization dawned on him. Did I just dream of Kisame kissing me? He blinked a few times as he tried to remember the details of his dream which were fleeing his memory like the sand in an hour glass. One minute they were sitting on Itachi's bed talking about Deidara and the next Kisame was saying something and then...he kissed him.
Itachi sighed and tossed back the covers. As tired as he was, his mind would no doubt pick up where it left off and quite frankly, Itachi didn't care to see where things went from that point on. Even if he tried convincing himself that it didn't mean anything and tried to fall back asleep, his quickening heartbeat would determine otherwise and in another hour Itachi would wake up in a cold sweat after witnessing part two.

It'd been three – scratch that – it'd been four days since Itachi had gone to Kisame's apartment to help him with his statistics homework. And everything had been going fine until Kisame insisted upon talking about Itachi's social life. Until then, Itachi thought that everything was fine. It had been nearly two months since Shisui died and with it, the gossip surrounding his death. And although Deidara was pursuing Sasori again, it was none of Itachi's concern. Everything was fine. *He* was fine.

That is, until he found himself wiping the tears from his eyes on Kisame's bed where he would find out that the one person he trusted not to have feelings for him in any regard...was bisexual.

"I'm sorry... you're what?" Itachi had asked him.

Kisame chuckled. "I'm bi. I like chicks as much as I like dicks."

On any other given day, Itachi would've frowned at Kisame's vulgarity but in this moment he was so taken aback by Kisame's admission that he found he didn't know what to say.

"Shocking, I know, but that's just how I am. Dicks, tits, pussies, clits, pecs, I don't really give a damn either way. So long as the person's got a good head on their shoulders and a heart of gold to match." He smiled before adding "Looks play a part too. A small part, but a part nonetheless. Anywho, what were we talking about? Deidara?"

Itachi nodded although he was only half listening at this point.

"Um... that's right; you were saying how Deidara's got you pegged as a 'homosexual,' right? Like I said, the kid strikes me as a bit out there. I don't meant to be rude but he seems very opinionated. Don't let him get to you, though. If you're not gay, you're not gay. You're the only person who has the authority to determine that."

"I don't know." Itachi whispered. "I feel like I don't know anything anymore."

Kisame smiled and placed a large palm on Itachi's shoulder. "It's okay. You've been through a lot this semester so far and it's all catching up to you so of course you're overwhelmed. It happens to the best of us—"

"But I thought you were heterosexual."

"Well it's not like I got a big flashing sign on my head that says 'I'm bi! I'll take whatever life gives!' That's not how it works." He said.

When did it get so far out of hand? When did he become so emotional all of a sudden? When did he become so absorbed in everyone else's problems? He came here to get good grades so that he could get a well-paying job. Not so that he could find himself having a discussion about human sexuality on the bed of a bisexual athlete.

On the bed of a bisexual athlete... that is what his life has come to.

"Itachi, look at me." Kisame said, gaining Itachi's attention. "Don't let it get to you. Deidara made a
mistake and he said he was sorry, right?"

Itachi nodded.

"There. He hasn't done anything to you since then, has he? Anything that has harmed your person at least?"

"No." Itachi answered in a small voice. And when did he lose all of his confidence? When did this happen?

When the world as he knew it came crashing down all around him.

When Shisui's life ended.

"See?" Kisame continued. "Deidara made a mistake and apologized for it. Life goes on. I'm bi. I was bi when I met you, I was bi yesterday, I was bi when I woke up this morning and I'm betting all the money in my wallet right now that I'll be bi tomorrow. I know it's shocking but that doesn't change a thing. Or at least, I hope it doesn't change anything because we've got a pretty good thing going here, don't you think?"

"What?"

"You and I. We've got a pretty good thing going here. You helping me with my statistics homework, me getting a good grade in my class...I hope that the fact that I'm bi doesn't change any of that because by the looks of it, this class is only going to get harder." He laughed.

"I should go." Itachi said abruptly.

"Wait, why?"

"I don't need this." He whispered to himself thinking that Kisame wouldn't hear this.

"Itachi." Kisame commanded. It was one word but Kisame said it in such a way that had Itachi frozen inches from the door. "What you need right now is a friend because you're trying to deal with everything by yourself and look what it's doing to you. Look at you. You need to talk to this to someone and I don't think you're leaving to schedule an appointment with the school counselor are you?" He said. "Okay, that might have been the wrong thing to say, but the point is, you've kept all of these things bottled up for God knows how long and look what it's doing to you. I'm not expecting you to open up to me completely and tell me your hopes and dreams or what your folks do for a living or anything like that. All I'm saying is that—"

Just then, Itachi's phone rang, effectively silencing Kisame mid-sentence. Itachi frowned when he looked at the caller ID. "I'm sorry, I have to take this." He explained and answered the phone. "Hello?...I'm good...How are you?...No, not at the moment why?...Next weekend...Spring break starts next weekend...Friday afternoon...Good…” He answered and moved the phone away from his face to talk to Kisame. "I should go. It's my mother." He said.

Kisame nodded. "Let me show you out."

"Okay." Itachi agreed and placed the phone to his ear again. "What was that?...I'm sorry I didn't catch that last part, can you repeat it again?" Itachi asked and followed to Kisame to the entrance of the apartment.

"Take care." Kisame mouthed as Itachi walked into the hallway.
They didn't kiss.

So had Itachi dreamt that they had? He pushed through the swinging door of the communal bathrooms down the hall with more force than what was necessary and padded over to the large mirror that lined the wall. The creases under his eyes liked longer than usual, more pronounced and the capillaries in his corneas were swollen from just waking up. He wasn't homosexual. He didn't have feelings for Kisame. That much was for certain.

Then why was he dreaming that they had kissed?

Sure, his view of Kisame had changed from their first real conversation back in October. Although Kisame was still an athlete who mainly cared about getting good grades so that he could stay on the team and keep his scholarship, he was also very sympathetic to the feelings of those around him. Itachi wasn't related to him. He wasn't Kisame's roommate. He wasn't what you'd call "close friends" with Kisame either. They weren't even in the same year of college.

Itachi was Kisame's tutor.

And yet, Kisame cared for him as if Itachi were his younger brother.

Just as Shisui would've done if he were still alive.

-8-8-8-

"Club sandwich and a medium drink?"

Itachi offered the lunch lady a short nod and handed her his student ID card. While she processed the transaction he stuffed the plastic wrapped sandwich into the cook of his elbow and picked up his drink.

"Have a nice day and take care." She smiled, returning his card to him.

"Thanks, you too." He replied back. Ever since his fight with Deidara, he'd been eating anywhere but the cafeteria. If he sat in the cafeteria, he would be asking for drama. He'd never forget the near screaming match he had with Shisui in the cafeteria the semester before and didn't want a repeat with Deidara this semester. Pretty soon, the other students would begin to catch on to this trend and keep their distance. Itachi would be happy with that if it weren't for the negative stigma that came attached.

"Hey! Itachi!"

What now? He wondered and quickly stuffed his ID into his wallet.

"To your left!" The voice called out.

Itachi looked left to the bulletin board advertising the Student Government Association.

"Sorry! Other left!"

This was more work than it was worth. Did he really want to know who was trying to gain his attention? Sitting at a table to his right was none other than the upperclassman he was tutoring, another individual whom Itachi was trying to avoid at the moment. He considered ignoring Kisame's invitation to join him for lunch but he'd already made eye contact so what other excuse was there? "How are you?" He asked plainly and approached the table. If he kept his questions short and formal, hopefully Kisame would follow suit.
"I'm doing well. What about you?"

So far so good. "Same."

"Are you sure?" Kisame pressed. "Because last time I saw you you were really upset."

*Why can't anything in my life be simple for once?* "I'm fine, thank you for asking."

"Are you sure?" He pressed again and patted the spot across from him. "Have a seat! You don't have class soon do you?"

Itachi considered his answer. If he said yes, it offered him an easy way out of this current conversation but was that too convenient? Would Kisame see through his lie and call him out for it later? Conversely, if he sat down with this man, he would be willingly subjecting himself to a barrage of personal questions that he'd rather not answer. "No." He relented and sunk into the seat he'd been offered. As much as he wanted to avoid the topic, he'd waited too long to give Kisame an answer and saw no way out of the situation now.

"You seemed pretty upset the other day when we were studying in my apartment. I just wanted to know if you were okay and all…" Kisame said.

Itachi unwrapped his club sandwich, hoping that doing so would give him something to focus on other than Kisame's penetrating gaze. "I was tired and unjustly took out my frustrations with Deidara on you. I apologize for that."

Kisame waved a dismissive hand in his direction. "Oh no, you're fine. But you shouldn't have to shoulder everything you're dealing with on you own. You can talk to people about that kind of thing, you know?"

Itachi looked up to meet the older student's eyes and answered "I know." *I know but there is nothing for me to gain from doing so.* He imagined talking to his mother about everything that had been taking place in his life lately and envisioned it sound something along the lines of "Oh honey, why didn't you tell me that you were dealing with so much? You never mentioned any of that on the phone whenever you called…" She'd say in regards to Shisui's drinking. He didn't dare consider what she would say in response to his shared kiss with his roommate on Valentine's Day. The roommate that he still shared a room with.

"I'm not saying you have to tell everyone on campus what's going on in your life but don't try to keep it all in."

"I'm fine, Kisame. Really." Was he really fine? Obviously not if Kisame had taken it upon himself to play the part of the school counselor. In the middle of the cafeteria of all places. "Why are you so invested in my well-being? What is there for you to gain?" Itachi ventured, unable to bite his tongue any longer.

Kisame pried open a small bag of potato chips and glanced up to meet Itachi's eyes. "I saw a side of you the other day that I didn't know you had." He began to explain. "Don't take this the wrong way but you're like a forty-eight year old man stuck in the body of an eighteen year old."

*Interesting comparison.*

"But the other day you were like any other eighteen year old. Until last week I pegged you as that bookworm that does homework in the library all day. I had no idea you were dealing with so much drama. Usually you're so calm and quiet but last week it was clear that you were frustrated and overwhelmed and angry and that's a side of you I thought I'd never see."
Itachi could say the same about Kisame. If anyone had said that he and Kisame would be having a heartfelt conversation about Itachi’s mental and emotional health in the midst of a college cafeteria in the beginning of the year Itachi would have laughed out loud. At the time, every athlete attending college was the same in Itachi’s mind. They were the kind of people who ate in groups, laughed loudly, catcalled pretty blonde girls in short skirts who passed by and held contests to see who could belch the loudest.

But before him sat someone who cared enough call him over and ask how he was doing instead of offering his condolences and pretending that he and Shisui were friends. Unlike everyone else, Kisame took the time to listen to what Itachi had to say. He seemed to be genuinely interested in Itachi’s well-being and made sure to follow up with him after their last encounter.

"What does your textbook say?" Itachi asked, completely rerouting the direction of the conversation.

Kisame retracted his forearm from the book he was using as an armrest. "Applied Anatomy and Physiology for Manual Therapists."

Itachi stretched out his arms and opened his palms. "May I take a look?"

"Sure!" Kisame smiled and handed him the thick text. "What? Do you think I carry around big heavy textbooks just to impress you? Statistics isn't my only class, just so you know."

"What class is this for?"

"Body Systems and Applied Anatomy one."

How was it that a science major struggled so much with introduction to statistics? "Are you pursuing a career in the medical field?" Itachi couldn't picture Kisame donning the school's purple scrub attire and couldn't recall a time when he had ever seen the man wearing such garb.

"No, no, no, no, no. I'm a Health and Phys. Ed. major." He answered.

That made more sense. Regardless, Itachi flipped through the physiology textbook, taking in the flicker of diagrams detailing the different body systems and their functions. "I never knew what you were studying before now." Itachi admitted and slid the book across the table back to Kisame.

"That's because it never came up until now." He smiled. "My turn. Let me guess, you're majoring in…philosophy!"

Itachi shook his head. "Accounting."

Kisame snapped his fingers and plunged his hand into the bag of chips. "Well that explains why you're so good at math then. But I wouldn't be surprised if you were studying to become a philosopher because you aced philosophy last semester."

Itachi picked at the strands of lettuce hanging from his long forgotten sandwich. "Thanks. So why Health and Phys. Ed?" He asked and mentally kicked himself. He needed only to look at Kisame's build to find his answer. "I mean, when did you decide that you wanted to become a gym teacher?"

Kisame crossed his arms and finished chewing the handful of chips he'd shoved in his mouth prior to Itachi asking the question. "Last year."

"Last year?"
Kisame nodded. "I was a Marine Bio student 'til the end of my sophomore year."

"Why'd you switch majors?"

"General Chemistry II." Kisame answered. "I barely passed the first general chemistry course I took so I don't know why I thought the second one would be any different." He laughed. "And I failed Calculus for the Life Sciences which was probably a sign to wake up and switch majors!"

It made sense to Itachi why Kisame would change majors. Science courses weren't for everyone. Even Deidara, who was fairly competent with formulas and computations struggled to keep up with the course load of his own major every now and again. Itachi was certain that he himself could manage in such a specialty but he never favored a hands-on learning approach which was a necessity when conducting experiments in a laboratory setting. Although Health and Physical Education dealt with aspects of science, the main focus would be in the kinesthetic or physical aspects of the discipline.

"Let's just say," Kisame continued, "that I'm more of a National Geographic Channel kind of guy, not a Organic Chemistry kind of guy, you know what I mean?"

"I understand." Itachi said and looked at his watch. "I should probably get going."

"Get going? You barely touched your sandwich!" Kisame lightly protested. "Is your class starting soon?"

He shrugged and went to work rewrapping his long forgotten sandwich. "In forty five minutes or so but I like to look over the material before the start of every class and I can't concentrate in here."

Kisame smiled and ran a hand through his dark spiky locks. "Yeah, I know what you mean. I should probably be studying for a quiz I have this afternoon but as you can see I haven't gotten very far." He said, gesturing to the text books he had since resumed using as an armrest.

Itachi smiled at that and rose to his feet. "Good luck with that."

"Thanks! See you sometime next week?"

Itachi shook his head. "Next week's spring break."

"Oh that's right I forgot about that. Damn."

Itachi leaned over to pick up his messenger bag up from the floor. "Don't worry; I'll help you with your statistics homework when we get back."

Kisame's eyes lit up. "Thank God! What would I do without you?" He asked.

It was clear to Itachi that Kisame probably wasn't planning to do any sort of homework over the break. Luckily Itachi had the foresight to know that Kisame would put off a homework assignment or major project until the day before it was due and come begging Itachi to help him out with it. It was so commonplace that Itachi was unbothered by it. "For starters, you would locate your textbook?" Itachi smirked.

And as expected, Kisame's jaw dropped. "I see what you did there and for your information I know where my textbook is!"

The underclassman nodded and turned on his heel to leave with his sandwich in hand. "See you in two weeks, Kisame."
Kisame sent a short nod in Itachi's direction. "Take care, Itachi. And hey! Don't party too hard you hear me?"

He raised his hand and waved off the comment. "I could say the same to you, Kisame."

He called over his shoulder and turned to exit the cafeteria.

It wasn't until he was outside that he realized that he was still smiling.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
"THAT'S MY BOY." FUGAKU CHUCKLED PROUDLY and absently twirled Pad Thai noodles around the tines of his fork. "I thought that maybe college would provide you with more stimulation than high school did but I guess I was wrong."

Itachi nodded to show his father that he was listening, not necessarily because he agreed with him. College was indeed more stimulating than high school was but none of his assignments were so arduous that he couldn't keep afloat. He had no doubt that the workload would increase with every passing semester but even then he was confident that he could stay organized and relatively stress free. The latter of course, heavily depended on his living situation which he hoped would improve next semester at the earliest.

"First college, then graduate school." Fugaku continued. "By the time you reach the workforce you'll be guaranteed almost any job you want within your field. Your qualifications will be—" he began to say when his phone vibrated inside of his trousers. Without excusing himself, he slipped the device into his palm to check the caller I.D. "What on earth could they possibly want now?" He growled and quickly rose from the table. "Yes, what is it? Yes, I was in the middle of having dinner and yes, Itachi's home from school."

The rest of the family cast their gaze down at the plates of food before them and ate in silence. His father's conversation would last no longer than five minutes so it was pointless to start a new conversation. Fugaku would return back to the table with an air of annoyance surrounding him and briefly grumble about the incompetence of the guys down at the station before resuming the previous topic of conversation like nothing had happened.

"Something's wrong." Mikoto mused aloud when five minutes had passed. Wordlessly she stood up from the table and disappeared into the kitchen.

Overhead, Itachi could hear the heavy thud of his father's footsteps treading upstairs.

"So much for a proper family meal, huh, Itachi?" Sasuke asked.

Itachi shrugged slightly. He wasn't really looking forward to sitting down with his family the first night back as it would undoubtedly give rise to questions about his studies, his social life, and his relationship with Deidara. All of which were related and all of which Itachi wanted to avoid discussing because they were all intertwined.

"I have to go down to the station." Fugaku briefly explained when he reappeared a few minutes later donning attire appropriate to that of the local police lieutenant.

Mikoto, who had since packaged up his dinner to take to the station, stood up from her seat to press a soft kiss to her husband's lips. "Your dinner is in that Tupperware." She explained.

"Thanks." He replied and turned his attention to Itachi. "Sorry about this Itachi. We'll talk about your studies some other night."

Itachi looked up to meet his father's distracted gaze and nodded.

"I don't know how long it'll take so don't bother waiting around for me." He called over his
shoulder as he exited the room.

"Be careful, honey." Mikoto responded and took her seat at the table. Only after Fugaku shut the front door behind him did she speak again. "I wonder what's going on now." She uttered to herself and picked up her fork. "Anywho, how's everything going at college, Itachi?" She asked.

*Didn't I already answer that question?* He wondered.

"How are things going with Deidara?" She asked, the real intention of her previous question.

Sasuke, who had just taken a particularly large bite of his dinner, quickly glanced up to meet Itachi's gaze. Not surprisingly, he too was curious to know the answer to that very same question.

"Fine." Itachi voiced.

'Liar.' Sasuke mouthed.

Mikoto kept her gaze locked with her oldest son's and nodded slowly. Seemingly content with his answer, she averted her gaze to the plate of food in front of her and pierced a piece of shrimp with her fork. "I ask because you haven't talked about him very much over the phone when I've called." She said. "You talked about him much more last semester."

"Did something happen between you?" Sasuke couldn't resist asking.

Itachi narrowed his eyes in Sasuke's direction and answered "Deidara's been spending more and more time hanging out with members of the art club that he's involved in." Which was the truth. Sasori was a member of the art club and as far as Itachi knew, Deidara had been regularly attending the art club meetings every week. "So I don't see him very often."

This time it was Sasuke who narrowed his eyes at Itachi, trying to discern the truth in his statement. Itachi was confident that Sasuke would drop the subject because Itachi was actually telling them the truth. There was no reason to believe that he was lying about his lack of interaction with his roommate.

"I was just wondering," Mikoto began to say, and brought a hand up to her mouth to cover up her chewing, "because you seemed to be getting along so well last semester." She swallowed. "So much so that he invited you out to the movies over winter break, correct?"

"Yeah." Itachi shrugged, aware that a vague one word response was not all that convincing. "But I've been pretty busy myself this semester." He said and took a bite of his pasta. When he finished chewing he continued, "I've been tutoring a former classmate of mine so I haven't been spending much time in the room myself lately."

"*Former classmate?*" Sasuke asked.

Keeping his facial expression neutral, Itachi nodded and took another bite of his food. "The one I tutored in philosophy." He said as if to jog Sasuke's memory. "He did well under my tutelage and asked if I could help him with his statistics homework."

Sasuke didn't appear convinced and Itachi knew why. Sasuke knew that Itachi wasn't the type to willingly seek out social interaction if it didn't benefit him in some way. While Kisame persisted on paying him for his time and energy, Itachi wasn't a tutor hired through and paid by the university. What he was doing for Kisame wasn't a paid job position he could list on his future resume which was the only conceivable reason Sasuke could come up with as to why Itachi would even waste his energy on someone like Kisame.
"That's nice of you, sweetheart." Mikoto smiled. "How old is this friend of yours, or I mean, classmate? How old is he?"

"Twenty." Itachi answered.

Sasuke's eyes widened in sudden realization. "Wait, this guy's twenty years old and needs help with statistics? What a joke!"

"Sasuke!" Mikoto hissed. "Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses and his weaknesses happen to be—"

"An intro to philosophy course, simple statistics, math, anything academic in general." Sasuke rambled on.

"Sasuke, dear, since you're done eating your dinner why don't you clean up the dishes in the kitchen?" Mikoto asked politely.

Sasuke glared in her direction. "Whatever." He said and stormed off into the kitchen with his fork and plate in hand.

Waiting until he was out of earshot, Mikoto turned to Itachi and said "I'm glad to see that you're helping out a fellow classmate." She said. "Do you only study when you're with this man or do the two of you hang out as friends from time to time?"

Itachi felt as though he could answer her question honestly, especially without Sasuke's judgmental gaze boring into his skull. "I sit down with him at lunch from time to time."

There was a twinkle in Mikoto's eyes. "That's wonderful, sweetheart! I'm glad to hear you're making friends."

You say that as though I'm physically incapable of doing so. If Itachi truly wanted to, he could make and keep an acquaintance. But the way he saw it, nobody truly understood him or shared the same work ethic as he did. What was the point of befriending someone who was no work and all play? A friendship like that would only be destined for ruin. All in all, it was easier to avoid pursuing such relationships.

He wouldn't go so far as to even refer to Kisame as a friend yet because he didn't know much about the other man apart from his age, major and a few of his interests and hobbies. In addition to that, Kisame was the type of person who didn't know how to properly budget their time. Who didn't place enough emphasis on success and hard work until it threatened to interfere with the things he loved most. In short, Kisame was the type of person Itachi usually didn't get along with. He didn't share the same ideals.

Yet, somehow, Itachi felt calmer when he spent time with Kisame. For once he felt as though the world wouldn't pass him by if he spent even a little bit of time doing nothing or sitting down to eat without a textbook open at his side. What's more, Kisame gave Itachi his distance when it came to issues he didn't necessarily want to discuss with the older man.

At least, that's how Itachi felt about him as of late.

By now the clanging of dishes in the sink had subsided as Sasuke finished up his task in the kitchen. "I'm done, can I be excused now?" He asked.

"You're free to go." She called from over her shoulder. She watched as Sasuke hurriedly darted from the kitchen out into the hallway and up the stairs, no doubt racing for his phone which was
lying on the desk in his bedroom. Only when she was sure that her youngest was contained in the space of his bedroom did she start to speak again. "I didn't want to bring this up in front of your brother earlier but I'm concerned that there's something you're not telling me, Itachi."

Itachi's heart skipped a beat but he tried not to let his panic show. "What do you mean?"

Mikoto glanced at the entrance to the foyer. "I can really pinpoint it but I have this gut feeling that something is up between you and your roommate." She said. "Is everything okay?"

Was it that obvious? Was he so aggravated by the situation with his roommate that it was apparent to everyone who spoke to him? The normally dense Kisame knew that something was wrong, Sasuke was waiting from the start of the school year for something to happen between the two and now his own mother was questioning his relationship with the blonde without having any concrete evidence.

He mentally kicked himself for becoming so involved in Deidara's business that everyone took notice. Itachi looked up to meet his mother's look of concern and sighed. "You're right. Deidara and I haven't been getting along very well recently." He admitted sheepishly.

"What happened?"

With a shrug, he shook his head. "It's trivial. I resolved to go to bed early in preparation for an exam and he insisted on keeping the lights on to work on an art project. That's all." Itachi lied, remembering back to Kisame's assumed cause of their dispute. I thought that maybe you and Deidara were arguing about him wanting to keep the lights on when you wanted to go to sleep or some stupid shit like that you know? It was a shot in the dark to provide this as an answer to her claim but under no circumstances could Itachi tell her the real reason that he and Deidara were avoiding each other.

His mother looked pained. "Did you ask him to turn the lights off so you could sleep?"

Did she honestly think he was so socially backwards that he couldn't speak up for himself? Even in an imaginary scenario? "I did."

"So what did he say?"

Itachi absently chased around the few noodles leftover on his dinner plate with his fork. "He said that his assignment was due the next day and that he would rather stay up to finish it as opposed to waking up early the next morning." Itachi answered. So long as he kept his gaze directed at the food on his plate, his mother had less of a chance of doubting his words.

"So how did you handle it?"

Itachi thought back to the way he had handled their actual argument. "I didn't handle it well." He admitted. "We weren't seeing eye to eye and I said some things I shouldn't have said."

"You lost your temper? Sweetie, that's so unlike you." She said and looked as though she was about to press him further on the subject. A small shake of her head told Itachi that she decided against questioning his actions as she continued her previous train of thought. "Whatever the case, I'm sure you could recover your grade if you didn't do as well as you liked on it."

"I know." He murmured. "I was stressed out and I handled things poorly." The truth of his own words hit home. The day Deidara kissed him Itachi had been stressed out from his run-in with Shisui's old friends Fu and Torune. Could it be that he unjustly taken out his frustrations on Deidara? Was he the one in the wrong? No. Deidara had kissed him when he was openly sharing
his feelings regarding a sensitive topic - his cousin's death. Itachi didn't see the need to apologize for his actions. This wasn't a misunderstanding created over a simple light switch and conflicting studying beliefs. It was more than that.

The groaning of Mikoto's chair pulled Itachi out of his own thoughts. "Are you finished with your plate, honey?" She asked.

Itachi nodded and rose to his feet with fork and dinner plate in hand. "Yeah."

"Let's take this into the kitchen, shall we?" She prompted.

Itachi offered her a curt nod and wordlessly followed his mother into the kitchen. "Not to beat a dead horse but I can't get over the fact that you lost your temper with him, honey." His mother began as she turned on the faucet to rinse her dinner plate. "I mean, Deidara strikes me as being kinda airy at times, but over something like a test?"

Silently listening to his mother's words, Itachi couldn't discern if she was disappointed in her normally level-headed son for lashing out over something so trivial or concerned for his mental state. Did living with another person have such a profound effect on her son that he couldn't concentrate on his studies, she probably wondered and Itachi couldn't blame her. The source of her concern was made-up, after all. Itachi's studies had not suffered since Valentine's Day save for the fact that some of his professors changed the criteria for assignments he had completed weeks in advance. Although it was a hassle to redo everything and adapt to the new changes, Itachi maintained a solid 4.0 GPA. While it was true that he and Deidara were not on speaking terms with each other, his relationship with the other man had very little effect on his studies.

When it was clear that Itachi was not going to provide her with an answer, she provided one of her own. "Honey," she said delicately, "it's not like you to lose your temper over something so...so—"

This line of conversation was exhausting and Itachi wanted to put an end to it as soon as possible. "I know, mom but it can't be helped. I was stressed out and I lost my temper." He reiterated so that she wouldn't have to.

Mikoto pursed her lips, acutely aware that Itachi was becoming agitated by her barrage of questions and cut straight to the point. "Sweetheart. I'm worried that the root of your frustrations lately is tied in with your cousin's death."

Itachi's eyes widened and in that second he wanted nothing more than to tell her that she was wrong and that Shisui's death had nothing to do with it. But that was just the thing. Real or imaginary, it was feelings stirred up from Fu and Torune's comments regarding Shisui's death that had put Itachi in such an unfamiliar state of mind. That Sunday, he had been disoriented, upset, and in need of a distraction. And when he got the distraction he was looking for, everything turned upside down and now he and Deidara weren't speaking to one another.

Even in the days following their argument, the nature of his relationship with Shisui only added fuel to the fire. "The Itachi Uchiha I know doesn't stress out over homework assignments he did three months in advance." Kisame stated and released his hold on Itachi's wrist. "Is this about Shisui?"

"What?"

Kisame averted his gaze to the floor and scratched the back of his head. "I worded that badly um...I dunno...you're different...this semester...I—"
"I'm different?!

"Well no, I didn't mean it like that I—" Kisame stuttered.

"If your cousin—your best friend—died a week after you finally made up after a semester of animosity towards each other in a car accident, wouldn't you be different too, Kisame?

That was only a week ago. A week ago he was arguing with Kisame over the nature of an argument he had with Deidara two weeks before that. Two arguments in the span of a single month. Whether he was shouting at Deidara and crying in front of Kisame, the utterance of his cousin's name was present at least once each time. In short, every argument he participated in tied back to Shisui's death in some way or another.

Mikoto didn't need to wait for Itachi's reply. His silence was more than enough to confirm her worries as she pulled him into a tight hug.

They stood that way for a while. Mikoto's arms wrapped around Itachi's upper arms, her cheek resting against his shoulder. He was much taller than his mother was so the embrace didn't have quite the effect as it had when he was younger and could bury his face in the crook of his mother's neck as if to cocoon himself from his worries. Nonetheless, Itachi treasured the closeness he felt in that moment because his mother was right. Although she didn't say it directly, the source of Itachi's frustrations were a direct result of grief. The grief of his cousin's death that he'd attempted to push aside and work through at a later date. The grief he'd attempted to ignore all these months following the accident. The grief he chose not to deal with that slowly started to manifest in the depths of his heart like bacteria in expired milk. He was a ticking time bomb waiting to happen. In fact, he'd already detonated, countless times. How long, he asked himself, would it be before he took the time to properly deal with his emotions?

He pulled away from the embrace just then, a sign that he was satisfied with the duration of her comfort. She flashed him a gentle smile. "The death of a relative can be hard." She began. "And there's no doubt in my mind that Shisui's death was particularly hard for you given how close you boys were."

Itachi kept his gaze directed to the floor tiles as she spoke. He feared that if he met her eyes, his resolve would crumble and he was frustrated with his constant displays of emotional weakness. This wasn't the kind of person Itachi saw himself to be. This wasn't how he normally acted. This wasn't him.

"But you have to remember that nobody knows what you're going through unless you tell them, sweetie." Mikoto continued. "Like I said before, Deidara...seems like he can be a little...dense...sometimes. That being said, you shouldn't lash out at him for something that is beyond his ability to fix. The only one who knows how you truly feel is you, Itachi. Deidara doesn't know how you feel and probably doesn't understand why you were so angry with him over wanting to keep the lights on."

Until now, Itachi was so absorbed in the recent events of his life and how closely his mother's words tied into them that he had forgotten about his original lie. This entire time his mother was speaking to him as if he was upset over a light switch when in reality, he was grappling with an unwanted kiss during a time of vulnerability and mixed feelings regarding his relationship with Kisame.

"Are you and Deidara on good terms?"

Itachi blinked in confusion. "Hm?"
Mikoto cocked her head to the side. "I said, are you and Deidara on good terms?"

No. The answer was simple. Or at least, the answer would have been simple if he'd told his mother the truth to begin with. How did he answer a question like this when she was under the impression that they were arguing over lights?

"You don't have to answer that."

He exhaled in relief but maintained a neutral facial expression so she wouldn't assume something else was bothering him.

"Just…" she began uncertainly, "keep in mind that your stress may be something internal that your friends don't understand."

"I will."

The corners of Mikoto's lips quirked upwards slightly. "I went to the store and bought some ice cream for when you came home." She said and opened the freezer to reveal two pints of "Chocolate Therapy" chocolate ice cream.

Chocolate Therapy. Itachi couldn't resist the urge to smile at the coincidence. "Thanks."

His mother smiled broadly now, exposing a row of straight pearly whites. "Not a problem." She said and closed the freezer door. "Oh! There was something else I wanted to say before I go." She turned to face him once more. "When I said that your friends might not understand the source of your frustration, I'm not saying that you have to tell them everything that's on your mind."

"I know." Itachi smiled.

"I just want you to keep in mind that you might be misdirecting your feelings of grief. That's all."

"I will."

Mikoto smiled once more before disappearing around the corner, leaving Itachi standing alone in the middle of the kitchen. Not even a minute after her departure, Itachi padded over to the freezer to enjoy the ice cream she bought for him. After a heavy conversation like that, he felt as though he deserved to treat himself, despite the fact that it was getting late.

Although his mother was under the impression that he and Deidara were fighting over something trivial, her words resonated deeply within him. The day that he shared a kiss with Deidara, the blond had been generally under the impression that Itachi was single and had feelings for him. He may have been right about Itachi's relationship status but he had mistaken Itachi's kindness towards him for something more than that. Something beyond the realm of friendship. What's more, Deidara had apologized profusely for the misunderstanding and Itachi refused to hear him out. And when he did, he continued to lash out at his roommate and mock his decisions. And what right did he have to do so? Itachi had never been in love with anyone before. While it may have seemed obvious to him that Sasori did not feel the same way towards Deidara as Deidara felt for Sasori, maybe love did cloud and complicate one's judgment and thought process. Maybe it was for that same reason, that Deidara had kissed Itachi that day, only to realize in the face of Itachi's confusion and anger that he had been mistaken.

Instead of trying to see things from Deidara's point of view or trying to understand even a little how Deidara felt, Itachi turned a deaf ear to him. He had effectively shunned him and for what? For his inability to properly deal with his cousin's untimely death.
Sitting at the dining room table with an open ice cream container in hand, Itachi carefully considered his mother's words and wondered how he could fix something that was beyond repair.

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
Shift Happens

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

HI

Too blunt.

Hey, how are you?

Too casual.

Hey.

Itachi pondered this one over for a moment. It didn't make it seem like Itachi had forgotten what happened between them, but in his mind, it opened the door for conversation.

But after he uttered it, what did he say next? What would Deidara say in response to that?

He probably wouldn't say anything. The admission would surely catch the blond off guard but he would most likely think that it was a trap of some sort and act as though Itachi hadn't said anything. In Deidara's mind, Itachi would sooner greet the door to their room than say anything to Deidara in fear that the chemistry major would be overcome with emotion and pull him into a hug followed by a tender kiss.

The thought sent shivers racing down Itachi's arms and caused the tiny hairs on his arm to stand up on end. No matter what, he couldn't shake off the kiss they'd shared exactly one month prior. "How can I work towards repairing our friendship if I can't move on and let things be?" He asked himself. After all, he didn't know what Deidara was thinking or how Deidara felt about him since they've been avoiding each other for the past couple of weeks.

"But unlike you, Itachi, I know how to give people a second chance."

Even if the two weren't on speaking terms right now, those words alone were gave Itachi a pretty decent idea as to how Deidara felt about him. Which lead him back to his current dilemma: how did he engage in a conversation with his leery roommate?

Hey.

Then what? What if Deidara ignored him? What did he say after that?

Five hundred feet ahead of him, the traffic light changed from green to yellow. Knowing he wouldn't be able to beat it, Itachi released the gas pedal and gently pressed on the brakes to bring the car to a slow stop. Was it really so important for him to repair things with Deidara now? They were midway through the second semester so what did he have to gain? Their friendship? Unlikely. They could talk and share lunch and dinner together on campus but Itachi doubted that he would accept any invitation to hang out with Deidara outside of campus again. Getting lunch at a restaurant or taking a walk through the park or even catching another movie were all too intimate, he thought. Especially given their history.

And just like that, he was back to square one, thinking about that dreadful kiss they shared.
“What do I do?” He pleaded internally. It was times like these when he wished for Shisui to be alive again, so he could ask him. Although they didn't see eye to eye on everything, Itachi could always count on his charismatic cousin for answers to his social dilemmas.

“You're going to apologize? You? Itachi Uchiha? I never thought I'd live to see the day.” Shisui would laugh.

*I only wish that you could be here to see it, Shisui.* Itachi thought somberly when the light changed to green.

-8-8-8-

*A mistake.* Itachi concluded, feeling very out of place in his own skin. *This was definitely a mistake.*

Before him sat a grilled chicken Caesar salad wrap, neatly sliced in half and split open upon the paper that wrapped it. In addition to this, he purchased a small bag of sea-salted chips and a bottled water.

When he and Deidara were still on good terms, their class schedules coincided in such a way that the pair would run into each other for lunch at a certain days of the week. They never formally agreed to spend lunch together on those days, it just happened that way. Dinner, on the other hand, was a different story. Because they shared a room together, Deidara would stop by to drop off his bag and ask Itachi if he wanted to grab something to eat at the cafeteria with him. And more often than not, Itachi agreed because he had nothing to lose from doing so.

As far as him and Kisame were concerned, things were different. While they never formally agreed to share lunch together or meet up for dinner ahead of time, they never fell into any kind of routine of doing so either. Most days, Itachi couldn't be bothered to spend time in center of the hustle and bustle, surrounded by an endless stream of loud, opinionated and often immature upper and lower classman alike so he opted to spend his lunch break elsewhere. Every now and then he'd run into Kisame who would call him over on his way out the door for a quick chat.

But today was different. Today, Itachi decided to venture out of his comfort zone and willingly invite Kisame to share lunch with him in the most unobtrusive way possible. His plan was designed to work in one of two ways: he could either buy his lunch and invite himself to sit with Kisame if the upperclassman was already eating or buy his lunch and wait for the upperclassman to pass him by in hopes that Kisame would sit down on his own.

Why he couldn't carry out his normal day-to-day actions knowing that Kisame would inevitably take a seat at his table, Itachi did not know.

*At the very least, I should start eating so it doesn't look like I've been stood up.* He thought pathetically and gingerly picked up half of his wrap.

The things he wanted to talk to Kisame about weren't really that important. In his mind he envisioned himself asking Kisame about how his spring break went and discussing when they would meet up to work on his statistics homework again if need be. Nothing out of the ordinary.

*If it's that simple why can't I do the same with Deidara?* Itachi wondered but refused to entertain the thought any further. He did, however, make a mental note to ask Deidara how his spring break had gone. *Hey, how was your spring break?* Progress.

"What'cha got there?"
Itachi nearly choked on a piece of lettuce he was chewing and covered his mouth to speak. "A grilled chicken Caesar salad wrap." He muttered.

"A healthy choice." Kisame smiled and lowered himself into the chair opposite the lowerclassman. "Do you like French fries?"

He narrowed his eyes and studied the older man's face for any clues that might suggest why he was asking him if he liked French fries or not. "Sometimes. Why do you ask?" He ventured when he realized he was unable to decipher Kisame's intent. He realized with a start that Kisame, who had just entered the cafeteria and didn’t have anything to eat, might buy him a plate of French fries and force him to eat some.

"No reason." Kisame shrugged and nudged his book bag under his chair with his foot. "I just never see you eat French fries so I thought I'd ask."

"Oh." Itachi mumbled and lifted his chicken Caesar wrap to his mouth.

"Ever dip your French fries into a chocolate milkshake?" Kisame asked next.

Itachi, who had opened his mouth to take a bite, stalled, furrowed his eyebrows and answered "No. I have not."

Kisame smirked, a mischievous glimmer in his eye. "Don't knock it til you try it, okay? It's amazing." He said and rose to his feet. "I'll be back; I'm starving."

Itachi watched Kisame's retreating back as he walked in the direction of the entrance to the lunch line. Only when Kisame was out of view did Itachi ask himself "Who decides to dip French fries into a milkshake – chocolate no less – and eat it?" He could understand if it were a dessert item or a candy of some sort but not something salty or greasy like French fries.

It dawned on him just then that he had a predetermined goal in mind that he wanted to accomplish over his lunch break. His plan was to wait for Kisame to sit down with him, ask him about his spring break and inquire about his studies, primarily in his statistics class. And yet, somehow they had waded into the topic of French fries and milkshakes. What stunned Itachi was how effortlessly Kisame had maneuvered the conversation in that direction.

"What'cha got there?" His first question. "A healthy choice." Validation that he had indeed processed Itachi's answer. "Do you like French fries?" A question from left field with seemingly no direct relation to anything that had been said prior. If anything, French fries were the opposite of what Itachi was eating.

"Thanks, you too!" Itachi could hear Kisame saying to the lunch lady who had processed his meal. He watched Kisame take long, confident strides over to their table, smiling broadly all the while.

Is there ever a time when he's not smiling? Itachi wondered before the answer dawned on him: Whenever he's studying. A fond smile spread across his face as he looked back on those long, trying nights in the library when he had to let Kisame borrow his text book because he had misplaced his own or left it behind in his bedroom.

"I'll have to buy you a milkshake and fries sometime so you can try them together." Kisame announced when he returned back at their table.

It did not escape Itachi's notice that the other man's lunch consisted of chicken tenders, French fries heavily drizzled in ketchup and what appeared to be cayenne pepper and a soda. The polar opposite of Itachi's lunch.
"So," Kisame began and shoved three fries into mouth all at once before continuing, "how wush yor," he paused to swallow, "spring break?"

Did it ever occur to this man that Itachi could barely understand him when he spoke with his mouth full? If he was in the middle of chewing when Itachi asked him a question it would be different. But who started to talk, paused to eat, and continued to talk?

As much as it bothered him, he didn't comment. This behavior wasn't new to him so he let it be. "Good." He answered. "It was good."

Kisame licked the ketchup off his fingers with a nod. "That's good."

"How was yours?"

As soon as the question had left Itachi’s mouth, Kisame was reaching to pick up his soda and took a long sip before answering "It was great. I got to kick back, relax and think about anything not related to school." He answered contentedly and leaned back in his chair to express how at ease he felt. "You don't have midterms to study for?" Itachi couldn't help but ask. Although he set aside a decent amount of time to complete his assignments well before they were due, he still had group projects to complete. On top of that, a few of his midterm exams were set to take place after spring break so he had spent a majority of his free time studying for them while he was at home.

"Oh yeah. Of course I do." He balked and effortlessly ripped a chicken tender in two before cramming it into his mouth like a squirrel storing nuts for the winter. "I shink everywom hash some short of mid—" he closed his mouth to chew, "—term test regardless of their major."

You do realize that it's not proper etiquette to force food into your mouth like that. Itachi silently chided him. You're a human being, not an animal.

"Why kill myself studying for them when it's called 'break' for a reason?"

Itachi wordlessly disagreed. As the semester progressed, the course load intensified. If you didn't manage your time properly you would spend the days leading up to final exams pulling all-nighters when sleep is key to doing well on said exams. That wasn't to say that Itachi didn't enjoy spending time with his brother and parents for a week – he did – but he also thought it was important to effectively utilize his free time catching up on assignments before the various project deadlines started to creep in on him.

Although he hadn't voiced his opinion aloud, Kisame seemed to sense his variance and smiled nonetheless. "I don't expect you to understand. You do homework for fun, right?"

Itachi understood that Kisame's comment was meant to be light-hearted in nature but he couldn't quite bring himself to smile and laugh it off. There were several instances when he would have rather opened up a novel instead of a thick accounting text over the break but reminded himself that if he worked hard in the moment, he'd have more time to relax later in the semester. Before he could open his mouth to comment, however, two familiar figures entered his field of vision.

"I wonder what they're serving at the hot foods station, yeah." Deidara beamed.

Beside him Sasori furrowed his eyebrows in what appeared to be disgust. "I don't understand how you eat that stuff. It's never anything good."

"Says the man who always eats the same thing!" Deidara shouted loudly enough for reach Itachi's ears from twenty feet away before disappearing into the lunch room to grab something to eat.
"Are you guys still ignoring each other?" Kisame asked.

Itachi slowly turned his head in Kisame's direction and carefully considered his answer. Yes, he and Deidara hadn't spoken to each other apart from a few uttered "sorry's" and "excuse me's" when maneuvering around each other in their shared dorm room but nothing more than that. Itachi had wanted to initiate some form of conversation with the blond yesterday but when Deidara hadn't arrived back by the time Itachi retired for the night, he surmised that he was planning to come back the next day. "He's been spending a lot of time with Sasori lately so I haven't seen very much of him." He settled on. It was a vague answer but it satisfied the particular nature of his current situation.

"I see." He said and picked up his soda.

In that moment, Itachi wished more than ever that he knew what Kisame was thinking. Before the break he'd made it apparent that Itachi was being harsh in his treatment of Deidara since their shared kiss. "I don't know the kid that well to be honest with you, but from what I've seen, he's a little bit 'out there,' you know what I'm saying? He strikes me as the type to act first and think later but based on what you've told me about, his heart was in the right place." He'd told Itachi the day everything came spilling out in Kisame's apartment. And yet, Kisame said nothing to distinguish his position on the matter. Maybe he didn't want to tap into a latent anger brewing deep within Itachi like he had a week after it happened or maybe he just didn't care. "Your statistics homework isn't due this week, is it?" Itachi asked when the silence between them started to become uncomfortable.

Was it pathetic that he was beginning to memorize Kisame's statistics homework schedule, he wondered absently but refused to let this despair show on his face.

Kisame shook his head. "It's due next week. On Thursday. Phase two is due this Thursday though. I haven't started that yet!" He laughed.

Itachi reached out for the bag of potato chips he picked up early. "You wouldn't have to worry about it if you'd taken the time to complete it last week." He teased the upperclassman and pried open the salty snack.

A tight smile stretched across the bottom of Kisame's face before giving way to a toothy smile. "I should've known you'd say that you arrogant little jerk."

Phase two was a fourth of a multi-step project Kisame was conducting over the course of the semester. From Itachi's observations when he was a statistics student, every class, regardless of the instructor, completed the same project. Therefore he understood that if you paid attention in class and completed your work, each phase of the project would make sense. As such, the pair had come to an agreement long ago that Kisame was more than capable of completing each step of the process without Itachi’s help, especially since Itachi saw to it that Kisame completed the work necessary to complete each step of the project. "If you want to get a head start on your homework for next week I'd be more than happy to provide you with assistance this weekend." Itachi offered and took a bite of his chip. Like someone who was raised with proper manners, he waited to finish speaking before eating.

Kisame cocked his head to the side and rolled the base of his empty soda cup in circles on the table. "Can we do it next week?"

"Next week?"

Kisame nodded but didn't look up to meet Itachi's eyes. "Don't get me wrong, I'll probably need
your help with it and I know you like to get things done and out of the way as soon as possible but I kinda got something going on this weekend."

Itachi thought this over for a moment. "That's fine."

Only then did Kisame look up to meet Itachi's gaze. "You sure it's okay? I feel like I'd be inconveniencing you."

"It's fine. Really." He answered. "Since I spent my spring break exclusively completing homework assignments I have a lot of free time now."

"Point made, point made." Kisame snickered.

For a moment the only noises were those around them. Students discussing coursework or complaining about their professors with their peers, friends laughing and talking about what they did over the break, the crumpling of sandwich paper and the distant clicking of fingers against the keys of a laptop.

Kisame, who was smiling just moments earlier was staring out the nearby window, watching people pass by. He had long since scarfed down his fries and chicken tenders without so much as a crumb leftover and placed his empty soda cup in the paper container that once contained his lunch. It was odd to see the normally boisterous upperclassmen look so serious for once. His eyes were narrowed as if he were in deep thought, but his irises stayed locked in once place, staring off into distant space. Even the corners of his mouth which were almost constantly upturned and giving way to a bright smile were drawn in a stiff line.

It was a side of him Itachi had never seen before and that was what concerned him. Something was bothering the older man. It wasn't like him to indulge Itachi in the details of his plans this weekend unless it was something serious. And even though they had since moved on from the discussing it, whatever it was still seemed to nag at Kisame's conscience. "Is everything alright?" Itachi thought he should ask him. He wanted to but he felt that he didn't know Kisame well enough to pry into his personal life. In any case, Itachi would surely run into him later in the week. If Kisame still displayed this demeanor, Itachi would ask about it. If regained his usual disposition, then Itachi wouldn't utter a word about it.

"I'm going to throw away my trash." Itachi spoke, breaking the silence. "Are you done with this?"

He tilted his head in the direction of Kisame's own trash.

Before Itachi could push his chair away so he could stand up, Kisame was already rising to his feet. "Don't worry about it; I'll take care of it." He offered and gathered both his trash and Itachi's trash to throw away.

"You don't have to do that."

Kisame shook his head. "It's not a problem. It's the least I can do to repay you for putting up with me for this long!" He laughed.

A small smile graced Itachi's lips. "Are you laughing to try to cover up what's bothering you? He wondered and watched as Kisame walked in the direction of the nearest trash bin.

This deadbeat had never spoken to him in class before, so why did he feel the need to start now?

Was he trying to make friends, he wondered. He certainly hoped that he wasn't trying to recruit him for the swim team. If that was the case, he was in for a rude awakening.
Back then, Itachi regarded Kisame as your typical failing athlete. The type who received a full scholarship to play sports and ditch class when students like Itachi had to work hard to earn scholarships like that by performing well in school and on college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT exams and maintain a certain GPA while they were enrolled. Itachi was disgusted, to say the least, when the man first initiated a conversation with him around this time last semester.

But things were different now. While Kisame still had a lot to learn about proper lunch etiquette, the man was considerate of Itachi's feelings when something was wrong, conscientious of Itachi's time when it concerned their weekly study sessions. In general, Kisame was proving himself to be a warm, caring and all around good hearted human being.

Maybe Itachi had been wrong about him from the beginning. Maybe this man could surprise him the more they hung out. Perhaps they could even become good friends.

He was pulled from his thoughts when Sasori and Deidara came into view. The two walked side by side like old friends who've known each other forever as Deidara chatted on about science as an art or something using sweeping hand gestures while Sasori listened impassively. As they approached his table, Itachi's dark eyes connected with Deidara's bright blue ones. It lasted less than a second before Deidara broke the contact and continued to talk as though nothing had happened. Their shared glance did not go unnoticed by Sasori, however, who narrowed his eyes in annoyance and sent a sharp glare in Itachi's direction on the way out.

This has nothing to do with you, Itachi thought bitterly, so stay out of it.

"What was that all about?" Kisame asked when he returned to the table. He was on a few steps behind the two so it was a given that he would take notice of the venomous stares.

Itachi shook his head rose to his feet. "Nothing." He deadpanned and slung his messenger bag over his shoulder. "My class is in half an hour so I'm going to take my leave."

Kisame's eyes followed him for a moment as if to look for any sign of distress in his ebony colored irises. Only when he found no outward cause for concern did he say "Alright. Have fun in class!"

"Thanks." Itachi shrugged.

"What class is it? Intro to Quantum Physics?" He joked.

Itachi knitted his brow. "Computer science." He supplied and turned on his heel to walk away.

"I took that class freshman year!"

"Well seeing as I am currently in my freshman year I must be on track." Itachi said, turning around to face Kisame again.

Kisame folded his arms across his chest with a deep chuckle. "Enjoy yourself." He said. "And I'll see you around."

"See you around."

Chapter End Notes

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband
It saddens me to announce that you are all officially caught up as in I just finished writing this chapter today and you probably won't see another update until May when the semester officially ends and I have free time once more. I'm not throwing this story to the wayside by any means! I just don't have time to update it every week because I don't have time to write for fun when school is in full swing!

Some of you may have noticed that I posted 12 chapters tonight instead of my usual 1 or 2. The reason being is that it's Kisame Hoshigaki's birthday (March 18th) and this chapter actually takes place the day before his birthday so I couldn't resist uploading every chapter between chapter 7 and this one to celebrate!

That said, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ITACHI SIGHED. "LET ME GUESS, you're not going to start eating until you've seen me try this, are you?"

Across the small table, Kisame uncrossed his arms and gestured to the chocolate frosty positioned in the middle of the table. "That's the plan!"

Itachi extended his middle and index fingers into the fry reached into the cardboard fry container to pluck two average sized French fries. "What compelled you to even try such a combination in the first place?" He asked, stalling for time.

Kisame shrugged. "Kim Possible, duh!"

"You watched that show?" Itachi asked. He personally never saw the appeal of a teenage spy or whatever she was and her blundering sidekick.

"You didn't?"

Itachi shook his head.

"I watched that show all the time when I was younger." Kisame reminisced with a fond twinkle in his eyes.

Itachi glanced down at the wilting French fries he still held between his fingertips. If he ate them without dipping them into the offending dessert in the middle of the table, Kisame would make a scene. "Hey wait a second, you were supposed to dip them in the frosty not eat them plain!" He'd complain.

Seeing as he couldn't put off his fate any longer, Itachi dipped a single French fry into the light cocoa colored dessert and retracted it. Kisame had gone out of his way to take him out to lunch solely to try this odd concoction. The least he could do was give it a try.

"You're doing it wrong!" Kisame protested suddenly.
The sudden outcry caused him to flinch. "There's a right and wrong way to do it?" What could he be possibly missing? Dip it in, take it out, and eat it. Simple.

"Here." Kisame offered and leaned across the table. His large hand completely engulfed Itachi's and thrust the fry back into the dessert. "You can't just dip it in and take it out," he instructed, "you need to angle it so that you can actually taste the frosty on the fry. Otherwise it's just going to taste like a soggy French fry."

With Kisame's hand still tangled around his own, they removed the fry to reveal a sizeable glob of frosty hanging off the fry like toothpaste on a toothbrush. "You can let go now or were you planning on feeding me while you were at it?"

Kisame laughed. "I think I can trust you to do that much on your own." He said and sat down to do the same with his own fries and chocolate frosty.

Itachi opened his mouth, careful to place the mass hanging off the fry directly on the surface of his tongue before biting down to sever it in half.

"What do you think?" Kisame asked immediately after stuffing two frosty covered fries into his mouth. Not surprisingly.

It tasted exactly like a frosty at first, chilling his palate. At the same time the saltiness of the fry assaulted his nostrils. Pushing the combo to the side of his mouth so he could chew the crispy fry encased inside the frosty, he came to a conclusion: it tasted exactly like he imagined that French fry dipped in a frosty would taste. "I don't see the appeal." He said upon swallowing.

"You're kidding!?!" He asked incredulously and immediately snatched the frosty away. "These things are the best!"

"Be my guest." Itachi murmured and delicately reached for his Mediterranean salad. When they first arrived to the establishment, Kisame argued that Itachi always opted to eat salad and then tried to equate his diet to that of a rabbit's. In the end, Itachi was able to dissuade him by saying "If I'm to try this concoction of yours then I should be able to decide what I want to eat."

"Fair enough." Kisame compromised.

As the pair started to eat, Itachi watched Kisame take large bites of his sandwich, a double cheeseburger topped with bacon and mayonnaise and wondered why the man had chosen to take him out for lunch today. While Kisame had promised to let Itachi try the combination of French fries and frosties sometime, Itachi didn't expect for it to be a few days later. There was no rush in his mind to try this wayward combo.

But what puzzled Itachi the most was the fact that he rarely saw the man eat lunch with people his age. He had seen Kisame loudly chatting with a group of friends in the dining hall for dinner on the weeknights before and he assumed that during swim season he often dined with his teammates after practice.

"Because I was going to get something to eat and wanted to know if you wanted to tag along." Kisame had said the evening he invited Itachi to sit with him while he ate dinner after practice. Back then, Kisame hadn't been surrounded by a bevy of jocks like Itachi had expected him to be and he appeared to have no dinner plans that involved his other teammates either. It was only when, upon running into Itachi, he asked if the younger classman wanted to share dinner together somewhere. "May I ask you a question?" He asked after several minutes of silence.
Kisame was in the process of devouring the last of his sandwich and nodded, his mouth too full to provide a verbal response.

"You don't usually eat lunch with your roommates." Itachi ventured.

Kisame arched a quizzical brow. Seconds later, a crooked smile spread over his face. "You know that's funny because one, that wasn't a question, it was a statement."

Itachi regarded him with a blank stare. Of all the times to nitpick, Kisame chose to do it now. Unless he was avoiding something.

"And last I checked I checked, neither do you."

He sent a narrowed glare in Kisame's direction because the man knew full well why he and his roommate didn't eat lunch together anymore. "It was an observation."

"But you wanted to know if you could ask me a question. You didn't say you wanted to tell me an observation." Kisame grinned and pinched several French fries from the container. "My roommates and I have different lunch schedules which is why you don't see me eating lunch with them all that often. Either that or they've already made plans to eat lunch with their girlfriends or make out behind a building somewhere instead." He shrugged.

Itachi didn't need to know the details of Kisame's roommate's love lives. Explaining that their schedules conflicted was sufficient enough.

"I could make plans to eat lunch with them if I wanted to," he continued, "but by the time I get out of class I'm starving. And you seem to be free the same time that I'm free so I spend my lunch eating with you instead."

So he was nothing more than a placeholder then. If Itachi understood correctly, Kisame would rather eat lunch with his roommates if they were free, but because they had other commitments Itachi was the next best option.

"Don't get me wrong, I enjoy eating lunch with you." He said as if to read Itachi's mind. "It's a good time to talk about when we're going to meet up to help me with my statistics homework and catch up, you know? Talk about life."

_Talk about life._ Kisame said. More like "make sure you're emotionally stable and won't be reduced to tears when I question your relationship with Deidara again." At least, that's how Itachi interpreted his words. "Don't feel obligated to sit with me for lunch because you feel sorry for me."

Kisame, who had long since tilted his frosty in an attempt to salvage what was left of it, slowed his movements and glanced upwards at Itachi. After several seconds went by, he averted his gaze downwards at his frosty.

So Itachi was right. Kisame didn't sit with him because he enjoyed his company. He sat with him because he felt sorry for him. If they were in the cafeteria, Itachi would have casually slung his messenger bag over his shoulder and retreated to an empty classroom, mentally cursing himself for being so foolish and so ignorant.

"I already told you I'm bisexual, right?" Kisame finally spoke.

The question was sudden and immediately pulled Itachi from the swirling vortex of his thoughts. There had been no mention of sexuality so why was he bringing it up? "Yes…?"
"And I told you how a lot of people assume that because I'm an athlete that I'm straight, right?"

Itachi nodded though he still didn't understand where the course of the conversation was leading.

Wiping his salt laden fingers on his dark jeans, he somberly continued. "It's not really a big deal since I don't go around flaunting what type of people I'm into but when I'm with my roommates or my teammates I feel like I'm hiding something. An important piece of myself, you know?"

In all honesty, Itachi didn't know. He never felt like he was hiding any part of himself from anyone but nodded to keep the conversation going.

"I don't know why but it's different when I'm with you. You're more down to earth I guess."

"What do you mean?"

For the first time since Kisame began to answer Itachi's question, he looked up to meet Itachi's eyes. The contact lasted only a second before Kisame looked away. "I don't know. You don't seem like the type of person to judge people until you've really gotten a chance to get to know them." He said.

It was Itachi's turn to look away this time. Typical jock and knuckled headed athlete were just a few of the words that came to mind when he first met Kisame. To this day he wondered why someone like Kisame – a confident, popular athlete who drinks protein drinks and runs at the break of dawn for the fun of it – would willingly sit with someone like Itachi – a quiet bookworm that would rather spend the day in solitude reading a book than in the company of others. And somehow or another this man believed that Itachi wasn't one to judge.

"I assume you knew your roommate was gay before, you know, Valentine's Day, right?"

Just the mention of Valentine's Day made Itachi's pulse race. He had yet to find the right moment to make amends with Deidara. "Yes."

"And yet that didn't stop you from befriending him, even though his sexual orientation made you uncomfortable right?"

Itachi didn't respond.

Kisame scratched the back of his neck. "I don't know if this makes any sense or not but when I'm with you I don't feel like I have to hide anything. I told you I was bisexual and you haven't treated me any differently since. You haven't run for the hills or anything like that!" He laughed.

I considered it. Itachi absently thought. And it was true. When Kisame told Itachi that he was bisexual, the world felt like it was spinning. Was everyone he associated with on this campus everything other than heterosexual? He remembered thinking at the time. But Kisame never forced the issue. He never made any unwanted advances towards Itachi, and until today, he had never broached the topic. And Itachi respected him for that. It was because of this that Itachi continued to tutor him and sit with him at lunch.

"Anyhow, I hang out with you at lunch time because it's the only time you're not in class or studying in your room. I don't eat with you because I pity you or because I don't have anyone else to sit with. I eat with you because the more time I spend with you, the more comfortable I feel in my own skin."

Itachi couldn't bite his tongue. He had to pry for a further explanation. "How so?" What quality did he have that made Kisame feel better about himself? His studiousness, perhaps? His organization?
"Well when I first met you I thought you were this robot that spends all his time studying." Kisame began to explain. "But the more time I spend with you, the more I get to know you, the more I realize how human you are. The day you came clean about what happened between you and Dei last month really changed my perspective of you."

He could only imagine. After weeks of concealing the events of that night, Kisame managed to force it out of him. Itachi's normally steely composure crumbled that day and it wasn't something he looked back upon fondly.

"That day I saw a more human side of you that I had never seen before. Not only that, but it was kinda cool to know that there was somebody like me who kept things locked up inside. Things you feel like you can't really talk to anyone else about."

Although Itachi hated it when Kisame implied that he was anything less than human, he understood the point that he was trying to make. Somehow or another Kisame found solace in Itachi's company because like him, Itachi strived to keep parts of his life a secret from the rest of the world.

Across from him, Kisame pulled his phone from his pocket. "I guess we should start getting back, huh?"

Itachi checked his watch and nodded in agreement. "It's probably for the best." He said and tossed his plastic fork and crumpled up napkin into his empty salad bowl.

"Thanks for coming out with me today." Kisame smiled with bright eyes. A stark contrast from just ten minutes prior. "I was surprised you said yes."

Itachi shrugged and rose from his seat to collect their trays. "I figured you'd either drag me out here to try it for myself or you'd bring one to me the next time we met up."

"That's not a bad idea, actually." He mused, a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

Itachi dumped his tray in the nearby trash receptacle. "No thank you, I'll pass." He said and waited for Kisame to dump his own tray. Kisame volunteered to drive them since he was more familiar with the area than Itachi was.

"I don't sit with you because I pity you," Kisame said as they walked into the parking lot, "I sit with you because you fascinate me. There's more to you than what meets the eye." He pulled out the car keys to the gray mustang he lovingly named "Samehada."

Although Itachi would've guessed that Kisame drove a sports car, there was more to Kisame than what met the eye too. Itachi would have never imagined that he could ever be persuaded to try a combination as unsightly as French fries and a chocolate milkshake of all things and yet here he was, in the company of an athlete he'd originally pegged as a dumb jock, trying things he would have never considered trying before if it hadn't been for Kisame. And their conversations were… nice. Whenever Itachi spoke with Kisame, he forgot about schoolwork and Deidara and everything else that nagged at the back of his head on a typical day.

"I'm sorry for my accusations of you earlier." Itachi said a few minutes into the drive back to campus. He opened his mouth to offer a reason for his actions when he realized he didn't have one. He wasn't sure why he assumed Kisame only thought of him as a placeholder. Such a thing never mattered to him before so he was uncertain as to why it riled him up so much now.

"Don't be." Kisame interjected. "I probably would have thought the same thing if I were you."
When he found himself at a loss for words, he simply smiled in response, thankful for Kisame's understanding.

"And Itachi?"

"Yeah?"

"You know you can ask or tell me anything right? I mean, I told you that I was into guys just as much as I was into girls so don't be afraid to talk to me when something's bothering you, okay?"

This was the second time now today that Kisame brought up his sexuality in a conversation. Perhaps admitting to Itachi that he felt comfortable in his presence eradicated any hesitation he might have felt in mentioning it before.

"I mean you don't have to if you don't want to but I'm just saying you don't have to keep everything bottled in, you know?"

"I'll keep that in mind." Itachi replied back.

Kisame looked over in his direction and smiled before shifting his focus back to the road.

*You know you can ask me anything right?* If that was the case, perhaps Kisame wouldn't mind if he asked him something that had been on his mind for a few weeks now. "Are you in a relationship right now?"

He would be lying if he said he was expecting to Kisame to erupt in a fit of laughter when asked. In fact, it was so sudden that it made Itachi flinch. "Wow when I said 'ask me anything' you didn't hesitate, did you? You went straight for the kill and asked the personal stuff!"

Maybe his question was a bit too personal. "Forgive me," He mumbled, "ever since you told me that you were bisexual I—"

"I'm not in a relationship right now, Itachi." Kisame cut in.

How did one respond to an answer like that? It wasn't as though Itachi was expecting anything to come from it one way or another. He just couldn't picture Kisame being in a relationship with another man.

"But I do have my eye on someone at the moment." Kisame said, keeping his eyes level with the road.

"Really." Itachi answered evenly.

Kisame nodded slightly. "Hm-hm. But I don't think they're aware of it yet."

He wasn't surprised that someone like Kisame would be pinning after someone. Kisame was charismatic, popular, athletic, and by popular standards, he wasn't unattractive by any means. What surprised Itachi most was how someone *wouldn't* be aware of Kisame's affection as he seemed like the type to go out of his way to spend all of his free time winning the other person over with displays of chivalry and disgusting fast food combinations if today was anything to go by.

"Mind if I ask you a question?" Kisame asked as the university came into view.

*Are you in a relationship with anyone?* It was the only thing Itachi could think of that Kisame would want to ask him. And it was only fair since Itachi had asked him the same thing just now.
"Have you talked to Deidara yet?"

"No not yet." Itachi replied and released the breath he was holding. "I haven't found the chance yet." Which was both true and untrue. Deidara didn't spend as much time in their shared room as he used to. From what he'd observed, his roommate was spending more and more time hanging out with Sasori in the art room or in the upperclassman's room. And given Itachi's relationship with Deidara as of late, he could see why.

"Try to find the time to talk to him. Even if it's not about anything important." Kisame said. "Talking about your day or about his day will at least help break the ice before you talk about more important issues, you know?"

"Yeah." Itachi understood that. His problem, however, lie in implementation. He could plan exactly what he wanted to say to Deidara and how he wanted to say it but every time he saw Deidara the blond was either in a hurry to go somewhere else or blocked any of Itachi's attempts to make conversation with him. "I'll keep that in mind." He settled on.

"Just give him some time to warm up to you and it'll be fine."

_It'll be fine…_

_Shisui brought a gentle hand to rest on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Itachi; it'll be fine! I promise!"

_It'll be fine._ He promised a few days prior to his death. And now Kisame was promising him the same thing. "Thank you." He said in a voice just barely above a whisper.

Kisame glanced in his direction as they entered the parking lot behind his apartment building. "Not a problem! Call me up anytime you're craving French fries and a frosty and I'll make it happen!"

Itachi wasn't thanking him for taking him off campus for lunch but he might as well have. He didn't have the heart to tell Kisame what he was really thanking him for. "It's unlikely I'll have a craving for that particular combination but I'll give you a call if I change my mind."

Kisame smiled and reached for the gear shift to put the car in park. "I hope I live to see the day!"

As soon as Kisame stopped the car and pulled the keys from the ignition, Itachi opened the passenger door and stepped out onto the pavement. "Am I meeting you at your apartment again next Tuesday?"

"If that's okay with you." Kisame agreed. "Anywhere but the library; that's all I ask."

"That's fine."

Kisame flashed him a warm smile and unlocked the back doors of the car so the pair could retrieve their bags from the back seat. Kisame hadn't told Itachi of this plan until this morning in the form of a badly worded text and several corrections marked with asterisks so they brought their bags with them. "Well I hate to 'dine and dash' but I gotta get to my next class."

"Same here." Itachi said and slung his own messenger bag over his shoulder. "See you later, Kisame."

"Later, Itachi!" Kisame called over his shoulder and started to jog across the parking lot.

Itachi followed Kisame at a much slower pace as he had more time to spare before his next class.
started than Kisame did. Once he traversed the parking lot and set foot on the side walk he chided himself for not buying a vanilla frosty to go because now he really wanted one. Sans French fries.

-8-8-8-

Itachi enjoyed Fridays. Fridays were very peaceful for him as he only had one class to attend at eight in the morning, leaving the rest of his day to do whatever he felt like. And in most cases, he spent his time working on homework that was recently assigned. Although he strived to complete as many assignments as fast as possible to prevent the stress that most of his classmates felt later on in the semester, some of his professors didn't explain the criteria for the assignments until closer to the day they were to be introduced on the syllabus.

Thus, Itachi spent his Fridays getting a head start while everyone else attended classes or slept in.

Deidara didn't have such a luxury. Like Itachi, he also had an eight o'clock class to attend followed by another class shortly afterwards. After eating a quick lunch, he often returned back to the room to collapse in his bed for a few hours until meeting up with Sasori later in the day for art club.

Today, however, Deidara arrived back to the room and immediately began shifting around in his closet for something. Itachi didn't say anything to the blond as it was none of his business what Deidara was doing. But when he saw a bright flash of blue and a dark black pant leg he was curious to know what the blond was planning. It still wasn't any of his business but from what he could tell, Deidara had disappeared to the showers with a pair of dress slacks draped over his arm.

Twenty minutes later, Itachi confirmed his suspicions when Deidara reappeared donning an electric blue dress shirt, a black bow tie pulled into a perfect bow around his neck (a feat Itachi was't sure he could even accomplish without a tutorial), suspenders and dark black dress pants. Even his normally wild hair was washed, blow dried and combed back into a neat pony tail that hung low at the base of his neck. It looked as though the artist had attempted to comb back the long fringe that normally hung in front of his left eye but several strands had come undone, not long enough to do what he wanted to do without the use of bobby-pins or the like and Deidara didn't seem to care.

"It's unusual to see you so dressed up." Itachi stated in a tone that lacked any animosity or ill will. It was his hope to sound as open and friendly as possible so that Deidara wouldn't spit out a sarcastic remark and storm out of the room as he had the last time he tried to engage in a conversation with the blond.

"I have an interview, yeah." The blond answered back, much to Itachi's surprise. His tone was bereft of any anger or resentment. If anything, he sounded distracted which was understandable as he continued to fish around in his dresser for something. Socks, if his bare feet were an indicator.

"Really? Off campus?" Itachi pressed. They were already on rocky footing so he had nothing to lose from asking his roommate questions.

"On campus." He responded. Their room was tiny. Just big enough to fit two beds and two desks. The two closets in the room were just big enough to accommodate Deidara's large suitcase and were arranged on either side of the doorway. From where Itachi sat at his desk, he could clearly hear Deidara mutter "Where the hell is my other sock? I just saw it last night, yeah!"

"Which department?"

"Admissions, yeah." He spoke to Itachi. "There you are you little bastard!" He spoke in regards to the sock. "I didn't get the RA position I applied for so I thought I'd apply for a job giving tours to
prospective students and their parents, yeah."

Itachi knew Deidara applied to become an RA or resident assistant. He too, received an e-mail explaining when and where the mandatory information sessions were being held but didn't see the appeal. Patrolling the hallways until the early hours of the morning, writing incident reports detailing his findings, planning monthly events to get people to come out of their rooms. An on campus job couldn't hurt him since he didn't want to rely on his parents for money for the rest of his life but mediating between roommates who couldn't get along with one another clearly wasn't the right job for him. How could he help people sort out problems with their roommates if he couldn't even sort out problems with his own roommate freshman year? "I didn't know you didn't get the RA position. I'm sorry to hear that."

Deidara shrugged and stalked over to his bed with two socks in hand. "I got the rejection letter on Valentine's Day, yeah. I was kinda bummed out about it but there's nothing that chocolate can't fix, right?"

Hearing "Valentine's Day" was enough to make Itachi's heart skip a beat. Knowing that Deidara had gone to such lengths – the chocolate, the rose petals, the dimmed lighting – to ease the pain of rejection only to have Itachi lose his temper with him later on over a kiss. Scratch that, a misunderstanding. "I didn't know that."

Deidara pursed his lips, pulling his black shoes on over his feet. "I didn't have the chance to tell you about it, yeah."

Itachi would have much preferred to have Deidara snap at him as opposed to this. He wasn't hissing at him or saying anything sarcastic but he could definitely hear the hurt in Deidara's voice when he spoke of the events that transpired last month. Every bit of new information was like a punch to the gut as if Itachi wasn't feeling bad enough for his attitude regarding the blond.

He knew he should apologize. Say something at least but he wasn't expecting the conversation to end up like this. He was at a loss of words. What did you say in response to something like that?

"Gotta go. My interview's in less than an hour and I wanna get there early for sign-in." Deidara announced, rising to his feet.

"Good luck." Itachi called after him.

But the door to their room shut before Itachi could hear Deidara's reply.

If he replied at all.

Chapter End Notes

Damn that chapter ended on a somber note. I knew it was going to be kinda heated but damn. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed this massively long chapter and I am excited to announce some fun facts about this particular chapter:

Fun Fact #1: I knew that Kisame was going to drive a 2014 Mustang that was roughly the color of Samehada since 2013-2014 and wanted to stick it out with this story until I could say that he drove one. (I say 2014 for the ridges(?) towards the back that reminded me of shark skin. I saw my resident director driving one a few years ago and
immediately knew that Kisame would drive one too and I am so HAPPY to finally share that little factoid with you guys!

Fun Fact #2: I applied to be an RA my freshman year. And got rejected. In fact, I got my rejection letter on Valentine's Day too so I know the pain.

Until next time,
Itachi’s Husband
I think it's been a while so to recap: It's March 2016 in the story right now. The last chapter took place on Thursday, March 17th and this chapter takes place on Tuesday, March 22nd through Friday, March 25th. Spring break was two weeks ago and Easter Sunday is just around the corner. You'll remember that in the last chapter Kisame treated Itachi to French fries dipped in a chocolate frosty/milkshake and Deidara was preparing for an interview as a campus tour guide since he didn't get the resident assistant position which is news to Itachi.

With that said, happy reading!

ITACHI WOULD HAVE MUCH PREFERRED to have Deidara snap at him as opposed to this. He wasn’t hissing at him or saying anything sarcastic but he could definitely hear the hurt in Deidara’s voice when he spoke of the events that transpired last month. Every bit of new information was like a punch to the gut as if Itachi wasn’t feeling bad enough for his attitude regarding the blond.

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If he replied at all.

-8-8-8-

Almost five minutes passed since Deidara left the room for his interview and Itachi hadn’t moved
from his position. “I got the rejection letter on Valentine’s Day, yeah. I was kinda bummed out about it but there’s nothing that chocolate can’t fix, right?” The revelation echoed in Itachi’s head. Deidara was already having a crappy day and Itachi only added fuel to the fire.

He had sincerely intended to try to remedy their strained relationship by the end of the school year. To part ways on decent terms. He just wasn’t sure how. And now he felt at an even greater loss than he did before. How could he remedy things if a sense of guilt silenced his voice when he moved to open it? Just thinking about Deidara’s words sparked a small pain in his chest.

As much as it bothered him, there was nothing to be done at the present moment in time. Deidara was gone and Itachi didn’t know where to start the next time he talked to him, much less apologized for an event that happened over a month ago.

“You know you can ask or tell me anything right?”

Maybe Kisame could help him tackle this. The athlete was sure to have better people skills than he did and Itachi was finally starting to warm up to him. Asking him how to approach this would probably be the smartest idea if he was serious about fixing things between him and his roommate. And he was.

Speaking of Kisame, Itachi wondered what he had planned this weekend that wouldn’t allow him to meet with Itachi to complete his statistics homework ahead of time. They’d still get it done before it was due on Thursday; two days prior wasn’t exactly “last minute” even if Itachi could never wait to do an assignment that late if it could be helped. The swimming season was over he thought, so there couldn’t have been a competition this weekend. In addition, he’d like to think that Kisame would’ve invited him to watch if it was his last competition of the season. Or maybe he had plans to meet with the person he had feelings for.

Itachi wouldn’t know how something like that could span the entire weekend because he’d never tried to win someone’s affections before.

Whatever the reason, Kisame would most likely share with him the details the next time they got together. And if he didn’t Itachi wouldn’t press him for any.

-8-8-8-

He was going to tutor him in statistics. Nothing more, nothing less.
At least, that’s what he told himself as he quickly stalked across campus to meet Kisame at his apartment to tutor him. It wasn’t anything different from what they’ve been doing. He meets Kisame at his apartment. He helps him understand concepts he didn’t understand in class. They practice a little. Kisame finishes his homework ahead of its due date. Itachi leaves. Simple.

But today Itachi was planning to ask the upperclassman how to initiate a conversation with Deidara. And just the thought of opening up and asking for advice rattled him to the core.

He tightly wrapped his arms around his torso to keep from shaking and grinded his teeth together. The temperature plummeted twenty degrees on Sunday and persisted. Although he threw on a warm coat the open area between buildings acted like a wind tunnel, more so as he passed by narrow openings where the wind would barrel towards him and stop him dead in his tracks. His bangs would no doubt appear as if he’d woken up after a rough night of partying which Kisame would bring up the moment he saw him which would not ease his anxiety in the slightest. At least he could pin his uneasiness on the weather conditions if Kisame picked up on his shaky demeanor.

“Whoa, your hair!” Kisame greeted him when he reached University Hall.

He wasted no time pushing past the older man to reach the warmth of the lobby. “I know.”

“Is it bad out there?”

Itachi put his hands to his burning cheeks. “It’s windy yes, and the temperatures are below freezing.”

Kisame looked at him with wide eyes and a gaping smile then through the double doors to the outside. “Who wears a skirt in this weather?!” He said of someone braving the cold in the quad. “Slut.” He muttered and turned to where Itachi was waiting. “Damn if I knew it was going to be that bad I would’ve trekked over to your place instead! I’m sorry!”

Itachi ran a hand through his hair to untangle the knots the wind created. “It’s fine.” And it was. The reason Itachi agreed to meet at Kisame’s place was because Kisame claimed he could concentrate better and because there was no chance of Deidara walking in and jumping to conclusions if they studied in Itachi’s room.

“Next time, maybe.” Kisame said and turned to the stairs. “Some light exercise will get the blood
circulating.” He laughed.

Itachi shook his head. He didn’t mind taking the stairs as Kisame’s apartment was only on the third floor. A little exercise wouldn’t kill him as Kisame mentioned.

“Hey, before we go in, I just want to warn you—”

Sentences that start that way are never a good sign and immediately Itachi was preparing for the worst.

“—that my roommates are there.” He finished.

_Athletes._ Itachi assumed.

“I meant to text you but I thought they’d leave before we met up, you know?”

He was apologizing. _Rowdy athletes._

Kisame extended his hand to clasp the door knob but did not open it. From the inside Itachi could hear someone laughing. “They shouldn’t bother us. We can study in my bedroom if you want. It’ll be quieter there.”

_Quieter. Loud, rambunctious, young adults with the maturity of a child._ Before today he’d never thought about what Kisame’s roommates would be like because he never envisioned meeting them. There was a possibility that the men just beyond the door were simply enjoying themselves and were as loud and boisterous as Kisame was but Itachi doubted that. Kisame’s precautionary warning raised red flags as Itachi prepared himself for the worst.

Kisame pushed the door open and urged Itachi to enter first so he could close it behind them. Immediately Itachi picked out Kisame’s roommates, one of which was tall and muscular with short hair and a steely eyed gaze and the other was more ragged looking if his short bushy beard and his oversized untucked button up shirt was anything to go by. Itachi was by no means an expert on contemporary fashion but he was fairly certain that the latter did not hold his appearance in high regard.
“That your new boyfriend, Kisame?” The ragged one barked in their direction.

The taller roommate smirked behind him, holding a can of beer in his hands.

Kisame returned the smirk and extended his arm to flip them off. “Fuck you, Jinpachi!”

Whether Jinpachi and the taller man standing beside him knew of Kisame’s sexual orientation, Itachi did not know. Either way, their exchange appeared to be good natured fun. The kind of good natured fun shared between athletes that is mainly comprised of throwing insults and trying to outdo one another.

“Kisame.”

Kisame halted in his tracks to turn to the voice calling his name.

The taller of the two roommates stood at the fridge with an opened beer can in hand and brought his arm back to toss it to him. “Have a beer with us.”

It was no surprise that Kisame caught the pass with ease. “No thanks.” He said and passed it back to the taller of the two.

“What’s the matter with you?” Jinpachi accused from across the room.

“I have homework to do.” He replied.

The taller man narrowed his eyes. “That didn’t seem to stop you on Friday.”

Kisame didn’t miss a beat. “That was when I still had time to complete my statistics homework. I’m running out of time now.” He said and turned to leave.

“Suit yourself.” The taller one called after him.
Kisame didn’t say anything back and opened the door to his bedroom for Itachi to follow him inside.

“What was that all about?” Itachi asked. He could easily piece together the bits and pieces of information he overheard just now to figure it out but wanted to hear the full story from Kisame in case there was something he was missing.

The older student slowly crossed the room to take a seat on the unmade bedspread before beginning his story. “I was hoping I wouldn’t have to tell you this for a while.” He sighed and looked up to meet Itachi’s eyes. “Remember how I told you I couldn’t study last weekend because I had something I needed to do instead?”

Itachi nodded. “Yes.”

“Yeah. Well. Friday was my twenty-first birthday and I planned to spend the weekend out getting drunk with my friends.”

Itachi hoped that wasn’t the case. But he wasn’t surprised. He knew that the upperclassman was twenty-years old and would eventually turn old enough to legally purchase and consume alcohol and alcoholic beverages.

“I didn’t want to tell you because of…you know…” He stammered. “I know how you feel about drinking and I didn’t want to jeopardize what we had going you know?”

“What we had going?” Itachi asked, just barely above a whisper. He didn’t intend to voice his thoughts but it was too late to take it back now.

Kisame’s eyes widened slightly and he averted his gaze to the closed door behind Itachi instead. “You know. I think you and I had a good thing going here. You help me pass classes you’ve already taken and I repay you with trips to get French fries dipped in chocolate frosties.” He said.

Itachi wasn’t aware that Kisame intended to pay him in disgusting food pairings for his time and efforts tutoring him. Beyond that, he was hoping Kisame would talk on behalf of their friendship instead of their weekly tutoring sessions. To Itachi, it sounded as though Kisame only valued his presence for his tutoring skills. Not because of any particular trait of bond the two shared.
“I didn’t want you to think badly of me if you knew I went out to get shit-face wasted the moment I turned twenty-one.” Kisame continued. “And I promise I’m not going to overdo it or anything like that. I swear.”

“How can you be so sure?” Itachi asked. Again, he didn’t mean to speak what was on his mind but he couldn’t help it. How could someone like Kisame, someone who was likely to be easily swayed by the pressure put upon him from his friends and fellow teammates, not to drink to excess and get seriously injured in the process? Or worse, seriously injure someone else?

“Just trust me.” He said. He was staring straight into Itachi’s eyes now with an iron resolve. “Trust me and I’ll prove to you that I won’t do anything stupid under the influence.”

Itachi inhaled. He wanted to trust Kisame. From the bottom of his heart he wanted to put his trust in this man. To know that he wouldn’t do the things Shisui had done when he was alive. And to know that his death wouldn’t be tethered to anything alcohol related. But he hadn’t fully recovered from the death of his cousin just yet. The pain was still raw every time he thought of his bubbly demeanor and comforting smile. Although he did well to push the last memories he and Shisui shared together, any mention of drinking and alcohol brought everything back to the surface again.

Kisame rose to his feet and walked a few steps so that he was standing in front of Itachi. He stood so close that it was almost uncomfortable and Itachi had to crane his neck slightly to meet his eyes. “Trust me. That’s all I ask. Just, trust me.”

“Okay.” He said.

The upperclassman exhaled in relief. “I won’t let you down, I promise.”

Itachi wanted to believe him. He wanted to forget everything he’d overheard ten minutes ago when they ran into Kisame’s roommates. And more than anything, he wanted to let go of all the pain he still held from Shisui’s death.

But he couldn’t. And if it meant telling Kisame what he wanted to hear so they could get on with their work today, then so be it.

-8-8-8-
“Are you sure you’re okay with us inviting Shisui’s parents over, Itachi?” Mikoto asked over dinner Friday night.

“That’s fine.” He murmured. She had asked him the same question the night before over dinner and his answer remained unchanged since then. If he was being honest with himself, it wasn’t fine. He didn’t want to see his father’s dark curly hair or his mother’s warm smile. It would dredge up too many painful memories. But what was he supposed to tell his mother? “No, I don’t want them over because I’m not over Shisui’s death yet?”

Shisui was Kagami and Megumi’s only child. To spend Easter without him would no doubt be hard on them. Harder than it would be for Itachi to see their faces after so long. Surely Mikoto had already extended an offer and was expecting them to show up on their doorstep on Sunday. If Itachi said no, she’d have to call them back and retract her proposal. So he pretended that everything would be fine even though he wasn’t quite sure if he could handle this right now. Not with everything else that was currently happening in his life back at school.

He still hadn’t figured out how to make amends with Deidara after so long and now he was expected to remain friends with another potential at-risk alcoholic who would die the moment Itachi fully let his guard down around him. And he couldn’t bear to lose another friend that way.

“At least sit with us through dinner and you can go up to your room if you like afterwards, okay honey?” Mikoto asked.

She had the best of intentions and while it still wasn’t ideal, it made the arrangement seem more manageable to him. “Thanks.”

Mikoto smiled and returned her gaze to her dinner plate. “Are you still tutoring that classmate of yours?” Itachi nodded. “How’s that going?”

He waited to finish chewing the rice in his mouth and answered “It’s going well.” The sudden change in topic was to serve as a distraction, Itachi knew.

“What’s this man’s major?” Their father asked him.

“Physical education.” Fugaku Uchiha liked short answers that were straight to the point. If he wanted clarification he would ask for it.
“Physical education,” he repeated. After a moment of thought he nodded. “You said you shared a class with this man?”

“Yes. Introduction to Philosophy.”

Another nod. A nod was neither a good sign nor a bad sign. It only signified that Fugaku had processed the information he had been given and had come to a conclusion regarding it. “And you tutored him then as well?”

“I did. Yes.”

“Hm.” A contemplative grunt this time as he sliced the meat off the pork chop bone before him. “Does he play in any sports on campus?”

It was Itachi’s turn to nod this time. “He’s a part of the swim team, yes.”

A nod coupled with another grunt. “I see. Reminds me of my days on the football team.” He smiled fondly, a rarity. “Your mother used to help me study back when we were still dating. Do you remember those days, Mikoto?”

Mikoto blushed and playfully batted her husband in the arm. “How could I ever forget?”

“Can I be done now?” Sasuke interrupted.

“Yes, you can go.” Fugaku permitted. “I remember those days like it was yesterday. You had those acid washed jeans and hoop earrings. Wore your hair in a high pony-tail too.”

“That was the style back then!” She cried.

“If anyone needs me, I’ll be upstairs!” Sasuke called over his shoulder from the kitchen.

But neither Mikoto nor Fugaku acknowledge him. They were too busy reminiscing about the “good old days” and fashion styles and musical bands in their prime.
Itachi didn’t particularly care if he overheard any of their conversation while he finished his own meal. They spent little time talking about the early days of their relationship and focused more on the passing of time. A small part of him, however, wished that they would have spoken more about what it was like to fall in love with one another and if it was as smooth and idyllic as they made it out to be.

-8-8-8-

“I know that something happened between you and Deidara.” Sasuke began.

There was no way around it anymore. Every time Itachi came home for any amount of time, Sasuke made certain to question his every relationship at college. It didn’t matter if Itachi waited until he was ready to go to bed to escape the criticism and questions from his younger sibling because Sasuke didn’t care if Itachi wanted to talk about it or not. And the more often it happened, the harder it became to come up with plausible lies that would satisfy Sasuke.

“He made a move on you, didn’t he?” Sasuke asked when Itachi refused to answer. He had tried ignoring him before too and it never worked. Sasuke would find new questions to ask of him until he couldn’t stand it anymore.

“What happened? Did you say something to him?” Itachi finally asked. “You do this every time I come home. You always ask if Deidara and I ‘hooked up yet’ or if we’ve ‘kissed.’ What are you expecting me to say?”

Sasuke wasn’t oblivious to Itachi’s increasing frustration. He was aware that his older brother was getting annoyed with him. He just didn’t care and persisted. “Because I saw the way he looked at you the day we helped you move your stuff down there. He likes you.”

This was growing out of control. He needed to put a stop to this now or Sasuke would never quit. “That may be but that doesn’t mean he’ll be ‘putting any moves on me’ any time soon.”

“What happened? Did you say something to him?”

“I simply told him that I was not interested in people who are the same gender as I am.” Itachi offered.
“So you told him you’re straight basically?”

Itachi sighed and stalked the length of the room to where his book bag sat at the foot of his bed. “Sure.” If he didn’t say something, Sasuke would only continue to nag him until he did.

“What did he do to you?” Sasuke asked.

“Nothing.” He lied and pulled out the novel he was currently reading from his book bag. He had tried this tactic before: pretend to be engrossed in something and hope that he'll take the hint. The success rate was still low. “I simply put a stop to any feelings he might have had for me before he could say or do anything. That’s all.” He shrugged.

Unlike their father, Sasuke didn’t nod in understanding or grunt when given new information to process. He simply stared at the object of his interest and quietly scrutinized them, much like Itachi and their mother did. When he reached a satisfying conclusion, he would either walk away or pose a new question. “So what’s up between you and that athlete guy?”

If it wasn’t one thing, it was another. “Nothing, Sasuke.” Itachi said. “And why must you assume that everyone I come into contact with has some hidden agenda?”

Sasuke’s eyes widened in offense. “I’m not assuming that he has a hidden agenda. I wanted to know what happened between you guys between spring break and now.”

“What makes you think that?” Itachi asked. He was curious to know how his younger brother managed to pick up on something so minute and what evidence he had to back up his claim.

“The other week when you brought him up at dinner with mom you made it sound like you guys were friends. Now you sound like you can’t stand the guy. What happened?”

He could spare to indulge Sasuke in the truth, he decided. “He and I don’t share the same ideals.”

“Like...what?”
He was hoping he wouldn’t have to explain himself but apparently all of Sasuke’s friends were too busy to text him and Itachi’s relationships was the next most entertaining thing. “I wanted him to get a head start on his homework last week but he preferred to spend the weekend getting drunk with friends.”

“So?” Sasuke asked. “Not everyone is a total nerd like you, Itachi. I don’t blame him for wanting to have fun over the weekend instead of being cooped up in the library doing math drills or whatever it is you do with him.”

Unbelievable. “Sasuke.” Itachi said.

“What?” He was oblivious.

“You realize that Shisui’s idea of ‘fun’ was going out drinking with friends and look what happened.”

Sasuke narrowed his eyes. “Shisui died because a drunk driver crossed over into his lane when he was on his way to a party. He didn’t die of alcohol poisoning, Itachi.” He said matter-of-factly.

“Do you realize how often Shisui drank?”

“No and I don’t care! Alcohol didn’t kill him and you’re acting like it’s the root of all evil!”

“Mom could have died because of dad’s reckless behavior under the influence! Shisui could have been the drunk driver who swerved into the wrong lane! You’re lucky to have been born without any complications because of the accident that mom was in!”

“And that’s the thing!” Sasuke cried and quickly turned his head to the closed door. “That’s the thing!” He hissed, softer now that his parents could overhear and demand to know what the siblings were arguing over so late at night. “Dad got help and doesn’t drink anymore; mom’s alive; and I’m alive and I wasn’t born without any complications. It sucks that Shisui died the way he did and I hope Danzo whatever his name was who killed him rots in jail for taking him away from us but life goes on! If you wanna be friends with an athlete, be friends with an athlete! But just because the man drinks doesn’t mean he’s going to end up dead in a ditch somewhere because of it! God!”
“You don’t know that!” Itachi shot back.

“And you don’t either which is why it’s stupid to assume that you can’t be friends just because he likes to go out drinking with his friends! A lot of people drink and they don’t all end up dead or in car accidents or anything like that!” He fumed. “Everybody makes mistakes; nobody’s perfect. Not even you, Itachi.”

Although he was only thirteen years old, Sasuke spoke like a mature adult and made some valid points. Conclusions Itachi would have reached if his judgement wasn’t clouded with feelings of guilt and unresolved trauma from thirteen years ago when Sasuke was born. Hearing Sasuke’s words made Itachi realize just how foolish he sounded and how stubborn he’d been. It was preposterous to assume that Kisame wouldn’t drink or that he would go down the same road as Shisui when he was still alive. Even though Shisui wasn’t driving under the influence when he died, Itachi worried that he would have eventually been in Danzo Shimura’s shoes. That he would kill somebody’s cousin, or friend because he was too drunk to drive and too stubborn to admit it. And even though Itachi couldn’t change the past, he could prevent himself from going through the same thing with Kisame by not allowing himself to grow so close to him.

“Itachi,” Sasuke spoke, bringing Itachi back to reality, “if Shisui could hear you right now, what do you think he’d say?”

“Don’t isolate yourself, Itachi. Don’t assume that everyone’s going to make the same mistakes that I made. Because if you do, you’re going to lead a very lonely, miserable life.” Is what Shisui would say. He might not have possessed the best judgment in the months prior to his death, but when it came to Itachi, he always knew the right words to say.

Itachi released a shaky breath. When had he strayed so far? And what was he planning to accomplish by isolating those around him just because they liked to consume alcoholic beverages?

First Deidara, whom he’d unjustly hurt with his words, and now Kisame, the person who seemed to understand him the best since Shisui’s death, the person he was planning to push out of his life?

“I know it’s been hard for you since he died,” Sasuke suddenly appeared by his side and wrapped an arm around his older brother’s shoulders, “but you can’t distance yourself from everyone because of what happened to him when he was alive or what happened between mom and dad thirteen years ago! You gotta let go and move on with your life.”

“I know…” He whispered. And he did. He now knew what he needed to do to remedy things and the first step was to learn how to be more open with those around him.
“And if you ever forget that, just ask yourself what Shisui would say if he were here. Okay?”

“I will.” He smiled and looked up to meet his younger brother’s eyes.

“Good.” Sasuke smiled in returned and leaned forward to embrace his older brother. “And Itachi?”

“Yes, Sasuke?”

“I don’t think Deidara was really your type.”

“What?”

Sasuke smirked. “You say you told him you weren’t homosexual, which, by the way, is more offensive than saying ‘gay’”

“Make your point.”

“But anyways, you say you told him you weren’t into him and I don’t doubt that. He didn’t look like he was your type.”

“What are you getting at?”

“But I wouldn’t write off that athlete you’ve been talking about. Even if nothing ever happens between you two, at least try to remain friends, alright?”

“Yeah.”

With a final pat on the back, Sasuke rose to his feet and pulled his cellphone from the pocket of his sweat pants. “I’m going to bed. Goodnight, Itachi.” He called over his shoulder and exited the room.
Unlike their father, Itachi did not nod in understanding or grunt when presented with new information. Like his mother and Sasuke, he liked to sit back and quietly analyze the situation at hand until he came to his own conclusion. Unlike his mother and brother, however, he liked to respond with a noncommittal “yeah” if only to stall for more time and appease the person he was speaking to.

“But I wouldn’t write off that athlete you’ve been talking about. Even if nothing ever happens between you two, at least try to remain friends, alright?”

What was he insinuating just now? That he was homosexual—gay and had feelings for Kisame? That Kisame was more of his “type” as opposed to Deidara?

What did he even think Itachi’s type was and on what basis?

Long after Sasuke had left the room, Itachi lay awake staring at the ceiling, trying to determine the underlying message in his little brother’s words.

It wasn’t entirely impossible. Kisame was attracted to both men and women. But he had mentioned the other day when they went out that he had his eye on someone who didn’t know it yet.

It would be stupid to exercise the notion of a possible romance with Kisame if he had his eyes on someone else. In addition to that, Itachi wasn’t gay. That much was for certain.

Chapter End Notes

I think I promised I’d update sometime between May and June and I’ve been wanting to get this chapter done earlier but I’ve been so so busy! I don't know when I'll get around to updating the next chapter as I have a busy summer and other stories to update but you never know. You might be in for a pleasant surprise! I also don't have a very clear idea (not as clear as the notes I had written for this chapter a while back) as to what the next chapter(s) will be like so I might have to take a step back in order to reevaluate the story’s plot.
Half a year later...I honestly don't think it's that bad for this story. I feel like I've waited longer to update a chapter. My excuse this time is: writing is only one of my many hobbies and this summer I decided to dedicate my free time to one of my other hobbies and furthering goals that will help me in the future. In short: I've been busy doing other things.

On a brighter note: I've been generating a lot ideas for this story's future. I have an idea as to what I want to do regarding Itachi and Kisame's relationship going forward, Deidara's relationship with Itachi and Sasori, and while I was revising this, I had an idea as to how I want to end this story. I don't have everything planned out just yet but I'm still thinking about it even though I'm not writing as much.

Without further ado, I hope you enjoy the chapter (which, ironically, was supposed to take place in March when I updated the last chapter - to be specific, this chapter takes place on March 27th, 2016 - which was Easter Sunday that year).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I HOPE WE'RE NOT TOO EARLY!" MEGUMI UCHIHA smiled when Itachi answered the door. In her arms she held a large roasting pan. In the center of that pan, an uncovered fully cooked ham.

Itachi casually peered behind her. It was raining outside and yet she stood before him completely dry with an uncovered ham in her arms. Surely the rain hadn't started the moment she set foot on the front porch.

Still smiling, Megumi strolled past Itachi followed by her husband, Kagami. "Where's Shisui?" Itachi asked them. He wasn't in the car in the driveway.

"Shisui wanted to spend the day with friends so he won't be joining us today." Megumi called from behind him.

Itachi followed the couple inside. "What do you mean he's spending the holiday with friends?" Didn't they remember what happened the last time Shisui spent a holiday with friends instead of his family? Why weren't they more concerned about this?

"Itachi, sweetheart, why don't you come eat with us?" His own mother asked. "Dinner's ready."

Why didn't anyone care that Shisui was spending the holiday with friends? College students didn't spend holidays like Christmas and Easter preparing elaborate home cooked meals and giving thanks around a dining room table! They used the holiday, no matter how obscure, as a reason to get drunk! Shisui could be out getting drunk at this very moment and nobody seemed to be concerned about it.

There had to be a mistake. They couldn't have forgotten the last time Shisui spent a major holiday with friends. If worse came to worst, Itachi would make them see reason.
"There you are!" Kisame greeted him.

Since when did Kisame attend family gatherings? He didn't invite him. His parents wouldn't have invited him.

And yet here he was, sitting at his family's dining room table with an open textbook to his left and a worksheet lying before him. "I brought this week's homework!" He proudly exclaimed.

No. Itachi was not tutoring this man during Easter. He didn't care when his homework was due or what his current grade in the class was. It wasn't happening.

"Kisame I'm not—"

"It was only one drink Itachi, I swear!" Kisame argued.

"What?"

"Don't try to persuade him, yeah." Deidara pushed past him to take a seat next to Sasuke. "In a matter of time he'll stop talking to you like he did me."

"Deidara I'm sorry." Itachi explained.

"Sweetie, the food's getting cold, come take a seat." Mikoto urged.

Itachi did as he was told even though it seemed like everything was spiraling out of control. Shisui was out partying with friends and nobody seemed to care, Kisame was dipping French fries into a chocolate milkshake and dripping it onto his math homework, Deidara hadn't stopped glaring at him from the moment he arrived and Fugaku was nowhere to be seen. "Where's father?" Itachi asked anyone who was listening to him.

Mikoto furrowed her brow. "He's working, sweetheart. Don't you remember?"

He took a seat beside Kisame. "No, I don't."

As if on cue, Fugaku appeared at the entrance to the dining room. "Itachi."

Why was he addressing only him? Why him?

"Shisui's dead."

Hot tears rolled down Itachi's cheek. Suddenly all eyes were on him. "I knew this would happen." He choked out. "I knew this would happen."

Shisui was dead. And it was all Itachi's fault.

6:34

It was early. Too early for classes to start and too early to awake on the weekend. Itachi narrowed his eyes at the unchanging time, trying to recall what day of the week it was. He couldn't remember the last time he was in school which meant it must be a weekend. Analyzing his surroundings, he came to understand that he was in his bedroom at home.

His hometown was a two hour drive from the university he attended. Not an unreasonable distance but not a commute Itachi liked to make very often which is why he decided to return home only during the holidays.
Holidays.

Today was Easter Sunday.

"I invited Megumi and Kagami over for dinner this Easter. Is that alright with you?" His mother had asked him a little over a month ago.

Shisui's parents were coming over for dinner tonight. And without Shisui.

"Shisui wanted to spend the day with friends so he won't be joining us today."

"Shisui's dead."

The words echoed in the back of Itachi's mind. Had it all been a dream? Was Shisui still alive?

"Honey, that was Kagami. Shisui is dead." He remembered his mother saying months back.

Shisui was in fact dead. But why did it all feel so sudden? Like it only happened yesterday?

6:39

Time was moving at a crawl and the longer Itachi stared at the clock the more frustrated he felt. He couldn't explain why he felt this way or why he needed to stare at the clock on his nightstand. When he couldn't take it any longer he let his head fall back against his pillow and stared at the ceiling above him. Blank. Unchanging. Consistent. It had been that way in all the time Itachi had lived in this house.

Megumi and Kagami wouldn't arrive until later this evening. Around five or six if Itachi had to guess. And here he was, awake eleven hours early and unable to fall back asleep.

"Shisui's dead."

Not that he wanted to if an equally disturbing continuation of the dream he was having awaited him.

An image of Kisame's smile flashed before him. Had he dreamt of Kisame last night too? Searching the recesses of his memory, he could recall Kisame sitting at the dining room table downstairs. Had he invited him over for Easter dinner? No. That was unlikely. He wouldn't dream of inviting anyone from school over to his house. He could practically hear Sasuke's snickers if he did.

"What are you lying in bed for, Itachi?" He could hear Shisui telling him. "Come on it's a beautiful day outside and it's Easter! You gotta enjoy your days off school while you can!"

If Shisui were here, Itachi would remind him that every Sunday was a break from the rigor of the typical school week. Easter was no exception. He would also point out that at this hour the world was still dark as it was too early for the sun to illuminate the town in its warm rays. What on Earth could he possibly accomplish at this hour?

"Nothing if you just lie there."

Shisui was one to talk. He slept in almost every morning. As a child, Itachi used to admire Shisui for waking up at 7am to go to school. It wasn't until his cousin entered middle school and started to complain about waking up at 6am that Itachi realized Shisui wasn't the early riser that Itachi thought him to be.
For Itachi there was no other choice but to start his day, regardless of the early hour. He wouldn't spend the day climbing mountains or exploring new territory like Shisui would have suggested if they were younger. No. Like every other adult in this house, he would go downstairs and prepare breakfast and a cup of coffee for himself and figure out how to best spend the rest of the day until Megumi and Kagami arrived.

A white sky blanketed the land as far as the eye could see and the air was chilly. Dark patches of clouds crawled across the sky, threatening rain. The grass was a dark shade of green, a stark contrast to the rectangular patch of dirt before him.

BELOVED SON, SHISUI UCHIHA; BORN OCTOBER 19TH, 1994; DIED DECEMBER 31ST, 2015; REST IN PEACE

The granite slab was typical. One could almost say it was plain. There were no carvings of Shisui planting trees or scooping soup at the soup kitchen where he frequently volunteered or even a simple carving of his smiling face. Such a service would cost extra, no doubt, but money wouldn't have been an issue for Kagami and Megumi who both had stable, well-paying careers.

The tombstone also lacked any inspiring or motivational quotes. Something to summarize Shisui's lifestyle or beliefs or reflect his selfless personality.

Back when they were younger Shisui would often joke about what he wanted to have engraved on his headstone when he died. "If this sandwich kills me please have them write 'DEATH BY BACON' on my headstone! Please!" Or something along those lines. He said it so often that Itachi was almost compelled to do it or at least bring it up when they were older. "I thought you wanted me to have them write 'FOREVER SINGLE' on your headstone." He would joke with him. "Don't you remember that?"

Itachi still remembered these things. Only this time he had no one to tell. The headstone and engravings had already been set.

There was something about seeing this slab of granite in the ground, emblazoned with Shisui's name that made everything a reality. Not a day went by that Itachi didn't consider Shisui's death as such but there was something about seeing his tombstone that made his chest constrict and his cheeks burn.

Despite the foreboding clouds rolling in the ground was dry. Standing above Shisui's grave, looking down on his final resting place didn't seem right. Ever since they were kids, Shisui towered over him by at least an inch but even so Itachi considered them to be equals. He wouldn't lie on the grass beside the dirt plot but he would take a seat before it instead so he could be face to face with Shisui's name – second only to Shisui sitting before him in person.

Unlike so many of the grey concrete headstones surrounding it, Shisui's was the opposite. A smooth piece of black granite that dully reflected everything around it. It was perfect, in a way. A flashy tombstone that stood out from the rest yet said nothing different from the template of those around it. When he was alive, Shisui was no doubt flashy. He was the life of the party. He had a polarizing effect on those around them and everyone smiled when they saw him. But those who really knew Shisui knew that he was a humble man. He didn't strive to rise above and be better than those around him. He was very much down to earth in that manner.

In turn Itachi strived to be just like him. He wanted to have a positive effect on others without stealing the spotlight for himself. Somewhere along the way, however, his image of himself and
what he aspired to became clouded like his reflection in Shisui's headstone. When did he become this person who shunned others for an honest mistake? When did he become someone who couldn't find the words to stitch together a simple apology and admit when he was wrong?

Shisui wasn't perfect. Far from it, in fact. But Shisui knew when to apologize and knew when to admit that he was wrong so why couldn't Itachi do the same? If Shisui were to sit before him right now, in this instant, what would he tell him?

"You gotta stop what you're doing." He'd start.

Vague as always. Even in his thoughts Shisui's words were vague. But how would he continue with that? What would he mean to tell him? Truly mean to tell him?

"You need to make nice with your roommate." And just like that he'd cut to the chase. Relationships like that are the foundation for the rest of your time in college and so on and so forth…" Whatever followed wasn't relevant. He didn't come to college to make friends. That much was certain the day he moved in. Alive or not, Shisui would not convince him otherwise.

"It was a simple kiss, Itachi! So what? He apologized and you should've moved on! You're treating the kid like he has the black plague or something, man what is with you?" Even without the exaggerations there was truth to Shisui's words even if they only existed in Itachi's mind.

"And Kisame…" His cousin would sigh in exasperation. "Dude. You gotta get over that too. I know I fucked up when I was alive," yes, even in death, Shisui would jump to reference a time 'when he was alive,' "I made some bad decisions but not everyone will be the same way!"

"I know," Itachi found himself responding, "Sasuke told me the same thing." Fortunately everyone was at home preparing for Easter and couldn't witness him talking to himself. Such a thing was perfectly natural in a cemetery though wasn't it? Or was it proper to maintain complete and utter silence save for mournful sobbing? Either way he didn't care.

"Let him live his life and live yours as well. If he wants to drink, let him drink! If that bothers you that's fine but it's not your life to live and take me for example: you only live once."

It was all in his head, he tried to tell himself. Shisui's voice was only in his head. However, no matter how much he told himself that it felt as though Shisui were speaking to him in person, right in front of him or next to him or from behind, it didn't matter. He sorely missed the sound of his cousin's voice and the advice he gave him and more than anything he wanted Shisui to be here. To be with him in person and to tell him what to in his own words and to come back to the house to celebrate Easter as a family again this year.

His thoughts were a broken cry that didn't escape his lips but instead dribbled down his cheeks and dripped onto the denim of his jeans.

"You can do this, I know you can." He could hear Shisui saying which fractured the thin line that was his mouth. All of the pent up stress from his ordeal with Deidara, his conflicting feelings regarding Kisame, and everything he'd been hiding from his mother, his brother and his father, gradually bubbled up to the surface and then in waves that caused his shoulders to shake. He was certain that if he looked into the face of Shisui's headstone he wouldn't like the man it reflected back. The crying, hysterical mess doubled over on the asphalt.

Placing an outstretched palm on the ground before him, he leaned forward, removed his right leg from underneath him, followed by his left and scrambled to his feet. Shisui wasn't going anywhere, he knew. But the longer Itachi stayed the more wretched he felt. The more he listened to Shisui's
voice within him, the more his heart ached for his cousin's presence. The more tears that stained his cheeks the more ashamed he felt for the way he'd been treating those around him since Shisui's death. He could spend all day in this cemetery but his family had plans and wanted him to be a part of them. And it was quickly becoming apparent that Itachi needed to make some changes in his life before he could face Shisui again.

By the time he collected himself and returned to the driver's seat of his car, it started to rain. Tiny droplets speckled his windshield and dotted the pavement ahead of him. He spared one last glance at his cousin's grave before it became muddy. The fact that the ground hadn't been covered by a blanket of grass yet already unnerved him. He didn't need to see the pond that would form and settle the dirt more than it already was.

Turning the key in the ignition, he flicked the windshield wipers on spared one last glance at his cousin's grave before he put the car into drive. His eyes burned but his chest and shoulders felt lighter. Like the weight of the semester's drama had dissolved into the morning air. It was also made clear to him that he needed to set things right with both Deidara and Kisame when he returned to campus this week. More than anything, however, this trip confirmed that Shisui was always there to lend him a helping hand or random quip or unwanted advice if he just opened himself up to it. If Itachi ever lost sight of himself he knew where to go to restore his sanity and confess what was bothering him.

"Talking to a hunk of granite every time you have a problem isn't healthy." Shisui would chime in once he pulled out of the cemetery. "It's not like you don't have people in your life who are willing to listen to you when you have a problem, you know." He was right.

"You could have told me. I would've listened to you as carefully as I'm doing right now." Kisame told him earlier in the year when he broke down in the upperclassman's apartment.

A smile spread onto Itachi's lips. The thought of Kisame's ever present grin evoked memories of chocolate frosties with a side of French fries.

And if it weren't for his mother's dinner preparations for the holiday, Itachi would've driven out of his way to buy himself one.

-8-8-8-8-

Later on when he returned home he was greeted by the sounds of soft thudding coming from the kitchen. The distant suction of the refrigerator opening and closing. The shrill clang of the silverware being sifted through. The hollow thud of a stainless steel pot being set in the curved opening of the sink, made from the same material.

"Oh hi, honey." Mikoto smiled and brushed a strand of hair behind her ear to see him properly. "I thought you were Sasuke for a minute."

He smiled lingered in the doorway. "Do you need any help?" He knew his mother was one responsible for the noise as she would most likely be preparing tonight's dinner ahead of time. His father and Sasuke normally stayed clear with the exception of grabbing a drink from the fridge.

She brushed a lock of hair behind her ears and returned a welcoming smile. "Sure! Can you check the potatoes while I check on the ham?"

"Yeah." He stood clear while she opened the oven door and pulled the roasting pan out of the oven.

"You were gone for a while." She spoke as she set the roasting pan on the stove top. "Is everything
alright? I was beginning to worry."

"It's Easter. Nobody's on the road." He answered.

Mikoto glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and picked up the thermometer that was lying on the countertop nearby. "That's what worried me, actually. Everyone's at home with their families today and most of the stores are closed."

What could you have been doing for over an hour? She meant to say.

"I was at the cemetery." He answered and removed the lid from the pot the potatoes were in.

A cloud of steam obscured his view of his mother's expression but he didn't need to look at her to know that her eyes were wide with shock. Although she probably wasn't shocked. Itachi hadn't seen or talked to his aunt and uncle since Shisui's funeral and they were due to come over any minute. She probably suspected that he would retreat to the cemetery before they arrived. If anything, she probably worried about his mental and emotional state. "How was it?"

Now it was Itachi's turn to steal a glance in her direction. "It was good. I'm glad I went."

A sympathetic smile quickly replaced her worried frown. "Well that's good. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself."

For several seconds the two continued what they were doing in silence – Itachi testing the potatoes and dumping them into a strainer in the sink and Mikoto stirring the glaze she prepared beforehand. For the first time in a long time Itachi was finally being honest about his feelings with his mother even though he hadn't told her much of anything except for his whereabouts over the past hour. And it was probably safe to say that Mikoto was glad to hear him truly open up about his feelings this year and confront the reality of Shisui's death.

He didn't feel the need to elaborate and she didn't feel it necessary to press for details.

The doorbell sounded just then, signaling the arrival of Shisui's parents Megumi and Kagami. "I'll get it." Itachi volunteered.

"Are you sure you'll be fine?" She asked.

"I'll be fine." Itachi answered over his shoulder. Even if he suddenly changed his mind, his aunt and uncle were already here.

"Happy Easter!" Megumi announced when Itachi opened the front door to allow her inside. A strand of hair stuck to her forehead and her face was dotted with tiny water droplets. In her arms she held a small container with a foggy lid covering the contents inside. "How are you, Itachi? I wasn't sure if we'd be seeing you today!"

Mikoto didn't give him the option to skip dinner with his aunt and uncle. He was to spend dinner with the family and could retreat to his bedroom afterwards, his mother told him. Apparently she did not mention this to Megumi.

"I'm doing well, thank you." The polite response to her question. "What's this?" He asked of the container.

Itachi took a step away from the door to allow the couple inside. "Glazed carrots." She explained once she was inside.
He almost expected her to present him with a fully cooked ham.

"Megumi I told you we'd have enough food!" Mikoto called from the kitchen.

Megumi looked over Itachi's shoulder to lock eyes with her sister-in-law. "I know but I couldn't help myself!" She smiled sheepishly.

Itachi turned to his mother who was drying her hands on a dishtowel and making her way over. "Did I hear you say you brought glazed carrots?"

"That's right!" She smiled and extended the container to Mikoto's waiting hands.

Shisui inherited her positive, forward thinking demeanor. Itachi liked to think that he would do the exact same thing during family gatherings when they adults. "I know you said you had enough potatoes but we always run out and you know I'll take home any leftovers!" He'd laugh and playfully nudge Itachi in the side with his elbow.

"How are you, Mikoto?" Kagami asked and pulled Mikoto into a delicate hug.

"I'm doing fine, Kagami, how are you?"

"Hair's a little wet but other than that, can't complain!" He laughed and patted his messy curls.

Itachi could hear a little bit of Shisui in his uncle who took great pride in styling his once voluminous curls that grew smaller and smaller as the years went by. Even so, the man spent a considerable amount of time in the mornings trying to look presentable only to have his efforts ruined by the fine mist outside.

Itachi remembered a time when Shisui ran from the grocery store parking lot to the store's entrance because he forgot an umbrella. Itachi, on the other hand, patiently waited in the car for the rain to let up while Shisui shook his head like a dog to dispel the rain droplets hanging from the wet strands of hair that stuck to his face. Itachi remembered how you could see Shisui's nipples through his white graphic t-shirt and how his sneakers squeaked for aisles.

"You look ridiculous." Itachi chided him then.

"That may be but I've never felt more alive."

"Where's my brother at?" Kagami asked in present time.

"He's upstairs getting ready, I believe." Mikoto answered.

"Thanks." He and headed towards the stairs. "Fugaku! Where ya hiding! Come show your brother some love!"

"I swear my old man still thinks he's nineteen and cool." Shisui would have snickered.

Although he felt Shisui's absence almost every day since he died, Itachi found himself smiling at the memories he still had of when his cousin was alive. It would be different this year, not to drag an additional chair to the dining room table to accommodate the seventh person and to sit so close that his elbows bumped into either Shisui's or Sasuke's but he would survive. He could see pieces of Shisui in Kagami and Megumi and it was nice of his mother to invite them over for the holiday.

"Itachi, could you come mash the potatoes please?" Mikoto asked him. "You know your brother will pour half a gallon of milk into the mix if we let him, remember?"
Itachi chuckled. "I remember."

"Are you seriously bringing up the potatoes again?" Sasuke asked, emerging from upstairs. "Nobody told me how much milk to put in it and it tasted bland!"

"You'll learn someday, Sasuke, don't worry." Megumi reassured him.

Listening to his family laughing and having a good time made Itachi smile even though Shisui wasn't here with them. What Itachi thought would be an awkward family dinner spent in silence looked as though it'd be like every family dinner they had when Shisui was alive.

It wouldn't be easy, juggling his social life and everything he needed to fix along with preparing for final exams when he returned to school but he wouldn't worry about it.

As Shisui would have reminded him, "Everything will be fine."

Chapter End Notes

Gotta love crazy dreams of things you hope will NEVER happen in real life, morbid cemetery visits and epiphanies and heart-warming family get-togethers!

I personally liked how this chapter rolled out. There wasn't a lot of dialogue (save for Itachi's inner conversations with Shisui) but I think Itachi has a pretty good idea as to what he needs to do going forward. I think he's had a really hard time in the past several months since Shisui died and really just needed something to make him realize that what he's been doing isn't healthy. Hopefully going forward he'll make some changes and in the end all we can do is hope for his happiness and peace of mind in the end.

I hope the chapter flowed nicely - I wrote the beginning and the middle first, then wrote in the cemetery visit and had to reread it to make sure it flowed nicely and just when I was about to upload it I decided to add a transition between the cemetery visit and Megumi and Kagami's arrival (the talk with Mikoto) to reflect Itachi's change in demeanor. Then I think I changed what Itachi and Mikoto were doing in the kitchen after reading through the rest of the chapter...(in short - lots of revision!)

Hope it flowed okay!

Until next time,

Itachi's Husband
Bridges

Chapter Notes

So it's been since September since I updated this last I believe and if not this weekend, I will update again most likely in December or January if I have time.

I wasn't planning on updating this tonight or even this week but I had some free time and I've been giving the plot a lot of thought lately and wanted to see what I could do!

As a little reminder: This chapter takes place on Monday, March 28th, 2016 and the last chapter took place the day before on Easter Sunday. For anyone who likes to keep track.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“YOUR FROSTY IS MELTING.”

Itachi merely glanced at the yellow cup that once housed a semi-solid chocolate milkshake inside. He placed his text on a spot on the bed beside him and pulled his feet out from under him. “Do you mind if I pour it down the sink?”

“You're not going to eat it?”

Itachi stalled. “It’s melting.”

Kisame quickly peered into the deserted cup that was still half full. “You can still eat it. Want me to get you a spoon?”

“I dipped fries into it.” He thought the purpose was to dip fries into it until the treat melted. What more could be done afterwards?

“So? You can still eat it as a regular frosty. I’ll get you a spoon.” Kisame offered.

“I dipped salted fries into that. I’m not eating it by itself.”

The older man stared at him as though he had sworn at him. The corners of his mouth began to quirk as though he as amused or disgusted. Itachi couldn’t determine which emotion he was seeing. “That’s what you’re worried about?” He smiled. So he was amused. “You won’t be able to taste the salt, Itachi!”

He didn’t want it. It was childish of him and a waste of good food but he couldn’t bring himself to take it back knowing he had dipped fried potatoes seasoned with salt into a chilled dairy product laced with chocolate syrup but if he took it back it would melt and go to waste anyways.

Without a word, Kisame turned to the door and turned the knob.

“Where are you going?”

“To put it in the fridge. I’ll eat it later.” He explained.
Itachi furrowed his brow but did not argue with him. “Okay.”

“It’ll be fine!” He assured him and exited the room.

So don’t worry about it; it’ll be fine.

Although he was starting to come to terms with Shisui’s passing little things still caused his chest to constrict. Kisame wasn’t aware of it, but the things he said to help put Itachi at ease were similar to the things Shisui told him whenever Itachi was worried or distraught about something.

Sitting back on the bed, he rested his head against the wall, closed his eyes and forced himself to inhale and exhale. Shisui was gone and there was nothing he could do to bring him back to life. Conversely Kisame was here with him and they were having a good time and he should be enjoying himself. This Itachi knew but he was still having a hard time switching to a more positive mindset.

“You okay?” Kisame asked when he returned.

Itachi opened his eyes and straightened his posture. “Yes.”

“You look tired.”

Kisame and Shisui may have comforted him in similar ways but Kisame was blunter than his cousin was. “I’m fine.” He told him and picked up his management text. Even as he pretended to resume his reading, he could still feel the weight of Kisame’s stare.

The bed shifted as the athlete adjusted his position so that he was leaning against the wall too. Just when Itachi thought he had dropped the subject, Kisame uttered “My offer still stands. If you want to talk about it, I’ll listen. Remember that.”

Itachi glanced Kisame’s way. The upperclassman wasn’t making eye contact with him. Instead, he was flipping through his statistics notes and graded homework assignments.

If it were Shisui, he would’ve placed a hand on Itachi’s shoulder and made eye contact, scrutinizing Itachi’s features for anything that would indicate that Itachi wasn’t alright. Kisame simply went back to work as if nothing had happened. And Itachi was quite alright with that. Anything more would have been uncomfortable. Maybe Kisame felt the same.

Itachi looked back at his own reading laid out in front of him. About to pick up where he left off he felt as though he should say something to show his appreciation for Kisame’s concern. “Thank you. I’ll keep that in mind.” With that said, he continued to read. Kisame’s body shifted slightly and if Itachi had to guess, he was smiling back at him, grateful for the response. As much as Itachi wanted to see that friendly smile, he did not look back and focused on the text before him.

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“What’s your final answer?”

Kisame tightly knitted his brow and tapped the eraser of his pencil against his paper. “Twelve point ninety seven is less than twenty-four which is greater than twenty-six point three.”

Itachi glanced up to meet Kisame’s eyes, waiting for a response. When Kisame made no move to answer, he prompted “So is it probable that twenty-four of thirty graduates have student loans?” He asked.
He sighed. “No because…twenty-four is more than twelve point ninety-seven and less than twenty-six point three which means it’s not unusual…right?”

“You tell me.” Itachi said and straightened his back. In order for him to clearly see the other man’s work he had to sit right next to him and look over his shoulder. Their combined weight in the center of the bed caused a dip that had Itachi almost leaning on Kisame’s arm.

“I mean, if I did it right then yeah, that’s the answer.”

Itachi pushed himself back to his original spot and picked up his calculator to check it himself. Kisame handed him the review page and tilted his head back against the wall. “I’ve always hated probability but this is impossible.”

“Not if you know how to do it.” Itachi said and handed back the paper.

Kisame chuckled and outstretched his hand. “I hate to break it to you but not everyone is as smart as you are.”

“It’s a new concept to you and with practice it’ll become easier. Trust me.”

“So it’s right?” He asked, flashing the paper towards him.

Itachi nodded. “It is.”

“Thank God.” He sighed.

It was clear that he was frustrated but he admitted that probability has never been one of his strengths, even in elementary school. Decades later things were beginning to intensify and he was struggling. If Itachi was in the same predicament he would practice and practice until he saw improvement but Kisame didn’t possess the same academic drive as he did. For him, a passing grade would be enough.

“Kisame?”

“What?” He asked, turning his head. His eyes were half lidded and without his usual jubilant smile he liked exhausted.

Itachi didn’t want to bother him but at the same time he didn’t want to force him to work through another probability problem. If he did, the number of mistakes Kisame made would increase along with his level of frustration. “I need…some advice.”

“What?” He asked, turning his head. His eyes were half lidded and without his usual jubilant smile he liked exhausted.

Itachi didn’t want to bother him but at the same time he didn’t want to force him to work through another probability problem. If he did, the number of mistakes Kisame made would increase along with his level of frustration. “I need…some advice.”

“Some advice?”

He nodded. “I’ve been meaning…I need to talk to Deidara about what happened last month.”

“You still haven’t talked to him about that yet?” Kisame asked. He turned his body so that he was facing Itachi and looked at him with curious eyes.

“I’ve tried but every time I try to make small talk he leaves the room or says something snide.” He began to explain. “And I understand. Given the way I treated him I know I deserved it but I want to apologize and I don’t know how.” As the words left his mouth all Itachi wanted to do was bring his knees up to his chest and close himself off to Kisame and the rest of the outside world. He wasn’t used to opening up to people like this and felt the shame of having to ask heat his face.

“I get what you’re saying, Itachi.” Kisame spoke in a level tone. He wasn’t laughing. He was calm
and alert. More so than just a minute ago when he was struggling through a math problem. “Deidara’s probably still licking his wounds from the fight you two had and it might take time.”

Itachi’s shoulders slumped. Giving it time wasn’t what he wanted to hear.

“But if it’s bothering you that much I’d suggest talking to him at night or really early in the morning when he can’t escape to class or go somewhere else you know?”

It was a thought. “Deidara comes home late each night. I’m never able to catch him.”

“Try the morning then. Not right after he wakes up but before he leaves the room.”

Itachi thought about Kisame’s words. If he followed through with his advice he would have to wait until the weekend as their class schedules conflicted during the week. Itachi usually departed for class before Deidara was even awake and couldn’t afford to wait for the blond to wake. Even then he was always in a rush to make it to his own class on time and wouldn’t be in the mood to listen to whatever Itachi had to say. “I guess I could try that.”

“Or you could leave a note on his desk or something.”

He shook his head. “That wouldn’t go over well.” After their fight last month Deidara had written him a note of apology and he refused to read it. It would not bode well for him to do the same now that the tables were turned. In fact, it would most likely add fuel to the fire.

“When try to talk to him in the morning or sometime when he can’t escape to class or something. That’s probably your best bet.” He said and slid off the bed. “Be right back; I gotta take a piss.”

Once Kisame left the room, Itachi pondered why he hadn’t thought of this before. In all the times he had tried to talk to his roommate he was either packing up his things to disappear to Sasori’s apartment or rushing to class. He hadn’t thought to try to talk to him when he didn’t have class or when he didn’t have plans to visit Sasori or wherever he spent his time these days.

His cell phone vibrated within in pocket. Probably a text from student activities. Itachi reasoned. He received five to ten texts on any given day about events being held on campus and typically attended none of them unless he was passing by a table promising free cookies. Other than that he had no interest in karaoke or game nights or choral concerts or anything that required leaving his room and socializing with people he didn’t know.

But when he phone continued to vibrate he realized that someone was trying to call him. His mother probably. While he hadn’t told her that he was grieving Shisui’s death early Easter morning, she knew what he had been up to. She probably saw it in the redness of his eyes and probably wanted to confirm that he was doing alright now that he was back on campus.

When he pulled his phone from his pocket he was surprised not to see his mother’s name but Deidara’s instead.

“He probably dialed by accident.” He uttered. Deidara never called him before. This was probably a mistake. Sliding the phone back into his pocket he considered the circumstances that would lead to an accidental phone call. The last time Deidara called him was before the start of the school year to introduce himself so it would be odd for his number to appear in Deidara’s recently contacted list. It would also take a considerable amount of button pushing to make a call from the text messaging screen and he hadn’t texted him recently either.

In his hesitation, the vibration stopped. If Deidara truly wanted something, he could contact Sasori for it. If it was indeed an accident, he would realize it later and it would be a thing of the past. He
was just about to slide the device back into his pocket when two icons appeared on his lock screen: the missed call icon along with the voicemail icon.

“Is everything alright?” Kisame asked when he reappeared.

Still staring at the phone Itachi asked “When you dial someone by accident…is it possible to leave a voicemail by accident as well?”

Kisame stopped dead in his tracks. “When you dial someone by accident…? Oh! You mean when you butt-dial someone!”

“Same thing.”

“Yeah I suppose you can leave a voicemail if the person you butt-dialed doesn’t answer. Why? Did someone butt-dial you and leave a voicemail?”

“…yeah…”

“Who?” He asked, taking a seat on the bed.

“Deidara.”

Kisame’s eyes widened. “No way! And we were just talking about him too! What’d he want?”

Itachi stared at the phone as if it were a foreign object. “I don’t know. I didn’t listen to the voice message.”

“You should listen to it and see if he said anything.”

He looked in the athlete’s direction who provided him with a careless shrug.

“It can’t hurt can it? Maybe he called you on purpose. You never know.”

“Maybe…” Itachi breathed and opened up his voicemail.

When he put the speaker to his ear he was surprised to hear Deidara’s voice shouting into the other end. “Hello? Itachi? It’s me, yeah. Deidara. This is gonna sound kinda weird but if you’re not busy can you come pick me up? I’m at somebody’s house and I don’t have a ride.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me.”

“He’s at somebody’s house?” Kisame asked from behind.

“If you get this message can you call me back, yeah? I can explain just…just…give me a call okay, yeah? I don’t know who else to call.”

Itachi closed his eyes and exhaled through his nose. When the message ended he pulled the phone away from his face exhaled once more to calm his nerves.

“What was that all about? Is everything okay?” Kisame asked him. “I heard that he was at somebody’s house without a ride is that right?”

Itachi glanced at the illuminated phone screen and considered whether or not he wanted to call Deidara back or not. “I don’t know.” He answered and pressed the call button.

“Hello?”
“You called?” He spoke, trying to mask the frustration that was slowly bubbling within him. He wanted to apologize to Deidara and the last thing he needed was another reason to be angry with him again.

“Yeah. Hi. Um…this is gonna sound really bad but…”

“Deidara? Are you drunk?” Itachi asked. The blond’s words were loud and slightly slurred and Itachi had heard what it sounds like when someone has had too much to drink too many times in his life to mistake it.

“No I’m not drunk…I only had one drink but you have to listen to me!”


“He’s drunk?” Kisame whispered from behind him.

“I’m at somebody’s house, yeah.” Deidara answered. “Some of Sasori’s friends invited us out to unwind and work on our art and there was alcohol and I was curious and I swear I only had one drink! I swear Itachi!”

“How far away is this place that you’re in?” Itachi needed to know. Deidara was asking him for a ride back to campus and while Itachi didn’t want to comply he definitely wanted to know where this place was if he did agree.

“Thirty-five minutes away I think…I don’t know, yeah. Sasori drove us here.”

“Why can’t you ask him to drive you back then?”

“Because he doesn’t want to leave yet, yeah and trust me I tried to ask him to take me back to campus but he doesn’t want to leave.” He whined. “You have to listen to me Itachi, yeah! I have no one else to call, I’m not feeling so hot, I’m not drunk but I just wanna go home and you’re the only person I could ask. Please, yeah. I won’t ask you for anything for the rest of my life if you do this for me.”

“What’s going on?” Kisame asked from behind him.

Itachi placed his hand over the speaker. “He’s at a house party and wants a ride back because he doesn’t feel well.”

“Damn! How much did he have to drink? It’s not even ten o’clock yet!”

“I don’t know.” Itachi answered and put the phone back to his ear. “Deidara?”

“Yeah?”

“Text me the address and wait outside. I’ll be there in thirty-five minutes and don’t make me come in there and find you, do you understand?”

“Got it, yeah! Thanks a bunch! I’ll be waiting outside and I’ll text you the address yeah!”

“Are you going to get him?” Kisame asked when Itachi rose to his feet and pulled his jacket from where it hung on the back of Kisame’s chair.

“Yeah.” He answered tersely. “I’m sorry Kisame. We can study tomorrow night if that works for you, okay? I don’t know when I’ll get back to campus once I pick him up.”
Kisame hopped off the bed. “I’ll come with you.”

“That isn’t necessary.”

The upperclassman shook his head and began to look around the room. “Your car is probably parked on the other side of campus near your dorm isn’t it?”

It was. “Yes.”

“So it’ll be quicker to take my car which is parked right out back.” He said and struggled to put his shoes on while standing up. “Besides,” he grunted once the foot was finally in, “you’re probably not familiar with this area because you’re not from here right?”

Itachi hadn’t thought of that. “I can manage with the GPS.”

The older man approached him and put a hand on his shoulder. “It’ll be quicker if we take my car. That and I’ve seen the people that guy hangs out with. God knows what you’ll find there.” He said.

It hadn’t crossed his mind that Deidara was at a house with friends who were as old, if not older than Sasori even though Deidara had mentioned it when they were on the phone. Regardless of their strained relationship at the moment Itachi wasn’t about to let Deidara find a ride home with a stranger or with a possibly drunken Sasori. He’d dealt with one fatality as a result of alcohol this year, he didn’t need to deal with another one. And this time, he’d help prevent it.

“Did he text you the address?” Kisame asked, donning a dark blue sweatshirt with the name of the school swim team printed in white on the front.

Itachi checked his phone. Sure enough there was a street address texted to him from Deidara. “Yeah.”

“Then let’s go.”

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The car ride was relatively quiet save for the pop music station playing in the background and the sound of Kisame’s turn signal blinking when he merged in an out of lanes. He normally drove faster than Itachi would’ve liked but in their current situation he didn’t care. Kisame tried to make conversation numerous times throughout the trip but Itachi couldn’t concentrate on what he was saying. All he could think about was why Deidara had agreed to go on this excursion with Sasori and his friends. How long had he known Sasori’s friends for? Were they students at the university, students from another university or graduates? He didn’t know. He hoped to God that Deidara knew but that still didn’t excuse his reckless behavior.

As frustrated as he was with his roommate he blamed himself. If he hadn’t treated Deidara the way he did maybe Deidara wouldn’t have gravitated back to Sasori again. Perhaps he wouldn’t have agreed to leave campus with him and journey to some random house more than half an hour away. In addition Deidara was drinking. He claimed to have only had one drink but if that was the truth, why was he complaining of this sudden illness?

So many questions were running through Itachi’s mind as he watched the headlights of the cars in the lanes beside them pass until they were driving on a two lane street in a suburban neighborhood. If it was brighter outside, Itachi may have been able to tell what kind of residents lived here but it was too dark to make that kind of a call.

When they arrived almost an hour later they found Deidara sitting on the front steps with his arms
wrapped tightly around his body.

“Hey Itachi.” Deidara quietly greeted him. When he looked up to meet his roommate’s steely eyes he caught a glimpse of Kisame right behind. “You’re here too?” He asked with narrowed eyes.

“I was helping him study for an exam when you called and he offered to drive.” Itachi answered and herded him towards Kisame’s car. “Do you have everything you came with? Your cell phone? Your wallet? All of that?”

“Of course, yeah…how do you think I called you if I didn’t have my phone?”

Itachi looked over his shoulder and glared at him. “Just get in the car.”

“Okay.”

Once they pulled away from the curb and started to drive, Kisame looked into the rearview mirror where Deidara resting his head against the window. “You okay kid?”

Deidara nodded. “Yeah…”

“That must have been one hell of a drink to make you that sick. Want some water to drink?”

“Sure…”

Kisame reached down to the cup holders to where the bottled water sat. “I’ll give it to him.” Itachi said. His fingers brushed against Kisame’s warm ones to pick up the bottle and hand it back to Deidara.

“Thanks yeah.”

“Jesus Itachi! Your hands are freezing! Are you that cold?” Kisame exclaimed and clutched Itachi’s hand.

“I’m always cold.” Itachi explained.

“Jesus! You should have said something! Here, let me turn the heat up or something.”

While Kisame attempted to warm up Itachi’s hands using his own, the only noise in the car was that of the music playing and Deidara’s quiet breathing and the occasional cough from the back.

“What the hell did you drink while you were there? A fireball? A Jack Daniels?”

Such terminology was lost on Itachi who was only familiar with a handful of alcoholic beverages and beers from when his father used to drink. While Kisame tried to determine what it was that Deidara had consumed at that house, Itachi watched his roommate’s behavior. Sure, there were alcoholic beverages with some kick to them that could cause someone to cough, but Deidara it was logical to assume that Deidara had drank whatever it was almost an hour ago when he called Itachi. The effects of such a drink should have passed long ago. Not only that but since they began to drive Itachi could hear the blond’s breathing from over the sound of the radio.

“Deidara?” Itachi spoke.

“Yeah?”

“How much did you have to drink exactly?”
Deidara sighed. “A small sip, yeah. I didn’t like the taste of it and didn’t pick up another drink for the rest of the time, yeah.”

Itachi watched as Deidara wrapped his arms more tightly around his body. He was wearing a sweatshirt as thick as the one Itachi himself wore and Kisame had since turned the heating on. Even for someone with poor circulation such as himself, Itachi wasn’t that cold. “Have you consumed alcohol before tonight?”

“Can we not do this right now? I’m not in the mood for another lecture, yeah. I get it. I’m not legal, I shouldn’t have been drinking, it was a stupid decision and I’m sorry for making you and Kisame come all the way out here but I had no other choice, yeah.”

“I don’t care about any of that, Deidara, just answer my question. Have you ever consumed any alcoholic beverage before tonight?”

Deidara rubbed at his eyes. “No. I haven’t. I just wanted to try it and didn’t like it. End of story, yeah.”

Even after Deidara finished, Itachi continued to stare in his direction.

He studied the way Deidara wrapped his arms around his stomach once he finished rubbing his eyes and the manner in which he bounced his uncrossed legs. If he was cold, it would make more sense to have crossed them one over the other. But his legs were side by side. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel carsick but I normally don’t sit in the back seat, yeah.”

“Sorry.” Kisame apologized and immediately slowed down some.

“Does your stomach hurt?”

Deidara regarded him out of the corner of his eyes. “Kinda but it’s probably something I ate, yeah.” He said. “Listen, I know you don’t approve of my choices Itachi, but I don’t need you to interrogate me right now, okay?”

“How does your throat feel?”

“How does my throat feel? It feels like I swallowed a piece of hair or something and why do you keep asking me all of these questions yeah? What are you getting at? Spit it out already!”

Itachi turned around to face forward in his seat and sighed.

“What’s the matter?” Kisame asked him.

“Do you know where the nearest hospital is, Kisame?”

“Nearest hospital, yeah?” Came a cry from the backseat. “I ate something I shouldn’t have and I’m not used to riding in the back of somebody’s car! Why are you suggesting we go to the hospital, yeah!”

“Less than five minutes away from here I think.” Kisame supplied. “Why?”

Itachi carefully thought over what he had observed since they picked Deidara up before voicing his thoughts aloud. “I could be wrong but…Deidara, I think you might be having an allergic reaction to something you ingested.”
“An allergic reaction, yeah? From what? I’m not allergic to anything!”

“Have you eaten anything tonight that you’ve never had before?”

“No!”

Itachi sighed. “Well then if that’s the case I think you might be allergic to alcoholic beverages.”

“You think I’m allergic to alcohol, yeah?!”

“Allergic to alcohol? Is that even a thing?” Kisame voiced.

“Unfortunately, yes.” Itachi answered. “Can you take us to the nearest hospital, Kisame?”

“Is it really that bad? What if he’s not allergic to alcohol?”

Deidara leaned forward and clutched the back of Itachi’s seat. “Yeah! What if I’m not allergic to alcohol? How would you know?”

Itachi turned around to face him. “You’ve been breathing heavily ever since you got in the car, you’ve been rubbing at your eyes and you just said your throat itched, Deidara.”

“So? It could be anything! I could be getting sick!”

“You called me when you started to feel unwell after you consumed an alcoholic drink.” He said, raising his voice slightly. “Do you really want to go into anaphylactic shock when we get back to our dorm, Deidara?” Itachi pressed him. “Or would you rather get treated for whatever you may have at the hospital? It’s your choice.”

Deidara was silent.

“Better safe than sorry kid.” Kisame added.

Deidara looked in Kisame’s direction and then back at Itachi. “Fine, yeah.”

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhanger! DUN. DUN. DUN! But as I said I plan to update either next month or the following month so it shouldn't be so bad.

Anaphylactic shock is no joke. Deidara needs to get that checked out to be on the safe side.

Meanwhile, if you decide to comment (and I hope that you do! I appreciate the feedback! It inspires me to update faster lol), please tell me what you thought of the chapter and what you think of Itachi and Kisame's ever-changing relationship lately! I'm curious to know what you think!

Until next time,
-Itachi's Husband
That wasn't too long of a wait now was it?

This chapter takes place on the same day as the last chapter - Monday, March 28th, 2016 - for those of you who like to keep track.

I hope you enjoy the chapter!

KISAME WAS RIGHT WHEN he said that the nearest hospital was less than five minutes away from where they were at. Although Itachi wasn’t paying close attention to the illuminated time on Kisame’s dashboard it was likely that they made it there in five. Finding a place to park was another story, however.

“Where’s the emergency room?” Kisame asked in a quiet voice, more so to himself than to any of the other passengers in the car.

“You drove past it when we came in, yeah.”

Itachi turned in his seat. “You shouldn’t be talking, Deidara.”

“I think you’re overreacting, yeah.” He muttered and slunk further into his seat.

Itachi watched him for a few seconds more, scrutinizing his roommate’s appearance for physical symptoms but at this hour it was nearly impossible to tell unless they were passing under an overhead light. When it was evident that Deidara was going to take his advice, he turned to face forward again. “I think the emergency room is down that way, Kisame.” He said, pointing to his right.

“I know but how do I get there? That’s what I’m trying to figure out.”

“If you drop us off right here we can walk there while you find a spot.” Itachi suggested and unbuckled his seatbelt.

Kisame nodded and pulled up to the nearest sidewalk. “I’ll meet you guys in a few, ‘kay?”

As soon as the words left his mouth Itachi had hopped onto the pavement and shut the door behind him with Deidara following close behind. Once Deidara was by his side, the roar of Kisame’s engine sounded as he drove away in search of a place to park.

“Do you still feel lightheaded?” Itachi asked.

“Kinda, yeah.” Deidara whispered. He pushed his hands into the pockets of his jacket and brought his shoulders up to his ears. “But then again I’m not used to sitting in the back seat of people’s cars you know?”

“Yeah.” Itachi agreed. Kisame wasn’t a bad driver but his turns and habit of weaving in and out of
traffic left a lot to be desired. “Are you still able to breathe okay?”

“Yeah, Itachi. I’m fine. I’m breathing. My throat kinda hurts but I can breathe just fine.” He said and focused his gaze to the sidewalk before them.

“Let me know if you can’t and I’ll let someone know, okay?”

“Kay.”

The entrance to the emergency room turned out to be a short walk from where Kisame dropped them off and faced the street they’d turned into just as Deidara had said. Once inside, Itachi directed Deidara to take a seat while he spoke with the receptionists about his roommate’s condition. Every now and again he would point to where the blond slouched in his chair with the lower half of his face buried in the collar of his university sweater and eyes gazing into the distant space before him. By the time Itachi returned to his side to take a seat Kisame strode through the double doors with a smile and a wave and sat on Deidara’s other side.

Within a few minutes a woman dressed in white scrub pants and a navy top approached the trio and asked Deidara to follow her to an examination room.

“Good luck, kid!” Kisame called after him.

Deidara looked back over his shoulder, perhaps to say something or make a face, but became distracted by the woman in the scrubs asking him questions.

All the while Itachi sat and watched until the two disappeared down a hallway. Only when they were out of sight did he lean back in his chair and rest his head against the wall with a long inhale and exhale.

“He’ll be fine.” Kisame assured him with a gentle tap on the back of the hand. “You did the right thing and he’s in good hands now.”

“Yeah.” Itachi breathed and sat forward once more.

“You’re concerned about him I see.” Kisame noted.

What was that supposed to mean? “Of course I’m concerned about him, Kisame—”

“It shows you care.”

“Of course I care! What would have happened if I hadn’t noticed and he’d gone into anaphylactic shock when we returned back? Then what?”

“I understand.” He said calmly. “But what I’m trying to say is your concern shows Deidara that you still care about him.”

Itachi stared into the Kisame’s light brown eyes trying to search for a deeper meaning in his words. Surely he was missing something but what? “Things aren’t so bad that I wouldn’t show my concern for his wellbeing in a situation like this.”

“I know that. And now Deidara knows that too.” He said ever so calmly. “Seeing you so worried about him might make it easier for him to talk to you or hear you out whenever you decide to talk about things.” He said with a shrug. “You never know.”

Itachi understood what he was saying now. And Kisame seemed to sense that when he didn’t press
the matter further.

“By the way,” Kisame started, the tone of his voice higher and more cheerful, “how did you know he was allergic to alcohol?”

He released the breath he was holding. “When you’ve consumed something you’re allergic to you tend to feel unwell,” Itachi explained. “You may feel sick to your stomach, your throat may burn, the inside of your mouth may become irritated or itchy. In some cases, people develop hives or skin irritation though it’s usually more severe by then.”

Kisame’s eyes were wider than Itachi had ever seen them. He opened and closed his mouth as if to formulate a sentence but the words he wanted to say wouldn’t come out. “I mean…how did you…how did you know that though? He was in the back seat and you didn’t even know what he did at that party did you? Or did I miss something?”

Itachi considered it for a moment and shrugged. “He didn’t look well and was scratching his throat. I didn’t know he could be allergic to anything and for all I know maybe he’s not. Better safe than sorry.”

This didn’t appease Kisame’s quest for answers as he still sat staring at Itachi in disbelief. “But even I wouldn’t have thought he was allergic to something if I had seen him scratching his throat! How did you—”

Itachi averted his gaze to the tile floor beneath his feet. “My younger brother is allergic to cherries.” He said. Out of the corner of his eye Kisame seemed to relax his posture. “So I know what an allergic reaction to food looks like.”

“I see.” Kisame whispered. “But how did you know you could be allergic to alcohol? I mean I know people can be allergic to food like peanuts and shellfish and all that but alcohol? How did you know that?”

A shy smile played at the corner of Itachi’s lips. The answer was a simple one but he wasn’t sure if he wanted to tell him or not. After a moment of thought, he answered “I like to research odd things in my spare time.”

Kisame’s look of inquiry slowly morphed into one of amusement. The corners of his mouth upturned and spread to reveal that characteristic grin he always wore and he chuckled lightly. “Somehow…I’m not surprised, Itachi.”

Still smiling, Itachi turned away. “I know. It’s strange.”

“It’s very strange but it’s very you.” He said and patted Itachi on the shoulder. “But it’s good to know, you know? I’m just glad that I’m not allergic to alcohol!” He laughed.

Half an hour had passed when the woman from before returned without Deidara. Itachi was the first to speak. “How is he?”

“Are you his roommate?” She asked.

He promptly rose to his feet. “Yes.”

“Well it’s a good thing that you brought him here. He was definitely suffering from a reaction to something.” She said. “We gave him an epi-pen to reduce the swelling but we can’t conclude what he’s allergic to yet.”
“Okay.”

“You did the right thing bringing him here and there is a definite possibility that he could be allergic to alcohol in general but we’d like to recommend that he visit an allergist for a more conclusive result. You see, sometimes people who appear to be allergic to alcohol are really allergic to one of the many ingredients contained in alcohol such as grapes, wheat or barley to name a few. There’s many more out there.”

“I understand.”

“He should be fine but should he report any symptoms of any sort don’t hesitate to bring him back, okay?”

Itachi nodded. “Of course.”

“An allergist would be able to better determine if he’s allergic to one of the ingredients in the beverage he consumed or if he suffers from an intolerance to alcohol which is less fatal than an allergy to alcohol altogether you see.”

“Where’s he at?” Kisame interjected. “Can we see him? Can he go home?”

The nurse nodded. “Yes, you can take him home. Just keep an eye on him tonight, okay?”

“Of course. Thank you.” Itachi said to her.

The woman smiled and turned, gesturing for the two to follow behind. She lead them into a large room sectioned off by blue curtains and walked them over to where Deidara was sitting on a bed draped with white linens, his legs hanging over the edge and his hands folded in his lap. When he saw Itachi and Kisame he smiled and quickly glanced back down at the floor again.

“Deidara, you’re free to go home now.” The nurse told him. “Take it easy and let your roommate know if you’re feeling unwell, alright?”

“Thanks, yeah.” He said but did not meet Itachi’s eyes. “Will do.”

“Ready to hit the road, blondie?”

Deidara nodded.

“If you two wanna wait here I’ll go get the car. I parked on the other side of the building.” Kisame offered.

“My legs aren’t broken.” Deidara told him. “I can walk.”

“You should take it easy.” Itachi cautioned him.

“He couldn’t figure out how to find the entrance to the E.R. what makes you think he can do it now? We’ll be here all night, yeah.”

“Kid’s got a point.” Kisame chuckled.

Itachi didn’t agree but he was outnumbered two against one. Kisame wasn’t sure how to find the entrance to the E.R and Deidara claimed that he was well enough to walk so Itachi followed behind while Kisame led the march across the parking lot.

“Will you two be okay tonight?” Kisame asked from within his car parked just outside Itachi and
Deidara’s building. “Because you can crash at my place. Deidara can have the bed, you can sleep on the couch if you want and I can sleep on the floor or something it’s no big deal.”

“I think we’ll be fine.” Itachi glanced at Deidara.

“Thanks for the offer though yeah. And thanks for the ride, Kisame.”

“Anytime.” The upperclassman smiled when his eyes suddenly became unfocused and his cheery grin quickly faded. “Itachi your stuff is still in my room do you want me to bring it over for you?”

Itachi felt the weight of Deidara’s eyes on him just then. “It’s fine. I have my wallet and my keys. I don’t think I brought anything else with me.”

“What about your calculator?”

“It can wait until I see you again, Kisame.” He said. “It’s not important right now. I won’t need it tonight.”

Kisame nodded, his grin restored. “Maybe we can meet up again tomorrow night? Do you have anything going on?”

Itachi shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“I’ll text you.”

“Sounds good Kisame. Thank you again for driving us to the hospital.”

“Anytime, Itachi.” He smiled and rolled up the window.

Without a word the pair turned in the direction of their dormitory while Kisame drove in the opposite direction to his apartment. The walk back to the room was spent in collective silence, much to Itachi’s surprise. He knew that Deidara was watching his interactions with Kisame a few moments ago and wondered what he thought they were doing before they picked him up at that house party. Surely nothing inappropriate if a calculator was involved but he could feel the weight of the blond’s eyes on him as if he were being studied and wondered if Kisame had felt it too. Probably not.

“How are you feeling?” Itachi asked once they were behind closed doors.

Deidara dragged his feet over to his bed, turned and let himself fall onto the mattress. “I feel fine, yeah.” He said. “I promise I would tell you if I didn’t.”

Itachi bit the inside of his cheek and nodded. There was a hint of annoyance in Deidara’s voice that he couldn’t quite place. Was he annoyed by Itachi’s constant questioning or was something else bothering him he wondered. Would it worsen their relationship if he simply asked or should he just explain what he and Kisame were doing prior to picking him up? Or should he remain silent?

He wasn’t sure so he decided to stall for time and turned to his dresser. “I’ll be back. I’m going to get ready for bed.”

“ITACHI?”

Itachi turned to meet Deidara’s gaze. The blond was sitting up now and staring directly into his eyes for the first time in what felt like ages. Itachi had nearly forgotten just how blue Deidara’s eyes actually were it had been so long. “Yes?”
“Thanks for picking me up tonight, yeah.”

He felt himself relax slightly. “You’re welcome, Deidara.” He said and turned back to his dresser. A thank you was a start. It’d likely take some time for them to have a normal conversation again but at least they were talking to one another. It was a start.

“I’m sorry, yeah.”

Itachi turned to face Deidara again, perplexed and eager to hear what more Deidara had to say this time. “For what?”

He fixated his gaze at the checkered carpet, his fingers fiddling in his lap. “For calling you tonight.” He told him. “I know how you feel about parties and alcohol but I-I honestly didn’t know who else to call, yeah. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize.” Itachi said in a voice just above a whisper. “I’m glad you called me. I’m glad I could help.”

And he would leave it at that. There was no need to say anything further. He had several questions of course. Who threw the party, how did Deidara know them, why did he feel the need to take a drink in the first place, how long had he waited to call Itachi and many more. As much as he wanted to know these answers, to hear them from Deidara himself, he knew it would only cause more conflict between them and it stood to reason that they had argued far too much this year already. It would do neither of them any good to have yet another with only a month before final exams.

What Deidara chose to do in his free time was none of Itachi’s business and thus the questions playing at the back of his mind would remain unanswered.

Some things, Itachi learned, were simply better left unsaid if it meant maintaining what little peace existed between them.

He was about to leave it at that and get ready for bed like he said he was going to. Yet his arms refused to open the drawer to his dresser and there he felt a sense of unease. A sort of tension swirling between him and Deidara, who had not made a sound within the past minute and a half.

It was then that Kisame’s words of advice floated to the surface of his memory. “…if it’s bothering you that much I’d suggest talking to him at night when he can’t escape or go somewhere else you know?”

Now was the perfect moment to voice what he had been on his mind for the past month now. The things he felt he needed to say to Deidara and the things he most wanted for Deidara to hear that he had refused to listen to until now.

“I’m sorry too.”

“Why are you sorry yeah?”

Itachi turned to face his roommate, inhaled and glanced upwards to meet Deidara’s eyes. “I’m sorry for the way I treated you over the past month and a half.”

Deidara regarded him with steady eyes devoid of emotion.

When he said nothing, Itachi continued. “After Shisui died,” he paused, “after Shisui died I was a mess. You did your best to comfort me and I snapped at you. A simple misunderstanding quickly
escalated and created a strain in our relationship and I know I should have handled it better.” He said. “I realize that none of this serves as a proper excuse and I know this apology is long overdue but I needed time to realize what I did was wrong. Once I realized my mistake I could never find the time to talk to you. You were either running late to class or hanging out with friends and you probably didn’t want to hear me out and I understand. I understand completely.”

Deidara’s eyes softened slightly. His chin, which was pointed towards when Itachi started his apology had lifted slightly. Maybe Itachi’s words were having a positive effect on the blond. Or maybe Deidara was waiting for his chance to give it back to him. To say what was truly in his mind and heart over the past month.

But before he could hear Deidara out there was one last thing Itachi needed to say. “I know this probably won’t change things between us, Deidara.” He said softly and looked to meet Deidara’s eyes. “But I wanted you to know that I’m truly sorry for what I did. I’m truly sorry.”

The room was silent. Deidara was staring at the window. The blinds were closed and there was nothing to see but he looked as though he wanted to leave. To be anywhere but here. “I forgive you, yeah.” He finally said.

Itachi blinked in surprise.

“And I’m sorry for what I did too. The things I said, yeah.”

“You don’t have to apologize, Deidara, really. I—”

Deidara held up a hand to silence him. “Itachi. You had your chance to say what you needed to say. Now it’s my turn, yeah.”

Itachi nodded in compliance. Deidara was right. He had his turn. Now it was Deidara’s time to speak.

Clearing his throat, Deidara reiterated his earlier statement. “I’m sorry for what I did too. You were in a vulnerable place and I took advantage of that – of you – because I was tired of waiting, yeah. I thought I knew what I was doing. I thought I knew you but it turns out I didn’t. At least, not in that moment, yeah. I was only trying to help but I made things so much worse for you and you didn’t deserve that, yeah.”

“Deidara…”

“Let me finish, yeah.” He commanded with determined eyes and took a deep breath to steady himself. “You were right. You had a lot on your plate with Shisui and everything and kissing you probably only made things ten times worse. I understand why you said the things you said and I can understand why you needed time, yeah.”

Deidara flicked his bangs to briefly reveal his other eye but the fringe quickly fell back into place. Itachi, who had been staring intently at Deidara throughout the duration of the blond’s apology, was still staring at him and Deidara could tell he wanted to say something.

“I’m sorry.” The two said in unison.

Itachi’s eyes widened as did Deidara’s. The latter relaxed slightly and smiled. “We cool now?”

“Yes.”

“Cool.” Deidara grinned and looked around the room for something. “Shit! I left my sketchbook at
Sasori’s apartment! Shit!”

Having said what needed to be said, Itachi pulled open the drawers of the small dresser in search of something to wear to bed while Deidara swore and shifted around the room in search for another sketchbook most likely. “After what happened tonight,” Itachi voiced, “are you going to continue hanging out with him?

The shifting stopped. “With Sasori yeah?”

Itachi nodded.

“Probably yeah.”

A month ago Itachi probably would have argued with him. He would have listed the reasons why he thought Sasori was a bad influence and why it would be in Deidara’s best interest to cut ties with him. In fact, he already had. But it wasn’t his place to tell Deidara how to live his life. Especially when they had just reconciled less than a minute ago.

Behind him Deidara exhaled. “I went to a party with Sasori and a bunch of other art majors. Yeah, there was alcohol and yeah, I know there’s a million reasons why you don’t approve but everybody was drinking. Not just Sasori.”

“I know.” Itachi admitted softly but that wasn’t what he was concerned about.

“You can’t blame him for not driving me home, yeah. His judgement was clouded. That’s all.”

You wouldn’t be in this situation if you didn’t hang out with him, Itachi wanted to say. “Do you still like him?”

A curt laugh resonated throughout the room. “You don’t beat around the bush, do you Itachi?” He laughed. “I still find Sasori attractive if that’s what you’re asking, yeah. But if you’re asking me if I still want to hook up with him the answer is no, yeah.”

“Really?” All this time Itachi believed Deidara was spending time with Sasori because he wanted to pursue a relationship with him.

A wistful look clouded Deidara’s features as he glanced off into the distance. “Don’t get me wrong, yeah. I wanted to. For a while. But he’s honestly he’s a fuckboy. One minute he’s over Sakura and never wants to speak to her again. The next he’s talking about getting back together with her again and it's not for me. I’m happy being just friends for now, yeah.”

Itachi glanced in Deidara’s direction. The blond’s eyes held a sense of yearning for a relationship with the upperclassman but the somberness air around him confirmed that it probably wouldn’t happen anytime soon. “I just don’t want to see him hurt you again, Deidara.” He offered.

“Is that your blessing, yeah?”

Itachi rolled his eyes. “Sure.”

Deidara pulled his fingers into a fist and smiled victoriously as though Itachi’s approval was all that mattered to him. Whether it really did or not Itachi did not know, nor did he think to ask. “I know you don’t approve of him, yeah.” Deidara said. “But you and I are two different people, yeah. It would be weird if we hung out with the same type of people, you know?”

This was true. Artists were unpredictable, wild, and chaotic in Itachi’s opinion. They had a sense of
organization that made sense only to themselves and others just like them. Deidara claimed to
know exactly where everything on his side of the room was located – that he had an organized
system, but all Itachi could see was clutter and trash. It’s not trash yeah – it’s scrap paper! Deidara
had once told him. I could use that in the future and save a tree or something, yeah! It still looked
like trash and it took every bit of Itachi’s willpower not to throw it in the garbage each week.

But if Deidara’s “type” were artists, what did that make Itachi’s type? Bookworms? Kisame,
arguably Itachi’s closest friend, was by no means a bookworm. In fact, the upperclassman didn’t
share any trait that Itachi would use to describe himself.

“Let’s make a deal, yeah.” Deidara proposed.

“I’m listening.”

“I won’t nag you about the people you choose to hang out with if you don’t nag me about the
people that I choose to hang out with. Does that sound fair, yeah?”

Itachi considered this for a moment. If he agreed to this, he would have to keep his opinions about
Sasori to himself from now on. On the flipside, Deidara couldn’t comment on his relationship with
Kisame anymore which would be a weight off his shoulders. “Alright.” He agreed. “But if he hurts
you like he did on homecoming I won’t keep quiet.”

“Okay, yeah!” Deidara laughed. “You’re so overprotective!”

Itachi ignored the comment.

“One more thing, yeah!”

Itachi rubbed at his eyes and turned to face him. At this rate he’d never get to bed at a decent time.
It was already going on half past eleven but luckily his first class wasn’t until 10am tomorrow
morning. “Yes?”

“You asked me if I liked Sasori. I think it’s only fair that I should be able to ask you the same.” He
said. “After today I promise I won’t bother you about it again, yeah.”

“Okay.” He hadn’t considered the possibility that Deidara would ask him this but he should have.
And he had a feeling he knew what he was going to ask.

“Do you like Kisame?”

The answer was a simple one. “I like him only as a friend.” He answered “Nothing more, nothing
less.”

The answered seemed satisfactory enough for Deidara who gave him a friendly “okay” in return
and resumed searching for whatever it was he had been looking for earlier. “It’s getting late, yeah.
You should probably get ready for bed.”

“Yeah.” Itachi conceded, grabbed a shirt and a pair of flannel pants and quietly exited the room. As
he walked down the hallway he replayed his answer to Deidara’s question over in his head. I like
him only as a friend. Nothing more, nothing less. And that was the truth. If it weren’t for Kisame’s
insistence to help him pass his classes, the two wouldn’t be as close as they were.

Kisame was a junior and Itachi was a freshman. Next year Kisame would be in his last year and
Itachi would be in his second. If Kisame had no need for his tutelage, would the two still hang out
with one another? Or would they drift apart?
The thought tugged at the corner of Itachi’s mind. He questioned the validity of their friendship if all they ever did was work through math equations and recite the Just War Theory. Even if they drifted apart, Itachi was confident that they would still share lunch or dinner every now and again and the occasional French fry/frosty combination that Kisame was so fond of.

We’ll still be friends. Itachi told himself. Nothing more, nothing less.

But no matter how often he told himself this he felt guilty. As if he were telling some sort of lie. But it was the truth. Itachi spent his time with Kisame tutoring him and from this they had developed a friendship.

Nothing more. Nothing less.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all the people who comment on my work! It keeps me going! (though I've hit a bit of a road block with the next chapter so we'll see how that goes...) I'm trying to incorporate the comments/suggestions I've gotten thus far so I hope you've enjoyed this chapter and the many more to come! (just to let you know - there is one more month before the semester ends in this story so the school year is coming to a close!)

If you noticed, the name of the chapter is the name of the story. The question is, did anyone spot the story's title within the chapter? (Hint: It's not word for word but you'll know it when you see it!)

Until next time,
Itachi's Husband

End Notes

Thanks for reading! This story currently has 17 completed chapters and I'll post them sort of sporadically whenever I have the time/can remember to do so!

Feedback is appreciated and...(there was something else I needed to say)...oh! I was, at one point, revising this chapter/story (tightening up the grammar and plot line) but that sort of fell by the wayside so... :/

Until next time!
Itachi's Husband

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