

Connected

Von BlueJey

Kapitel 2: This Is War

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Summary: When Oto attacks Konoha, Konoha fights back with all its might. With war raging all around them, their bond seems to fail them. And while Sakura still hopes, Naruto wonders. And Sasuke fears he knows.

Author's Note: One of my older works, I believe, and while I know that my style changed quite a lot, I can only *hope* that my English got better was well... I really kind of like this one though, it's nicely rough and sketchy. Or shady, I should say. I tried to leave as much to your imagination as possible, so let's just see how that worked.

"How are ya, boy?"

Naruto dives to the left, brings up his katana and another enemy goes down. Still warm blood hits his face and he quickly brushes it away. It feels horrible on his skin.

"I'll live through this," he answers truthfully, not bothering to speak any louder than he usually would. Jiraiya is a Sannin after all, his ears are fine.

Behind him, the noise of a body hitting the ground indicates that his former teacher decided to join the fight, his sudden appearance creating only a second of hesitation and uncertainty among their opponents. He can't help but wonder...

"Not quite the answer I wanted but it'll have to do for now." There is a bitter, joyless laugh in his unusually hoarse voice and a shuriken cuts through the air just inches away from Naruto's neck, flies past him and embeds itself into a third attacker's throat with deadly precision.

Another swift slash of steel and they are the only ones alive in the small clearing. Naruto exhales slowly, forcibly calms his heartbeat and breathing.

"How's everyone doing?" he wants to know, wipes the blood off his blade with his own sleeve. His voice is even, emotionless almost, except for the sad undertone he

cannot suppress.

Jiraiya crosses the distance between them, his intent stare fixed onto his student bloodied face, before he even considers answering. Naruto knew him long enough to know this habit. He knows Jiraiya is scanning him, measuring the damage done by the few minor wounds he received during the previous fights. For a second, the older man's eyes linger on the cut just below his collar bone, but it's not a deep one, they both know it's nothing to worry about.

"No one ever said this was going to be easy," he finally says, voice firm and hard and Naruto knows he shouldn't have asked. "This is war. And war kills people."

It's like every word that leaves the grey-haired man's mouth pushes the knife deeper into his chest, but he bears it, fights it down to a dull presence at the back of his mind. He knows that, at the moment, pain is what keeps him going.

"They're fighting bravely, but this battle will not have a winner," Jiraiya continues lowly, seriously, bitterly. Naruto *feels* the pain in each single syllable. "In the end, there will be nothing but dead bodies and regret. And with an awful lot of luck, Konoha's orphanages will be more crowded than ever before after this."

He understands what his teacher says. He knows that this isn't a battle for glory and honor. It's about survival, purely, and about nothing else. Konoha's orphanages... He shivers.

There is another wave of pain and he almost winces with the force it hits him with.

"How is everyone doing, Sensei?" he asks again, unable to keep the intensity of what he feels out of his tone and there, for a tiny moment, he's the boy he once was: an uncertain, desperate child seeking the advice of a person who has been like a father to him.

Jiraiya looks at him with the same emotions, the same helplessness, before he turns his head away, rebuilds a wall he never intended to let down.

"I'm sorry Naruto, I don't know, but there was a series of remotely strong explosions along the southern city wall no ten minutes ago," he whispers, shifts his gaze to the clouds above them, glowing in the silver light of what might be a fullmoon. It's clear gesture, everything Naruto needs to understand and he does as he is told, locks away the child inside, forces himself to go back to being strong despite the pain.

"Did you finish your mission?" he wants to know, changing his tone along with the topic.

Jiraiya's eyes fix on his face once more and the old man nods, serious, hard, untouchable.

"I found their headquarters," he says, strong, determined, down to business. "But I couldn't get close enough to find out whether *he* is there."

Naruto frowns, disappointment and frustration gnawing at his resolve. But he knows he cannot allow himself the luxury of weakness in what is about to come.

"We have to try nevertheless. The faster this is over, the better. If we can kill him, maybe this will come to an end." It's childish hope and he knows it, but it's their assignment, their mission and maybe, maybe, maybe, his prayers will be heard...

He's about to turn around and jump off into the direction Jiraiya came from when suddenly, the old man's hand is on his shoulder, holding him back with just a tad more force than necessary.

"There's something else, boy," his former teacher tells him and his heart skips a beat. "Someone."

Naruto tenses, can't help but tense, can't fight it. It's almost like this tension has always been there, just waiting for a chance to release it's full power. His heart aches when he thinks of what the Sannin just said, wonders if it weren't better if he just overheard it. He considers it, only to realize that, no, he couldn't ignore it. It is impossible. So he stays where he is, perfectly still, and waits for Jiraiya to continue.

"I sensed him. He's here." The older man makes a vague gesture into a direction and Naruto's senses almost automatically follow his movement, focus on the area there until he feels it - *him*. "Up to now, he's not participating in the bloodshed, but who knows for how long he will wait." It's something between a warning and understanding, knowledge and compassion, and it was meant to be a permission. "I can take down Orochimaru on my own."

"Tsunade-baachan told us to go together...", Naruto says before he really thinks about it and the silence that follows leaves him to wonder why a part of him wants to cry after he wanted to see *him* again for all the years.

Then, Jiraiya speaks again and Naruto's heart almost stops at how heavy his voice suddenly is, at how the pain returns full force and how fake his wavering strength suddenly is.

"Tsunade will never know of this."

There is less than a second of pure shock when Naruto understands the weight of those words. He thinks he will break down. He thinks he can't suppress the tears and the heartache and whatelse washes over his mind in that instant. He thinks he's dying then and there.

Jiraiya turns away and it's like the motion creates a wall of glass between them, blocks Naruto from his almost-father's raging emotions.

And then, from one second to the next, he manages to turn the feeling of being torn apart into determination and strength, swallows the bitter taste in his mouth and makes his decision.

"Thank you, Jiraiya," he whispers, a weak, yet powerful goodbye and maybe-farewell to one of the few persons he ever thought understood him. He makes a step towards his former teacher, leans in and, just for a split second, presses his forehead against the old man's shoulder. Then, he turns, blinks away the tears and starts to run.

It's not far and it doesn't take him long to get there and when he reaches his destination, he feels like it can't be more than a few seconds later, yet it's like a different world.

Sasuke looks older, more mature, and in some dark, twisted way, he is breath-takingly beautiful. But what catches Naruto's attention isn't the change he's gone through on the outside. It's the difference in his eyes. It's what the years of separation changed inside the dark-haired boy, how there is something even darker inside him than there has been the last time they met, and it makes him forget what he doesn't want to remember right now.

For a moment, he believes his heart breaks. Then, more than ever before, he knows that he wants nothing more than to save this person.

"Sasuke," he says with all the force those feelings provide, with all the honesty he has. "There's still a chance. I won't let you go on like this!"

And right then, he sees the slightest shadow of a grin pull at Sasuke's lips. And he restarts to believe in what he used to believe for so long. After all, a connection like theirs cannot be broken so easily, can it?