

Out For Karma: Naruto

Chapter 76: Planning

Riku wiped the tiredness away from his face with his hand as he sat down in his mother's seat. Considering the circumstances and how he became the Rokudaime Hokage, he would never think of the chair as anything else than Tsunade's. No matter how long he sat in it.

Finally, he took a deep breath and looked at Hiruzen who was waiting patiently to the side. An update was required. Opening his mouth to say something, the door opened. Strolling in were Homura and Koharu, probably done with the task Riku had given them. It was perfect. He dismissed the anbu on the spot and activated the security seal, locking down the whole office.

"The Mizukage recovered to full health. Missing parts regrown, face fixed. She was nothing but grateful." He started with and before anyone could say anything about how she was an 'allied enemy' and shouldn't receive too much trust, Riku raised his hand to stop them. "I know. No need to say it. We freed two powerful shinobis from Orochimaru's mind control. Momochi Zabuza and his daughter are now fighting for us."

"This is good news." Homura said.

"One of the swordsmen of the mist and an ice user would help greatly."

Koharu was more straight to the point than Hiruzen. "Especially since they are undead. They won't tire and recover from any wounds."

Riku nodded but nuanced the news. "They are A-rank shinobis at best. It won't matter against S-rank and Kage level ninjas. They can take the heat off from our troops a bit, though." He exhaled through his nose. "Uchiha Itachi."

The name made more than a brow furrow. It was a very sore subject for the two elders and the former Hokage. The perfect shinobi. A genius of the tallest order that they used without thought and got broken by their late teammate. They all had a bitter taste in their mouths as a result.

"We need him on our side. Unfortunately..."

Hiruzen finished his successor's thought. "Sasuke is dead."

"Yes." Riku nodded. "I never met him so I don't know much. I know a lot about him as a shinobi but not about him as a man. Are you aware of anything that will make him join us?"

"Itachi..." Koharu said with surprising emotions. "Was very much like our late teammate Uchiha Kagami. An Uchiha with Senju ideals."

"Peace through understanding, not strength." clarified Homura who suddenly looked like he aged ten more years.

"He was perfect." Hiruzen spoke up then. "He loved the village, its people, more than he loved his clan. He was strong. He was smart. He was talented." The old man was looking outside the window, lost in thoughts. The regret and frustration of his face was made obvious by his wrinkles.

Riku understood then what Itachi was. "Your successor. You saw him as the Godaime Hokage. He had all the qualities needed. The cherry on the top of the cake was that he was an Uchiha. Decades of perceived slights... It would have quelled their resentment down. Appeased them but not really gave them any power because Itachi wouldn't have prioritized his clan above the village."

They all nodded silently to what Riku had said. Itachi had been the hope they needed to finally put to rest the difficulties the Uchiha created in the village after years of political conflict.

"Yet, something happened." Riku pointed out. "He was sixteen. More than old enough to be considered a proper man and adult. His reputation as one of the most outstanding shinobi of the village reached even the lowest part. You only needed to officially take him under your wing," He looked at Hiruzen. "To appease the Uchiha and the rumors about them regarding the Kyubi's attack. I know you well enough by now to know you would have done it."

Hiruzen's mouth contorted into a rictus of fury. "He got sick." He replied perfectly, controlling his anger. "A degenerative disease attacking the lungs. Something he got from birth."

"So that's how he died." Riku leaned back against the seat. "The disease took him. It makes sense now. And why he went with everything... The only thing he had left was Sasuke and the village and he wanted to be sure it was protected from enemies within and without. Alright. Can we capitalize on this? On his love for Konoha?"

"Before his brother's death?" Koharu asked. "Probably. Now..." Her words hung in the air leaving behind a trail of silence that no one had anything to say to break.

Riku scratched his chin in reflection. There were a few options but they were all complicated. They could of course go straight to it and hope for the love of Konoha being enough but it was risky. Sighing he went with one of the ideas he had.

"How about we bring him and Sasuke back to life?"

Hiruzen didn't miss the implication in that question. "You want to give the Uchiha another chance? I thought you said it was good riddance that they were gone?"

That surprised Koharu and Homura to hear that. Never would they have thought that Riku would espouse what they had been taught and firmly believed in. Not like they hated the Uchiha per say. They hated their mindset. The few Uchiha like Kagami and Itachi? They liked just fine.

"It is." Riku confirmed. "Less trouble, less headaches. But we need firepower the likes of Itachi's. If the price for victory and saving the world is bringing back the Uchiha then it's a small price to pay."

"They are the ones responsible for everything happening now." Homura pointed out.

"Their mindset is. If Itachi is still embracing the Senju's ideals then it's half the reconditioning of the clan done. The problem would be Sasuke. Most of his life is nothing but lies, psychological torture and revenge. We'll need to watch out for him. At worst? Once he has a few children..."

"He'd be dealt with quietly, without Itachi getting wind of it." Koharu finished the line of thought.

Homura shook his head. "He will suspect."

"That's putting the cart before the horse." Hiruzen interjected. "We'd need to bring them back and it's not a sure thing. Not without the Rinnegan."

"That we will retrieve or recreate." The conviction in Riku's voice was firm.

"Afterwards we're destroying them. For good. Death should not be taken that lightly. We shouldn't have a resurrection button at the ready. The results would be very costly for the world as a whole."

"I agree. The dead should stay dead. I know it sounds hypocritical when we brought back Minato and Kushina but they deserved it in my opinion. Regardless, convincing Itachi may require the truth about the Uchiha massacre to be shared with Sasuke." Once again he raised his hand, indicating he wasn't done. "Of course we will need to shift part of the blame."

"Danzo." Homura said with a nod, agreeing to the idea.

"Perfect scapegoat." Riku said. "And it's the truth. I would upgrade the security of your homes though. Even if your intent was to just eliminate the leaders of the coup, it included his parents."

"It didn't actually." Hiruzen denied and explained further when Riku gave him a look of curiosity. "Fugaku was pressured by the elders. He agreed that something needed to be done as the Uchiha were segregated,"

"Hiruzen!"

"No, Koharu," The Sandaime maintained his position. "It's the truth. We should never have made them move their compound at the edge of the village. It was the last straw for them. It looked like a good decision at the time with the possibility of them releasing the Kyubi but by doing so we broke the unity. It was a mistake and I'm neither too proud nor foolish enough to not admit it." He turned back to Riku, leaving his teammate to scowl deeply. "Fugaku saw little option for his clan to strive and get their due. It was with reluctance that he agreed to the coup that is why my original order was to have him spared. Not only was he a powerful shinobi in his own right, the likes of which was stronger than the elders, but he was also the head of the military police. His disposition and situation made him too invaluable to lose."

Homura took it from there. "We wanted the Uchiha cowed but not disorganized or destroyed. Fugaku would have maintained the order."

Riku nodded again. "Something else we can pin on Danzo, then. Good."

Still scowling, Koharu changed the topic a bit. "What about the cover story for the village? We can't integrate them back as if they did nothing. That would bring resentment and mistrust among the troops. Especially now with the change in leadership."

She had been as tactful as possible, considering that Riku had just learned of his mother's death an hour ago. As far as she knew.

"For Sasuke, I was thinking of Orochimaru brainwashing him. When he defected the first time it was because of the curse seal. We did retrieve a piece of Orochimaru's soul from it and it had been filed in the T&I logs. His imprisonment was not for any crime beyond defection but because of the possibility of Orochimaru still influencing him. As for his attack on the village with Akatsuki... I was thinking of the same thing. This time we're putting the blame on Uchiha Obito, which I believe should also reveal the involvement in the Kyubi's attack."

"So you do intend to make the Uchiha responsible." Hiruzen voiced.

"Of course, although I prefer saying 'accountable'. With their name to clear and their reputation to rebuild, Itachi and Sasuke will be too busy to plot." Riku nodded. "Especially the latter. His pride and love for his clan will be his shackles."

"It could work." Homura replied with a hum. Hand on his chin.

“And Itachi?” Koharu asked.

“More complex but a bit of the same thing.”

“Danzo usurped my authority through Itachi being in root. He gave me information that the Uchiha were preparing a coup. Information that proved to be false from the documents we found in his lair. He betrayed Itachi and sought to silence him but he was more resourceful than expected and had no choice but to defect when Danzo revealed his hand.” Hiruzen continued the line of thought. “He made contact with Jiraiya over the years and infiltrated the Akatuski, working as a spy for Konoha.”

“Simple, but it’s a lot to digest for the people.” Homura remarked.

Riku’s reply was swift. “That’s the best I came up with. If you have a better idea, I’m open to suggestions.

“Forced marriage.”

Everyone turned to one of Riku’s shadow clones. They were still there, reading the mountain of information Shikaku had shared. They had been so silent no one had paid attention to them.

“A marriage to a loyal kunoichi to raise the children properly? A good idea but it could backfire badly.” Koharu voiced her opinion on the subject.

“Perhaps not.” Riku replied. “We don’t need to force them to marry a kunoichi of our choice. Just give them a deadline. Just like for Karin and the- Wait why are we talking about this?” Riku was taken aback. “I was talking about justification to make the village accept them back not- Oh,” He suddenly stopped and considered the topic more carefully for a moment. “They still have their wealth. I don’t think mom had the opportunity to take it. Nor the land. That would be enough to interest merchants and kunoichi of marriageable age.”

“Your mother did not have the time, no.” Hiruzen confirmed.

“Then it’s settled. We’re going with that. Now let’s talk about something less headache inducing, like... raising the age of graduation.”

They all gave him a flat stare. They were in the middle of war and increasing the minimum age for academy students to become genin was not on the list of priorities.

Riku explained himself. “I just took the hat. My clones are getting acquainted with everything as we speak as you can see. I can’t do much about the war right now so why not discuss the future after it? Konoha was founded so children wouldn’t have to die in senseless battles. We’re now at a corner of History and I think it’s time to finally realize what Hashi-ji dreamed of.”

Hiruzen smirked at Riku's audacity. The way he wrapped the argument by reminding him and his teammates about why Konoha was built in the first place was absolutely devious. Devious but not wrong. During his first tenure he had increased the graduation age to twelve before waving that law away for the third shinobi war. He put it back in place during his second term but it wasn't quite where he wanted it to be. At twelve, the genin were technically still children. Unfortunately he hadn't had the heart to bring new change to the village, feeling himself too old.

With enthusiasm, Hiruzen took a seat and began to talk about the topic at hand. Koharu and Homura did the same knowing there wasn't much they could do against it.

Chapter 77: Making deals

The news of Tsunade's death had saddened everyone. She was well liked by most of the population. For diverse reasons. Because she was a good Hokage, of course, but also a Senju. There were those who respected her for being the greatest kunoichi or medic in the Elemental Nations then those who adored her because she had the biggest pair of tits on the continent. Shallow as that may be, it was still a form of respect.

It worried everyone to know that their leader and protector had died in battle to let the troops retreat. It had sounded like a defeat and it was. That she had taken down the Tsuchikage was a small consolation.

When Hiruzen announced that per the late Godaime's wishes her successor would be Riku, hope bloomed again in people's hearts. Riku has saved the village thrice now. Once when the village was razed to the ground. Once when the Kyubi attacked again and once when Iwa and Kumo launched a surprise invasion. They knew that if a shinobi could lead them to victory it was him.

The speech he gave was, in Minato and Hiruzen's opinion, perfect for those dark times. Pointing out how much Konoha had endured and that she would endure even more because they were strong and had each other. It lifted everyone's spirits.

None of the clan Heads, either from minor or major clans, had any objection to voice when Hiruzen told them point blank that Riku was now the Rokudaime Hokage. If anything, most of them were pleased by the news. Especially Hiashi and Inoichi who were their leader's father-in-laws.

The ceremony officializing the investiture had been postponed until after the end of the war. A decision Riku took and that wasn't received unanimously. Some thought it would help with morale but Riku disagreed.

Currently he was dressed in the Hokage robe and was wearing the hat. By his side were Hiruzen and Kakashi. In front of them on the ground was the very same scroll which contained Zabuza and Haku but also more undead captives. Crouching down, Riku activated the storage seal and Uchiha Itachi appeared in a puff of smoke. Removing the tag on his forehead to let the man speak, Riku took a step back and greeted the man.

“Hokage-sama.”

His onyx eyes were devoid of emotions but to the trained eye there was calculation behind them.

“Sandaime-sama, Kakashi-Taicho.” Itachi continued with the greetings.

“Itachi-kun.” Hiruzen nodded. His voice had a genuine hint of regret. “I’m sorry to meet again under such circumstances.”

“You’ll have all the time in the world to talk later.” Riku cut in. “There are more urgent matters to discuss.”

Itachi’s eyes landed on Riku once again. This time curiosity was clear in them. “I do not recognize you. Who might you be to be the Hokage?”

“Senju Riku or perhaps you would have heard of my other name. Warudo Riku.”

That surprised the Uchiha, a twitch of his brow being proof of it.

“Short story short. I’m Danzo’s Hokage pet project. Son of Tsunade and Minato. raised in the same condition Minato had been raised.” Riku quickly explained and moved on. “And as of three days ago, Rokudaime Hokage.”

A nod of acknowledgement was given by Itachi. “I saw her fall after taking down the Tsuchikage. She fought bravely and saved many lives that day. My condolences.” His voice sounded genuine. It was however obvious to him that Riku didn’t care.

“Let’s get straight to the point. I know about your clan’s wrongdoings.” Itachi’s eyes darted to Hiruzen who shook his head. “We know Danzo fucked you over. He’s dead now. I…” Riku turned to Hiruzen. “I killed him myself?”

“Since it was your chakra sealing tag that activated his cursed seal which killed him. Technically: yes.” The sandaime confirmed.

Riku turned back to Itachi. “We hope you still harbor love for Konoha and request your help.”

"I know little of Madara's plan if that is why you summoned me. I'm afraid I can't help you much. I gleaned very little information since I was brought back. It was only two days before my capture."

"We know it's not Madara but Uchiha Obito." This time Itachi's eyes darted to Kakashi whose face was blank and buried in his open icha icha. "We know his overarching goal so information is not what we need. What we need is your help in dealing with other ninjas that have been brought back. S-rank shinobis. Kage level shinobi. We believe Orochimaru and Obito stole the bodies of many legendary and powerful ninjas and simple troops can't deal with them."

"That is correct." Itachi nodded. "I didn't see many of them as I was one of the last to be reanimated but I saw enough. The jinchurikis, for one, have been brought back and can use their biju's chakra."

Riku sighed. "You have a choice to make, Itachi. One: you're going back into the storage seal until the war is over. When it is, I will teach you the seal to release the Edo Tensei and your soul will go back to the Pure Lands. The other option is to fight by our side. We really need your skills. In exchange there is the possibility of you being resurrected fully. Not as a corpse but as a living being. Your name will be cleared and you will have the opportunity to rebuild your clan."

"What about my brother?" The man inquired.

Riku blinked. "You don't know?"

"The last news Jiraiya-sama shared with me was his capture and imprisonment for defection. I passed away a couple months later."

Sighing again Riku told the truth, looking Itachi square in the eyes. "The Akatsuki broke him out and recruited him. When they attacked the village in a combined assault with Kumo and Iwa, he was among them. I killed him myself."

While Hiruzen facepalmed loudly, Itachi was stoic. Inwardly he was greatly disturbed by the news.

"I had hope that he would direct all his hatred towards me and, left with nothing, would come to protect the village first and foremost." The Uchiha said in a sad voice.

"Stupid plan."

Hiruzen interjected on the spot. "Riku!"

"It is what it is." The Rokudaime retorted. "If we delude ourselves we never learn to not make the same mistake again."

Kakashi agreed with that. "That's true. A shinobi is a master of lies and illusions yet-"

"He must not fall prey to his own." Itachi finished.

"Children teaching *me* the rules of the shinobi book." Hiruzen grumbled.

To his surprise and Kakashi's, Itachi chuckled.

"The last Uchiha defeated by a Senju. History repeated itself."

"No." Riku denied. "Whether my name is Senju or Warudo, it doesn't matter. I could care less about it. I'm first and foremost a shinobi of the leaf and it was as a shinobi of the leaf protecting his home that I took your brother's life."

The silence that ensued was heavy. Itachi, for the first time, began to truly consider the man in front of him. He, that had been burdened by a clan name, burdened by being the heir and the expectation of his whole clan appreciated the words he had just heard. In his opinion clans were less important than the village. It was her division that made Konoha strong but also weak. It was important for the different clans to mingle with others and the regular people but it was also important to keep the family intact. A very delicate balance that his own clan had failed to find and it led them to extinction by his own hands.

"He was brought back too. That's why I'm surprised you didn't know. Captured too." He pointed at the scroll under Itachi's feet. Not far from the empty storage seal, a full one had the name Uchiha Sasuke under it. "The possibility extends to him too if he chose to help. The problem is, we're pretty sure he wants to take down Konoha for the whole massacre of your clan. He wouldn't have joined Akatsuki otherwise. Not without knowing the truth."

"Mada- Obito helped me that night." Itachi revealed. "I wouldn't have been able to do the deed by myself in such a short amount of time. He probably twisted the truth to get Sasuke to join his side."

He fell silent for a moment. A few seconds at best. All to make a decision. With his eyes closed he pondered the options he had.

"I will fight for Konoha once again. Regardless of my brother's choice. Whether I'm agreeing to be resurrected is something I need to think about more. The Uchiha... were a blight upon Konoha in the end. Incapable to break free of the cycle of hatred. I had hoped..." He paused there and shook his head. "Nevermind."

Riku stepped forward again and much like he did to Zabuza and Haku, began drawing a complex seal on the undead in front of him. Soon enough Uchiha Itachi was free of the compulsion seal controlling him. Without any delay, they summoned Sasuke next and his reaction was quite the opposite to his brother. Once his head was freed, his stare

landed on Riku with nothing but hatred. Riku was unphased however. Sasuke had not been a good opponent since their academy days nearly ten years ago. They had three confrontations after their graduation and each time Riku dominated him. Each time more easily than the previous one.

“Sasuke, enough.”

Hearing his brother’s voice, Sasuke turned his head to the side in shock. “Nii-san? You were brought back too?”

“I was.” Itachi nodded. “And just like you, was captured. Senju-sama was kind enough to free me from Orochimaru’s compulsion.” Sasuke sneered at Riku but Itachi called him to order once again. “He will free you too if you join Konoha in the fight against-”

“Join Konoha?! When they forced you to wipe out our whole clan?!”

Riku sighed and turned to Kakashi, giving him a flat look. The cyclops just shrugged his shoulders and waited in silence. So far he hadn’t had much to do and was more of a spectator.

“I wasn’t forced, Sasuke.” Itchi denied. “I made the conscious decision to do it. For Konoha’s sake and yours. The coup would have failed and the village ripe for the taking by enemy nations.”

“You don’t know-”

“I do know Sasuke.” Itachi’s voice turned cold. “The fact that two shinobis took down the whole clan is proof enough. The elders’ arrogance blinded them to the truth. The sharingan is a formidable tool but a tool nonetheless. It’s not perfect, it’s not omnipotent. Furthermore, instead of earning the respect of everyone they demanded it, for the past glory of our ancestors while themselves did nothing. They needed to be dealt with. To break the hold the power of the sharingan and hatred has over our clan.”

Hearing this, Sasuke snarled in rage. “Then why push me towards that path in the first place?! I thought-”

“Because he believed you were smart enough to take the other path of what he told you he chose.” Riku interjected and everyone looked at him. “He played the bad guy, making sure you hate him so much that the very idea of following the same path disgusted you. The only other path you had was the path to rebuild the Uchiha clan properly, free from the pride of the sharingan. Unfortunately, you’re a bigger idiot than he is.” His tone was terribly flat from the stupidity of the two brothers.

“What the hell do you know about-”

"He's correct." Itachi cut in, stopping Sasuke in the middle of his insult. "It was stupid of me to try to manipulate you like this. And it was stupid of you to let your hatred blind you. Sasuke..." He paused to be sure he had his little brother undivided attention. "There is more to the massacre than-

"I know everything there is to know about it. Madara told me all of it."

"Did he tell you he helped me that night?"

Sasuke's eyes widened in surprise. It was clear that it wasn't the case.

"I... No... He said..."

"Oh my god." Riku slapped his hand on his face. "Sasuke, did you really trust the words of a stranger wearing a mask because he had a sharingan? A stranger that was part of an organization the brother you hated worked for? What are you? Five? Never heard of stranger danger?"

Kakashi couldn't help himself. He snorted and didn't even bother to hide it, Sasuke's glare rolling off his shoulders.

"He was quite sheltered as a child." Itachi shared.

"Being the son of the police chief didn't make things any better, I bet." Riku sighed, not for the first time in the past half hour. Dealing with Uchiha was really tiring for him.

Itachi agreed. "Indeed, no. But that's not the point of why you were summoned, Sasuke."

"I'm not fighting under that asshole! He killed me!"

"A punch with super strength to the face. Honestly? That was the cleanest kill of that day." Riku shrugged his shoulders. "Regardless, I'm offering you the same choice I offered your brother. You can go back into the storage seal and you will be released to the pure lands when the war is over or you can help us fight. In the latter case there is the possibility of you being truly resurrected. You'd be as alive as I am and will be able to rebuild your clan. As for an incentive, Madara was the one who unleashed the Kyubi on Konoha and took control of it. Everything that befell the Uchiha after that is a result of his actions that night."

This time, Sasuke kept his calm. He fixed Riku with his gaze but seriously considered the options he was given.

"How are you planning to bring us back to life?"

"The rinnegan."

“The what?”

“The rinnegan is the progenitor dojutsu of the sharingan. One of its abilities allows that. Unfortunately the only pair in existence is currently in the enemy’s hands. The objective is to steal them.”

“Pain will not be an easy opponent to deal with.” Itachi shared from his knowledge of the man.

“Pain is currently in a cell with his friend Konan. We kicked his ass a few months back and took the rinnegan. Unfortunately Zetsu stole them back during Iwa and Kumo’s invasion. It’s Obito who has them now.”

Sasuke got confused. “Who?”

“Uchiha Obito. The real name of the man passing himself as Madara.”

Itachi spoke up to try and convince his little brother to join the fight. “Sasuke... The Uchiha are given a second chance. A chance to be what they always could have become had their arrogance and lust for power not dragged them down.”

“I’m not going to lie,” Riku interjected and the brothers looked at him. “It’s going to be difficult. I can officially clear your name. Both of yours. But you’d have to work very hard to restore the prestige of your clan. The Military Police is now open to every shinobi interested and competent enough. It’s not beholden to the Uchiha clan anymore. You’ll have to find a new niche to make money because once the war is over, unless Sasuke has proven he can be a shinobi of the leaf he’s not being drafted into the corps.”

“What?!”

This time it was Kakashi who explained. He hadn’t been aware of Riku’s plan for Sasuke but he understood why. “You defected twice, Sasuke. You were part of the invading force and well... you’re not a team player. There is a reason why I made Team 7 focus on teamwork first and foremost. No leaf-nin is going on mission solo and an inability to work with others would have shot down your career fast and any chance of receiving advanced training or help to go after Itachi.”

“I needed power!” Sasuke defended himself.

“And how did that work out for you?” Riku cut in. “We were relatively even in the academy in Taijutsu. You ended up with the best Jonin-sensei of the year and I ended up in the genin pool. Yet I completely trashed you time and time again despite being left on my own to learn and train. The truth is: power was available to you in Konoha, you just were too impatient to get it.”

That shut Sasuke up on the spot because it was the truth. Naruto and Riku became insanely strong while staying in the village. If not physically at least affiliated to it. And while his time with Orochimaru had been very fruitful, he felt he was lacking when he battled his former teammate and was killed with one punch from Riku.

"Prove that you can work with others, that you really care about the village as a whole..."

"Fat chance of that. Konoha still ordered the slaughter of my whole clan." he looked at Hiruzen with hatred.

"I didn't." the old man answered simply. "Save for your father, only the leaders of the coup were sentenced to death."

"That's the truth." Itachi confirmed. "I received further orders that night from Elder Danzo. I was told there was a change of plan and to kill everyone. It was only after the deed was done that I realized about the man's treachery and falsification of the order."

"His hatred and jealousy toward your clan was borderline obsessive." Riku added. "He's dead now."

Itachi chimed in again. "Sasuke... Hatred has never done our clan any good. Look at where it led us. The clan, us."

Struggling with his feelings, Sasuke looked at his brother. "How can you..."

"For you and... for mother."

Sasuke blinked at the mention of their mother. He hadn't thought of her in years. "What about mother?"

"Where do you think I got my ideals from?" Itachi revealed. "Mother saw first hand the fall of our clan. Not by Konoha but by our own hubris. She was the one to teach me differently, hoping that once I became the head I could bring change. Change for the better."

"Mikoto was the one who warned me about the coup." Hiruzen had his own revelation surprising both Itachi and Sasuke.

"Mother did?" The eldest asked in surprise.

"Yes. A week before you came to me with the information, she wrote a letter asking for help. As a result, I met a few times with your father in secret, hoping to diffuse the situation peacefully." He shook his head. "Nothing came out of it, unfortunately." He looked at Sasuke. "I'm deeply sorry about what happened to the Uchiha. I had hoped that with the elders gone, the plan of the coup would be abandoned and that negotiating

with your father without the pressure of the elders on his shoulders would bring forth a consensus that everyone would agree. I knew what kind of man Danzo was but I didn't know how low he had fallen. The idea he would just seize the opportunity to wipe the whole clan..." Hiruzen shook his head again. "I miss your mother dearly. It was always a breath of fresh air to see her. She reminded me a lot of my old teammate Kagami."

Sasuke blinked, not knowing who Kagami was.

Itachi was the one to explain. "Shisui's grandfather. Mother's uncle. He died a couple years before you were born."

"All this is very touching but I've things to do. Sasuke, what will it be?" Riku interjected, done with the whole thing.

The young Uchiha diverted his gaze from Riku to his brother. After receiving a nod. He sighed.

"I agree."

Riku clapped his hand. "Perfect." His tone didn't contain an ounce of happiness about the result however. "Kakashi." He called out as he retrieved his fuinjutsu tools from his BoS and began to work on Sasuke.

"Yes, Hokage-sama?" The cyclops lazily turned a page of his book.

"Starting tomorrow. You're in charge of Team 7's training, not just Naruto. Have Itachi help you with it."

The icha icha in Kakashi's hand was lowered and he did a double take to look at his superior. "What?"

"You heard me."

"Sakura is-"

"Reinstated as of right now. Her file purged of her wrong doing. On top of that, I will teach her the strength of a hundred seals. She has perfect chakra control and your team needs a Taijutsu specialist on top of a medic. "

Kakashi pointed out something. "I already have to babysit Zabuza, now you want me to take under me my team again? The ones with the worst personality clash in Konoha's history?"

"They're adults now. They grew up and are aware of their shortcomings."

Riku, now used to draw the seal, finished in record time and freed Sasuke.

His former teammate complained. "...You just want to give me a constant headache."

"What's this I hear? You want you and your team to train every day before dawn with Gai?"

Kakashi's face paled right away and his tone changed. "Mah, Mah~ I'm fine with my team reforming, Hokage-sama." He waved his hand in dismissal.

Hiruzen let out a laugh at the sudden 180 of the silver haired jonin while Riku smiled in amusement. With nothing more to say, he left the Botib once again. This time he didn't go back to his office but to the prison. He had a couple of people to talk to.

Chapter 78: Fast development

"This is so weird."

Riku turned back to look at Sakura, a questioning look on his face. He thought for a moment that she was talking about the huge boulder he had just smashed into pebbles with his fist as a demonstration of his super strength. Just in case his question was broad.

"What is?"

"You, teaching me. We're the same age for one. For two..."

"You hate my guts." He interjected.

Sakura didn't deny it. "I do. Or I used to. My friendship with Ino fell apart because of you, then you were taken by Tsunade-sama as an apprentice, then you killed Sasuke..." The last part was said with a held breath. It was difficult for her to speak about it. Not because of Riku killing Sasuke but because it was Sasuke and her time in therapy had shown her her unnatural obsession with the guy. "Then send me to jail."

"None of those things were my fault." He answered her with a flat expression.

"I know. Now." Sakura replied after another sigh. "Therapy helped a lot with seeing things as they are. You didn't go out of your way to seduce Ino. Meeting Tsunade-sama was your own luck, Sasuke was an enemy of the village and I... screwed up. I still don't like you. But for you. Not for imagined actions against me."

Riku conceded. "That's fair enough."

"But you don't care, do you?"

“Not one bit.” He admitted it shamelessly. “I don’t know you enough to care. The bit I know... Makes me want to have nothing to do with you. But that’s the you from our academy days. Time changes people however. Look at Naruto and I. We couldn’t stand each other much but now? We’re not friends but we’re alright with each other.”

She gave him a flat look. “You’re brothers.”

“And?” He asked her with an eyebrow raised. “I don’t see him that way. We spent little time together. When we do it’s because his father is here.”

That took her aback a bit. “You don’t consider Namikaze-sama your father?”

“Nope. I acknowledge he is my sperm donor and we’re getting along just fine but I see him more as an uncle than father.”

“Why?”

Riku stayed silent for a moment and his gaze bore into her. Sakura flinched from it.

“I... For starters I am the child he didn’t sign up for. A child made against his will. I’m like... an affair baby in a way and I don’t really want to immerse myself into the Namikaze family like a hair in the soup. Naruto also deserves all the attention of his father and Kushina-san shouldn’t have to deal with me either. Uzumaki or not. It’s not like I don’t have my own family too.”

“I see.” She said nothing more but her thoughts ran. She had always made Riku into an evil monster in her mind. The one that beat Sasuke, the one that took Ino from her. In their academy days he had always been so cold and distant. She realized now it was because no one wanted to have anything to do with him. Both because of his mother’s crimes and because very few students were as dedicated to becoming a shinobi as he was. Now she perhaps saw a glimpse of kindness that no monster could have.

“Less talking, more training. I’m sure you’re more than smart enough to understand the principle behind the strength of the hundred seals. With your chakra control I don’t think it will take you long to master it. What will take time is training how to use it in creative ways.”

After tilting her head to the side she asked aloud the question she had in mind.

“Creative ways?”

“Fists and feet are an obvious way to use the technique but there are other parts of the body that you could use. The elbows and knees, the forehead to name a few. Your whole body in truth. Look.”

Rik walked to another boulder. Smaller this time around. Taking a stance, he pivoted on his foot and hit the rock with the side of his ass, blowing it to pieces.

“See what I mean? Your body is a weapon and the strength of a hundred seals relies on releasing chakra on the tenketsu. In consequence-”

“Every tenketsu turns into a weapon with this jutsu.” Sakura nodded in understanding.

“Yes. Now focus first on the hands, then feet. Afterwards we’ll work on other important parts of the body useful in Taijutsu.”

“What about the Taijutsu style?”

That was a valid question. Thankfully, Riku had thought of it long before. “I can’t teach you my mother’s style. It belongs to the clan. That’s why I asked Gai to come around soon to see what would fit you the best.”

“What about your Iryoken?” She inquired. The idea of destroying people was quite interesting for her.

Riku shook his head, turning her down. “The Iryoken is not really a style. It’s a skill. I use my mom’s style and apply the Iryoken to it. It’s not like the Goken or Jyuken which have stances and secret techniques. I could teach it to you but it would take too much time. Even mom, who had perfect chakra control like you do, couldn’t replicate it on her own after years of trying. It’s also way more chakra intensive than the explosive strength. Maybe after the war, if you still want to learn. However just like the strength of a hundred seals-”

“It’s a Master-disciple secret. I can’t share it with anyone without explicit approval from you or your master. I remember.” She said with exasperation. Not like she was against it. She understood why and she had no one to teach too anyway. It was just that Riku had been reminding her about it a lot and it was tiring.

“Good. Now go practice on your own. Try a tree first before hitting rocks.”

Seeing her fired up, Riku left her alone and turned into the direction of the three people to the side of the garden. Two of them were helping the third walk on his own legs. Something he hadn’t been able to do for the past decade.

“That’s great, Nagato. It’s two more steps than yesterday.” The orange haired man cheered as the former Leader of Ame’s legs fell under his own weight.

An hour earlier in the outside world, Riku went to visit Nagato and Konan in jail for a proposition. To join the war effort at Konoha’s side. Their refusal was done in a heart beat. They had no love for Konoha after two Shinobi wars ravaged their country and took their loved ones. Especially their third teammate, Yahiko. The man had been killed during a confrontation with Hanzo the salamander and former ruler of Ame. The kicker had been Danzo meddling with things. What was supposed to be a diplomatic meeting between Akatsuki and Hanzo for a more relaxed politic from the Tyrant, turned into a

tale of betrayal because of Konoha's crippled warhawk. As a result they blamed Konoha as a whole.

Since Nagato used Yahiko's body for his Deva Path, Riku told them that, if they had anything with the man's chakra, he could be brought back to life fully. They didn't believe him at first but he had called for Kushina as proof. The woman had been delighted to help in turning her fellow Uzumaki to their side. She still had mixed feelings towards the man and his plan to extract all the Bijus from the jinchuriki. It was the reason she died and Naruto was hunted after all. She knew how to separate things however and understood the intent behind Nagato's plan was to hold the bijus to deter nations from warring against each other or risk being annihilated. She recognized the man wanted peace but in her opinion went all wrong about it.

When Riku advocated for an alliance with Ame and shared his plans for the future of the Shinobi world, Konan was the first to crack. What Riku was selling sounded very much like what she, Nagato and Yahiko dreamed of in their youth. Before Obito made contact with them. After ironing the deal in detail, Ame-nins and Riku came to an agreement.

Konan still had a few exploding tags made by Yahiko she had kept as memento and gave them to Riku. He and Karin worked diligently and meticulously to reanimate Yahiko's body and heal it of all injuries or degradation from his death. Once it was done they performed the same variant of the Edo Tensei and Yahiko was brought back to life.

Shocked to be in the impure world once again at first, it took him quite a few days to deal with his resurrection. Thankfully Konan and Nagato's presence helped a lot. The most difficult was to learn of what his friends had done to honor his memory and their dreams. He hadn't been happy about that and let them know in no uncertain terms. The fight was quickly over though. Much like Naruto he had a disposition to let bygones be bygones should people really regret their actions.

Since then, the trio spent their time helping Nagato to walk again. His body may have healed but his brain needed time to relearn how to send proper signals through the nerves of his legs. It was a long process but they did that in the Botib so they had all the time in the world.

Leaving the garden he passed through the main hall. On his way to the training room he saw Kushina and Karin sitting around the main table and practicing with their chains on how to make seals with them. Of all the kekkei Genkai he knew about, the Adamantine chains were the only one he wished he had. The rinnegan, sharingan or byakugan held no interest to him. The elemental kekkei genkai weren't ones as he demonstrated through fuinjutsu. Everything else was useless to him.

The chains however? They could help with fuinjutsu and would make it simpler to directly use his chakra to create seals. He was still working on it from Minato's instructions and it was maddening. So far he was able to put a hiraishin on anything but

a version that requires his own chakra to use as there was none of his chakra stored in his target. It necessitated modifying the formula a bit and that had taken time.

Stepping in the training room, he saw Minato, looking at Naruto sparring with Itachi, while Kakashi sparred with Sasuke. The former was learning not just how to break genjutsu powered from the sharingan but actively how to counter it. The latter was working on how to manipulate his raiton in different shapes than a sword.

The reformation of Team 7 had been tense. Sakura's first reflex was to reach for Sasuke but she held herself back. Naruto had mixed feelings. On one hand he was glad to see his rival again on the other he was saddened and a bit bitter to see the person who he considered his very first friend but never was in the state they were in. Kakashi had laid down the law immediately. They didn't have the time to quarrel and for their egos to clash. The world's future was at stake.

"How is Naruto doing?" Riku asked his father.

"Well. He's using shadow clones to work on his muscle memory to remember the stances of my style. It's down now but he needs a bit more time to master it and to switch from it to the frog kata. His chakra control made leaps and bounds and can now make a rasenshuriken with one hand, he's currently working on mastering other affinities. I have to say, I've never seen anyone deal with so much information at once and progress so fast."

A nod of acknowledgement escaped Riku's control. "Naruto is smart. His quick thinking when doing is perhaps the best in the village. He instinctively understands what he needs to do once it was explained to him properly. With the shadow clones he's able to try and test every idea that comes to him on how to achieve his objective, increasing the speed at which he learns. That jutsu was really made for him." He replied while looking at his brother, sprouted from the ground and attacked Itachi. He had substituted himself with a shadow clone which was affected by a genjutsu in his stead.

They watched in silence for a while. Riku's attention was then caught by Gai who was practicing farther away in a corner of the training room, shattering a boulder with shurifusen of his own creation. The green beast of Konoha had diligently kept working on his fuinjutsu and Riku had taught him more advanced seals and how to carve them on shuriken.

It wasn't something new. What was however was Mei looking at the man with clear interest and dare he say hunger and thirst. Wondering in amusement if the jonin had noticed the lustful gaze of the Mizukage, the idea of the two of them together almost made him laugh.

'The beauty and the beast,' He thought.

Having seen enough, he left the room. On his way outside the Botib he came across Shikaku who was apparently done with his nap. The man would sneak all the time to get proper rest.

“Shikaku-san. I’m done reviewing all the information. Meeting in my office in one hour.”

Riku got a nod of acknowledgment and stepped outside the Botib. Thanks to the Time dilation effect, weeks had been spent inside the Botib and it showed with how far along his training went. For the oldest permanent occupant inside, it had been a year. Outside? It was lunch time. Riku had become Hokage the previous day and it was publicly announced in the morning. For him it was very old news but for others it wasn’t.

That’s why, out of nowhere he was tackled to the side by Ino. An act of comfort towards her husband for the loss of his mother. The village may have lost their Hokage but Riku lost so much more.

“It’s alright, Ino.” He took her in his embrace properly. “It’s weeks old news for me.”

She pulled back her head to look at his face and blinked. Realization dawned on her face and she gave him a flat stare.

“You could at least have filled me in.” Her eyes narrowed in accusation.

“I’m sorry. I had a mountain of things to do. Still do but I have time for lunch. Outside the Botib.” A gentle and soft smile graced his lips.

She sighed in resignation. He always had a cart load of work before and she never begrudged him for it. It was important work. The last thing to date that took him away from a long time was the creation of the bunker underground the village and it saved everyone’s lives. Now that he was Hokage and in such an unfortunate and sudden way, she knew he was asked for everywhere. She held no blame on her husband’s head but she certainly didn’t like he was spending time away from her. Long period of time.

Her face said it all and Riku reacted. Cupping her cheek and laying a loving kiss on her lips, he tried to calm her down. “I know. But it’s only for a little bit longer. A few days to a month at best. Afterwards...” he paused there, looking far away. Lost in thought for a moment his eyes settled back on the blonde. “No more extensive work for a while.”

“Riku.” His name was said firmly. “I believe you when you say the war is going to end soon but you’re Hokage. There won’t be an end to overwork, so don’t lie to me.” She put a finger on his lips to stop him from formulating a reply. “It’s alright. I knew what I was getting into when I chose to date you. I don’t like it but I’m accepting it. Just don’t serve me bullshit, okay?”

His lips spread further, changing his smile into a grin. “I wasn’t. Tomorrow Iwa falls, then it’s Obito and the undead’s turn.”

Ino searched his eyes for any deception and found none. Satisfied and having faith in him, she nodded. Taking his hand, she dragged him to the kitchen. Karin was in the Botib, and Hinata was at the Hospital working, meaning there were only the two of them. To her, they haven't seen each other in a month and she sure as hell was going to spend some time alone with her husband. Even if depraved sex wasn't on the table. A simple lunch would do.

Chapter 79: Final hours

"Tommorow, I'm going to wipe out Iwagakure from the map."

Riku's declaration installed a heavy, deadly silence in his office. Hiruzen, the elders, Shikaku and Jiraiya who had just made it back to the village, looked at him with complexity. Even Mei and her bodyguards at the side were perplexed. The Sandaime was the first to speak.

"Riku..."

The Rokudaime immediately interjected. "No. Iwa had three chances to work with us for peace. No more. Regardless of if Onoki was mind controlled by Obito or not, the fact doesn't change. Iwa is too hateful towards us. Especially after Minato and I slaughtered their shinobis like a farmer using a scythe on his field. Perhaps we can go back from this. Perhaps we're not too far gone and actual peace is achievable but it would be at the price of Konoha and Kiri ninja's lives and I will never abide by it. It's too high a price to pay. We also can't give further time to Obito and Orochimaru to bolster their strength and find ways to counter our seals for the undead. Our attention must not be divided when we deal with them."

"As much as it pains me to say it, I agree." Mei chimed in. "While Kiri never had any real hostility towards Iwa in its history, our Nidaime aside, now it's different. Iwagakura is working, perhaps unaware, with an enemy that wants to enslave the whole world. My nation has recovered from a decade of civil war and now we're into another conflict. My people are tired of fighting. If the opportunity to put an end to our enemy once and for all is there then we should seize it."

Any retort anyone had to make died in their throat. The argument was sound if not pragmatic. Hiruzen and Jiraiya, both proponents for peace through understanding, didn't like it at all but they were veteran shinobis. They set their feelings aside and let their pragmatism take over.

"The plan I have in mind is simple. Our forces on the Western front will launch a pincer attack. From the front and the back."

"The back?" Mei voiced in curiosity. It was with reason. An assault from the back implied that there were troops beyond the enemy's line. Something that shouldn't be possible during a war, especially considering how Iwa had absolute control over their territory and the one they were occupying.

Riku, without a second thought, revealed to her how it was possible. "In preparation for the war with Iwa, we buried several bases in the countries bordering the land of Earth. Also a few inside of it. All have a hiraishin tag inside them."

Mei's eyes widened in realization. It meant Konoha could be everywhere if even Iwa-nins, earth specialists, haven't been able to detect those bases hidden underground. The fact that a hiraishin tag was in each base was even more dangerous. Konoha could strike anyone from any side. Once again she was glad to have decided to ally her country with the leaf.

"From the south Ame will bring support. Nagato will be recovered enough to fight and box Iwa in. Their two ways of retreat would be East towards the Land of Waterfall but it's too far from their village and supply line. The other is to fall back toward Iwagakure. That's when they will meet our infiltrated troops. In the meantime I will pay their village a visit and raze it to the ground."

Riku paused there to see if anyone had any questions but there wasn't.

"Jiraiya, you will partner up with Nagato and Konan as a liaison with Konoha." He didn't mention Yahiko to avoid any lengthy explanation.

The man blinked in confusion for a moment but before he could say a single word, Koharu was faster.

"Help from Ame? And Pain? The former leader of the Akatsuki? Have you lost your mind you-" She wasn't liking what she was hearing.

A burst of killing intent filled the room. So powerful that even Hiruzen had goosebumps at the feel of it. He wasn't even the target. Koharu on the other hand was shaking like a leaf.

"As of now, Konoha, Kiri, Suna and Ame are allies. Nagato wanted peace in the Elemental Nations by holding everyone hostage with the Biju. Noble goal, stupid execution. Peace through strength is just tyranny. We came to an agreement. Much the same Konoha has with Suna and Kiri. On top of it I had to heal him. As a powerful shinobi and leader of a country, we couldn't let him rot in a cell when he can help. It will take time for Ame and Konoha to make a genuine bond of friendship, especially after we ravaged Ame the past three shinobi wars but they are willing to try and are genuine about it. They also understand the consequences should we lose to Obito."

Now Hiruzen and Jiraiya liked what they were hearing much better. The former even had a small happy smile on his lips. Riku had told him that true peace could only be achieved through understanding and strength both and he demonstrated it fully.

"In the meantime..." Riku looked at Mei to let her speak up and assert her authority.

"I'll go back to the North East and take control of the troops." She announced. They had rehearsed that part in the botib after the two planned the whale plan together. "I will consolidate our defenses while creating a few assault teams to chase and capture undead ninjas before retreating in a flash." She smiled at her own joke. Everyone understood that the teams would use the Hiraishin.

"Once Iwa is dealt with, most of the troops will move towards Mei's location, while a small part will stay behind and keep watch, just in-"

The phone on the desk began to ring loudly, stopping Riku in his sentence. Picking it up he talked to the person on the other hand of the line. The conversation was short. But everyone noticed the brief look of surprise passing over his face.

"Understood. Accommodate them both appropriately." He put down the handset and looked at his audience. "It was Abarume Chibi. He reported that a contingent of Samurai had survived the undead assault and joined the base. Furthermore, they were approached by a few dozen Kumo ninja."

"I thought Kumo had been completely destroyed and everyone killed?" Jiraiya frowned.

"Apparently a few survived. They want their pound of flesh from Obito and Orochimaru." Riku answered. "It will be up to you to decide what to do with them, Mei."

The Mizukage nodded in acknowledgement. After giving directives to Shikaku the meeting ended. Riku didn't waste any time in grabbing Jiraiya and teleporting into his Botib. He pointed at the Garden and after a careful look, the Toad sage walked to it. Riku for his part found Kakashi back in the training room. This time the fake cyclops, Itachi and Kushina were fighting Team 7. From his observation, it was about testing their teamwork. Naruto was in the front creating chaos with clones with support from Sasuke's ninjutsu from behind. Sakura disappeared from sight only to reappear to Itachi's side. The older Uchiha had been distracted by the fire balls and horde of clones and got hit in the head through his blind spot by an explosive punch, pulverizing it. She had been lucky Kushina's chain had been a tad too slow because soon enough she was captured.

"Alright, enough." Kakashi called out, putting an end to the spar.

Sakura was released while Itachi's head was almost done reforming. The two teams got closer to each other and began to debrief what was good, what wasn't and what could be improved. The idea of having Karin and Kushina expand and reinforced the training

room even more to allow the Uchihas and Naruto to practice their most destructive abilities crossed his mind and he filed it for later.

Once the debriefing ended, Riku approached.

“There is news.” Everyone turned to him and awaited for the information. “Tommorrow outside time, Iwa will be annihilated. From the troops to the village itself.”

Naruto opened his mouth to say something. Probably a protest but shut it quickly without saying a word. It was clear that much like Hiruzen and Jiraiya he didn't like that at all. Yet, he knew better now than to question the need to sometimes kill people. Even if this was excessive.

“You guys are going with Mei to the North-East front. She will be directly in charge of you. From what I gather, your missions will be to make quick but hard assaults on the undead and capture them, before retreating. If possible, perhaps even deal with Orochimaru. Without him, no more undead as I doubt he would give Obito the knowledge to use the Edo Tensei.”

“His usefulness would be null if he did.” Sakura remarked with a nod. A reflex to explain for Naruto. It was the right thing to do as he was a bit lost as to the reason why.

“Yes. Now for you, it means you have around nine months to be ready if you stay continuously here.” he paused to let them digest this. “Your teams will be as follows. Team 7 will have Kushina-san as a new member for the use of her chains and Itachi will take Kakashi's place as Team Leader.”

“What?! Why?”

“Naruto.” Kakashi warned but the blonde loudmouth waved his hands.

“Not that I'm against it. It's an order but I'd like to understand why the change.”

“Fair point.” Riku nodded. “Zabuza will only take orders from Kakashi and he doesn't fit Team 7. There is also Haku to take into consideration, that means two people. Already with five, Team 7 is almost too big to operate stealthily.”

“Oh, okay. Make sense.” Naruto nodded, understanding the reason why.

“Kakashi, your team will be composed of Zabuza, Haku, Gai and Karin. On top of being your capture specialist and sensor, Karin will be your healer. Both Teams, keep in mind that both Naruto and Karin are the priority target of the enemy. If things don't go according to plan you are to retreat immediately through the hiraishin. They must not be captured at any cost.”

"Yes, sir." Everyone replied, indicating they understood the parameters of their assignments.

"Kakashi, you both know what to train your team in. Kushina-san a moment please."

Everyone separated then. Itachi took his new team to the side and had them sit down to begin explaining a training regiment for capture. Kakashi left the room to gather his team members and Kushina walked by Riku's side.

"How is their training with the Kyubi? Did Mito-baachan's scrolls were useful?" He inquired.

"Not really." She shook her head. "But it doesn't matter. Naruto found a way." A smile was on her face when she said that. A proud one.

"Oh?"

"Yes." She bobbed her head this time. "Mito-sama always said that love was the key for a jinchuriki. I thought it meant surrounding myself with people I loved and who loved me back but I was wrong. Naruto then asked 'What about the Kyubi?' "

Riku stopped mid-step when he heard that. His mind raced at the ramifications of such a question. "You mean... Being nice to the Kyubi is the solution to the problem of using his chakra?"

"We believe it is. " Kushina nodded again. "It's difficult, they have been sealed for almost a century and before that they were persecuted for their immense power. On top of that, the Kyubi is really prideful and stubborn."

"Well, too bad for him he's sealed inside two Uzumakis. He won't win a fight of stubbornness." He chuckled and Kushina did too.

"Yes. Karin has a better time with the Yin version of the fox. He's less... violent although he's more vicious and insidious. Still he's more receptive to her talking than the Yang part. Naruto however has his natural ability to connect with people, so while he's going nowhere right now, when he does he will get the fox full cooperation."

"While Karin's will be more gradual." Riku realized. "This is good. Perhaps it could help if they are told that once the war is over I intend to free them both?"

Kushina's eyes widened in shock at the prospect and what it meant. Before she could utter a single word, however, Riku explained himself.

"We can bring back Naruto and Karin, so the extraction is not a problem. As for the fox being free.... I hope to remove the Bijus from the world or at the very least make it so

they can't be used as weapons. No more jinchurikis. No more senseless destruction at country scale."

"But... How?" The redhead liked what she was hearing. Having been a jinchuriki herself she knew of the prejudice first hand. She had been lucky that her status had been kept secret during her time.

"I don't really know yet. I was thinking of applying a seal powered by their own chakra that would prevent them from being sealed again. I still have nothing against mind control genjutsu." He sighed. "The other idea I had was to create a huge pocket dimension for them to live in peace."

"Separated from the world."

"Precisely. It's just an idea for now and it would take years before something like this is possible."

"But a worthy endeavor. Do the elders know?"

A scoff escaped Riku's lips. "Of course not. I'm already bringing enough changes that they are on the verge of a stroke so this?" He shook his head in amusement. "So far only Temari and Mei know. Both agree."

"That's surprising from leaders of two of the five." That was a valid remark from Kushina.

"Not really. Temari grew up with a very unstable little brother because of Shukaku. She witnessed first hand many bad things and she would be really glad to not have any Bijū around. As for Mei, she had to fight one to the death to free her country. She knows better than most about their power. Hashi-ji may have thought it a good idea to contain and sell them for peace to keep each other in check but it wasn't. It just gave people tools of mass destruction and misery for their jinchuriki."

Kushina will not argue that point. While coming to Konoha saved her from dying during the destruction of Uzushio, her whole childhood to the day she died had been nothing but restrictions. Constantly under surveillance. Confined to a certain part of the village. Limited in who she could meet and acquaint herself. Comparatively, Naruto had a better life or would have if not for the villagers' resentment. Had his identity as the jinchuriki of the Kyūbi been hidden he would have had a good childhood. No different from other orphans by much.

"Well, I hope you'd succeed in this endeavor and if you need help regarding any seal for that, count me in." She said with enthusiasm. There was no mention of Karin, it was a fact that the young Uzumaki would help too not only as a jinchuriki herself but also as Riku's wife. "What is it?" Kushina noticed Riku looking at her with intensity.

He took a moment to give a reply. As if he was pondering if he should speak of what he had in mind or not. Kushina saw the shift in his eyes, from uncertainty to determination and she wondered what he was about to share.

“I need to speak to you about something. In private. It’s for your ears only. Perhaps Minato too but no more.”

He walked out of the training room and a curious but confused redhead followed him without a word. Kushina didn’t know what it was about but since it was restricted to herself and maybe her husband it was definitely something serious.