Solving All Your Problems and Saving the World: A Speed Run

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1274.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Naruto
Relationship:	Haruno Sakura & Uchiha Sasuke & Uzumaki Naruto
Characters:	Haruno Sakura, Hatake Kakashi, Uchiha Sasuke, Uchiha Itachi, Uchiha Shisui, Original Character(s), Self Insert, Hyuga Hinata, Hyuga Neji
Additional Tags:	Reader-Insert, Isekai | Transmigration, Self-Insert, Team Seven (Naruto), Team as Family, Chaos, Crack, Crack Treated Seriously
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-05 Words: 12,576 Chapters: 4/4

Solving All Your Problems and Saving the World: A Speed Run

by Araived

Summary

It was on the very first day of school that Uchiha Sasuke met the person who would alter the course of his life forevermore. It came in the form of a pink-haired girl who, upon seeing him, grabbed his hand, sat him down, and told him very seriously: *"Together, you and I are going to save the world."*

--

Or, Haruno Sakura is having the time of her life. Her attempts to prevent the Naruto world's descent into chaos are going swimmingly! Unfortunately (or fortunately?), no one else knows what the hell she's doing.

Notes

This was written for Liv for the RTN gift exchange. Cross-posted from Ao3.

Chapter 1

It was on the very first day of school that Uchiha Sasuke met the person who would alter the course of his life forevermore. It came in the form of a pink-haired girl who, upon seeing him, grabbed his hand, sat him down, and told him very seriously: *"Together, you and I are going to save the world."*

Sasuke had never been told this before. He figured most people hadn't. But while it intrigued him, he hadn't been immediately convinced into going along with some random classmate's plans who, upon further inspection, had a glint to their eyes that was rather worrisome.

He dismissed her then, and was promptly set upon by fangirls.

The next day at lunch, the pink-haired girl brought a watermelon to school, stood next to Sasuke, and making very deliberate eye contact with their classmates, crushed it with her bare hands. The fangirls avoided him after that.

That was the moment Sasuke decided that maybe Haruno Sakura was worth keeping around after all.

—

When Sasuke finally snuck his way into Sakura's bedroom after school the next day, he was immediately confronted by a fellow classmate. It was not Sakura. Instead, it was a yellow-haired boy, the loud and obnoxious one who had interrupted their teacher during introductions.

"What are you doing here?" Sasuke demanded.

"Me?" The boy asked, pointing at him rudely. "Sakura-chan said she's gonna help me become Hokage! What're *you* doin' here?"

"I'm here to help save the world!" Sasuke blurted, baffled.

It was then that Sakura swept into the room, door slamming into the wall behind her. "We're all here to save the world," she announced.

"But—"

"You can't become Hokage if we all get devoured by a rabbit goddess, Naruto," Sakura pointed out reasonably. "So really, we're all doing you a favour."

"…Oh." Naruto thought about it for a moment. "I guess that's okay then."

"What do you mean about getting devoured by a rabbit goddess?" Sasuke asked. He felt that was probably the most important point in this conversation.

“There are many, many problems with this world,” Sakura intoned. “The rabbit goddess is just one of them. An awfully big one, though. But don’t worry! We will work through each problem one step at a time. *Plus Ultra!* Uh, wrong fandom.”

Naruto leaned forward, almost toppling off the bed. “What problems, Sakura-chan?”

“What problems, you ask?” Sakura’s eyes glinted again, and Sasuke was suddenly hit by a mysterious feeling that indicated he would probably be in for a bad time. He would become very familiar with this feeling in the coming few weeks.

“Oh, let me tell you about the *problems.”*

—

By the end of the furious whiteboard presentation, all three of them lay sprawled out on Sakura’s bed, staring blank-eyed at the cherry blossom printed ceiling above.

“That’s a lot of problems,” Sasuke said hoarsely.

“We need to destroy the moon!” Naruto cried out. “We need to stop the Akatsuki! I need to make friends with Kurama!”

Sasuke suddenly powered upright from the bed. “We need to tell Itachi!”

“No!” Sakura cried. She slammed her hands down on Sasuke’s shoulders, and stared very deeply into his eyes. “Sasuke, listen to me. *Itachi is an idiot.”*

Sasuke gaped. He wasn’t even sure what to do. Come roaring to Itachi’s defense? But this wasn’t even something he knew how to defend. Nobody had ever, *ever,* said something like that about Itachi before.

“Itachi’s a genius,” he said weakly.

Sakura wobbled her hand. “A genius *idiot,”* she amended. “But… he’ll probably still be useful! Actually, that’s step number one. We need to make people like the Uchiha again!”

Sasuke bristled slightly. That was a sore spot. It was true that in the village, other people seemed to be… colder towards his clan than normal. Itachi tried to hide it, but Sasuke knew it all the same.

“It’s not fair. The Uchiha clan is powerful and loyal to Konoha.”

Sakura winced. “Uh… yeah. But that’s why we’re going to fix that!” She nodded decisively. “We need a long-term plan. Something to give us more powerful support, and to give the Uchiha a stronger position in the village. Which leads into my brilliant plan…”

She sat up straighter, wiggling her hands at them. “Uchiha for Hokage!”

“What?” Naruto squawked. “But *I’m* gonna be Hokage!”

“Uchiha for temporary Hokage,” Sakura assured him. “Just enough for politics. To, uh, prevent certain things. And then once everything is good and people like the Uchiha again, they can start training you. They’ll owe us a favour for helping them get their position, so. It’ll all work out!”

Sasuke considered this. He was pretty sure his father *would* be pretty happy if there was an Uchiha as the Hokage. And everyone respected the Hokage. Maybe Sakura was onto something after all.

“Who’s going to be Hokage, then?” He wondered aloud.

“They have to be powerful,” Sakura answered promptly. “And really smart, because they have to handle politics. But most importantly, they need to be *super* charismatic.”

Naruto frowned. “Charis-what?”

“Charismatic. Like, friendly and nice and good at talking. Someone who's good at convincing people and everyone likes to be around.”

As unfortunate as it was, Sasuke could admit it. Not many members of his clan fell under that description.

“I met someone nice near the Uchiha Quarter!” Naruto exclaimed. “She helped me pick up my stuff and didn’t even yell at me! She had a really pretty smile. Her name was uh, uh, Miko-something?”

Sasuke’s head snapped towards him, eyes widening. *“Uchiha Mikoto?”*

“Uh huh.” Naruto nodded happily.

“That’s my mom!”

“Your mom?” Naruto scratched his head. “Well how was *I* s’posed to know that?”

Sakura’s eyes were wide. “I… never even thought of that. Hey Sasuke, is your mom powerful? Does she have crazy Sharingan abilities too?”

“We’re trying to make my mom Hokage?” Sasuke cried, alarmed. He hadn’t ever considered *that* as one of the possible outcomes of Sakura’s plan.

“She’ll just be one of our options,” Sakura decided. “It’s always good to have a backup plan! But no, I was thinking about other Uchihas. Like. The geniuses.”

“Itachi?” Sasuke immediately said.

Sakura wobbled her head from side to side. “He can also be on the list. But ideally they should be more… people-friendly?”

“Itachi is people-friendly,” Sasuke grumbled, but he furrowed his brow in thought. Out of everyone in the Uchiha clan, Itachi was by far and away the most lauded for his genius,

something which Sasuke looked upon with both pride and resentment in equal measure. But Itachi wasn't the only one. Because although he was regarded as a bit of a fool, there was no denying that the youngest Uchiha to obtain the Sharingan, to have graduated at *age seven* was —

"*Shisui?"* Sasuke shrieked.

—

Shisui twitched slightly as his baby cousin stared up at him intently. Deliberately, he blinked. Sasuke did not follow suit.

"So," he said loudly. "What's this about, Sasuke-kun?" He chanced a look at Itachi, but his other cousin did not appear to have any answers.

"I have an assignment for class," Sasuke said. His little gremlin stare never faltered. It was making Shisui nervous. "We have to do a psy-chology experiment." He pronounced the words very carefully.

Shisui squinted at him. He was pretty sure *he'd* never done any such experiments for the Academy. Especially not in his first year. Then again, it had been awhile, but still…

Sasuke had a notebook out and was tapping his pencil impatiently. "Do you consent to participate?"

Shisui's gaze flitted back over to Itachi. His cousin regarded him neutrally. "I already gave my consent."

Well, alright then. Shisui could sacrifice an hour of training with Itachi to participate in his little cousin's weird… *psychology experiment.* "Sure, why not? Hit me with it."

Sasuke nodded gravely, flipping open his notebook. Shisui tried not to giggle. "Question one," he read. "What colour should the moon be?"

Shisui snorted, then hastily attempted to conceal it at Sasuke's responding scowl. "Uh… silver? Yellow?" He attempted. "What kind of experiment *is* this?"

Sasuke didn't deign to answer what Shisui would have considered an extremely valid question. He just gave a satisfied nod, before noting something down in his notebook and moving on to the next question.

"Question two. Rabbits. Yes or no?"

Shisui glanced at Itachi. He looked extremely focused, completely invested in whatever nonsense Sasuke was currently spewing.

"Rabbits, otouto?"

"Yes or no?"

Itachi stared hard at Sasuke's expression. That was his thinking face. Shisui wasn't entirely sure what he was trying to analyze, but whatever it was, he seemed to come to a conclusion.

"...Yes."

Shisui decided to pick the opposite answer just for the hell of it. "No. Rabbits are freaky. Did you know I got attacked by a pack of red-eyed rabbits once? Bitey little devils."

Itachi gave him a look. Sasuke looked extremely displeased, but scribbled something else down in the notebook all the same.

"*Hn*. Question three: You're at a fancy, important party and you find out one of your allies is trying to kill you. Do you: a) kill them first, or b) be careful but keep them as an ally?"

Was it just Shisui, or were these questions getting weirder by the minute? This one actually seemed like a plausible scenario-based practice question, but coming out of Sasuke's mouth, it still just seemed wrong.

"I would determine what risk there would be in offending an important political partner, and if deemed safe, I would assassinate them discreetly, pinning the blame on a separate party," Itachi responded promptly.

That was a classic Itachi answer — picture perfect, clean, and no-nonsense.

"I'd hang close," Shisui offered. "Chat them up, keep an eye on them. Act if necessary, but mostly just watch."

Sasuke jabbed at the paper. "You're both wrong. The answer is option c) punch them in the face, bond over your tragic backstories and then become friends for life."

Shisui was so taken aback, that this time, he wasn't able to stop the loud guffaw from escaping.

"Otouto," Itachi started carefully. "I know you don't like when I look over your assignments, but I believe it could be beneficial—"

"Question four!"

"Otouto…"

"*Question four,"* Sasuke repeated loudly. "There are two tracks. On one side, five people are tied to them. On the other side, there is only one person tied up. There is a train coming—"

"A train?" Itachi interrupted.

Shisui waved a hand. "It's one of those new transport technologies developing in the Land of Snow. It's like a giant carriage with multiple carriages attached behind. Steam powered, I think?" He squinted at Sasuke. "Wait a second, since when did *you* know about that?"

Sasuke simply scowled at him, so Itachi turned back towards the boy. “My apologies, Sasuke. You can continue.”

“There’s a train coming and it’s about to run over the five people and kill them. If you’re standing by the lever that can switch the tracks, would you pull it?”

Itachi tilted his head. “I would pull it. It would be easier to rescue the one rather than attempt to protect five hostages.”

“Nii-san!” Sasuke whined. “That’s not the point! It’s about who you’re going to let die. This question only has two options. For real, this time!”

"That's a bit silly,” Shisui laughed. “In a real-life scenario, I’d be fast enough to untie them all. Or we could just stop the train.”

“Well, it’s not a real-life scenario. It’s all *the-o-retical.”* Sasuke had an adorably grumpy expression on his face.

“Then I guess I’d pull the lever,” Shisui relented. Itachi nodded in agreement.

Sasuke scribbled something down in his notebook. “Okay. Now what if I were the one tied to the tracks? And—”

“I would never let that happen,” Itachi said instantly.

“Nii-san, you have to let me finish! So if I were the one tied to the tracks, and the other people were Konoha citizens, and the Hokage *ordered* you to pull the lever, *then* what would you do?”

The lighthearted mood dropped off very quickly. Shisui exchanged a concerned glance with Itachi.

“Hey, so you said this was a *school assignment,* right…?”

Sasuke stomped his foot. “You have to answer the question.”

“I would never let that happen,” Itachi repeated fervently. “Never, Sasuke. Do you understand me? You have absolutely nothing to fear. I will ensure it.”

“Yeah, Sasuke-kun,” Shisui agreed. “That’s not a great question, huh? It’s like you’re implying the Hokage would do something like that, which we all know would never happen.” He wasn’t even being sarcastic! Much.

Either way, it probably wasn’t a good thing for Sasuke to be running around questioning out loud.

Pen scratched loudly against paper as Sasuke scribbled the page out irritably. Shisui almost thought he’d finally succumbed to his apparent disgruntlement and they’d be treated to an adorable Sasuke rant. But then he puffed out his cheeks and lifted his head once more, beady black eyes staring right into Shisui’s soul.

“*Fine*. Question five: Do you believe in aliens?”

…It was going to be a long day.

—

“Okay, so new plan,“ Sakura declared the following day. “Uchiha for Hokage was a bust. We need a new target.“

Sasuke was still sulking about Itachi’s apparent failure. He had never seen his brother flunk a test so abysmally before.

Naruto squinted at her. “Whadd’ya mean?“

“We don’t really need an *Uchiha* as Hokage. We just need someone Uchiha-friendly. We can work at improving the Uchiha public image ourselves.”

“How do you know they’re going to be a good Hokage?” Sasuke grumped.

Sakura waved a hand. “Just trust me on this. Besides, we also need firepower. It’s better if we get someone really good who can do all the action stuff for us.”

“Nii-san *is* good!”

“Yeah, maybe,” Sakura allowed. “But he’s probably not easily coerced.”

“Nii-san would help us if I asked him!” Sasuke insisted. Maybe. Probably. Itachi wasn’t always around though. He was busy all the time. He hardly even made time for Sasuke, after all. Sasuke deflated slightly.

“Hey, hey!” Naruto bounced up and down. “So who are we picking?”

Sakura beamed. “Don’t worry. I know just the guy.”

—

And to think the day had started out so well.

Kakashi had woken up that morning with his usual zest for life, which was to say with the normal amount of overwhelming dread about his continued existence. This had been slightly mitigated by the fact that today was the release date of the latest Icha Icha book, one of his only reasons for living.

He’d eaten his breakfast, oiled his tools, spent his allocated time talking to Obito and Sensei, then taken a leisurely stroll towards his favourite book shop. He was in no hurry. While Icha Icha was popular, it wasn’t a complete sensation yet, and besides — very few people were quite as shameless as him. No one else would be caught dead lining up for the opening sales.

So he had planned for a nice, relaxing, *peaceful* day. Unfortunately, he hadn’t accounted for the pink-haired menace.

Which led to now.

"*Out of stock?"*

"I'm so sorry, shinobi-san," the shopkeeper said apologetically. "They were all purchased right as we opened."

"Every copy?" Kakashi asked incredulously. How was that even possible? "How many did you have?"

"It's an established series so we ordered a case pack… forty books in total."

And they sold out of *all* of them?

"When will it be available again?"

The shopkeeper winced. "The shipment just arrived a couple days ago. We weren't planning on putting in another order for another month. At the very least. I'm so sorry."

That was… *highly* unfortunate to hear.

"Can I interest you in a different series?" They offered. "I can show you some of the other top picks from that section…"

"No, it's alright," Kakashi cut her off. He waved a hand loosely. "Maa, I suppose we can rejoice in the fact that so many people support the joy that is Icha Icha."

The shopkeeper gave him an awkward smile. "…Mm hm— oh, *yeah!"* They wouldn't meet his eyes anymore, and he couldn't help but notice. Something about this had suddenly gotten him feeling slightly suspicious.

"…*Who* was it that all purchased these books right at opening?"

The shopkeeper shifted in place. "Oh, they were just very enthused…"

Kakashi gave her a nice, friendly smile. "Then you wouldn't mind giving me a name? I think we have *a lot* to discuss."

—

He tracked them down to the Uchiha quarter, and it was there that he got a little bit stuck.

"Uchiha-san," he greeted.

The guard scowled at him. "Hatake," he responded stiffly. "Do you have business with the Uchiha clan today?"

"Business?" Kakashi hummed. "I just might." His gaze drifted towards the side to where a little Uchiha boy was coming back from the Academy.

The guard turned towards him. "Welcome back, Sasuke-kun."

“Hi, Ren-san,” the boy said. He swept a cursory glance over Kakashi as he passed through the gates — then whipped around and gawked at him a second time.

…Did Kakashi have something on his face?

And then Sasuke — and it *was* Sasuke, the clan head’s second son and Itachi’s little brother — turned right back around and ran out of the compound.

Well, *that* wasn’t suspicious at all.

Could he even be blamed for following?

Kakashi stalked Sasuke from the rooftops as he wound his way through the streets. The boy dodged around passerby and ducked through alleys, weaving around the throngs until he reached the civilian quarter. Just what was a clan child doing there? The question was quickly answered once he saw Sasuke enter a park, dart to the very back, and duck behind a large clump of overgrown trees.

It was there that he joined a group of two children: one, an enthusiastically-gesturing pink-haired girl, and two, a very familiar blond child. A boy that he’d spent several hours a week watching over for the past few years. A boy that in another life, very well could have been his own brother.

But here they were, huddling together like three evil, plotting toddlers in a tree.

“I saw him!” Sasuke exclaimed. He was breathing heavily, clearly not yet prepared for sudden dashes across the village. “He was exactly like you said! With the old man hair, and weird mask, and only one eye!”

…Well. That was hardly the worst way he’d ever been described.

“Then he *knows,”* the girl said gravely. “Alright. We’ve all prepared for this. Everyone knows what to say? Good.”

So Kakashi was apparently being *personally* targeted. He wasn’t sure if he liked that.

“Let’s get’im!” Naruto cheered, pumping his fist. “And then we’ll—”

All three children bodily flinched as Kakashi dropped out of the tree.

“And then you’ll what?” He asked mildly.

“Teach us cool jutsus or we ruin your freaky adult books!” Naruto blurted.

Kakashi blinked. Was he being *extorted* right now?

“Idiot,” Sasuke scoffed. “We want him to fight things for us, not that.”

The girl pointed at him, eyes shining with almost frightening determination. “Kakashi! You’re going to be our firepower and do politics for us. Help us save the world!”

“Oh,” she added casually as he was attempting to mentally piece this all together. “And we also took all your books so if you don’t want to get spoiled then you have to do what we say.”

…Now, Kakashi wasn’t one to be easily coerced. But that was an extremely valid threat. Moreover, it wasn’t every day that he got threatened by a bunch of brats. So sue him. He was curious.

So not to say that he wouldn’t take gleeful pleasure in repaying them in kind, but—

“Alright, you menaces. Let’s hear your offer.”

Chapter 2

“And this marks the day of my greatest failure,” Hiro declared. “Haunt me no longer, my love! I shall rejoin you in death!” And with that, he turned the sword inwards, plunging it into his breast and falling dramatically onto the wooden ground below.

There was a long silence, then darkness. Then the lights came back on, the cast returning to the stage to take their bows.

“Wooo!” Sakura cheered, leaping to her feet. “Bravo! Bravo! Bravissimo!” Naruto clapped loudly alongside her, tears in his eyes.

Sasuke folded his arms. “…That was terrible.”

He hadn’t been able to make out more than half the words, the singing had been horribly off-tune, and everything had seemed over-acted and unnaturally expressive. Why the other two were applauding as if it was the best thing they had ever seen was beyond him.

“It was *sad!”* Naruto wailed. “She loved him and he *betrayed* her! You don’t do that to someone who loves you, believe it!”

Sasuke believed it. He just hadn’t needed some stupid, ancient romantic tragedy to tell him that.

“The acting was bad,” he huffed.

Sakura was still clapping. She looked over her shoulder at him. “They’re only a small company,” she defended. “And it’s good to support our local theatres! They’ll still be good enough for our purposes anyway.”

Sasuke glanced around pointedly. Towards the back, a small handful of people were already making their way out the door. Apart from another two couples and a family of three, they were the only ones left in the theatre.

Even the word *theatre* was stretching it. Sasuke would have described it as a dark basement, a wooden platform, and some folding chairs. And that was putting it generously.

“Thank you so much for coming!” Hiro’s actor called, stepping back up onto the stage. “We greatly appreciate all your support, and look forward to putting on more shows for you! We’re a small company and there are a lot of fees associated with these productions, so if anyone would like to make a donation, all of our cast members have baskets here for anything you’d be willing to give. Thanks again, and we really appreciate all of your support and donations.”

Some of the audience members started moving a bit faster. Sasuke remained in his seat.

“So they’re poor,” he said flatly.

“Which is a *good* thing for us!” Sakura reminded him. She clapped her hands together. “Alright, let’s go hire a cast!” Turning away, she started towards the stage, humming cheerily under her breath. “Man, I love having rich friends.”

Sasuke hesitated, but then exhaled sharply and hurried after her. Sakura had already approached the lead actor with quick, confident steps.

“Hello! You said you were looking for donations?”

The actor's expression shifted, robes rustling as he bent down slightly towards them. “Oh, hello! You three are adorable! Did you enjoy the play?”

Sasuke frowned. He didn’t want to talk about the play. He cut straight to the point. “We want to hire you.”

“…H-hire us?”

“That’s right,” Sakura enthused. “We have a new script for an extremely pressing play. One that *must* be produced! For the good of humanity, really. And of course, we’re more than willing to compensate you.”

The actor’s smile twitched, a mixture of bafflement and dismissal. “How old are you three? Are your parents around here somewhere?”

“Sasuke, show him the cash,” Sakura ordered.

Blank-faced, Sasuke slid open his robe the slightest bit, just enough to flash one of his stacks of cash before closing it again.

“See, see!” Naruto jeered. “You haf’ta listen to us now!”

The man’s eyes were nearly as wide as the evil, alien moon. “W-what’s the play?” He stammered.

“Hashirama the Musical,” Sakura declared.

“*Hashirama the Musical?”* The actor exclaimed, which was about the same reaction Sasuke had heard upon first hearing this plan.

“Uh huh.” Sakura grinned with all her teeth, and all of a sudden Sasuke was struck with the sudden insight that he had made an excellent decision in aligning himself with her side rather than against it.

“Don’t worry! Soon enough, the whole *world’s* gonna know our name.”

—

“I don’t get it,” Naruto whined from their lazy sprawls back in the open sunlight. “Why’d you say it had to end like that? I don’t get how it’s gonna help make people like Sasuke’s family more.”

“It’s because of yaoi,” Sakura said. Her eyes were wise and knowing.

“What’s *yaoi?”*

Sakura waved a hand. “It’s… how do I put this? Basically, it’s boys' love. Things about boys loving boys.”

“Oh.” Naruto scrunched his nose, before suddenly sitting bolt upright. “Wait a second! Hashirama the Musical’s about Hashirama and Madara being *in love?”*

Sasuke jerked his head towards Sakura as well, staring at her with wide, horrified eyes.

Sakura shook her head. “You don’t know it yet, but you’ll see,” she intoned. “The force of yaoi is great and powerful. The power of ship wars and sexy man kinning can shape entire nations.”

“None of that made *any* sense,” Sasuke complained.

“Hm.” Sakura tapped her fingers together. “Okay. How about this? To put it simply, right now, the Uchiha clan has a negative reputation. People think of them as arrogant, untrustworthy, and rude. They’re known for their deadliness and for only caring about themselves.”

Sasuke scowled. “It’s not fair,” he said sullenly.

“It’s not! Which is why we’re basically giving them a brand makeover! When we’re done, everyone will associate you with good things, things that they like! And then boom!” She snapped her fingers. “Problems solved! Well, one problem solved, at least.”

“But how does *yaoi* make people like them?” Naruto demanded again. “Huh? *Huh?”*

“Just trust me, okay?” Sakura said. She said that a lot. It wasn’t always particularly convincing. “It’s one of those things that’s just weird but true. In order to get people to care, we have to get them *emotionally invested.* And whether we like it or not, nothing gets people more emotionally invested than hot, complicated men with tragic backstories.”

Sasuke squinted at her. He wasn’t sure if he liked this plan, but he couldn’t deny the power of fangirls.

“So we’re putting it on during the festival.”

“That’s right!” Sakura exclaimed. “We’re celebrating Konoha’s founding, so that way we can say we’re being all patriotic. It *is* Hashirama the Musical, after all. And we won’t even make too much of it up! It’ll just be… artistic liberties.”

“Making it yaoi *is* making stuff up,” Sasuke grumbled.

“I’ll just imply it,” Sakura assured them. “Emphasize the tragedy, make it more star-crossed friends from warring families… Then if we add in the emotional constipation and tsundere-ness, the audience will do the rest.”

“Hn.”

“It’s all good, I’ve got the script mostly written already! The hard part is adapting all the songs… ugh. But it’s fine. Our job is mostly to handle the advertising.”

“Advertising? What do we gotta do?” Naruto inquired, squirming up from the grass.

“Well, first we have to get permission to put it on somewhere where it will attract more viewers. Naruto, I was kinda hoping you could talk to the Hokage about this one…?” Sakura smiled hopefully in his direction.

“You need me to ask Jiji?” Naruto scratched his head, before giving a big thumbs up. “I can do that, believe it! You can count on me!”

Sakura grabbed his hands excitedly. “Great, that's perfect! Okay, now we just need to make sure people come. Have you guys ever made posters before?”

—

Itachi was just returning home for a brief break before his next mission when he spotted the large paper pinned to the side of the compound wall. It was black and gold, with the image of a large tree in the background, and what looked to be the figure of the Shodaime dramatically posed at the front.

…That hadn’t been there the other day.

He scanned over the large text printed at the bottom. *Hashirama: A Konohan Musical*, it said. And then, *watch at the Festival of Konoha’s Founding.*

This was new. Itachi had never seen something like this before. That being said, he had never been overly invested in these sorts of things. He idly wondered who had bothered to come put it up on the Uchiha compound walls, then put it out of his mind as he continued walking home.

From down the street came a familiar head of fluffy hair, and Itachi felt that sudden rush of guilt that always hit him whenever his little brother came into sight.

Itachi slowed, trying for an apologetic smile. “Hello, otouto. I’m sorry, I know I promised to train with you, but—”

Sasuke brushed past him, with a rushed, “sorry, nii-san! Next time!” He hurried out of the gates, papers fluttering in his wake.

“…it’ll have to be next time…”

Itachi's eyes continued to follow Sasuke as his little brother ran off without a single glance back. This too was a new development. And although Itachi wasn’t always home, he couldn’t help but get the feeling that Sasuke had been acting a lot… *odder* recently.

…Had that been a stack of black and gold papers tucked beneath his arm?

—

“Longer eye contact!” Sakura demanded. “More passion! More *tension!”*

The Izuna actor dropped his prop sword. The Tobirama actor ran a hand through his white wig wearily.

“Kid, aren’t you like, *seven?”*

—

Hashirama lay on his bed, hand stretched out towards the sky. “And through the bloodshed, we still are brothers,” he sang. “For the peace that I seek lies with you…”

“Angle,” the director barked. “Prop yourself up more. The audience needs to see your face. Let’s run that through one more time!”

—

“More blood,” Sasuke suggested, eyes narrowed as he examined Izuna’s position being run through with Tobirama’s sword. “Gut wounds bleed more than that.”

“Adjust the lighting!” Sakura called. “Make it as dramatic as possible!”

“Add more sounds,” Naruto chimed in. “Like *woosh! Slash! Swchp!* ‘Cause it’s supposed to be a cool sword fight!”

The director sighed, long and loud. “Yes, *thank you* for the suggestions from our patrons.”

—

“My brother gone,” Madara rumbled. “Something has changed within me. His final words, and with them he decreed… that we must not trust those who’ve ripped us apart. Yet if I had only from the start, I could have saved my family.”

He whipped around, glorious mane flying out behind him. “I take no joy, though I shed no tears. I’ll see this through, allay my fears. We’ll be at peace, no more needless loss. But my soul has cracked from this terrible cost.”

It still didn’t get any less weird to see Madara singing. Sasuke followed along with the lyrics and tried his best to pretend not to hear Naruto sniffling again.

—

Sakura shook the script pages aggressively. “He’s been driven out of his mind by the loss of his brother. He’s mad with grief! He loves his friend, and he once dreamed of Konoha’s founding, but Izuna’s death cost him so much. He lies awake at night plagued with guilt at making peace with his killer. *That’s* what spurs the final battle on!”

“Okay, okay.” Madara’s actor adjusted his costume uncomfortably, armour plates rattling. “I got it.”

“The battle is a last ditch attempt at dealing with the conflict inside of him,” Sakura emphasized. “He’s not expecting to win it. He just wants to make sense of the world, and to make Hashirama understand.”

“Thank you, Sakura-chan,” the director said again. His tone indicated that he was now far too used to receiving this sort of advice. “Let’s try the next song now.”

—

“I see it now,” Madara rasped. “That dream we once shared… I can finally see it again.”

“My friend,” Hashirama said, voice thick. “Save your breath.”

“When we were just boys… by the river, our dream took shape. We called it… *Konohagakure.”*

“And we made it real. Konohagakure stands today. Because of us. Because of *you.”*

“… I tried to destroy it.”

“But you *didn’t. Shush*— it’s not too late! Let me heal you!”

“No. My people and yours— they stand together, hand in hand. As one. As *Konoha.* Please, if I can ask for anything… do not let my mistakes destroy that.”

“Never. This is what I fought for. This is what Konoha was founded on. Peace for our families. Peace for our children. We will stand united forevermore.”

“…Good.”

“My friend?”

“…”

“…Madara?”

“H-Hashirama…”

Madara’s head fell back, and for just a moment, all went silent. Then the shakuhachi flute began to play its mournful solo.

—

The morning of Konohagakure’s Founding Day, Kakashi was just getting home from a week-long mission. He was in his usual state: chakra-depleted, sleep-deprived, and feeling like death. Which was why the sudden shock of a hundred cheering civilians hitting his sensitive ears was particularly unpleasant.

…Unfortunately, if he wanted to escape and go crash in his apartment, he needed to go through the square.

The cheers were dying down, but the noise only got louder the closer he approached. There was music playing, and the stomping of a dozen feet impacting in coordination against a wood floor.

"Senju Hashira-a-ma!" A chorus sang out. *"Konoha sings for you!"*

Rounding the corner, Kakashi was greeted by the sight of a gathered crowd of civilians and shinobi alike, avidly watching what could only be someone's best interpretation of the Shodaime and Uchiha Madara dramatically posed in combat.

The word slipped out from his lips without conscious thought.

"…Why."

"The songs are surprisingly catchy," a voice called out. Genma was sprawled out on the rooftop above, alongside Raidou, who gave him a lazy wave. "Hey Hatake, you should stay and check it out! We've still got act two to go."

Kakashi eyed the scene. The Madara figure made some sort of child's attempt at a handsign. Red lights flashed across the backdrop behind him.

"I think I'm good, thanks," he said flatly.

Genma shrugged. "Suit yourself. It's been pretty entertaining though."

Kakashi cast one last glance around. From the curtains behind the stage, he caught a glimpse of too-gleeful eyes and an unpleasantly familiar head of pink hair.

Could it be…?

If there was one group of people he didn't want to run into, it was the Uchiha Clan Head's son, the encapsulation of all his mistakes, and the head menace herself. He had successfully avoided thinking about them for the past several days. He had no intention of breaking his streak now.

He had tried retrieving his book, but it had quickly become clear that they were stashed somewhere inside the Uchiha Compound itself. And while Kakashi was all kinds of audacious, he had enough history with the Uchiha Clan already. Even *he* wasn't going to try pulling off a heist.

So he'd get back at them. Eventually.

Just not quite yet.

On stage, Tobirama and Madara had started insulting each other during a council meeting in song form.

And… yep. That was his cue to call it a day.

Chapter 3

“Well, I think we can officially call that a roaring success,” Sakura declared. “Now we just need to wait and see how things turn out. Sasuke, have you noticed any changes yet?”

“I think people are talking to us more,” Sasuke reported. “Mostly about the musical, but still.”

“I saw a bunch of guys wearing our shirts!” Naruto crowed. “We got Hashirama merch all over Konoha, believe it!”

“The Madara ones are really popular too,” Sasuke added grudgingly.

“*Perfect*. Nice work, team!” There was a round of Sakura-induced high fives, before she settled everyone down again.

“Alright, onto the next stage of our plan. Has anyone heard of Danzo?”

“Who’s that?” Naruto asked loudly.

Sasuke frowned. “…He’s on the Council of Elders, isn't he?”

“That’s right. So listen up.” Sakura leaned in very close towards their faces, smushing all their heads together. “Danzo is *the enemy.* Danzo is the great, eyeball-stealing evil, and we have to take him down! Thankfully, I have a plan.”

“Sakura-chan’s plans are the best,” Naruto said adamantly.

As of yet, they hadn’t been *that* terrible, but Sasuke wasn’t willing to go *quite* that far. “What’s your plan?” He didn’t do a very good job at keeping the suspicion out of his tone.

“It’s a somewhat complicated, multi-step plan,” Sakura said evasively. “I’m going to need all your help. But I know we can do it! And hopefully not even get speared to death while we’re at it!”

Naruto puffed out his chest. “You can count on me, Sakura-chan!”

Sasuke glanced at Naruto, then firmed his expression. “Of course we can do it.”

“That’s more like it! Okay, but to get at Danzo, there’s one more person we need. Well, actually, group of people, but hopefully we’ll only have to recruit one.”

Sasuke crossed his arms. “Is it another weird jounin?”

“Nope! They’re even in our class. So… who wants to befriend Hyuuga Hinata?”

—

Iruka gazed at the three faces staring up at him and did his absolute best not to flinch.

There was Uchiha Sasuke: focused, determined. Reserved in class, but competitive and eager during exercises.

Haruno Sakura: keen, enthusiastic, and just a touch maniacal. But in a good way! He'd never met a student so… passionate about such odd subjects.

And then there was *him.*

At first, Iruka hadn't been able to look at the boy without seeing the world painted in red. Overwhelming terror, inescapable violence… and then that empty, crushing feeling that had stayed with him ever since the dust had settled. He had recovered since then, bolstered by his friends and the Hokage's support, but even still, there was something missing.

Looking at the Kyuubi's host was like running straight into the jaws of the monster he had always tried to suppress. On some level, Iruka understood it was unfair to the boy. He had pleaded with the Hokage, begged him to understand why he just couldn't teach like this.

But on the first day of class, the boy was there anyway — those black whiskers burned like claw marks into his cheeks.

On that first day, the boy had acted out. He had been resisting, and impertinent, and uncontrollable. Iruka hadn't been able to see him as a boy at all. But these past few weeks…

Seeing him playing, laughing, stumbling about and making friends? It had shaken him up enough to provide that shift in worldview that Iruka had needed to finally see that he was a child just like any other.

And so seeing the three children now and looking straight into the boy's— *Naruto's* eyes, he told himself the only fear he needed to feel was the concern of what these three *seemingly* innocent individuals were up to.

"Sensei!" Sakura said cheerily. "Do you have a minute?"

Iruka leaned down slightly, putting a more friendly smile on his face. "Of course. Did you have any questions about today's lesson?"

"We did, actually," Sakura replied promptly.

"We were very interested in the Nidaime's last stand against the Gold and Silver Brothers," Sasuke said. His tone was slightly stiff, but somewhat sincere all the same. "And where we could learn more about it."

"Yeah! It was super cool!" Naruto cheered. "Cause he went back and protected his students, and tried to fight them all off by himself! Like, *swoosh, wssh, whap!* He's a hero!"

Iruka couldn't help the added upturn to his lips. "I'm glad you were all so interested in the lesson. The Nidaime *was* a very special man, and important to our history here in Konoha. We'll be moving on to our next unit in class, but I can give you some books… or… *hm.*…"

He considered the situation. Iruka wasn't sure if they were all at a high enough reading level yet, but as a teacher, he definitely wanted to nourish their excitement and curiosity.

"You know what would be cool, Iruka-sensei?" Sakura cut in. "What if we could hear more stories from back in Konoha's history? It would be really great to learn more about what happened back then! I really like getting to know all the details — the stuff that doesn't make it into the history books. Imagine if we could speak to the Nidaime or the Shodaime themselves!"

Iruka smiled knowingly. "Ah, you must be fans of the recent play, aren't you? Hashirama the Musical… it was very well-done, even if it wasn't entirely historically accurate."

A shallow snorting noise came from his left, but when he turned to look, Sasuke's face was completely impassive.

"It *was* pretty cool," Sakura said confidently. "But what I'm really talking about is getting the chance to hear from real people who were around back then. I'm sure we could learn a lot from them. Our elders have so much to share! And they deserve a chance to tell their stories too, you know?"

"A-ah, that's quite the idea, Sakura-chan," Iruka stuttered. Was it strange that he was feeling slightly overwhelmed? Each word came out with such *vigour.* How could there be so much force of personality in such a small body?

"I wanna hear from people who were there!" Naruto declared. "They can tell us about saving people, and cool battles, and all the jutsus!" Even Sasuke was nodding in avid agreement.

"I'll think about it," Iruka said helplessly. And he *was* thinking about it. *Really*. In fact, the more he considered it, the more appealing the idea seemed to become. Iruka was always searching for interactive activities, exercises that could engage the children's interests. Having speakers come in was an excellent idea. And if he managed to pull in some of the elders… they had actually been *there* during the Nidaime's last battle, hadn't they? His students would be delighted.

"We could spar! We could have a *tournament!"* Sakura pushed. "The elders could get to see our progress and get to know what it's like at the Academy these days, and they could even offer us advice."

"Yeah! Yeah!" Naruto cheered.

Iruka sighed. "Well, I can't promise anything, but it's definitely a thought for later. I really am happy with how you're engaging with the material though. Keep it up, you three!"

Naruto grinned. "You're the best, Iruka-sensei!"

Sasuke nodded. "...Thank you."

"It really would be a good idea," Sakura pressed. "Such a great learning experience, right?"

Iruka raised his hands, laughing helplessly. "I'll consider it, I promise."

She nodded, satisfied. “I believe you. Thanks, Iruka-sensei!” Sakura finally swept off, Naruto and Sasuke in tow.

It wasn’t a bad idea at all though. Iruka wasn’t sure if it would pan out, but the elders weren’t all that busy, were they? And surely they would be inclined to help teach the future generation and bolster Konoha morale.

…Maybe Iruka would mention the idea to the Hokage later.

Still, in the back of his mind, all he could see was the satisfied glint in Sakura’s eyes. Was it just him, or had she looked *way* too pleased about this?

–

“It’s not working,” Naruto exclaimed. “She keeps running away from me!”

“I guess that’s not entirely surprising.” Sakura looked thoughtful. “Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. Let’s just go after her.”

Sasuke hit her with a particularly skeptical look. “*Go after her?”*

“Not like, in a press ganging way or anything!” Sakura said hastily. “Just, you know. Steal her away for a little bit. And then we’ll *make friends.”* She cracked her knuckles. It was not very friendly.

“Come on!” Sakura gestured impatiently. “She’s probably walking home now. Let’s go!”

There was a brief period where the three of them put their best stalking skills to the test. They found Hinata walking down the street back to the Hyuuga compound, accompanied by an older boy.

“Hinata-chan!” Naruto waved at her wildly.

“Ee-eep—” Hinata’s face immediately went crimson red.

“*Heyyy* Hinata,” Sakura said cheerily. “We’re just going to steal you away for a second. Okay? Okay!” She grabbed her hand and rushed off, dragging a flustered Hinata behind her.

They ended up in an alleyway. Sasuke walked in to Sakura pinning Hinata to the brick wall.

“We’re going to be best friends from now on,” Sakura informed her. She slammed her hand into the crumbling brick emphatically, and little pieces of shale fluttered away.

“W-wait, but I’m still your *best* friend, *right*, Sakura-chan?” Naruto said, wide-eyed.

“Take your hands off her.”

From behind them all came the taller boy, long hair swishing and pale eyes flashing. “Hinata. *Come.”*

Sasuke frowned. “Who are you?”

“Hyuuga Neji,” he said shortly. “I won’t repeat myself. Let’s go.”

“I-it’s okay,” Hinata stammered. She shrunk into herself slightly. “I d-don’t mind…”

“*Pathetic.* You can’t even defend yourself, can you?” He made a sound of disgust, before striding down the alleyway to grab Hinata’s arm.

“Ohhh,” Sakura said knowingly. “You’re still in your jerk phase, aren’t you. You haven’t had your character development yet!”

Neji paused, then very slowly turned around. *“…Excuse me?”*

Sasuke recognized that tone from his mother. The overly polite, clipped words were a big, blinking indicator that it was time to backpedal, and fast. Unfortunately, Sakura didn’t appear to get the message.

“You’re still in your jerk phase,” she repeated. Her hands flew out, gesturing excitedly. “But that’s okay. We can fix it! Neji, you have to let go of the inevitability of fate and strive for your own happiness!”

Neji stared her down, pure derision in his eyes. “What would *you* know of fate?”

“I mean, it definitely *does* exist, at least to some extent,” Sakura admitted easily. “That’s kinda just the way things work here. But why would you think you can know what your fate is already? Everyone still needs to *try.”*

Neji sneered. “To try and be shot down? There’s no point at all. It’s perfectly evident who is born fortunate and who will lead a life of worthlessness. If you’re such a fool as to believe otherwise, try all you like. You’ll quickly find it’s useless.”

Naruto bristled, fists clenched. “You’re wrong! Thinking like that… it’s a *stupid* way to think! I’m gonna be great one day! I’m gonna be *Hokage*, and no stupid fate is gonna stop me!”

“You tell him, Naruto!” Sakura cheered. She stood up taller, smushing her hands around Neji’s cheeks. “You better shape up, man. You can be mopey, but you can’t be mean, got it?”

Neji slapped her hands away in disgust. “Never talk to me again.”

“I mean it though,” Sakura emphasized. “Better to learn it now than to dwell in misery for another five years or so.”

“You’re an arrogant nobody who will *never amount to anything.”*

Naruto shrieked in indignation. Sakura’s eyes glinted. “Don’t worry, I haven’t given up yet! Alright, plan two. We’re doing character development the classic way. *Get him!”*

And with that, she *pounced.*

Neji went down with a muffled shout, Sakura right on top of him. It almost looked like she was attempting to shove his face into the dust, her fingers tangled in the back of his hair.

"If talk no jutsu fails—" She huffed out heavily through gritted teeth, all the while trying to maintain her position on top. *"It's time for punch no jutsu!"*

For a second, it looked like she was winning, but then Neji clearly recovered from the surprise. Sakura tumbled over with a yelp as Neji managed to shove her off, jabbing her harshly in the side.

She didn't stay down for long though. Her eyes were as bright as ever as she went in for a second charge. Neji was prepared this time though, and dealt her a punishing blow in the stomach. Sakura folded, wheezing.

"Hey!" Naruto roared, but Sakura was louder.

"It's vital to the future that we beat his face in! *Pile him!"*

Naruto leapt on his back with a yell. Sasuke stood and stared for just a second, but he wasn't one to be left out. He slid in, tackling Neji back to the ground. With all three of them, it was much easier to send Neji sprawling.

Hinata reached out tentatively. "N-Neji-san—"

"Character development, take *that!"* Sakura shouted. She reached out, clutched at Neji's head, and slammed both their skulls together.

They both recoiled with loud exclamations of pain, clutching at their heads.

"None of us are useless nobodies!" Naruto growled. "And I'm gonna prove it!"

"W-wait," Hinata stammered.

Sasuke levered Neji's arm away painfully. Naruto punched him in the chest, then drew his fist back again to sock him in the face.

"Stop!"

They all froze.

Hinata was panting, hand out, eyes blazing. She faltered slightly as they all turned to look at her, blip and firmed her stance. "Y-you may want to be friends, a-and Neji-san may not like me due to my position…" Her voice trembled, but she didn't stop. "B-but he is still my family. If you're g-going after him, then I will defend him."

Neji frowned, forehead red and bruised. "Hinata…"

Sakura hopped up with a pained grimace, but the grin that followed was still real. "That's right, because you still care about him, don't you? You don't think less of him for being a branch family member?"

Hinata shook her head fervently. “N-no!”

“You think he still deserves a chance to succeed despite his circumstances?”

“O-of course!”

Sakura clapped a hand on Hinata’s shoulder, then turned back and did the same to Neji. He didn’t even brush her off this time.

“Then I think you guys should talk it out. There’s always *someone* willing to help, you know? You're not really as trapped as you might think.”

She strode out of the alleyway, gesturing for Sasuke and Naruto to follow her.

Naruto clambered off sheepishly, scratching the back of his neck. “Hehe… sorry Hinata-chan! I hope you get rid of your jerk phase, Neji!”

Sasuke simply huffed and walked away.

And over her shoulder, Sakura tossed them both an overexaggerated wink.

“You can do it! Hey, if you still want to be friends after, you know where to find me!”

—

One day later, Hinata approached them after school, a determined expression on her face. Neji stood at her shoulder.

“L-let’s be friends!”

Chapter 4

The desk was hard and cold beneath Shikamaru's cheek. He didn't like napping on his desk. It was usually better with a book beneath, or Choji's scarf, when he was lucky, but the wood itself wasn't all that comfortable. It didn't deter him, of course, but he far preferred the soft grass and the sun's warm rays on his face for a proper napping spot.

Even with his eyes closed, he wasn't entirely tuned out. Shikamaru liked to nap. Sitting up and being alert was just too troublesome. At the same time though, Shikamaru understood that there were advantages to being underestimated. The 'lazy Nara' stereotype had been cultivated for a reason, after all.

Not only that, but his father had warned him of the dangers of being just a little too talented, a touch too quick. Well, not *warned,* exactly. Shikaku didn't do that. What he *did* do was lay things out — present information in such a manner as to suggest there was something there worth paying attention to, if only you could find it.

Shikamaru had found it. And what he had found told him that he was perfectly content with his current reputation.

Their teacher was currently going on about a new matter. Some sort of Elder's Day. Shikamaru cracked half an eye open as Iruka explained.

"And the members of our very own Konoha Council will be joining us this Friday to review some of the lessons we've been learning recently. Everyone will be on their best behaviour, or else. They're very wise and experienced, and you should all treat them with respect. We'll all have a lot to learn from their stories."

The Konoha Council, huh? Shikamaru had heard his father talk about them before. His tone had been neutral, but it was evident that his opinion of them was not the highest.

"Sensei," Haruno said, waving her hand around wildly. "Sensei, I have a suggestion!"

"Yes, Sakura-chan?" Iruka's tone was wry but indulgent.

Shikamaru opened his second eye. He even deigned to prop himself up a little in his seat.

The thing was, in all his life, there wasn't a whole lot that piqued his interest. Most things were too boring and not worth paying attention to. The rest was too troublesome to bother getting himself wrapped up in.

Haruno Sakura was very troublesome.

She was also very, *very* interesting.

"We should make presents to give them," Haruno said enthusiastically. "I can sew! And Sasuke's good at drawing. And at the end, we can present them with thank you gifts! For all

their help!”

Uzumaki cheered for this suggestion, but he did that for practically all of Haruno’s ideas. Sasuke and Hinata seemed to be nodding along though, and even Ino had a glint in her eyes that suggested she was interested.

…Troublesome.

“That’s a very nice idea, Sakura-chan,” Iruka said kindly. “Please feel free to make them gifts. We can set some time aside at the end of their visit to give them a proper thank you.”

The thing about Haruno was that by all accounts, she seemed to be a perfectly average, if slightly over-enthusiastic, civilian girl. And she was! Really. But still, every time Shikamaru looked at her, there was something that rubbed him the wrong way. Maybe it was the way she spoke. Shikamaru knew that his own intellect and vocabulary were far above average, but Haruno was just unnatural. Or the things she did. Like this whole Elder’s Day plot, which was most definitely *her* doing. She was scheming, loudly, overtly, but scheming all the same.

Maybe that was why nobody seemed to accuse her of anything. She was too in-your-face about it all, so why bother?

Still, there was something very suspicious afoot.

…Troublesome indeed.

–

Between the Council, the Elders, the Police Force, and his family, Uchiha Fugaku had a lot on his plate.

Balancing the push towards the coup was as stressful as ever. That being said, there were different complaints being raised now. No longer was it only about Konoha’s mistreatment of the Clan and the distrust of their forces… *Now*, it was about the defamation and disrespect of their noble clan.

…Yes, it was all due to that *bloody musical.*

Fugaku hadn’t seen it in person, but he’d definitely heard a lot about it. And while he wasn’t overly impressed by the material, he couldn’t help but be surprised by how *positively* they seemed to depict the Uchiha Clan. There was an emphasis on Konoha being the sum of its parts, with Senju and Uchiha working as one. And although Madara had indeed turned against it, the ending was *far* more forgiving than reality.

Most of the children seemed to recall it fondly, but the majority of the older members of his clan hated it. They called it blasphemous, disrespectful, a stain on their honour. And while Fugaku definitely wouldn’t call himself a *fan*, he couldn’t deny that it was making a difference.

Still, there were only so many times one could listen to off-tune renditions of *Senju Hashirama* without going insane.

Fugaku was just exiting his office when one of his assistants pulled him to the side.

“Tekka,” he greeted. “Did you need something?” He held the door back open.

“Nothing urgent, sir.” Tekka stepped back into the room after Fugaku, shutting the door behind him. “I just wanted to discuss the recent accounts.”

“Yes?” Fugaku tilted his head. “Is there an issue? If the council is still asking about the armoury budget, I told them just last week that it would be split with the housing repairs.”

“No, no, it’s not that. It’s about your personal transactions, sir.”

“Elaborate, please.”

“See, I just wanted to clarify something.” Tekka pulled out a stack of papers, flipping steadily until he reached the one marked with a dark tab. “Currently, the theatre company costs are under your personal account. Seeing as they are for clan benefit, would you like me to fund them from the Council account? Or if you’d prefer that I keep it discreet, please let me know.”

It wasn’t often that Fugaku was taken off guard. The last time that had happened had been during Mikoto’s second pregnancy. “Repeat that again,” he ordered, very calmly.

“...The theatre company costs. Two million yen to the Konoha Stagecraft Collective. I assumed this was an operation meant for swaying public opinion through the, ah, *musical.”*

“Two million yen,” Fugaku repeated. “To the *Konoha Stagecraft Collective.* On my *personal accounts.”*

Tekka’s expression was very rapidly falling. “...I assume I can take this to mean that you did not intend to spend two million yen on *Hashirama the Musical.”*

“I did not.”

He winced. “...And can I assume then that the purchase of forty copies of adult erotica novels was *also* not your doing?”

“...”

“...Fugaku-sama?”

The resulting explosion was loud enough to be heard all across Konoha.

–

Sasuke stomped up towards the group, expression trapped in a permanent scowl.

“This is all your fault,” he accused.

“*Me?* My fault?” Sakura pointed at herself, offended. “What did *I* do?”

“You got me in trouble!”

“In trouble? In trouble how? *In trouble with whom?”*

“In trouble with Tou-san!” Sasuke clutched his hands in his hair. He looked more distressed than angry now. “He found out about all the money!”

“The… *oooh.”* Sakura's eyes widened. “Oh, oh that’s… not great. Did he find out, uh, what we’ve been spending it on?”

“Yes.”

Sakura winced. “Well that’s… doubly not great.”

Hinata poked her fingers together worriedly. “A-are you alright, Sasuke-kun?”

“Fine, *I guess.”* Sasuke crossed his arms. “He got really mad at me, and he asked me a bunch of questions, but he didn’t actually know what we did. He thinks that I spilled his account information or got scammed or something. I’d never do that!”

“Of course you wouldn’t do that!” Naruto clenched his fists. “That’s so unfair! It’s not your fault your dad doesn’t realize we’re buying weird adult books for a good reason!”

“A-adult books…” Hinata’s face immediately flushed. Neji laid a hand on her shoulder, glaring Naruto down suspiciously.

Sasuke huffed. “I saved the books, you know. But we your plan won’t work now anyway. We can’t pay the model. I don’t have any money anymore.”

“...Ah. That might be a problem.” Sakura suddenly slapped her hands into her cheeks. “Alright, we need solutions! *Think,* people! Any ideas? Get-rich-quick schemes?”

Naruto scratched his head. “I don’t have that much money. Only what Jiji gives me every month.”

Sakura squinted at him. “Could we maybe convince him to give you *more* money? Like… a couple million yen more?”

Naruto shook his head. “Jiji’s cheap. He only buys me like, three bowls of ramen when we go out.”

“Okay, okay.” Sakura started pacing. “Other rich people we know. The Hokage’s rich. Uh… who else is rich? And willing to pay? What do we have to offer… *ugh,* we should have taken a commission on the Hashirama merch…”

“Um…” Hinata started timidly.

“We should just sell the books,” Sasuke groused.

Sakura considered it. “I guess right now we have a monopoly on them. We could just jack the prices way up. Or we could write our own! Is that legal? I wonder if Jiraiya has a copyright claim… oh! Jiraiya! *Jiraiya!”* Sakura was grinning wildly.

“What is it?” Naruto had jumped to his feet as well.

“Okay, new plan.” Sakura pointed at Naruto very determinedly. *“You* are going to pimp me out.”

Hinata fainted. Neji let out a startled hiss and immediately got to work trying to fan her awake.

Naruto tilted his head. “What’s that?”

“Hm…” Sakura tapped a finger against her lips. “Okay, so, Jiraiya likes women. In a sexy way. Like the weird adult books. And he’ll pay women a lot, right? Like, *tons* of cash. So basically, we’ll all learn henge, I’ll pretend to be older, he’ll pay me, and then *poof!* I’ll take off the disguise. And it’s bad when adults are with kids, so then we can *blackmail* him! For lots and lots of money!”

Sasuke stared at her with wide eyes. “...This is your worst plan yet.”

Sakura didn’t back down. “It’ll work! And worst case scenario, Naruto can just guilt trip him. Maybe he’ll even give you money! Maybe.”

“U-um…” A small voice said, and they all looked over to where Hinata was sitting up again rather woozily. “I h-have a suggestion…”

Sakura made a giant ‘X’ with her arms. *“You* can’t pimp me out! You’re too pure! I forbid it!”

“No!” Hinata shrieked. Her face was suddenly red again. She coughed, then hid her head in her hands. “It was a-another suggestion… um… As a member of the Hyuuga h-head family, *I* have money…”

“Hinata-sama!” Neji exclaimed.

Sakura subsided, eyeing Hinata carefully. For the first time, her tone was actually serious. She took Hinata’s hands in hers. “You don’t need to do that. I can figure something out. Something that’s not even pimping! Probably. Sasuke got in trouble, you know. Which shouldn’t have happened. Sasuke, I’m very sorry about that.”

Sasuke turned away, tucking his chin in his collar. “...whatever. I agreed to it anyway.”

“I w-want to,” Hinata said. Her voice wasn’t solid, but it was firm enough. “Y-you’re my friend. And you s-say it’s important… so I want to.”

“It can’t be that important,” Neji said sharply, before glancing back down at Hinata. “...But it’s Hinata-sama’s choice. I will make sure she doesn’t get caught.”

Sakura threw her arms around them both, ignoring Hinata's squeak of alarm and Neji's sputtering. "Alright!" She cheered. "You're the best! Team Takedown is a go!"

–

It started with a flyer Kakashi received outside his doorstep. Kakashi almost never received flyers. He lived in a shinobi-heavy complex, and people just didn't do that there. Still, there it was, white flimsy paper, and a very rough drawing of a very familiar book cover.

Icha Icha Model Book Signing! The large letters of at the top of the page proclaimed cheerily. More text followed below it: *Icha Icha Makeout Paradise cover art model and inspiration Inoue Mae to hold book signing and Q&A. Enter the draw to win free copy of Icha Icha Sequel!*

There was a location and a time printed at the bottom of the page. Kakashi couldn't help but quickly calculate it. Next Friday… he had something assigned later that evening, but there would still be enough time to make it.

And while this was *definitely* suspicious and more than likely some sort of trap, he couldn't just *not* go.

But that location… that was directly outside the Academy, wasn't it?

–

Sasuke tugged at Itachi's arm. "You *have* to come to Elder's Day on Friday," he insisted. "I really, *really* want you to come."

Shisui tried not to coo. Sasuke really was adorable sometimes, as much as he protested it. He had always followed Itachi around like a little duckling. It was a perfectly accurate comparison! And still, both his cousins glared at him when he called Itachi a mother hen.

"I'll do my best, Sasuke," Itachi said. He carefully detached his brother from his sleeve.

"I mean it, nii-san! We're going to have a tournament, you have to come watch me! And there's a ceremony afterwards too. With all the elders."

"No invite for your favourite cousin?" Shisui joked. "I can't believe I have to miss out on watching you and your little classmates kicking butt. I feel betrayed, I tell you."

Sasuke glared at him for a long moment, before muttering something under his breath. "You can come too, I guess."

Shisui grinned. "What was that?"

"I want you to come too," Sasuke said loudly. "Okay? So you *better* come on Friday."

Shisui blinked, startled. In reality, of course Sasuke didn't hate him. His baby cousin got jealous of anyone stealing Itachi's attention, and Shisui liked to annoy him right back, so they

just had that sort of love-hate relationship. But in a friendly way. Sasuke obviously cared about him beneath all that.

But still, he hadn't been expecting an actual invite. Certainly not one delivered in such a genuine manner.

Sasuke had changed recently. Itachi had noted it as well. Maybe it was the Academy. Or the new friends Shisui always saw him running around with. But whatever it was, Shisui glad to note that it seemed to be for the better.

"Alright, Sasuke," he said, giving him a true smile. "Friday, you said? I'll be there. Promise."

Itachi sighed, then nodded solemnly. "I will be there too." He reached out slowly, then poked Sasuke in the center of his forehead. "I can't wait to see how you have progressed."

–

…This might be the most ridiculous thing Neji had ever done in his life.

Haruno Sakura was *infuriating*. She was foolish, and over-confident, and didn't think before she spoke.

Except the thing was, even though all those things were true, she had also still managed to defy them. Sakura was a fool but was extraordinarily creative. She was confident, but used that confidence to bolster others. She didn't think, but when she did, she showed long-term planning skills and deep insight.

For so long, Neji had been trapped in anger, and grief, and spite. Destiny was a cruel mistress, and although he could be *great,* he was forced to stew beneath the uncaring heel of the Head Family. But after Sakura…

Not everything had changed. He still resented his role. He still wished to be free, able to carve his own destiny away from the seal that kept his wings clipped. But seeing Hinata stand up for him? Watching someone so weak adamantly try to defend him, say that she *cared* about him…?

It had changed something.

He and Hinata had spoken afterwards. She had told him things that he once would have despised, but all the same, had always longed to hear. Neji had explained too, and she had *listened.* She cared. He could tell. And although she hadn't quite yet earned all his trust, and still had a long way to go… he found he didn't entirely mind waiting for her.

Sakura, though, was another thing entirely.

Neji still didn't believe in her. Or approve of her, for that matter. No matter what she said, she was still a reckless, no-name civilian. But all the same, there was something about her that he envied.

She was free, wasn't she? Maybe it was the fact that she *had* no future that meant she could do whatever she liked. She ran around, said whatever she thought, and made up the most *ridiculous* plans, carrying them out just because she could. There *was* a certain freedom to that. That wild determination and confidence in herself and everyone around her.

…Maybe that was why he was actually going along with this.

It was ridiculous, and nonsensical, and *stupid*, but here he was. Out in the yard of the Academy, sun overhead, and students shifting in their seats. He could hear the passersby in the streets, see the small gathering of what looked to be a bunch of civilians lined up around a table outside the gates. On his right was Hinata, nervously shifting in place, and beside her, Hiashi, stone-still and expressionless.

"Thank you very much for coming to the Academy and sharing your knowledge with our students," their teacher said. "They also made some gifts for you to show their appreciation. Here, come up–" He gestured at three of his students, who ascended the stage. The three students in question?

Did he even really need to say?

"Thank you for coming, Homura-san," Sasuke said blandly. He handed the man a rather offensively coloured beaded chain.

Homura stared at it for a long moment. "...May I ask what this is?"

"It's for your glasses!" Sakura added in. "You know, like a glasses chain!"

"You attach it to your glasses and then they can hang around your neck," Naruto piped up. "That way you can't lose them even though you're old and your memory's gone, you know?"

"Naruto!" The teacher hissed.

"Sorry, sorry." The boy didn't sound all that sorry. He approached Koharu next. "Hey, hey, thanks for coming! You had some super cool stories about the Nidaime, believe it! This is for you." He thrust out a short, curved item. It was bedazzled in rainbow wrappings and glittering rhinestones. "It's for your cane, see? It's an *accessory."* He sounded very pleased with himself.

"...Thank you." Koharu said. She took the cane accessory from him like it was a venomous snake.

Sakura was the one who approached the final man on the stage. "We were super, *extra* appreciative of you coming because we heard you're a pretty busy guy. So I made this for you personally!" She whipped something out of her pocket. It was a messily sewn strip of fabric, separate white and purple loops hanging off each other.

Sakura spread it out, holding it up to her face. "I call it the *thneed,*" she declared. "Because it's everything you need! It can be a hat, it can be a scarf… but most importantly, it's meant for you to use as a two-in-one headband eyepatch thingy! To replace your dirty bandages!"

Danzo looked the utter opposite of impressed.

She shoved it in his hands regardless. “You don’t have to look so doubtful,” Sakura coaxed. “It’s machine washable!”

“Is that all?” He asked stiffly. He held the *thneed* in a clawed grip, away from his person.

“No, no, you have to try it on!” Sakura insisted. “I was really unsure on the measurements, actually. I tried to measure my own head, but yours is definitely bigger. All that knowledge in there, right? Come on, try it! Then I’ll know if I need to resize it.”

Danzo stared at her coldly. “Enough, girl. Your gift was given. As you said, I am a busy man. Good day.” He started to rise.

“Wait!” Sakura surged forward. “Come on, please! It’s my first sewing project! The thneed could make it big! What if I offered to pay you royalties?”

Danzo sneered, whipping around. “I said, *enough–”*

That’s when Naruto dropped to the ground with a high-pitched shriek.

“My stomach!” He cried out. He clutched at his belly, squirming in the grass. “I feel all weird… something’s wrong! I’m hearing weird things, there’s something… something is *breaking free–”*

Around them, Neji could see certain people shooting each other pointed looks. People stood at attention. Others reached for their weapons.

…This wasn’t right. Neji didn’t understand. A random child’s outburst shouldn’t provoke *this* much of a reaction–

Beside him, Hinata shot up. “N-Naruto!” She cried out. Her Byakugan activated. She took a deep breath, steeling herself, then opened her mouth.

“Something’s wrong!” She called out loudly. “There’s something wrong with him!”

This was what Sakura had asked her to do. For what reason, Neji didn’t entirely know. Something to do with Danzo, whom Sakura strangely seemed to despise. Either way, he had thought this whole thing was stupid, and he disapproved of dragging Hinata into it.

Now though…

Neji activated his Byakugan.

The first thing he noticed was that Naruto had a *ridiculous* amount of chakra. He was practically bursting with it, blue energy swirling frantically around his system.

The second thing he noticed, was that apart from that? Naruto was completely fine. There was absolutely nothing wrong with him other than the insane amount of chakra. But there were no blockages, no depletion, no genjutsu, no *nothing.*

But the next thing he noticed… it practically made his heart stop.

On the periphery of his attention, he took note of Naruto letting out a long burp. The boy scratched at his neck, standing up sheepishly. “Sorry everyone! I ate *way* too much ramen before this, hehe. Man, my stomach is rumbling. I really need to go to the bathroom!”

But under his breath, Neji whispered…

“Sharingan.”

He wasn’t the only one who said it. Beside Hinata, Hiashi’s eyes were bulging white, and he had his gaze firmly fixed on Danzo. His face was utterly pale.

And that was when all hell broke loose.

–

It took a while to clean everything up in the aftermath.

They had taken Danzo down, but not without injuries. And an awful lot of collateral damage. Thankfully, having Hiashi, Itachi, and Shisui all on scene had made the outcome far more positive than it could have otherwise been. The Mokuton had certainly been an unwelcome surprise, but Hatake Kakashi popping up from just around the corner had definitely evened the odds.

There had been protests. Politics. Many unwelcome revelations. All of the clans had had much to say about Danzo’s blood theft. They’d had even more to say about the private child army living downstairs. In the end, the Uchiha Clan had found themselves supported by many, and discovered that they were far less alone than they had first thought.

And that was the aftermath.

–

In the aftermath of the aftermath, Sasuke and Naruto found themselves flopped out on Sakura’s bed, as she poked idly at both their faces.

“You guys look kinda weird…” she commented. “Like, distressed and in utter agony? It’s a bit worrisome.”

“We took down an elder of the Konoha Council…” Sasuke whispered under his breath. He sounded ill. “We took down a *secret bloodline thief…”*

“He had a magic Uchiha eye,” Naruto said, dazed. “He shot out spiky tree branches… He coul’da killed you!”

“No, he was nowhere close,” Sakura reminded them. “Remember? Because the plan was to run away as fast as possible and let the actual shinobi fight for us? The fighting didn’t even start until way later!”

“You were *right,”* Sasuke spat out. He levered himself up so quickly, he almost knocked Sakura off the bed. “You were telling the truth! About *everything!”*

Naruto clutched his head in his hands. “You really meant it! Like, *for real*, for real! I *actually* have a giant fox in my stomach! *The world is really gonna end!”*

Sakura looked positively perplexed. “...Wasn’t I saying this all along? I *told* you we were saving the world!” She slammed her hands down. “Wait a second! Are you telling me you didn’t even believe me this *whole time?”*

Naruto and Sasuke exchanged glances.

Naruto looked at Sakura. His gaze wandered down to the bedspread. When he finally spoke, he was quiet for once. “...You told me we could be best friends. I’ve never had a friend before. A-and… you believed in me. I said I was gonna be Hokage, and you didn’t laugh.”

“Of course I believe in you!” Sakura declared. “You’re Uzumaki Naruto, and you’re one of my best friends. *Believe it.”*

“You said I was important,” Sasuke blurted. He coloured slightly, looking away. “You said you needed me. Like you thought I could actually do stuff. *Actually* save the world.”

“You *can,”* Sakura emphasized. Like it was perfectly evident. “Why wouldn’t you be important? And I *do* need you. I couldn’t have done this without you.”

Naruto sniffled loudly. Sasuke scrunched up his face.

“Then we’re doing it,” he announced. “We’re solving all the problems you said. And we’re saving the world. *For real.”*

Naruto wiped messily at his eyes, but when he punched the air, it was with perfect determination. *“Yeah!* We can do it! ‘Cause we’re best friends, and we need each other, and-and we *can!”*

“That’s more like it!” Sakura grinned with all her teeth.

“Alright you guys, ready for my next plan?”

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!