Naruto Prompts and Ficlets (Ongoing)

by Tozette

Summary

Collection of Naruto prompts, short fics and writing, mostly from my tumblr askbox.

Including but not limited to:

• Ino is Deidara's Recently Orphaned Half-Sibling, feat. civilian bureaucracy who are completely done with this ninja shit;

• the Sex Pollen Story in which Deidara and Itachi are Captured in Enemy Territory and Do Not Have Sex;

• the one where Kakashi is not the last Hatake and Pakkun secretly does not use Sakura's shampoo

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
In Which Orochimaru Accidentally Adopts A Child

Chapter Summary

Prompt: I wish you would write a fic where Orochimaru (before his mad scientist stage) finds a baby in a secret lab his team is investigating. Baby gets attached, he raises the baby. And then he becomes a terrifying papa bear to orphan clan kids.

Orochimaru doesn’t really have a non-mad scientist stage. He’s unhinged before he hits adolescence and he can’t remember a time when he wasn’t interested in investigating reality. How real is real, exactly, anyway? And how can he change it? (Not very, he discovers, and in many, many ways. Gratifying.)

What he does have is a time when his proclivities are better hidden, when social skills are – not something he understands very well, but something he wants to understand. He knows that many of his interests aren’t fit for polite society, so he keeps them to himself.

Sometimes they slip out anyway. It’s tiring otherwise.

He does find a baby, alone and alive and unhappy in a recently abandoned laboratory. It can’t have been left for more than a day or two, but it’s dehydrated – finding it helps, actually, with tracking the ninja they’re looking for. The baby’s a better indication than a cold campfire.

It has no parents, Orochimaru supposes. He knows that feeling.

He must lose his mind somewhere on that mission, because he takes it home.

He tries to foist it off on Tsunade. It is not, as she seems to suspect, because she’s a woman - it’s because he only has two friends and nobody in their right mind would trust Jiraiya with anything more complicated than a kunai.

Tsunade refuses, of course.

“It needs someone,” Orochimaru says, awkwardly. It comes out like a question. It needs someone? Right? Like he’s not sure, like being human is so far distant from wherever Orochimaru’s standing that he has to squint to figure it out.

“Sure,” Tsunade agrees, signing off on somebody’s discharge summary. “Are you volunteering?”

Orochimaru blinks slowly at her, which is the closest to incredulity his expression gets, but Tsunade doesn’t relent.

Sarutobi won’t take it off him either, as it turns out.

The truth is, he doesn’t have time for a child. He leaves the baby with Anko a couple of times and she isn’t any better than him, because she stares at him bewildered and clutching gingerly at the child. “What–?”

But he’s gone before she finishes, and for an absurd second he recognises that this is irresponsible and stupid, something Jiraiya would do, which is – no. He stops that train of thought. He has
work to do and he’s being the opposite of irresponsible. He races off to do something more relevant (and more interesting, and remotely profitable).

The baby starts calling him something that sounds a lot like *Ongchi*. Or, well, no - the baby calls him something that only usually starts with ‘O’ and it changes day to day, gaining new - and not necessarily more accurate - forms as her language skills develop.

*Ongchi* is sometimes *ochimanu*, which is…

People are, he is aware, supposed to care about the children they adopt - accidentally or otherwise. Orochimaru is pretty sure most days that he doesn’t even like her.

She doesn’t have a name. He hasn’t thought of one. She hardly needs one: she’s “the baby” and she’s the only baby he interacts with.

“She needs a name,” Jiraiya tells him, looking at him over a dish of sake and a novel of uncertain provenance. He looks like he’s forgotten how *weird* Orochimaru is in the time they’ve been apart. “She’s a person, she needs a name.”

Orochimaru is stubborn. To name something is an expression of permanence that he is not really willing to undertake.

“How do you want her?” he asks, more resigned than hopeful.

Jiraiya laughs in his face. “Maybe in sixteen years or so,” he says, cheerfully lecherous.

Orochimaru stares at him, unblinking.

“Wow,” mutters Jiraiya, “you’re not cut out for fatherhood, are you?”

Orochimaru does not dignify that one with an answer.

Orochimaru tries, but in the end he cannot help himself: he drugs and vivisects the child before her third birthday.

There’s nothing especially different or new about her. It’s completely unnecessary. But he’s been watching her developmental milestones, frowning at the rate she develops language and thought, examining her early experiments in motor control…

He’s been there the whole time and he has has to see how it works, how she works.

How could he not?

She is semi-conscious and only slightly frightened, and Orochimaru feels, for the first time, perfectly in control of his relationship with this strange young creature.

Sarutobi would not approve, he’s sure.

Nobody finds out, anyway. She’s young and the scars will fade over time.

She calls herself Child when she’s old enough to do so, and it isn’t for years and years that she seems to realise it’s never been a proper noun - it’s just what he calls her when he wants her attention. She’s the only child there, after all.
Child trusts him in a way that Orochimaru has never experienced, doesn’t expect, and cannot comprehend.

People don’t trust people like that. It’s a terrible idea. She must be defective, or stupid or –

She thinks he’s her father, he realises one day, pausing in the middle of painting out the bloody seals for tapping a person into nature chakra without all that tiresome sage business.

With dawning horror, he is forced to consider that he actually kind of is.

“How did you not notice that?” Tsunade asks over her own sake dish, bleary-eyed and weary even though it’s noon on Tuesday. (And, really, is he the only one who didn’t grow up to be an alcoholic?)

“You feed her. You teach her. You bitch at her when she does something dumb. How did you not–?”

Orochimaru stares at her.

Tsunade is actually beginning to look more confused than cynically bemused.

Yes, he thinks, he does those things, but he does them – like a check list. Is the child clean? Fed? Learning something instead of running about underfoot? Good, done.

He thinks of her like an experiment he’s monitoring, not like – he’s not her parent.

Except for the part where somehow he is.

Orochimaru doesn’t know what to say, and the truth of the matter is that he doesn’t trust anybody, not really - he trusts them to look out for their own best interests, but not with pieces of himself. His flaws and insecurities are already too obvious for a woman like Tsunade.

He is lucky she doesn’t have the temperament to use them against him.

(Root is another matter, though, isn’t it?)

“She trusts me,” he says finally, uncertain if that was the right thing to say and unbalanced and off-kilter in a way he hasn’t been in years.

“I’m terrified for her,” drawls Tsunade, and tosses back the rest of her drink.

He never tells Child that she can’t, although sometimes his throat itches with the pressure of words stoppered up inside of it.

She shouldn’t, he knows that much. He can still see the lines, faintly but clearly, where he cut her open.

He thinks about it sometimes, and knows that he could cut her throat in her sleep without ever shedding a tear.

He doesn’t, because it’s not worth the hassle.

Orochimaru tells her not to call him father, and packs her off to the academy without lingering too hard on the thought.
Child is an occasional test subject.

Orochimaru sometimes struggles to define who is and who isn’t a test subject, but he knows it’s strange with Child. Different.

On one level, he knows he reduces her to this because the idea of her being something more upsets him in a way he can’t afford to analyse. It’s better for him when she’s just anatomy and particles, chakra and seals and meticulous notes.

“It hurts,” she tells him once, when he’s carefully stimulating part of her brain with a tiny spark of lightning chakra, “I don’t like this. I want to stop.”

“You can’t stop,” he says, half-annoyed but mostly just distracted reading something much more relevant. “You’re representing the control group.”

Orochimaru cuts the heads of the experimental group open and changes the method of stimulation. They are prisoners of war and not Konoha citizens of course, but –

Well, she’s not hurt. He didn’t cut open her head.

“I don’t know what you’re complaining about,” he tells her distantly.

She’s woozy and sleepy, but he still takes it upon himself to show her which part of the brain is responsible for stimulating the language centres, and how they’re using new applications in interrogation.

“It’s a rather new idea,” he cautions her.

One of the experimental subjects has an anomaly in his brain structure - useless as part of the sample - so he lets her practice her chakra control on him.

He’s a little bit proud when she makes him talk nonsense without killing him. That feeling makes him blink.

“Orochimaru-san?” Child says his name in a way that is particularly precise. Her mangling it annoyed him when she was younger, and she is very careful now.

“Nothing. Continue.”

Orochimaru doesn’t really understand what’s happened until Child mentions a strange old man with a mangled arm talking to her. One of the Hokage’s advisors. Something about a group –?

She seems unsettled, although she’s too careful to show it much. Orochimaru nods at appropriate places when she tells him, but his mind is ticking and whirling behind his eyes. It’s going too fast and he can’t stop it.

“Child,” he says, sounding very far away to himself. She stops talking immediately. “Go to bed.”

She looks at him for a second too long but she doesn’t protest, even though it’s miles too early.

Orochimaru’s mind is not laced tightly. It isn’t until he’s washing the blood off his hands that he even realises Danzo’s dead.
When Orochimaru leaves Konoha, it is with an increasingly awkward murder investigation underway. He has no thoughts of being Hokage. He couldn’t care less. He already has too much to deal with.

He’s fucked up.

“Are we ever coming back?” Child asks. She’s not quite a genin yet, but close enough - he can leave her to her own devices most of the time so it’s not so dangerous to take her with him.

“No,” he says, hard and final, and Child never once looks back.
In Which SI OC Replaces Naruto on Team 7

Chapter Summary

Prompt: I wish you would write a fic where the SI OC gets put onto Team 7, but instead of taking Sakura's place (because let's face it, they /always/ do), they replace Naruto (who's still the ostracized jinchūriki and all, he's just not on Team 7). And then the SI doesn't know how to deal, because Naruto's the /main character/, but Team 7 is, like, Team Chaos, so where does that leave them?

Uchiha Sasuke,” said Iruka, “Haruno Sakura and Akimichi Chourin.”

I twitched. Hard.

That was not meant to happen.

My first thought was: Oh, come on. There’s no way I’m lower ranked than Naruto! My second thought was: Bugger, I have fucked the plot up something fierce.

“Don’t get excited, Chourin,” said Ino from somewhere behind me, “he’s not going to fall for you.”

I ignored her because I was so very much more worried about how I had apparently dismantled team seven just by existing. Oh my god, where was Naruto going? What was going to happen?

How badly had I broken everything?

I rubbed my forehead in consternation. A toe jabbed into my back.

“Are you listening to me?” Ino hissed. “Just because you’re on his team, he’s never going to fall for you. Don’t get cocky.”

I glanced at her and wondered how much trouble I’d get into if I responded by hitting her really hard – not because she was actually that awful, even. I just wanted somebody to hit. I could not believe how pear-shaped everything had gone and panic told me hitting her would make me feel better.

Probably kind of a lot of trouble. Our clans were really important to one another. It wasn’t really the done thing. One seat over, Chouji’s expression was firmly upon his chips, avoiding even the possibility of getting involved. Some cousin he was.

“‘Kay,” I said to Ino, and stole one of Chouji’s chips. He looked offended.

Served him right.

“Why don’t you bring your own food if you get hungry?” he asked.

“The last thing she needs is more food, Chouji! You’re so insensitive,” Ino snapped – insensitively.

Shikamaru was asleep.
When I used to read fanfiction about this shit, it seemed way, way less frustrating. But, no. I actually was surrounded by literal twelve year olds and it was about as much fun as you’d think.

“Shouldn’t you be more worried about Sakura, anyway?” I asked, through a mouthful of potato chip.

Ino’s expression clouded over and she shifted her terrifying regard from me to her next victim. Thank god.

I went back to fretting about Naruto.

“You two are only going to hold me back,” Sasuke said in a flat voice that didn’t quite hide his dismay, looking at Sakura and I as though we were something he’d found on his shoe - which is to say, with a grumpy expression, because that was how Sasuke looked at everything.

*Grumpy.*

I didn’t actually dislike Sasuke. But I found him frustrating and I did want to punch him a lot. Unfortunately, I couldn’t actually hit him. The manga had gotten that bit right: he was definitely the strongest in the class. Pity, that.

The classroom had emptied, and we were the only ones left - waiting for Kakashi, I assumed, because nobody else would have been assigned to teach Sasuke. But that still made me wonder what had happened to Naruto. The sharingan was also useful for controlling him if he lost it, and that he wasn’t on Kakashi’s team was… worrying. He’d had to have graduated, but I hadn’t seen hide nor hair of him in the village since the night of the academy exam.

I hoped Mizuki hadn’t managed, somehow, to kill him. I doubted it, but accidents could happen. And wasn’t that a nightmare thought?

As though the timeline wasn’t fucked up enough.

Sakura fidgeted and wound herself into simmering anxiety without even saying anything, although I saw her open her mouth several times as though to speak - but then she shut it again.

I eyed Sasuke, wondering if I should say anything about his attitude. I was pretty sure Sasuke wouldn’t actually listen to me, but I could say it, couldn’t I?

“What,” he said, and I realised I’d been staring.

I decided to be honest. My mother, bless her soul - residing in some other universe, presumably - had always said honesty was the best policy. “I’m just thinking - you’re not stupid, and your family was all ninja. So you know Konoha ninja work in teams and you’ve been surrounded by ideas about the will of fire and Konoha unity for forever. So you already know ninja in Konoha have to have the ability to work in a team. I was just wondering why you’d bother saying we’d hold you back, when you know you’re going to be judged on how well you work with other people the whole way through your own career. Like, are you just ignoring it because it’s not personally convenient, or –”

“What I want is none of your business,” Sasuke hissed.

“Chourin!” Sakura said, barely a breath later - and here she shoved one elbow into my ribs. Luckily, my ribs are rather, ehem, well-padded. “Don’t scold Sasuke-kun! He doesn’t need you to tell him things he already knows!”
“Well,” I interrupted her right back, “either he doesn’t know, in which case somebody should tell him, or he’s being obtuse on purpose, in which case I want to know why.”

She scowled fiercely. Clearly, my mother had lied to me. Maybe I should try lying through my teeth instead of honesty, next time.

Sakura turned a saccharine expression on Sasuke. “Don’t worry, Sasuke-kun, I think–”

“Because my career is not my goal,” Sasuke said flatly.

He was – wow, okay, he was actually answering my question.

Sakura fell silent.

“What I want to achieve…” his voice trailed off dramatically, sinking into the lengthening shadows as they spread across the classroom floor. Nobody moved, but somewhere a clock was ticking.

I saw Sasuke’s hands flex. “My goal is to become strong. It has nothing to do with teamwork or getting promoted or being paid more. I just have to be strong. I need to… kill a certain person.”

There was a few seconds’ silence after that pronouncement.

“Sasuke-kun…” Sakura trailed off. Her voice was wavering at the edge, but there was still a kind of glossy awe there.

I’d already known that, so I wasn’t too bothered to hear him admit it - although I admit it probably would have been heartbreaking, otherwise. He was way too young for the expression in his face.

“Right, fine - you want to kill a guy and that’s all you care about. That’s fine, but what on earth makes you think your goals are more important than ours? We have goals, too, and maybe they do involve becoming good konoha ninja. You don’t think we might be a little pissed off that you’re so selfish you think wanting to murder somebody is more important than whatever we want?”

“That’s what I’m saying,” he said. “You need me to work with you to achieve your ambitions. I don’t need either of you – you’re just dead weight.”

Sakura made a hurt noise.

Oh my god. The ego on that boy, seriously. He wouldn’t believe me unless I could physically beat him into the ground, and the chances of me ever being that good were – pretty slim, really.

“As enlightening as this conversation has been,” drawled a voice out of nowhere, “you three are late.”

I tensed, Sasuke flinched and Sakura twitched. None of us had noticed him come in. Well – of course not. Jounin, I supposed.

“Sorry, did you – did you say we’re late?” Sakura asked.

“Yep,” said Kakashi, from where he was leaning against the wall, flipping idly through his book. “I was supposed to collect three ninja. Instead, I get three brats who can’t even tell when there’s somebody waiting for them on the roof of their own building.” He heaved a huge, put upon sigh. “Come on then,” he said, and then disappeared in a swirl of leaves.

“He was there the whole time?” Sakura said, scowling. “That’s – that’s not fair.”
“Well,” I said, following after Sasuke, who had already begun to ascend to the roof, “he’s a ninja, I guess.”
Prompt: I wish you would write a fic where, instead of declaring his Eternal Love for Sakura, Rock Lee developed a crush on Chourin instead

Chapter Notes

Right, but I think Lee really likes looking at Sakura – so it’s probably not a crush-on-sight thing since Chourin would make nearly two of her and looks nothing like her. There’s not a lot that’s traditionally cute about Chourin, from her uncombed hair to her clan facial tattoos to her delightfully squishy figure. She’s like a very awkward wombat with spikes. But he could develop a crush on Chourin. Technically. Over a lot of time. I dunno, maybe he finds abject social awkwardness cute?

Anyway, here’s how their first meeting might go:

“No! Er, no. I won’t go out with you. You’re very,” Sakura paused, “unique looking,” she said uncertainly, staring at Lee’s eyebrows. Somewhere behind Lee’s shoulder, Sasuke was squinting like he wasn’t sure what Lee actually was.

I winced. Harsh, Sakura. Oh my god, we were all in trouble if I was the one with social skills here.

Lee looked mortified for a second, but then he pulled himself together. I sincerely doubted he was going to give up on that one.

But with Sasuke looking at him like he’d never seen anything like Lee before, and Sakura cringing away from his eyebrows, I felt - well, actually, I felt like the only person with any manners at all, and kind of obligated to show them here.

As Sakura beat a hasty retreat toward Sasuke, I reached awkwardly out to touch Lee’s shoulder. “I’m sure she didn’t mean it quite like it sounded,” I said haltingly.

Lee turned his huge, dark eyes on me. And, okay, no. He was not an attractive boy. But I wasn’t an attractive girl, so it wasn’t like I had room to throw stones, you know?

“I doubt that,” said a smooth, oddly deep voice. I glanced sideways, and remembered that Neji wasn’t meant to become even a remotely decent human being until Naruto thrashed him in the Chuunin exams.

Which was a bit unfortunate, because Naruto wasn’t in the exam. He was an apprentice - he didn’t have a team. Technically, he should have taken my place.

“Well, all right - she probably did mean it like that. But that was really rude and she shouldn’t
have said it. And – er, people’s opinions change. Not that… I’m… encouraging you?”

God, what was I doing?

Neji glanced at me once, and then looked dismissively away.

Even Tenten was now looking at me like I was some kind of escapee mental patient, and Tenten had a very high tolerance for weirdness.

“Uh,” I said awkwardly. “Sorry. I -”

“Chourin!” Sasuke’s voice, hard as glass. I flinched. I looked toward where he and Sakura were lingering. Neither looked happy.

I gave Lee one last look, hoping that he could somehow interpret the sincerity in my expression because clearly I was completely incapable of expressing myself like a normal person. “Look. I’m sorry. Just – forget it. I’m going to –”

One of Lee’s bandaged hands came up to clasp mine in a grip that was frankly terrifying. Fierce determination lit a fire in his eyes. Somewhere beyond the glittering well of his heartfelt tears, Tenten sighed and slapped her forehead.

“Akimichi-san,” he said, breathless and touched-sounding, and I stilled almost without my own consent. This was what a sparrow felt like, caught in the gaze of a snake. “Thank you. You have rekindled my spirit. The next time I encounter Sakura-san, I will be a stronger man.”

“Er,” I said, disentangling my hand from his awkwardly. “That’s – that’s great. Yay, fighting spirit. Anyway, I’m going to –” I looked toward my team, where Sasuke’s patience was thinning by the second. “Right! Bye!”

And then I fled. Oh, how I fled.

“You don’t need to talk to them,” Sasuke scowled, glaring at Neji over my shoulder. I didn’t need to look back to know Neji was feigning indifference behind me somewhere.

“I wouldn’t have, if you hadn’t been so rude,” I snapped back crossly – but I was saying it mostly because he was right. That had been completely unnecessary, and there was probably some way for sharper minds than mine to analyse the interaction and come up with something useful. I sighed internally. Stupid.

Sasuke grunted and pressed on, walking more quickly.

Lee cut us off before we reached the classroom to challenge Sasuke. I wasn’t sure if it was really because he was strong or if it was because Lee wanted to beat up the kid Sakura was obsessed with.

“Should you really fight before the first exam?” I asked with a sigh.

“Don’t worry,” said Sasuke, lifting his chin and staring Lee down. “I’ll be done with this before I break a sweat.”

“I hope you get your arse kicked,” I muttered darkly, toeing the ground. Sasuke’s ego was so large and sharp it was practically weaponised - but it was also fragile as hell. I never quite knew how to approach him because of it.

Either way, honestly, I was kind of pleased to see somebody kick Sasuke in the face. In my view,
Sasuke often needed a good kick in the face - I just wasn’t very good at catching him, unfortunately.

Lee was, though.

Lee was fast. And from the way Sasuke recoiled, he also hit like a freight train.

No matter how carefully I was watching, I still wasn’t entirely sure where the hell the turtle came from. It just was. It appeared, and it seemed very annoyed with Lee’s inappropriate use of taijutsu.

Then: Gai-sensei.

What can you really say about Gai-sensei?

Let’s put it this way: when the three of us rounded the corner and came face to face with Kakashi’s stupid book and his bland grey eye, we were all counting our blessings.

Sakura looked like she might be about to hug him.

“I,” I said, staring intently at the cover of Icha Icha, “am very glad you’re our teacher.”

Sasuke grunted.

“…hhai,” said Kakashi, with the air of somebody not touching that statement. “Well, all three of you made it, so I guess you can go in.”
In Which Deidara is Nonbinary and Wants People to Stop Caring So Much About it

Chapter Summary

Prompt: I love all your discussion about nb!Deidara so I'd love to see you write something about them, in any universe.

Deidara isn’t going to tell you, kind reader, what was between his legs when he was born. He doesn’t give a fuck about your curiosity and he’s sick of trying to explain himself.

He’s been sick of trying to explain himself about a lot of things, and for most of his life. Art. Philosophy. Murder.

Sex and gender are so very much less important than any of those things. Fixating on it is… confusing. Frustrating.

In the start, it doesn’t matter so much. There aren’t toys in the orphanage, and the things they make to play with are mostly modeled on weapons. It’s encouraged. Nobody tells anybody that he or she or they shouldn’t or should do this or that based on their bodies unless they’re really sick – they’re all meant to grow up to be killers. It’s a done deal.

But then, later, some classes are for kunoichi only. It wouldn’t bother him - Deidara doesn’t care about flower arranging or infiltration. Subtlety isn’t his strong point.

Except…

Deidara’s pretty sure he’s not a boy.

But he’s not super sure that he’s a girl, either.

“Do I have to be one or the other?” he wonders, eventually, when an annoyed chuunin asks him what’s taking him so long.

“What?” barks the chuunin.

Deidara has to stretch to see over the desk and look at the chuunin properly. “If I do take the classes I’m a girl, but if I don’t, I’m a boy. Can I… take some of the classes?”

“Are you fucking with me, brat?” demands the chuunin with narrowed eyes, and Deidara gets kicked out of the office.

That’s a no, then, he thinks.

(Does that mean he has to be a boy? It’s not a question he ever really gets answered.)

He grows up trying to ignore it. Kids at the academy think he’s weird as hell. He has few friends, and early on he decides he doesn’t care about the ones he does make. He doesn’t care about
anybody but himself. It’s almost a mantra.

He makes genin early and thinks: fucking finally, I can make my own decisions.

Which is hilarious, really, if you think about it.

Kids, right?

Honestly, Rock is mean and full of crazy, but it’s not the worst place to grow up if you’re different – since every good shinobi is basically a nervous breakdown waiting to happen, ninja villages put up with a lot of eccentricities. Nobody ever makes it easy, but, well, nobody ever tries really hard to make him do anything about it, either.

(As long as he’s not a nuisance about it. As long as he’s not too inconvenient.)

The way management figures it, there are worse vices than refusing to accept any particular gender. So even when Deidara never seems to really decide what kind of bathroom he wants to use, as long as he’s not doing anything gross, none of the ninja really seem to mind which he wanders into today.

It always gets weird when people ask questions, though, and ninja can be direct as hell.

“Does it matter?” he answers, usually, when somebody asks.

“Well… not really, I guess,” is usually what they end up saying.

Some of them are insistent, though.

“There must be fucking something down there,” a jounin points out at one point. “You sit down to piss or not?”

“Ask again, and you’ll be pissing through a catheter, yeah!” Deidara snaps back. That is, he thinks internally, gauging the man’s scowl, if he doesn’t just set him on fire.

Of course Deidara’s got feelings about his gender, and his body, and how they interact in… in weird ways. He knows he’s weird. It’s isolating.

Some days his skin feels all wrong: parts he shouldn’t have, missing others he shouldn’t be. Sometimes he looks at his hands and thinks they’re not meant to be there. He’s startled by them. A sudden shock. What the fuck is that doing there? And panic thunders in his head because that’s not his.

They can’t possibly be his. They don’t belong.

It’s hard for a ninja to feel so out of control, to be so unable to trust his body from one day to another. Some days it’s – not right, but it doesn’t bother him. Others… it’s bad. It hurts, in a way he’s never quite managed to wrap his head around, that he’s never right. He’s never quite… comfortable.

There are still people in Rock who have his medical records, who have seen his body and – decided. Decided for him.

He’s not sure if that makes him angry. Maybe?
Sometimes he goes outside and people look at him and he thinks they know, they all know, they know I’m wrong.

Defective, he thinks. There are times when he looks in the bathroom mirror, late at night, when the moon is highlighting its cracks, and wonders if that’s really his face.

Surely not.

There are times when Deidara has the overwhelming urge to cut away pieces of himself. They don’t belong there. They’re a hideous misrepresentation of what’s inside him, but – he doesn’t know what’s inside him. It’s not quite one thing or the other.

Sometimes he’s not sure if it’s even human.

Sometimes he presses the sharp edge of a kunai against his skin. He holds it there in places where nobody will see a mark, and he indulges in fantasy. He pretends, for a few seconds, that he can pare down his stupid, traitorous body and become pure wind.

It… calms him.

It shouldn’t, but it does, and he never tells anyone. What does it matter? He gets hurt worse daily.

Once, when asked, he answered: “Oh, it’s a mouth, obviously,” flashing several smiles all at once.

“Guess that’d make you a chick,” said the woman he was talking to, snorting drunkenly, and Deidara slammed her face into the bar and walked out.

For fuck’s sake. Why?

Deidara makes a habit of evading that one specific question. Sometimes he lies just because he can: “I cut my dick off,” he tells a client once, dead serious and flat-voiced, one who was politely but relentlessly invested in finding out Deidara’s physical sex, as though that would make any goddamned difference to whether or not he could blow up a building for cash.

His smile doesn’t go away though – he sharpens it, and adds, “it kept talking shit.”

Unsurprisingly, he never hears from that client again.

Fuck him, Deidara doesn’t care. He’s too angry to care.

Sometimes he’s angry with everyone, but when he looks around for somebody to blame for making him feel so damned bad, he’s all alone.

Which is telling, when you think about it.

Sasori is a breath of fresh air. Which is kind of ironic because he doesn’t breathe. Technically.

“How do you talk?” Deidara asks when he learns this, and he never receives a satisfactory response. Sasori’s glare is a thing of beauty, but it is also scary bananas.

(Not that Deidara would tell him. Deidara, quite literally, smiles when he’s afraid. It’s not a nice smile, but it also never looks frightened. He doesn’t care if he is frightened, but once other people know - the game’s up. So he smiles. Hard. Mean. Sasori isn’t impressed, but when is he ever?)
The first time Deidara’s actually there when somebody asks Sasori that same stupid fucking question – looking, no doubt, at his soft, young face and long lashes – Sasori stares straight at him and says, “I’m a puppet.”

“…A boy puppet or a girl puppet?”

“A puppet puppet.”

A *puppet puppet*. Deidara sniggers.

“But what’s – you know – down *there*–?”

“*Poison*,” says Sasori flatly, and that is certainly the end of that.

Deidara attaches himself to Sasori like a limpet and doesn’t let go. Not physically, but…

“Dammit, brat,” Sasori mutters more than once, “go away and shut up.”

And Deidara never does, but Sasori also never tries to kill him or make him piss off by force.

They have, Deidara thinks, an understanding.

It’s months after that day when Deidara finds himself sitting in a camp full of bandits, stuck in the cold mud in the forest on the border of Fire. There’s firelight, but the air is cold – and, strangely, not cold enough. Deidara never once thought he’d miss the stark, cold beauty of Rock, but he does.

He misses a lot of things, like not being surrounded by morons. He wishes, not for the first time, that this job was *over* already.

“HEY PRINCESS,” somebody from the camp calls, and Deidara heaves a sigh. He’s wondering, yet again, whether or not it’s worth facing Kakuzu’s wrath if he wipes out all their clients. If he kills everybody who knew of the job, there’s no way the Akatsuki’s reputation can suffer… right?

“Stop fidgeting,” Sasori growls somewhere behind him, curled up safely inside Hiruko.

“WE GOT A BET,” yells the bandit again. “SHIRO SAYS FIFTY RYO SAYS YOU’VE ACTUALLY GOTTA DICK!” There’s uproarious laughter from the others. Some of them are too drunk to stand properly.

“Surely they won’t miss one or two,” Deidara murmurs. He knows just how he’ll do it, too. He loses himself for a second in imagining the look on that one’s face when he realises he’s swallowed a bomb. And then – *bang*.

Unthinking, Deidara smiles.

“They will,” says Sasori flatly.

But Deidara’s already getting to his feet.

“Brat,” snaps Sasori, and suddenly his tail is hissing through the air. “*Don’t* make this job a waste of our time.”

Deidara scowls. He hates it when Sasori is practical and *right*. It’s the worst combination.

After a second, though, his partner relents: “You can kill them after we get paid, if you have to.”
A pause. “And leave some of them intact. I’m running out of parts.”


In Which Kakashi is Trans

Chapter Summary

Prompt: I wish you would write a fic where Kakashi is trans

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kakashi graduates at five years old.

At five, he’s old enough to be a ninja, old enough to run messages to the front lines of a war. The village assesses him as having the forethought and tactical capacity required for a ninja. It’s on his records: at five he has the emotional control to kill in cold blood and never flinch.

For some reason, people never assume that he makes that decision himself. They think it’s the system, they think it’s his father, the brewing war, a relic of the clan wars, a – People assume a lot of things, really.

If he’s ever actually asked, maybe he’ll tell them that he decided. Not anybody else.

_He did._

As a child, kunoichi classes throw Kakashi into such a state of confusion - horrible, frightened confusion - that he’s forced to reassess a lot of his own core beliefs about himself.

It’s never been a _problem_ before. Kakashi is a ninja. He’s in training to kill people. Nobody really tells him what is or isn’t ladylike. Nobody expects him to behave very differently from the boys - except civilian children, of course, but they are weird and dumb and Kakashi has no way to relate to them in the first place. And they usually drop out early so who cares what they think anyway?

Sakumo does, on one occasion, try to persuade him into a dress.

“I don’t like it,” says Kakashi, brain tripping over strange associations, too fast for him to really process what it is that distresses him: femininity, vulnerability. Inconvenience. He thinks of long hair and soft hands, of skirts tangled up around a person’s legs.

He thinks of his mother and he recoils.

He can’t be that. He’s never wanted that. He can’t. He – he _can’t._

Panic hits him.

“No,” he says.

Sakumo takes one look at his face and never asks again.

(Kakashi never flatters himself that Sakumo had actually understood on that occasion. But that was the thing about his father: he hadn’t _needed_ to. He’d known _something_ was wrong, and he’d left off. As a child, their relationship was rocky; as an adult, Kakashi wishes more people were
more like his father.)

What does Kakashi care, in the end, if people call him ‘-chan’ sometimes and ‘-kun’ others? Nobody tries to force him to change his behaviour and nobody treats him particularly differently - as a child, anyway.

The kunoichi classes change all of that.

It’s true enough that a big chunk of the girls hate the classes - cooking, sketching, cleaning, flower arranging, tea ceremonies, dancing, music… the list is endless, but the pursuits of civilian women are not always very engaging. Kakashi can understand that.

It’s not the skills themselves that are the problem, though. The classes are geared toward one thing and one thing only: how to be as feminine as possible, how to appeal to the sensibilities of a society that has certain expectations.

The young girls in the class have some instinctive understanding – or at least some blithe instinctive interest – in what they’re learning.

Kakashi isn’t just uninterested, he’s downright threatened.

He feels like he’s been plucked out of a filthy river and dropped in a daimyo’s garden party without so much as a by-your-leave. Every time he attends a new class he is swept away on a new certainty that he is horribly out of place.

He is an infiltrator, a stealthy outsider. He is stuck in some nightmare mission where nobody seems to want to believe him when he tells them I’m not one of you.

He asks Hinako-sensei about early graduation, but he keeps being sent back.

("Many of the girls hate it when they first try,” she tells him, not unkindly. “You don’t need to graduate the whole academy just because of a few compulsory classes.”

She’s wrong, though.

He really does.

Even the classrooms make him feel weird now, queasy and uncertain and – pressurised, in way he doesn’t get and doesn’t like.)

I’m not meant to be here, he thinks every time he sits down to class, feeling intrusive and vile and guilty. Just because he can put together a top-scoring flower arrangement for any event doesn’t mean he’s meant to be here.

Sometimes he wonders, though. Maybe he’s wrong. Maybe he’s meant to be here, like all the other girls, and he’s a girl and they’re all girls and there’s just something terribly, horribly wrong with him.

Maybe being a boy doesn’t feel anything like this after all.

Maybe he’s sick.

Kakashi doesn’t know.

(Yes he does. But people keep telling him – well. He’s less certain, sometimes.)
If anybody ever asks Kakashi probably won’t tell them that Minato helps him graduate. It’s not really their business, is it?

He remembers very little of the conversation, just a weird twitching panic. “I’m not like that,” he remembers saying, unsure how to explain and tremblingly distressed with the need to make himself understood. “I’m not – I shouldn’t be there –”

“Oh, okay,” says Minato, gentle as ever. He takes him so seriously, soft and grave. For a moment Kakashi is reminded of Sakumo.

All Kakashi remembers after that is one short session with a jounin-grade counsellor. A certificate of fitness for duty.

Then Hinako-sensei, desperately uncomfortable with Minato’s smiling presence looming over one shoulder, asking him to demonstrate his capabilities and earn his forehead protector.

It’s so easy.

___________________________

Kakashi makes a name for himself in the war. He sees himself in a bingo book and feels like he’s made an achievement – not because he’s got a bounty on his head, but because the entry says male.

___________________________

These days Kakashi’s records say “M” next to his name.

He broke in and changed them when he was eleven and still unaware that there was actually a procedure for that sort of thing.

His medics know - have to know, really, in case of hormone disruptions or oddly specific physical ailments.

That, and they get this weird look on their faces when he goes in for surgery if nobody tells them. There was this one time, when they had to dig shrapnel out of his butt, and the operating medic had to be relieved by somebody less easily startled.

“Your job will have complications,” snarls the relieving medic, already taking over despite her scratched gear and mission-weary posture. Kakashi recognises that one from miles way. “Deal with them.”

___________________________

Unfortunately that does mean actually, you know, telling his medics.

Telling Tsunade is weird but …oddly affirming, in a way.

“Oh. Do you?” She squints. She makes that awkward, uncertain expression people make when - if - they find out. Looking for signs. Looking for fakery. He swallows. He’s not fake. He’s not.

“So…Vagina, huh. Okay. Surgery? No, none, according to your records. They are accurate, aren’t they?–” she looks up from her notes and fixes him with a stare that makes her pretty face and pillowy boobs only marginally less appealing – “Good. Ovaries, then? Uter–”

“Everything,” he grinds out.
She hums, writing something down. “Okay. Bad cramps? Endometriosis?”

“No.”

“Risk of pregnancy?”

The very thought makes him uncomfortable in ways he’s not prepared to analyse. “Tubal litigation.”

“Uterine prolapse?”

“No,” he says, feeling a muscle in his jaw twitch. “No, nothing, I just –”

“Just what?”

“Just – in case?” he says, finally, weakly.

She drops her notepad. It makes an ugly thwack on the floor.

“Hatake, I’ve seen a vagina before. I’m familiar, in general, with the entire reproductive system of males, females, and a whole bunch of unique in betweens. I’m a medic. If there’s nothing wrong with your vagina, why the hell are you telling me about it?”

Kakashi stares really, really hard right past her head and mumbles something that sounds like it might, maybe, once have contained the phrase ‘head medic’.

Tsunade rolls her eyes.

“Okay. Great. Consider me informed. Now unless you’re going to fill out your discharge paperwork, get out of –”

He’s gone before he even hears the last words.

Sometimes Kakashi loses track of who knows and who doesn’t, but he just assumes most people don’t.

Gai does, definitely, though, because Kakashi went through a phase of never being able to figure out the bleeding thing for about a year in his teenaged years there somewhere, and Gai was really his only friend.

Which was kind of lucky, in hindsight, because Kakashi isn’t sure another friend would have so cheerfully gone shopping for ten million different brands of pads and tampons, trying to find the ones that are simultaneously inoffensive and actually effective.

Hint: none of them are both of these things at the same time. Ever. It takes a very long time to figure that out.

If Kakashi wasn’t a ninja he’d probably consider manufacturing plain-packaged, scentless, non-stupid tampons.

But he’s a really good ninja, actually, so he just does his level best to stick Gai with the bill.

He’s really good at that, too.

Despite all the odds, Sakura’s his medic now. She is, if anything, even more blessedly indifferent
than Tsunade was.

Except for that one thing.

There is one awkward mission debrief, once, when Naruto is squinting at something from under his fancy Hokage hat and Kakashi barely notices because he’s reading one of the best bits of *Tactics*, and it’s *really good*, okay? but then –

“Wait! Kakashi-sensei’s a *gi*–!”

Naruto is cut off because Sakura punches him through the wall.

“That idiot,” murmurs Sasuke, who seems colossally unimpressed with the revelation. “That’s coming out of your pay,” he adds thoughtfully to Sakura.

“My pay *is* your pay, Sasuke,” Sakura says sweetly. She peers through the hole in the wall for a second.

“Leave it,” he says, ignoring this comment. “He’ll figure it out. Probably.” A pause. “Eventually.”

Sakura hums thoughtfully but she doesn’t dispute him. “Sorry,” she says, adjusting one glove and returning to the debrief. “Hokage-sama’s indisposed. Where were we, then?”

Kakashi never looks up from his porn.

Chapter End Notes

+ a tiny omake for one anon who was especially thrilled to hear about Gai and the tampons:

“Why do you have those in your pack?” Genma asked once, tipping his head back and trying to ignore that his team mate was strapping a butchered tampon to his thigh. Having Gai between your thighs was always a weird experience, and one Genma’d had too often in his short life.

“I carried them for a team mate,” Gai said seriously, staring intently - and a little alarmingly - into Genma’s face for a second. Then his face broke into a huge, terrifying smile. “But they have turned out to be surprisingly useful! It seems like the sort of thing *all* ninja should –”

“Or we could pack extra bandages,” muttered Genma, wincing as Gai tightened a compression bandage over the – tampon.
SasoSaku: In Which Sasori Continues To Be A Puppet

Chapter Summary

**Prompt:** any SasoSaku headcanons? They don't even have to be sexual/romantic

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You never…” Sakura untangled her hands from Sasori’s hair and paused to catch her breath. Then she found she couldn’t quite go on. She bit her bottom lip.

Sasori’s eyes, languid and unreadable, fell to her mouth.

“What?” He prompted after a second, already impatient.

“Er,” said Sakura. She could do this. For heaven’s sakes, she was a medic. She could have this conversation like an adult. She cleared her throat and said, baldly and flatly: “You never have an erection.”

Sasori paused as though the implicit query surprised him. In a way, that was a bit offensive - like Sakura would never want to have sex? Ever? Even if she maybe didn’t, the lack of obvious physical proof was… disconcerting.

The pause went on.

“Am I doing... something wrong?” She asked, eyeing him as though she could see through his clothes.

“Not especially,” he said.

“So do you… oh! Oh, do you have an, um, an erectile problem? I’m… I’m qualified to—”

“I don’t have a penis, Sakura,” he said flatly.

Oh.

Yeah, Sakura was not qualified to do anything to change that. That was a different and more specific qualification. “You…” she paused. “You’re…” There was a heartbeat’s silence.

“I am a puppet,” he reminded her, as though she might have forgotten.

“I know that!” she snapped. “You just… you have all your other body parts, I…”

“No. I don’t,” he corrected. “Only the shell of my body has been preserved. My organs -”

“The outside, though,” she interrupted.

“I kept only the most practical parts of my original body,” he said. “I had no idea this would be
such a problem,” he added with a hostile note in his voice.

“It’s not a problem,” Sakura said, leaning back so she could get a better view of him. “It’s just… unexpected.”

“More unexpected than being a puppet,” he said, as though for clarification.

She glared. “I knew about the puppet thing.” A pause. "Why did you cut it away?" She blurted then, unable to help herself. “I mean, it wasn’t… hurting anything, was it?”

Sasori looked at her with flat, hard eyes. He sounded irritated when he started talking again. “Sakura—”

“What do you even want to make out with me, if you can’t have sex?” She asked after a second. Then a terrible thought occurred to her. “Are you just humouring me? All the time?” Her voice went high and hot with the edge of an impending explosion.

“I don’t need a penis to have sex!” he snapped. “And when,” he added, “have I humoured anyone?”

She settled a little at that, because of course he was right, but… “So…?” she frowned. She looked sideways at Sasori, at his blank face and empty body language. “You do get something out of this?”

He gave her a look that would have been scathing if he’d been willing to put the effort into a facial expression. “Something,” he agreed flatly, “although what that may be is becoming more mysterious by the second.”

Sakura thought about that for a moment.

“Okay,” she said slowly. Then, in a voice that was suddenly a lot more cheerful: “So. Wanna keep making out?”

“Yes,” he said.

So they did.

Chapter End Notes

This was written aaaaages ago on tumblr, but I forgot to add it here.
The Scifi AU where Hinata Ends Up With the Akatsuki

Chapter Summary

This one is not a prompt, just a thing that happened. Written on my phone while on hold at work, so pls disregard typos.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The ship was huge, a behemoth of gleaming metal and lights, and Hinata hesitated even as the world shook and roared around her.

"Are you sure you can fly that thing?" she yelled over the sounds of tearing rock and hissing smoke. The air was red with ash. The sky was falling.

And still the ship gleamed.

"No. Hurry up," said Ka- Kakuzu, wasn't it? He was an outworlder, that much was obvious from his accent, but all Hinata really knew was that he was tall and going with him seemed a lot less scary than dying in the streets.

His hand clamped down on the back of her neck, and Hinata had to either run faster or be dragged over the breaking ground. Ahead of them, the ship sagged and listed sideways with a horrible grating sound.

For a second Hinata was sure it would fall upon them and they would be crushed. "Kakuzu --!"

"Move," he snarled, and then they were there, hands upon the outer shell of the ship. Kakuzu kicked open a sleek panel -"Hold it open," he demanded - and wrapped his hands around a heavy duty pressure valve and for a second Hinata just thought: no way, but muscles surged, huge and ropy, and there was a shriek of metal and a whistle of released air --

"Up!" Kakuzu hooked her around the hips and boosted her into the opening that was suddenly yawning in the side of the ship.

Hinata scrambled inside, nails scraping awkwardly on the sleek metal. A rush of icy air whistled through her hair, burned her eyes, and then her feet hit the cold metal of an interior maintenance shaft. She stumbled.

Kakuzu vaulted in after her. He landed on his feet, bent at the knees to absorb impact, and straightened to his full height all in one smooth motion.

The hatch closed behind them, and lights flickered cleanly to life throughout the interior.

There was a mad dash to another barrier, this one with a panel requiring a pass code. Kakuzu checked something on his wrist, clicked his tongue and -

"Isn't this a military ship?" Hinata asked, wide eyed, as the doors slid seamlessly open.

Kakuzu ignored her completely, racing through the long, empty passages ahead. He seemed to
have over all a much better grasp on where he was going than he ought to have had.

He left her behind with his long strides and powerful muscles, and by the time Hinata caught up with him there was a shudder and rumble of engines.

He'd made it all the way to some kind of control room: interfaces lining the walls, chairs bolted to the floors; console, keypads, measurements she didn't quite understand - internal versus external pressure measurements, fuel gauge, something that looked alarmingly like a weapons array.

The view screen was front and centre and it m cut from scene to scene, pulling satellite images from outside the planet, but...

All of them were chaos.


Bodies, and things like bodies that she didn't look at too closely.

Hinata must have made a noise, because Kakuzu glanced over his shoulder.

"Strap in. We're going to make it off planet before it gets really bad."

That implied that this, somehow, was not really bad. Hinata swallowed. "O-okay," she managed, and dropped herself into a chair. The closures on her harness snapped fast.

She couldn't take her eyes off the screens.

Pressure slammed them back into their seats for interminable minutes. It felt like Hinata's stomach was trying to crush her spine. There was a moment of disorientation, dizziness, and then the internal pressure stabilised and they -- they must have been off planet? They...

There was a moment's weightlessness and then a dull whine as internal gravity set in.

The satellite images were still running.

Around them, though, messages from other ships and transports pinged - others evacuating, Hinata hoped.

"I don't... Th-they said it was a storm, but I've never..." Her voice cracked.

"It's not a storm."

Hinata nodded dumbly. Then, swallowing, "Your friend, he was --?"

"Friend?" Kakuzu repeated the word like he understood the idea but had only the vaguest notion of how it might apply to himself.

"The white man, with the --" Hinata touched her collarbone gently.

Kakuzu snorted. "Hidan can take care of himself," he said, sounding utterly unconcerned.

There was a buzz over the speakers. "Incoming," flashed up in one corner of the view screen.

"Take that," said Kakuzu, who had his hands full trying to navigate.

"Gooooood morning," drawled a man's cheerful voice through the speaker. "Bit of early turbulence, but we're out past the exosphere now. Flying high and smooth at two hundred ks and
"Cut the shit. You almost got us blown up."

They were speeding away from the planet but the satellite images were still coming fast. Hinata could make out coast lines, mountain ranges -- on fire.

The whole planet was on fire. Clouds covered -- so much of it, thick and heavy.

Anybody who survived the initial event was surely going to be smothered beneath all that ash...


The voice clicked his tongue. "You've no appreciation for my art, yeah."

Kakuzu made the most disgusted noise. "Did Hidan make it back?"

"Yes," said the voice, sounding amazingly resentful of this fact. "Hang on, I'll patch him in--"

A series of beeps.

"--although he has no sense of artistic appreciation either."

"I'll appreciate your fucking FACE, you--"

"Hidan."

A deep, noisy breath. "Yeah, yeah, I fucking got it. You got the ship? And the girl?"


"If it was a science," said that cheerful voice again, with what sounded like the least sincere of smiles, "you wouldn't have hired an artist."

Hinata shuddered violently. On screen, an entire continent heaved, burst into hideous fire, and was covered by steaming, seething ocean.

"Eldest?" She repeated stupidly.

"Oh. Hello, princess. Didn't realise you were with us." A pause. "...Didn't know Kakuzu could be that gentle, yeah. Something you wanna tell us, Ka-ku-zu?"

There was a cackle from the other person, Hidan.

"She came voluntarily," said Kakuzu.

"Clever girl."

"I--" her mind was fuzzy and very calm, numb with horror. "What?"

"Can we tell her?" Deidara asked curiously.

"How the hell could he keep it a secret?" Hidan wondered.

Kakuzu just grunted. "Hyuuga Hiashi is among the group who hired us for the job; he made a second, private contract that required us to ensure the survival of his daughter and heir, so--"
"My father hired you to blow up a planet?"

"Yep," said the voice called Deidara, popping the p. "Not bad work, if you can get it."

Hidan started laughing like a broken hinge.

Hinata swallowed. "I..." She paused. "Right. But... Hanabi..."

"Hanabi?" Repeated Hidan. "The fuck is a Hanabi?"

"Younger sister." Kakuzu glanced sideways at Hinata again. "Look. It was hard enough getting one of you off planet before Deidara wiped everything out. Maybe you should just be grateful you're your father's eldest."

"I-" Hinata stopped. Panic was rising, and it wasn't slowing down. The satellite image, now relegated to one small corner of the viewscreen as they sped away, showed a world consumed in flames.

"But..." Her voice caught and stopped again.

"The fuck is with your shitty connection? I can't hear shit, make it work properly!"

"I'm checking, asshole, it looks clean, I don't --"

"The connection's fine," Kakuzu interrupted flatly.

"Then--?" A pause, then a disgusted noise. "Kakuzu," Hidan whined. "Did you break her already?"

"No. I-"

"I... I'm not my father's heir!" Hinata burst out.

Silence.

"What," said Kakuzu.

"I'm his eldest, but because I am - um, not capable of certain things, I was never -- I'm not..." Hinata's voice got weaker as she tried to explain, and then finally, quietly, she stopped.

"...aw, shit," muttered Hidan.

"I don't suppose she. Uh. The other one. She wasn't, you know not planet side, was she?"

Hinata had never before felt so empty. She shook her head. "Hanabi was--"

She stopped. Words wouldn't come.

There was a long, awkward pause. "Fuck," said Kakuzu.

Hinata felt the completely inappropriate urge to apologise.

"Well, look at it this way, princess: at least you stand to inherit a lot, now."

"I'm... not sure about that," Hinata said in a tiny, wavering voice.

Kakuzu's eyes narrowed. "Deidara. Check with Hyuuga. He has a nephew - if he doesn't want
her, she's not worth anything to us."

Deidara clicked his tongue. He sounded annoyed, but there was a series of clicks and the sound of a computer alert, and his voice was distracted when he spoke again. "I'll know by the time you get here."

Hinata remained silent. She was pretty sure she already knew the answer.

Chapter End Notes

I am a praise based life form, as you well know by now. Let me know what parts of it you liked! And, despite my having no intentions of continuing it, let me know what would, in an ideal world where I had endless writing energy, happen next. :)
NSFW - You're not a Puppet Today, Have A Blowjob

Chapter Summary

For the anon prompt: "Do you think you could do Sasori/Deidara?"

Chapter Notes

This chapter is nsfw. The sex has... well, there's a lack of enthusiastic consent, some uncertainty from one character - one character has thoughts of telling the other to stop at various points but he doesn't in the end. I don't want to disappoint people actually looking for dubcon tropes by tagging it, but I also don't want readers going in blind. So: this note.

Sasori is aware his head is tipped too far back, throat uncomfortably bared. He hasn’t been human for a long time, hasn’t had nerves and biological feedback, hunger or terror or – nothing, really.

Being a puppet was astonishingly calm and he misses it already.

Now Sasori’s cloak is open down the front, smooth skin and all his fleshy human weaknesses on display. He can’t move properly - all of his limbs feel alien and rubbery and they protest when he tries to move them with chakra; they want contracting muscles and organic chemistry.

His limbs won’t work.

Deidara’s head is between his thighs and Sasori can’t seem to find his tongue to tell him to get the hell off.

His penis is hard, which is something he hasn’t felt - hasn’t even thought of - since that last day of feeling, since he was sixteen and alone in the desert, trembling with a knife over his heart and a body prepared on a table in a washed-out bunker.

Deidara is licking his penis. It’s a detached thought, taken like that, but Sasori’s not really doing it justice: lips, soft, chapped, rubbing friction. He licked them before he started, but they’re still catching on his skin, dragging lines of heat and disastrous tension up the length of his dick.

The feeling coils in his belly; tight and electric, twisting and uncomfortable: a kind of heart-pounding anxiety that winds tighter and tighter and he wants to tell Deidara to stop, stop, too much, wants to kick him in the head and scratch at him and breathe poison in his face, but his tongue won’t work, his limbs are heavy.

Deidara’s hair is a smooth, slippery counterpoint to his mouth: cold, silky. It drapes on his thighs, shifts uncertainly, makes shudders wash up his spine when a swathe of it spills against his skin. There are teeth in Deidara’s palms that scrape and nibble and drag on the insides of Sasori’s thighs.

Deidara makes a thin, smug noise and drags his open mouth up the underside of Sasori’s penis,
and then all he can think is of that slippery friction and flexible tongue, of soft lips and the strange, luxurious warmth inside his mouth.

Sasori’s head falls back, way more dramatically.

He is aware, peripherally, that he has managed to say *something*, but it certainly isn’t ‘stop’.

The muscles in his legs clench and tense, shift and jerk, but Deidara is holding him down and Sasori doesn’t want it enough to fight and he doesn’t have the coordination in his new body to fight much of anything anyway.

Deidara clearly has no idea - or at least no concern - for how unsettling this is. The door is probably broken from being kicked closed behind them and Sasori is in his chair, legs spread and hands with teasing teeth holding his thighs open.

Sasori feels frightened and panicked and a little - a lot - out of control. He wants to reclaim something, maybe to bury his hands in Deidara’s hair. Maybe to shove him down until he can feel the back of his throat, to see Deidara’s eyes watering, breath coming hard when - if - he lets him up.

Deidara sinks down, pulls up. Saliva is hot and slippery when it’s on Deidara’s tongue, but it cools quickly once it’s out, and it trails all the way down Sasori’s balls. When Deidara pulls back, he can feel the ridges of the roof of his mouth rubbing maddeningly on the head of his penis.

It’s overwhelming. It’s overwhelming and Sasori’s eyes are half-lidded. He can feel the heat in his face, blood rising to his skin everywhere and making him flush. He can hear his own panting breath: unsettled, yes, but also making stupid noises with every exhale, soft-voiced gasps and mumbling sounds.

Deidara hooks a hand under one of his knees and jerks it over his shoulder. It is unexpected and Sasori twitches at the sudden movement but there is a press of teeth, a hint of threat, right over the artery. He stills.

Deidara never even acts like he knows this exchange has taken place. He’s still working Sasori’s dick with his mouth, deft and unselfconscious. Something about the change in angle makes Sasori’s toes want to curl.

He tips his head further back, lets his hazy gaze drift to the ceiling, searching for a detachment that just won’t come.

Deidara’s free hand licks a long wet stripe up the back of one of his thighs, tongues artfully over his balls. There’s a wet pressure along his perineum and he twitches and jerks, and then the tongue of his hand is pressing in, pressing past the muscle of Sasori’s sphincter.

The coiling tension is electric, it’s chemical, it tightens things in his body like poison or something worse. Sasori knows his eyes are unfocused, his eyelids at half mast; his mouth is open and his breath is coming in pants, in gasps and mumbled noises that mean nothing.

Deidara presses the flat of his tongue to Sasori’s asshole, flexes it and wiggles and licks, slick and hot and – *inside*, shit, he’s –

He makes a noise, a long, broken thing that finds its way from his throat in a ragged groan.

Deidara sinks completely down on him, nose pressed into the fine curly hairs at the base of Sasori’s penis, teeth hidden behind plush, hot lips. His mouth is wet and cavernous and soft and – *amazing* – and he has a strange concentration on his face when he *sucks*, and he does it hard
enough for his cheeks to hollow. His eyes are bright and there’s saliva running down his face.

There’s red at the edges of his vision, sweat on his forehead, on his neck and in his hair. The head of his penis bumps the back of Deidara’s throat, and Sasori imagines choking for a second, wonders if Deidara would yell and gasp like this, wants to know for just a second what he smells like, if Sasori could control him with his mouth and lips and teeth just like a puppet – but then his thoughts are becoming disjointed, unreliable. He feels the strain for something, some satisfaction barely out of reach, and –

The next noise out of his mouth is Deidara’s name, although he can’t tell what he’s trying to communicate - more, just a little, so close yes, or stop too much- or even a warning?

Deidara makes a low sound, something that would be laughter if his mouth wasn’t so full, and it’s not even mean - it’s pleased, a little smug, something delighted and oddly proud behind the musical noise, but it also vibrates.

Sasori’s hips jerk into that humming vibration - yes, yesyesyes - and he – he can’t think at all. There’s a feeling that shudders through him from his ears to his toes, that bursts in heat and bright electric pleasure low in his belly.

Sasori thinks, for a second, that his vision has dissolved completely.

But no, his eyes are just crushed shut.

By the time he manages to gather his thoughts enough to open them and blink - rapidly, dazedly - at Deidara, his partner’s pulled away, settled back on his knees. He doesn’t look particularly uncomfortable or selfconscious there, although there’s an uncomfortable shift in his weight that screams favouring his knees, sore, weak to a ninja. Some habits you can’t turn off.

There’s an erection ruining the line of his pants, his hair is a mess and there’s a bright flush high across his cheekbones and nose. His teeth flash in a smug smile, but his mouth is swollen, red around the edges of his lips where they’ve stretched.

“T’m just saying, danna,” he suggests in a voice that is strange and croaky. “You could think about it a little longer before you go making yourself a puppet again, yeah?”
“Haruno Sakura?” said one of the medics, peering uncertainly at her over his glasses as he peered around her door.

She sat up as straight as she could. The damage from the ichibi’s sand had been repaired, mostly, but she was still taking time to recover. She wasn’t Naruto... which had never been a thing she thought she’d lament.

The medic was looking grave, though.

Sakura’s guts clenched. “What is it?”

He cleared his throat. “There’s something unusual in your blood tests.”

The blood tests landed Sakura in Tsunade’s office with her mother.

The conversation mostly consisted of her looking awkwardly between the two while Tsunade and Mebuki spoke.

“Hm,” said Mebuki placidly, looking between them. “Hatake-san, really?”

“What do you mean, ‘really’?” snapped Tsunade, rubbing her hands over her eyes. “How could you not know?”

Mebuki shifted her giant fringe out of her eyes for a second. “Kizashi’s sterile. We used a bank,” she shrugged. “Does it matter?”

“A--” Tsunade’s features clouded over. “There were donors from--” A pause. “Of course it matters, the Hatake family was one of Konoha’s important clans of...” she stopped. “Did they keep records of their donors?” she said slowly.

“Genetic screening only, I think.”

“...so you’re saying that there could be genetic material on ice from any of Konoha’s clans or families,” Tsunade surmised. “And we wouldn’t necessarily have it flagged.”

Mebuki shrugged.

Ten minutes later Tsunade was back in the hospital proper, hurling files at frightened interns and
bellowing about record keeping.

The word ‘sharingan’ kept coming up. Not that she said it herself, but people muttered a lot. Sakura, having trailed after the Hokage, uncertain if she’d been properly dismissed or not, could hear them.

Her mother raised an eyebrow at her.

“Clearly the Hatake clan is very important,” drawled Mebuki drily, hands in her pockets, watching the show.

After a second, she looked sideways at Sakura. She was nearly drowned out by a red-faced Tsunade shaking the nurse unit manager who interrupted her search. “Does it bother you?”

Sakura shot her mother a surprised glance. “Dad’s my father. If I’m related to Kakashi-sensei, too... he’s, well, he’s not the worst.”

“Hmm,” said Mebuki, and didn’t elaborate.

“HARUNO SAKURA!”

Sakura flinched.

A tall medic strode toward her. He had pale eyes and dark hair, and an ugly mark was branded on his forehead. His face was bleakly hard and without expression. “How old are you?”

She blinked. “Uh. Thirteen?”

He stared at her with his strange eyes and then sniffed. “I don’t know why this wasn’t picked up during her physical,” he snapped without looking at whoever it was he was speaking to. “Her chakra’s too dense and tightly controlled for a civilian family, it’s --”

“Her parents are both ninja,” interrupted Mebuki, raising her eyebrows dangerously.

“Genin. First generation. Hardly counts, really--”

“HYUUGA,” yelled Tsunade at the top of her lungs.

Three white coats turned around. “Hokage-sama?” they said, virtually in unison. Sakura was not the only person in the vicinity who shuddered.

Tsunade spun on her heel. She was surrounded by hospital detritus: sterile-packaged equipment strewn on the floor, papers scrunched and crushed, whole files hurled at frightened staff spilling their contents across the tiles. Above, the halogen lights hit her pale hair and made it glow like a halo.

“It will all have to be redone,” she growled.

Winces all around.

“Yes, Tsunade-sama.”

“You know you don’t really smell at all like my shampoo,” Pakkun told her, some hours after her release from Tsunade’s terrifying clutches.
Sakura sighed. Idly, she sniffed her hair. It smelled like training sweat and the cherry blossom shampoo she preferred.

She was in one of the more isolated training grounds, trying to make some progress on her own - since her team was either AWOL or running around with Jiraiya and her teacher was busy doing actual work, it seemed like all there was for it. She’d worked up a sweat and let herself fall back into the grass.

The sky was blue. The air was warm.

Life was weird.

Pakkun ambled closer. “I was surprised. When you were sweating and bleeding you started to smell -- well. I couldn’t be sure.”

“I got it,” Sakura nodded. Clearly, the dog had panicked and blurted the first thing he could think of about her scent, which was absolutely absurd in hindsight.

“...you don’t smell happy,” he muttered.

“Ne,” she said, ignoring this comment (of course she wasn’t happy; she needed to re-calibrate a lot of ideas that had been predicated upon her assumption of who her parents were -- who liked changes like that? Nobody, that’s who). “Kakashi’s not even thirty yet. Was he really donating sperm when he was fourteen?”

Pakkun blinked. “Nah. It wouldn’t be him, it’d be his old man. Hatake Sakumo was--”

“I know who he was,” said Sakura quietly. She’d done a project on him in the academy. Team mates, duty, family... Complicated ideas. She was sure if she looked at that project today it would lack the nuances she understood now.

Despite her complicated feelings about the man, she’d never known him as anything but a historical entity, an idea more than a person. It sat better with her to think that he might be her biological father and not Kakashi-sensei.

“Wait.” Sakura sat bolt upright, making Pakkun jump and bare his teeth. “Kakashi-sensei’s my brother?”

“Well,” said Pakkun, like he was just thinking about it himself. “Yes.”

She flopped back into the grass and threw an arm over her eyes. “My brother reads porn in front of me in public,” she said in a despairing voice.

There was a pause.

“...Half brother,” Pakkun said, patting her shoulder gently with one paw.

Kakashi had been back for roughly thirty minutes when Sakura had managed to find him with Pakkun’s help. He was clearly shopping to restock his fridge after his mission - clean but tired-looking, with a white bandage wrapped around his biceps but no other notable injury. She carried his bags, which he allowed her to do mostly because it freed his hands for reading *Icha Icha*.

He must have known something was up, but he wasn’t showing it.
And she really could not figure out how to tell him. ‘Hi sensei, so it turns out you’re my brother,’ seemed unnecessarily direct.

The rumour mill must have done it for her, however, because she was haggling with an elderly man about the price of salted salmon - aggressively, with her teeth bared and her face flushed across the cheeks - when Gai burst upon their oddly domestic scene.

“MY ETERNAL RIVAL. YOUR RECONCILIATION WITH YOUR ESTRANGED CHILD IS A SCENE OF GREAT BEAUTY AND MUCH PERSER--”

Kakashi leaned out and put one hand over his mouth, momentarily stalling his yelling. “My who?”

Sakura flinched.

The rumour mill hadn’t even gotten it right, dammit.

“Haruno Sakura, the youthful fruit of your loins, which --”

Sakura eschewed all dignity and dropped Kakashi’s groceries to cover her ears. *Fruit of your loins*. God, no.

Kakashi didn’t look super comfortable with the turn of phrase either.

When nobody around them cringed for a few moments, Sakura dropped her hands and peered cautiously back toward the conversation... such as it was. “Gai... I know that you have strong feelings toward your students,” Kakashi was saying patiently, “but you can’t just adopt random children. Sakura has parents already.”

Yes, thought Sakura, a little hysterically, *and one of them’s your father.*

Gai looked... sort of hurt. “You... would deny your relationship to this young woman? Kakashi...” his voice was serious. “It is at this time of life, when a girl blossoms into the full bloom of womanhood, when she needs the most guidance and attention. It’s hardly--”

“Gai,” Kakashi interrupted. He leaned in close enough that Sakura thought for a moment they were going to kiss -- which, oddly, would not have seemed that out of place. “I’m not her father. I don’t have --” he stopped, looking briefly but acutely uncomfortable.

Gai’s eyes widened. “I... didn’t think of...”

There was a long, awkward moment.

”Saa...” Kakashi flipped open his book again, disengaging from the discussion. “It’s not such a bad thing, that.”

Sakura blinked. Everybody was either staring, or very obviously not staring. She had no idea what was implied in the shared silence between Kakashi and Gai -- a horrible groin injury? Impotency? Sterility? -- but she did sort of have to step up now.

She coughed quietly to clear her throat. “Um.”

Kakashi’s uncovered eye drifted toward her. “Did... did you know Sakumo-san was a donor?” she said in a croaky voice.
Kakashi blinked once.

He turned toward her for a second, eye cataloguing and calculating in ways she wasn’t sure she liked. “Huh,” he said.

Then he pocketed his book, scooped up his groceries and disappeared in a swirl of leaves and dust.

Sakura blinked. Her hair shifted in the breeze he’d made. “Er...”

”Are you going to buy this goddamn fish or not?” huffed the shopkeeper. He was ignored.

Gai looked heavenward for a second. “My rival is obviously very tired from his mission,” he said blithely after a moment.

“Right,” said Sakura mechanically. “Sure.”

He gave her a long, grave look. Then he smiled, flashing gleaming teeth. “Come! there’s nothing like the hard work and sweat of youth to take your mind off such a thing!”

“I -- er,” Sakura stumbled over her words, trying to figure out how to avoid actually agreeing, but by the time she’d gotten them sorted out in her head, Gai had grabbed her by the elbow and whisked her away to his team training ground.

He was right, in a way, though, because three minutes later Sakura was too busy trying to avoid Tenten’s enormous array of pointy things to think about this terrible, terrible mess.

Chapter End Notes

This took so much weird effort to write. I feel uncertain about it but to be honest I’ve written about six thousand words of this stupid thing and scrapped it over and over. Please take it with my blessings... and good riddance, omg. Anyway, remember I am a comment-based life form, right? Right.
The thing about Snow Country, aside for the permanent state of civil unrest, economic decrepitude and state violence, was that it was cold.

And okay, that was a given. It Snow Country: cold. No shit.

But saying “Fire Country gets cold in winter” or, hell, even “Rock gets cold in winter” was nothing like saying “Snow Country gets cold in winter”.

For most of winter in Konoha it didn’t even snow… By comparison, Snow Country was frequently too cold for proper snow. Sakura had initially kept her mouth covered to prevent the cold from burning her lungs quite so badly… but it meant that her breath iced and chafed on her mouth.

Basically: Snow Country was awful. Sakura was pretty sure that sacrificing ninja to Jashin-sama here was, like, actually curtailing their suffering.

Didn’t stop her, of course. But still: definitely worth considering from a theological standpoint.

“Their suffering in the cold isn’t dedicated to Jashin-sama,” Hidan had pointed out.

“It’s not, but I’m saying that it might be that much more severe and prolonged that it doesn’t matter. All suffering is fundamentally Jashin-sama’s power, so—”

“Sakura,” said Hidan, rolling his eyes. “Are you going to kill her or not?”

Sakura frowned, gazing at the hazy-eyed, gasping kunoichi in the icy ground between them. Her blood actually steamed in the air. Her right leg was run through, one of her ribs was broken and she was badly concussed from their initial fight. She wasn’t going anywhere.

“Yeah,” Sakura said.

“Then hurry the hell up. I’m fucking freezing.”

As though it hadn’t been Hidan’s idea to come to this country in the first place? She clicked her tongue. But she took his point.
The kunoichi died fast, but not easy.

And Hidan complained about the cold the whole time. It was actually kind of hard to focus on praying.

“Fucking finally,” he muttered. “Now let’s get the hell indoors. It looks like more shitty weather.”

Sakura stretched. For once, she wasn’t freezing. Nothing like dying in ecstacy to warm the blood, she supposed.

She looked sideways at Hidan.

He was still bitching, scowling at the sky like it had personally offended him.

Sakura leaned down to hide her smile – and to scoop up a handful of bloodied slush. It hurt her hand almost immediately, but she’d recover.

She packed it hard into a projectile and turned to Hidan, who was still whining.

“Ne,” she said sweetly, cutting off his diatribe against the weather, gathering chakra to her feet and legs and preparing to put on a wild burst of speed, “Senseecii.”

That definitely pulled him up short. He turned to scowl at her. “What’re you trying to–” he stopped, eyes narrowing. “Don’t you dare throw that snowba- SHIT!”

He dodged, but she’d predicted this move and when he landed she was already there, in a surge of chakra-enhanced speed.

She grinned at the sight of bloody, icy slush leaving pinkish trails in his hair and down his face.

“–goddammit, Sakura!” He snarled.

A second later she was gone in a burst of speed, kicking up snow behind her, leaving bloody footprints as she went.

With a shriek of rage, Hidan lunged over the kunoichi’s cooling body and took chase.

“You won’t be fucking giggling when I’m through with you, you little shit,” he snarled, which did absolutely nothing to dampen Sakura’s amusement.

By the time anyone found the body, they were long gone. The snow was thoroughly disturbed, and broad patches of frozen blood glittered in the light of the searchers’ torches.
In Which Itachi is a Baby With Back Problems and Sakura is Very Awkward

Chapter Summary

Prompt was: Itachi and Sakura. "Do you... Well... I mean... I could give you a massage?"

There's now a lovely podfic of this chapter!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You won’t develop the right antibodies if I purge the infection with chakra. You just have to wait,” she repeated dully, with the air of a medic who’d said the same thing several times and was still not allowed to beat her patients to death.

He said nothing.

“We wouldn’t have had to tie you down if you’d stop leaving, Itachi-san,” she tried, signing off on a course of antibiotics because she was pretty sure he would need them. They’d reimburse Suna for all this anyway…

He made a noise, but it was muffled by the sheets. Still, she interpreted it as best she could, and sighed deeply.

“And if you hadn’t tried to render everybody who looked at you comatose, we’d have tied you face up, Itachi-san,” she pointed out.

“Mff,” he said again.

With a sigh, Sakura stood up and approached. She shoved one hand between the pillow and his eyes – ignoring a muffled squawk – and gently twisted his head. “Yes, Itachi-san?”

“You do understand that this position is probably causing more harm than good, Sakura-sensei?” he inquired, all politeness and bland respect.

She wanted to punch him through the window.

“And whose fault is that?” she inquired sweetly instead. “Besides, some stiff muscles won’t kill you. An unchecked infection will. Try to get some sleep.”

“My spine doesn’t bend this way,” he said through his teeth, as though admitting that he was in discomfort would seriously injure him.

Itachi’s spine did actually bend that way, but Sakura could see where the pressure would probably cause pain. But the injury required that they had to elevate his foot and his own recalcitrant stupidity meant that they had to keep his face away from the nurses – and Sakura, actually.

Sakura was pretty good with genjutsu, and she didn’t think he’d expend the energy needed to
entrap her on such a trivial thing as getting out of hospital unauthorised, but…

Well, she didn’t actually know how badly Itachi wanted to leave. She wasn’t risking it.

She frowned down at him though.

“Sakura-sensei,” he said blandly, “if you could take your hands off my face…”

She snorted, then used his hair as a handle to twist his head back, face-down again. He made a brief, dissatisfied noise.

“I could order painkillers,” she suggested, propping her hands on her hips. “Or adjust the height of the bed.”

“You could adjust the restraints on the bed,” he suggested.

“I could,” she agreed, and then pointedly did not. Sakura, contrary to popular belief regarding medics, could totally stand to watch somebody suffer.

Still. It did… look uncomfortable.

“Do you… well… I mean… I could give you a massage?” she suggested finally, and with the distinct impression that she was going to regret this offer. She’d made the same offer once before. Just once. To Naruto. When she was young and naive and not at all aware of any of the subplots of Jiraiya’s stupid novels.

Itachi twitched. The muscles of his back strained so he could lift his mouth from the pillows.

“I don’t…” Blessedly, Itachi seemed at least as uncomfortable about the whole possibility as she did. There was a long moment’s pause. “…would it help?”

“It… might. There’s. Uh. The Tiger Roars At The Moon Lotus Blossom Seven Signals Chakra Massage Technique,” she recited, staring straight at nothing as though she couldn’t even taste the words on her own tongue. They were just words. Still, she coughed discreetly after saying it. “It’s a massage form designed for recovery on long missions where reconnaissance requires remaining still.”

And hadn’t they all been horrified to learn that a massage technique developed – and named – by Gai was actually therapeutically useful?

“… I see,” said Itachi, sounding at best bewildered.

“You know what,” said Sakura, covering her face with her hands, “forget it. Just. Go to sleep. I can order some sedatives if –”

“If you wouldn’t mind, Sakura-sensei. The… massage…” there was a terribly shy hesitance in that, and Sakura felt her eyebrow twitch.

“I…” should not have offered. She knew she shouldn’t have. Oh god. Dammit. Dammit. “Sure,” she croaked out.

She wasn’t blushing.

“Your hands are cold,” he informed her in a low, slow voice.

“You have a fever,” she reminded him. Although… he’d taken an antipyretic for that. She knew. She’d injected it.
They were silent.

And… awkward.

Itachi’s report, when they returned to the village, was professional and bland and very, very thorough.

Three days later, Sakura walked into Intel and was swiftly met with Ino’s grinning face.

“Ne, Sakura-sensei,” she purred over the low hum of chatter, which immediately ceased so people could listen in, because – well, Intel ninja, good god. “I’m just – mou,” she made a faintly pornographic sounding moan, “I’m so stiff. Would you help me… rub it out, sensei?”

There was a pause for effect, and then the whole office burst into peals of laughter.

“I’m going to kill him,” hissed Sakura.

Chapter End Notes

From this ask meme.
Sakura Vs The Weird Canon AU

Chapter Summary

tumblr user nausicaa008 submitted this prompt: "sakura haruno (from canon) somehow gets transported to a creepier alternate version of Konoha. (think creepypasta or welcome-to-night-vale-fusion-with-konoha type creepy.) bonus points for the occasional bits of humor or fluff?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When Sakura landed in this strange, topsy-turvy version of her world, she had… well, for one, she hadn’t been expecting to end up there. Not that she was annoyed about not being dead, precisely – just that she’d been expecting something a bit more final and a bit less… weird.

She was twelve again. Awkward.

‘What’s a hobby, really?’ Kakashi wondered when it was his turn to answer. ‘A pastime. It’s in the word, isn’t it? Time passes. It goes fast. It’s creeping up on us and I’m pretty sure it’s up to no good.’

‘What?’ Sakura said, squinting, even as Naruto rubbed his chin thoughtfully and nodded as though this was sage wisdom.

‘Keep up,’ snorted Sasuke, giving her a mean look. ‘I thought you were at least meant to be smart?’

‘Let’s get to work,’ said Kakashi, smiling brightly from behind his mask.

D-rank missions were… not as Sakura remembered them. This was not to say that they were less menial in any respect, but…

Sakura wasn’t entirely certain she’d ever actually been required to clean out a grave yard before.

‘It’s from the war,’ Kakashi told them cheerfully from his spot in a nearby tree. One of his legs dangled over a shovel that he evidently had no intention of using. Sakura, who had nearly tripped over a dismembered arm with cracked nails and lightning scars, could certainly have guessed something along those lines.

There were bits of wood and buried valuables spread all across the dirt, grim bits of bone and old flesh sticking up from the ground, scraps of clothing – synthetics only, since the natural fibres had decayed quickly.
It was obvious that floods had forced the coffins aboveground, made them burst. But Sakura wondered about the deep gouges in the wood – on their \textit{insides}.

‘Sensei,’ she said before they were done, ‘there are fewer bodies than coffins.’

Kakashi didn’t twitch. In fact, nobody seemed to hear her. If they did, they didn’t answer.

Tora, at least, remained constant.

Sakura wasn’t sure if that was a good thing.

There was very little more shocking to a Konoha ninja than heading into the Hokage’s office, expecting Sarutobi Hiruzen and coming face to face with Uchiha Itachi instead.

‘There aren’t any D-ranks left for the morning,’ Itachi said in a placid voice, ignoring what must have been a deeply comical expression on Sakura’s face. ‘If you had been on time, Kakashi-san, you may not have missed them.’

‘Mm?,’ said Kakashi, in a tone of voice that suggested to Sakura that he was not at all sorry to have missed all of the odious D-ranks, ‘That’s too bad.’

On the windowsill a crow gave its mournful cry and Itachi tilted his head as though he was actually listening to it. ‘Mm,’ he said, impassive. Then he looked at Naruto. ‘She says you have no future.’

‘Hey!’ squawked Naruto, whirling toward the crow, who spread her wings and fluffed her feathers high and gave a loud, mocking caw. ‘I have \textit{so} –’

Calmly, Kakashi slapped his hand over Naruto’s mouth, ‘Do we even know if he has a present?’

Naruto bit him.

‘Today,’ Itachi said, nodding his head; Sakura couldn’t tell if this was an answer or a complete non-sequitur. He handed them their C-rank mission and it looked pretty much identical to the one Sakura remembered. In a way, that was comforting. Better that \textit{something} was familiar.

The crow croaked again. The sound made Sakura think of carrion.

Itachi’s eyes sharpened. ‘I’ll miss you when you’re gone, Sasuke,’ he said.

‘Don’t you mean ‘while you’re gone’?’ Sakura said, sharp and sudden, shifting uncomfortably on her toes.

He glanced at her. His eyes seemed like pits set in his face, dark and endless. She imagined stars, tiny pinpricks bleeding light into his irises. She felt dizzy.

‘That, too,’ he said after a second.

She opened her mouth to ask, but the door slid open. Tazuna still smelled like cheap rice wine.
The Demon Brothers attacked them. Sakura had almost forgotten them; her mind was on Zabuza. This time she got to punch one of them in the face.

He had a silver tooth. She kept it in her pocket as a reminder, and wondered quietly if maybe this world wasn’t affecting her, too.

‘He lied,’ muttered Naruto angrily, scowling at Tazuna from across the fire in the evening. Sasuke was on watch, perched high in a tree some distance out. His hair blended into the birds at sunset, glossy and dark like the ravens’ wings.

(‘They think I’m like them,’ he’d told her gravely, when he caught her looking.

‘What?’ she’d blurted, but he’d already been gone.

‘Birds,’ snorted Tazuna from the fire’s edge. ‘Never liked ‘em.’)

‘Mm,’ said Kakashi, ‘but clients often lie. Intel should have vetted him better.’ He leaned precariously to one side so the light from the camp fire could reach the page of his book. The cover said Icha Icha; inside Sakura caught a glimpse of something huge and toothy rising from a lake. How… romantic. ‘Heads will roll when we return,’ he predicted.

‘So? What good will that do?’ Naruto demanded.

Kakashi lifted his eye from his page. ‘Hm?’

‘The idiot’s right,’ said Sasuke, arriving on soundless feet to report on his recent patrol of the area. ‘Nii-san says it’s inconsiderate.’

‘Cutting off heads?’ Sakura was certain that it was, actually. But it seemed odd to point it out. Especially for a ninja. Especially for the Hokage.

‘Rolling heads. The cleaners have to find them before they can burn the bodies,’ Sasuke pointed out.

Well. Well, yes. But –

These versions of her team mates were weird. Sasuke was the weirdest, sure, but she thought maybe that had more to do with how his brother was alive – and apparently the Hokage, dear gods – than the strange world itself.

The night passed uneventfully.

(Unless you counted Tazuna’s snoring. Which… maybe she would…)

Zabuza was more or less as Sakura remembered him: a huge, muscled figure in cow-patterned clothing and without eyebrows.

The standoff with Kakashi was… different.
‘The future is undecided,’ Kakashi pointed out all lazy slouch and confident drawl, ‘but we can all be reasonably certain that you’re going to die.’

‘So are you,’ said Zabuza, raising the space where an eyebrow perhaps should have been. ‘All of us, really.’

‘Well, yes.’

A heaviness fell upon the ninja then. Tazuna shuddered in the cold, and Sakura could hear his unsteady breathing in the silence.

It seemed to take both Kakashi and Zabuza a moment to regain their enthusiasm.

Then Kakashi reached up and unveiled his other eye. Sakura saw it not as the sharingan of her memory, but as a hole in his face. Something had bored deep into his skull: bloody flesh and black flecks, deep and weeping and with the brightness of new blood.

Then it began to spin and the stars wheeled above their heads, bright even at midday through the mist.

‘But you’ll die first,’ Kakashi assured him.

He didn’t, but Sakura wasn’t sure if she should tell them that.

They had time, anyway.

That night they slept in Tazuna’s old house. It was creaky with age and the wind off the sea, but his daughter was nice: polite, demure, careful. She was a pretty woman, and she seemed to take a great deal of care of her son – even though he didn’t really seem to listen to her.

Tazuna cooked dinner despite his drunkenness, but Sakura thought she’d noticed the Tsunami’s hair sneaking grains of rice when it thought they weren’t looking. This seemed odd, because as far as she could tell the woman herself wasn’t eating.

‘Maybe it was hungrier,’ suggested Kakashi when he woke up, after eating and listening to their reports but before revealing that Zabuza was likely still alive.

Sakura could hear voices while she slept, low and mumbling, and wondered if the walls were really so thin. They didn’t sound precisely like Tazuna, but perhaps his daughter had company.

They were speaking in very low voices, and must have been right next to the wall for her to hear, but when she got up to check, she found that the only thing next to her wall was a huge cupboard in an empty bedroom. It was a bit dusty, but perfectly serviceable as a bedroom.

Maybe this was what she’d heard?

‘Is that Tsunami’s room?’ she asked Tazuna.

He looked surprised, but he told her it was and she sighed in relief.
The bridge was finished, more or less. It was imperfect, but it certainly seemed to function as a bridge.

‘I don’t understand,’ said Sakura, exasperated. She was sick of trying to act like her twelve year old self. Goodness knew none of her team mates were offering her that courtesy! ‘Why would you hire ninja to guard you while you were building a bridge that’s already built?’

‘It’s more than just wood and steel,’ Tazuna said loftily, like she couldn’t possibly be relied upon to understand the fine and complex art of bridge-building.

‘No,’ she said repressively, ‘it’s not.’

Sasuke toed the wood. ‘I think there’s a sealant, too,’ he offered, although he didn’t exactly look pleased either.

‘You came,’ intoned Zabuza, interrupting, and his voice rolled like a wave before a thick mist.

It was little wonder Mist ninja had terrible hair, thought Sakura.

When she saw him, Haku was pretty much as she remembered him. He looked like a beautiful woman, but he moved with a strange dip and sway to his hips, a graceful but unsettling shuffle like there were more than just two feet beneath the hem of his pretty yukata.

When he removed his mask, he smiled at them all softly, forgivingly. His eyes were like glass, and behind them Sakura thought she saw nothing but turning disks of brass.

In the end, he bled black oil. When Naruto punched him Sakura heard the shuddering mechanical sigh of his heart when it stopped.

(Gatou was still a piece of shit.

Sakura sighed in relief.

She was somewhat less relieved when Zabuza tore off his jaw with a swipe of one heavy hand. She thought she’d have remembered that.

Blood sprayed. He died, which was as it should be. Sakura didn’t mind much.)

‘It’ll wash out. It’s auspicious, anyway. Blood makes the crops grow,’ said Tazuna seriously, even as he scrubbed it out of the wood. ‘It’s a good start.’

‘Ne, ne!’ Naruto yelled, unable to contain himself, ‘you said you were going to name it soon? What’s it going to be? C’mon, the Great Ramen Bridge? The–’

‘Tsunami,’ said Tazuna placidly.

‘For your daughter?’ Sakura prompted, even though it seemed like pretty bad luck to name a bridge ‘tsunami’.

‘Yep,’ said Tazuna. He looked up at them with soft eyes for a second, cloth and bloodied water forgotten. ‘Next week it’ll be four years to the day since she died. Inari doesn’t remember her so
well, but he’s little, isn’t he? Still. It’ll be better than a nameless grave to remember her by. The Great Tsunami Bridge!’ he beamed.

‘That’s one way to look at it,’ said Kakashi in a disinterested drawl, but he flicked a glance toward Sakura.

She swallowed. ‘Right,’ she said.

No wonder her room was so dusty and empty.

When they returned, heads did indeed roll. It didn’t necessarily follow that they rolled well.

Itachi – _Hokage-sama_ – certainly seemed to regret it, but he also seemed to regard it as a necessity that could not be dispensed with.

‘Violence and non-violence aren’t matters of morality,’ he informed them as he returned from the lane. ‘They’re tactics.’

The bowling alley was mostly empty, mostly staff and the slightly drunken jounin commander. Itachi’s hair shone in the light and his face was pale but serene. Sakura wouldn’t have picked him as somebody who’d only recently executed his own subordinate but, well –

That was why he was the Hokage, wasn’t it?

Itachi’s fingers slid through the hair of one of the Intel agents responsible for vetting Tazuna and he passed it on to Naruto with a thoughtful face. ‘Your turn,’ he added.

Naruto scowled. ‘I swear you’re cheating,’ he complained, squinting at Itachi’s eyes as though the sharingan would be more obvious the closer he looked.

‘I don’t need to,’ he pointed out. ‘That’s another strike, please, Sakura-san.’

She marked down his score carefully. Naruto’s shot hit the gutter and knocked over precisely one pin. He handed the head over to her, scowling harder.

She met its sightless gaze. ‘Do you know,’ she said after a second, hefting the skull to judge its weight, ‘I think his nose was never set properly. You need to angle it differently if you want to hit the pins,’ she suggested to Naruto.

‘You still won’t beat Nii-san,’ said Sasuke confidently.

Sakura took her own turn then. A spare. Hmm.

In the end, Itachi did win. Sasuke was as smug as if he’d won himself, and Itachi, far from discouraging this behaviour, looked upon him with a sort of indulgent, regretful sadness.

(The janitorial staff left them all a strongly-worded note. They had been, after all, very inconsiderate.)
I have to admit to being pretty thoroughly ignorant of most creepypasta urban legend type things and also of WtNV as a thing, so I couldn't possibly tell you how right this is.

That aside, I need to know what you liked in the same way tropical plants need water, okay? Drop me a comment. :)
In which there are Deidara, Sasori and the Apocslypse

Chapter Summary

Prompt fill: apocalypse au, Deidara and Sasori. This one is ambiguous on the pairing - it could be read either way.

Sasori does not analyse his motives for offering to build Deidara new lungs. He’s lying anyway, so what does it matter?

It’s an argument they’ve had over and over lately, ever since that night in late December when the world stopped turning.

Literally: it stopped turning.

As far as the best of them could tell, the death of almost everything on the planet was a direct result of that: the relentless sun burned noxious gasses out of one side and the gelid darkness made the other uninhabitable.

Turns out that corrosive and toxic fumes aren’t really breathable. They’ve also been kind of awful for water sources, flora, fauna and –

Actually pretty much everything. There are only a few materials impervious to this mess. Chakra, which is useful but not really a construction material, and a few minerals and one kind of wood.

Sasori is largely comprised of resistant materials now. His heart is safe, his chakra grown back in – he’s suffered setbacks, but he’s overcome them.

There are others who have adapted. Hidan’s skin never really heals, blistered in new places daily, but it doesn’t seem to slow him down. Kakuzu has replaced two of his own hearts with Hidan’s, and he seems to be nigh invulnerable now. (Sasori is not certain if he is relieved or annoyed to have missed that conversation.)

Sasori can still sense Orochimaru’s murky chakra somewhere in the west – it has become easier, with so few remaining, to pick out individual signatures, and Sasori’s always been sensitive. Cleaner and more restless is the trace of Tsunade in the southwest.

Then there’s Deidara.

As far as Sasori can tell, the idiot’s plan is to pack himself with explosives and launch himself into the sun.

“That’s a fucking stupid idea,” says Hidan, and nobody disagrees.

Sasori knows it’s the apocalypse because he actually agrees fairly vehemently with Hidan. He is unused to strong feelings (or, really, sensations that can be classified as ‘feelings’ at all), but Deidara’s plan is absurd and it offends him on some level he’s not quite familiar with.

“I’m dying anyway,” Deidara points out, sounding ridiculously cheerful in the face of such
knowledge. “Might as well go with a bang, yeah.”

Sasori disagrees.

Deidara, however, seems to consider the whole process of sickness and poison and decay to be something inherently beautiful. Sasori has caught him more than once peering, fascinated, at hardy plants slowly dying under the sun.

“Organic decay is a symptom of human weakness,” Sasori informs him loftily, but it hardly matters.

“Yeah,” breathes Deidara, as though that’s among the most exciting things he’s ever been told.

Sasori clucks his tongue but decides not to take up the argument this time. Irreconcilable differences.

“If your plan’s so important to you,” he says at one point, “what will you do if you die first?”

It’s obvious Deidara’s lungs are giving out. He has a high threshold for pain, and his bloodline has a surprising resistance to certain toxins common in explosives – but he’s far from immune. He’s beginning to breathe similarly to the way Itachi once had, to talk less between exhales. It hasn’t affected his skills but Sasori regards it as a matter of time, and –

At first, he makes the offer cautiously. New lungs. Sasori will build them, chakra and seals will make them breathe. The most advanced form of mechanical life support on the planet.

“You’ll last long enough to…” he can’t bring himself to give Deidara’s stupid plan the legitimacy of his voice. “…do whatever it is you think you need to.”

The offer is delivered without inflection, and Sasori’s eyes are languid and bored; heavy-lidded. Of course they are – they’re a doll’s eyes, incapable of expressing actual emotion. Sometimes they look at things faster or slower depending on his mood, but that’s just a change in his use of them.

Deidara is literally incapable of dissecting his motives because there is no way to give expression to them – unless he tells him.

He doesn’t even analyse them himself, so, no. He does not tell Deidara.

It takes him two weeks to agree and by that point in time he’s more or less stopped speaking. Even the mouths on his hands rasp. Sasori will be interested to know if the one in his chest does, too, but first he needs to get him to agree.

When he finally does, and Sasori has him laid out, eyes glazed and absent, immobile, painfully vulnerable – the huge mouth in Deidara’s chest gasps for breath in time with its rise and fall.

Sasori runs one finger along the seam of its lips curiously. There is no response – unsurprising, since Deidara is drugged to insensibility.

The replacement parts are denser, heavier, and requires some… updates… to the hardware with which Deidara is naturally equipped.

And. Hm. Maybe it is disingenuous to promise him easy breathing and then to remove the necessity for such a thing altogether - but Deidara would never have submitted to Sasori’s knife if he’d told him the complete truth.

Sasori is very careful, perhaps even more so than he was when he undertook this process for his
own body. Deidara will last for centuries, if he so wishes.

There is a dark and very human satisfaction in having him, breaking his ribs and cutting him open, pulling away the useless organic dross inside, corrupting him to Sasori’s will. When he comes to, he will be Sasori’s creature entirely.

Deidara wakes, in as much as a puppet can wake, and the fallout is – well, it’s loud, certainly.

Hidan laughs at them through his blistered lips, gleeful at the chaos. Deidara doesn’t laugh, doesn’t cry, doesn’t even yell very much.

He just blows a lot of things up.

His new formula is effective, although perhaps not as effective as he needs it to be to make his explosion seen from the sun.

When he calms down - which takes a lot longer than it should, because puppets do not tire, and Deidara’s chakra control is refined enough to last - he is cold, flat-eyed, lacking affect.

Sasori thinks he is beautiful.

Deidara disagrees somewhat, but once the initial burst of rage is over, he hasn’t the emotional energy to be upset. This, in turn… upsets him.

“Stop sulking,” Sasori snaps at him finally, impatient with his histrionics. “If you’re so invested in blowing yourself up, nobody will stop you. I just ensured you’d survive long enough to do it. Ungrateful brat.”

He should be less surprised than he is when Deidara takes this advice on board.

He goes up in a blaze unlike anything Sasori has ever seen. It isn’t the sun, isn’t the huge finale he’s heard Deidara waxing magniloquent about. But it is impressive.

For a moment, anyway.

Then it’s just ash on a toxic wind.

Stupid, stupid Deidara.

“What the fuck were you even expecting?” Hidan snorts and rolls his eyes. And, really, Hidan has never been so very grating as he is in that one moment.

Sasori slips strychnine into Hidan’s lunch. He finds the seizures oddly satisfying and he doesn’t analyse his motives for that, either.

Sasori didn’t even know he could dream anymore, but now when he closes his eyes he dreams of fire.
Konan comes to see them about a job, and Sakura doesn’t like her.

It sounds, on paper, pretty normal: lay some ghosts, get paid. Sasuke and Sakura don’t always do exorcisms, but people die all the time, they leave ghosts behind pretty often, and it’s a bread and butter kind of business for them. Not everything can be poking destiny with sticks and asking the dead about buried treasure.

Sakura really doesn’t like Konan, though. It’s not her manners, it’s not her request, it’s not even her occupation that seems worryingly closely connected with big organised crime. Sakura even thinks Konan’s beautiful to look at: pretty face, grave eyes, carefully put together. Her hair’s dyed all the way down to its roots, her makeup is flawless, and there’s an elegance in her manner that Sakura will never be able to imitate.

That is not why she doesn’t like her. Sakura’s always been plain and she hasn’t gotten upset about women prettier than her since that one awkward time with the succubus.

No, it’s because Konan walks through the door and Sasuke goes completely, utterly still.

It’s… telling. It’s not a ‘there’s a ghost following you around,’ sort of stillness. It’s much more like stillness he gets when somebody tries to talk about his family. It’s watchful, wary, waiting.

Sakura doesn’t like it on him.

She’d be stupid to think Sasuke runs on anything but forward momentum and hope. He’s tired, twisted up; he’s like something that’s been broken into pieces and put back together all wrong, until every piece of him has sharp edges, until his every expression is jagged and pugnacious.

Sasuke, Sakura thinks, does not deserve to be what he is.

Konan makes him freeze, stiff and still like a deer in oncoming traffic.

So Sakura doesn’t like Konan, and she doesn’t go very far out of her way to hide it. Their meeting goes downhill from there.

It’s funny, because when most people look at them, they think that their partnership is obvious: people have preconceived ideas about who must be the magical heavy hitter and which of them’s gotta be the sensitive.

They’re pretty much always wrong.

Konan, though?
Konan looks straight at Sasuke, catches him standing still and silent before Sakura can even think to intervene. She says, “What do you see?”

Sakura can see his spine stiffen, she can see the tightness in his shoulders, the hard clench of his jaw.

She steps forward with a smile like stone and offers her hand to Konan. “Haruno Sakura,” she says loudly. “Nice to meet you.”

Konan hesitates.

Then she takes her hand. They shake. It’s firm. Sakura can feel the bones under Konan’s skin, and she makes a conscious decision not to crush her hand.

She could.

She’s just saying.

She could.

Maybe she wants a little.

Sasuke’s her responsibility. Hers to take care of, hers to keep. She’s never wanted a family of her own, but sometimes Sakura thinks this must be what it feels like: fierce, bubbling, seething. It’s a voice in her head, a feeling under her skin. Affection and protectiveness are supposed to be such soft feelings, but Sakura looks at Konan and she thinks: I’ll kill you if you touch him.

She tries not to let it interfere. “This is my partner, Sa–”

“Uchiha,” says Konan, eyes zooming right back to Sasuke. He looks, if possible, even less happy. “Uchiha Sasuke.”

Sakura’s grip on her hand tightens.

They don’t advertise his surname. It’s not on the business register and it’s not in any of their ads. The Uchiha clan is a very, very famous bloodline of true seers. They’re also mostly dead.

These facts are related.

“You’re not meant to know that,” she says mildly, but inside Sakura is calculating. She can take Konan, she’s sure of it. From here she can break her wrist, dislocate her shoulder. She doesn’t necessarily want to piss off the lady’s organised crime connections, but if they want Sasuke–

She flexes her fingers in a way that is ominously talonlike.

“Sakura,” Sasuke murmurs. His voice is strained, but without much actual inflection.

Carefully, she peels her fingers away from Konan’s delicate, breakable hand.

“I work with –”

“I know who you work with,” says Sasuke. “I can see his handprints all over you.”

Konan blinks. “He and I aren’t involved.”

“Sex isn’t the only thing that leaves a mark,” he sneers. “I won’t help you.”
Konan purses her lips. “Itachi-san said that he wouldn’t be able to lay them without you.”

It wouldn’t be the first time Sasuke’s brother has tried to persuade him to cooperate – and not the first time he’s lied to do it, either. It’d be sweet, if it wasn’t so creepy.

Sasuke makes a disgusted noise. “I don’t care. They’re your ghosts, they’re your problem.”

Sakura’s eyes flick between the two, because actually they do kind of need to pay their rent and it’s hardly like laying ghosts is beyond them. Sasuke doesn’t like working with other people on the best of days, much less Itachi, but…

“One of them put a child’s eye out with a ring of keys,” Konan informs him.

“Yes,” says Sasuke, utterly indifferent. “I know.”

Konan stiffens, and she opens her mouth again. “Then–”

Sasuke sighs. It’s a deep, heavy, burdened thing. “They’ll go away themselves if you kill the priest,” he says, grudgingly. “Itachi should have seen it. He must know.”

He’s lying, is what Sasuke hasn’t said. Sakura’s hearing it anyway and she’s hardly surprised. She shifts her weight, crosses her arms. She is careful to remain between them.

“The pr– The priest,” mutters Konan, as though she knows exactly what he means but she would never have phrased it like that herself. “We can’t kill the priest. The priest can’t be killed.”

“Everyone can be killed,” Sakura interjects, raising her chin when all she gets is a dismissive look.

“Hidan can’t.”

“Everyone,” Sakura insists, more clearly, “can be killed.” She knows she’s right, anyway. It doesn’t matter how people try to assure their continued existence, death’s waiting just around the corner. Some souls are more challenging than others, but he has them all in the end.

She’d know.

Konan looks back at her.

Sakura smiles. It’s not particularly nice. “If you’d let me finish my introduction, you’d know that I’m the necromancer.” A pause, and she looks at Sasuke, who looks like he doesn’t want to be staring at Konan but he can’t possibly look away.

Sakura can only see hints and shapes, and even then, not unless she’s looking indirectly. Dead things, following Konan, hissing whispers. Her dreams must be awful.

She glances at Sasuke, but his face is as grim and blank as ever. It’s hard to know what he sees. He cocks his head, listening. His eyelids flutter.

“He’s a serial killer,” says Sasuke finally. “If you don’t get rid of him, the ghosts will pile up. Even if we did help lay them, they’d be back. There’s no point.”

Sasuke clicks his tongue, a little disgusted, like nothing annoys him so much as this pointless waste of his time. He looks toward Sakura and for a second he loosens. It takes this for her to realise quite how tense he’s been.

“Go,” she suggests. Rest, she doesn’t say, although she might if they were alone. Sasuke looks for
a moment as though he’ll argue on principle – he *hates* being told what to do. But he gets up, turns around and walks away. Their front office is only about a quarter of the building, and the rest is homey and filled with things that don’t have ghosts or feelings or history.

Sasuke likes the familiar, old insights. Constant new stimulation isn’t good for him. He doesn’t like being told what to do, but the stronger his gift gets, the more concessions he’s forced to make.

Konan takes a step forward as Sasuke leaves, and Sakura deftly steps into her path.

“No,” she says.

“You don’t understand,” Konan says, with a hint of something awful behind her educated voice.

“No,” says Sakura again, implacable like the ocean.

Konan’s face twists into something hard, and Sakura knows she won’t leave without a fight.

That’s all right, Sakura’s been spoiling for one since she walked in.
Itachi wakes up in a prison on some godforsaken desert planet. This is, unfortunately, a better set of circumstances than the last time he woke up.

He remembers pushing his mother’s body off his own, recalls the smell of burning, the feel of tacky blood drying on his face. He remembers staggering out into the permanent frozen twilight of Hestia VI (– thin atmosphere, icy climate; reports suggest unfit for longterm human habitation; native species peaceful) and –

And waking here, in a prison.

It cannot still be Hestia VI. Itachi can see daylight creeping in through a translucent window – a reddish, powerful sort of daylight. Perhaps they are closer to a star than Earth is.

His eyes are burning, which is actually good, in its way.

It means that whoever is responsible did not think – or perhaps even know – to remove the lenses.

“You’re awake,” says his cell mate, in a dull and raspy voice. Itachi squints sideways at him.

He’s huge, blue-skinned, with gills – gills and lungs, from the generally humanoid build. There are obvious cracks in his skin. He is, Itachi suspects, not built for an arid climate.

“I am,” says Itachi. “Are our jailers also a humanoid species?”

“Most,” says the huge, hulking creature.

Good.

“Kisame,” says the alien – well, the other alien, really – after a moment.

Itachi looks blankly at him. He is unfamiliar with the word. It could be a part of the alien’s own language, or perhaps the name of their jailers’ species, maybe even the name of the planet. He–

“My name,” he clarifies.

“Ah.” It occurs to Itachi that he has assumed male, but that may be incorrect. Sexual dimorphism in humans does not necessarily hold true for others. He hesitates. “My personal name is Itachi. We… group together, generally, among my species. My group is Uchiha.”

“Family name,” nods Kisame sagely, as though he is pleased that he already knows.

“Yes.” A pause. “Although I believe my family is dead.”

Kisame blinks at him. He has an extra eyelid, which Itachi would find more interesting with less of a headache, and perhaps if he wasn’t having quite such a terrible day. “That’s bad?” Kisame
suggests carefully.

Itachi purses his lips, wondering if Kisame’s is a social species. Eventually, he just nods. “Yes.”

“We don’t grieve,” says Kisame flatly.

“I do not require strangers to grieve with me,” Itachi assures him, although he can’t keep the dryness out of his voice.

Kisame nods.

They look at each other for a moment, and Itachi finally gets up to check the security of the prison facility. It’s fairly tight, but the level of technology appears to be such that they will require actual people to bring them water, if they want their captives to survive.

They wouldn’t have taken captives, Itachi thinks, if they wanted to kill them. They’d have just killed them. Unless –

That’s the thing about living amid such large and diverse sectors of space: Itachi can account for a lot of things, but alien cultures always throw him for a loop. It puts a grating well, probably on the end of his every assumption and plan.

He blinks his burning eyes.

Itachi is tired.

“You have a plan,” says Kisame.

“I do,” Itachi agrees.

“Am I a part of it?”

Itachi eyes the obvious strength of Kisame’s huge shoulders. There is a distinct sense of rippling musculature about him and Itachi thinks he could, indeed, be very useful. “Do you wish to be?”

Kisame smiles, flashing big pointed teeth. “I want to get out of here.”

Itachi inclines his head. “All right.”

And, look, maybe there’s an actual reason for Kisame to be here. Maybe he’s dangerous, maybe he’s mad. At this point, Itachi is well past caring.

Eventually, as Itachi has predicted, three guards show up to provide them with water. They are covered in some kind of – armour, Itachi thinks, although perhaps it’s more like a uniform. It could be both. He can see their eyes, uniformly pale, but not the rest of their faces. They are helmeted and covered.

They wait outside and the corners of the cell give an ugly hiss, releasing gasses into the air. Kisame immediately begins to wheeze and shiver, although it has significantly less impact upon Itachi’s physiology. They are, he suspects, unused to dealing with humans. That’s useful; humans are neither the strongest nor the cleverest of alien species, but they have the dubious advantage of being one of the hardiest.

Kisame collapses in the hissing gas.

Itachi is… dizzy. But still okay.
He opens his eyes wide and begins running through the series of code words that will unlock the neural processor. It takes about three seconds before the bloody red of the sharingan lens washes over him.

Thirty seconds after that, the guards are on the floor.

Itachi picks his way delicately through their stunned bodies to find the mechanism for piping in the gasses.

He gives it three minutes, which is probably three minutes too long. If Kisame takes too long to recover Itachi will be forced to leave him behind. He cannot carry him. The lens detects his life signs changing rapidly, but Itachi cannot say whether that marks an improvement or a decline.

Alien physiology is extremely inconvenient.

But one minute more and Kisame opens bloodshot eyes, stares up at him, and coughs.

Itachi conscientiously offers him a handkerchief taken from one of their guards.

Kisame laughs like a broken hinge.

“Reckon they have a ship somewhere here?” he asks in a voice that sounds like it’s gone through a compactor.

Itachi looks down at their guards. They are still twitching, which means that they must not be human behind those helmets. That stands to reason; they aren’t quite the right shape for human heads.

They are more sensitive to the lens than he expected.

“We should find out,” he decides.

They leave the planet that evening with smoke drifting in their wake.
In Which Hidan Moves in Next Door to Kakuzu

Chapter Summary

For the prompt: "Meet your new neighbor AU - Hidan and Kakuzu. :D"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kakuzu’s new neighbour is loud.

He’s louder than he’d previously thought possible, really: it’s all noise, all the time. And his neighbour doesn’t seem to need to sleep – or else he’s somehow learnt to sleep through the earrupturing wails of the damned.

Kakuzu kind of wishes he was exaggerating, but he’s not actually that prone to hyperbole. Practical, is Kakuzu. And this music is a mix of some ancient lost tongue layered in throaty, rumbling chant, discordant flutes that set his nerves abuzz – and actual screaming.

The screaming is enough to make him pause, sometimes.

It reminds him of this one time when a job went sour and of a guy whose leg got blown off. There’s a quality to the screaming, a weird mix of confusion and pain and the terror. Kakuzu’s heard that before. It’s the sound people get when they’re looking at bits of themselves and thinking: This can’t be fixed. That’s not coming back.

And that’s… interesting.

He thinks he can tell when it’s actually his new neighbour screaming instead: the bastard does it at three in the morning, without fail. His is raw and gravelly, mostly anger – and it cuts off into bellowed swearing, over and over and over.

Kakuzu puts up with it for a week.

Well, no. Kakuzu hears the noise, thinks “I’ll give him a week,” out of a misguided sense of obligation, and lasts approximately four days. He considers it close enough.

(Also, nobody else seems to be doing anything about it. He supposes that the nutjobs across the street probably can’t hear him nearly as clearly as Kakuzu can.)

Kakuzu, you see, is practical. He prefers silence. Silence means you can hear footsteps, can hear creaking floorboards, car doors slamming outside, footsteps and muttering – oh yes, Kakuzu enjoys silence.

Predictably, knocking on his neighbour’s door is absolutely useless because of course he can’t hear Kakuzu - Kakuzu can’t even hear Kakuzu.

But, see: Kakuzu’s not the sort of neighbour who leaves passive-aggressive notes with little frowny faces on them. He doesn’t call the police and he doesn’t make complaints to the council. He prefers practical solutions to his problems.
Kakuzu meets his neighbour on a windy night at just about half past twelve.

Surprise, surprise, his neighbour does not hear him breaking in, and neither does he hear Kakuzu’s soft footsteps as he pads down the corridor, into the depths of the house. He doesn’t even hear it when Kakuzu enters the room he’s in, loose and relaxed, breathing quietly.

His new neighbour’s some kind of albino - shorter than Kakuzu, and so white he almost glows in the low light. From the decor Kakuzu thinks he likes knives; from the clothing tossed around he’s pretty sure he doesn’t like shirts; and from the state of his trousers he spends a lot of time on his knees.

He’s not looking toward the door, so he has very little opportunity to struggle when Kakuzu steps right up behind him, careful to keep his shadow out of sight, and slaps a soaked cloth over his nose and mouth.

His struggles, while ineffective, are… surprisingly strong. Kakuzu almost loses grip of him twice before he finally slumps, quiet and still.

(Another kick like that and Kakuzu’d be limping away with a broken instep. That’s something else to know: his neighbour is vicious. Broken or not, his foot will swell spectacularly before morning.)

He secures his neighbour with cable ties and leaves him on the floor. He can’t figure out how to work the enormous, pulsing, vibrating speakers so he just pulls the plug from the wall and then blinks, almost stunned by the sudden silence that descends.

His ears ring.

Kakuzu takes a deep breath and enjoys, for a second, actually hearing it.

And then, since he’s here anyway, he snoops through his neighbour’s mail.

Hidan is apparently a giant nuisance to everybody he encounters, rather than this being a special honour he’s reserved solely for Kakuzu. His mail is a tragic compilation fines and… well: three letters of demand, two threats of dismemberment and one painstakingly planned out bomb threat, a notice to appear in court, and five notifications of separate instances of criminal damage.

Thoughtfully, Kakuzu also smacks the flashing button on the answering machine. Another bomb threat, two hang ups, a message from a voice Kakuzu recognises as Sasori of all people (a thought he files away for later, and which then causes him to double-check those bomb threats), and, astonishingly, one quiet and soft-voiced query about where the next ‘service’ will be located.

By the time Hidan is coming to, Kakuzu has assured himself of several things about his new neighbour. The most important is that he certainly won’t be going to the police.

“What the fuck?” mutters the voice, that same voice Kakuzu has heard screaming after midnight, and he looks up from where he’s sitting at Hidan’s messy desk, rifling through Hidan’s tax records.

(The man’s a priest. A priest. The documentation is either perfectly genuine or a very good forgery – he doesn’t think Hidan’s subtle enough for a forgery like this, but Sasori might be – and all of Kakuzu’s preconceptions about organised religion are challenged by the thought that his paperwork, including his actual qualifications, might be real. He might be an actual honest-to-god priest.)

“You’re awake,” he says in a low, slow voice. It’s taken a lot less time than he’d been expecting,
which could mean several things.

“‘You’re awake’,” Hidan says, mimicking him in a voice that sounds absolutely nothing like Kakuzu’s. “What the actual fuck, why are you in my house,” he grits out right after, so mad and flat it doesn’t even sound like a question. He’s wriggling around in his bindings, reminding Kakuzu of nothing so much as a miffed cat.

The cable ties are tight enough to damage his circulation if they’re left on long enough, so Kakuzu doesn’t like his chances of getting out with his injured-caterpillar act… but there are plenty of knives in the room, and he doubts he’s accounted for all of them.

He stands. “I’m your next door neighbour,” he informs Hidan, turning his desk chair so they’re facing each other properly.

“Are you fucking with me?” Then he scoffs. “Neighbours. The other one brought mochi,” he adds, sounding somewhere between annoyed and bewildered.

Hinata is unaccountably friendly. She probably did bring sweets, even to a person like this. She brings them for Kakuzu on holidays, even. She lives on the other side of Hidan’s house, and if he thinks about it Kakuzu’s almost certain she’s invested in ear plugs instead of in rat poison to put in the next ‘neighbourly gift’.

(Not for the first time, Kakuzu wonders if that girl has some kind of personality disorder. One that makes her predisposed to make excuses up for everybody she meets. Everybody.)

And then Kakuzu is abruptly impatient. He must deliver his message and get out. He has things to do, and time, as everybody knows, is money. How annoying.

Scowling, he stomps closer and grabs Hidan by the chin, jerking his face up to meet his gaze. “Your music’s loud,” he tells him flatly, glowering into Hidan’s reddish-pink eyes. Definitely albino.

“So the fuck what?” Hidan snarls. His face is flushed from the awkward angle, which is putting pressure on his neck – and also from exertion.

“So if you don’t turn it down and let me get some sleep, I’m going to come back and cut your throat,” he tells him, pleased to see Hidan’s pupils contract – and then surprised to see them expand, blown and huge.

He’s – Kakuzu’s not thinking about that.

Instead of even contemplating that, he pats Hidan’s cheek, a little too hard. “Consider this a friendly warning,” he says.

He drops one of Hidan’s own knives to the floor in front of him before he leaves. Cutting himself loose will take him some time.

That night, Kakuzu sleeps in beautiful silence. He blinks his eyes awake when a small animal races across his roof – a cat, he thinks, the nutjobs over the street love those little shits – but there’s no screaming, no discordant instrumental music or screaming voices. At three, he rolls over wide awake – that’s the sound of Obito coming home two doors down, which Kakuzu only hears because he trips over something, and one of Hatake’s dogs gives two deep, warning barks before falling silent again.

But the night settles around him and he slumps back to the covers, back to sleep. No screaming.
Twelve hours later, Kakuzu discovers that this newfound silence was probably because Hidan was out looking for louder speakers.

Fine, thinks Kakuzu, pausing in counting up the cash from his last job. The wailing and screaming is louder, the flutes set his teeth on edge. His head hurts almost immediately.

He grinds his teeth.

Fine. If Hidan wants war, Kakuzu will bring it to him.

Chapter End Notes

For what it's worth, the "nutjobs across the street" who like cats are Madara and Tobirama.
Chapter Summary

This one's a little different to the usual: there was a screenshot going around whereby some trilby-headed dude wanted to read a story about a weak but smart protagonist who turned into a complete monster and finished it with "I don't mind an OC or someone else, no girls tough (sic)". I ended up tagged in it when people were mocking it, and wrote this in response, mostly out of spite. Spite is a great motivator for me. >_<

Oniko’s breasts were bound snugly beneath two sports bras, and she made sure to select her cutest knickers for the job. Today was going to be tough, and she needed what comfort she could get.

Her bag was packed: a place for everything and everything in its place. She hadn’t been organised when she’d first arrived, but time in the ninja world had left her with no illusions. She’d learnt. She’d had to.

Her food stores would last her two weeks, three if she cut her rations. Her weapons were sharp. Her minimal chakra supply was full and prickling under her skin - she didn’t have much to burn, would never inherit a summoning contract, but she was well rested and she knew how to make the best of what she had.

Oniko shoved a package of extra-absorbent tampons into one last corner of her pack, hiding behind the medical supplies and two sealing scrolls of clothing. She wasn’t due for another fortnight, but who knew how long she’d be on the run and what she’d be able to get her hands on in that time.

She bandaged her knees and ankles for support, running her hands over her full and feminine thighs to smooth her clothing when she was done.

It was time.

Strangely, she didn’t even feel nervous. Oniko had prepared the best she could, and now it was up to the fall of the dice.

“Preparing for the finals, right?” She said brightly to Naruto as he exited the hospital.

He squinted at her.

Oniko raised her eyebrows. “You didn’t notice me?” She touched her chest in mock offense and pulled an exaggerated sad face. “I was watching the prelims. Good job with Inuzuka!”

“Hehehe,” he rubbed the back of his neck and laughed nervously, because of course she hadn’t been there. Oniko was hardly in the habit of showing up where she wasn’t wanted and drawing suspicion to herself. “Thanks. It was pretty good, wasn’t it? I’m gonna go all the way– I’m definitely going to beat Neji in the finals!”

She smiled. “I’ll bet. Say, you look fit to practice – how about a spar? It’s good to test yourself against lots of styles, right? And I’ll bet your teacher,” she said this with a tiny twist of disdain, “is
more interested in his other student. I mean, it makes sense – Uchiha has the sharingan. Talentless grunts like us have to stick together, right?"

Naruto scowled. “Teme…” he muttered, apparently remembering something unpleasant.

Oniko smiled properly then, quick and genuine.

Hook.

“Naruto,” Oniko sighed, sweaty and more than half exhausted, “you’ve gotta try thinking tactically occasionally. You know I’m not stronger than you are, so why is it I won?”

“You cheated!”

“Playing fair will be a great comfort when you’re dead,” she drawled, rolling her eyes.

“You said it was an antidote,” he pouted. “And then you were trying to protect it, so I thought –”

“It was saline,” she shrugged. “And also a trap. The poison you inhaled wasn’t even that debilitating.” That much, at least, was true – it might have been, for somebody else, but Naruto wasn’t affected very much. In fact, the only reason he was affected by it at all was because of the five elements seal Orochimaru had laid upon him during the exam. It had been Oniko’s luck – and her careful planning – that had allowed her to take advantage of this weak period in his defences.

And the ‘saline’? Well. A little insurance never hurt anybody, and it gave her such peace of mind.

“Hakuran Oniko!” Barked a voice from out of nowhere, and a tall masked man shimmered into existence. Clone generation looked a lot like a really good shunshin. “Mission!” He tossed a scroll toward her and she snatched it from the air.

She bit her lip uncertainly. “B-rank… I’ve never done one solo before. Wish me luck, ne, Naruto?”

“Eh? Eh? But you’re all tired and-”

“I’ll be fine. It’s true I could use some backup, but we must be short staffed. I can handle it,” she said, grimly pocketing the scroll and going for her pack.

“I’ll be your backup,” declared Naruto fiercely.

“I… Oh, I couldn’t possibly ask it of you. It’s B-rank. It’s too dangerous for a genin–”

He gave her a serious look, and the sun shone on his golden hair and his eyes were stubborn and determined. He lifted his chin. “Oniko… I’ll have to do those missions if I want to be a chūnin, won’t I? I have to get stronger. And besides… we’re friends, right?” He smiled suddenly.

“…we are,” she agreed quietly. “All right.”

Line.
They were barely four miles out of Konoha when the first set of explosives went off with one hell of a bang.

“Oniko!”

“I heard them! Keep quiet and run!” She took off through the trees at a dead sprint, trusting that Naruto would follow her.

Oniko knew this forest well enough to get through it blindfolded, but it didn’t stop the anxiety unfurling in her guts. There were a couple of uncertainties in her plan - as with any plan - and it was hard to make contingency plans when one was dealing with actual people.

Still. Her timing was, as expected, perfect.

“Oniko,” Naruto said half an hour later, in a whole new tone. This one was low and raspy and uncertain.

She paused. “Naruto?”

“I don’t feel…” He swallowed loudly, and Oniko looked back at him, gauging his expression. He was leaning against the trunk of a tree, breathing hard and sweating heavily. He’d had more stamina than she’d thought, but she’d accounted for any such discrepancies.

Thank god for Orochimaru’s slap-dash sealing work, honestly.

“Shit. You must be reacting badly to the poison I used. I can mix you an antidote, but it won’t work immediately. We’re almost at the rendezvous point,” she added urgently. “Can you make it?”

He grit his teeth. “Yeah. I can.”

She gave him one last worried look and kept going.

The rendezvous point was closer to Rain than Leaf, although not really adjacent to either. It was a bridge over a river, surrounded by towering trees. It offered a decent vantage over the valley below.

They stopped, and as Oniko was pulling her first aid kit from her pack - setting aside her giant pack of extra absorbent tampons - a figure dropped from a nearby tree.

“Finally,” it growled, and Oniko felt her heart start to race.

It wasn’t a good feeling.

“Is he out contact?” Naruto asked breathlessly. There was a dull glaze to his eyes and he wasn’t quite looking directly at the man.

“Yes,” said Oniko. “Hello, Kakuzu-san.”

He grunted, which was as close to a ‘hello’ as she was getting. That was all right – she hadn’t asked for Kakuzu for his personality. He was powerful enough and hard enough to work with that Akatsuki really would send him alone when she requested it. Trying to ambush Kakuzu was like trying to ambush a venomous snake by shoving your hand in its face, and they all knew it.

“What did you do to him?”
"The five elements seal laid by Orochimaru deformed the flow of his chakra sufficiently for it to be affected by poison," she said readily. "He can’t mould chakra, and soon he’ll fall into a fever. He’s as helpless as he’s going to get."

Kakuzu’s eyes narrowed on Naruto’s flushed face. “Will he survive if we remove the seal?”

She pursed her lips. This was the tricky part. “Yes, with the antidote."

“O–Oniko?” Naruto’s voice was weak and confused. “What’s–”

“And you have the antidote,” Kakuzu drawled, interrupting.

She shrugged. “Sorry.” She wasn’t very sorry. “You’ve got to understand, this could end really badly for me. It’s just insurance."

“And what’s to stop me from taking it from your body?” Kakuzu stepped forward, one foot thumping gently but ominously on the dirt.

Oniko took a step back, keeping their distance. “I’m not carrying it,” she said.

“That’s why you demanded one person come alone – and even if I sent a clone to deal with the antidotes, no doubt they’re trapped. Survivable for a good ninja, but not for a clone. You’ve thought this through."

She really, really had. She’d even planted the idea of a promotional event at the hot springs to keep Jiraiya distracted. She licked her lips.

Kakuzu paused. “Akatsuki has its own poisoner,” he mused.

Akasuna. Yeah, they did. He was good, too - but his poisons were quick and lethal, and she doubted he had the experience with the class she’d used on Naruto. If Orochimaru had still been with the Akatsuki she’d have worried.

“The second poison I gave him interacts with the antidote to the first,” she said finally. “You’ll need to administer that one first, wait and then administer the second.”

“–said it was saline,” slurred Naruto.

“It was… mostly."

From the look on Kakuzu’s face he already knew how much more complicated that would make fixing it.

Oniko swallowed and tried to unclench her jaw and relax her shoulders. “Look, you won’t get an opportunity like this again. This is the Nine Tails. Half of Leaf’s scurrying around, scared stupid of Orochimaru; the other half is trying to save face and run the chuunin exams. I’ve been planning this for months, and you know damn well I asked half the price I could have.”

Kakuzu clicked his tongue against his teeth. “You did,” he agreed. “I’d wondered if you knew.”

She shook her head. “If I’d charged what I could you’d have done it yourselves. I just want to get my money and get out of the elemental nations.”

A short pause. Finally, Kakuzu nodded.

He tossed her a bag, which was full of notes. She was just crass enough to flip through them, checking for the right notes. Yep. Good.
She took a step back, away from where Naruto was sagged, mumbling weakly.

Then another, and another. Kakuzu did nothing.

“Your antidote is stuck in the bend of a tree eight miles due north of Leaf,” she said finally. It had been there for a week now. Oniko provided coordinates in a clear voice, even as she backed away. “You’ll need to hurry, though. Pursuit was on its way by the time we were four miles out. I took care of them, but it was loud, which means –”

The sound of snapping hounds was heard from the valley below.

Right on time.

Kakuzu swore. Oniko bolted.

Annnd sinker.

With any luck, she’d be out of the elemental nations by the weekend.
An AU where Itachi comes back to Konoha and has a Trial

Chapter Summary

This is an older one I forgot to post here earlier. I don't think it's a prompt... but I can't remember so if it was your prompt lmk

Chapter Notes

Some suicidal themes

Itachi’s trial, such as it even is, is… strange.

It’s all pretty well worked out, especially since it’s been Tsunade doing the working out: Danzo fucked up, Itachi tried to make the best of a bad situation, and now there’s been a short trial and a huge shift in council leadership. Major clan heads and Hokage only for now, which is usually a format reserved for war time only.

Tsunade has been bulling forward with the phrases ‘genuine remorse’ and ‘under duress’ and ‘valuable blood line’ like a human battering ram.

Itachi doesn’t understand her insistence. The blood line continues, stronger, in his brother and any children of Itachi’s run the risk of inheriting the weakness of his constitution.

“It should be an internal matter,” Hiashi says, delivering the Hokage an extremely icy look.

Itachi is present, sitting seiza, chakra restrained and eyes on his hands. There is no need to look up, and certainly no need for him to speak. He is an apprehended prisoner. There are others here, and he can feel their chakra even if he can’t use his own.

He can smell the forest and the homely scent of dog on Inuzuka Tsume, and he can hear the delicate swish of Yamanaka’s hair whenever he shifts. The Aburame have such unique chakra he’d be hard pressed not to feel it buzzing so close, and Nara Shikaku is…

Nara Shikaku is sitting next to Akimichi Chouza, because of course he is. But his presence hides in the shadow of his friend’s. Itachi knows he is there, and that will have to do.

They argue about him and he says nothing, because there is no need to speak. It feels so easy to leave his fate to these people. He’s been pushing himself so hard for so long that he’s running on empty; not just tired but worn out. Worn thin, worn down.

He feels like no more than the sum of his pieces, a cup drained and left upside down. Nothing fills him. Nothing delights him. Nothing upsets him.

This, at least, makes him calm.

The clans and Hokage may conclude that it’s best to execute him. They should, in fact, he thinks
without feeling. It would be congruent with Konoha’s laws as set down by Senju Tobirama. It would be sensible.

It’s a regret that Sasuke won’t be able to kill him in that case – Sasuke, of all people, has that right, and Itachi won’t ever really feel assured in his brother’s strength until he knows he can do it.

Sasuke needs to be strong enough to kill Itachi, because ninja must be strong. Itachi knows this like he knows his own laboured breathing. He is a product of the third war, a child soldier, and he sees hairline cracks when he looks in the mirror. Ninja must be strong to survive, and Itachi knows he is dying.

It’s a ripple, a moment’s thought, a trembling idea that’s easily quieted. Itachi’s mind is still.

“It cannot be an internal matter because there is no clan to internalise it,” Tsunade points out, too drily.

Another ripple, this one smaller. She’s right. There is no clan. There is Sasuke, but –

“Precisely my point,” Hiashi says, and takes a pointed sip of his tea.

Tsume sighs gustily, and Itachi can hear the shift of more than one body, the rustle of fabric or – fur. Kuromaru, restless as his partner. He blinks once, slowly.

“It’s no point,” she says, sounding bored at best. “Sitting around complaining that he should be dealt with by a body that doesn’t exist is the opposite of having a point.”

Itachi can feel the shift of tensions in the room.

“The point stands. Why? Uchiha Sasuke is not here.” That’s Shibi, then. The vocal patterns are common to the clan, familiar to Itachi. He thinks of ANBU.

“One kid doesn’t make a clan, although – he’s family, if that means anything. Where is he?”

“In the field,” says Shikaku, voice low and rough. Lazy. Predatory. “Should be back in four weeks.”

Four weeks? Itachi very nearly lifts his head. What sort of mission could they have his brother doing that might take a month? He could travel halfway across the wold in that time…

Itachi had hoped to see him. Angry and hateful, certainly, but – alive. All right. Taller, perhaps. He’d hoped – well. That’s …a pity. He relaxes once more.

There’s a heaved sigh from somewhere deeper in the room.

He can see the sweep of Tsunade’s sleeve when she rubs her forehead. “I agree that in ideal circumstances this would be a matter internal to the Uchiha clan. This isn’t about moving in on clans’ rights and you know it. For one, Uchiha’s not here and he won’t be here within a reasonable time frame for keeping an S-rank shinobi captive. Shikaku?”

He sighs, a very Jounin Commander sigh, heavy with responsibilities he’d rather not contemplate. “The only reason we’ve kept him this long is he’s cooperative. Kakashi can’t watch him all the time.”

Not all the time, no. But mostly it has been Kakashi, perched somewhere close to the cell with his nose in a book and both eyes bare. Or, twice, a haggard-seeming Jiraiya. His attempts to persuade Itachi to comment on the physical qualities of the T&I kunoichi who passed by were…
“–er, I’m privy to his records,” Tsunade is saying, flat and uncompromising, “Which are relevant in this case. He would not be able to participate if he was here.”

A sudden noise of assent from Yamanaka, a whisper of cloth – *genjutsu trauma*, in a whisper between comrades. Itachi can hear everything going on in the room right now, and he wonders if they’re pretending for his sake or their own.

“Nevertheless,” Hiashi says repressively. “It cannot be allowed to set a precedent.”

Somebody clicks their tongue. “He’s not wrong.” Tsume, again. A rough noise from her dog.

“Oh, for – Fine,” says Tsunade, exasperated. “Put it in the minutes. Shizune, note it. The Hokage agrees–” she trails off, and there’s a swish like she’s waving her hand.

“Hai,” murmurs the Hokage’s attendant. She’s quiet like a mouse, and very organised. She writes quickly and with sure strokes. He could smell something faintly familiar, astringent perhaps, on her when she came in – another medic. Probably. She’s dangerous, but in a room like this she’s overshadowed.

It takes them the better part of an hour to determine the precise ways in which action taken with regard to Itachi without Sasuke’s presence, knowledge or permission is not to set a precedent for further interactions between clans and village.

Itachi is patient. These delicate negotiations are often all that prevents Konoha from toppling into civil war. He knows that better than anyone.

Once that matter is settled, they are quick and strangely cooperative. It is concluded that Itachi behaved against village laws under duress and with the intention to protect his village. The issue of massacre is brought up – he has killed, and killed in ways that are unacceptable, even among ninja: murdered children, elderly folk, disabled veterans.

The tension is… difficult to decipher.

Nobody disagrees with this assessment, but they all seem unwilling to punish him for it. He thinks he understands a little: every person in the room is a product of shinobi wars. Each of them has killed children, old people; anyone in their way. They hesitate to punish him because they hesitate to damn themselves.

He waits.

“Demote him,” Shikaku sighs eventually. “And put him to work doing something nobody wants to do.”

“So, everything, if we ask you,” murmurs Yamanaka. There is a swift shift of fabric and a quick indrawn breath. “Ehem,” he amends.


“In some cases leniency is reasonable,” Shibi says thoughtfully. “Where criminals show true remorse, re-educational and integrative efforts are often successful.”

“What, you wanna send him to a ‘How Not To Murder Everyone’ seminar?”

“Enough,” hisses Hiashi. “That’s completely–”
Tsume says something pithy and vulgar and Hiashi withdraws into offended silence.

“What do you think?”

There is a long pause, and it takes Itachi several seconds to realise Tsunade is addressing him. He lifts his head and looks at her.

“It would be in line with Konoha’s laws that I be executed,” he says slowly.

She rolls her eyes heavenwards and mutters something about having the strength to deal with idiots. “Do you want to be executed?” she demands.

Itachi stills, thinking. He…

Traditionally executions are done by beheading. There are very few techniques that will allow a shinobi to survive it, and once you can hold up a person’s head and shake it around by the hair there’s usually no way to deny that the person’s properly dead.

In some places they are done before a crowd, and in others the Kage and the headsman are all who are in attendance. In Konoha, it’s not quite like that. They try not to make a spectacle of themselves, but no execution is supposed to be hushed up: signatures are required and high-ranking witnesses should be present. He knows it’s not always, or even often, the case that such rules are followed, but…

His death would need to follow such rules. Danzo died for committing offences against those codes. It would be impolitic for the Hokage to practice such hypocrisy with regard to a related case.

He wonders what that would be like.

Itachi is not afraid to die. But he wonders if such a death would really be enough.

“I don’t know,” he says finally.

Tsunade, if anything, looks more annoyed. “It was a rhetorical question,” she says from between her teeth.

And then, “He needs a psych assessment,” says Yamanaka, because of course he does. Itachi remembers ANBU; the Yamanka intel agents always thought everybody needed a psychiatric assessment.

“Yesterday,” he adds, squinting at Itachi like he can see through his skull. Maybe he can.

Tsume snorts, and mutters something that sounds a lot like ‘no shit’ under her breath.

Itachi does not require an assessment – it would be pointless, and a waste of village resources – but he doesn’t argue. He’s given himself over, calm and numb, and there’s no point and no purpose.

“Is that really what we’re going to do?” wonders Chouza. “Psychiatric assessment and supervised labour?”

“Don’t forget the demotion,” drawls Tsume, prompting a growling cough of laughter from Kuromaru.

“The re-education undertaken by Root shinobi may be beneficial,” Shibi suggests.
There’s a hesitation in the air, strange tension.

“Labour heavily supervised,” says Hiashi, sounding deeply put out but resigned to the absurd leniency of the council. “And unpaid.”

“Fine, fine,” Tsunade waves one hand. “Comprehensive medical and psychiatric therapies pending assessment, re-education, unpaid labour – I could use somebody to file mission reports from the new genin – and demotion. Yes?”

There’s silence for a beat.

“Agreed,” says Shikaku, to an annoyed huff from Tsume and a click of the tongue from Hiashi, but nobody argues.

“Fine. Shizune, minute it.”

“Aa,” she agrees, and then there is silence, and the sound of a brush on paper.
“In Which Ino is Deidara’s Recently Orphaned Half-Sibling”

Chapter Summary

Exactly what it says on the tin. This one was prompted by phoenixyfriend, who wanted something where Kakuzu tries to teach Deidara how budgeting works.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“You'd be taking over as her primary carer,” said the cool and professional voice on the phone. "The rest of her immediate family is dead."

"...Yeeaah," drawled Deidara slowly. "But is it really okay to ask an internationally wanted criminal to take her in, I mean - hey! Danna! Give that back!"

"How did you get this number?" Sasori demanded. Which, yes, okay, maybe Deidara should have been worried about that too... but seriously, what kind of social worker tried to palm a kid off onto him? Even he knew that was a terrible idea!

Scowling fiercely, Deidara leaned closer. When he was close enough that his hair was mingling with the reddish edges of Sasori's, the tinny voice from the speaker was loud and clear.

"-able to divulge those details without sufficient identity related information except to Deidara-san. However, the Konoha department of child welfare has avenues of information available through the rest of the bureaucracy, including the tax office. Now-"

Deidara rolled his eyes and took the phone back from Sasori with some effort. Sasori gave it up after a moment's struggle, but he countered by putting it on speaker.

"-can commit her to care as necessary." Deidara snorted. He had grown up in an orphanage, and, look, yeah: it was shitty. But he turned out fine, and he didn't see why anybody else should get it any easier than he had, so really- "but the Hokage has decreed that we must contact any living family that isn't actually institutionalised."

"What," said Sasori flatly.

Deidara was a little inclined to agree with him, which was how he knew it was dire. "Even if they're S-ranked criminals from outside the village?"

He shared a glance with him, and they were both thinking variations on: That would not have happened in Suna and Iwa would never.

"Honestly, Deidara-san," said the caller, sounding briefly but intensely exhausted, "the Hokage makes a great many strange, questionable or clearly unethical decisions about the village's orphans here. At this point I'm just doing my job and hoping for the best."

"...Yeah," said Deidara slowly, which was probably not the response he should have had to what was doubtless vile sedition inside the village's walls. "...Sooo, does the Hokage have final authority over the orphanages themselves, or-?"
"Of course," said the voice, sounding a wee bit strained.

He shot another look at Sasori, whose expression was completely blank. There were, you know, orphanages. And then there were orphanages. The mouth in his left hand licked its lips nervously.

"No," said Sasori. The tone of his voice was a warning, although his face still didn't change.

The person on the phone went on as though Sasori wasn't clearly audible. "So, Deidara-san, if you're amenable to a brief interview and to proving your financial state is equal to caring for a second person-

"Deidara, no," Sasori repeated, pitch rising.

"-we'd be delighted to give you full guardianship of your half-sister."

"I'll do it, yeah," breathed Deidara, heart pounding.

"Brat-!

"Lovely," said the caller. "Our office is open nine to five. There's an outpost in the capital, near the public gardens. Drop in any time this month and I'll make room for you in my schedule."

There was a click and a dial tone.

"You're telling Leader," grated Sasori from between his teeth.

...which was about when Deidara realised he'd just agreed to parent a child.

Panic ensued.

Pein was surprisingly good about it, actually. "She'll have no contact with her village again," he said with his pale eyes boring into Deidara's.

"No problem, yeah. All her family's dead, it's not like she's got much to go back for."

"Poor girl," mused Konan, although not as though she pitied her. Instead she looked at Deidara as though she was seeing right through him. A moment later, she glanced out into the rain and her stare remained locked there.

Annd Konan continued to be hella creepy. Deidara inched away from her. He reminded himself once again that it was all okay because paper burned really well.

Then after a pause: "Kakuzu isn't likely to increase your pay," added Pein.

"...shit," said Deidara.

Yamanaka Ino was twelve, the illegitimate a product of the war with Konoha, and she looked a hell of a lot like him.

"Wow," he muttered, eyeing the photograph he'd been given. "We could be -" he was about to say related, but then he would probably have to have smacked himself. "Huh."

"I know, right? She'll be a knockout when she's older," said the officer of the department, sitting down across from him.
Deidara eyed the man uncertainly. He wasn't the best at social stuff, but he wasn't, like, *Danna*. He was pretty sure that wasn't the sort of comment a thirty-something year old should be making. He'd have felt weird saying it, and he was only eight or so years older than her. "She's twelve," he pointed out.

The officer looked up at him, made a delighted expression, and noted something on a piece of paper.

Okaaay...? Deidara actively chose not to read whatever the hell that was.

"I can tell we're going to have a good interview already, Deidara-san," he said cheerfully. "Now, let's talk about your criminal history. I can see mercenary acts of terrorism and violence, but none of those are any different to the missions sanctioned by Iwa..."

Considering the missions sanctioned by Iwa - and considering the missions sanctioned by *Konoha*, which were just as bad - that wasn't really a ringing endorsement. Deidara knew it, but the officer seemed to have developed some kind of selective stupidity.

Or non-selective stupidity. Deidara didn't spend a lot of time around civilians.

"Your criminal history appears to be limited to large-scale property damage and mass murder," the officer went on.

"Pretty much my skill set, yeah."

"Excellent, excellent. There's no history of non-consensual biological experiments, non-consensual psychological experiments, longterm imprisonment, sexual violence -"

The list went on.

And on.

A lot of the list seemed ...strangely specific.

Although interestingly Deidara *did* learn that sex with an intelligent, consenting summon was still considered a crime in Fire Country, but only if it was a reptile.

*Huh.*

In the end, Deidara was approved to become the carer of a twelve year old girl without delay. Even after he'd told them that his hobbies involved blowing things up and watching in a kind of trembling, heart-pounding excitement and elation so intense it almost made him dizzy.

"Excellent! It's good to be enthusiastic about your work," the officer had said cheerfully.

"Danna," he wailed into his phone ten minutes later, flying high above the capital on a clay bird, "their child welfare department is *terrible.*"

"It's windy. I can't hear you," said Sasori, "and also I don't care. Why are you calling me?" And then he hung up, leaving Deidara squawking indignantly five hundred meters in the air.

Kakuzu didn't even make the effort to acknowledge him when Deidara appeared in his doorway. 'Not likely' Pein had said. Well. That had been something of an understatement.

"No," he said. The room behind him was dark, although Deidara could see the disturbingly serene
silhouette of Hidan praying against a window. It was overcast outside. It pretty much always was, here.

"You don't even know what I was going to ask!"

"No," he repeated. He'd never even looked up from his book. It wasn't their accounts for once - it was a dated bingo book, which he seemed to be comparing with a newer release, subjecting both to an intensely critical eye.

"I'm not asking for money." Deidara'd already given that one up as a lost cause. There was the kind of 'no' that could be coaxed into a 'yes' and then there was the kind of 'no' Kakuzu made when he was talking about precious, precious funds.

And since Deidara wasn't stupid, he was willing to offer that concession right from the outset just to pique Kakuzu's interest enough to get his attention. Negotiation with Kakuzu was ...delicate. At best. Sometimes he just lost his temper and murdered someone.

"I just need somebody to show me how to plan a budget, yeah," he added sourly.

*That* made Kakuzu look up.

He squinted. "...really."

Deidara crossed his arms, scowling. He didn't need to look so disbelieving! Deidara could be responsible. ...sometimes. Well, not about himself, but he was an adult, that wasn't anyone's business but his!

But he was plenty responsible when Danna asked him to be, for example. Well. Mostly.

Either way, the child welfare people were insane and he wanted to make sure he wasn't going to, like, let the kid starve or something.

More squinting.

"She's a genin?"

Deidara nodded.

Then Kakuzu made a disgusted noise. "Sit," he commanded.

Deidara sat.

"Where do you get money coming in?" he barked.

"What?" Then: "Oh. You?"

Kakuzu twitched, but leaned forward to write 'AKATSUKI' in his sharp, old-fashioned script. The number he wrote next to it was not one with which Deidara was actually familiar, but it was probably around the same amount Kakuzu showed up with every month.

"...Would you even notice if I didn't pay you?" Kakuzu asked, twenty minutes later.

"Yes," said Deidara quickly, because he wasn't stupid enough to say otherwise. But he wasn't actually that sure.

There was a tick developing in Kakuzu's cheek. It was partially covered by his mask, but it was definitely there.
The intent in the air was rising, too, enough that Deidara was tensing every time Kakuzu moved his hands and Hidan, despite his relentless droning prayer, was obviously getting restless.

They kept going. Deidara was actually learning, which was unexpected. Kakuzu wanted a running account of all of his outgoing expenses, which Deidara thought was pretty unlikely to happen ever, but he was...

"You spend more than you get paid," Kakuzu said shortly.

"How does that work?" Deidara wondered.

"It doesn't, idiot. Do you have a line of credit anywhere?"

"A what?"

"Credit card? Source of income other than stated?"

That vein in his forehead could not have been good for Kakuzu's health.

"No?"

"I need your tax invoices and the transaction history from your bank."

"...and, um, where would I get those?"

Deidara supposed he shouldn't have been that surprised when Kakuzu flipped the table and stormed out, but Hidan's laughter was really unnecessary.

Of course, Kakuzu's temper was uncertain at best, and he stormed back in about ten seconds later.

This time he grabbed Deidara by the hair. "Come with me," he hissed in a low and terrible voice.

By the time he made it back to his own room – shared grudgingly with Sasori – he was seriously bruised. Battered. Lightly singed. More sick of listening to Hidan laugh like a broken hinge than he'd even thought possible.

Kakuzu had been too close to really get any distance from, too.

It wasn't that Deidara minded setting himself on fire, but he really would have liked for there to be an alternative option. Taking away the choice factor made it significantly less exciting.

"Danna," he whined.

"Mm."

"I'm not really a short distance fighter."

"Mm."

Sasori looked up at where Deidara was sprawled across the bed. He had the nascent urge to reach down and shove the edge of his shirt down lower where it was riding up over his belly, but Sasori was never really interested in Deidara's naked skin - except when he occasionally discussed what a nice puppet he'd make.

But that was perfectly normal and not perverted or creepy or anything, so Deidara didn't worry too
"Idiot. You knew this would happen."

"Money is really boring, yeah," he said defensively.

Sasori grunted again.

"I could poison him," he offered after a moment's silence.

Deidara looked away and didn't let the smile overcome him. The warm fuzzies in his gut had nothing to do with the heat from his bruises.

He sighed instead. "No. I just need to talk to my bank."

"Mm."

As soon as he figured out which one was his bank.

Deidara woke to an itemised list titled How Not To Be A Terrible Older Brother pinned to his door.

It was scattered with suggestions like 'make time for her instead of putting her off' and 'try not to kill anybody she's fond of'.

Perplexed, he crumpled it up and threw it away and commenced putting his hair up.

Then after a second he put his hair brush back down, pulled it out of the trash and peered at it again.

*Teach her things when she asks.*

Okay...

Deidara hesitated, then left it on a table to be forgotten about instead.

...Weird.

Sasori refused point-blank to come to meet his new charge with him. He did not want to wait for the bureaucracy to organise themselves.

Deidara did not understand Sasori's impatience, because it was always so selective: he'd plot and settle to wait like an ambush predator half the time, and then the other half would see him lashing Hiruko's tail and spitting insults as his ire rose by the second.

So he asked, Sasori said no, he asked again and Sasori said no again, and so he asked again - although this time he was mostly just stirring shit and they both knew it. Sasori ignored him at the time but somehow found the patience to wait *hours* for revenge, at which point he poisoned his breakfast.

This really only proved Deidara's point about Sasori's patience. He sure had time for some things.

Deidara was heartily sick, however, having ingested the spores from some obscure emetic mushroom.
"Really?" sighed Kisame, peering at his own food. "Really?"

The overcast sky lit the kitchen through a skylight, and the rest was all sturdy benches and utilitarian seats. They didn't cook often, so when somebody did cook it usually attracted the others like flies to shit. (Provided it wasn't Itachi's cooking, which attracted precisely nobody.)

"It's not in the food. It's on the spoon," said Itachi, completely unconcerned. His eyes flickered red and spun, bright and alien.

Deidara flipped him the finger. He was too busy throwing up on his own boots to shriek at him like he deserved. Asshole.

"Yeah, I think I'll eat something else anyway," Kisame sighed, and got up in a ripple of oversized muscle and terrible grace to go throw his breakfast away.

Itachi watched him for a moment, but in the end he ignored the commotion and picked delicately at his own rice.

When he was done vomiting he looked back at Sasori with bright, fevered eyes and contemplated stuffing Hiruko's mouth with C4. Deidara could think of five or six ways to do it, and Sasori would probably survive it.

And even if he didn't, Deidara couldn't help but think of all that potential and energy, all the beautiful essence of him, burnt up in one glorious moment. Mmm.

He licked his lips, tasted bile, and decided against it. It was a fine thing to balance, but there were other things.

Still, from the way Sasori edged around him and calmly but meticulously checked his things, he'd probably seen the thought on Deidara's face.

In the end, nobody came with Deidara. He supposed that was for the best, because Itachi was the bogeyman of the girl's own village, Kisame was a mountainous brute of a man, and everybody else was either too creepy for words or actually insane.

Sasori had really been the best choice of all of them, temper aside.

Although Deidara could allow that he spent a lot of time filling out paperwork in that office and Sasori probably would have snapped and stabbed someone.

As it was, Deidara alone - short, blond, androgynously pretty with no obvious weapons - seemed to terrify the pants off her.

Which just meant that at least she wasn't an idiot. (Of course she wasn't an idiot. She was his half-sister. Duh.)

In this case that wasn't necessarily a good thing in the short term, though, because it meant that when she was escorted into the office, Yamanaka Ino took one look at his forehead protector and went white.

"There's been a mistake," she said frantically, reaching out to snatch the elbow of the person who'd led her in. She seemed torn between shoving the civilian behind her or using him as a meat shield and fleeing.

The officer of the department of child welfare seemed totally inured to this sort of behaviour. "No
mistake,” he disagreed, removing his arm from her grip.

"He's a *missing nin,*" she hissed quietly, as though Deidara might be offended by the comment, or perhaps as though he wasn't aware and she was trying not to break the bad news to him prematurely. He stifled a snort.

"Yes. But he's your half-brother," said the officer, shuffling a surprisingly thick pile of papers. "By decree of the Hokage, your familial relationship trumps politics in this situation, Ino-chan. Now please sit down."

Ino crept into the office and perched tensely on the edge of her chair. Her eyes strayed only briefly from Deidara and when they did it was mostly to check out her surroundings. He could see her picking exits, skimming obstacles. Obviously not much of a fighter, then; at least she knew it.

She was... skinny. Skinnier than he was, skinnier than Konan or Itachi, and that was saying something. Her face was pretty, but he skin was dehydrated and there was a darkness and a tension around her eyes.

He kind of wondered what she was seeing when she looked at him, because he hadn't gone out of his way to be intimidating or anything.

"So, this is Deidara-san. You'll be going home with him today-"

"Yo," he said, and flashed her a bright smile. "Shitty situation you've found yourself in, yeah. Let's hope we'll get on."

She looked at Deidara like he was a death sentence. The expression rolled off him. He'd seen it plenty of times before. "Please take care of me," she said flatly, by rote.

Still. He kind of wondered how she was going to deal with his housemates. He was really not the scariest thing in that building, yeah.

...not to look at, anyway.

Well, they could burn that bridge down when they got there.

He looked at this too-skinny girl with her delicate looks and careful assessment of her surroundings and wondered for the first time if she liked blowing things up.

He hoped so.

Chapter End Notes

I hope I find the motivation to write a couple drabbles or short ficlets about Ino trying to settle in to living with the Akatsuki. I foresee that going really badly and also being pretty fun. xD

Drop me a comment and let me know if there was something you liked in particular here!

Also note that requests go through my askbox on tumblr at tozettewrites.tumblr.com/ask, and are answered on an As I Can Be Bothered basis.
Chapter Summary

I had fun writing the first one of these and was compelled to write an Ino-POV continuation.

When Ino was little, her father had clutched her hard, breathed in the scent of her hair and told her if anything ever happened to him and her mother, anything bad, that she was to fight tooth and nail against being put in an orphanage.

“She has other family,” her mother had pointed out, in a dry tone that suggested Inoichi was being paranoid, even for a ninja. Even for him.

He’d looked grimly upon her, at her yellow hair that wasn’t quite the right shade, at the curves of her face, the shape of her mouth. “They might surprise you,” he’d said.

And her mother had gone quiet, icily cold, flat and empty behind the eyes.

That made a lot of sense in hindsight – now that Ino knew her dad wasn’t her father, now that she knew that her mother had been pregnant during the tail end of the third war, those bitter skirmishes that never seemed to cool, the ones that even now seemed imminent when shinobi met in the line of duty.

At the time, Ino had been small, loved to a fault by both her carers, and frankly bewildered.

“Ino?” Inoichi had prompted severely.

“Not the orphanages,” she’d parroted, uncertain why it was important but sure that it was.

They’d never brought it up again, but she remembered.

And now that distant somewhen had arrived, and Ino had been escorted from her village and to a tiny office in the capital. The whole place was clean, dressed in grey and off-white, with bright overhead lights and uncomfortably overstuffed furniture. It was unassuming, no charm or character – but that just made what was waiting for her there more alarming by contrast.

When her case worker had told her that her remaining blood relative was from outside the village and she’d have to meet them in the capital, she’d assumed a civilian. Not…

Ino’s half brother was a missing nin.

A missing nin originating from Iwagakure, of all places.

That was…

That was actually pretty terrifying.

Her eyes zeroed in on his defaced forehead protector and didn’t want to leave.

She could see why they hadn’t been more specific. If somebody had actually told her that the
relative who’d agreed to take her in was a criminal from Rock, she’d never have shown up.

And now that she was sitting in this sterile office, perched tensely on the edge of her chair with her hair on end, she could sense his chakra – he had a lot of it, even though it was locked tightly down. He might have had as much as Asuma-sensei, although that might be Ino’s alarm talking.

“Please take care of me,” she said mechanically in response to his introduction.

Deidara – introduced a little condescendingly as ‘big brother’ by the case worker, who seemed completely immune to the narrowed eyes and curled lip he was receiving in response – did not look like a missing nin. Ino had never encountered very many, but she had a distinct idea of what a missing nin should be.

There was a stereotype. Deidara, short and pale and surprisingly pretty with his carefully groomed hair and neat, wiry muscle, didn’t fit it at all.

So Ino found herself watching him while they sat in the office. She catalogued exit points and obstacles, unable to stop herself out of sheer nerves, but in the end her eyes always drifted back to him, compelled by paranoia and curiosity alike – Deidara wasn’t that relaxed, either, no matter what his carefully contrived body language suggested.

Ino picked out details almost without thinking: a ring with a teal stone and a character painted on it. He paid it no attention and must have been used to its weight on his hand. And he’d painted his nails black at some point. The polish wasn’t chipped or uneven, either, so it was a recent novelty or a habit. He was groomed, fit, smiling. He looked a lot like her, and not just because of his hair and colouring. He had her mouth, her chin, he raised his eyebrows in the same way.

He’d fit in back in Konoha, and that seemed… wrong. It set Ino’s nerves on edge a lot more than if he’d struck the expected notes of shadowy criminality.

“If you want to go into the orphanage, I’m not going to stop you,” he said directly – right in front of the case worker, who looked scandalised.

Ino looked at him. She looked at the case worker.

She knew, although perhaps these two did not, that anyone who ended up “in care” in Konoha ran the risk of disappearing. They came back, but… When they returned they weren’t the same. Cold. Colder.

It wasn’t acknowledged much, even more rarely aloud. But Ino was observant, and she had Inoichi’s bizarre and cryptic warning – she knew. And, look, usually it was younger people than Ino who went away… but the risk was still very, very real.

She wondered what Asuma-sensei would say. Probably that a Konoha orphanage was better than an Iwa missing nin, no matter what shady possibilities awaited there.

Her eyes stung to think of Inoichi now, but…

She knew enough to know she didn’t want to be there.

Ino swallowed. “No,” she said, after only a terrible second’s hesitation. At least this missing nin was a blood relation – Ino knew all about establishing points of familiarity with a captor, but she didn’t know what the hell went on in Konoha’s quiet, bloodless orphanages.

Deidara’s eyebrows rose. His mouth did a thing, the same twist that hers did when she was
unpleasantly surprised. It was… strange. Compelling.

He gave her a second and then shrugged, blond hair falling loosely over one shoulder. “Sure, okay.”

She was careful to ensure that the spike of queasy relief in her belly didn’t show on her face.

The case worker relaxed. “Right,” he said, clearing his throat, “so, Ino-chan, did you have any questions for your big brother?”

Yes. Millions. So many that she almost stalled just thinking about them. And then she really did stall because, well. “…Are there many you’ll answer?”

He hesitated. His visible eye drifted pointedly toward the case worker. Ino wrinkled her nose but nodded, and that whole silent exchange flew right past the case worker, who was scribbling on his notes.

Deidara waved a hand, and Ino blinked at a glimpse of something that didn’t look quite right there – but it was only visible for a split second, and she wasn’t sure what she’d seen. Something white buried in his palm. “I’m from Hidden Rock,” he said, tapping his forehead protector wryly, and she looked back at his face, feeling unaccountably guilty. His lips quirked. “I’m nineteen, and I’m an artist~”

“An artist? Deidara-san, we have on file that you’re a demolitions specialist,” interrupted the case worker, frowning.

Demolitions expert, Ino processed internally. In Konoha that meant huge fires or massively destructive lightning techniques, but fire natures were rarer elsewhere – maybe for Deidara that meant large scale earth techniques, destabilising foundations, making landslides and collapsing buildings? There were a lot of earth-natured ninja in Earth country.

“I am,” said Deidara in a voice that had gone warm with the edges of defensive anger. “There’s lots of overlap, yeah.” He paused, clenched his jaw, clicked his teeth.

The case worker looked dubious.

“Civilians wouldn’t get it, yeah,” sniffed Deidara.

Ino mistrusted the sudden tension in him.

He had seemed too well-adjusted for an Iwa-nin. But there was something mean and hungry peeking out behind his pretty blue eyes and Ino found that – not comforting. She’d be stupid to find it comforting. But the knowing was important. It was a relief to find something he had strong feelings about.

She licked her lips.

“I like growing flowers,” she said, making him turn to peer at her. “Well. Growing lots of things, really. But there’s a lot of overlap there, too - more than people think.”

His expression warmed a little – or at least the actual hostility drained away. “Aa… poisons, yeah?”

…also medicine, inks, paper and coded messages or a kind gift at a hospital bedside, but everybody did tend to think of poisons first.
She nodded, though, because: well, yeah. Poisons. That was the big one.

Deidara opened his mouth to say something but then seemed to think better of it.

They watched each other in very awkward silence. Somewhere an analogue clock was ticking.

The case worker cleared his throat. “Ah, well, maybe you could talk a little about where you’re going to live?” he suggested.

Ino couldn’t quell her annoyed look in his direction. If even the hidden villages were hidden, missing nin sure weren’t going to advertise their homes. As if!

She decided to ask the inevitable question before the awkwardness set in, and even as Deidara opened his mouth to speak, she asked: “Did you know my father?”

Deidara seemed compelled to show willing somehow, though, and at the same time he was already saying, “It’s not nearby. I cleared out a room - or, well, supervised clearing out the room – f…”

And he stopped. His expression evinced such a complete lack of change that it had to be fake.

There was a pause.

“I knew him, yeah,” he said finally. “He died when I was seven. You didn’t really miss much.”

“Oh,” said Ino. She hoped fervently that, if she ever had kids, none of them ever looked a stranger in the eye and described her absence as ‘not missing much’.

An unfortunate possibility occurred to Ino then. “You’re a missing nin, right? So, um, am I going to be able to see people?” Ino wondered. “Friends,” she clarified.

Deidara tilted his head. “…probably not.” He looked at her uncertainly. “You could send letters, if they don’t have anything about some stuff in them. Or supervised visits, if we’re careful.”

Ino clenched her jaw. That was… better than she’d expected, but worse than she’d hoped. She’d miss – well, she didn’t talk to Sakura all that much these days, and rarely about anything but Sasuke. And he didn’t talk to her. She’d miss Chouji, though, for all his dull wits and obsession with food. She’d even miss Shikamaru’s whining.

Mostly, though, she’d miss her parents. And they weren’t coming back no matter where she went.

She nodded. “That’s… yeah, okay.”

Deidara made a relieved face. She supposed that could have ended up being harder on both of them.

“Well,” said the case worker, too brightly. “You seem to be getting along just fine, and your time’s up, so, Ino-chan, Deidara-san—”

And here he stood, trying to encourage them to do the same so they could leave his soulless little office.

Ino stood, chewing her bottom lip. “I had an escort here,” she said finally, “a friend’s dad. And they’re probably waiting. Can you take your forehead protector off when we leave?”

“I’m in the bingo book,” Deidara cautioned her.
“Really?” Ino glanced at him, trying to figure out if she’d seen his image before. All the familiar features were ones she’d seen in her face, so it was hard to say.

But then people only really memorised the A and S ranked warnings and bounties, so…

“Hey, hey! Are you saying you don’t think I’m scary?” he asked, shoving his forehead protector in his weapons pouch and ignoring the case worker looking pointedly at the clock.

Ino hesitated. Anyone else she’d have teased, but she didn’t know him well enough, and the truth was that Deidara was scary. When she was close she could feel his chakra, big and restless, and she knew enough to know that surviving a defection from one of the big five wasn’t easy.

“You don’t look scary,” she said, even as she hesitated to exit in front of him because it would mean putting him in her blind spot.

“But I see you’re prepared to be wrong, yeah,” he said cheerfully, sweeping right past her and through the door without a moment’s pause.

She followed him out just in time to see the expression of dawning recognition on Shikaku’s face. And looking at his sleepy eyes narrow, his lax posture shift and stiffen… Yeah. She was prepared to be very wrong.

“This is so troublesome,” murmured Shikaku, discarding his cigarette with a flick of his fingers. “Hokage-sama didn’t intend his decree to apply to Akatsuki,” he complained to the civilian receptionist.

“Who?” Ino asked, blinking.

“If you can cite part of the decree we’ll enforce it, Nara-san,” the receptionist said with a strained smile that spoke of many repetitions. She was looking at him like she thought he was kind of slow. “Unfortunately the Konoha branch of the office of Child Welfare is beholden to the letter of Hokage-sama’s decrees, not their spirit.”

Shikaku heaved a huge, smoky sigh.

“If Hokage-sama’s decrees made any damn sense I wouldn’t have agreed to this in the first place, yeah,” muttered Deidara. He turned away from Shikaku and the reception desk and raised his voice so Ino could hear easily. “Are you coming, or–?”

“We’ll need to set up visits,” Shikaku said, cutting Deidara off. He pushed off from the wall he was leaning against and his shoes made soft, ominous taps on the floor. The shadows swelled and rippled around his feet.

Ino was, somehow, between the two of them - she’d landed there when Deidara had stepped away from the confrontation. She froze, feeling like a mouse before a cobra: motionless, fascinated, terrified.

“No,” said Deidara. Just like that: a hard, flat no.

Ino started because he’d literally just said that they could do that. She frowned and looked over at him. “Deidara?”

His expression was one of pure spite.

“Maa,” sighed Shikaku. “You just don’t like being told what to do.”
…which, given the dull flush that rose over Deidara’s face, was completely accurate.

“Is it really okay if you give a kid to another kid to look after?”

Deidara sputtered. “Maybe you should ask your Hokage that, yeah!”

Shikaku made an annoyed noise like he was contemplating the Herculean effort of doing precisely that. “Nevertheless. We’ll need more than proof of life. Monthly visits are–”

“Ne,” said Ino quietly, ignoring him in favour of inching close enough to be heard by Deidara. “You did say.”

“I know I did,” hissed Deidara, “but now if I do try to organise that it’ll feel like I’m doing it because he said so!”

Ino snorted a small, surprised laugh before she could stop herself.

Shikaku had stopped talking, and was now watching them curiously. Ino wasn’t sure if he could see what they were saying – he could see her mouth, but Deidara had angled himself away.

“Is that really so awful?” Ino asked.

“Only if Danna finds out,” muttered Deidara. Then he sniffed. “Quarterly, on neutral ground,” he said more loudly.

Ino shifted on her toes. Quarterly. That was three months, twelve or thirteen weeks… It felt like a long time. She licked her lips.

“Quarterly,” Shikaku said, eyeing her carefully. Then: “Wind Country.”


“Mmm? Who, then?”

“I don’t care. But not you. Konohagakure’s jounin commander can’t come crawling out to Wind for this every three months,”

“I’m flattered,” drawled Shikaku. “That’s fine, though. It’s a troublesome thing to do anyway. You’ll have to limit your numbers, too. Maybe–”

“Ah, shinobi-tachi,” interrupted the receptionist, jangling her keys pointedly, “our office does close for lunch. I’m afraid you’ll have to take this outside.”

“Just as soon as he lets me go, yeah,” said Deidara, looking pointedly toward his shadow

Ino followed his gaze. She hadn’t even had an inkling.

“Just insurance,” said Shikaku, without moving. “Considering.”

Ino glanced more critically between them. Considering what?

Deidara’s smile was narrow and very sharp. “That’s very fair,” he said sweetly. “You can let go first.”

A pale little leg hooked over Shikaku’s shoulder, and then a smooth clay body was hauled up after it. The little spider sculpture was perfectly articulated and actually very cute.
Ino had no idea what it was doing there or when Deidara had placed it.

“Of the two of us,” said Shikaku, “I’m not the one who’s a known traitor. So we can probably take my word on it, don’t you think?”

“Eh-hem,” said the receptionist. She shook her keys again. “Today, gentlemen, if you don’t mind.”

Deidara pursed his lips. “Let’s call it a show of good faith, yeah,” he said after a second, and the spider crawled off Shikaku’s shoulder and dropped to the floor with a soft, meaty thump.

The spider crawled away and the shadows looping around Deidara’s feet slackened. Deidara took Ino’s elbow just long enough to pull her back with him when he moved out of range.

Then he stopped.

He looked back at Shikaku and clicked his tongue.

There were still shadows trailing away from Shikaku, but now they were no longer tiny thin strings - they swelled as the bulk of the shadows were drawn away from Deidara.

There was a lot more than one clay spider at the end of those.

“So you did notice,” mused Deidara happily.

Shikaku shrugged. “If I let them get much closer, I might get caught in the detonation.”

“Gen-tel-men,” said the receptionist despairingly. “Workplace health and safety regulations require me to take no less than half an hour every six hours. You must leave the building before I can lock up, and I’m three minutes away from being in violation of those regulations. It is time to leave.”

Civilians had the weirdest rules. That, and they actually knew no fear. Ino shook her head incredulously.

Deidara looked between the receptionist and Shikaku. “Mm. I’m ready to go, yeah.”

He looked at Ino.

She swallowed, shot Shikaku one more uncertain look, and followed Deidara out.

“Finally,” muttered the case worker to the receptionist behind them.

“Do you think I can get hazard pay for this?” The receptionist wondered.

“No,” said the case worker ruefully, “but if you need counselling it’s tax deductible.”

“Ooh,” murmured the receptionist.
There's been some re-ordering of this fic so the Ino-and-Deidara stories are next to each other and in chronological order.

The streets were calm and quiet in the capital. It was mostly a civilian city with a few exceptions. The Fire Daimyo's guard was one. Ino had also seen samurai in the streets occasionally, mostly from Iron -- mercenaries passing through, or just tired ronin travelling from place to place. Mostly, though, it was civilian, and that meant that people paid very little attention to them -- without his forehead protector, nobody even seemed to notice Deidara, and the Leaf emblems Ino and Shikaku wore were by far the most common in this part of the world.

One or two people shot them a curious look, but most were busy -- office workers taking their state mandated breaks, loud children tightly controlled by parents' clinging hands, shoppers and petitioners and, distantly, a nobleman in a palanquin who attracted far more interest than they did.

Outwardly, Deidara looked like he was completely ignoring Shikaku. Ino doubted that was true but you couldn't prove it by her. He drew her away from the door of the case workers' tiny office and pulled a tiny sculpture from one pouch. He set it gently on the ground, then stepped back.

"Now would be a good time to say goodbye," Deidara suggested. "But if you really do want to come with me, I don't recommend getting in reach of his shadow, yeah. I'm not built for the hostage stuff."

*Demolitions*, Ino remembered. She looked sideways at him.

Deidara raised his eyebrows. Smiled guilelessly. She bit her lip. Was she really…?

She thought of orphanages, of her father’s advice, of children coming back different. Yeah, she was.

Her proper goodbyes had, in theory, already been conducted at the village gates before dawn - a tentative and surprising peace between her and Sakura, blooming only now under the threat of Ino's absence; an awkward 'well, see you,' with Shikamaru, who had said a lot more by getting up that early to see her off than he actually has with his words; and crushing hugs for both Chouji and Asuma, who she thought she’d miss the most. Hinata-san had appeared, briefly and surprisingly, and shyly gifted Ino a new diary. There was a pressed peony between the pages, a quiet message: *be brave*. Ino hadn't thought they were close, but it was nonetheless a touching gift.

Ino hesitated, then turned and bowed a little toward Shikaku. "Thank you for coming with me and helping," she said.

Shikaku just looked tired. "Anytime, Ino-chan." Then he raised one hand toward Deidara. "Three months."

"Sure, sure," Deidara said, waving this off, and made a gesture at the little sculpture, which expanded with a soft *pop!* and a shift of chakra.
"This is our ride," he told her.

Ino eyed the bird. It was definitely big enough to ride on -- it was big enough that it would have brushed the ceiling inside a building, and much broader than a person. But...

It was a bird.

With wings.

She was thinking that if he'd wanted something that moved all nice and stable across the ground, Deidara probably could have made a bigger version of one of those little spiders.

"It's fine," he told her, peering at her face like he was trying to tell why she was hesitating. "Seriously. It's not going to blow up or anything, yeah."

Ino wasn't scared of heights. She had grown up scrambling through the topmost branches of Konoha's huge trees and she'd been to the top of the Hokage Monument heaps of times. She didn't get a sense of dizzying horror looking down, and most of the time she didn't even think of the possibilities of a fall. She'd never been on anything that literally flew before, though. And there was nothing comforting about the oddly specific assurance that it 'wasn't going to blow up', either.

Carefully, she stepped on, climbing the oddly ramp-like tail. It felt like clay under her feet, damp and malleable and worryingly slippery.

"Your chakra won't be able to stick to it," Deidara said cheerfully, darting up and casually slinging one arm around her middle to hold her on. He had to be close to do it, close enough that their hair mingled in shades of blond and she could smell the iron and chemical residue on him. They weren't bad smells, necessarily, but very... ninja. They were very ninja smells, and not familiar ones. Ino could hardly help how she tensed up.

Then, beneath them, the bird began to move. Its broad wings spread and unbent, casting a huge shadow upon the ground. They flapped once, experimentally, and kicked up a little cloud of dust on the road.

"Oh," said Ino, and she clutched reflexively at the arm around her. She really couldn't stick with her chakra, although that didn't stop her frantically trying. Something about the clay repelled it. And they were definitely about to take flight.

"Bye, Nara-san!" Deidara called over his shoulder. He gave a jaunty wave, which was not returned.

This time the wings gave an almighty thrust. Dust and dirt billowed and obscured half the street, and then there was a flicker of wind chakra at the edges of her senses. The bird launched into the air, taking them with it.

The pressure of their sudden ascent was enough that Ino almost lost her footing. The air tore at her hair and clothing and whipped past her ears.

Ino couldn't quite suppress a yelp. She clung to Deidara with shaking, white-knuckled hands. The actual sound of his laughter was lost to the roar of the air but she could feel the movement of it in his chest where they were pressed together. Below, the ground dropped away, away, away, until the city was a grey blemish on the landscape and the trees were just a slightly fuzzy-looking patch of darker green. She could see the roads running like veins below.

She'd never been scared of heights in her life but she'd also never been this high up before. Her
head felt like it was spinning. Any second now she was going to topple and plummet to the ground.

Deidara was still laughing.

"It's not funny!" Ino yelled to be heard over the roar of the wind as they gained altitude. She smacked his forearm because it was easy to reach.

He dipped his head toward hers. "It is kind of funny," he assured her right into her ear. "A little."

She contemplated stomping on his instep but there was a good chance he was channeling chakra to his feet to keep them attached. Ino didn't fancy being tossed from the bird.

"Come on, Ino-san, I've got you. I won't let you fall. I've never let someone fall, yeah! Well," there was a thoughtful pause, "not by accident."

Ino wished he'd stop trying to comfort her with these doubtless honest but very specific assurances.

The flight was mostly silent because it was a strain to raise their voices that high over the wind. There was nothing particularly skeevy-feeling about the way Deidara was hanging on to her, at least. Ino had had enough men put "friendly" hands on her lower back or around her waist to trust her guts on that one. Although it was kind of awkward to have a relative stranger holding onto her the whole way, she considered it way less awkward than falling to her death.

There was one thing, though.

Ino was pretty confident that Shikaku-san would have some intention of tracking her back to wherever Deidara was taking them, even just as a precaution. But it was also true that Shikaku had not expected Deidara -- and most tracking methods would be useless against a flying enemy. Inuzuka dogs would never find the scent and the byakugan was only useful at a certain distance, which, well, Ino was pretty sure they were at least that far up, never mind the distance over ground. A kikai would be the better bet - the beetles could sense each other from absurd distances and a single one required such minuscule amounts of chakra to survive that most ninja wouldn't even notice them. But the Aburame were not as numerous as the other clans and the chances of one being present in the capital and capable of leaving a tracker on her during the time period were not good.

On the other hand, Ino didn't know Shikaku that well but she did know Shikamaru. Planning for all possible eventualities was kind of the Nara thing.

She unclenched one hand from Deidara's arm where it was hooked around her waist, then dug her fingers into her hair. Her hair was the easiest and most obvious place, so of course she didn't find the tiny female kikaichuu until she got to the wrappings around her waist.

"Ugh." Ino held the tiny dark thing between her fingers. Its little legs kicked at the air in a panic.

"You're bugged," said Deidara down into her ear, sounding oddly delighted.

"Yeah... Shikaku-san had to have organised this before we left." Because what was the point of bringing an Aburame all the way to the capital for a meeting with what was very likely to be a civilian? Shikaku had not had any way of knowing for sure that Ino's mysterious relation would be a missing-nin, and missions had to be paid for.
"No," said Deidara, "you're *bugged*. With a *bug*. It's a pun."

"A...aa," agreed Ino slowly, eyeing him sideways.

It was in fact a very common pun in Konoha, particularly among the Intel field agents who most often did tracking and reconnaissance. It was so common, in fact, that it was almost on par with the ritual 'I'm here to relieve you,' and 'I'm so relieved!' shared between bored chuunin on gate duty.

Deidara, on the other hand, had obviously never considered it before. He held it in for a few more moments, but then her complete lack of response seemed to just make it all the more amusing to him and he snorted inelegantly. "Come on, that's great."

It had delighted Ino the first time she'd heard it, too. At four.

Ino regarded the bug for a second and then flicked it over the clay bird's wing. It quickly disappeared in the wind, presumably not to be heard from again.

It might have been stupid, in a way, given that the bug she'd just killed was probably her only solid chance for getting back to her home village. But she'd made this decision herself, and she wasn't going to endear herself to Deidara by bringing trackers into his house.

The huge clay bird ate the miles, moving swiftly and taking an unobstructed straight line across the sky. A journey that would have taken Ino days on foot took only hours by this method, although it had its downsides. Her face hurt from the biting wind, and as soon as they passed into an area where it was raining her clothes were plastered to her.

Rain at this altitude, with no real shelter, was basically like taking a shower fully clothed. Water was in her eyes and mouth, running down the collar of her clothes, slicking everything to her. It turned the wind icy.

When they finally slowed and began to lose altitude it was in the middle of nowhere in a location that Ino assumed was over the River boarder -- it wasn't barren enough below to be Wind, but it seemed too far to still be in Fire.

It would have been slightly chilly without the water, but after the biting wind up in the air and now soaking wet, it was freezing. Her teeth were chattering.

"There's no point trying to wait it out," sighed Deidara, glancing up at the dark sky. The clay bird shrunk again with a pop of displaced air. "It's basically always like this, yeah."

He bent to collect the much smaller sculpture and tucked it away.

It was only an hour or so at an easy walk, but between stress and bring soaked to the bone Ino found it exhausting. By the time they actually got to the base, she felt like she'd been awake for days.

The base was on the outskirts of a village. This far into River, all the villages had a derelict and industrial feel: cracked windows, chipped concrete, civilians who paid more attention than usual. The building Deidara came home to was grey, squat and ugly with narrow windows and a distinctly foreboding air.

It was also big. Ino had been under the impression that Deidara lived with someone -- a “Danna”, who would make fun of him somehow -- but this place was much too big for three people. She recalled belatedly that Shikaku had referred to a whole group, an ‘Akatsuki’.
She glanced at Deidara, who, far from being relieved to be home, seemed to be working himself up to something. “It’s big,” she pointed out. “Are there a lot of people here?”


Ino paused. Ten people? Ten… she looked back at Deidara. Ten people, and she thought it unlikely they’d be civilians.

Ino was exhausted but she still had plenty of energy to be nervous.

As they came closer, a shape emerged from the entryway: broad and squat and sort of hunched. As they approached more details became clear, until Ino was quite certain that the body under that dark cloak was not human shaped. It was just hunched up all wrong, roach-backed, more like a reptile or an insect than a person. Ino swallowed nervously.

"Ah, Danna," said Deidara, and his shoulders relaxed.

This was--? Ino looked back at the cloaked shape. Was this really okay..? She licked her lips. This person looked a lot more like the intimidating sort of character she’d expect from a missing-nin.

Deidara was still talking. "I'll bet he's grumpy. That jounin commamnder slowed us down... Don't worry, his bark is worse than his bite. Although if he actually bites you, you should..." There was a pause. "Um," said Deidara. "Well, he won't bite you, don't worry. Yeah."

"You're late," growled a voice that seemed to emerge from somewhere deep in the belly of the... person. Creature. Person. Ino inched closer to Deidara.

"Ino-chan had an escort," said Deidara. "And then we ran into the storm. It couldn't be helped."

"Excuses. You could have predicted any of those things."

Deidara sighed. "I didn’t keep you waiting on purpose. Anyway, this is Ino-chan -- Ino-chan, this is Sasori. He’s--"

“Sick of waiting on a brat who doesn’t have the sense to come in out of the rain,” Sasori interrupted waspishly, turning from them to head inside. From what Ino could see of the shape beneath his dark cloak, there was something trailing under it. It might have been a bag or a weapon... or it might have been a long, segmented tail. Whatever it was, it dragged in the puddles he crossed, leaving a narrow trail.

"Er," said Ino, letting Deidara herd her forward and into the big dark doorway of their base. "Pleased to meet you..."

She did not feel particularly pleased to meet this abrupt and intimidating man, but he was obviously important to Deidara. Even if it didn’t seem like Sasori was the kind to be won over... Well, Ino was friendly and enjoyed being liked naturally, of course, but she was also very aware that she’d eschewed the protection of her village and her safety was more or less in the hands of the ninja here.

Ino wanted Deidara to like her, and that meant being friendly to his important people. Obviously.

Sasori cut a glance over his huge hunched shoulder at her. His eyes weren’t right, she thought, with a weird shift in her belly. They were sort of... glassy, not like people’s eyes were glassy, but like they might be made of actual glass.

She swallowed.
He made an annoyed noise and turned back away.

Deidara poked her in the shoulder to get her attention and then when she looked back at him he raised his eyebrows and mouthed, ‘See? Grumpy,’ to her.

Ino gave him a smile, but it felt like she was forcing her face into some strange unfamiliar shape. From the way his eyebrows drew together, looking faintly concerned, she figured she’d done pretty poorly.

The corridor was dark.

Maybe this was a mistake.

Well.

Too late now.
Chapter Summary

There's been some re-ordering so the Ino-and-Deidara stories are next to each other and in chronological order. This is Ino and Deidara and an awkward dinner.

Chapter Notes

From an ask meme on tumblr. The prompt was by exemplarybehaviour, who said: "Prompt meme: Ino and Deidara From That One AU have an awkward family meal"

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It had obviously been Deidara’s attempt at doing something to make Ino feel – well, normal. From the second she’d walked into their hideout on the industrialised outskirts of Ame, nothing had been normal. The sounds and smells were different and the people here - the ones she’d been allowed to meet, at least - were variously crazy or terrifying.

Deidara wasn’t as good a cook as Ino was. He wasn’t even as good a cook as Sakura was, which was a little bit tragic. That much was obvious. But it also wasn’t the point. He hadn’t pulled her from where she was ‘settling in’ (sitting in horrified shock on a new bed in a room that was now hers) and marched her down to the kitchen because he wanted to wow her with his culinary skills.

Food was a good choice, objectively. Everybody ate. It was a point of familiarity. And eating with somebody was an exercise in trust. It was obviously more about trying to make Ino feel okay than it was about the food being good.

The sun was still out, but Ame was a grey place and the light that filtered in through the skylight was dim. It was still plenty of light to see when dinner was being mutilated, though.

“Maybe I should do that?” Ino said weakly, watching Deidara grossly overcook a side of fish. She hopped down from her seat on the sturdy wooden table to peer over his shoulder.

He made a dismayed noise but swiftly surrendered his spatula to her. The teeth in his palm clicked on its handle. The fish …wasn’t really salvageable. She put it aside, pleased that he’d at least had the foresight to get more. Initially it had seemed like a really inappropriate amount of fish but now she realised that half of it was likely to be inedible.

There was a long pause. Ino threw some salt in. At least some salt would help. Deidara-san didn’t seem to remember spices were a thing, which was common in shinobi who took a lot of field missions.

There was a long, uncertain silence. Deidara-san hovered.

“Um. The vegetables need to go on now,” she prompted, uncertain if this was how they were meant to be doing it.
“…right!” Deidara-san said, and cheerfully switched gears to follow her instructions. “That looks good. You must really know your cooking, yeah.”

‘That’ was only partially cooked and she hadn’t done anything much to it, so the compliment was either completely insincere or at least very optimistic. He was probably trying to make her feel more relaxed, but all it did was make her tense. She wondered what else he was lying about.

“Do I cook all of it?” she asked levelly instead of answering.

“If there are leftovers we can eat them later, yeah.”

Looking at the enormous pile of fish she had to wonder how much Deidara was planning to eat.

Ino was silent for a second.

“Right,” she agreed.

He smiled at her.

She smiled back.

They both… smiled.

Ino was actually feeling pretty miserable, but by god he was trying. She could respect that.

Even if he wasn’t a very good cook himself, Deidara followed instructions pretty well when he felt like it, and they succeeded in making a perfectly edible if not exactly gourmet dinner.

“Amazing,” Deidara-san said with what seemed worryingly like genuine awe. He served the rice, fish and vegetables up onto a plate and handed it to her directly. “Ta-da,” he declared.

At least he was cheerful. Ino heaved a relieved sigh and accepted her plate. It was looking like maybe they could get through dinner without –

“Food!” Yelped a voice, and then a whirlwind of dark hair and long limbs and something very orange swooped past.

“ITTADA-gck!”

Deidara clotheslined it with the arm that was still clutching a serving spoon.

“Don’t you dare,” he hissed in a voice that was suddenly way, way less cheerful.

He wrapped his arm around the newcomer’s neck and pulled him closer, into a headlock and now very near the filleting knife in his other hand.

Ino felt her whole body lock up just in time for her brain to remind her that she was stuck in a fortress full of missing-nin again.

Deidara shot her a look that was halfway apologetic. “I won’t be a minute, Ino-chan,” he said in the same deliberately-friendly voice he’d been using for most of the day.

“Senpaaai,” whined the new missing-nin. She hadn’t met this one when she’d arrived. The orange thing was a mask. She couldn’t see any of his face and it only had one eye hole.

Deidara put his spoon down - but not the filleting knife, she noticed - and twisted just enough to grab the masked man’s hair and ran his skull into the corner of the table. The mask only protected
the front of it.

Ino clutched her plate.

“Yamanaka-san, excuse me,” murmured Uchiha Itachi from right behind her.

Ino let out a shriek fit to wake the dead and leapt away.

There was a long pause.

“Slow reflexes,” grunted a hulking man by the door, one with glowering bloodshot eyes and ugly scars.

“She’s a genin, Kakuzu-san,” Itachi said mildly, sidling past her to help himself to their dinner. He passed a plate back to Kakuzu, too. “It’s to be expected.”

“I like genin. They’re easy to catch,” said yet another missing-nin. This one had a symbol on his forehead protector that Ino didn’t recognise. He was white as snow, from his skin to his hair. His eyes were a dark pinkish colour, but he navigated like he had no trouble seeing. Dangly jewellery around his throat, hair just long enough to grab, half-open clothing hanging from his shoulder – either he didn’t fight at close range, or he was very confident. And he was built like a close range fighter.

Instead of helping himself, he took two steps into the room and casually tugged the plate from Ino’s hands.

She gave it up without a fight.

“Thanks, kid,” he laughed. It was bright, but the killing intent was already in his chakra. She could feel it on her skin. He reached forward. She flinched. All he did was smile wider and tug lightly on her hair. It didn’t even hurt.

“Hidan,” said Itachi repressively. Ino could almost feel him staring at the albino one right over her shoulder.

She looked sideways, but Deidara had become embroiled in a shrieking argument with the masked man.

She swallowed.

Slowly, Hidan released her hair. Okay. That was good. Okay.

Ino replaced herself with a chair halfway across the room, conspicuously putting Deidara between her and the rest of them.

“What–” he looked up, looked around, glanced between Itachi and Hidan and made a noise like a teakettle boiling over.

“You can’t just come in here and steal her food,” he snarled, booting the masked man in the ribs one more time – he barely reacted, and then, after a second, made a grand show of fake agony. Deidara left him and stomped toward Hidan. “Give that back!”

“Or what?” Hidan asked, baring his teeth. “She’s not gonna stop me.”

Itachi sighed softly and wove around them to leave.

“Or I’ll stuff you with C4 while you sleep, yeah,” said Deidara. “I’m gonna turn you into mist,”
That was… graphic. Ino swallowed. Even if he did succeed in getting her plate back, Ino wasn’t sure she’d be eating. Her stomach didn’t feel good.

“There, there,” sighed the masked man, getting up – completely uninjured, apparently – and patting her gently on the arm.

“Um?”

“Tobi will get you a new plate if Tobi can have some,” he bargained happily.

Ino looked at the stove, and then at the two bristling missing-nin in front of it and the dark stare of the one leaning in the doorway. Itachi was long gone now, and Ino had never thought he’d be one of the least scary people in a room, but she kind of wanted him back. She’d swap him for Hidan, that was for sure. That man seemed to not even notice that he was leaking killing intent.

“…sure,” she said, because queasy or not, she had to eat sometime.

“Yosh!”

With exaggerated sneaking motions, Tobi made it to the stove and back. Although he was dramatic and silly, Ino did notice that his presence - the sense of his chakra - dropped to almost nothing while he was ‘sneaking’.

He returned just as Hidan finally took a swing at Deidara.

Ino flinched again.

Tobi hooked one arm around her shoulder and shoved a plate into her hands. “Don’t be scared, Ino-chan,” he said cheerfully. He shoveled a piece of fish through… the eye hole… of his mask… Ino twitched. “Think of it as dinner and a show!”
Itachi in a Soulmate AU

Chapter Summary

Itachi gets his soul mark. Itachi's plans can't change.

Chapter Notes

I am so into Soulmate AUs, you have no idea. I just never actually get around to writing them properly?? Except that one Hidan/Ino one ('The One Where Ino And Hidan Are Soulmates by Tozette' -- I'm creative). I wrote this one a while back though and I still really like it, weirdly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Itachi’s soul mark doesn’t arrive until he’s seventeen.

That’s late, in the scheme of things – ninja with soul marks get them young and they lose them quickly. Ninja are the perfect match for other ninja, by and large, and they live fast, short lives.

But Itachi is seventeen years old when his soul mark shows, and it’s not quiet. It comes at mid morning on their third day on the road, a blistering burn on the outside of his thigh that makes him shift his weight and twitch. It’s weird and uncomfortable, bordering on painful.

It’s also completely, inconveniently unmistakable.

Years ago, he’d have been itching to see it, excited with the heady knowledge that his words had come. He’d have dropped everything to roll up the leg of his trousers, to drag his fingers over the writing and see and feel, to stare at it with red eyes whirling so he’d never forget.

Now those words are hidden only by a thin layer of fabric. All Itachi feels is dread.

He doesn’t stop walking.

It’s a nice day, he thinks. It’s bright and sunny, and even if the leaves are fuzzy on their branches to his eyes, they’re still green. He can still smell recent rain and grass crushed underfoot, hear the comforting croak of a raven overhead.

He’s not sure why it’s a nice day.

“Itachi-san?”

He realises he’s slowed and stifles the urge to stretch out his leg. The burning feels oddly like a cramp.

It’s a nice day, and there’s no need to think about soul bonds or people he never wants to know.

He entertains the brief, fickle hope that the mark belongs to Sasuke – it isn’t beyond the realm of
possibility. If something’s happened that’s changed him enough…

Itachi suspects, however, that the formative events in Sasuke’s life have already occurred. If nothing showed up between them on the night of the massacre –

Well.

No.

He’s silent and mechanical through the day, and he doesn’t trust himself to bathe. He won’t be able to help himself.

If Kisame notices, he doesn’t say anything that night.

But of course he does notice eventually, notices that Itachi does his damnedest neither to see nor show that skin, notices that he can’t stop touching it when it’s covered, notices, even, the anxious quality to some of Itachi’s silences. And Kisame, well, he’s a bloodthirsty monster but he’s also profoundly honest, loyal to a fault, and quickly angered by deceit.

“Itachi-san,” he says, finally, looking at his leg in such a terribly pointed way – “It’s not like you to hide an injury.”

He doesn’t say it, but it’s implied: obviously, Kisame doesn’t think it’s an injury.

Itachi blinks thoughtfully. “It’s not,” he agrees. But in agreeing, he allows that there is an ‘it’ to discuss.

The words on his thigh burn occasionally but not unpleasantly. He lays a hand on them sometimes, feels them warming his skin like a painless infection.

He swallows.

“You don’t want to look,” Kisame says, clearly having arrived at the correct conclusion on his own.

Itachi thinks that’s stupid. He knows it’s stupid. It’s sulky, absurd: they will be no more or less real if he looks at the words. They exist regardless. His soulmate will say them.

But he thinks he can live without knowing, at least for as long as he needs to. It will be easier. It will hurt less.

He looks impassively at Kisame. He doesn’t want to say any of those things, so he doesn’t.

“As expected of Itachi-san,” says Kisame, bemused and very nearly fond.

Itachi finds that strange, because he hadn’t expected anything at all. He’d expected to remain–scarred and blemished, because he is, with just as many scars behind as before, but blank of soul marks.

He’s seen people with more than one – seen one woman with eight, dancing without her clothes in a bar in Lightning.

He thought when he was younger that – maybe he’d get one, maybe at least one person…

Then he’d been thirteen and he’d made a decision. And Sasuke’s writing never showed up, and why should it – how could it?
So he’d known then that there would be no writing.

And now Itachi is seventeen, seventeen and walking from Earth through Wind and down to River, seventeen with a loyal monster at his side and the bloodiest future he can grant himself and somebody writing promises on his skin.

“It’s not necessary,” he says finally, when Kisame’s curious, interrogatory looks will not wane.

Kisame smiles flashing his huge pointed teeth at Itachi in the light of their fire. “You’re a strange person, Itachi-san.”

Itachi gives him a blank look, but Kisame doesn’t bring it up again that night – not with his looks or in words.

That doesn’t mean he lets it go, though.

They end up heading slowly for Konoha – because they need to seek the nine tails, certainly, but mostly because Itachi has heard unsettling rumours about Orochimaru’s presence in the village. There’s still time before the finale of the chunin exams, when so many strangers come to watch and the village’s security is impossible to manage. That, of course, is when Orochimaru will strike to vindicate himself upon the village. But Itachi hasn’t exactly forgotten Orochimaru’s ignominious retreat from Akatsuki. He wants the sharingan, and Sasuke is… Itachi doesn’t know how strong he is, can’t really be sure, but he doubts his brother’s ability to protect himself from Orochimaru, so the village had better be holding up their end.

So they’re going to Konoha. They’ll probably miss the inevitable invasion at this pace, but Kisame will ask questions if Itachi pushes their pace. Sarutobi, Itachi hopes, is still sharp enough to prevent the village’s collapse. They’ll all have bigger problems if that happens.

“It’s a girl’s script,” Kisame tells Itachi, days later and apropos of absolutely nothing. They are trying to wash some of the travel dirt away, knee-deep (which means shin-deep, on Kisame) in a sluggish stream, and so of course the writing is there, is on display. And of course Kisame has read it, but it’s not like Itachi was trying to stop him, not now, but –

Itachi thinks, how does kanji look masculine or feminine? and he looks down and

It’s the writing of somebody who has practiced. Who has been made to practice, over and over, until the strokes come by muscle memory just like throwing kunai.

There’s an edge to this writing though, and it’s strangely large, written – in haste, Itachi thinks, although there’s a tremble on the first stroke that makes him feel uncertain about that. He hopes it’s written in haste. The alternative would be ‘under duress.’

It takes him a second to recognise the word.

B Y A K U G A N

“…ah,” says Itachi.

He’s not sure what he expected, but after a brief flicker of surprise, he looks at his soul mark and thinks he was right to dread.

The writing means one thing: he will fight his soul mate.

And Itachi cannot afford to die by anyone’s hand but Sasuke’s.
He looks at the writing that bloomed, so recently and so fiercely, right there on his skin. He touches it with guilty fingers. He thinks of a world where this is possible.

It hurts. It aches in his joints and behind his eyes. He’s as old as the hills, exhausted and breathless with sickness, each breath heavier than the last.

He won’t let a word on his skin stop him.

But the characters whisper their potential, they tell him that a world exists where he could. And Itachi feels older than dirt and cold right down to his bones.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve been thinking about soulmate AUs and thinking about Itachi having a soulmate always leads to him having to choose between giving all of himself over to guilt and misplaced fraternal weirdness and actually trying to do something to help himself and he’s just never going to be brave in the right way to do that last thing. Someone’d have to convince him to give up his enormous, personally costly life plan. Yeowch. To Itachi happiness and positive bonds are immoral and very hard to sell.
The new captain of the Fourth Division makes Kurotsuchi look like Chappy the Happy Bunny.

Chapter Notes

This one comes from a tumblr prompt I answered ten months ago (sorry!) which was "Orochimaru & Hanatarou Yamada dystopian au".

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hanatarou is a medic, and he’s never really been ashamed of that before. Sure, it means people say he’s weak, that he has minimal combat skills – it means, too, that he’s spent a significantly greater amount of time scrubbing sewers than most shinigami, and certainly Hanatarou is also quite used to running errands that should by rights be carried out by the Eleventh Division members who bully him into it.

These are all – more or less – regrettable things, but not shameful ones.

Now?

Now Hanatarou does not know if he wants to be a medic anymore.

The new captain of the Fourth Division makes Kurotsuchi look like Chappy the Happy Bunny.

Their research is impeccable. The are improving their medical skills in leaps and bounds. The combat applications are not something anybody’s willing to look down his nose at, either.

Hanatarou used to be terrified of Kurotsuchi but he’s been working for Orochimaru-taichou for four months now and he’s thinking about applying for a transfer.

Or, well, he’s been thinking about applying for a transfer, except that he hasn’t been able to actually find any of the other officers who’ve applied for a transfer.

Orochimaru-taichou upsets the other captains, but they all clearly know something Hanatarou doesn’t, because he speaks and they all – they flinch and their eyes look anywhere but at him and they back down. Even Kyouraku. Even Soi Fon.

Zaraki didn’t, of course, but now Ayasegawa-taichou does.

Hanatarou hasn’t seen what happened to Zaraki, either, although there is this… thing. In the laboratory.

“Is it human?” Isane asks, soft and uncertain. Hanatarou is there with her, with Orochimaru-taichou, in the halogen-lit brightness of their laboratory.
The thing is a... blob, really. There isn’t much else Hanatarou can say to explain it. It’s large, but relatively shapeless, and it looks a little like what he thinks a human body should look like – if the human in question had all his bones removed and was turned inside out.

There are blood vessels and sweet flesh-coloured muscles contracting and expanding. There are organs gleaming wetly in the light. They are for harvesting, and they work beautifully.

Orochimaru-taichou’s almost eliminated rejection as a risk factor in transplant surgery. His surgeries have a 0.3% risk.

“The transplants work significantly better if the source tissue produces extremely high levels of reiatsu to begin with,” he informs them.

Hanatarou isn’t sure if Isane notices that he hasn’t answered her question.

Hanatarou notices.

He doesn’t ask again.

Sometimes, if he passes close to the blob while completing his rounds, he thinks he can hear yelling.

He hopes he’s wrong.

The blob does have a very high rate of reiatsu production.

It is Kuchiki-taichou who reports that Central 46 is dead – again. Hanatarou feels sorry for them. Politics must be rough.

Kuchiki-taichou, though, looks as though he doesn’t feel anything at all. He’s been looking like that for a while now. The unfortunate disappearance of his younger sister and his own lieutenant have left him a bit …distant.

That might also be the medication he’s taking.

“Poor thing,” purrs Orochimaru-taichou. The sentiment seems very out of place on him, and Hanatarou cannot help but flinch when he starts to laugh. Orochimaru-taichou’s laughter is a soft, raspy thing, but Hanatarou’s heard it rise to a shriek once or twice.

Orochimaru-taichou has been working on ways to trap higher-level hollows so he can study their healing.

“So some of them have such terribly advanced regenerative powers,” he rasps gently when Hanatarou brings him a report from the field medics.


He’s seen other things, too. Bubbling walls of skin-toned flesh: a hollow trap with jagged geometrical lines printed black in its skin. He’s felt the almost captain-class reiatsu thrumming in it.

Hanatarou is neither stupid enough nor brave enough to mention it.

Orochimaru-taichou has the steadiest hands of anybody Hanatarou has ever seen.
This is lucky, because he rarely bothers with anaesthetic during surgery.

“Er,” says Hanatarou, very, very carefully, even as he watches Orochimaru-taichou’s deft fingers twirl his scalpel with vicious, terrifying dexterity.

“Is something the matter?” Orochimaru-taichou asks. His voice is soft and raspy and Hanatarou thinks his eyes might be glowing.

He swallows.

No. He’s pretty sure he doesn’t want to be a medic anymore.

“I… thought that analgesic made recovery faster,” he whispers. He can feel himself shaking, which is terribly unfortunate. The pinch of his reiatsu is the only thing stopping Ukitake-taichou from bleeding out.

As it is, all three of them can see into Jyuushirou’s chest cavity.

He’s struggling to breathe, but then, he’s usually struggling to breathe these days. Orochimaru-taichou seems genuinely certain that the surgery will help, but…

Sometimes Hanatarou isn’t sure Orochimaru-taichou defines “help” in quite the same way as everyone else.

“That’s true,” Orochimaru-taichou agrees, astonishing Hanatarou for a second.

He feels a rush of spine-melting, knee-weakening relief at the statement.

“Howeover, I find the reports of anaesthetised subjects to be unreliable.”

“Oh,” says Hanatarou in a small voice.

At no point does Ukitake-taichou have the breath to scream. He doesn’t die on the operating table, and neither shock nor infection touch him. But he flinches when he sees Hanatarou, and even though he breathes clearly for the first time in centuries, he certainly isn’t well.

Seireitei seems empty, and still Hanatarou is not brave enough to resign. He isn’t even brave enough to run, although nobody would blame him.

He spends most of his time stopping people from dying while Orochimaru-taichou questions them closely in the middle of surgery. He’s very fond of removing pieces of people.

Hanatarou has lost count of the shinigami who won’t look at him.

He doesn’t panic until Orochimaru-taichou pats him on the head. It is gentle, idle, possessive: the way a noblewoman pats a favourite dog.

Hanatarou finds that once he’s begun he cannot stop crying, and he cannot figure out why Orochimaru-taichou’s smiling at him like that.

Chapter End Notes
It's probably really awful how much I like this one. I'm trying to write actual Bleach fanfic (as opposed to another weird crossover) at the moment and I always struggle terribly with writing Bleach, so if you have any encouragement I'd be happy to hear it. Otherwise, let me know if you liked something and/or have a nice night. :)
In Which Gai and Lee Time Travel

Chapter Summary

Lee and Gai go back in time. They have instructions, but Gai clearly has his own priorities about who needs him.

Chapter Notes

Another one from the annals of my blog, and which I hadn't posted here. This one's from back in February '16. :)

“It’s… doable.”

Kakashi delivered his verdict with an expression in his eye like he was soon to expire from sheer mind-numbing boredom.

Lee, on the other hand, accepted this news with a whoop of glee. He whirled upon his teacher and embraced Gai-sensei tearfully.

Kakashi ignored the waves crashing and the sparkling light and the sleazy musical accompaniment with the ease of long hard practice. “Mm. We’ll need Naruto to power it… Tenzou on standby. And Tsunade-hime, for her reserves and her chakra control, if you can find h–”

“OSSU!” Lee snapped a salute, all sharp edges, and then he was gone in a whirl of green and yelling.

“…Maa, maa. Kids these days,” Kakashi drawled. He leaned back against the Hokage’s desk and flipped open Icha Icha Violence to chapter thirteen.

Gai grinned, sparing only a glance for Kakashi as he peered after his student. “Wouldn’t you be excited, my Rival?”

“Mm?”

“To have the chance to relive your life! To make new memories with your precious people, to right past wrongs and thwart unsavoury plots with the fires of your youth!”

“Excited?” Kakashi repeated thoughtfully. He blinked once, slowly. No. Grimly determined, perhaps. Anxious. Terrified of failure. Paralysed by the sight of familiar faces he now knew only as names carved in cold stone. “Mmm… Not really.”

(There was a reason it was not Kakashi being sent back through time.)

Gai looked momentarily incensed that his inspiring commentary had been cut off by Kakashi’s utter lack of enthusiasm. His face reddened, probably with anger. Then he deflated slightly. “Is now really the time for that hip attitude?”
Kakashi made a noise that, interpreted generously, could have been construed as encouragement.

“We are about to embark upon an adventure through time. We’ll do things that have never been done. And the whole world will be better for it.”

Gai said it for all the world as though he wasn’t being torn from where he belonged, thrust through space and time in a very risky technique, and left alone with Lee in what would amount to hostile territory. As though he didn’t have a list of names, dates, places; an assassin’s grim checklist.

“…If you say so,” Kakashi said without looking up from his book.

“Kakashi.”

“Mm?”

“When we go back…” Gai’s voice held the edge of something fierce and determined. “You will not be alone this time.”

Kakashi wasn’t sure if that was meant to be an assurance or a threat. Gai’s company was definitely a mixed blessing. He blinked once, made a vague noise of assent, and went back to reading.

He didn’t look back up until Lee returned, with Tsunade looking hungover and fit to murder, Tenzou blank-faced and blank-eyed and Naruto bouncing off the walls.

“Seriously! Why can’t I go? This is SO COOL,” Naruto was saying at the top of his lungs.

“Future Hokage-sama can’t go gallivanting off through time.” Kakashi yawned. Naruto looked put out, so he added: “I don’t make the rules.”

“Eh? But you’re –”

Tsunade thumped him upon the head, sending him sprawling into a crater, and in the ensuing silence – a frozen silence, filled with people too scared to move lest they rouse her ire – she rubbed her forehead. “Are we doing this or not?”

“Yes, Tsunade-hime,” they chorused as one frightened voice.

Except Naruto. Naruto sat up, rubbed his head, and cursed.

That boy had no sense of self-preservation.

“Now,” Kakashi said, finally straightening as they prepared to start, “if you’re guiding the seal –” he nodded gravely to Gai, who beamed all the harder and shot him a sparkly thumbs-up, “– you’ll need to focus on the point in time you need to arrive at. Are you ready?”

“My heart is prepared,” Gai promised solemnly. He looked at Lee. “We will not falter.”

“…Right,” Kakashi said, with the air of a man who was not touching that statement.

“Gai-sensei! We’re early.” Lee pointed at a newspaper in a store window. He paused. “That date… we’re right before the Third war? Sensei!” He looked at Gai-sensei, who was smiling enigmatically.
“It is,” he agreed. “But we are not early, Lee. We are right on time.”

“We are?”

When Gai-sensei had shared his plot - kept very quiet from the nosy ninja in question - to help Kakashi, Lee had been a little dubious. He would never think ill of his teacher, but he couldn’t help the distinct sense that Kakashi-san was more than capable of taking care of himself.

“He has helped me,” Gai had informed him gravely, eyes dark with something unnameable and fierce. “I have leaned upon my Rival more times than I can count. If there is a way to improve things for him, I will take it.”

Lee had been on board – and crying – within about ten seconds. Gai-sensei!

But from that view point, it had seemed obvious that they were to interrupt the Kanabi Bridge mission on which Obito went missing. That was a lynch pin in this timeline, a pivotal point that changed a lot for Konoha.

But… that wasn’t for years yet.

“Are we going to prevent the war?” Lee’s eyes were huge. Saving comrades was one thing – a beautiful, fulfilling thing that lit his heart with joy – but preventing an entire war?

Gai shook his head.

Lee deflated. “Oh.”

Gai would have liked to, but the war was too important. People changed and developed in those years. Good ninja were often forged in fire. Without he war, Minato would never grow fast enough to become Hokage. And who knew what might happen then? Jiraiya as Hokage? Or worse – Orochimaru?

“No,” he said sadly. “We can’t stop the war. It’s been brewing for years.” Since the last war, basically. That was the nature of war, the nature of shinobi… and something they would change, with fire in their hearts and determination in their fists!

Eventually.

But for now… “We’re going to have tea with an old friend. Somebody who needs us.”

Lee, bless him, was immediately excited to meet any friend of Gai-sensei’s.

He was puzzled when his beloved mentor led him to an unfamiliar door, but he had patience enough to wait. He wasn’t disappointed.

It took almost eight minutes before somebody opened the door, and then Gai-sensei pounced, flinging the door wide enough that it banged against the wall: “Hatake Sakumo!” He bellowed, “WE ARE HERE TO REIGNITE THE WILL OF FIRE IN YOUR HEART.”
In Which... Renegade Fireman Kisame VS Deidara?

Chapter Summary

“Been following me,” says Deidara when Kisame finally catches up with him.

He’s short, lean and ragged in a way that Kisame thinks is probably a lie, despite the birdlike, fragile look about him. He’s not eating enough, obviously, but gossip says this is a kid who could trade blows with pretty much anyone and limp away.

Kisame likes that. He likes that a lot.

[Fill for an anon ask for a dystopian sequel to the fic where Kisame abandons the Akatsuki and becomes a mysterious renegade fireman instead, featuring Deidara.]

Chapter Notes

For the anon prompt: "Are you still doing requests? If so, I'd love to see your take on a Dystopian world au with Renegade Superhero Fireman Kisame and Deidara". The prompt references Renegade Fireman Superhero Kisame, an earlier fic of mine.

Deidara’s reputation precedes him and Kisame isn’t the slightest bit surprised when they end up meeting as opponents. The fires he’s chasing don’t look at all like accidents – Deidara has plainly not even tried to cover them up.

Kisame puts them out because that’s what he does now, that’s his thing: it’s easy and it’s weirdly rewarding and it’s surprising how much goodwill you can garner by putting out fires. Civilians these days stay out of his way and give contradictory Intel to the hunter-nin. One or two of them have even given him weird little baskets of food. He’s discovered these weird little cakes called ‘scones’. He used to think noodles and bread were the only things people made out of wheat flour, but apparently not.

A little girl in a tiny village outside Grass gave him a bracelet of cheap glass beads for no discernible reason. He feels like a giant dork wearing it, but he won’t take it off. It's cool.

Deidara, though.

Yeah, Deidara.

Kisame catches up to him eventually and he finds out that the kid’s pretty much nuts.

He is a kid, too. Kisame will eat his shoes if he’s even twenty yet.

He rejects the Akatsuki’s call just like Kisame, but they haven’t let him go easy. He gets why – Deidara can do enough damage on a big enough scale that even the nine-tails would feel it.

It’s obvious that they didn’t let him go easy – maybe they’re still tracking him, even. It’s not like
his trail’s hard to follow. There’s that hard twitchy edge of genjutsu paranoia about him, one that even Mist doesn’t like to see in their active duty ninja.

He drops out of a tree just ahead, a nice, careful medium distance from Kisame – a calculated arm’s length out of Samehada’s reach. So he’s crazy, but not stupid.

“Been following me,” says Deidara when Kisame finally catches up with him.

He’s short, lean and ragged in a way that Kisame thinks is probably a lie, despite the birdlike, fragile look about him. He’s not eating enough, obviously, but gossip says this is a kid who could trade blows with pretty much anyone and limp away.

Kisame likes that. He likes that a lot.

“Well,” he says, showing off all his pointed teeth, “you keep setting fires.”

“You keep putting them out,” Deidara snarls, a sudden lightning change of mood that sets Kisame’s teeth on edge.

“Yeah,” Kisame agrees slowly, carefully. “It’s kind of my thing,” he admits, and that’s actually the first time he’s said that aloud.

Weird.

“Well, your thing can stop interfering with my art!” Deidara hisses.

There’s a terrible moment there where Kisame looks him in the eye and sees the scars of a life of war, sees a kindred spirit too battered to function under another’s uncertain leadership.

“Art, huh?” And that’s a weird delusion, but he’s heard weirder. People find things to care about, things that aren’t people. But what art has to do with arson sort of escapes him.

Coping mechanism, Kisame thinks, and he has a moment of sympathy for this young, crazy, ragged thing – and he nearly gets his face blown off for his effort.

“Bang,” says Deidara, pretty blue eyes wide and wild. There’s a flush on his face, and something hungry in the way he licks his teeth.

Kisame dodges. Just.

He wasn’t kidding about the sheer scale of Deidara’s attack range.

For a second it’s all heat and enormous force and Kisame staggers – and then he leaps, channeling chakra, flinging himself through the air, away from the blast radius.

“And,” he says to the smoke, “that looks like art to you?”

Something pricks Kisame’s leg, and he reacts only barely in time to fling away the tiny clay insect crawling up his calf. It blows the trunk out of a nearby tree and sends the crown and all its leaves to the dirt.

Smoke billows and the ground shudders.

“I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” says Deidara’s voice, thrown out from somewhere in the smoke. “It’s where we’re all headed anyway,” he tacks on with admiringly straight-faced nihilism. “Ashes. At least this way? We’re brilliant, yeah.”
“Sure,” Kisame says, with the air of a man who isn’t touching any part of that statement, and he draws Samehada.

Deidara puts up a fight that’s wild and frantic and fierce. He’s like an alleycat in a sack, and, yeah, Kisame thinks, this kid’s nuts. Even with the whole ‘inevitable death by burning’ bit aside, this kid’s completely bugfuck crazy.

He kinda likes him, though.

... Or at least he has to assume he does, because Kisame lets him go.

He lets him go, and six months later when he sees him again Deidara’s just as lean and hungry and crazy-vicious, and he’s cornered by a baby-faced, candy-eyed kid (who is, by the by, fucking terrifying) and a scythe-wielding psychopath who won’t stop screaming and–

Kisame drops half an ocean on the monster kid with the red eyes. It’s fast and it comes out of nowhere – not least because Kisame has no reason to interfere.

Three seconds later Deidara shoves a palm full of clay into the crazy yelling dude’s chest, whirls, kicks him in the guts, and turns to flee.

“Might wanna leave, yeah!” He yells back to Kisame.

That, Kisame thinks, is as close to a thank you as he’s gonna get.

He takes Deidara’s advice.

The explosion is… Kisame hesitates to call it ‘art’, but it’s undeniably impressive.
Deidara was... in a bit of a bind.

Literally.

On paper it was a very simple task: infiltrate, search, destroy. Itachi's genjutsu, Deidara's explosives. Both of them were clever enough, and light enough on their feet, to run the search without getting caught.

In... theory.

The whole thing had gone belly up about as soon as they'd discovered that Zetsu's intel was just a little out of date and the whole building was rigged with disruptive sealing arrays. All it had taken was one person to trip the alarm, and then... well, even sharingan based genjutsu didn't work very well with seals firing bursts of random-wavelength chakra everywhere. The ones that did were chakra intensive, and there were a lot of enemies.

And then Deidara's explosives had interacted badly with an airborne poison, leaving both of them dizzy and confused, and then Itachi had had to use his freaky eye-thing in a bid to get them out, and - well.

Well.

It got fuzzy.

There'd been a big redheaded bastard ahead of them with Itachi dangling limply over his shoulder, and Deidara recalled - or his scalp recalled, more accurately - somebody else dragging him by his hair. If his memory ever recovered enough to find out who that had been, he was planning on soaking that shithead's hair in kerosene and lighting a spark.

He'd just been starting to get his feet under him again when he'd been pitched face-first into a table and that huge redhead had kicked his feet apart - a strip search, not a sexual assault, but once you got past the purpose of the thing there was very little difference in why somebody was squeezing your butt cheeks and peering up your anus. Whether it was to make sure there were no poisons up there or for sheer perverse pleasure was pretty much irrelevant.

Standard prisoner protocol.

The big guy was surprisingly good about it, though - thorough but quick and businesslike, if a
little rough. There were others, though. Some asshole with a rough voice commented that he was almost as pretty as a real woman and with all those mouths he could suck "at least" three dicks at once.

Deidara made a singularly disgusted noise. Lame. Laaaaame. As though he'd never heard that one before.

He definitely didn't like the way the one with the pale eyes and sandy brown hair came and ran his fingers over the lips in Deidara's palm, though.

He jerked his hand back before Deidara could bite off a finger. Pity.

The big redheaded bastard laughed, but amusement didn't stop him wedging each of Deidara's mouths open to inspect for false teeth.

Please. As though Deidara would commit suicide with a poison? Honestly.

Even while he was cataloguing the indignities visited upon him (or not visited, actually - some of these jeering assholes were going to scream until their voices broke when he yanked out six yards of their guts and set them on fire, but a couple of them seemed downright decent and he'd make the effort to try to kill them quickly and beautifully), Deidara was paying attention to his captors. A lot of them had the slighter builds, the rumbling earthy chakra, that he associated with Iwa. Their protocols seemed familiar, too...

The big redheaded bastard was completely different - Deidara had no idea where he was from, but he sure wasn't an Iwa native. On the other hand, that made him stand out among the rest of them, stark against their quirks of speech, against their height and body language. In fact a lot of this looked and felt like Iwa nin, which was interesting to Deidara because the compound was on weird edge of Wind Country where it got kind of blurry as to which was Wind and which was River.

None of them were wearing forehead protectors but Deidara had the sneaking, curious suspicion that not all of these guys were missing-nin.

Itachi was usually very protective of his personal space, but he didn't kick up a fuss. Then again, Deidara was not absolutely certain he was really... you know, conscious. The Tsukuyomi, beautiful as it was, took a lot of chakra, and he didn't seem to be focusing.

And then they were covered in suppressing seals. The big redheaded bastard had been perfectly and cheerfully in his element drawing them, all spirally swirls and bloody ink.

"No way out," he'd informed him, "but I can be back down with ramen if you're good for the interrogation boys, you know?"

Deidara had squinted at him.

He didn't feel like the guy was lying.

Weird.

"Are you stupid?" he croaked.

"Wow. Rude," muttered the redhead, and then he'd pulled back and put his brushes away. He smacked Deidara on the ribs. "No ramen for you, nuke-nin-san," he'd said before he'd left.

So now Deidara was naked, tied to Itachi around the waist and strung from the ceiling with one
arm threaded between Itachi’s. Their feet were dangling above the ground, and they'd been tied not just close, but literally together.

It was surprisingly effective, because unless there was some kind of extremely complicated, coordinated cooperation, neither of them would be able to get the leverage to reach their hands with their toes, and - well, he wasn't sure about Itachi, but Deidara did not bend that way. Chakra suppressants took care of untying jutsu.

And, well, any other jutsu, basically, as it turned out. Whoever that guy was, he was good - he'd managed to confine Deidara's chakra to the pathways absolutely necessary for sustaining life only. He hadn't even needed to crack open a reference, either.

"Hey."

Itachi didn't answer. Deidara swung his foot a little and kicked him in the shin, but all that resulted was a tiny shift in breathing. His head remained awkwardly slumped against Deidara's collarbone.

"Shit. Are you drooling on me?" Deidara asked, cringing.

Itachi made a soft grunting noise in response.

"Gross." Definitely still out of it.

It took Deidara about three minutes to determine that he could probably chew through Itachi's neck if he had to.

He was barely conscious. If Deidara was going to do it, now would be ideal.

He was pretty sure nobody would actually miss him.

He sniffed Itachi. He smelled... well, it wasn't like he smelled bad. He just smelled like Itachi. Smoky chakra, rust and sweat. Very... ninja-smelling, that.

Gingerly, Deidara licked his skin. He tasted like something that stung Deidara's tongue and salt. Could he chew through that? Maybe he could pretend it was a genjutsu when the blood came.


Itachi didn't even twitch.

Deidara decided against trying to chew through him. He wouldn't mind killing Itachi, but eating him alive was, like, Zetsu-level messed up.

He moved on to new ideas. In his palms, small mouths ground the fibres of their gags slowly but surely between their teeth.

It was hours before Itachi woke. Deidara's shoulders started aching fiercely by then, but none of their captors had come by and nothing had happened and even though he was anxious and he was trying to think his way out of the situation he was also bored out of his mind.

Of course, as soon as Itachi actually managed to recover enough to be aware, Deidara immediately wished he was unconscious again.

It was a lot easier to ignore somebody's naked body smooshed against his, dangling feet above the ground, when the other body wasn't lucid.

Itachi's eyes flickered beneath their lids, though, and because he was pressed right up against him
Deidara could feel it when he realised his situation and tensed minutely.

"Deidara," he said, soft and alert and with no inflection, and lifted his head. His eyes were blank and black and they drifted, unfocused, over their surroundings.

There was a long, silent, tense pause.

"They have to let us down eventually," said Itachi in a low voice, right into Deidara's ear. "Unless this is an unusual method of execution, they'll need to separate us for questioning."

Deidara had already thought of that. Unsurprising, since he'd been aware for hours longer. It would have been a weird and cruel method of execution - because technically either one of them could escape that death, were they willing to chew through the other. It would be a test of whose nerve broke first.

...It sounded like something they'd do in Iwa. Not sanctioned, necessarily, but the sort of thing that bored guards would get up to. Deidara eyed Itachi and wondered if Konoha was the same. Probably. People were people wherever you went.

"I still haven't completely ruled out chewing through your neck, yeah," he said by way of response.

Itachi didn't even blink. He just looked at Deidara, almost too close to actually focus on, with those blank eyes.

Deidara clenched his jaw. Stupid stoic bastard. "I don't-"

A rattle. Both froze.

"Ah, you're awake," said a voice. The hinges of their cell gave a protesting shriek as the door opened. It was a short ninja, with yellow eyes and careless blond hair, no hitae-ate, broad shoulders, blunt fingers, air of authority - Deidara took in, processed, analysed. Somebody in charge. Somebody with a weird bloodline limit, maybe, considering those eyes? There had definitely been projects trying to create new bloodlines by the time Deidara had abandoned Iwa. He was only a few years older than Deidara, which meant he was young enough to be a product of those experiments.

Redhead Bastard followed him, eating noodles from a plastic bowl. He seemed completely nonchalant about the situation, and Deidara wasn't even sure what he was doing there.

The blond prepared a syringe, which made both of them tense. Whatever was in it, Deidara thought, didn't affect metal, didn't affect glass. The ninja handled it with little care, so it probably wasn't toxic on contact. The dose was large, the liquid clear. He couldn't smell anything.

That still left way too many things for it to be. He stared at it, thoughts racing, heart racing. What the hell was in that needle?

There was some brief, uncomfortable and violent struggling - from both of them, even Itachi, who usually seemed so very composed - but the needle ended up jammed into the meat of Itachi's thigh.

"We'll be ready to collect samples in an hour," said the blond, and Redhead Bastard shrugged as though he didn't know what that meant or, if he did, he didn't care even a little bit. The blond man seemed to find this extremely irritating.

"Can I go?" Redhead Bastard asked, supremely unConcerned. "The seals're fine, I'm due a break,
and I have at least three more bowls getting cold."

The blond ninja sniffed. "I'm surprised they have time to get hot." he sniped. Then he turned and stalked out, leaving Redhead Bastard to lock up after him. Deidara watched for a moment, but he was careful with securing their cell.

They'd injected Itachi, but not Deidara.

That was... odd.

Usually, if you were injecting drugs for lowering inhibitions and telling secrets, you'd give them to everyone and hope for the best. They were all pretty hit and miss, but you might get lucky with one of your captives.

Deidara was dead certain most of these ninja were either from Earth country or actually still in the employ of his own previous Hidden Village. Had they theorised Itachi had lower tolerance because Deidara was an Iwa native?

He scowled, wondering. What was it? What did they know about them that would lead them to treat each of the pair differently? He ran over what had happened in his mind. They knew Itachi was the genjutsu guy, he supposed, and had probably seen the sharingan. But they had seals for that. And chakra suppressants. He scowled.

Maybe they picked at random? Or...

"Feel anything?" he muttered.

Itachi made a negative noise.

That was ...good, he supposed, but also bad.

Ugh. Deidara didn't know why he'd ended up on this stupid mission anyway. They all knew that there were slightly more discrete people in the Akatsuki. They might have recruited for brute force most of the time, but Sasori, Zetsu, Konan, hell, Kakuzu even, were probably better at infiltration than he was. Kisame was probably better at this!

But either way it would have worked out as long as Itachi's goddamn genjutsu had actually worked.

"This," he said quite unfairly to the curve of Itachi's ear, "Is all your damn fault."

Itachi didn't answer, which was actually more annoying than if he had. Annoying and, well, worrying, in its way. Deidara didn't like Itachi but given that they were tied together and covered in chakra suppressing seals, it seemed likely that they'd need each other to get out.

"Say something, yeah," Deidara hissed.

"I'm thinking," said Itachi, as though he thought Deidara might be unfamiliar with the concept. "From here, the records should be only three floors up, so-

The records? The records?

"I take it back. Would you just shut up?" Deidara snapped, cutting him off.

Itachi blinked.

"Fuck the mission, we need to get out of here. We can fix it later, yeah!"
Itachi seemed even more dubious about getting out. "Finding our objective," he said in a very low voice, lips mostly unmoving, "and blowing everything up is much simpler than getting past everybody between us and the exit. Especially if they're expecting an escape attempt," he pointed out.

Deidara could feel him shifting uncomfortably even as he tried to explain. Itachi's skin was weirdly warm and...

...and, uh, his dick was weirdly hard.

He shifted awkwardly. "Deidara-"

"No," said Deidara flatly, staring straight over Itachi's shoulder and trying not to think about it. Sometimes these extremely awkward and completely absurd things happened when ninja were super anxious with no outlet - and also when they were injected with doubtless mind-altering drugs.

There was an awful pop-crunch noise and an annoyed grunt, and then - Deidara was pretty sure people didn't bend that way.

"I think there was ...something in the syringe," Itachi said, ignoring Deidara's attempt to avoid all contemplation of the too-hot, swollen penis rubbing against his hip. "Not a poison."

"You think?" Deidara muttered. "Because I gotta tell you, I can't think of a situation less likely to end in an awkward boner otherwise."

Itachi blinked slowly.

Deidara made a frustrated noise of pique, kicked him in the shin, and then manfully ignored him.

"I hate you," he said, four minutes later. Itachi was still struggling between the drugs and the impromptu vacation into unconsciousness to pay attention to very much. "This is going to hurt so much."

Deidara rolled his shoulder, and then after a second he braced himself with a breath, squeezed his eyes shut, and - there was a filthy wet pop. Deidara's shoulder sagged, the joint rolling grotesquely, and he wrenched it around and slipped the rope over his head. He blinked, rapidly and hard, and his next breath was a wheeze. "Okay," he muttered then. "Okay."

Itachi made a soft curious noise, but his gaze was getting, if anything, hazier. His skin was hot to touch. Oh, this was so not what Deidara had intended to do with his weekend.

With his shoulder dislocated, though, he could get the ropes into a position to pick them apart with his teeth - evidently, none of these ninja were used to restraining men with more than one mouth. It was a common mistake, perfectly understandable.

He unlaced the last of them. "How fast do you think they'll be back?" he wondered. It wasn't a question he expected an answer to, although he'd have been happy to see Itachi thwart his expectations.

Itachi did not. He remained silent.

Deidara dropped to his feet on the floor, bending his knees to absorb the impact. He shut his jaw, squeezed his eyes shut and shoved his shoulder back in. Ow. Ow.
By the time he got Itachi down, the man was useless. He was squirming, restless and agitated, and stared in confused consternation at Deidara.

"Feel like spilling everyone's secrets yet?" Deidara asked.

Itachi took a second to process that question, and then shook his head. "No. Just..."

"Slow and stupid?"

He nodded, tilting his head, and looked at Deidara expectantly. If the drug was a truth serum, it wasn't working any better on Itachi, he decided. The side effects - confusion, hot skin, erection, sweating, agitation - they all indicated that something was going on with his chemistry, but nothing that seemed to be loosening Itachi's tongue.

He supposed he should at least make sure Itachi didn't seem like he had brain damage or anything yet. "What the hell." He squinted at Itachi's pupils - "black eyes, seriously, why?" - and took his pulse at the neck.

Itachi - Itachi sort of... arched into the hand on his neck. He raised his chin, baring more dangerously vulnerable flesh, and sighed softly when Deidara's grip reflexively tightened.

"Are you- are you nuzzling me," Deidara said. Nuzzling was the wrong word, but he wasn't about to say stretching into me, sighing in pleasure, stop that!

Itachi blinked again. "...am I?"

"...you don't know," said Deidara slowly. "What the hell did they gi-"

He stopped. Felt his heart beat kick into overdrive. Felt his pulse jump in his throat. Deidara clenched his fists and swore. "I knew they were Iwa nin," he spat.

He stopped triaging Itachi for poison, though.

"...Deidara?"

"Iwagakure doesn't have doujutsu," said Deidara flatly, suddenly wishing he had clothing to offer Itachi, "and that lost them the war."

Itachi blinked slowly again. "Aa?"

"They don't want you to tell them anything - they want your babies. You're not poisoned, they just roofied you."

"I..." It took a second for that thought to catch up to him, and then Itachi stilled. "That's not good?" he said, but it didn't even sound like a proper statement. He was clearly confused, and given the way he was looking at Deidara, Itachi's eyes weren't even focusing correctly. Dammit. Dammit.

The thing was.

The thing was.

Deidara had actually read mission reports a lot like this.

Standard procedure was, technically, to try to provide succour to the victim of such drugging by getting them off really fast and hoping the drugs cleared out upon orgasm. This had the important effect of removing the impetus for (potentially bloodline-jeopardising) sex with the locals, and of
providing mental clarity for the escape.

The fact that there were a) mission reports and b) standard procedure suggested to Deidara that this was actually more common than anybody really indicated. Or that they were all mortally humiliated and didn't want to discuss it.

Deidara considered Itachi's dick for a second.

He contemplated.

He... *might* go for it, were they not stuck in a cell surrounded by hostiles. Provided Itachi was too out of it to make any smug faces. (So, like... his resting face.)

On the other hand...

...they were trapped in a cell surrounded by hostiles.

"Good thing I have a plan," he announced instead. "Just try not to fuck any oddly obliging young women before I get us out, yeah?"

Itachi said nothing for a moment, brows furrowing. "Why would I...?"

Deidara sputtered. "*Why* woul- Ugh! ...You really are an alien, aren't you?"

Itachi didn't seem to be able to muster the capacity for thinking the answer to that question all the way through. He leaned into Deidara instead, and made a happy sigh at the contact of his skin.

Deidara raised his eyebrows. He supposed that meant he was taking point, then.

Deidara chose to accept it as a kind of cosmic mistake that they were captured in the first place. Minor miscalculations led to this kind of screw up all the time for ninja. While most ninja weren't really good enough to drag a mission back on track by the time they were naked and had all their chakra suppressed and stuff, Deidara and Itachi certainly were.

Getting out of the ropes was fine. Between the mouths in his hands and his willingness to casually dislocate his joints, Deidara was well equipped to untie them.

Getting out of their cell was... mildly more challenging.

The short blond guy returned wearing thick rubber gloves and carrying a dish and a bottle labelled 'FOOD GRADE LUBRICANT' which was distinctly disturbing.

Deidara body-checked him off balance, jammed the side of his bare foot into the bend of the ninja's knee, and wrapped one rubber glove around the man's neck just in time for him to stagger.

The dish fell, and Deidara caught it between his arm and his hip, wincing when he wasn't quick enough to get the bottle. It fell with a soft thump rather than a clatter, but it was still noisier than he'd have liked.

Deidara'd never garotted somebody with a rubber glove before, but it was just as disappointing as most garottings: he felt the strain in his forearms as he twisted the rubber tighter and tighter behind the man's neck, catching bits of his hair as he went. The tendons and veins bulged out, and the poor fellow made some weird grinding noises in the back of his neck.

Deidara counted it off internally - four minutes at least, six to be sure, just like an academy lesson.
Except he'd never been asked how long it took somebody to die while not wearing a stitch of clothing before.

It was a boring death, for exactly all the reasons it was ideal in this situation: quiet, bloodless, scentless, smokeless...

"That was so tiring," he muttered once their captor was dead, ash-faced and bulgy-eyed. It took him a moment to realise that it was tiring because he had minimal access to his chakra - so he was working with the reserves of a clever, experienced, very fit... civilian.

Itachi was swaying gently on his feet, naked, plainly aroused and... inspecting the bottle of 'FOOD GRADE LUBRICANT'.

"There's no food here," he said, eyeing the dead body after a second as though he might have the answer to the implied question.

"This may surprise you, but that's not for food, yeah." Deidara rolled his eyes. The dead guy was too little for any of his clothing to fit either of them, even Deidara. Still, he had weapons, keys and bandages. Deidara loaded himself up and strapped the packs to himself. It felt weird on his naked skin, and would probably chafe, but he'd rather have them than not. "Come on."

Loopy as hell or not, Itachi followed with surprising grace.

Right up until they started sprinting in earnest.

Deidara had to admit he'd never seen anyone try sprinting with a drug-induced, too-swollen erection before. Itachi was starting to make little flinches of pain when his feet hit the ground.

"You'd think it would help you balance, like a tail or something," he gasped, slamming his back into a cold but very solid wall.

Itachi made the single saddest noise he'd ever heard from him when Deidara grabbed his biceps. Deidara ignored that. With his back covered, he could haul Itachi up close to him and give him a second to -

"Are you still holding the lube," he said incredulously.

"It says 'FOOD GRADE'," Itachi pointed out, sounding bewildered, as though that was something so strange and compelling he'd had to cling to it.

"Next time we get captured and somebody wants to rape you, I'll make sure they know you only accept sex grade lube!" Deidara snapped.

"Is that a thing?"

"How should I know? Food grade is probably not proper water-based or -" He stopped. "I'm not having this conversation with you, yeah. Drop the lube. Have a kunai." A pause, the smack of the bottle finally falling, the clink of metal on stone. "Now kill that guy," he added, pointing.

Uncomfortable and off-balance, Itachi obliged. He didn't actually end up using the kunai, instead clutching it protectively. But there was still a really satisfying crunching noise when he elbowed the ninja in question right in the nose. He hit the floor with a dirty-sounding splat, and then there was spreading blood and the bloodshot-bruised whites of his eyes.

Nice. Good.
"Okay," said Deidara, heaving another breath.

That marked the pattern they followed during their decimation of the compound: whatever his actual capacity for rational thinking, as long as Deidara could point and say 'that person needs to go,' Itachi was more of an asset than a liability.

He was still kind of a liability in some ways.

Deidara had never seen anybody with an erection kicked in the dick but it didn't seem like a really fun experience.

It took them roughly thirty minutes to work their way from the cells to the door.

Usually Deidara's work resulted in smoke and ash, beautiful and powerful scents that lingered on his clothes with a corrosive chemical tang. This was nothing like that. Blood was rusty, urine was strange and sharp-sweet, and there was overall a smell of something distinctly meaty, a rank abattoir reek that meant Deidara's sense of smell had basically closed up shop and gone home for the evening.

There was blood in Deidara's hair, thickly matted and drying in little rusty brown flakes. The ringed hilts of the kunai he'd nicked were soaked and slippery with it, and only the fabric wrappings kept his hands from sliding off when he stabbed.

He stabbed a lot.

He felt disgusting.

Then they staggered outside.

"Not you," said Deidara despairingly.

Redheaded Bastard was sitting in the sunshine, slurping at what appeared to be his eighth bowl of noodles.

He turned and squinted at Deidara.

His eyes drifted to Itachi.

Itachi, Deidara was willing to admit, looked like something out of the kind of porn Hidan would probably read.

He was dripping. He looked a bit wild, too, with wide eyes and a smear of brown-red drying across his mouth, and a sweaty, flushed countenance. His hair was slicked to his face and neck.

Also his erection had only gotten worse. It was also dripping. But... not blood.

"Wo-ow," said Redheaded Bastard, conversational and admiring. "No, you know, I'm on break. It's in my contract. No working while on a break."

Deidara eyed him incredulously.

"What?" he bristled, from his half-demolished bowl of ramen to his bloody red hair. "Do you know what kinds of shitty conditions missing nin work under?"

"Yes," said Itachi.

"Exactly. Workers' rights are important, you know?" He peered up at the sun. "My break's only
for another ten minutes though?"

Deidara blinked once. Slowly.

The idea of fighting somebody that proficient with seals with his own chakra locked down was not a good one.


And then he grabbed Itachi by the arm again and tugged on it to get them going again.

So they ran.

Chapter End Notes

Something you liked particularly about this one? Let me know in a comment. : )
The AU Where Hidan is a Dragon and Hinata is a Princess

Chapter Summary

Anon prompt: Hmmm. Out of pure self-interest: Fantasy AU in which Hidan is a dragon and Hinata is a princess who has Had Enough? They burn down villages together. Hidan is pleased by this.

Chapter Notes

Uhh… Feat. “Why IS it always a virgin sacrifice, anyway?” and “Hidan adopts a human as a pet”.

What saves Hinata is a combination of factors. One, the dragon is sated. Two, there’s a weird emphasis on the virginity of the appropriate sacrifice, which the dragon finds either hilarious or disturbing. And three? Hinata does not run. Mostly, in hindsight, because her legs won’t hold her.

By the time Hiashi looks up the oldest lore regarding dragons in the land - one hasn’t even been seen for centuries, after all - the village under attack out in the foothills isn’t really under attack anymore. Half the population has fled, the other half has been roasted or eaten, and the livestock are a complete write off for the season. The village will be lucky if it ever recovers.

When they bring Hinata out there, pale and shaking and feeling queasy and quite sorry for herself, the dragon has already eaten his fill and caused as much havoc as he pleases. He’s asleep: a colossal dark form sprawled in the ruins of the local keep. His huge leathery wings fan out under the sun and move unconsciously with his breath. His clawed feet are bigger than the steady old mare Hinata is riding.

He doesn’t snore, exactly, but he’s so huge his breathing drowns out the wind. He breathes little plumes of smoke when he exhales.

“WELL MET, DRAGON,” bellows Hinata’s guard. This is, she thinks, a very inaccurate way to greet a dragon. A dragon is not well met; a dragon is met quite poorly, in a rain of blood and fire.

Still. The dragon’s face moves, scales shifting like a local tectonic event. He cracks one gleaming amethyst eye open and its huge pupil shifts left, then right, then contracts belatedly in the light.

He’s looking right at her.

Hinata’s heart is beating like a drum. It’s beating hard enough that she thinks it might escape her ribs and run away.

“Get down,” hisses her guard.

Ah. Yes. She should–

Yes.
Hinata swallows. She dismounts. Her knees are weak, and she keeps a white-knuckled grip on the pommel of her saddle for balance.

“As a gift,” announces her guard in a stuttering voice that nonetheless carries. There’s nothing else to make noise, really, except the creak of settling rubble and the rasp of the dragon’s breath. Everything else with any sense has fled. “A virgin bride. Our – our king’s own eldest daughter.”

Once he’s started, her guard seems to draw strength from his own voice. He goes on in this vein at some length, trying to talk up Hinata’s market value like she is actually a bride here – like the dragon might somehow be impressed by her skills and lineage.

Hinata cannot take her eyes off the dragon, and she doubts he cares whether or not she can wield a naginata. Even if he does, she did not come armed. She was not allowed.

The dragon isn’t hungry anymore. This much is clear because he’s already eaten pretty much everything. His bloody breath attests to it. He has also made no actual demands.

He doesn’t seem that surprised to be brought a virgin princess, though.

“Nice,” he draws when the guard is done, and spits out a gout of flame at the man without pausing for breath.

The screaming is fierce, but blessedly brief.

Hinata flinches.

Beside her, her horse gives a wild scream and rears back, ears pinned and eyes rolling. She’s been doing well to get this close to a dragon in the first place. The next frightened plunge rips her reins from Hinata’s numb fingers, but if she’s honest Hinata isn’t holding on very tightly anyway. The horse bolts, steel shoes clattering over the stones.

(It’s sort of funny. She’s such a placid, ancient thing, with a temperament to match Hinata’s. … But instinct drives her and she runs like a young filly now.)

Hinata doesn’t look at the guard. The fire is bright and it takes a lot longer than the screaming to stop. The heat makes Hinata sweat. She can smell it, like cooking pork, like burning hair. If she’s lucky, that’ll be her. If she’s unlucky, the dragon will eat her whole and she’ll die in the burning heat of its guts.

If she’s really unlucky… She’s heard dragons have other hungers. The guard was probably trying to scare her.

But this dragon is huge and terrible and his wings block out the sun. Any horror seems possible.

She averts her eyes and doesn’t look. Not at the guard and not at the dragon. She can’t look. If she look she’ll – scream or vomit or die on the spot. She’s not sure.

It’s all Hinata can do to stand straight. Her father will expect that much, at least. …At least nobody will be able to tell him that she couldn’t look the dragon in the eye.

His breath is like a furnace.

“You gonna run away?” he prompts pointedly.

Hinata struggles to breathe. The heat is one thing but her own fear is making her dizzy.
“No,” she says finally.

There’s a pause.

“Huh,” says the dragon. “Well, why not?”

Hinata flounders. She did not come here expecting she’d be asked to explain anything. “There’s… an old manuscript that says you won’t attack our people anymore if we give you a princess. So it’s… I’m… I have to…” Hinata can hear in the quiet between them the way her voice trails off, frightened and uncertain. She can’t get the words out. She stops.

In the shadow of the dragon, the idea seems even more preposterous.

“A virgin princess, right?” he says. “He was pretty clear on that point.”

“Um…”

“You don’t think that’s kind of weird?”

“I…” She bites her lip. It tastes like smoke. Everything kind of tastes like smoke.

“I mean weird enough that some strange guy can go around telling everyone who’s a virgin but really weird that they think a dragon would care.”

Hinata remains silent. Why a dragon might care about the state of her virginity is a topic her father glossed over in the throne room and her guard lingered upon during the journey.

Hinata looks at the wreckage beneath the end of the dragon’s dark scaly snout. She thinks the lord of the keep’s bed is under there somewhere. She can see goose down. Maybe the dragon is using it like a pillow.

“Hey,” he complains. “I’m talking to you. Jeez, you’re so rude. Aren’t you meant to be a princess?”

“I’m sorry,” she says reflexively. What she’s sorry for she’s not sure, but honestly at this point it’s a catch all apology. Hinata is currently sorry for a lot of things, and frankly a rather sorry person.

“He called you a bride, too,” says the dragon, stretching his wings luxuriously.

The membrane is thinner when they stretch, and in places where the angle to the sunshine is right she can see the veins. It is a sunny day but now that his fire has burned down, Hinata is cold in his gargantuan shadow.

“…It has… It was…” She feels her face flame. “… It’s been mentioned,” she finally gets out. They weren’t sure why else her sexual status was so important. She’s been having nightmares. Graphic ones. Her guard thought they were awful, and funny, and probably accurate.
“Fuck me,” laughs the dragon, a throaty sound that Hinata can feel vibrating through the cracked stone underfoot. “One, that’s disgusting. Your king’s fucking gross. And two, Princess, you’ve got balls of steel, seriously. If I was you, I’d have run away by now.”

She doesn’t know what to say to that. She can’t even look him in the face, so she doesn’t… She doesn’t know what to say to that.

All Hinata knows is that somebody has to be where she’s standing right now and if it isn’t her it’ll be Hanabi. The thought makes her feel even worse, which is sort of a feat because Hinata is already so nervous she might faint.

One massive, filthy paw comes out of nowhere and curls around her, too big and radiating heat and reeking like an abbatoir in summer.

Hinata flinches and screams. This is it, she thinks, and her brain shorts out in a buzzing terrified mess. This is the end. She’s – she’s –

“Shit, ow, don’t make that noise. You humans are so squeaky, I swear.”

Actually she’s okay. Uncomfortable, but okay. A second later the claw deposits her on top of the dragon’s head. The impact jars every bone she has, but it’s very gentle considering the sheer size of the dragon.

“Um,” she says, fighting for breath. The sun is bright up here. The dragon’s scales are dark, black with a reddish sheen in the sun, and along the ridge of his spine and the bones of his wings there are gleaming bone-white markings. If he was any less terrifying he’d be a handsome creature. As it is, Hinata looks at him and thinks he looks deathly and frightening.

The dragon raises his head and she flails and grabs onto a huge curving horn for balance.

“Anyway,” says the dragon, getting to his feet. His spine gives a series of cracks that sound as loud as a hammer on an anvil. “That’s not how sacrifices work at all. Sacrifices are about shared suffering and the glory of God. They’re not willing, that’s stup- wait, do you know about God?” He demands, interrupting himself.

“W-what?”


“O-on the way?”

“To talk to your king, obviously. Fucker has some disgusting ideas about dragons, right?”

That… Does not sound good.

“I–” Hinata breaks off in a strangled gasp when his wings unfurl and he gives them a few experimental beats. Oh dear. Oh no.

He breaks into a run.

Hinata closes her eyes.

She can feel it when they take off because the wind rips into her, powerful and icy and completely terrifying. Beneath her the dragon is a huge warm body and she can halfway hear him saying something about the god of suffering.
He doesn’t land for hours until her fingers are numb and she’s shaking from trying to hold on. There’s ice on his horns and his scales and her clothing are soaked.

“Are you still awake up there?” He asks. She can hear him scowling.

Hinata doesn’t care anymore. “Are you going to eat me?” She asks weakly, finally.

“What? No! Have you been listening to anything I’ve said?”

“I can’t hear you over the wind,” she admits, sagging onto his scales. They’re so much warmer than she is. Her head is floating.

“Oh. You should have said something! Wait, are you slipping? You are. Are you— shit!” Dimly, Hinata feels the dragon drop to his haunches beneath her. When she falls it’s only a couple of metres and she lands with a jarring thump onto a scaled paw.

“Aw,” says the dragon, peering down at her. “Shit. Did I break you?”

Hinata curls into the paw. It’s very warm, even if it smells like bloody death.

“I,” says the dragon in a tone of dawning realisation, “don’t know anything about keeping a human.”

The last thing Hinata hears before she drops into an exhausted doze is “I bet Kakuzu will know what to do—” and then she’s gone, lights out, black void. Hopefully when she wakes up this will all have been a strange, oddly real dream…
It was a fine morning in Ame, where the rain had softened to a misty drizzle and the sunlight poured through in patchy spots. Ame was a great spot for rainbows on mornings like this – all the water and the metal were very reflective, and the air was full of colour. And there Hidan was, up with the sun and just finished his morning prayers, ready for breakfast and quietly minding his own business.

…Admittedly this was a pretty suspect start to any day, especially if Hidan was the one telling the story.

Hidan was not a reticent or introverted person, and the business he minded was rarely just his own; it was Kakuzu’s, at least, and most of the others’, when they were around. When he wasn’t picking fights, he was usually offering suggestions as to how they might better recommend their souls to the god of suffering, which didn’t really endear him to anyone.

Nevertheless, Hidan actually was minding his own business. He was sitting in the broad common room, eating his breakfast and watching Sasori shove Deidara down the stairs and across the room toward their large, messy communal kitchen, bickering all the way.

“Sleep, danna~”

“You’ve had hours to sleep~”

“Two. I’ve had two hours. I need nine.”

“I’m not waiting nine hours,” Sasori growled, sounding so much like Hiruko that Hidan almost looked for the hulking puppet. But no. It was just the sound coming from Sasori’s own blank-eyed, doll-like face. “Eat,” he commanded, equally dire, and stared at Deidara like he could force him to move faster just by the sheer force behind his eyeballs.

There was a long pause.

Then, reluctantly, the clink of kitchenware.

And then Kakuzu came out of fucking nowhere and slammed his hands on Hidan’s table with an almighty bang – in the kitchen, Deidara yelped and something broke and Sasori made a noise of
pure murderous pique – and hissed, about three centimetres from Hidan’s face: “Hidan.”

All the hair on Hidan’s person stood on end and he twitched wildly, sending a piece of mackerel flying. It landed in his hair. “SHIT. WHAT. WHERE THE FUCK DID YOU COME FROM.”

Kakuzu ignored this completely. “Does your taxable income ever exceed three hundred and eighty thousand ryo?”

“What,” said Hidan. The wayward piece of mackerel fell from his hair and to the table. He didn’t take his attention off Kakuzu - doing that never ended well - but he saw it in his peripheral vision. His eyes narrowed.

“…Oddly specific,” said Deidara slowly, peering over a kitchen bench to see them.

Sasori pulled him back on task by the hair. “Brat, if we’re not out that door in the next ten minutes—”

“Yeah, yeah,” mumbled Deidara, drowning out whatever Sasori said next, which was something about while you’re sleeping and lye in your eyes.

Hidan put his hand on Kakuzu’s face - blessedly covered by a cloth mask for the most part - and pushed it away.

Kakuzu grabbed his wrist and squeezed until the bones ground together under the pressure, a fierce and radiating ache. He did, however, back off slightly, which was worth the bruises – they’d go away in a minute anyway.

“I don’t know.” Hidan flicked the piece of fish off the table and toward Kakuzu, who ignored it – ostensibly, anyway, although Hidan was pretty sure he saw an eyebrow twitch.

“You don’t know,” Kakuzu repeated, in a very different tone. This one was ominous in the same way that bone-deep rumblings from the belly of the earth were ominous.

“…Uh,” murmured Deidara from somewhere deeper in the room, where the sharp smell of too-strong, slightly burnt coffee was rising. “Danna I think I’m done here—”

“Finally.”

They left in a whirl of black and red and trailing yellow hair. Hidan never really looked away from Kakuzu, but the room felt emptier without the threatening weight of Sasori’s chakra saturating the air.

Hidan leaned back and sighed, snapping up some rice with his chopsticks. Whatever this shit was, it wasn’t worth letting his breakfast go cold. “You do all the money shit,” he pointed out, scraping his chopsticks with his teeth and pointing it back at Kakuzu.

Kakuzu eyed the end of the chopsticks and his jaw clenched behind that dumb mask, but then he made a noise in his throat. Hidan was kind of a connoisseur of Kakuzu-sounds, and this one was a you’re an idiot but that is a valid point because I would never leave something that important in your hands noise.

“Fine,” he ground out. “Do you earn any other taxable income?”

“What, like, other than what we take from the bodies?” Hidan wasn’t too sure who’d cooked the fish he’d appropriated reheated for breakfast but it wasn’t half-bad, which ruled out a lot of possible cooks.
“That’s not taxable income, Hidan.”

“I don’t fucking know! How the hell should I know what a ‘taxable income’ is or isn’t? This is all the kind of shit you care about – you go to hell for caring more about the money system than your soul, you know.” Hidan let his chopsticks drop to the table with a clatter and turned the full force of his body language on Kakuzu.

“Good.” Instead of getting pissed off, Kakuzu glared at him. “We’re going to get married.”

Honestly, that made about as much sense as anything Kakuzu said at this time of the morning, so Hidan didn’t regard it as particularly strange. He had to keep in mind that Kakuzu also said things like ‘this person’s death is worth significantly more than this other person’s death’, like you could put a ryo value on suffering – or a ryo value on so much aging flesh once the body was empty.

Kakuzu was a good guy, for an atheist, but he was also kind of fucked up. Hidan tried to be understanding about it but it got on his nerves a lot.

And marriage was a religious ceremony so he probably didn’t understand any of it anyway. “Lying’s a sin. And I’m not sharing your suffering for the rest of your fucking life,” Hidan said flatly. He went back to his breakfast.

“For tax,” Kakuzu clarified impatiently.

Of course he wanted to lie about a fairly important – not like, the most important, not like an actual death sacrifice, but binding yourself permanently to one or several other people so you felt all their pain and suffering forever was fairly important in the scheme of things – religious ceremony so he could have more money. Of course.

It was such… classic Kakuzu, Hidan didn’t know why he still had the energy to feel this disgusted.

“No,” he said flatly. He got the feeling Kakuzu was going to insist – which, seriously, how fucked up was Kakuzu, anyway? – and he curled his fingers around the handle of his scythe. “I can’t fucking believe – no, I’m not going to marry you.”

There was a long glaring moment. He could feel Kakuzu’s chakra rising like a tidal wave, a tense towering body of murderous intent and danger, just waiting for an unsuspecting head to break upon.

“… We will come back later,” said Itachi from the doorway, followed by the sound of pointedly audible, retreating footsteps.

“You’re not at all curious about that conversation, Itachi-san?” asked Kisame’s voice politely, disappearing into silence as they got further away.

“…We’re going to get civil-unioned for tax,” he amended after a moment.

Hidan paused. Squinted. “Mm?”

“You sign a paper,” Kakuzu clarified. “It says we live together and share expenses.”

“We do live together and share expenses,” Hidan pointed out. That wasn’t a lie.

“I know,” said Kakuzu, in a flat and unhappy sort of way, which seemed to suggest to Hidan that he’d rather not share expenses with anyone. (Or, possibly, live with anyone. But Hidan knew that couldn’t be the case. For all his temper, Kakuzu was a surprisingly nice guy.)
“And this is for… tax?” Hidan was not actually very familiar with how tax systems worked; he had been, briefly, a shinobi in the employ of a village and drawn all his income from the village’s work – his tax was handled by the village and he’d never felt like he really missed an opportunity by avoiding a bunch of thrilling paperwork.

“The marriage deduction is significant. And I can get an income tax exemption based on your medical expenses,” said Kakuzu, in a voice gone all warm and soft around the edges. “And when we sell the safehouse in Wind I can get almost twenty eight million ryo exempted—”

“Do you even make twenty eight million ryo?” That was kind of a lot. Hidan didn’t know a lot about money – did not, actually, want to know a lot about money – but that was a lot. Especially if money earned killing people somehow didn’t count. What was even taxable income?

Kakuzu’s expression contorted. “Don’t be stupid.”

Hidan scowled. “You said some stuff wasn’t taxable, don’t be an asshole.”

Too late for that, of course. That’s what Hidan got for showing interest in this dumb shit, wasn’t it?

Kakuzu leaned in. “Are you going to m– enter into a civil union with me or not?”

Hidan shoved another piece of fish into his mouth. “Sure, fine, whatever. Like it matters to me what you do to your soul.”

Strangely, this seemed to make Kakuzu happier. “Excellent.” Then, after a pause, “I’m almost certain Deidara has no legitimate business interests either, so we should adopt him as a dependent.”

Hidan spat out his fish. “What the fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

Hidan and Kakuzu are actually really cute with each other in canon. Just sayin’.

And I’m sorry, Deidara, you deserve so much more sleep than you’re getting :(:(:(

Anyway, you know the drill: if you liked something, let me know.

If you have a prompt you’re welcome to leave it for me at tozettetricstuff.tumblr.com/ask or tozettewrites.tumblr.com/ask and if I can think of something fun for it I’ll fill it; if I can’t you’ll probably think the kracken ate it, sry
Hogwarts AU: Hinata Takes A Baby Step Toward Delinquency

Chapter Summary

Hinata, Kakuzu, Hidan and ...Unicorns?

Hinata crept out just as the sun was coming up. She didn’t wake any of the girls in her dorm, and when she got down stairs there was only Kiba passed out on the couch in the common room. His familiar was flopped across his belly, snoring softly.

She headed out to the Quidditch pitch with nobody in Gryffindor tower the wiser. It was cold outside, and the sky was a kind of luminous slate, dim but lightening even as she walked. The grass was icy and damp and her breath steamed in the air.

The Slytherin Quidditch team was already in the air when she made it down, although it looked more like play than practice – Sasuke seemed more determined to put the quaffle through Naruto’s head than through any of the hoops, and Naruto was laughing loudly, calling out increasingly rude challenges as he diverted each attempt.

As Hinata came closer, he flipped in mid-air, using the bristles of his broom to smack the quaffle away from the hoops. The sky was lightening to silver grey as she climbed up to the stand, and it caught Naruto’s bright hair fiercely in its light.

“You haven’t scored yet,” he reminded Sasuke cheerfully.

Hinata cringed a little, because it didn’t take a genius to know what came next.

Naruto bellowed, somehow surprised when Sasuke flattened himself to his broom and sped toward him. One pointy elbow connected with Naruto’s belly, sending him into a shrieking spin in mid-air which was halted only by the painful intervention of a goalpost.

The quaffle went through the centre hoop with a whoosh and a ding! from the scoring charms.

“That’s a foul, bastard!” yelled Naruto, although he didn’t sound like he was very upset.

Even from her distance, Hinata could see Sasuke look at the quaffle, then at Naruto and then back to the quaffle. She could imagine the telltale narrowing of his eyes.

“Hey, what—”

Predictably, he hurled it at Naruto’s face. It made a loud whap when it connected.

"That’s her, isn’t it? She’s the only Gryffindor here – Hey, Hyuuga, right?"

Hinata turned, alarmed at being addressed.

She blinked once, slowly, and felt her stomach knot up. She knew the people approaching her, but only by reputation. They were both older than her - fifth years. The reputation she knew them by was… not good.

Kakuzu was big, raw-boned but broad and getting broader all the time. He was barely sixteen and
taller than most grown men she knew. His dark skin was peppered with ugly scars – his parents had been high-ranked followers of Grindelwald’s, and the scars were rumoured to be some kind of dark magic of theirs gone awry. Rumour also said Kakuzu had shown up knowing more curses when he was Sorted than most students did by fourth year.

Hinata tried not to put much stock in that because knowing a lot of curses was basically self defence in Slytherin house, as far as she could tell – even Naruto knew more hexes than he really should, and he was as close to harmless as they came. She’d seen him cast one that turned all the victim’s hair to noodles. The Ramenator Jinx was a completely original hex. It was very impressive, even if their teachers didn’t seem to entirely agree.

The other boy was the one who’d called her name, which was unfortunate and.. maybe a bit frightening. Hinata didn’t want either of them even knowing she existed, but if one of them had to she’d have taken Kakuzu any day.

Everybody knew Hidan had no parents. His mother had died birthing him – almost unheard of in the Wizarding World – and his father had made the papers four years ago, dead with his guts hanging out in some horrific ritual sacrifice to an old god whose name no one could pronounce. Hidan looked unearthly with his colourless skin and hair and bright pink eyes, and even if Hinata didn’t hold with pureblood prejudices about children who killed their mothers just by being born, or children the sun wouldn’t touch, or –

Well. Hidan made her nervous just by existing. And now, apparently… he knew her name. Hinata’s hands were starting to sweat just thinking about it.

“Neji’s cousin, right?” he said carelessly, swooping down on one side of her. His robes were all black, with none of the tokens of house pride other students put on them.

“Ah… that’s true,” she said cautiously. Kakuzu had somehow ended up on her other side, towering over her, and the early morning was even colder in his shadow. Hinata licked her lips.

High above, the Slytherin seeker put her fingers to her lips and gave a shrill whistle, drawing everyone’s attention. Karin looked strange with her hair pulled tightly away from her face, but nobody was allowed to play with their hair loose. She let go of her broom handle with one hand and gestured while she yelled over the wind. “Naruto, stop messing around! Sasuke—” a brief pause, like she hesitated to tell him off, then, marginally less aggressive, “—that’s what bludgers are for!”

Naruto gave an outraged squawk.

“She’s so damn loud,” muttered Hidan, much closer, scowling up at Karin.

Hinata twitched at the sound of his voice. Well, at least if his strange pink eyes were fixed on Karin then they weren’t looking at Hinata.

“Can you really make that criticism?” Kakuzu wondered. His voice rumbled up like something from the belly of the earth. It was probably the first time Hinata had actually heard him speak. His voice was deeper than she expected.

“What’s that meant to mean?” Hidan asked. He turned back, eyes narrowed, chin raised.

Between them, Hinata froze. She couldn’t think of anywhere she wanted to be less right now. Maybe her father’s study. Or Azkaban.

“Nobody’s louder than you,” said Kakuzu, like he couldn’t even feel Hidan’s deeply unsettling regard testing on him.
Hidan spat. Hinata flinched.

“At least when I’m talking it’s about something important,” he growled.

“Stop it,” said Kakuzu. Hidan bristled even more at that. Hinata clutched her wand. She desperately needed to practice her shield charms. “You’ll scare her.”

Hidan subsided in confusion. He peered down at her. “Nah, she’s a Gryffindor, isn’t she? What’re you even doing watching them?” he wondered aloud. His eyebrow quirked. “Oh… Spying?”

Spying? “No!”

“She’s always out here, according to Yamanaka,” said Kakuzu. “I doubt she’s spying. If she was, the Gryffindor team wouldn’t always be so surprised by their tactics.”

“…Hm, is that so?” mused Hidan, looking between Hinata and the flying figures above.

“Um…” Hinata looked between them. She still wasn’t sure what they wanted with her and she was very uncomfortable sandwiched between them like this. “Can… Can I help you?”

“Yes,” Kakuzu said, which was not at all what Hinata had been hoping to hear. “You do Care of Magical Creatures, right? How are you with unicorns?”

“Er,” said Hinata. She’d met one unicorn, and it hadn’t been in class. She knew they weren’t friendly to a lot of people, supposedly people with, er, impure natures…

She looked uncertainly between the two upperclassmen. What if they’d found a sick one, or a lost foal or something? Hinata chewed her bottom lip. It couldn’t hurt to be honest, could it?

“Um, I don’t know a lot about them but they’re… friendly…?”

“Fuck yes,” exploded Hidan, beaming. It was a very alarming expression to have directed at her – Hinata was worried that anything that made Hidan look like that was not a good thing at all. “I told you. I knew she’d be able to do it. She’s exactly the type!”

Kakuzu shot him an annoyed look and clicked his tongue against his teeth, impatient. “I didn’t say she wasn’t. We’re out here, aren’t we?” He looked back at Hinata. “Can you get one to come and stay still?”

“I-” Hinata hesitated. “I think so,” she said slowly, swallowing, and looked anywhere but at the pair of them. “But–”

But I’m not sure I want to do whatever you’re thinking about, she wanted to add, but it didn’t come out at all. So much for bravery!

She chewed her bottom lip. How did she say it..? “Um…”

“Good,” he said flatly. Then he took her by one shoulder - and his hand was heavy and hot in the icy dawn air - and steered her down from the stands.

Hinata glanced up to where most of the team had finally gathered and was now paying proper attention to its small, vicious captain. Naruto’s hair was bright like a beacon. She saw him stick one arm out and shove Sasuke sideways without ever looking away from whatever Mei was saying.

“Where…”
“The forest, obviously,” said Hidan. He fell into step on Hinata’s other side just as soon as they were on the ground and there was room to do it. Bookended between the two of them, Hinata found herself propelled toward the sprawling greenish shadow of the forest.

The *Forbidden* Forest. Which was… forbidden. As in, they should not go there.

“Ah, are you sure we should… um, that is…” None of Hinata’s words were coming out right today. Or… most days, really.

“Spit it out,” ordered Kakuzu.

Hinata flinched. “Ah, that is… the forest, is. Um. We can’t… go there?”

She’d only come out of the castle to watch the Slytherins at practice – Naruto-kun was their keeper this year and she… Hinata liked to watch him. That was all.

She didn’t understand why they were out there anyway. It was six in the morning, barely light outside, and even third years like Hinata knew Kakuzu didn’t care about Quidditch. And it wasn’t even Hidan’s house! But they’d been right there, like they were waiting for her specifically or something – except that was impossible. Surely if they’d been looking for her, a *Gryffindor* practice would have been the right place? Or– or lunch in the Great Hall, not a six am ambush!

And if they’d been looking for her specifically for, for some kind of presumed skill with unicorns? What did that mean they thought about her…?

Her face was warm. She suspected she was blushing fiercely.

Hidan, at some point, had started to laugh - real, shoulder-shaking peals of laughter.

“We can go wherever we want,” he said breathlessly when he’d finally recovered from this bout of hilarity. “The forest’s a little dangerous, but not if you’re not stupid. If we get caught we might lose points or something–” here Hinata cringed “–but it’s not like we *can’t* go.”

That was exactly what it was like! Hinata still remembered the shame and embarrassment of losing points for forgetting her homework once in second year. It had been the only time – but she could almost feel everybody in the classroom looking at her when she thought about it. It had been a terrible moment – her burning face and the horrid swooping feeling in her guts and the unsteady trembling of her fingers and –

“Yo, seriously, calm down. It’s not that dangerous, Shub-Niggurath’s tits, it’ll be fine. Half the teachers aren’t even up to catch us.”

Hinata was not sure what a shub niggurath was, but the word echoed strangely on the air and one of Kakuzu’s stiff shoulders gave a twitch almost like a flinch.

“Um,” said Hinata. Trees loomed.

They were definitely going into the forest.

Visions of being caught - of humiliating points losses, or – oh Merlin – *detention* flashed before Hinata’s eyes.

What if they *told her dad*? He was still not quite recovered from the shock of his daughter being sorted into *Gryffindor*, but detention? It would be just the proof he needed that she was destined to be a delinquent.
But she couldn’t say no to Hidan and Kakuzu, not really. They were bigger, older, and Kakuzu had a firm grip on her shoulder. Even aside from all that, with the things she’d heard about them – she’d be safer in the forest than disagreeing with them. She knew Obito, one of the fifth years in Gryffindor, was friends with them, and Obito was –

She swallowed down the feeling of nausea.

Hinata was so preoccupied with visions of doom that she barely noticed when they passed the first big tree. Suddenly it just seemed that they were in the forest proper.

It was still dark under the canopy - it would be another hour until sunrise in the forest. The trees were huge, dark pillars looming out of the dimness, and everything smelled of wet leaves, moss and earthy things. Small twigs and rocks crunched underfoot as they went. It was much colder than it had been in the open air. Abruptly, Kakuzu’s hand felt like the only warm thing left in the word. Hinata shivered.

They quieted as they went, even Hidan, which felt ominous.

Kakuzu steered her unhesitatingly toward clearing deep in the forest, where dawn was at least touching the air. There was a big dry rock in its centre, and that was where they prodded her to sit.

“Um,” said Hinata. The rock was cold. The air was cold. She tucked her hands into her sleeves.

“This is going to be so boring,” Hidan complained.

“You can leave.”

“Piss off.”

“Then don’t complain.”

They waited in awkward silence for a few long minutes. Hidan sighed a huge sigh, then slumped back against the trunk of a huge tree. Kakuzu didn’t move.

Hinata worried at the sleeve of her sweater. “Um. Are we…” She still wasn’t sure what was going on.

“They come here sometimes,” Kakuzu explained. “We’ve seen them. They won’t stay still for us, though,” he added, scowling.

“O-oh.” Hinata, to put it delicately, was not surprised that Kakuzu didn’t exactly attract unicorns. And Hidan – well, you could almost taste the dark arts on Hidan. That thought made her heart skip a beat, because dark arts and unicorns, well –

It was such an awful, rude thing to ask somebody, but her mouth moved almost on its own: “You’re not, um, you’re not going to h-hurt…?” and then her voice died, trailing off into a mortified silence.

There was a pause. Hidan made a low huffing sound of laughter, short and surprised. “Wow, you must think we’re real shitty pieces of work,” he said.

Hinata’s heart was thundering now, jumping in its unsettled cage between her lungs. She lowered her eyes to her hands. “Sorry. I –”

“Whatever you might think of me personally,” Kakuzu said, without changing expression, “assume I’m not so stupid as to kill a unicorn… or use tainted unicorn blood for anything. You’d
have to be a moron.”

She nodded in humiliated silence.

It took almost no time before they heard the sound of hooves crunching in the undergrowth, although the minutes crawled by like hours.

Finally, a pale equine face peered out from around a tree trunk. Its eyes were huge and dark and its ears were pricked forward. The horn on its head was as long as Hinata’s arm, gleaming silver and wickedly sharp. After a long curious second, the unicorn dropped its head and sauntered on closer, horn bobbing with every leisurely step.

As she got closer, Hinata could see it was a mare - easy to tell, since she was fat and swollen with a foal. She was swaybacked and there was some pure white coming in among the silvery hair on her nose.

The wan morning sunlight shone down on her coat and made her glow silvery and beautiful in the dim forest.

Even just seeing her made Hinata breathe a little easier. The clearing felt warmer for her arrival.

She ignored Hidan and Kakuzu and approached Hinata to nose at her shoulder, careful with her horn. Hinata sat still, almost afraid to breathe.

The unicorn made a low noise, shoving harder with her nose.

“A…Ah,” murmured Hinata, and obligingly reached up and scratched her withers. The mare wickered happily and shivered.

“Fucking uncanny,” muttered Hidan from his seat at the foot of the tree. “Told you.” Kakuzu ignored him. He uncrossed his arms and dug around until he came up with a silver potions knife and a crystal phial, the sort people used to keep magical impurities out. If they didn’t want blood… he must want the hair, Hinata realised.

Kakuzu’s approach was noisy in the quiet forest, a crunch-crunch-crunch of boots over bark and twigs and leaves. The mare’s ear twitched in his direction uncertainly.

Her eyes widened and her head – and her horn – rose abruptly. “Um, I think it’s best to introduce yourself,” Hinata said nervously. Kakuzu paused. “Introduce myself,” he echoed, sounding dubious. “Here,” Hinata held out a hand. She wasn’t quite sure where her confidence came from – she felt better with the unicorn there, with her big shining warmth right at her side. It was easy to take Kakuzu’s wrist and draw him two steps closer. The unicorn gave him a long, steady look. He shifted on his feet, knife forgotten in one hand. The unicorn transferred her gaze to Hinata. She looked faintly judgmental. “Sorry,” said Hinata, although she couldn’t tell quite what she was sorry for. “They’ve never let you that close before,” Hidan said thoughtfully. Then his voice took a turn for the sly. “Is it true about unicorns and virgins?” Hinata’s face was very, very hot. “That’s a muggle mistranslation,” Kakuzu corrected him flatly. “They like people who have pure intentions. And they can sense dark magic.” Carefully, he began cutting long coarse hairs from the unicorn’s tail.

The unicorn looked up at the first tug and turned a baleful eye – and her long, sharp horn – on him.

Kakuzu stilled.

“Hyuuga,” he hissed.
“Oh!” said Hinata, who had sort of shut down from embarrassment at Hidan’s question. “Um. Yes. Hello,” she said to the unicorn, holding her hand out again.

The mare gave Kakuzu an unimpressed look for a few long, dangerous seconds.

Then she huffed, blowing her sides out dramatically, and returned her attention to Hinata.

Kakuzu’s shoulders relaxed visibly. “Good. That’s good,” he muttered. For the first time Hinata got the impression that he, too, was anxious about this.

The unicorn seemed to realise she was looking at Kakuzu again, because she shoved her nose insistently into Hinata’s hand.

“I don’t have anything for you,” Hinata admitted. The mare snorted and shook her head, sending her mane swishing back and forth.

“Would that work?” Kakuzu asked in his flat, gravelly voice.

“Er… Probably.” Bribing animals with high value treats was Care Of Magical Creatures 101.

“Good. You can bring her something next time.”

“N–” Next time? Hinata twitched. “Next time?”

“Yeah,” Hidan agreed, getting up and stretching. “Unicorn hair’s worth more than gold. But we don’t want to shave any of ‘em bald, do we?”

The mare twitched and stomped one hoof. “You’re selling it?” Hinata asked in surprise.

Kakuzu grunted an affirmative. “Neither of us comes from a background like yours,” he said. “The orphans’ fund doesn’t provide everything. That must mean that Kakuzu’s parents were dead, too - or maybe that he wasn’t allowed to live with them. Hinata glanced at his scars and quickly looked away again. She hadn’t known. ”…Sorry,“ she said.

“Stop apologising,” Kakuzu said.

“So–” Hinata paused. “Um.”

Hidan laughed, and this time it really was mean. “Are you done yet? I can’t feel my fingers.”

“Nearly,” said Kakuzu, at the same time as Hidan took a step forward.

As soon as his boot landed on the ground, the unicorn squealed and threw her head back. Her ears went flat to her skull. She took a nervous step to one side, shivering and pawing wildly at the ground. Hinata could see the whites of her eyes.

“Whoa.” Hidan rocked back on his heels. “You don’t have to freak out,” he complained.

“Like I said,” said Kakuzu, scowling. “They can sense dark magic. He’s not coming any closer,” he said to the unicorn, who didn’t even flick an ear in his direction. She was too focused on Hidan. “Hyuuga, tell it.”

Hinata looked at the unicorn, but it was clear she was having none of it. “I don’t think…”

Even as Hinata said it, the unicorn whirled and fled with her hooves kicking up the dirt and leaves.
“Stupid horse,” muttered Hidan.

“Idiot,” said Kakuzu in an identical tone. He turned his scowl on the phial in his hand. There had to be at least twelve long shining strands of hair in the crystal container.

Hinata tried to remember what the going rate for unicorn tail hair was. It wouldn’t be as much as the horns, which were only shed once a season, but more than dragon’s blood.

“It’s enough,” said Kakuzu, and Hidan made a sound of relief in the back of his throat. “Let’s go.”

Hinata was in complete agreement - they should get out of the forest as soon as possible. Despite this, Kakuzu and Hidan still seemed to feel the need to box her in and herd her out of the forest between them.

The tree line became obvious because the sun had well and truly risen outside the forest – as the trees thinned out it was lighter and warmer, and Hinata breathed easier with every step. Maybe, just maybe, this whole bizarre morning would end without disaster.

This, of course, was when a figure detached itself from the shadow of a nearby tree. It resolved itself into wild-haired shape of Jiraiya-sensei. He taught Ancient Runes, but he was a favourite among the younger students… usually. Probably not, Hinata thought numbly, in this situation.

The bottom dropped out of her stomach. Oh no. Oh no.

“Hidan, Kakuzu.” There was a pause. “…And Hyuuga,” he added. “Huh. Are you two dragging younger students into your delinquency now?” There was another pause and a huge sigh as he crossed his arms. “…That’s going to cause me trouble, isn’t it?”

Nobody said anything.

“Fine, fine.” He scratched his chin. “That’s– twenty points each and a detention, I think. I’ll let your heads of house know so they can talk to you about it–”

Hinata flinched. In Gryffindor, her head of house was – well. He was… Scary.

“–and you can come up to the castle with me now, since apparently we can’t keep letting you wander.”

It was a long, awkward walk up to Hogwarts. At the steps Jiraiya let them go. “It’s Saturday.” he yawned. “Go do Saturday stuff. Just try not to get bloody arrested.” He squinted at Hinata for a second. “And you, maybe try making some other friends.”

Hinata blinked and swallowed nervously. Few of her classmates were up, so nobody was really watching… except the portraits in the entrance hall. Their painted eyes made her nervous. She scrunched the edges of her cloak in her hands. “Um…”

Jiraiya patted her once on the shoulder – she flinched again – and meandered off, probably to harass the Potions professor in her office.

When he’d gone, Kakuzu gave Hinata a sharp, narrow-eyed look. “You could have told him we made you come with us.”

Hinara blinked. The thought hadn’t even occurred to her. And… they hadn’t, really. She hadn’t even been brave enough to protest. She shook her head.

“How,” said Kakuzu, and whatever that meant she didn’t get to learn because he grabbed Hidan by the elbow and pulled him away – down towards the dungeons, she thought.
“Ow, stop fucking– I can walk, shithead– Hey! Be seeing you, Hyuuga,” Hidan called over his shoulder, trying and failing to yank himself away from Kakuzu.

Hinata watched dumbly after them. For a second she was alone in the entrance hall and calm, and then a portrait said “Detention, hmm? In my day–”

Hinata felt her stomach give a mighty heave. Oh Merlin, what was her father going to say? She scurried off down the corridor at a run.
The One With Hidan in a Country Music AU

Chapter Summary

Aka The Country Music AU Some People Actually Did Ask For. Prompt fic. It's literally a country music au feat. Hidan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hidan is born in a church. An old one, with its own churchyard, with pale paint that peels from its wood in the blistering sun. By the time he dies, that’ll seem fitting.

Or ironic.

It’s all perspective, right?

Before then, he is an orphan in a bar. The floors need sweeping, the air smells stickily of yeasty beer and cigarettes. He’s eight, out hours after he’s been sent to bed by indifferent foster parents, and watching a man in a plaid shirt sing a slightly off-key rendition of ‘Simple Man’. His fingers flash in the dim light while he croons about his twelve-gauge.

“So sure you should be here, sweetheart?” a blonde woman asks him, peering unhappily over the rim of her cup. Her eyes are bloodshot and unfocused.

“Dad’s over there,” says Hidan, blithe and indifferent. He’s not concerned with lying much. The woman nods and subsides - a kid with a parent is automatically someone else’s problem, and not her business. Hidan likes that.

It’s hard for such a young kid to stay up that long, but the night doesn’t last forever and when they’re stacking tables and swishing dirty water over the dirtier floor, he’s right up next to the singer.

“It’s three in the morning,” the singer complains, shifting his cigarette from one side of his mouth to the other.

“So you can’t have much else to do,” Hidan points out.

The man laughs, tells Hidan to go get him a drink, and maybe—

He learns the fingering from the big man, whose name is supposedly “Cousin”, which means all of jack shit to Hidan. He smokes too much – Hidan is given to understand that any smoking is basically too much, but everyone does it – and he has a tremendous beard and improbable biceps and he calls his guitar June.

It’s a weird name for a guitar.

“Carter, boy, where have you been?”

Not born, for the most part. Hidan has a smart mouth. He never shuts it.
“Right,” says Cousin, squinting down at him from red rimmed eyes and exhaling a soft grey cloud of smoke. “I forget.”

When he changes foster homes – and he does, over and over, all the damn time, sometimes not even six months apart – he moves towns. It means a new school, if somebody can get him to go. Some places are stricter than others – in those places he’s dragged and shoved to the schoolyard, sometimes brought back by police when he leaves again.

But he’s never injured, not really. He learns that they’ll grab and push and bellow but they won’t hurt him, not really. They can slap him and shake him and yell at the top of their lungs, but they’re barely even people to Hidan, not after that realisation. They’re curiously… flat. Ineffectual.

Each town is pretty much the same: everybody knows each other by name and face, and they all know each other’s business. ‘Poor thing,’ he hears, over and over, and he knows in a fortnight they’ll be hissing a different tune. In a month he’ll be the truant, the delinquent, the problem child. In trouble, up to no good.

But every town, no matter how small and bleak and isolated, has a bar. And every bar has country music.

So Hidan learns how to play from singularly irresponsible adults, drunk in bars around closing time. Some of them are women with smoky voices and lines around their mouths; some are big men with their rolled sleeves and open vests. Most of them are poor, he figures.

They’re similar. There’s a lot of beer, a lot of smoke – and a lot subtext that flies right over Hidan’s head, right up until it doesn’t.

Hidan learns the guitar, the banjo, the fiddle, even, a little – he can’t read music to save himself, but he can pick out the songs as he learns them, Johnny Cash and Lyle Lovett, Connie Smith and Willie Nelson, all these small beloved gods among country singers. He has an ear for it. He can even do some shit written within his own lifetime if he stretches himself. Sometimes.

Hidan’s foster homes are all the kinds who want to raise him ‘right’, god-fearing and respectful – at least until they have him, their perfect pale-skinned, blond-haired child, and discover how fucking hard it’s going to be to keep him.

He goes to school sometimes as he gets older, more out of boredom than anything else, and he gets suspended for stabbing another kid with a ballpoint pen when he’s ten. It’s not an accident, but it’s not a serious injury either. They keep saying he’ll recover, he’ll be able to use his hand again, so – what the fuck’s the problem? They spend so much time and effort getting Hidan to school, and then he shows up and they tell him to stay home? That’s… Stupid.

He goes through five foster homes before he’s twelve – and when he’s twelve he’s stuck in a five hundred population town with a foster mother who wears sunglasses to church every week just to hide her hangover. She still goes to church every Sunday, though.

“It wouldn’t look right,” she explains, dabbing concealer under her eyes with a heavy hand.

“Aw, well, if it wouldn’t look right,” he drawls, and she sends him away to nurse her head in peace. He doesn’t like her, but he’s old enough to know nobody gives a shit about what he likes. She won’t last long anyway.

This town’s all weatherboards, sagging porches, tin roofs that thunder with every drop of rain and dust. There’s those lonely baptist churches all sticky and dim in the heat. Church is fascinating to Hidan. Church is where everybody goes to lie and gossip – and then they sit down and pray and
tell each other to tell the truth and be kind to their neighbours. Hidan loves going to church. (Every week he thinks about what he could drop in the water main to sort five hundred people out.)

Five hundred people, and he feels like every one of them is watching him, waiting for the slow and agonising pace of the place to sink its claws into him and make him stay. Most days Hidan wants to rip the town up with his nails alone.

At twelve, Hidan hitchhikes in the back of a pickup. He doesn’t give a fuck where he ends up, just as long as it’s not here anymore.

“You got right with God, son?” the driver asks him conversationally. He’s a weird old dude. Rough beard, tanned hands. He smokes. He’s keeping a bottle of bourbon braced against the car stereo, half empty, and there’s a guitar in a heavy case in the back.

“So, says Hidan. He lies easily. Everybody lies and it seems stupid to him how often he’s been told you must not lie by adults who are just – inhale, bullshit, inhale. At least Hidan lies for sensible reasons.

“I’ll not have you in my truck if you’re a thief or a liar,” says his driver, flexing his hands on the wheel.

Hidan nods seriously.

“Good boy,” the man says, almost reflexively, and ruffles up Hidan’s hair. Like he’s a fucking dog. “Have some of this, it’ll put hair on your chest.”

Bourbon does not put hair on Hidan’s chest - turns out almost nothing does that - but it does make him dizzy and giddy. It makes his fingers clumsy on the frets when he needles his driver into letting him play the guitar.

“You’re not half bad,” muses his driver, and that’s how he ends up twelve years old and perched on the back of the man’s pickup at a lonely truck stop, playing Black Water at a bellow for dollar bills shoved into a hat by passing strangers – more impressed, he thinks, by his age than his actual talent.

He does a very clumsy guitar version of The Devil Went Down To Georgia because he can and he feels like it, even though god knows it’s not meant for the instrument. He gets an hour and forty minutes through and comes out the other end of Friends in Low Places before his fingers start to bleed.

The ache of blistered fingers and tendons pushed too far is satisfying.

“That’ll be my gas money,” says his driver nonchalantly, shoving the pocket change Hidan has just earned into the back pocket of his jeans.

“Right,” says Hidan, drawling and sarcastic, but it doesn’t seem to register on his driver. He looks from the man’s pocket to his eyes and back, then licks his teeth and decides to ignore it.

He needs a lift, anyway.

The roads are long and achingly bleak, winding, desolate.

They pass the ‘fifteen miles’ sign closest to town when something inside Hidan’s head finally gives way with a cruel red snap.
“Hey,” he says, tilting his head and popping his neck with a crack. “Pull over.” And that’s the last lucid thought he has for a while. It’s not until he’s playing with the radio, idly, annoyed by its fuzzy buzz, that he notices the blood on his hands and he realises what he’s done.

Huh. How about that?

“I wouldn’t wanna drive with a thief or a liar,” he tells his driver while his skin’s still hot, real close, breathing damp puffs of air on his collar. It smells sweet and metallic in the truck now.

Hidan empties the rest of the bourbon over the man’s face and chest. The bottle’s broken and bloody from midway down. He doesn’t really remember it. “Gotta get right with God, man.”

And then he laughs, loud and shrill, because it’s that ridiculous.

Hidan leaves the pickup in a ditch well out of the way, engine running and radio playing a mournful Dolly Parton song. The guitar he keeps – he’s never had one of his own before.

He thinks of Cousin and June and, bemused, he decides on naming her Lucille – maybe she, too, is restless and longing and hungry for something new, something that’ll make her feel anything at all.

It’s a long walk.

Hidan eventually does hit a proper-sized town, a good couple hundred thousand people. The cops finally pick him up as a missing person after a couple of weeks and he ends up shunted to another foster family. His new case worker is very disappointed by the efforts of his previous carer. Hidan doesn’t laugh in her face, but it’s a near thing.

Adolescence is a wash. He has a good couple of years with an elderly couple who feed him and give him a room and otherwise don’t seem to care much what he does, and that passes in a haze of music and long school classes. The teachers there have reasonable expectations – or maybe they’re just tired. They pick their battles, and if Hidan’s in class they don’t harp on too much about missed homework or jeans with tears in the knees.

He’s moved again when he’s fifteen, and that goes more or less to shit. At sixteen Hidan gets expelled – which is a feat in itself, because he doesn’t often show up for long enough to get into trouble with the school. The principal doesn’t even recognise him, and neither do most of the teachers.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that on the only day that week Hidan does show up he talks to some kid for fifteen minutes and then beats him until he can’t walk – may never walk, in fact. His latest foster parents are horrified. Hidan doesn’t give a shit.

“You’re lucky not to be facing a criminal sanction,” his current mother tells him, face pale and drawn. She’s got dark hair and luminous red eyes. They’re weird, almost like Hidan’s. Not enough to make him wonder if she’s actually his mother, of course, but – a bit.

“I’m not, though,” he points out.

“Let’s try to keep it that way, shall we?” She sounds pained.

“That boy,” he hears her husband say from downstairs later that night, “needs a firm hand. We’ve been letting him get away with too much. We’ll get him to church with the rest of the Sunday group this weekend, it’ll be a good start…”

“I don’t think…”
Whatever his foster mother doesn’t think is immaterial, because Hidan tunes her out. This town’s big enough for more than one bar, which means a lot of country music.

The next three years are kind of a blur. He does covers – good ones, fuck you – at local bars and night spots. The crowds are small and the stages are low and greasy, the lights dim, the venues dirty and overwarm. They’re usually lowkey, more given to barflies and alcoholics than parties, but he learns he can work the right crowd, in the right mood, into a frothing, boot-stamping roar along with him.

He gets the money for his banjo and his leather boots doing cheesy covers after hours: *Gunpowder and Lead, 9 to 5* – he gets actual, real-life requests for *Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy* and *Honkytonk Badonkadonk*, and there’s a bespectacled redhead with a jaundiced smile who seems to track him down weekly to beg for *Mama’s Broken Heart* and *Hurts to Think*. She slips him enough change every time to make it worth his while, so it’s not like he minds.

Sometimes he walks away feeling drained and high, seething with it under his skin, like the throaty, throbbing rendition of *Jolene* he just finished has ridden him hard and left his senses reeling.

Hidan never smokes. He quits drinking before he’s even twenty one. His vice has always, always been violence, and he doesn’t need drunkenness as an excuse. He doesn’t need any excuse at all.

Case in point: at nineteen he fucks off, briefly, back to his small-town, iced-tea world of sagging churches and long lonely roads. He has to, because he walks out of a show with blood on his face and Lucille slung over one shoulder, and there’s a nice officer looking to ask him some questions about the dead guys in the men’s room.

It’s twenty-three miles before he can wave down a car brave enough to stop and ask if he needs help, and he cheerfully tells the driver he just needs a lift to the nearest town.

“If you’re sure,” she says uncertainly, eyeing the spatter on his cheek. She must be at least fifty, given her manner and expressions, but she sure doesn’t look it. She has careless blond hair and a low cut shirt, with boobs that arrive to every conversation about ten seconds before the rest of her. He looks, because of course he does, and because she’s not dressed like that so strangers’ll avert their eyes, is she?

“I’m sure,” he promises, giving her his most charming smile. It’s the one he uses when he’s trying to coax a gig out of someone. “Seriously. You should see the other guy.”

She smiles, but not as though it’s funny. Maybe to her it’s not – he’s a nineteen year old in a black tank top and blue jeans with a gash in the knee, with dried blood on his leather boots and carrying a guitar like it’s the only thing that matters in the world. (Which isn’t strictly true - he has a banjo, too.)

“You should make sure you get your hands seen to anyway,” she tells him, jerking her chin towards his scraped knuckles. One of them’s cut deep enough his fingers go *twang* like strings when he tries to make a fist.

When they pause to fill up, he refuses to leave the car – the cameras don’t need to see him. She doesn’t push, but she does ask about the guitar. It’s the least he can do – he sings her *God’s Gonna Cut You Down*, soft and breathy and crooning low. It fits his mood – and the flaking blood on his boots.

She gives him a long, long look. “Maybe a bigger town would be a better idea for you,” she says
slowly.

“Maybe,” he agrees, “but I’m getting kind of well-known. Small towns can be good.”

“Hm,” is all she says in response to that. He waves her goodbye at the next gas stop and she keeps going, engine rumbling a throaty counterpoint to the drone of summer insects. He thinks she’s probably relieved to leave him behind.

Whatever.

He gets oversweetened iced tea and some kind of equally saccharine cake from the only diner in town, then heads out. The town’s only bar isn’t compelling, so instead he breaks into the only church instead and spends the night crashed out on a pew. Hidan’s gone again in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

1) I know nothing about country music, or actually any music

2) I know very little about America

3) I don’t know what I’m doing.

originally there was more to this thing, because I remember another person wanted Sakura in on the AU. Unfortunately Sakura fits into this even worse than Hidan does.¯\_(ツ)_/¯

The missing bits followed the small town adventures of bringing a strange violent country singer home to make him YouTube (and Instagram) famous, bar fights, teaching somebody with almost no capacity to hear tone how to sing “Girl In A Country Song” at the top of her lungs, accidentally ending up with a music career, and one very tongue in cheek version of “I Walk The Line”.

The One With Zabuza and Team Seven

Chapter Summary

The events at the Bridge go differently and Zabuza kind of, a little bit, nnnot-very-accidentally adopts some brats.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometimes it only takes one lucky shot to kill a ninja. It’s not always a heroic sacrifice or a chuunin with a knife in the dark, either; sometimes it’s a brick kicked off a wall or a bottle hurled by a frightened civilian. Lady Luck finds a way to take down even the most fearsome beast.

The kids stand stock still, shocked and frightened, in the aftermath.

Zabuza gets it, really he does: the bridge is awash with blood and bodies, Gatou is already stinking up the place with his vile corpse bobbing in the water. The dark haired kid with the scary eyes wakes up and they all turn around and stare at their sensei like they expect miracles to happen everywhere.

They’re shit out of miracles today, though, and Kakashi’s not getting back up.

These kids, Zabuza thinks, even as he runs his least busted hand over Haku’s tangled dark hair. These kids, they’re naive, but they have potential. The boys, anyway; he hasn’t seen much from the girl but if Sharingan Kakashi thinks -- thought, thought -- she’s clever, she’s probably got potential for something of her own.

His eyes drop back to Haku and he swallows down a wounded animal sob. It’s caught in his chest and it’s not coming out, he won’t let it. It sits there, tangled and black and awful, and Zabuza breathes past it. He blinks his eyes dry, breathes out, long and careful. Inhales. Out again, long, slow --

Fine.

He looks again.

No. Not fine.

He jerks his eyes away.

The kids. Kakashi’s kids. They have that look about them, glassy-eyed and wary. They don’t know they’re safe yet -- the Uchiha kid has a look about him, like he’s never quite sure if he’s safe. Zabuza knows the type. He mostly approves of that paranoia.

“Hey, hey,” says the blond one -- that brat with the killer chakra. He doesn’t seem like much now, but that stunt reminds Zabuza of nothing so much as of Yagura. If he really is a jinchuriki... “It’s another trick, right? He’s coming back?”
“No,” says the other boy. “It’s not. He’s not.”

The girl bursts into tears again, more hysterical than grieving.

“How do you know that? Look what you did, you made Sakura-chan cry!”

“I can see it,” he snipes back angrily, and that shuts the blond up for a second or two.

“...What do we do now?” He doesn’t sound like a monster. He sounds like a kid who’s fucking terrified.

“How should I know?”

“You’re supposed to be a genius!” Brat’s starting to cry now. Must be the first time he’s really lost anyone.

“Stop it,” snarls the girl through her tears, and the brat subsides in mulish silence.

Haku’s dead, his brain reminds him helpfully, and Zabuza closes his eyes against the rush of -- he doesn’t even know, there are too many thoughts and feelings to parse. He’s pissed off, though. He was sure Haku would outlive him, one way or the other.

These kids probably didn’t expect to lose their teacher, either.

He licks his filed teeth and begins the long hard process of hauling himself to his feet.

Immediately, the three kids all whirl toward him, tense and sharp. He snorts. “I have nothing against you guys,” he points out. His voice comes out all hoarse and gravelly. “The contract is over.”

“You killed Kakashi-sensei,” says the Uchiha kid. His eyes are glossy and red and wheeling in rapid circles. Zabuza watches his mouth instead of his eyes. Kid’s dangerous.

But no. He really didn’t. He opens his mouth -- he’ll take that one in the bingo book, but not from the man’s own students -- but he’s beaten to it.

“No,” says the girl. “No, he just -- one of the mercenaries.”

“What?”

She looks deeply uncomfortable. “It was just a lucky throw.”

Yeah, Zabuza’s not really comfortable with the idea himself -- that a ninja like that, somebody as powerful and famous and purely competent as Sharingan Kakashi, could go and get himself killed by a lucky throw from a two-bit mercenary.

“That’s how it is, sometimes,” he says, and levers himself to his feet. It hurts. Holy shit does it hurt. The fight was hard and he has goddamn dog bites on his sword arm.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” bellows the brat, through a face full of tears and snot. “‘That’s how it is’? I don’t accept that!”

Zabuza eyes him. “Kid, you don’t have to ‘accept it’. It’s not going to stop being true.”
The kid’s fists clench and his jaw clenches and his eyes narrow and for a second Zabuza is dead certain he’s going to throw a punch, but he doesn’t.

“We have to--” The girl cuts herself off, pauses, swallows. She blinks, then scrubs her own tears off her face with one hand. They are rapidly replaced with new ones, because she’s a kid and kids leak like faucets when they’re upset. “We have to dispose of the body. We have to -- Sasuke-kun, we need to get his eye.”

The Uchiha -- Sasuke, he remembers it now that she’s said it -- blinks and then jerks his chin. “Aa.” And just like that he gets slowly and carefully to his feet. “We can burn it all.”

Burning’s good for body disposal, Zabuza thinks dispassionately. Personally fire’s his weakest element, but there’s an earth technique for mulching dead flesh fast. It’s... better, probably, if nobody gets hold of Haku’s remains -- for much the same reason these kids are so worried about Sharingan Kakashi’s eye.

He leaves them to it, listening with only half an ear as they talk to their client -- the old bridge builder is supremely awkward about their dead teacher, and can’t seem to get away from the stressed kids fast enough -- as he takes care of Haku’s body. One step at a time. He’s done this before, hundreds of times, to hundreds of people. He knows how to dispose of a body.

It’s just not usually Haku’s.

Zabuza feels like all his scars are ripped open and bleeding here, and he feels supremely stupid for cutting free a long lock of hair. So what. So fucking what. He’s already cried like a child twice today and Haku’s not using it.

The body goes. The hair doesn’t. He ties it to Kubikiribocho’s hilt. He feels wild and shaky, well beyond the impact of his wounds.

He can feel the swell of the Uchiha kid’s chakra and smell the reek of burning hair.

What now, he thinks.

Haku’s dead.

What now.

Nothing has really changed. That’s what you get for treating people like tools: when they pass from your life, nothing much changes. Zabuza still needs money if he wants to take out Yagura -- and he very much wants to take out Yagura.

His being a jinchuriki makes that difficult. But then...

Zabuza’s eyes land on Kakashi’s kids, all three of them lost and frightened and miserable around the smoking remains of their teacher.

That blond kid...

Zabuza remembers that chakra. The kid doesn’t seem like the same kind of monster Yagura is, and maybe he can’t control it like Yagura can either, but.

*But.*
Yagura has the three tails.

And everybody knows which biju Konoha has.

It would be worth convincing the other two just for that, but that dark haired kid has to be the very last of his clan left in that village.

His bloodline limit is literally the stuff of nightmares for people who remember the war. There are some pretty compelling reasons for that, which Zabuza has recently discovered are at least not made up out of whole cloth -- Kakashi had just the one, transplanted and, from the way he kept it covered, poorly adapted, and he turned the whole fight around on Zabuza and put him out of action for days.

In Kirigakure, there are plenty of people who mention the sharingan in their arguments for the culling of bloodline limits. Unstable. Dangerous to everyone around them. Monstrous.

(Well. People say that about Zabuza, too.)

He’s not sure about the girl, honestly. She’s the weak link. But he’s seen that she takes orders and she’s got a practical streak, and presumably she is passably clever -- any jounin could turn her into a ninja, if she’s willing to apply herself even a little bit. Maybe even a good one. He doesn’t know.

He’s going to find out.

He looks back down at Haku’s body, already mostly decomposed, and he clenches his jaw and rises to his full height, swinging Kubikiribocho over his shoulder.

“Hey, kid,” he yells, striding toward them.

The blond one looks up. Good. That’s the one Zabuza wants. He’s the one with the will and the drive and, incidentally, the nine tails.

“What do you want?” he asks mistrustfully.

Zabuza props his sword in front of him -- with the hair in full view, even though it’s sort of humiliating to be that sentimental and acknowledge it. It’s for a good cause, after all. He wants the kid to see it, to think about Zabuza’s losses, a mirror to their own. He pauses respectfully to acknowledge the burning body -- Kakashi was a hell of a ninja, he can respect that if he can respect anything.

(The body smells like burning hair and fibre, but also like cooking meat, like pig fat melting in a pot. That’s the downside of burning bodies like this. It’s not quite hot enough to completely lose that pot roast smell.)

By the time he returns his attention to them, the kid’s eyes are fixed on Haku’s hair around the hilt of his sword. Uchiha’s staring into the middle distance past the body, already recalibrating. He recognises that, too. Lose enough people and you start taking it in stride.

The girl is the odd one out, watching his face with wide green eyes. She looks like butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth, soft and silly with her long pink hair. He’s not sure what she’s seeing, but she’s determined to pay attention, so probably something. He licks his teeth.
There are a lot of ways to approach this -- he could manipulate them with Haku’s death, he could offer to take them to the nearest Konoha outpost and convince them along the way. He could take one of them -- the boy with the eyes, probably, because he’s too dangerous otherwise -- hostage and ensure the cooperation of the others.

Zabuza’s a straightforward sort of person though. He opens his mouth and says, “I could use your help.”

There’s a long, long silence.

Then, cacophony. The brat’s loud. The dark one is unimpressed. The girl’s mouth is a flat line and her teeth are clenched and she says sensible things like ‘we are in enough trouble already, Naruto, I can’t believe you’ and ‘treason’.

In the end it’s the right call, though -- both in being straightforward about it, and in getting the blond kid on board first. The other two are rudderless without him, and even though their teacher could have corralled them and stopped them from making any stupid (treasonous) choices, he’s turning into ashes on the wind right now.

So in the end all Zabuza has to do is talk Naruto into righteous, revolutionary zeal. It’s not even hard, because they’re similar in this one, shining, unifying way: they want what’s best for their village, and they’re prepared to break a lot of things to see it happen.

There are lots of reasons Yagura is shitty and needs to go, but he looks between Uchiha and the lock of hair on Kubikiriibocho’s hilt and tells them about the bloodline massacres without flinching.

In the end, Uchiha is watching him all sharp and considering over his crossed arms and the girl, Haruno, is pale and grim-looking, and Naruto is nodding along: yes, yes, of course that’s wrong, it makes sense why he, Zabuza, would take such a shitty job from a shitty man now --

Zabuza doesn’t bother telling the kid that shitty jobs for shitty people is basically the entire experience of being a professional ninja right there. He’ll figure it out eventually.

“Haku...” the brat trails off when he sees the way Zabuza’s expression changes at Haku’s name, but he plants his feet and ploughs on anyway. “The way he thought -- that he was only a tool to be used, that it was his only purpose... we won’t let you be like that. We’re not just tools.”

Zabuza tips his head. They are. Of course they are. They’re all tools. That’s what being a ninja means -- tools for somebody, anyway. Somebody with money like Gatou, or somebody with power like Yagura. Ninja are always tools.

He thinks of Haku and swallows down the vile knot in his throat again. He can’t quite bring himself to say it. Haku was a tool, absolutely: he was a sharp edge turned to Zabuza’s will. But he was a person, too.

Zabuza is a cynical person, but he can’t quite manage to say so directly. He unbends enough to say, finally: “A person isn’t a kunai or a sword, brat. A ninja is always a tool to somebody, always. That’s just life. But a person -- a person can be both.”

That’s as far as he’s willing to go, and even now it feels like sentimental tripe. Konoha kids, seriously.
They look like he’s said something unkind, though, with trembling mouths (the girl) and hard offended eyes (the Uchiha kid). Zabuza thinks that if he has to rethink his policy of straight-up, brutal honesty on sensitive topics he’ll resort to plan B, kidnapping and coercion, without a single qualm.

He wants the nine tails.

He doesn’t have to in the end -- being stupidly direct pays off, somehow, again.

When Zabuza leaves Wave, he leaves Haku behind. His body’s just one of several new stains on the Great Kakashi Bridge.

He leaves at dawn with three Konoha kids trailing after him like lost ducklings, bickering relentlessly, and he wonders what the hell he’s going to do with them now. This, he realises, will be nothing like travelling with Haku and the Demon Brothers.

The sun’s beginning to rise, though, green and gold shining on the leaves and glancing off the waves, and Zabuza is feeling oddly optimistic for once.

There’s always something a little bit hopeful about sunrise.

Chapter End Notes

please just imagine obito’s face when he discovers kakashi’s dead and somebody went and named a bridge after him
Itachi has an alternative plan

Chapter Summary

Itachi was thirteen. He was responsible. He was organised. He had a keen tactical mind, excellent control of his sharingan and a lauded position as one of the youngest ANBU captains ever.

Itachi did not like his mission.

As an ANBU captain, refusing missions wasn’t really within the purview of his position. Not even ones in which his whole clan had to be eradicated.

He tapped his fingers on his bone-white mask thoughtfully. It was difficult to decide what to do.

It should not have been difficult. He had sworn to protect Konoha. He had a mission. However... he was honour-bound to support his clan.

His clan was planning a coup.

Which led him right back to the start of that circular thought: he was sworn to protect Konoha. The Uchiha clan was part of Konoha.

And then there was Madara.

It was sadly irrelevant in the greater scheme of things, but it was worth noting that Itachi had a headache. He’d been having them more and more often, lately.

“Ne, ne, Nii-san!”

The door slid open. Sasuke dropped his school bag and looked up at his big brother with huge eyes. The mask had vanished by the time the boy was revealed, and Itachi’s mouth twitched. He smiled rarely, but anyone could have seen the way the hard lines of his expression softened when faced with his brother.

“Home already?” he asked, examining him. A fact that was also irrelevant in the greater scheme of things, but very important to Itachi personally: Sasuke was adorable.

No wonder those girls at the Academy followed him around like lost little ducklings.

“What finished two hours ago, Nii-san,” Sasuke informed him, blinking.

Had it? Itachi glanced toward the window. It had. He didn’t sigh, but he wanted to.

Sasuke was looking at him hopefully, eyes big and dark.
Intellectually Itachi knew that Sasuke had just come to pester him for help with his taijutsu forms, and that he’d have to blow him off again because he had a mission. Itachi would really have preferred to be messing around with Sasuke than to be carefully planning out how to slaughter every single family member.

Well, not every family member.

Not Sasuke. Never Sasuke.

Itachi loved Konoha. He did not want a civil war. And the elders were right. They could not be swayed. The Uchiha clan would have to go.

But he didn’t trust Konoha. He certainly didn’t trust the village with his little brother. His tiny, adorable - doubtless *traumatised* - little brother. Trauma, in the general sense, would be unavoidable. His plan, at the moment, created with his mind all awhirl and his head pounding, was to apply a strong enough genjutsu to *shape* Sasuke’s trauma, to give him the drive to fight, to become stronger.

There were political fingerprints all over this, and he needed Sasuke to be strong enough to take care of himself.

He could barely imagine what Sasuke would be in the wake of the... culling, he supposed, was the word.

*Culling.*

Population reduced by way of selective slaughter.

Yes. That was it. Sometimes the bats in the Forest of Death had to be culled. And now, his clan, too. Just like wild animals.

The thought echoed hollowly inside his skull. He blinked slowly. Time seemed to drift past him like molasses.

“Nii-san?” Sasuke asked, brows furrowed in concern.

He blinked.

Sasuke had definitely been saying something.

“Your sharingan,” Sasuke said, biting his lip.

Itachi blinked again. His eyes stopped whirling and his headache relented, just a little. His vision dulled, but the sharingan had burned his brother’s face into his memory. That was all right. There were worse things to remember.

“Sorry, little brother,” he murmured.

Looking at Sasuke’s face, he knew his plan was *terrible.* “Ne, Sasuke,” he said suddenly. “I’ll have time for you tomorrow night, okay?”

Sasuke blinked. “Tomorrow night?” he repeated.

Itachi nodded. “Do you know where the forest meets the edge of the Uchiha compound?”

Sasuke nodded slowly. “That’s far out,” he said thoughtfully.
“Yes. I want you to go there straight after school - don’t come home. Then wait for me, okay? I’ll come as soon as I’m finished with my mission, and then we’ll do some training.”

He blinked again, and Itachi could almost see the wheels turning inside that adorable fluffy head. Sasuke was not a stupid child, and he clearly knew something wasn’t quite right about Itachi’s instructions, but he still responded just as Itachi had predicted.

Sasuke smiled. “Okay!”

He trusted Itachi, and he’d do just about anything to get approval from his big brother. Approval from somebody.

Their father, Itachi thought idly, through a strange detached haze, had a lot to answer for with regard to Sasuke.

Somebody should speak to him about it. Mother, maybe. Except -- no, Itachi was going to kill them both, wasn’t he? Oh.

He ruffled Sasuke’s hair, and then, unable to help himself, drew the younger boy into a hug. He inhaled the smell of his hair and the familiar, homey scent at the curve of his neck and probably squeezed him too tightly for comfort.

He could almost feel the boy’s confusion when he raised one arm and carefully patted Itachi’s back. “Nii-san?”

Itachi drew away, and then took the opportunity to poke him in the forehead because his indignant face was hilarious. “I’ve got work to do now,” he informed him, prodding him toward the door. “But don’t forget, will you?”

Sasuke shook his head. “I won’t!”

This, Itachi thought, was a much better plan.
The thing is this: Itachi is a coward. Not about the big things -- not about suffering, or else Hidan wouldn’t want him -- but about himself, about the things he wants. He’s a coward. Hidan knows the type, although he sure doesn’t get it: all duty and control, too sick in the head to leave it be for five seconds.

He’s incapable of asking, paralysed by fear and a constitutional unwillingness to give up control. It’s a funny paradox: in order for Itachi to get what he wants, somebody has to take it from him.

Hidan drags Itachi to bed by the hair. He shoves him face down on the mattress, neck twisted so Hidan can still see one dark, unfocused eye, knees on the floor. He kicks his ankles viciously apart and plants a hand on his neck to keep him there. Itachi is tellingly still.

“You’re going to like this,” he tells Itachi, quietly and, for Hidan, very seriously. His eyes are half-lidded. “Even though you’d rather not.”

He’s close enough to see Itachi’s pupils expand. Even if he wasn’t, the flush over his nose and cheekbones would be a give away.

“Mmph,” says Itachi, although he doesn’t move while Hidan’s hand is pushing him down, just turns his head a little more so he can breathe.

Hidan’s pretty good with restraints -- a holdover from the early days when he used to have to tie a sacrifice down, do it the old fashioned way -- and Itachi isn’t exactly struggling. It’s easy enough to get his arms bound, and only marginally harder to get a slipknot over his head.

When he pulls on that, Itachi’s head jerks back. He can feel the muscles shift and strain in his neck and shoulders from where his other hand’s already planted in Itachi’s back. He gasps like he’s choking, and Itachi on a cruel leash is the prettiest thing Hidan’s seen in a very long time.
difficult for me to conceptualise. Oops.
NSFW - Hashirama and Madara

Chapter Summary

Sex with Madara is almost impossible, because he fights Hashirama every single step of the way.

Chapter Notes

Originally intended to be part of the same universe as my fic 'this one is definitely a romance' but I definitely never got there with that. So here's ...that porn.


I feel like that covers all the bases I need here. Don't read this if you're squicked out by any of those things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sex with Madara is almost impossible, because he fights Hashirama every single step of the way.

Hashirama’s not sure why, since it’s obvious that he wants it just as much.

Well. Maybe not just as much. Hashirama is... Hashirama isn't sure anybody has ever wanted anything with quite the ferocity he wants Madara.

But Madara does want it.

As usual, the thought makes Hashirama all stupid and weak in the knees.

Madara has to swallow or get drool all over his chin -- he swallows too late and does both, and Hashirama pulls hard on his hair and yanks his face closer until Madara's noise is shoved against his belly and his throat is constricting, struggling against the head of Hashirama's cock.

Hashirama’s really sensitive there, and he blinks and feels his skin shudder and pulls even harder on Madara’s hair, hauling on his head like he can somehow shove his dick even further into Madara’s throat. The choking muscles in Madara’s throat clench and clamp, but they’re not really strong enough to hurt-- they just provide a brain-melting, shifting pressure on his cock. It’s good, it’s amazing. He can hear the shocked breathy noise that his own mouth makes.

Madara smacks his thigh once, and then again, harder, when he's not immediately released. It's so good though -- it sloppy and so so hot and so good. Hashirama draws back, gives Madara the chance for a gasped breath and a snarl. A second later he twists his hands in his hair and hauls his head in again, muffling whatever he's going to say with the rough shove of his hips. Madara’s
throat contracts again and Hashirama lets his eyes flutter. He bites his lip. Oh yes.

He can see, distantly, that Madara can hardly breathe and that every time he lets him draw his head back his face is wilder and more flushed, that there's more waterining eyes and that his mouth is bright red and sloppy with spit and his chest is heaving, huge gasping breaths that rasp noisily past the gag of Hashirama's penis in his mouth. He wonders at that, because Madara is good at letting people know when he's had enough, when he's insulted or impatient or even mildly annoyed. This, these aborted grunts and half-hearted struggles, this isn't even --

--Madara has his penis in his mouth and he hasn't bitten it off. He's gasped and shoved and struggled and ultimately he is letting him do this. Madara is letting Hashirama pull his hair and shove his dick as far down his throat as it will go.

It's bewildering and heady, and might be contributing more to the throaty noises Hashirama is making than the actual blowjob is. Hashirama's had blowjobs before -- not many, but he has, whatever Izuna and Madara and even Tobirama on occasion will say -- but he's never put Madara on his knees before. There’s a thought. He groans helplessly, feeling raw and excited and alight with it. That has to be why, anyway, because Madara does not give head like he's practiced at it -- although Hashirama doesn't let him, really, either. He's got a grip on Madara's hair and the fingers of one hand curled around his jaw and Madara has to struggle to stay upright.

There's a point at which Hashirama stops paying attention to whether or not he's going to hurt him. Madara will let him know if he's genuinely injuring him, and most of Hashirama's brain is offline by the time he's shoving his dick down Madara's throat. Instead he's occupied with hauling Madara’s head forward and back in long hard strokes while Madara chokes and sputters and gets drool positively everywhere.

"Ngghh," Hashirama mumbles, tossing his head back and shoving his hips forward. Madara coughs around his cock and the trembling contraction of his throat makes Hashirama flash hot from his head to his toes. Madara's fingers are bruising his thigh, clenched and shaking, and he’s making soft broken noises with every increasingly violent thrust.

He can feel when Madara shoves his tongue against the underside of Hashirama's cock and rubs, rough and relentless. He can feel that, the sudden pressure and friction and his eyes go wide even as he bites his lip and tries not to scream.

Hashirama gives a hard, ragged wail and yanks on Madara's hair, forcing him all the way in until he is, actually, very close to choking. Madara's nose is shoved painfully against Hashirama's pubic bone. Hashirama holds a hand on the outside of his throat just to feel the muscles contract from both sides when he swallows.

He presses, feeling the pressure of his own hand on the very head of his cock. Madara makes a broken strangled noise and jerks back, yanking on his hair. "No," gasps Hashirama, "stay." He holds his head steady, forced still with a hand on his throat and one fisted in his hair.

Madara stills for a second but then struggles again, succumbing to instinct. Hashirama holds him there and for a few long seconds. All Madara can do is make those urgent gasping grunting noises with every movement and take it. And Hashirama is so close, so very very close, and he squeezes again, gently and carefully, and no it's not his imagination -- he can feel it with his dick, just the tip of it, just a strange ghostly pressure, and Madara makes one of those helpless choked noises again.

Hashirama comes harder than he thought possible and his vision whites out. He spills hot semen down Madara's throat, rocking his hips to force himself in deeper still, too deeply buried to taste. He's making noises, loud stupid noises, groaning and mumbling Madara's name. He thought
orgasms only sounded like this when somebody was faking but he's going to have to rethink that, because there's bliss unfurling through his gut, making him babble stupidly. He sounds like a well-paid courtesan, whining and moaning in long broken sounds. *Madara Madara Madaramadaramadara--*

Then his voice stops that ragged noise and the white hot bliss withdraws a little from Hashirama's veins, leaving his limbs heavy and his breath hard and his brain filled with liquid sunshine. His knees feel weak.

Hashirama pulls back, pulls out -- Madara lets him, boneless beneath him, and he doesn't even try to swallow the drool and trailing semen that slide down his mouth when Hashirama lets him go. He looks --

Hashirama's first thought is that somewhere in there Madara started struggling earnestly and he was already too dizzy to get anywhere, and Hashirama wasn't paying enough attention and he's *hurt*. Or maybe he was really panicking and Hashirama didn't notice, or -- or it felt good and he didn't *care*.

His stomach turns. It is briefly but intensely awful.

Hashirama drops to the floor next to him, down on his knees because Madara still isn't getting up. He draws a thick spill of hair away from his face. "Madara," he says, soft but urgent. "Madara, can you--"

Hashirama blinks and cuts himself off. Madara doesn't look injured. He doesn't even look particularly upset.

Madara's face is impossibly flushed, sweaty under that tangled pile of hair, and he looks dazed. Dazed and overwhelmed. His eyes are all pupil, glazed and heavy-lidded. He's panting with his mouth open and his chest heaving. His lips are wet with spit and semen and there's a wayward lick of hair stuck to his neck--

Hashirama's brain short-circuits.

He makes an aborted noise somewhere around the sentiment of *oh my god*. It's probably a good thing he can't seem to say anything right now, because he doesn't know what would come out and that's usually when he says something stupid.

*Oh no*, he thinks finally, *he's so hot*. *Help.* But there is no help coming for him, just Madara's unfocused stare and wet mouth. And then just as quickly Hashirama gets stuck in a blind loop of *hot hot hot*.

One of Hashirama's hands rises of its own accord and he runs the fingers of it through Madara's wild hair and along the hard, high angle of his cheek. His face is hot to the touch.

"Hey," he gets out.

If anything, Madara flushes harder.

Then he blinks and smacks Hashirama's hand away.

Madara gets from his knees to his feet and turns away. Hashirama rises and catches him, one hand on his shoulder and one on his hip.

He's still breathing too heavily and his knees are actually kind of loose and wobbly, still weak.
from orgasm. His breath puffs into Madara's coarse hair.

For a second he has the urge to rest his head there, braced on Madara's strong shoulder, and let his eyes close. He can't, but he wants to.

"Wait," he says. Madara is still and tense. He, too, is breathing heavily, but probably more because Hashirama was very recently obstructing his airway.

"What," he snaps.

Hashirama shifts his hands to make sure he has a better grip, drawing Madara back against him. He's stiff as a board. He takes a deep breath, matching his breathing to Madara's for a breath, two, three, and then he settles one hand on Madara's stomach and slides his fingers down, down --

Madara wrenches away and elbows him in the face.

Which is fine, Hashirama thinks distantly, despite the throbbing in his cheek, because although Madara has never met a punch he wanted to pull, his elbow doesn't hit Hashirama nearly as hard as the sudden realisation that his fingers? Have come back wet.

Hashirama wrestled him to his knees and held him down and fucked his face, and Madara -- at some point during that experience, Madara had an orgasm.

The voice in Hashirama's head whimpering hot hot hot rises to a wail, with a plaintive counterpoint of can't believe I didn't notice, wanted to see him, wanted to watch and the acute memory of his flushed-dazed-sweaty face and--

"Hey!" yelps Hashirama, because Madara is genuinely all the way across the room and turning the door handle while Hashirama's been standing there like stunned granite.

One long woody tendril bursts up from a knot in the floor boards and curls around Madara's ankle. It grows even as Madara yanks on it.

"I will set this house on fire," snarls Madara, which is an empty threat that still makes Hashirama flinch. The idea is sad.

"Please don't do that."

"Then let me go, idiot!"

"I won't. You'll leave." Hashirama hates how increasingly upset his voice sounds, how it rises to be plaintive and accusing. He feeds the wood that's curled around Madara's ankle, lets it crawl up his leg and branch over his thigh, curving around his back and up his spine. Madara curses loudly, lips peeled back in a snarl. He jerks and digs his hands into it, and at one point twists in just such a way as to snap a branch.

"I just--" Hashirama cuts himself off. Madara won't turn to face him on his own, so Hashirama just -- does it for him.

It's a delicate application of the wood release when Hashirama captures each of his limbs and turns him so they face. It puts Madara's back against the door.

The door is wood. The floor is wood. The walls and ceiling and furniture -- all wood.

Madara looks furious, which is a good look on him.
All looks are... All looks are good on him.

For the first time Hashirama thinks he has an inkling as to what Tobirama means when he says *smitten*, because Madara has an if-looks-could-kill expression, angry and savage and dangerous -- and Hashirama still wants to kiss him breathless. He wants to coo to him and reassure him he won't be hurt.

"I just want to see..."

Hashirama finds very little resistance this time when he lays his hand on his stomach. Possibly that's because all Madara's limbs are bound with heavy loops of wood. He wriggles his way under Madara's clothes and runs his callused fingertips over his belly, down tense abdominals gone hard and trembling now, and reaches into Madara's trousers.

There's short, coarse hair there, trailing down until Hashirama finally gets his hand on the hot, velvet-soft skin of Madara's penis and everything is wet. Madara gives a half-covered wince, oversensitive still to Hashirama's touch.

"Ohh," mumbles Hashirama, completely unabashed. He shoves the fabric away finally, entirely out of patience. He draws his fingers up, trailing semen through the line of dark coarse hair that trails up Madara's belly.

When he finally looks up at Madara he's flushed bright red, looking away, sideways, over his roughly immobilised left arm.

Hashirama has the overwhelming urge to rub his fingers on Madara's mouth, to rub the slick semen over his lips and dip his fingertips inside and rub them on his tongue. He's pretty sure he'll get bitten -- not that hard, though, he thinks, not hard enough to stop him, and he shivers and feels his belly clench with something white-hot -- but it might be worth it to see Madara lick his own come off his mouth the same way he did with Hashirama's.

Hashirama licks his fingers off instead. He's not completely oblivious, he sees the way Madara starts when the movement catches his eye. He swallows. Bitter-salty. He's eaten things that objectively taste worse, but there's a distinct not-really-food quality to Madara's semen that makes it seem weirder.

Madara swallows. Hashirama catches the bob of his throat and smiles. It feels sweet and friendly on his face. "Idiot," Madara hisses, "you're not supposed to eat-" Madara cuts himself off, swallows nervously again.

Well, that's hypocritical.

Although... Hashirama didn't give him much of a choice.

Madara is glaring at him now, jaw clenched hard and teeth bared.

Hashirama wants to tell him it's okay, but he thinks he has to do that without acknowledging that Madara did enjoy, did really obviously love, what Hashirama just did to him.

He knew going in that Madara would -- probably, in private -- tolerate being roughly shoved around like that. Izuna's long-suffering, red-faced 'Look, if you're not on fire it's probably fine, nisan doesn't exactly suffer in silence, just go away,' still rings true to how Hashirama knows Madara.

And he knows that Madara gets something out of fighting and struggling, even stupid struggling, even struggling against things that he does not really wish to struggle against.
He's not sure he expected Madara to like being overpowered.

He's not sure, looking at him now, that Madara expected Madara to like being overpowered.

Especially not like that. Not with Hashirama's hand squeezing gently at his throat while he shoves his cock in his mouth. Not... Not like that.

He does, though, and Hashirama thinks it's probably lucky that the person most smitten with him is also the only person in the country who can overpower him. (Maybe. On a good day, anyway.)

He winds his arms around Madara's waist -- strong, hard-muscled, curved just a tiny bit, just enough to accommodate the jut of a hip and the distracting-on-a-good-day swell of his butt -- and rests his face in the juncture of Madara's neck and shoulder.

He presses them close and sighs happily, ignoring the ugly squelch of the wet patch.

"What are you doing," Madara says, in that weird way he has of making questions so flat and angry they lose all their punctuation. His voice is really hoarse. Hashirama's skin breaks out in little shivers. I did that, purrs every inappropriate and possessive part of him.

"Mmm," responds Hashirama, burrowing closer. He feels Madara take another breath to talk and so he tightens the wood release construct all around him. It's a delicate flare of chakra, but the wood creaks gently.

Madara hesitates for a split second and Hashirama takes that opportunity to nibble gently at his throat. There's something beautifully vulnerable about it, warm and soft, with the blood so close to the surface. It smells entirely like Madara, too, like his sweat and his hair and his skin.

Hashirama mostly scrapes his teeth on Madara's throat like that because he knows how sensitive the skin is there, but then he inhales and it's really good, so he does it again. And then Madara shivers helplessly and his breath hitches and Hashirama cannot possibly stop. He noses aside the endless fall of Madara's hair to get closer to his jaw, then his earlobe, then the fragile shell of his ear. He uses his teeth first, and like clockwork Madara shudders and then he follows with his tongue and his mouth, licking and sucking and--

It's such a good piece of him. They're all good pieces but Hashirama likes this one a lot.

Actually it occurs to him that Madara hasn't even tried to talk again, and that the breaths coming against Hashirama's shoulder are shaking even though they're slow. He can hear the strain of wood when Madara starts flexing his hands.

Hashirama subsides and squeezes him into a hug again.

Madara makes a confused, annoyed noise.

Hashirama experiences the overwhelming urge to tell him how awesome he is but he's pretty sure that then Madara really will set him on fire. So he just hugs closer, and imagines a world where he doesn't have to physically incapacitate Madara to get him to stay still for cuddles.

Chapter End Notes

I raised the rating of this fic for this chapter. Ʌ(´抵抗力´) Ʌ__
Ino and Deidara followed the grumpy Sasori into the building.

Suna was a close ally of Konoha, and some missing-nin were especially famous. It would take a lot of nerve for another missing-nin to take the name 'Sasori'... So Ino was forced to consider that when he introduced his friend 'Sasori', Deidara actually meant that this was *Sasori of the Red Sand*.

Her stomach felt cold and unsettled. Ino did not pretend that it was because of the flight.

“Remember, we leave at dawn tomorrow,” Sasori said in his deep and gravelly voice, and then he disappeared pretty fast. Had he just been waiting, then, to meet Deidara at the door and tell him this? Ino watched the tip of his -- tail or something -- follow him down the corridor. It scraped gently on the stones.

It was dark in here. Dark, and cold. The lights were in wire frames on the walls, bright and cool. They attracted insects and she could see the flickering shadows cast by fluttering wings on the featureless walls inside.

It wasn’t a welcoming environment. And the whole building was apparently just full of murderous missing-nin.

Ino shivered. It was only partially from how cold and wet she was.

“Come on, I’ll show you where the bedrooms are, and then the bathroom where you can clean up,” Deidara said. He swept his sodden ponytail over his shoulder, but he didn’t seem to feel the chill from their flight through the storm.

Deidara gave her the run down as he went through the layout on the way to ‘her’ room, pointing out common areas as he went. They did not immediately encounter anybody else, for which Ino was thankful. She wasn’t sure she was ready to meet any of the people who owned the chakra signatures she could sense flickering here and there. Ino wasn’t much of a sensor, but she didn’t have to be. They were all huge and potent.

“So this is you,” he said once he’d steered her into the first corridor on the left.

Ino eyed the door. She was apprehensive, and it drowned out almost all of her other feelings. Carefully, she reached out and opened the door.

The room on the other side had a bed against one wall, a secondhand desk with a pitted top, a chair and a chest of drawers. Everything was plain. There was a big window that looked out onto the overcast sky and a constant, drumming rain.
“It’s just the basics -- you can do what you want with it, although Kakuzu,” he rolled his eyes, “wants me to make sure you know that if you break the furniture you’re not getting any more unless you buy it yourself.”

“Break the furniture,” Ino repeated.

Deidara shrugged, and, in an evident effort to be reassuring, he said: “Well. Don’t worry too much, yeah. If it happens, it happens.”

This was reassuring in entirely the wrong way, and did not explain in the slightest what they thought Ino might do to break a desk or a bed.

Ino unslung her bag from her shoulder, ready to drop it off and continue on learning about the building -- and hopefully the people who lived here, before she had to actually encounter them -- from Deiara.

“It used to be Orochimaru’s,” Deidara went on cheerfully and obliviously, peering over her shoulder into the room. “We fixed it up for you, though.”

Ino stilled with her bag dangling from her fingers, frozen halfway across the threshold.

“Kisame hosed it down, yeah. Look,” he gestured, and Ino followed the motion to see the marks of a heavy duty water jutsu carved into the wall on one side of the room, presumably by accident when it had been directed away from the window, “although I checked it for traps.”

It... looked like a normal room.

“It was Orochimaru’s?” Ino asked, still unwilling to take a single step further.

Most missing-nin were troublesome because they undercut legitimate ninja business and were potential information leaks -- they had, by and large, left their villages because they didn’t want to be there anymore, or were likely to be convicted if they stayed, and were not therefore directly threatening to the inhabitants of those villages.

Ino only heard about the activities of missing-nin very rarely. They were a shadowy and dangerous bogeyman, a thing little ninja grew up being told to be wary of, and a grave danger when encountered on missions, but by and large nobody was actually that worried about them at home.

“Um... yeah. He’s not actually here anymore,” Deidara added, squinting at her. “Have you met him? Yeah? Creepy, right?”

Orochimaru was the single exception to the rule for missing-nin.

He showed up in Konoha once every few years with improbably detailed knowledge of their watch schedule, and then he left -- usually having made a mockery of their village security, taunted several of his previous comrades into a frothing terrified rage and really upset all the members of the Hokage’s janitorial staff.

It was always a very stressful time for T&I.

Ino did not really want to say ‘honestly I saw him from a distance this one time and that was
enough,’ because -- well, firstly, it seemed pretty cowardly, and secondly, apparently he’d once been Deidara’s housemate, through some strange circumstance. But, honestly, Ino had seen him from a distance, once. And it had been enough.

Ino had been eight. He'd sicked up a giant snake, which had sicked up a new Orochimaru holding a sword, who had then sicked up another snake. There had been a lot of wet noises, and the ninja close enough to smell it were all dead.

Inoichi had confirmed, tiredly, that this was pretty much how talking to Orochimaru went every time. Especially with the vomiting snakes thing. Vomiting things was, apparently, Orochimaru's signature move.

She hesitated. “Is it...”


“Are you,” she started and then paused. Hesitated. And then blurted: ”You're sure it’s safe?”

“As sure as I can be,” Deidara shrugged, crossing his arms. The sleeves of his cloak, still wet, squelched.

Ino eyed Deidara. He was clearly a pretty dangerous ninja himself, given how Shikaku had reacted to him, but that didn’t necessarily mean he was qualified enough to take care of anything one of the legendary sannin had left behind.

He watched her expression for a second as she hesitated at the door, and his eyes were calculating and searching in his pretty face. “Look,” he said finally, leaning back against the door frame. “We don’t have anywhere else to put you. You can’t room with me, because I’m with Danna and he’s - - grumpy, sometimes. Occasionally.”

He said ‘occasionally’ as though it was code for ‘constantly’, and Ino thought about Sasori’s gravelly voice and glassy stare and tried not to shudder. She didn’t entirely succeed. Hopefully, Deidara would interpret it as a shiver from the cold.

“You could ask Kisame, but he rooms with Uchiha Itachi and,” his mouth twisted when he made a face, “I won’t ask them for you, yeah.”

Stay alone in a room that had once housed Orochimaru in all of his terrible, unholy brilliance, or become roommate to a couple of strange mi...

“Uchiha,” she repeated slowly, “Itachi?”

“Oh, you know him,” Deidara muttered.

“He’s here?” Ino turned her head to stare at him. He had an expression on his face that Ino recognised distantly as exactly the same one she made when Sakura out did her in a written test at the academy. “Uchiha Itachi is here?”

As with most ninja, Ino had the vague idea that Uchiha Itachi, Sasuke’s older brother, was some kind of ravening psychopath who could safely be ignored because he was a missing-nin -- he’d left, and was therefore not in her village.

But apparently he lived here.
“You changed colour,” Deidara said curiously. “Do you need to sit down?”

Yes, thought Ino blankly. She let Deidara propel her into the room with no more resistance. She flinched when he kicked the door to BANG closed behind them.

He tugged her bag from her numb fingers and let it thump onto the floor next to her foot, and then steered her to the bed with his fingertips on her shoulders. The bed was way higher than the average futon and a much better height for dropping bonelessly upon.

She sat.

Oh. The realisation came upon her, again, that she was tapped in a single enclosed room with a missing-nin. An Iwa missing-nin, even.

This feeling, she understood with a sudden and unhappy lurch somewhere in her belly, was going to be her constant companion for the foreseeable future.

“Uh,” said Deidara, eyeing her like he had no idea what to do with her and thought she might be primed to spew poison on contact, “Do you know where you are?”

She frowned.

His expression went tight and unhappy -- eyebrows knitted together, mouth thinned down into a flat line. He shifted on his feet. “Uh, so, it’s -- December thirteenth, and --”

Oh. “No, I -- we’re in Rain. Or River. I think. I don’t know where I am because you didn’t want to tell me. Not because... ”

Because... What, did he think she was having some kind of episode? Was that common among missing-nin?

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“Oh,” said Deidara.

He looked at her. It wasn’t quite in the eye -- more like his eyes were set on her cheekbone and he was faking eye contact while actually avoiding it at all costs.

She looked back. His eyes, unlike hers, had obvious dark pupils. Otherwise the resemblance was uncanny.

There was a supremely awkward silence.

“Right, yeah.” Deidara shifted back onto his heels, rocking his body away from hers where it had bent closer and closer over the course of that exchange. “Okay. Well! Uchiha’s an ass but he’s not gonna, like, beak in and murder you in the middle of the night. I mean. Probably, yeah. Uchiha is really the least of...” He stopped.

Ino had already, internally filled in the rest of his comment and her entire nervous system gave a tiny, upsetting lurch. The least of my what? she thought, pulse racing, but she knew.

“He wouldn’t start with you if he did, anyway,” Deidara said.

Right, she thought, absorbing yet another alarmingly specific reassurance from Deidara. She
didn’t like them in general, but in this case it was actually comforting. It was, after all, a matter of public record that Uchiha Itachi had killed is clan to challenge himself. Ino knew that she could not possibly pose a challenge to an S-ranked ninja.

“He’d try to kill you first,” Ino said aloud. Hearing it made her feel a little better.

“...Right!” Deidara agreed. He tucked his facial expression away behind his eyes before she focused on him again, but she was very, very good at reading bodies and faces both. To her eyes he did not seem entirely pleased by her comment, despite his smile.

Deidara was trying pretty hard, she thought, to be friendly and accommodating for her, even though it was increasingly obvious that he had no idea what he was doing and had not considered the ramifications of bringing his orphaned half-sibling home to live with him at all.

She had a hunch that ‘friendly and accommodating’ did not come very naturally to Deidara.

“Sorry,” she said, “I didn’t mean...”

Deidara’s eyes narrowed. Then he made an annoyed noise. “It’s fine. It just figures that out of everyone, it’s him you’ve heard of.”

She swallowed. Her throat seemed parched. “I’ve heard of Orochimaru, too.”

“That’s like having heard of the Seven Swordsmen, yeah,” Deidara scoffed. He rolled his eyes.

“Are you just annoyed,” Ino began, and then went on with a burst of reckless confidence, “Are you only annoyed that I hadn’t heard of you?”

He twitched. He was. She bit her lip against a tiny, watery smile at the pure absurdity of it. He wasn’t really so much older than her, she guessed.

“An artist likes to be appreciated in his field,” he said stiffly. “But I guess you know him because he’s from your village, yeah.”

Ino gave him a short, calculating glance from under her eyelashes, and made the conscious, diplomatic choice not to tell him that she’d heard of Sasori. “Probably,” she agreed, glancing toward the door.

“Right. Yeah, of course... yeah,” Deidara straightened and twitched his long, damp tail of hair over his shoulder. “So, okay, this is your room, it’s fine, right? And there’s a bathroom two doors down that way,” he pointed vaguely.

Ino nodded. Bathroom, right. Once again she caught a flash of something embedded in his hand. She looked, but all she got was the distant impression of a smile. Which was... weird. Maybe she’d see better later. It would be rude to ask, right?

“I’ll show you the kitchen later. You should know where other people’s rooms are, too, if... well, you should know, yeah.” He didn’t offer her a hand up.

“Alright,” he said, opening the door again and waving her through. He pointed across the corridor. “Me and Sasori. If you knock and nobody answers, don’t try to go in.”

Sasori was pretty famous for poisons, so that made sense. “Okay,” she said, wondering if she
really wanted to be right across from that room.

“And, if I’m not here for whatever reason, don’t bother Danna. I mean. I’m sure he wouldn’t hurt you or anything--”

He did not, in fact, sound sure, and Ino certainly wasn’t.

“--but he has a pretty short fuse. So, if I’m not here, don’t bother him.”

Ino could not think of a single situation that might drive her to bother Sasori of the Red Sand. She didn’t even want to look at his hunched and alien figure. It was an easy rule to agree to.

“Okay.”

“Great!” he sounded relieved. “So if I’m not here and you need help with something,” he began. He stopped. Paused. Hesitated in the corridor. Glanced at her.

After a long silence, he finally advised her: “Probably you should try not to need help with anything.”

That was perhaps the least comforting thing he’d told her so far.

“If you really need help though,” he sighed, “Kisame is your best bet.”

Hadn’t he said that was the person who roomed with Uchiha Itachi? Ino felt herself twitch, but if Deidara even noticed, he ignored it.

“He’s in that one,” he pointed to a door. “And that is the end of doors you should knock on. Mine. Kisame’s. The bathroom. No other doors.”

There were several other doors in this hallway alone. Did their rooms all contain *yet more* missing-nin?

“This one belongs to Konan. The next one is Leader’s -- his name’s Pein --” because that wasn’t an ominous name or anything, “and at the end is Hidan and Kakuzu. Just...” he paused. “Ahh, just pretend *none* of those doors exist, yeah.”

Ino did not recognise a single one of those names, and now she wondered how hard it would be to get a copy of a bingo book -- any bingo book, she wasn’t that fussy about its country of origin -- out here.

“Got it?” Deidara prompted, turning to her impatiently.

“Got it,” Ino agreed, before he could run out of good will. “You, Kisame-san, the bathroom,” she pointed at each. She elected, as much as Deidara had, to ignore all mention of Uchiha Itachi. Deidara seemed relatively certain he wasn’t going to slaughter them all and flee into the night -- not, Ino thought, a certainty that seemed to be held up by experience, but all right -- but he also didn’t seem to want to even contemplate him.

Given that Deidara was cheerfully -- voluntarily, even -- hanging out with Sasori, who he playfully called ‘grumpy’ instead of ‘very upsetting to even look at’, that said ...kind of a lot.

“Cool, cool,” Deidara said with a relieved sigh. “Anyway, Zetsu has the basement and Tobi sleeps in, uhh, a hammock in the store cupboard or something, yeah, so don’t worry about them.
Let’s go introduce you to Kisame!

“Wait,” said Ino, who had gotten caught up on the phrase ‘hammock in the store cupboard’, even as her brain was counting out missing-nin quietly in the background and coming up with ten of them in this one, increasingly fragile-seeming building. “What?”

“Oh, well -- I know you probably want to clean up, but it’ll be good to introduce you to some people quickly,” Deidara explained. It was not the thing that she wanted explained, but it was indeed an explanation. “It’d be bad if they thought you were an intruder, yeah.”

“I... right,” said Ino, and wondered if perhaps she hadn’t made... rather a large mistake.

Deidara smiled sideways at her, fixed and a bit manic.

Konoha’s orphanages could not have been that bad.

Surely.

Once again, Ino was reminded that it was too late to rethink her choices now. With her clothes still clinging wetly to her and her damp hair tangled against her neck, she once again followed her half-brother down the dark and echoing corridor.

End Notes

If you liked something, let me know in a comment :)

Works inspired by this one

[[Podfic] In Which Itachi is a Baby With Back Problems and Sakura is Very Awkward by thriceandonce (sylvaine)]

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